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TESIS DOCTORAL

EFL Teachers' Professional Development within the
Educational ELT Context at UNAN-LEÓN, Nicaragua

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Marisol Morales Ladrón, Profesora Titular de Universidad y Directora del Departamento de Filología Moderna de la Universidad de Alcalá,

INFORMA:

Que la Tesis Doctoral realizada por Dña. Edipcia Chávez Loredo titulada "EFL Teachers' Professional Development within the ELT Educational Context at UNAN-León, Nicaragua" y dirigida por el Dr. D. Fernando Cerezal Sierra, reúne los requisitos metodológicos y el rigor científico que deben exigirse a un trabajo de investigación de estas características y que, por tanto, puede ser presentada y defendida públicamente.

Y para que así conste a los efectos oportunos, firma el presente informe en Alcalá de Henares, a nueve de enero de dos mil doce.



Don Fernando Cerezal Sierra, profesor emérito doctor del Departamento de Filología Moderna de la Universidad de Alcalá,

Informa que la tesis doctoral titulada *EFL Teachers' Professional Development within the Educational ELT context at UNAN-León, Nicaragua*, presentada por D^a Edipcia Chávez Loredo, cumple ampliamente con todos los requisitos científicos y metodológicos propios de una tesis doctoral para su defensa ante un tribunal.

Universidad de Alcalá, 9 de enero de 2012.



Fdo. Fernando Cerezal Sierra

Dedication

*To my two beloved sons Aldo and Aaron Maglione
for their unconditional support and love*

*“Teachers learn just as their students do:
by studying, doing, and reflecting;
by collaborating with other teachers;
by looking closely at students and their work;
and by sharing what they see”*

- Linda Darling-Hammond

Resumen



Este estudio exploró el proceso de desarrollo profesional de 15 profesores de inglés en servicio del programa de formación docente de la UNAN-León en el nivel de post-licenciatura. El principal objetivo era documentar la evolución del pensamiento de los profesores y su desempeño en el aula de clase, como consecuencia de la exposición al conocimiento necesario basado en sus necesidades de capacitación. El estudio fue de naturaleza longitudinal y utilizó un enfoque de investigación-acción para planificar, ejecutar y evaluar las acciones de la investigación, a lo largo de cuatro etapas principales. La investigación atribuyó gran importancia a la influencia del contexto en el que el proceso de instrucción se llevó a cabo en el pensamiento y el desempeño de los profesores. En consecuencia, el contexto fue una parte integral del análisis. Los instrumentos de investigación fueron cualitativos en su mayoría, e incluyeron diarios, entrevistas y observaciones en el aula. También se utilizaron como fuentes de información documentos pedagógicos, tales como ensayos académicos, planes de clase y evaluaciones

Para la reflexión estructurada se utilizó la investigación-acción en el aula de clase. El contexto en el que se realizó la investigación requirió apoyar la reflexión de los profesores a través de dos procesos de apoyo la *introspección* y la *colaboración*. Dentro de este enfoque los profesores estuvieron inmersos en un proceso de auto-reflexión acompañado del conocimiento pertinente durante el desarrollo del estudio. En consecuencia, ellos pudieron reflexionar en su práctica docente y descubrir las inconsistencias que obstaculizaban su crecimiento profesional, lo cual propició cambios significativos. Los resultados del proyecto arrojaron insumos importantes para los procesos de profesionalización docente y para temas actuales de investigación tales como las creencias del profesor, el conocimiento del profesor y la reflexión del profesor.

Abstract



This study explored the professional development process of 15 English teachers at the INSET level of the Teacher Education Program at UNAN-León. The major aim was to document the evolution of teacher thinking and performance as a result of exposure to relevant knowledge, based on their training needs. The study was longitudinal in nature and used an Action Research approach to plan, implement and evaluate the research actions along four major stages. The investigation attributed great importance to the context in which the instructional process took place as a major influence on teacher thinking and performance. Consequently, context was an integral part of the analysis. The research instruments were mostly qualitative and included journeys, interviews, and classroom observations. Pedagogical documents such as academic essays, lesson plans and evaluations were also important sources of information.

Action Research in the classroom was used as a means for teacher structured reflection. The situational context made it necessary to use two scaffolding structures, *introspection* and *collaboration*, to assist the teachers' reflective process. Within this approach, the teachers were immersed in a process of self-exploration and self-awareness accompanied by relevant knowledge during the development of the study. As a consequence, they were able to reflect on their teaching beliefs in light of their real practice and realize the inconsistencies hindering their professional growth, which fostered teacher change. The results of the project shed significant light on the processes of teacher professionalization and on important current research concerns, such as teacher beliefs, teacher knowledge and teacher reflection.

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List of abbreviations



ANPI	Asociación Nicaraguense de Profesores de Inglés
AR	Action Research
BAK	Belefs, Assumptions and Knowledge
CAR	Classroom Action Research
CRM	Centro de Recursos Multimedia
CSI	Centro Superior de Idiomas
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELT	English Language Teaching
EP	Exploratory Practice
ESL	English as a Second Language
ESP	English for Specific Purposes
INATEC	Instituto Nacional Tecnológico
INSET	In-service education and training
IRF	Interaction-Response-Feedback
ITCR	Instituto Tecnológico de Costa Rica
MECD	Ministerio de Educación Cultura y Deportes
MED	Ministerio de Educación
MEIRCA	Mejoramiento de la Enseñanza de Inglés en la Región Centroamericana
MINED	Ministerio de Educación
ODA	Overseas Devalopment Adminstration
PCK	Pedagogical Content Knowledge
PRESET	Pre-service educationa and training
SIT	School for International Training
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
SLTE	Second Language Teacher Education
STT	Student Talking Time
TEFL	Teaching English as a Foreign Language
TEPCE	Taller de Evaluación, Planificación y Capacitación Educativa
TESOL	Teachers of English to Students of other Language
TTT	Teacher Talking Time
UCA	Universidad Centroamericana
UES	Universidad de El Salvador
UNAN	Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Nicaragua
UPNHFM	Universidad Pedagógica Nacional de Honduras Francisco Morazán
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

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Chapter I



Introduction

Over the past few decades research in EFL teacher development has emphasized the urgent need to improve the processes of teacher professionalization. The premise is that promoting more effective programs will lead to a better teaching practice, which will, in turn, enhance student language acquisition. In order for this improvement to take place, it is necessary that language teacher education programs take into consideration three interconnected elements that have acquired increased importance in the processes of teacher formation: *teacher knowledge*, *teacher beliefs* and *teacher reflective skills*.

The first element, teacher knowledge, has been given considerable attention in the research field. Important steps have been taken in identifying the kinds of knowledge base that are necessary for a teacher to perform effectively. Thus, studies in the field have shed significant light on this area (Borg, 2006; Elbaz, 1981; Freeman, 2000; Kennedy, 1991; Shulman, 1987; Woods, 1996, among others) and several categories of knowledge have been put forward: *personal practical knowledge* (experiential knowledge reflecting the teacher's personal beliefs and principles and her individual approach to teaching); *content knowledge* (the use and usage of the target language in communication); *contextual knowledge* (acquaintance with the teaching context, and knowledge of the learners, including human development, school law and policy issues, curriculum organization and practicum experiences); *pedagogical content knowledge* (the ability to structure and re-structure content for teaching purposes); *reflective knowledge* (the teachers' skills to self-evaluate his/her performance for the purposes of on-going improvement); and *tacit knowledge* (a kind of knowledge involved in the teacher's teaching actions that is difficult to describe, but implicit in the teacher's *personal practical knowledge*).

In spite of the proposed knowledge, researchers have claimed that little is known about the kind of knowledge that is necessary for effective teaching practice in context (Freeman, 1989 and 1993; Johnson 1992; Woods 1996). Thus, studies that shed light on how language teachers construct their knowledge as a response to contextual needs are required. Such studies are particularly relevant in developing countries where in-service teachers struggle to improve professionally, while facing a number of contextual challenges in their teaching practice. Important issues to consider in this regard are: the evolving nature of teacher knowledge (potentially context-bound); the importance of teacher background knowledge (what teachers already know); how teachers perceive the acquisition of knowledge (how they want to learn); and the knowledge that teachers need (what is important or relevant for them to learn).

The second element necessary in teacher development is teacher beliefs about language teaching and learning. Such beliefs are considered to exert great influence on the teachers' practice. Research in the area has shed significant light on the sources of teachers' beliefs and their influence on how teachers teach the language (e.g. Richards & Lockhart, 1994). Some of the most remarkable findings of these studies are how teachers own educational experiences, first as language learners and then as language teacher learners shape their teaching practice significantly (Calderhead, 1996; Johnson, 1994). Because teachers tend to teach in the same way they learned the language (Freeman and Johnson 1998; Lortie, 1975), the efficiency of the instructional processes depends to a great extent on how efficient their own language learning process was. Unfortunately, more often than not, language teachers who were exposed to traditional approaches regard them as effective models worth imitating. Thus, such approaches come to be a part of their language teaching-learning baggage, which, in turn, has the same effect on those students who, eventually, become language teachers, causing a never-ending vicious cycle. Kennedy (1990) comments on the strength of this phenomenon when she compares the thousands of hours that teachers were exposed to different methods during their school days, as opposed to the reduced time that their teacher training could have lasted (Kennedy, 1990: 4). Given the powerful influence of teacher beliefs and their perennial nature, it is important to understand how they are shaped and affect teacher performance. This understanding is essential for teacher education providers in order to foster changes in teacher beliefs and consequent improvement of classroom practice.

The third element that is of utmost importance in the process of teacher formation is the development of teacher reflective skills. The works of John Dewey between 1859 and 1952 and Donald Schön between 1930 and 1997 have been very influential for the study of teacher reflection. Reflective teaching as an effective model to foster teacher development has been consistently promoted by a number of other authors, such as Cole (1997), Coyle (2002), Day (1996), Farrell (2001), Ghaye and Ghaye (1998), Hatton and Smith (1995), Hinkel (2011), Whong (2011), Nunan and Bailey (2009), (Richards, 2004), Nunan and Bailey(2009), and Zeichner and Liston (1996), among others. Within this approach, teachers are perceived as independent agents who self-evaluate their teaching practice for the purpose of self-improvement. Consequently, reflective skills are important professional tools that the teachers should acquire during their teacher education program. These skills enable them to question their teaching beliefs (which, as mentioned above, can be highly influenced by their past educational experience) and assess their performance in light of effective practice. Moreover, reflective teaching can help teachers put their knowledge and beliefs together to undertake the number of tasks that they have to carry out in the process of planning, implementation and evaluation of their lessons.

Within the perspective of the reflective teacher, it is considered highly important that teachers learn how to reflect in a structured way. This perceived need has given way to the role of the language teacher as a researcher, a line of action that can be traced back to the contributions of Stenhouse (1985) and that has been consistently followed by a number of studies over the past few years (Bailey, Curtis, & Nunan, 2001; Borg, 2003 and 2010; Burns, 1999; Edge, 1993, 2001; Freeman, 1998; Nunan, 1992; Wallace, 1997). In this regard, an important challenge for teacher education programs is how to help teachers undertake the role of researchers for significant improvement of their teaching practice. Action Research is perceived as a useful technique for engaging teachers in structured reflection at both pre-service education and training (PRESET) and in-service education and training (INSET) stages. Such a practice within these programs brings a number of benefits for teachers and teacher educators alike.

1. STUDYING THE PROCESSES OF TEACHER DEVELOPMENT IN CONTEXT.

In an effort to shed some light on the issues outlined above, I conducted an investigation at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Nicaragua, UNAN-León. The participants were 15 in-service teachers graduated from the Teacher Education Program offered by the English Department of the Faculty of Educational Sciences and Humanities, who willingly participated in the study. At the beginning of the research process, most of the teachers had recently graduated from their PRESET program. They were struggling to find their way within the ELT community and become familiar with the basic challenges of the profession, which involved significant contextual constraints such as the lack of consistent curriculum guidelines, scarce teaching materials, and heavy workloads.

Thus, the teachers were looking for ways to increase their knowledge and skills in order to deal with those challenges more effectively. The research focused on exploring and implementing alternatives aimed at helping teachers improve within the given contextual conditions. The situation was optimal to both provide the teachers with pertinent academic help, and find out relevant information about the target aspects explored. Given the importance of teacher structured reflection on teacher beliefs and knowledge, an Action Research methodology was used for this purpose.

The study consisted of a longitudinal process that took place in four stages from 2008 to 2010, within the institutional framework of the Teacher Education Program of UNAN-León at the INSET level. The research procedures involved an exploration of the evolution of teacher thinking based on evidence from questionnaires, interviews, classroom observations and document analysis. Being an Action Research, the study used an interventionist approach aimed at fostering teacher development. The study explored the effect of the program on teacher beliefs and knowledge, and the extent to which this effect was evidenced in practice. The results shed significant light on the effectiveness of the program and provided valuable information to improve the teacher education program at UNAN-León at both the PRESET and INSET level.

1.1 The importance of the teacher education program at UNAN-León

The results of this study confirmed the pertinence and social relevance of the teacher education program at UNAN-León in providing the English teachers with the necessary professional tools to face their contextual challenges in a more effective way. As widely discussed in the literature review, teacher education programs play a very important role in providing adequate supporting structures to the teachers, within their particular situational contexts. This study was an effort to establish such a structure for the teachers participating in this study, within the institutional framework of the teacher education program at UNAN-León. Furthermore, the results evidenced the urgent need for the program to increase its quality standards at both the PRESET and INSET level in order to contribute to more effective professional development opportunities for the teachers. For this purpose important recommendations are given in the main conclusions of this study.

1.2 The approach of the INSET program

The plan of action of this investigation took place within the framework of a tailor-made program organized in response to the perceived training needs of the teachers. The program used a *teacher training* approach combined with a *teacher development* dimension. Each of these operational processes of teacher education had particular benefits for the teachers' perceived needs. On the one hand, the teachers enhanced their knowledge in different teaching areas through teacher training, and, on the other hand, they developed their reflective skills on the multifaceted aspects of their practice through teacher development. Action Research was the thread joining the two approaches. Consequently, as a result of the program, the teachers went through an enriching process of knowledge enhancement, self-awareness and self-discovery, which was relevant to their training needs and to their particular teaching situation.

1.3 The characteristics of the INSET program

The program adopted the characteristics suggested by Johnson (2000) who portrays an effective teacher education program as a *situated experience*, a *reflective process*, a *collaborative effort* and a *theorizing opportunity*. These four characteristics served as major guidelines of the present study.

- *A situated experience*

The program was a situated experience as it took into account the contextual challenges that hindered the teachers' professional development. In this regard, the results revealed problems at three levels, widely discussed in the literature review: a global level, (e.g. curriculum), the institutional level (e.g. internal policies), and the practice level in the classroom, (e.g. student motivation and large classes). At the classroom level there was ample room for improvement, which was addressed within this research project. Consequently, the program helped the teachers' increase their teaching knowledge and skills, and become more reflective. The

academic help was provided through the different courses of the *Postgraduate Course in TEFL*, a program at the INSET level, which was the framework of the study.

- *A collaborative effort*

Collaboration was also a major effort of the program to foster teacher development. Such effort involved the participation of different important actors making contributions to the process from different perspectives. The first actors were the teachers who contributed their enthusiasm, motivation and interest towards their professional growth, reasons for which they integrated into the program. The teachers also made significant collaborative efforts that involved the formation of peers for the classroom observations. The benefit of this process was evidenced by the research projects in which the results of this collaborative work were documented.

The second actors were the trainers who contributed their knowledge and expertise to support the teachers within the particular focus of their training area. The trainers also gave valuable insights for making adjustments along the process and important contributions to the investigation. The third actors were the students, who were willing to participate in the teachers' research projects and provide pertinent information. The students acknowledged the potential benefits of the research projects for a better learning process.

The fourth actors were a group of external collaborators who contributed their expertise and knowledge, some of them in providing feedback for the improvement of the teachers' projects, and others in assessing them. Finally, the collaborative effort involved my contribution as a researcher to put together the different pieces of the puzzle to organize, develop and assess the training process. This academic collaborative effort made it possible for the teachers to benefit the most from the program, within the given contextual conditions.

- *A reflective process*

Teacher reflection was another major emphasis of the project. Thus, it was expected that after the program, the teachers would be able to continue their professional improvement independently. Each of the courses of the training program aimed at fostering the development of the teachers' reflective skills within their particular content area. Thus, the teachers had exposure to the acquisition of relevant knowledge and the opportunity to reflect on their practice through the immediate application of that knowledge in their classroom. The reflective process reached its peak in stage three of this investigation, a time during which the teachers were guided along the process of design, implementation and evaluation of their Action Research projects. The research projects in turn, were significant sources for teacher reflection.

- *A theorizing opportunity*

Theorizing was another central process of the present investigation. The reflective skills, fostered through the Action Research approach, provided the teachers with the opportunity to develop their own language teaching-learning principles. Thus, the teachers gained knowledge

and new understanding of their work as teachers. The premise was that teacher education programs should prepare teachers to theorize about their practice, with their own students, and in their own contextual realities. Such an approach was expected to guide the teachers towards the “state of heightened awareness” (Kumaravadivelu, 1994: 28), a condition in which teachers are independent beings, able to make informed decisions, and significant changes in their teaching practice.

1.4 The objectives of the research

The overall objective of this study was to explore the process of teacher development as a result of a reflective process based on an Action Research methodology. Such development was fostered by the teacher training course at the INSET level of the Teacher Education Program at UNAN-León. In particular, this investigation intended to achieve the following specific objectives:

a) To gather relevant information about the problems that the teachers face in their professional development and about their training needs, once they finish their pre-service education and training program at UNAN-León.

This objective corresponded to the first stage of the investigation which was focused on exploring the major problems and challenges caused by contexts that were perceived as obstacles to the teachers’ professional development. Bearing this in mind, a great deal of attention was given to how teachers interpreted their contextual reality, and how they perceived their specific training needs after their PRESET program at UNAN-León. Implicit in this objective was the exploration of the effectiveness of this program. The insights obtained within this research objective were valuable means to delineate the training program, which was implemented, as already mentioned, with the academic help of qualified teacher trainers.

b) To explore the original state of teachers’ beliefs and knowledge about language teaching and learning, and the influence these exert on their performance in the classroom.

The second stage consisted of the exploration of the knowledge and beliefs on which the teachers relied to carry out their teaching practice. This information was essential for the research as it provided a clear picture of the original state of teacher beliefs and performance concerning a number of target aspects. In addition to this, the investigation shed light on the sources of the teachers’ beliefs. Likewise, the teachers provided valuable insights about how they viewed themselves and their own development. The process of inquiry was further enriched by the trainers’ insights.

c) To explore the process of teachers’ reflection and the evolution of their beliefs and knowledge as a result of exposure to relevant guidance during the development of the research projects

This objective corresponded to the third stage of the research which consisted of a follow up

to the development of teacher thinking on a number of issues about their teaching practice, unfolded by structured reflection through Action Research. Implicit in this objective was the intention to raise the teachers' awareness on how their beliefs exerted great influence on what happened in the classroom. Likewise, the contradiction between their beliefs and actions was brought into play. The reflective process was supported by two scaffolding strategies, *introspection* and *collaboration*, which made it possible for most teachers to succeed in fulfilling their research projects. This exploration unfolded the number of problems that the teachers experienced in conducting their projects, and shed significant light on the suitability of Action Research for the given context. The exploration was further enriched by the external collaborators' insights.

d) To evaluate the relevance and effectiveness of the program and assess the differences in the teacher' knowledge, beliefs and performance.

This evaluation took place in stage four of the research and shed significant light on the effectiveness and impact of the teacher training program, the major problems faced, the weaknesses and strengths of the program, and the follow up suggested. The effectiveness of the program was assessed in light of the perceived differences in teacher knowledge, beliefs and performance. The assessment included the teachers' views about their professional development after the program. The evaluation was enriched by the perception of the teacher trainers. The results of this evaluation provided important insights for the improvement of the Teacher Education Programs of UNAN-León at both the PRESET and INSET level.

2. THE OUTLINE OF THE THESIS STRUCTURE

This thesis is divided into eight chapters. Following this introduction, Chapter Two provides a detailed description of the context within which this investigation took place; here the global situation surrounding the processes of teacher education is presented. Likewise, an overview of the local context of the study, the Teacher Education Program at UNAN-León will be provided. Finally, the chapter describes previous studies undertaken in the area of teacher education and highlights the major implications of such studies for this investigation.

In Chapter Three, a detailed review of the literature about teachers and teacher education programs is provided. The aspects addressed were the aspects unfolded during the development of this study. The information in this chapter has been conveniently divided into four different sections: (1) socio-cultural contextual factors involved in language teaching and learning, (2) teacher education approaches, (3) the characteristics of effective teachers and (4) the conditions for an effective teacher development process. The connection between these aspects and the focus of this investigation is explained and clarified thoroughly.

Chapter Four describes the methodology of the study. Here I present specific information about the kind of study and the evolution of the research questions over time. In addition,

specific information about the selection of the teachers participating in the study, and their characteristic is provided, as well as a description of the research design, instruments, data collection methods, and data analysis and interpretation procedures. Chapter Five concerns the data analysis and presentation. This chapter is divided into four sections that describe the core stages of this investigation. Likewise, each stage revolves around the specific objectives of the investigation. At the end of each section there is a summary presenting the main findings of the stage and their main implications.

Chapter Six involves the discussion of the findings. This chapter brings together the information in the preceding chapter in light of the research questions and shows how the issues unfolded connect with each other and relate to the major aspects discussed in the literature reviewed. Chapter Seven is the final chapter of the thesis and presents the main conclusion of the investigation. The information presented integrates the pedagogical implications of the study and the recommendations which are aimed at three different agents: the faculty in charge of the Teacher Education Program at UNAN-León, UNAN's authorities, and the teachers participating in the study. On the other hand, I describe the contributions to research and the main limitations faced in the development of the study. Additionally, I propose lines of action for further research in the area.

Chapter 2



Research context

This chapter describes the educational context in which this investigation was carried out. The description will provide a clear perspective of the conditions under which the study took place. This is particularly important, giving the significance of the context for the different issues raised by the research questions. The chapter is divided into several sections. Firstly, I will refer very briefly to the national educational context, which will be followed by the context in which the EFL instructional processes take place in the country. Then, I will provide an overview of the opportunities provided to promote language teachers' professional improvement and the formal teacher education programs offered in the country. This includes the specific teacher education context at UNAN-León where this study took place. Finally, I will refer to the major research efforts in the area of language teaching and language teacher education in Nicaragua and their implications for this investigation.

1. THE NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

Education in Nicaragua is a very complex issue. Over the past few decades the country has been going through a deep social crisis characterized by political corruption and widespread poverty (Nicaragua is the second poorest country in the Western Hemisphere). The civil war in 1979 and the subsequent establishment of different kinds of government have caused drastic sociopolitical changes, which have exerted negative influence on the educational processes.

The lack of consistent measures and general indifference of the competent authorities have caused the progressive deterioration of both primary and secondary educational systems in state schools in several important aspects. For instance, more than half million children are out of the school system in Nicaragua. School desertion is high; out of 100 children that start school only half finish primary education and out of these children, only half succeed in finishing secondary school. In addition, out of 100 children beginning school, only two manage to enroll at the university.

On the other hand, as a result of limited budget allocation for the educational system, teachers are among the worst paid sectors within the labor force in the country. Wages for Nicaraguan teachers are the lowest in Central America. The average salary of the over 42,000 teachers in Nicaragua is equivalent to 180 dollars a month (primary school teachers even less). As a consequence, being a teacher at both primary and secondary school levels is regarded as a low-quality status profession. Thus, it is not surprising that ten thousand qualified teachers are needed to supply the demand in schools.

Because of the same inaccurate policies there have not been significant changes and improvements on increasing the quality of the educational systems, building more and better-equipped schools, and providing the existing ones with updated didactic materials and equipment.

2. THE INSTRUCTIONAL EFL CONTEXTS IN SCHOOLS

The difficult conditions for education highlighted above affects all instructional processes significantly. Obviously, as part of the system, the processes of teaching English as a Foreign Language are not exempted from such contextual influence. On the contrary, the area of TEFL is one of the most affected ones because English is not considered a priority. This is revealed by the conditions provided for instruction and by the global characteristics of the processes, which will be discussed below.

2.1 Status and working conditions of EFL teachers

Because of their low income most teachers need to work in several institutions. Consequently, they face extreme and overwhelming workloads. The situation gets worse for those teachers who work in rural schools and have to commute to their workplace. MINED, the Ministry of Education in Nicaragua, has established some money allowance called “zonaje”, teachers still face problems in affording the expenses of travelling every day. In addition to earning a low salary, EFL teachers in state schools face a number of other significant problems and limitations, such as lack of materials, poor didactic resources, scarce bibliography, very large classes, and so on. For EFL teachers working in private institutions, the situation is somewhat more encouraging, as they get a slightly better salary, their schools can invest in providing them with better working conditions and resources, and, in general, they benefit from a better status within the community.

2.2 Status and perception of EFL in schools

Certainly, English has gained considerable importance as a global language, and most of the main actors involved in education in Nicaragua (authorities, parents, teachers, and students) would most probably agree with this. Nonetheless, very few efforts have been carried out to give the EFL teaching process its due importance.

English has been established as a compulsory subject at secondary school levels. The lessons are organized into forty-five-minute sessions three times a week. In most schools (both state and public) English is still considered a subject that can be taught as any other subject in the curriculum (Math, Geography, Social Sciences, and so forth). Paradoxically, English is not treated in the same way in terms of relevance. On the contrary, it is still regarded as an irrelevant subject or “filler” (e.g. English is the class cancelled when there is the sudden need for a staff meeting or for any other urgent reason).

The underestimation of English and the disinformation about how it should be taught provoke actions and policies that affect the development of instruction. This is revealed by the short time established for language instruction. It is very difficult for the teachers to teach and for the students to learn in such limited time. Another example is the distribution of resources. Very often school administrations spend available financial resources to prioritize didactic materials or equipment to reinforce and improve other content areas. With the exception of some private schools, English is very often isolated from such materials improvement.

2.3 Conditions in schools

The overall situation of EFL teaching processes worsens when it comes to the classroom settings and the physical conditions of state schools. Whereas private schools, in general, offer much better physical conditions in terms of classroom size, school chairs, illumination and ventilation, whiteboards, and so on; state schools face extreme limitations. The classrooms are very often too small for the amount of students, who have to sit in rows very close to each other (in some rural schools students sit in normal chairs and write on benches). Most classrooms are very hot, as there are no fans, and in many cases dark because they are like normal rooms with a few windows. Some other classrooms do have windowpanes on both sides of the classrooms, but they do not provide appropriate ventilation. In lessons that are scheduled around midday, both teachers and students are extremely affected by very hot and humid conditions.

2.4 Criteria and policies in the current national curriculum

For over twenty years, the national program for TEFL at secondary school levels was based on the series of books *Pathways to English* (H.B. Allen et. al.1994). Studies in the field identified this material as inadequate for the context and insufficient in number for the amount of teachers and schools (Luxon and Luxon, 1998).

The MINED promoted a National Educational Plan (2002-2015) with the financial help of different world organizations and the participation of authorities from different sectors (see content of this Plan in appendix 1). The plan established the new educational policies for the period. Within this framework, a new program in EFL, based on the educational philosophy of constructivism, started officially in 2008. The program, which is the current framework for the EFL instructional processes, is not based on a particular textbook and has been designed to provide the teachers with the pedagogical support to develop their teaching practice.

Although this reform is intended to foster improvement, a number of problems are affecting the successful development of the process. For instance, most teachers are not familiar with the approach suggested, and they do not have the training to create instructional materials either. On the other hand, the flexibility of the curriculum policies in terms of textbooks has left the door open for the teachers to continue to use the previous textbooks. This is particularly true for state schools where these books are the only ones available. Thus, special care is needed to

implement these new policies. The teachers specifically will need consistent help as they are dealing with the changes in real practice.

2.5 Teacher professional qualification

A worrying phenomenon affecting language instruction in Nicaragua is the fact that, very often, untrained and unqualified teachers (called “empiricos”) are hired to teach the lessons in state schools. The phenomenon varies slightly in some private schools, which have established specific requirements based on internal quality criteria. Information from the Ministry of Education reveals that, out of the almost 1000 English teachers currently working in the state system, 404 (44%) hold a university degree, whereas 511 (56%) are unlicensed teachers. There are areas in the country, like the north zone of Chinandega, where the percentage of unlicensed teachers is higher than 90 %. In some state schools (especially in rural zones), there are cases in which teachers from other areas (Math, Spanish, Physical Education, and the like) are appointed as EFL teachers. This might be due to a number of reasons: budget restrictions, the shortage in the offer of qualified teachers, or because it is necessary to fill the teachers’ working schedule of 30 hours a week. This lack of quality control, evidently, results in ineffective teaching processes often conducted by teachers who are inexperienced and unskilled in the matter throughout the country. In the most optimistic scenario some of these untrained teachers make personal efforts to get their university degrees in language programs offered by local universities.

2.6 Teachers’ command of the target language

It is necessary to point out here that there is a considerable amount of trained teachers in Nicaragua who, in addition to the necessary professional qualifications, have high linguistic abilities and proficiency levels. Nonetheless, because of the problems aforementioned, there are many other teachers who make efforts to increase their language proficiency while developing their teaching practice. Not all in-service teachers who are proficient speakers have been trained as English teachers, and not all trained in-service teachers are proficient speakers. In fact teachers’ language proficiency varies greatly. It depends on a number of factors, and several distinctions can be made.

For instance, there are teachers who got their training from university degrees. Although a significant number of graduates have good levels of linguistic competence university studies, unfortunately, do not guarantee that all of the graduates have appropriate proficiency levels. Actually, studies in the field have shown that some teachers still struggle with their language proficiency after graduating (see section 4 below). On the other hand, it is possible that some unlicensed teachers had got their language knowledge as a result of living in an English speaking country. Their proficiency level depends on the time and quality of exposure to the language. Other teachers might have learned the language in a self-taught manner, or in discrete courses at different institutions. Their proficiency levels in this case would depend on how long they studied the language and on how efficient the learning processes were. Evidently, the

worst cases are those, aforementioned, in which teachers, who are assigned to teach EFL, have very little knowledge of the language. Because of this mandatory work challenge, many of these teachers feel “motivated” to integrate into formal language programs at university levels.

2.7 Teaching approaches

Studies in the field have revealed that the use of traditional approaches for teaching EFL is a common phenomenon in the Nicaraguan ELT context, which has been transmitted from generation to generation (Luxon and Luxon, 1998; García et. al, 2005; Chavez, 2006). These investigations have shed significant light on the phenomenon suggesting that several factors exert influence on such approaches.

The first factor in using these approaches is related to the teachers’ previous language learning experience, which exerts significant influence on teacher decision making at the classroom level. Evidence has been gathered that while being aware of the fact that these approaches to teaching are unsuccessful, teachers experience serious problems in changing them because they have become an integral part of their teaching views. The influence of teachers’ previous language learning experiences, first as language teachers and then as language-teacher learners has been widely described in the literature review of this investigation (see lit. review 1.1).

The second potential factor is related to the internal policies of educational institutions. Let us take, for instance, the widespread vision that English can be taught (and learned!) mostly using a traditional teacher-fronted approach just as other subjects in the curriculum. This institutional view reveals an implicit resistance to allow teachers to use more participatory approaches, which obviously exerts influence on the choices that the teachers make. The situation accurately reflects what Richards and Lockhart (1994) imply when they state that one of the aspects any language program reflects is the “culture of the institution.” This is to say “the particular ways of thinking and doing things that are valued in the institution” (Richards and Lockhart 1994:32). These insights are applicable to the Nicaraguan EFL context, as the culture of the educational institutions in many cases limits teacher roles and actions significantly.

Other influencing factors on the use of traditional approaches are the conditions provided for language instruction and the teachers’ working conditions. Large numbers of students, little time for instruction and heavy workload, are powerful reasons for the teachers to handle the processes in the easiest possible way. One of such ways is the organization of classroom instruction with students sitting in rows. Teachers feel inclined to use this way of grouping students because “it is the best way to keep discipline under control; to avoid the noise and disruption involved in using a different approach and, to avoid problems with authorities and/or other colleagues”. (Chavez, 2006: 142).

2.8 Opportunities for continuing professional development

The following is a description of training and development opportunities available for in-service teachers in the country.

2.8.1 *Training promoted by MINED*

The MINED has established collaborative teachers' meetings called TEPCE (Taller de Evaluación, Planificación y Capacitación Educativa) at both primary and secondary school levels. Teachers of all core content areas participate in these meetings, which consist of four-hour sessions held on the last Friday of each month. The purpose of the TEPCE is that the teachers self-evaluate the results of the work made during the previous month, and share suggestions to plan the content, assessment and teaching strategies to be implemented in the coming month. This initiative is indeed very good, as it promotes teacher collaboration. Nonetheless, in the English area, the effectiveness of the results is debatable. This is particularly true in certain municipalities or regions with high rates of unlicensed teachers. These teachers are not in the capacity to provide suggestions to other teachers, as they themselves need suggestions to improve. Another problem arises when the personnel from the Ministry of Education in charge of organizing these workshops is not qualified enough. The situation can potentially become a vicious cycle in which little or no improvement and benefits are obtained.

Some other opportunities promoted by MINED have been coordinated with INATEC¹. In the year 2011, these two institutions joined efforts to provide training to 1,400 English teachers. The objective was to improve the teachers' linguistic competence so that they are better prepared to teach the language to students in technical studies. No official reports about the development and results of this program have come out yet.

2.8.2 *ANPI's conferences*

Other training opportunities for English teachers are the conferences promoted by ANPI² the Nicaraguan Association of English Teachers. These conferences are held once a year. Most teachers value these opportunities, but they experience serious problems to participate. Some of these problems are financial, because of the low salaries; some others are derived from the institutional context as in many cases teachers are not provided with proper support. With so many difficulties experienced to participate in these conferences many teachers decide not to

¹ INATEC, stands for Instituto Nacional Tecnológico. It is the entity in charge of technical and professional education in Nicaragua. Inaugurated in 1991 is aimed at the formation of qualified or the necessary human resources for the economic and social development of the country.

² ANPI, the Nicaraguan Association of English Teachers is a non-profit nation-wide professional association focused on the strengthening of English language teaching in Nicaragua. ANPI pursues the professional development of all its members through annual conferences to meet and share ideas and techniques as well as research and discuss professional issues.

attend. Because of these problems, ANPI organizers have taken the very good initiative to get closer to the teachers and, in the past few years, the conferences have been held in the main regions and cities of the country.

2.8.3 Training by the Peace Corps

Recently, volunteers of the Peace Corps³ in Nicaragua have been working on designing materials to support the reforms to the current EFL program for secondary schools. This is part of the collaborative efforts that Peace Corps volunteers have been making in Nicaragua in the TEFL area since the year 2006.

Within these collaborative actions the main role of these volunteers is to work as teacher trainers in secondary school education. Using a cooperative model, volunteers and counterpart teachers co-plan and co-teach classes. The program has three major goals. The first goal is to provide support to the teachers to improve both their language competence and their teaching methodologies, so that they implement more participatory and communicative activities in the classroom. The second goal is to collaborate with materials development and implementation. The third goal is to provide support at the community level.

The improvements to the TEFL curriculum are part of the activities enclosed in the first and second goals, which involve the design of complementary materials to teach the English lessons based on the established guidelines. A series of training sessions have started to take place in different parts of the country. This is, indeed, a very good initiative that will lead to the increased improvement of the processes. Nonetheless, the benefits have not reached all the teachers yet.

The previous sections have outlined the contextual conditions surrounding the instructional processes of TEFL and the opportunities for continuing professional education for in-service teachers. The following are the major training opportunities provided by universities offering Teacher Education Programs in Nicaragua.

3. TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN NICARAGUA

Three of the largest and most important universities in the country have been supporting English teachers' professionalization over the past few years: UNAN-Managua, the Universidad Centroamericana UCA and UNAN-León. These universities offering English majors have contributed significantly to decrease the high rate of unlicensed English teachers in the country.

³ Peace Corps is an autonomous government agency created to promote world peace and friendship through service of American volunteers abroad. Peace Corps entered Nicaragua in 1968 until 1979 and re-entered in 1991.

3.1 The Teacher Education Program at UNAN-Managua

The Teacher Education Program at UNAN Managua is established within the English Department of the Faculty of Education and Languages (FEI). It offers a degree in Educational Sciences with a special focus in English in Regular Studies during the week and on Saturdays. In the year 2011, about 800 students from different parts of the country were enrolled in these studies.

This is the oldest program offered at a national level, as it began in 1967 with a degree in TEFL. The original program was directly aimed at meeting the demands for teachers at secondary school levels and to revise and update the curriculum of these studies. In order to do this, a Fulbright-Hays lecturer collaborated to propose a four-year curriculum at UNAN-Managua, and to design a three-year program for English instruction at secondary school levels. The current program at UNAN is the result of a number of curriculum changes made over the past few decades. Some of the most important curriculum changes of this program are the ones that took place as a result of the study carried out by Tony and Michele Luxon between 1993 and 1996 (see a description of this study in section 4 below).

- *Mission*

The mission of the program is to train professionals in the field of Education and Languages with independent critical and reflective thinking skills to continue learning throughout their life. The ultimate aim is to contribute to the sustainable development of Nicaragua. The English Studies are aimed at responding to the social demands to improve the teaching of English and reduce the rate of unlicensed teachers in Nicaragua.

- *Exit Criteria*

After the five years of the Program, the participants have different options for graduation purposes. The first of such options is a graduation seminar, the second is a graduation project, the third option is an evaluation called “Examen de Grado”, and the fourth option is a monograph project.

- *Study plan*

The program at UNAN-Managua focuses on three main areas. The first area is general formation which involves subjects like *General Mathematics*, *Geography* and *Philosophy*. The second area is based on psycho-pedagogical formation. This area includes *General* and *Special Didactics*, *General Pedagogy* and *Psychology of Learning*. Finally, the third area is based on specialized formation, which includes all the courses that focus on the development of linguistic skills (see study plan in appendix 2)

The Teacher Education Program at UNAN-Managua has been consistently supported by the American Embassy through the academic help and support of the English Language Fellow Program. In addition, faculty from the English Department has received support from other

institutions such as the British government, which has provided the professors with opportunities for professionalization abroad.

UNAN-Managua also offers programs at the INSET levels depending on the needs of the teachers graduating from the PRESET level. Thus, these postgraduate courses focus on particular chosen areas, such as the reinforcement of linguistic skills and teaching methodologies.

3.2 The Teacher Education Program at UCA

Within the Faculty of Humanities and Communication at UCA, the first English courses offered were inaugurated in 1960's as English for "servicios" (the teaching of ESP- English for Specific Purpose- in the different Majors at UCA), and the offering of language courses to the community. The first English Major started in 1984 offering a degree in English Translation. Then, in 1986 an additional degree in Russian Translation supported by the Soviet Union was offered. These first steps were the basis for the formation of the current language school called Centro Superior de Idiomas (CSI), which emerged in the year 2001.

In 1996, the English Translation Studies were replaced by a new degree in TEFL. These studies at the present time are only offered in a regular program during the week and consist of 12 "cuatrimestres" (four-month periods). Once the program is completed, the students earn a degree in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). In the year 2011, 257 students from different parts of the country were enrolled in the program.

The Teacher Education Program at UCA has been consistently supported by the American Embassy through scholarships to professors to take short training in Costa Rica at the School for International Training (SIT-TESOL). Other professional development opportunities include attendance to international TESOL conferences, and the sponsorship for a Master's program in TESOL through a Fulbright scholarship.

- *Mission*

The mission of the program is to educate students as teachers for the Nicaraguan ELT context in high school, bilingual schools and ESP programs at university levels. Thus, after graduation the teachers can work in any educational institution such as language academies, primary bilingual schools, higher education, centers for pedagogical training and/or any other kind of institution where a high command of the language is required.

- *Exit criteria*

There are two possible exit criteria for graduation purposes. The first option is the "Examen de Grado", which is a comprehensive written examination that assesses language proficiency and pedagogical knowledge (the latter is based on a solution to a pedagogical case related to ELT in Nicaragua). The other possibility is that students carry out a Creative Project, which is a curriculum project designed as an alternative of improvement of ELT in a given context (at primary, secondary or a bilingual school). This project, which is written in English, is

intrinsically linked to a course called “Seminario de Graduación”; which is a compulsory course in the last stage of the studies.

- *Study plan*

The program at UCA focuses on four main areas. The first area is *Linguistic Instruction* which includes courses such as *Reading*, *Grammar*, *Conversation* and *Integrated English*, among others. The second area is *Basic Pedagogical* and *Psychological* instruction, which includes *Methodology*, *General Pedagogy* and *Language Learning and Acquisition*. The third area involves *General Instruction* in several different fields which aims at widening students’ cultural knowledge. Some of these courses are *Culture of English Speaking Countries*, *Mesoamerican Culture and Identity*, *Contemporary Social History*, and *Ethics and Human Rights*. Finally, the fourth area is focused on *Research Techniques*, which aims at providing students with the necessary tools to facilitate their professional development. The two specific courses are *Methods and Techniques for Pedagogical Research* and *Research on Teaching English* (see study plan in appendix 3).

In addition to the Major in English Studies at the PRESET level, the UCA also offers teacher professionalization opportunities at the INSET level which have included different kinds of programs since 2007. Thus, five editions of a Postgraduate course in the area of ESP have been offered and a Diplomado in ELT. A Master’s in Applied Linguistics is one of the future perspectives of the Program.

3.3 The Teacher Education Program at UNAN-León

The Teacher Education Program at UNAN-León is established within the English Department of the Faculty of Educational Science and Humanities. It has a direct impact on the professional preparation of teachers from the Western region of the country. Since this Program is the main context of this investigation, a detailed overview of its development, structure and components will be provided.

3.3.1 *The English Department: a brief historical overview*

Originally, English was taught at UNAN- Leon as ESP in several faculties and programs in the 1970’s. In 1988 the Faculty of Education merged with the “Preparatoria” program, and the English Department was joined with the Spanish Department. From 1988 to 1993 English was not an independent department. The head of the Spanish Department was the one in charge of the English area. Within this situational context, English instruction continued to be limited to the teaching of ESP in the Faculties of UNAN-Leon. It was only until 1993 that the English Department separated from the Spanish Department and started offering its own academic programs.

Since its origins, the English Department of UNAN Leon has been consistently supported by the Spanish University of Alcalá within an inter-university cooperation agreement. This collaboration program, which started in 1993 as the English Didactic Program, has been an

important supporting structure in the foundation and strengthening of the overall programs and academic services offered by the English Department. Among the most relevant outcomes reached by this cooperation program, the following are worth highlighting.

- The separation of the English Department from the Spanish Department in 1993 and the increase of its members from 4 to 22 permanent teachers (and 18 hourly teachers on the 2nd semester of 2011)
- The academic link with other Universities: The University of Valencia, the University of Nebraska at Omaha, the University of El Salvador, the ITCR in Costa Rica, and the Universidad Pedagógica de Honduras.
- The implementation of the English Studies at both the PRESET and INSET level.
- Three regional academic events in 1995, 1997 and 1998, with more than 300 participants and around 50 presentations.
- Two National Congresses for English Teachers. The First Congress entitled *Research and Practice in the English Classroom* took place in the year 2002 and had 200 participants, 42 presentations and 30 presenters. The second Congress that was entitled *Current Trends and Moves in TEFL* took place in the year 2008 and had 300 participants, 46 presentations and 50 presenters.
- The professional training and preparation of the members of the English Department through different kinds of postgraduate programs, two Masters' degrees and studies in the United States and Spain.
- The foundation of the multimedia English laboratory, called the Multimedia Resource Center (CRM).
- The donation of bibliographical and didactic materials for the Faculty library and the CRM.
- The establishment of the regional inter-university teacher training program MEIRCA⁴

3.3.2 *The English Studies at the PRESET level*

The Teacher Education Program offers two kinds of studies at the PRESET level: the Saturday English Program and the Regular English Studies⁵. The Saturday English program was first implemented in 1993. It is aimed at training secondary school English teachers. It offers a general degree in Educational Sciences with a special focus on English Studies. The Regular

⁴ MEIRCA stands for “Mejoramiento de la Enseñanza de Inglés en la Región Centro Americana”. Several Central American Universities are part of this network, UES, from El Salvador, the Universidad Pedagógica de Honduras UPNHFM, the ITCR from Costa Rica and UNAN-León. The main aim is to make joint efforts to address the problems of the TEFL area in the region. The project is supported by the University of Alcalá and the University of Valencia.

⁵ In 2007 the Teacher Education Program of the English Department was expanded to the communities of Somoto, Somotillo and Rio San Juan, where UNAN-León has established academic branches. In the near future UNAN is planning to open similar programs in other cities and towns in Nicaragua.

English Studies, on the other hand, were inaugurated in the year 1997 as a result of a Needs Analysis in the year 2006. This program is directed to students from secondary schools and offers a degree in English.

Several curriculum changes and improvement have been made over the past few years in both programs, which have emerged from research in the area⁶ and from academic support of different actors. Among these actors it is worth mentioning the Faculty authorities, professors from the University of Alcala and an expert from the English Language Fellow⁷ program financed by the US State Department and coordinated by the American Embassy.

- *Mission*

The mission of the program is to graduate qualified bilingual professionals who have solid theoretical, methodological and practical knowledge in the field of linguistics, research and multiculturalism. These professionals should also have humanistic values in order to contribute to the improvement of the teaching of English at the national regional and local level, and to the development of the Nicaraguan society in general. It is further intended that the graduates of the studies have characteristics of critical thinkers, leadership and entrepreneurship, essential elements for modern professionals to be competitive in a globalized world.

- *Exit criteria*

There are two possibilities to assess the students' qualification and proficiency to be able to graduate at the end of their studies. The established requirement gives students the option of an "Examen de Grado" or a thesis. The "Examen de Grado" involves the evaluation of the students' proficiency levels in all language skills. It is also intended to evaluate the students' didactic and methodological knowledge. The students are familiar with this assessment as they take, beforehand, a preparatory course called "Seminario Integrador". As far as the thesis is concerned, students who choose this way of evaluation have to develop and write a research project focused on the educational contexts in EFL. Students receive assistance from mentors along the process. Once their project is finished, they present it and defend it in English in front of an evaluator board from the English Department.

- *Study plan*

As aforementioned, these two studies have a different scope: the Saturday Program is aimed at training unlicensed English teachers and the English Major focuses on students coming from

⁶ In the years 2003 and 2004 a Language Program Evaluation was conducted by faculty of the English Department. The main aim of this investigation, which involved students and teachers, was to assess the effectiveness of the English Studies at UNAN-LEÓN. The recommendations of this study were valuable sources for the curriculum changes and improvements.

⁷ Within this program, Diane Millar collaborated with the English Department for two years (2000-2002), time during which she provided consistent academic support and training to faculty from the English Department. Her work involved, among others, the expansion of English to the Año de Estudios Generales and to the studies offered by the Faculty of Economic Sciences.

secondary school. Nonetheless, the study plan is very similar and, like the plans of UNAN-Managua and UCA focuses on different kinds of components. There are for example, those related to the strengthening of the linguistic skills focused on general English such as *Integrated English, Laboratory, Reading, Conversation, Academic Writing, and Advanced Grammar, and Phonetics and Phonology* among others. There are others intended to reinforce the students' research skills such as *Theoretical Basis for Research, and Projects Design*. There are also intercultural components such as *Socio-cultural communication, Literature and Translation*. Likewise, the program integrates educational components such as *Methodological and Theoretical Basis for TEFL and the Practicum*. Finally, there are components of administration and project management such as *Business English and Translation* (see study plans in appendixes 4)

Both the Saturday English Program and the Regular English Studies have strengthened over the past few years and it has made possible the graduation of several generations of teachers. The chronological development of both kinds of studies is shown in the following table.

Table 1

Chronological development of the studies at the PRESET level

Year	Type of Major	Students	Study plan	Period
1993	Saturday English Program	75	First study Plan	1993-1999
1997	Regular English Major	36	First Study Plan	1997-2000
1997	Saturday English Program	74	Second Study Plan	1997-2001
1997	Regular English Major	38	Third Study Plan	1997-2001
1999	Regular English Major	30	Third Study Plan	1999-2003
2000	Regular English Major	90	Third Study Plan	2000-2004
2001	Regular English Major	118	Fourth Study Plan	2001-2005
2002	Saturday English Program	35	Third Study Plan	2002-2006
2002	Regular English Major	128	Fourth Study Plan	2002-2006
2004	Regular English Major	126	Fourth Study Plan	2004-2007
2007	Regular English Major	23	Fifth Study Plan	2007-2011
2007	Saturday English Program	63	Fourth Study Plan	2007-2011
2008	Saturday English Program	62	Fifth Study Plan	2008-2012
2011	Regular English Major	34	Sixth Study Plan	2011-2015
2011	Saturday English Program	84	Sixth Study Plan	2011-2015

The table shows the development of both programs in terms of numbers of students and in terms of the reforms and changes to the study plans. Thus, the Saturday English Program started in 1993 with 75 students and has had six important curriculum changes. The Regular English Major, on the other hand, started in 1997 with 36 students and has also had six important reforms to its study plan. According to this chronological development, by the year 2015 a total of 1016 teachers will have graduated from these programs.

The 15 teachers who participated in this investigation were all graduated from these studies, six graduated from the Saturday Program and nine from the Regular English Major, between the years 2001 and 2007. The highlighted area in the table shows the programs from which they

graduated. More information about the teachers as the target population of this study is provided in the chapter about the Methodology of the Research (see chapter four).

3.3.3 *The English Studies at the INSET level*

The Teacher Education Program at UNAN-León has been offering opportunities for teacher professionalization at the INSET level since 1993. As aforementioned these programs have been established mostly with the valuable help of the University of Alcalá de Henares, within the framework of the English Didactic Program. Other universities and institutions have contributed to the strengthening of this program. The following table shows the development of the program at the INSET level.

Table 2

Chronological development of the studies at the INSET level

Period	Name of Program	Teachers
1993-1995	Postgraduate in Methodology, Didactics and Research in the English Classroom	16
1995-1998	Postgraduate in Methodology, Didactics and Research in the English Classroom	22
2001-2002	Postgraduate in Didactics and Curriculum Design in English	17
2002	Postgraduate in Didactics and Curriculum Design in English	26
2003-2004	Master Program in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL)	24
2005-2007	Master Program in English for Specific Courses	14
2008-2010	Postgraduate Course in TEFL	15

As shown, seven programs have been offered at the INSET level since 1993, five Postgraduate Courses and two Master's Programs. A total of 134 teachers, both secondary and university, have benefited from these programs. The following is a brief description of each one.

- *Postgraduate in Methodology, Didactics and Research in the English Classroom (1993-1995)*

This was the first INSET course offered by the English Department. It counted on the participation of 16 teachers, out of which four were from UNAN-León and twelve were from secondary school education. The course consisted of three hundred hours in three modules. The contents were focused on methodology and research in the classroom. The courses were taught by professors from the University of Alcalá.

- *Postgraduate in Methodology, Didactics and Research in the English Classroom 1995-1998*

This course was a second edition of the first postgraduate course. This time it was directed to teachers most of whom were “empiricos”. The course was taught in seven modules for a total of 500 hours. The participants were 22 teachers, out of which 16 finished the program. As a result of this program, 13 teachers were able to integrate into the Saturday English Program at UNAN-León. Within the development of this program the teachers implemented didactic units and conducted research in their classrooms. The courses were taught by professors from the University of Alcalá.

- *Postgraduate in Didactics and Curriculum Design in English (1st ed. 2001-2002; 2nd ed. 2002)*

These two postgraduate courses on *Didactics and Curriculum Design* (1st and 2nd edition) aimed at licensed teachers. Both courses consisted of 400 hours. The first was offered between 2001 and 2002 and 17 teachers from different universities of the country participated. The second was aimed at the professionalization of new teachers hired at the English Department to supply the demand for English, which had been expanded to the Año de Estudios Generales (first year of University Studies).

The contents of these programs were organized around the macro skills of the language and aimed at improving the language proficiency of the participants and their didactic-methodological knowledge. The participants designed, implemented and evaluated didactic units for secondary school focused on the Task-based approach. These units were intended to serve as materials for the secondary school program. The courses were taught by professors from the University of Alcalá, the English Teaching Fellow Program and the University of Nebraska.

- *Master Program in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (2003-2004)*

This Program was the first Master degree in TEFL offered in Nicaragua. It was offered between 2003 and 2004. The purpose was to improve the professionalization of an important number of teachers from different parts of the country, most of which had participated in the previous INSET programs. A total of 24 teachers participated in this program.

The program consisted of eight modules that included: *Principles and methods in the acquisition of English as a foreign language, Educational research, Communication in the English class, Advanced Writing in English, Learning strategies: student learning, Advanced Reading in English, Teaching Grammar and Vocabulary, and Assessment*. As part of the graduation criteria, the teachers had to plan, design and implement a Research project as their Master's thesis.

The courses were taught by professors from the Universidad de Alcalá, the Universidad de Pinar del Río, Cuba, and the University of Nebraska.

- *Master Program in English for Specific Courses (2005-2007)*

The second Master's Program offered at UNAN-León was focused on English for Specific Purposes. This program was also the first of its kind in the country and it aimed at fulfilling the needs for professionalization of teachers who needed to improve their knowledge in the area of ESP. At UNAN-León there had been an important expansion of English in all the study fields, which made this program particularly relevant at that time. It was taught with the support of the Universidad de Valencia y the Universidad Politecnica de Valencia. 14 teachers from UNAN-León and from the ITCR, Costa Rica, graduated from this program.

- *Postgraduate Course in TEFL (2008-2010)*

This Postgraduate Program is the last course offered by the English Department up to the present. The course is the main context of this investigation and an essential element of the intervention plan to foster the process of teacher development. It was focused on the improvement of the teachers' methodological skills on different areas, lesson planning, the teaching of the language skills, the design of didactic materials, and the use of technological tools for language instruction, among others. The programs also focused on helping teachers develop their reflective skills through Action Research. As shown, a total of 15 teachers participated in the program. The course was taught by professors from UNAN-León and it also counted on the collaboration of the Universidad de Alcalá de Henares Spain and the Instituto Tecnológico de Costa Rica (a description of the program is provided in chapter four, 3.1.3).

This section has focused on describing the teacher education programs available in the country for teachers' professionalization. The programs of the three most important universities of the country have been described in its different aspects such as a mission, focus, scope and development. The following section, which is the final part of the research context, will provide an overview of the background research efforts in the area, and their connection with this investigation.

4. BACKGROUND STUDIES

Two particular previous studies in the field will be briefly described here. The main objective is to provide an account of the preceding research efforts carried out in EFL teaching in Nicaragua, and to establish their correlation with the present study. Although these studies addressed the situation of EFL teaching from somewhat different perspectives, there are important implications worth highlighting.

4.1 The ODA ELT Project

The major effort aimed at exploring and improving the EFL teaching situation in Nicaragua carried out so far, was the study by Tony and Michelle Luxon. This research was called the ODA ELT Project (ODA stands for Overseas Development Administration, which is a branch of the Foreign Office of the British government).

4.1.1 The study

The ODA Project was carried out in 1993 jointly with two of the largest public universities: UCA and UNAN Managua, and with the Nicaraguan Association of English Teachers (ANPI). It also counted on the support of authorities of the Ministry of Education (called MED at that time). There were two general aims underlying this study. First, to explore and find out the conditions in which EFL teaching was taking place at secondary school levels throughout the country, and second, to provide practical and relevant solutions to the problems identified. The

initial stage of the project involved a large-scale baseline study. There were several important reasons for doing this. Firstly, the researchers wanted to have a clear idea of the conditions under which EFL instruction was taking place. Secondly, the baseline study would provide the researchers with the starting point to assess the impact and results of the project three years later. Finally, the initial exploration would allow the researchers to establish close contact with the teachers and gain confidence and credibility.

4.1.2 The target population and the data collection stage

The scope of the research involved 47 secondary schools, more than 60 teachers and 518 students. The data collection instruments were questionnaires, interviews and classroom observations. The main purpose was to explore and identify the actual conditions of language teaching in Nicaragua “to get as accurate and as general picture as possible of the state of ELT in secondary state system” (Luxon and Luxon 1998:35).

Through the questionnaires and interviews they collected factual data about teachers’ age, gender, salary, academic qualifications, and proficiency levels in the target language. Additionally, they collected information from the teachers’ perceptions about the teaching process of EFL. This information was then compared and contrasted with the students’ perceptions of the importance and difficulties of learning English.

The focus of the classroom observations, on the other hand, was the identification of the teachers’ teaching techniques and the different features of the classes. Also, the researchers documented the conditions of the instructional settings, the didactic resources, the language of instruction and the teachers’ skills to motivate students. In addition to this, the levels and kinds of interaction in the classes and the teachers’ classroom management abilities were widely explored.

4.1.3 The findings

1. Teacher qualification, knowledge and language proficiency

Some of the most significant findings of the project were related to the teachers’ professional qualifications and performance. Out of the more than 60 teachers involved in the study, only 19 (27%) were graduates of a pedagogical training program. The great majority of the teachers were “empiricos” (unlicensed teachers). Nevertheless, the study showed no significant variations or differences between graduates and “empiricos”, in terms of language proficiency and range and kinds of teaching techniques.

2. Physical conditions of the classrooms and available resources

Other important difficulties identified were the classroom conditions, the availability of resources and equipment, and the quality of the didactic materials used by the teachers. Some of the most salient findings were the large classes (an average of 45 students; some classrooms with 80 students) and the poor conditions in terms of school furniture (in some cases students had to sit on the floor). In addition to this, there was no access to video machines, TV sets, tape-

recorders or photocopies, and there was a lack of resources for designing additional materials. The prevailing means of instruction used by the teachers were chalk and the board.

3. The national program

Concerning instructional materials, the national syllabus established at that moment was based on the series of books *Pathways to English*. A number of problems concerning these textbooks were identified. For instance, out of the series of six books, only books 1 to 3 were used. In fact, they were the basis of the program for EFL instruction for the 5 years of secondary studies. Also, there were not enough samples for all students (and book 3 was virtually impossible to obtain). Finally, there was a lack of enough samples of the teachers' edition for most teachers. This improper and inadequate distribution of books was one of the main problems identified by the teachers and reported in the study.

4. The main characteristics of EFL instruction

Concerning the main features of the teaching-learning processes in school, the classroom observations revealed similar patterns in the way instructional processes took place in the classrooms. For instance, Spanish was the medium of communication in most cases and there were no significant differences between graduates and unlicensed teachers in terms of teaching techniques and/or proficiency levels in the target language. Most teaching processes were influenced by the teachers' own experience as learners. Based on this, in-service teachers had the tendency to repeat their previous teachers' traditional roles and techniques. This approach was defined by Wallace (1991) as the Craft Model (see lit. review 4.1.6 for a description of this model).

On the other hand, the teaching processes were based on a teacher-centered approach. There were very few opportunities for student-student interaction, group and pair work, and for students' free practice and production. Student performance was based on lots of repetition drills that were used for pronunciation practice. Listening was based on the teacher's voice for the sake of pronunciation. No real listening practice for comprehension purpose was observed.

As for the planning and implementation of the classes, these were not organized and/or divided into clearly distinguished stages or steps. Language items, grammatical structures and vocabulary were presented, explained and exemplified on the board according to the sequence in the book. Students would do a lot of note taking adding a few other examples or exercises on their own.

4.1.4 Approach adopted to address the problems identified

After analyzing the data and identifying the main problems, a feasibility study of the possible ways to address the problems was undertaken. Planning and implementing the actions involved the joint coordination of the institutions aforementioned in both in-service teacher training and curriculum reform at university levels. Based on this feasibility study, the decisions were to promote changes and improvements in EFL teaching through the teachers'

empowerment. Rather than establishing a new model, the plan of action involved providing teachers with the pertinent training they needed to work with the existing syllabus and materials. The main objective was to strengthen the teachers' abilities to be able to cope to overcome the problems and limitations that they faced. Consequently, significant efforts were devoted to provide them with appropriate training.

For this purpose, a number of measures were taken in the stage of the process known as the "Cascade Project", (teachers who were trained would then favor the training of their fellow teachers). Institutional support and involvement was crucial in this stage. As a result of the project a number of teacher training sessions nationwide were planned and established. This training reached approximately 400 teachers from different regions and cities of the country. On the other hand, the degree offered by UNAN-Managua for unlicensed in-service teachers was reformed and improved.

4.1.5 Implications for this study

Certainly, the ODA ELT project had a great impact on the ELT processes at the time. Because of the relevance and far-reaching improvements for in-service teacher training, it is worth mentioning its implications for the scope and objectives of the present study.

- *The role of the teachers*
- *The most significant implication of the ODA ELT project for this study is the great importance that the researchers attributed to the teachers.*

Thus, the premise in this study is that any attempt of innovation and improvement in the EFL classroom relies on the active participation of teachers. Moreover, the teachers' role as change agents has been consistently promoted throughout the development of this project. In order to foster the teachers' awareness and self-realization of their own importance in the instructional processes, some scaffolding structures were provided throughout the development of the program.

- *The role of the trainers*
- *In the ODA ELT project, the close contact between the trainers and the EFL teachers provided them with the proper conditions to carry out the actions of the project.*

In this project, good relationship between trainers and teachers were promoted and established. Like in the ODA project, the positive rapport between teachers and trainers made it possible to collect relevant and valid data from the teachers, and count on their collaboration for the measures taken.

- *The importance of teacher training*
- *Luxon and Luxon believed that the way to address the problems was through the improvement of the processes of teacher formation, reason for which they consistently promoted teacher training throughout. Furthermore, they promoted curriculum changes in the teacher education program within the universities involved.*

In this study, the process of teacher formation was a major focus, as well. Thus, the project involved an approach to teacher training that encloses a development dimension. Within this approach, teachers were provided with techniques, skills and knowledge to improve their teaching practice together with the reflective tools for them to reflect on the many aspects involved in doing so. The results of the study provided important input for the improvement of the teacher education program at UNAN-Leon.

- *The influence of context*

- *In the ODA ELT project, the measures took into account realistically the situational context under which the process of language teaching were taking place*

Context, like at the time of the ODA ELT project, strongly conditioned and limited teacher performance in the present study. As it will be discussed in chapter six, there were no major differences in the processes explored in terms of the conditions provided for instruction. Large classes, inadequate curriculum and scarce materials continued to be an issue in the teaching processes of EFL. Moreover, the results in this study, as it will be discussed in chapter six, indicate that the given context hinders teacher development significantly. Thus, providing relevant training and development opportunities in context are pertinent and urgent tasks for teacher education programs in the country.

- *The importance of collaboration*

- *The ODA ELT Project intended to create adequate structures at an institutional level to support the teachers' efforts to professionalization. On the other hand, the "cascade" effect that the project intended to cause was based on the teachers' collaborative efforts to support one another by sharing their knowledge.*

Promoting collaboration was an accurate decision, as the participation of institutions in the organization of the instructional processes should be guaranteed. It was also important that the teachers got closer to establish strong links of collaboration too. Unfortunately, no follow up was given to the measures and suggestion resulting from the ODA ELT project.

In this project there were efforts to establish liaisons with the central educational authorities that did not have any effect. Consequently, the collaboration efforts were concentrated at an inter-university level with the participation of trainers from several universities. Moreover, the processes of collaboration involved the teachers who worked in peers to share and support each other's efforts to teach the language in a more effective and to reflect on their teaching.

As shown, the ODA ELT Project had important implications that exerted influence on the present project. Nonetheless, there are particular different features in this study worth highlighting. For instance, this study had a much smaller population than the ODA ELT Project. The teachers participating were all licensed teachers, unlike the ODA ELT project, which involved both licensed and unlicensed teachers. The size of the population in this study made it easier to explore the processes of teacher formation and give a follow up to the teachers in a

more personal way. This is probably a factor that allowed important development activities. One of such activities was the process of teacher structured reflection through Action Research, which is another important difference between this study and the ODA ELT project.

Although this investigation was carried out at a smaller scale, it intended to be a contribution to shed light on the area of EFL teaching and on the processes of teacher education in Nicaragua. Drawing from the Luxon's study, the study stressed the importance of teachers, trainers, teacher education program, collaborative processes, and the context in which the instructional process takes place.

4.2 Teachers' beliefs, perceptions and knowledge in the Nicaraguan EFL context

This study was a previous investigation that I carried out at the PRESET level of the Teacher Education Program of UNAN in the year 2006. As explained in the methodology chapter (chapter 5, section 2.1) this study was a prelude of the present investigation. The findings were as source of motivation and knowledge to do research at the INSET level of this program.

4.2.1 *The study*

The study took place within the Saturday English Studies of the Teacher Education Program at UNAN-Leon. The particularity of this program is that, being a PRESET program, it trains teachers who are already in-service teachers. This Program is a response to the demand of professionalization of unlicensed teachers, a common phenomenon in the Nicaraguan context as explained in section 2.1.5 above. Thus, the focus of this study is to provide the participants with pertinent training and academic qualification. The main objective of the study was to explore and analyze the teachers' knowledge, beliefs and perceptions as EFL teachers within this program. Drawing from the ODA ELT project, the research was carried out devoting considerable attention to the context in which language instruction was taking place. The results of this analysis led to a series of recommendations aimed at improving the processes of English teacher education at UNAN-León.

4.2.2 *The target population and the data collection stage*

The research was carried out with a group of 15 in-service teachers who were in year IV of the Saturday English Program at UNAN. All of these teachers were practicing English teachers at primary and secondary school levels. The research was explorative and concentrated on gaining substantial knowledge about the beliefs and assumptions on which these teachers based their teaching practice. In addition to this, the investigation aimed to examine where their beliefs came from, and their possible connection with teacher behavior in the classroom. The research took into account the multifaceted contextual factors involved in the teaching-learning process, such as institutional policies, instructional settings, program, and didactic materials and resources.

The study took place in two major stages, the first of which involved the planning of the study and the data collection stage. These activities were undertaken in the second semester of 2005 within the framework of the course Methodology in ELT I (July-December 2005). During this time, the teachers attended 16 training sessions. The second stage, which took place during the first semester of 2006, involved the main activities of the data analysis and interpretation and the writing of the research report.

The data collection instruments were valuable means for the exploration of the teachers' views and actions. Interviews, surveys, questionnaires, and classroom observations were all used. Likewise, the research utilized as research instruments the pedagogic documents resulting from the normal activities of the course such as a diagnostic test, teachers' self-evaluation and lesson plans. Secondary data was collected through an interview to an external collaborator from the Ministry of Education (called MECED at that time). Overall, each instrument was designed to collect specific pieces of information. Nevertheless, each was also designed in order to have some kind of interrelation with the others. This was especially helpful to contrast and compare information from different perspectives for validity purposes.

4.2.3 The findings

The findings that emerged were focused on the following aspects: the situational context, teacher motivation, teacher knowledge base, teacher beliefs, the teaching-learning processes and the teachers' training needs.

1. The situational context

The research shed light on the challenges that contextual conditions posed to the teachers, which were focused on the following aspects.

- *Curriculum and materials*

The major problem observed was the lack of consistent curriculum guidelines and adequate materials. At the moment of this investigation the Ministry of Education had launched a curriculum reform that was in a piloting stage in some schools. Thus, the Ministry of Education had given guidelines for the teachers to use the constructivist approach and base their lessons on developing student competence. Within this approach, the teachers had the freedom to use any kind of textbook or instructional materials. Nonetheless, this represented a problem as only some private schools could provide the teachers with modern materials (not necessarily adequate to the suggested approach, or to the context). In most public schools the teachers only had access to the same series of books that the Luxon's study had identified as inadequate for the context.

- *Appraisal system*

Another significant contextual constraint was teacher appraisal system. Most teachers feared the process because of the way it was organized. Most of the time, the teachers' appraisal was carried out in the form of classroom observations, often called "supervisions". This process had

a negative influence on teachers, since most of the time such supervision aimed at providing judgmental feedback about their performance. The situation was aggravated by the fact that, more often than not, unqualified people were in charge of the process.

- *Lack of training opportunities*

The problems posed by context were also concentrated on the lack of teacher training opportunities. The teachers acknowledged the benefits of the Saturday English Program as a good training opportunity, but resented the fact that their institutions did not provide them with enough support to participate in training courses, such as the national teacher conference organized by ANPI once a year.

- *Teachers' workload and financial retribution*

In most cases the teachers' academic workload was very heavy, as they had to teach many hours, face different kinds of students and be in charge of large classes. The financial recognition for the teachers' work was low. The average monthly salary of a teacher working at a public school was between 1800 and 2000 cordobas (about 120 dollars at that time). With such a low salary teachers needed to work two or three shifts because of financial pressures.

All of these contextual factors conditioned and limited teacher performance significantly and exerted strong influence on language instruction. These major problems affected teacher range of action in the classroom, the nature and characteristics of the processes, and student acquisition of the language.

2. *Teacher motivation*

Teacher motivation was perceived as a major problem derived from context. This was not surprising taking into account that (a) the conditions for language institution were not adequate, (b) the teachers were affected by extreme workloads and (c) the teachers were not given the professional treatment they deserved (e.g. low salaries, lack of an adequate appraisal system)

The teachers revealed their perception that the language was not valued as an important subject within their institutions. Their perception was based on the contextual constraints, the little time devoted for language instruction, the large number of students per classroom, the lack of concern in providing adequate conditions for language instruction, and the lack of social recognition for teachers.

3. *Teacher knowledge base*

The findings revealed that most teachers' knowledge base had significant gaps. Their conceptualizations often overlapped, mixed, and lacked deepness and accuracy, which revealed that teachers had not achieved appropriate competence in mastering some of the most basic concepts and theory related to the processes of TEFL and SLA. This was perceived as a significant weakness as teachers should have acquired such knowledge at earlier stages of their training. This finding had implications suggesting a language program evaluation within the Saturday English Program.

4. Teachers' beliefs and their effect on teacher performance

Teacher beliefs emerged from different sources. For instance, the culture of the particular institution exerted great influence on how the teachers viewed themselves. Thus, the degree of involvement and decision making in class contents was low. Teacher participation in the learning processes was limited to follow the guidelines established either by their institutions or by the national system. On the other hand, teachers' beliefs were influenced by their experience of what works best and by their tendency to follow ritual teaching behavior in the classrooms. This was considered to determine for the most part, the nature of the classroom activity observed. In this regard, evidence was provided that the degree of teacher decision making inside the classroom was high. The teachers had significant freedom in choosing the kind of methodology to teach the language which suggested high possibilities of change and improvement in the way the instructional processes were handled. Nevertheless, the teachers needed consistent help to carry out these changes and improvements effectively.

5. Teachers' beliefs about teaching methods in EFL

Most teachers' did not have a clear idea of the principles underlying their teaching practice. Although they identified their beliefs as being influenced by the Communicative Approach, this was in disagreement with their actual actions and performance in the classroom, as the approach observed in most processes was the Grammar Translation Method. The information also revealed that the teachers were not satisfied with the results of these approaches because of student low achievement.

6. The instructional processes

The combination of all of these factors exerted great influence on the teachers' decision to organize classroom instruction. In the processes observed the teachers had the tendency to assume teacher-centered roles and there was little student involvement and participation in the language learning processes. Most of the processes observed revealed significant constraints in the teachers' repertoire of teaching techniques, use of instructional materials, integration of realia and authentic material, and design and implementation of complementary materials.

On the other hand, the classroom observations also showed that the teachers spent considerable class time providing students with difficult (and very often unclear grammar explanations), and writing on the board. Teacher talking time has a direct correlation with the nature and characteristics of the classroom activity observed, as in the majority of cases student degree of involvement was limited to a very passive and receptive role. Moreover, the students used to spend valuable class time copying in their notebooks or doing grammar exercises.

The use of the target language needed further reinforcement as well. There were considerable shortcomings in some teachers' linguistic competence in pronunciation, accuracy, and fluency. This was perceived to exert great influence on their choice to use the mother tongue as they lacked self-confidence in their command of the target language.

7. *Teacher training needs*

A number of recommendations emerged as a result of the study aimed at the improvement of the processes of teacher formation in the Saturday English Program. Thus the suggestions were focused on the curriculum improvement of the pedagogical and methodological courses. In this regard, it was considered that a language program evaluation would be highly beneficial to strengthen these studies.

On the other hand, since the Ministry of Education was promoting curriculum changes at the time this study took place, authorities were promoting teacher training for the upcoming curriculum reform. The prediction was that the reform would take place in the year 2007. Thus, the MECD approached the national universities offering ELT programs to ask for pertinent training nationwide. On the whole, the program asked should be aimed at reinforcing and improving the teachers' language proficiency and methodological knowledge. Based on the results and findings of the present study, a list of potential content areas for this program was provided. The contents suggested, which are listed below, covered a wide range of key aspects to address the teachers' training needs.

- A review of methods and approaches in language teaching based on an analytical perspective
- Terminology in EFL teaching and theories on Second Language Acquisition
- Syllabus: Kinds of syllabuses and syllabus design
- Language teaching based on a learner-centered approach: Students' roles, involvement and participation
- Language teaching based on a learner-centered approach: Learners characteristics, learning styles, and motivation
- Effective teachers' roles
- The dimensions of communicative competence
- Lesson plan structuring (opening, sequencing, pacing and closures)
- Stages of a lesson: Introduction (initial activities, presentation and warm-ups)
- Stages of a lesson: Effective practice (verbalization, automatization and autonomy)
- Effective approaches to provide controlled and free practice
- Effective approaches to teach integrated English
- Teaching techniques and classroom dynamics
- Effective approaches in the use of technological resources
- Effective approaches to error correction management
- Effective approaches to teaching grammar
- Effective approaches to classroom management and interaction: How to deal with large classes
- Effective ways to use complementary materials: visual aids, posters, brochures, magazines, and realia
- Effective ways to design worksheets and complementary materials
- Effective ways to use instructional materials: How to assess the suitability of textbooks.
- Effective ways to use instructional materials: How to deal with textbooks effectively
- Approaches to reflective teaching: classroom observation, peer observation and action research.
- Reinforcement of teachers' linguistic skills:
 1. *Speaking, reading, listening and writing*
 3. *Use of the target language in the classroom*
 4. *Clarity of instructions and explanations in the target language*
 5. *Effective ways to approach teacher talking time and students talking time*

Approaching teacher education programs was certainly a very good decision made by the educational authorities at such an important time of curriculum changes. Nonetheless, there was no follow up to the proposal and the training program did not take place.

4.2.4 Implications for this study

As aforementioned, this investigation was a prelude of the present study. By analyzing its scope, content, data collection procedures and results it is possible to detect its influence. The following are the major implications of these results for the present study.

- *The scope of the program*
 - *The results shed significant light on teacher knowledge, beliefs and classroom performance.*

Having analyzed the situation of teachers' at the PRESET level and shed light on the area of teacher knowledge, beliefs and performance fostered my interest in doing a similar research effort at the INSET level. The knowledge gained exerted significant influence on the scope of this new study and on the analysis and interpretation of the new data.

- *The contextual challenges*
 - *The study illuminated the major challenges posed by context on teachers and on the instructional processes*

Knowing the situational context was important to be aware of the constraints that the teachers faced, which could have a potential negative influence on the development of the program. This knowledge informed and led the major actions of the project. Moreover, the contextual conditions were consistently taken into account within the scope of the project.

- *The training program*
 - *Based on the main problems and weaknesses detected, a number of potential content areas for teacher training were suggested*

These contents were the basis of the draft proposal of the *Postgraduate Course in TEFL*, training program offered to the teachers at the INSET level. The proposal was further enriched by the teachers' insights in the identification of the teachers' training needs in the first stage of the investigation.

As discussed, this investigation exerted significant influence on the scope of the new research and informed its major actions. Nonetheless, there are significant differences between the two studies. The first difference is obviously the teacher education level. The new investigation was conducted at the INSET level, whereas the previous investigation was focused on the PRESET level. The other important difference was that the previous study had an explorative nature, very much like an ethnographic study. My participation as the researcher was only to observe the processes trying not to alter them. Through this approach I intended to get an accurate perception, which resulted in significant knowledge of the situation. This new investigation had a more proactive nature intended to intervene in the process through an Action

Research approach. The ultimate aim was to improve the process of teacher formation by fostering sustainable development.

This chapter was focused on the research context at different levels, the national educational level and the specific instructional level, in terms of the conditions provided for language instruction and the aspects affecting language teachers. The opportunities provided for teacher continuing development have been discussed too. Likewise, the major university programs offering opportunities for teacher professionalization were described. Finally, the chapter has discussed the major research efforts made in the TEFL area in Nicaragua.

Chapter 3



Literature Review About Teachers and Teacher Education

In dealing with effective teacher development it is important to take into account a number of multifaceted and varied aspects involved in the process. Some of the most important aspects within the aims of this project will be detailed in this literature review. The issues explored have been divided into the following four major sections:

1. Socio-cultural contextual factors and their influence on language teaching and learning
2. Teacher Education Approaches: The processes of teacher preparation
3. Characteristics of effective teachers
4. Conditions for an effective teacher development process

All of these aspects are intrinsically connected to the world of language teachers. They are, so to speak, components of the same complex web and, therefore, should be taken into account in any attempt to language teacher professionalization.

1. CONTEXTUAL FACTORS AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING

Language learning and teaching are social phenomena and as such involve complex ways of interaction, interrelation, and communication within a given social group. Thus, in relation to ELT processes, socio-cultural and political contextual aspects are considered key factors to take into account as they equally affect teachers, learners and the way language instruction processes are organized and ruled. As Bigelow and Walker (2003) accurately state: “It is thus impossible to understand the full picture of a language teaching/learning situation...without fully comprehending the specific contexts—social, cultural, and political—in which the event takes place” (Bigelow and Walker, 2003:7). Freeman and Johnson point out that “teacher-learners and their learning processes can only be adequately documented or understood if the socio-cultural contexts in which these processes take place are explicitly examined as part of that research process” (Freeman and Johnson, 1998:409).

Thus, contextual factors are related, among others, to the way language is regarded and valued by the national and particular educational institutions, teachers, students, parents, and by the community. They also involve institutional conditions for language instruction and policies regarding how the language is taught and learnt, its pertinence, and the level of general awareness (or lack of it) of how the language can be connected in reality to peoples’ lives: its practical use in the immediate outside world. There is, then, an implicit issue of power and decision-making in the conditions created for language instruction. Regarding this Johnson (2000) calls attention to

the fact that, “the place where teaching occurs is not neutral or inconsequential to the activity of teaching but a powerful force that affects what and how teachers teach” (Johnson, 2000:4). Kumaravadivelu (1994) refers to how context influences or “shapes” very specific issues concerning language learning/teaching processes such as learning motivation, language learning goals, the functions of the language at home and in the community, the input available, and the proficiency norms established by the specific social group (Kumaravadivelu 1994: 41).

Since language teachers and, therefore, their language teaching/learning activity, are embedded in particular social systems (which shape instruction) it is of great importance to closely examine the influence imposed by the particular characteristics of their situational contexts. Moreover, this influence should be taken into account in the first place in any attempt to explore and understand the teachers’ work with views to their development. This is particularly important in order to shed light on how context can represent either an obstructive or a helpful influence on teaching.

Much can be said about contextual factors in language teaching. Nonetheless, I will focus here on two aspects that are perceived as directly connected to the issue of teacher development: how context shapes language teacher experiences as language learners and language teachers and the major challenges posed by context.

1.1 Teacher educational experiences

Teacher educational experiences within their situational contexts strongly shape their conceptions of what a language is, how it is taught, their perceived responsibilities, roles, and immediate choices and responses to a particular language teaching situation. Thus, in becoming a language teacher, context directly influences the processes of teachers’ educational experiences: as language learners, first, and then as language teachers. Freeman and Johnson (1998) acknowledge the influence of context on both kinds of experiences and refer to this learning process as “normative” and “lifelong” (Freeman & Johnson, 1998). Thus, there is a direct correlation between both kinds of experiences. The premise is that teachers’ previous educational experiences are the basis for the process of teacher formation. Actually, until recently, literature in the field of teachers’ knowledge has started to recognize the importance of these experiences and their implications for the process of learning to teach. This can be inferred from the following statement:

Drawing on work in general education, teacher educators have come to recognize that teachers are not empty vessels waiting to be filled with theoretical and pedagogical skills; they are individuals who enter teacher education programs with prior experiences, personal values, and beliefs that inform their knowledge about teaching and shape what they do in their classrooms. (402)

So, teachers evidently have a whole mass of experiential information resulting from their earlier experiences as language learners, whatever their nature. Regarding this it is worth

referring to the common phenomenon of teachers who were exposed to traditional approaches when being language learners themselves. For these teachers, the “passed on” vision gets to be deeply embedded in their language teaching-learning beliefs, which makes the task of teacher development a much more difficult endeavor than if teachers had been exposed to more participatory language learning approaches (see section 3.2 below for more information about the sources of teacher beliefs).

This vision is further reinforced by the decision-making processes in the organization of language instruction within most institutions, which are usually of a top-down nature. Usually, the teachers’ role is to follow prescribed time-honored guidelines and teach the language using these prescriptions. This conception has been called the *positivistic paradigm*, an approach in which teachers are viewed as didactic implementers and, in which a “top-down administration imposes on them a dependent, technical role” (Kohonen, 2002:41). The influence of context, once again obtrusive, strengthens the teachers’ traditional views and actions and does not provide them with the necessary freedom and encouragement to explore more participatory roles.

The strong power of context in shaping teachers’ previous learning experiences and in limiting their current roles, has important implications for teacher education programs and teacher educators, as such experiences are the fundamental basis that teachers have preceding their formal training. As Johnson (2000) points out “teachers’ own experiences, intuitions, prior knowledge and present beliefs act as starting points for learning to teach” (Johnson, 2000:1).

Therefore, in any attempt to contribute to teacher development it is highly important to have a critical, down to earth vision. This involves searching for, identifying, and putting into practice ideas and measures that can be realistically used, taking into account the characteristics of the teachers, their particular background knowledge, and their specific situational contexts. Indeed, in order to succeed in such an ambitious enterprise it is crucial to consider what is feasible and practical for teachers to do within their contexts, and how they can be provided with consistent help under the given conditions.

1.2 Teacher contextual challenges

As outlined above, the socio-cultural/political context affects how the current perspectives of teachers about ‘how-to-teach’ are formed in schools and in teacher training programs. In addition, context relates to the very real challenges that teachers face in their current institutions and classrooms. Therefore, several issues concerning the day-to-day contextual realities that influence teacher development will be considered here. Richards (2001) links the context in which teachers work with the quality derived from the conditions provided. He maintains that: “the quality of teaching in a program relates to the institutional context in which teachers work”

(Richards 2001: 207). The institutional context can be divided into three levels: *the global educational level, the institution/school level and the classroom/practice level*. The conditions provided for language instructions at these three levels pose significant challenges to teachers in several interrelated manners.

1.2.1 Challenges at the global educational level

Bigelow and Walker ask an important question regarding language teaching/learning education processes: “How does language policy and language planning determine the nature of ...language instruction?” (Bigelow and Walker, 2003:7). The question tackles the issue of how contextual policies at a global level, can affect language instruction. Issues regarding language policies are beyond the scope of the present research project. Nonetheless, I will refer here to two particular factors of language policies at the national level which, as in a cascade effect, affect the institutional level and the classroom level significantly. These two factors are the awareness of the social impact of the language and the organization of the curriculum for language instruction.

The first factor is related to the social awareness of the impact of the language in the particular community. As Graves (2000) proposes “the beliefs that learners need to know how to participate in the community and that language teaching involves helping learners gain access to social systems, are both related to socio-political issues” (Graves, 2000:29). As Lin (2001) asserts “access (or lack of it) to English often affects the social mobility and life chances of many children and adults not speaking English as their first or second language” (Lin, 2001: 271). Social awareness of the importance of the language can exert powerful influence on the way the entire community values the language. If the awareness is low, the community will not perceive it as important. If, on the contrary, social awareness is high, people in the community will perceive the language as an important means for development.

The second factor is the issue of curriculum. Because of the relevance of curriculum for the organization of the language processes, it cannot be separated from the situational contexts where it is implemented. Within traditional or top-down curriculum guidelines “the work of teachers is to make delivery of content...through linear sequence of learning activities designed to teach...objectives and an evaluation of the learning of each objective” (Hudelson and Faltis, 1995:33). Perhaps the main criticism of this approach is the role given to the teachers (a transmitter role) and to the learners (a receptive role). Such curriculum policies prevent teachers from using more participatory approaches, which affect students’ language acquisition. More often than not the processes for language instruction favor these practices, particularly in developing countries affecting teachers’ performance. As Kohonen (2002) notes:

Well-intentioned...innovations may, in many cases, become counter-productive if they are introduced at such a rate that the teachers cannot cope with them properly. Therefore, increasing pressures without appropriate support can entail feelings of

powerlessness and frustration and can lead to withdrawal, fatigue, and a professional crisis. (48)

Nunan states that it is necessary to distinguish between the previous traditional model, which is based on a three-stage sequence, i.e. planning, implementing and evaluating, and a learner-centered curriculum in which teachers are the “prime agents of curriculum development” (Nunan, 1988:1). Within such an approach, the curriculum is seen as a product of joint efforts between teachers and learners rather than the systematic application of guidelines planned beforehand. In this bottom up rather than top down approach, the design and implementation of curriculum does not merely have as its main goal the mastery of a great deal of information. On the contrary, it takes into account language acquisition as a process of acquiring skills. It is learner-based rather than subject-based.

These two visions of curriculum, that differ greatly, are samples to highlight the importance of making accurate decision in this regard, which are in charge of educational authorities at the global level. The decisions made affect the teachers and student learning outcomes.

1.2.2 Challenges at the institutional/school level

According to Richards, an important quality indicator within educational institutions is the institution’s willingness to enhance teacher professionalization. He holds that “a quality institution provides opportunities for teachers to develop their careers”. (Richards. 2001: 206). The lack of concern for providing teachers with opportunities to improve professionally is a significant constraint that hinders the teachers’ professional development. Another constraint is related to the way teachers’ roles are viewed within educational institutions. Richards and Lockhart point out that “different teaching settings... create particular roles for teachers based on the institutional administrative structure, the culture operating in each institution, and its teaching philosophy” (Richards and Lockhart 1994: 98). Thus, institutions can exert powerful influence on the teachers as they are entitled to establish their own policies. The opportunities for teacher development inside the institution as well as the freedom for decision-making will depend on such policies.

1.2.3 Challenges at the classroom/practice level

There are many different aspects that could be addressed regarding the challenges that teachers face at the classroom level. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this study, there is one that seems to be the most urgent to address: The teachers’ use of traditional approaches to deliver instruction, which, in turn, generates an even more important challenge: students’ expectations, beliefs and attitudes.

It is a fact that in many cases language students are used to (and feel comfortable with) traditional models to teaching the language (a vision consistently reinforced by institutional policies in many cases). Generating change and switching to more participatory approaches

might make students feel inhibited and uncomfortable at the initial stages. Moreover, as Tarone and Yule (1989) suggest, chances are that students end up distrusting their teacher's competence and expertise:

If students from such a background are thrust into a much more informal setting in which the teacher assumes a less authoritarian role, expects interactive group work among students, does not encourage memorization or administer achievement tests, and generally acts as if students should be responsible for their own learning, then they may feel that their teacher just doesn't know how to do the job properly. (9)

The reactions and attitudes of students' are likely to exert a powerful influence on a teacher's decision to avoid participatory approaches. It seems that the major challenges for the teachers at the classroom level are to both change their own traditional views (see teacher change in 3.7 below) and defy their students' learning patterns and behavior. Grimmitt (1996:303) defines this challenge as a "struggle for increased professional authenticity" a process through which the teachers examine critically their professional views and teaching philosophies and reflect on the events in the classroom. Grimmitt argues further "that pursuing their professional growth involves teachers in a struggle because the conditions and setting in which teachers work pose obstacles of professionalism". This is particularly true for most Nicaraguan EFL teachers, particularly for those working at secondary school levels. The many obstacles they experience are, for the most part, derived from their contexts and the main affected area is their professional development, particularly in those aspects related to change and methodological improvement.

It is clear how these three interconnected hierarchical levels interact and relate to each other. What happens at the national levels exerts influence on teachers at the institutional level, which, in turn, affects them in the classroom level as well. Nevertheless, it is also true that what teachers do in class can affect all levels and can have an impact at the national level. A switch to better teaching approaches is an urgent need in the Nicaraguan EFL context, and language teachers have great social responsibility in generating this change. Moreover, in addition to what is expected from teachers in terms of providing more participatory approaches (and all that this implies), teachers' role as social agents is viewed as absolutely necessary as well. Hudelson and Faltis argue that language teaching is both a socio-political and a moral-ethical activity in that it takes the position that the "status quo" in schools and (in society) should not be maintained and that "teachers should be change agents working for both better schools and a more just and truly democratic society" (Hudelson and Faltis, 1993:27).

Based on all the above, it is clear that context cannot be separated from the teachers' struggle to transform their reality and that any attempt to make meaningful changes should take the situational factors into consideration. Given all of the constraints, it is my belief that all successful teacher education programs in the country must help to equip the teachers with the

necessary strategies to deal with their contextual challenges effectively. In order to define successful teacher education programs, some broad theoretical distinctions regarding teacher education approaches will be examined in section 2 below. Likewise, the approach adopted and used by this study will be presented and discussed.

2. TEACHER EDUCATION APPROACHES: THE PROCESSES OF TEACHER FORMATION

Language teacher education is primarily concerned with teachers as learners of language teaching rather than with students as learners of language. Thus, teacher education focuses on teacher-learners as distinct from language learners (Kennedy, 1991). *Teacher education*, then, is the term formally used to define the task of academic programs that prepare people to teach a language. Freeman states that language teaching is “the subject matter” of language teaching education (Freeman, 1989:28). He also describes the process of teacher education as “the sum of various interventions that are used to develop professional knowledge among practitioners” (Freeman, 1998: 399). These interventions, in short, are the different stages provided by teacher education programs so that teachers acquire the necessary academic and practical skills that enable them to achieve expertise as language teachers. The types of interventions proposed reflect differing viewpoints about the teacher formation process and so they are defined differently throughout the literature. Moreover, some of these terms are often used interchangeably while others overlap substantially. The difficulty that this poses is not confusion in the terminology, but the fact that there are different beliefs about teacher education. In order to clarify the approach used in the present study, I will briefly examine the types of possible interventions and their corresponding definitions below.

2.1 Teacher Education, Teacher Training and Teacher Development.

Teacher education, *teacher training* and *teacher development* are terms often used interchangeably. Sometimes they seem to merge and some other times they seem to mean different things. Freeman, for instance, sets out a tripartite distinction: ‘teacher education’ as the superordinate for ‘teacher training’ and ‘teacher development’. Thus, *teacher education* is the broader process comprising *teacher training* and *teacher development* both of which he defines as operational processes (Freeman, 1989: 37). Both processes are perceived as essential elements on the pathway to teacher professionalization. In this formulation the main distinction is between ‘teacher training’ and ‘teacher development’.

However, other important authors (Mann, 2005; Tomlinson, 2003; and Richards, 1990) only make a distinction between ‘teacher training’ and what they call ‘teacher education’. Essentially, the most important distinction, as discussed below, is between a ‘modeling behavior’ approach (referred to by almost all theorists as “teacher training”) and a ‘raising theoretical awareness/knowledge’ approach (alternatively called ‘teacher development’ or ‘teacher education’).

2.2 Teacher Training

Richards (1990) defines *teacher training* processes as approaches to teacher formation aimed at familiarizing student teachers with *techniques* and *skills* to apply in the classroom. Within a teacher training approach there is constant interaction between trainer and trainee. The former's role is to provide the practical and necessary pedagogical suggestions, ideas and techniques so that the latter gets the "tools of the trade" (Richards, 1990: xi). The way it typically works is through the trainer's demonstration of the effectiveness of the suggestions. The trainee is expected to learn the ideas and put them into practice. Thus, the trainer is perceived as the expert in charge (the transmitter) and the trainee as the apprentice who receives the knowledge (receptor). Based on this perception, it is clear where the main criticisms to the *teacher training* approach come from. Looking at it this way the trainee's role is, for the most part, limited to follow the trainer's advice. Moreover, the nature of such relationship is top-down, imposed, and external, as opposed to bottom-up, chosen, and internal.

Nevertheless, *teacher training* is perceived as an important process that all language teachers should go through, particularly at the initial stage when they lack the abilities and necessary information that can serve as the basis for further ways of improvement. As Clarke remarks, teacher training is "a necessary stage of development for professionals" (Clarke, 1982: 447). Mann supports this view as he says: "pre-service training or initial training education has the functions of giving guidance to possible pedagogic choices, teaching strategies, L2 methods, course design, and coursebook materials" (2005:104).

I believe that teacher training is a crucial step in the process of teacher formation. Trainees' initial ideas about teaching have to emerge from somewhere, not only to provide them with a solid knowledge base, but to clarify mistaken preconceptions, ideas and beliefs they have got as language learners. The important thing to bear in mind is to what extent this approach to teacher education is carried out by qualified trainers, and whether or not teachers are led to autonomy along the way (see collaboration at the PRESET stage in 4.1.6 below).

2.3 Teacher Development

Teacher development, on the contrary, is different from *teacher training* both in nature and in procedures. As opposed to *teacher training*, the process emerges "from within" and, as such, it reflects the deep desire of the teacher to make substantial improvements. Implicit in this desire are the issues of teachers' choices, decision making, self-awareness, and self-reflection processes (Allwright, 1999; Bailey et al. 2001; Breen and Littlejohn, 2000; Freeman, 1989; Hudelson and Faltis, 1993; Johnson, 2002; Richards, 1990). Thus, the process is seen as a continuous, life-long and personally-driven process that motivates teachers to go on improving professionally. Consequently, the purpose of teacher development programs is to nurture,

further and fulfill this desire. Tomlinson (2003) accurately describes the nature and characteristics of teacher development processes.

In a teacher development approach teachers are given new experiences to reflect on and learn from. Their prior experience and expertise is valued but they are encouraged to add to their repertoires and to develop their awareness of the processes of learning and teaching. The emphasis is not on finite, articulated knowledge coming from outside but on dynamic, multi-dimensional awareness developing in the mind, and on the ability to apply this awareness to their actual contexts of teaching. (1)

On the other hand, Richards uses the term *teacher education* for approaches that focus on helping teachers to develop *theories of teaching*, understand the nature of *teacher decision making* and foster strategies for *critical self-awareness* and *self-evaluation* (Richards, 1990: xi). His main criticism to the training dimension is that too much emphasis is given to the transmission of knowledge and skills *from the trainer perspective* and that a more holistic, integrated approach *from the trainee perspective* is needed.

While Richards uses the term ‘teacher education’, he is actually referring to the same fundamental process comprised by ‘teacher development’. In Richards’ work *Second Language Teacher Education* (1990), a classic in the field, he in fact declares and suggests a switch from a *teacher training* focus to a *teacher education/development* orientation. The work includes several papers that address major issues of content and process in teacher education programs. The core aspects, implicit in the papers, related to this re-orientation are the following:

- a movement away from a “training perspective” to an “education” perspective and recognition that effective teaching involves high-level cognitive processes, which cannot be taught directly.
- the need for teachers and student teachers to adopt a research orientation to their own classrooms and their own teaching.
- less emphasis on prescriptions and top-down directives and more emphasis on an inquiry-based and discovery oriented approach to learning (bottom-up).
- a focus on devising experiences that require the student teacher to generate theory as a source of discipline for second language teacher education, and more of an attempt to integrate sound, educationally based approaches.
- use of procedures that involve teachers in gathering and analyzing data about teaching.

(Richards, 1990: xii)

2.4 The distinction between Teacher Training and Teacher Development

It is clear that the teacher development perspective just described claims for better and more integrated approaches to language teacher education. The criticism to the training dimension is that it is a simplistic, transmitter approach. In other words, there has been the realization that it is not enough to provide teachers with the skills and abilities to teach the language, it is also important to encourage the adoption of reflective approaches to teaching, promote teacher autonomy, and their involvement in data collection/interpretation and theory-

making based on classroom reality. The education/development approach implies important changes in the roles and views of both the student-teacher (trainee) and the teacher educator (trainer): for the trainee, the adoption of a self-directed researcher role as both teacher and student, with views to her improvement; for the trainer the awareness that her role goes beyond that of a transmitter, and that she should lead the trainee towards the generation and testing of hypothesis and theory making, and the use of the resulting knowledge as a basis for further development (Richards, 1990:15).

Woodward (1991) summarizes the main ideas of the discussion above in table 3 below:

Table 3

Teacher Training and Teacher Development as components of a continuum

Teacher training		Teacher development
Compulsory		voluntary
competency based		holistic
short term		long term
one-off		ongoing
Temporary		continual
external agenda		internal agenda
Skill/technique and knowledge based	awareness based, angled towards personal growth and the development of attitudes/insights	
compulsory for entry to the profession		non-compulsory
top down		bottom-up
product/certificate weighted		process-weighted
means you can get a job done with experts	means you can stay interested in your job	done with peers

Woodward, 1991:147

The two bi-polar opposites are actually viewed as ends of a continuum, which highlights that there are not clear or cut distinctions between the two processes. Using this scale for *teacher training* and *teacher development* does help to clarify essential differences between the two approaches as it reflects the realities of teachers and teacher trainers in the field. It is clear that all teacher education programs need to include aspects of both teacher training and teacher development along these scales in order to be effective. In the following section I will refer to the associations presented here to further clarify the approach of this study.

2.5 Teacher Training and Teacher Development: A combined approach

This project has been based on a combination of approaches. Given the teachers' existing level of knowledge and their situational contexts, some aspects of a teacher training approach have been retained. Specifically, there was a solid focus on helping build up teacher skill /technique and knowledge, there was a balance between product and process, and experts, as well as peers were involved in the whole process. On the other hand, there are aspects of teacher development involved as well, intended to build on the teachers' reflective skills and promote their independence. Action Research was an important link that connected both approaches; mainly because of the importance of both product and process within AR projects. All this is

shown using Woodward's continuum below. The X's give an overview of how the two perspectives; *teacher training* and *teacher development* were combined. The development imperative within the training approach is shown by the arrow.

Table 4

Teacher Training and Teacher Development: A combined approach

Teacher training development			Teacher
Compulsory		✘	voluntary
Short term		✘	long term
One-off		✘	ongoing
Temporary		✘	continual
External agenda		✘	internal agenda
Skill/technique and knowledge based (ultimate goal)	✘ →		personal growth awareness based
Compulsory for entry to the profession		✘	non-compulsory
Top down		✘	bottom-up
Product/certificate weighted	ACTION RESEARCH		process-weighted
	✘		
Means you can get a job		✘	means you can stay interested
Done with experts		✘	done with peers

Note: This table was adapted from Woodward, 1991:147

It was perceived that a combination of *teacher training* and *teacher development* was crucial for the improvement of the teachers participating in this study. On the one hand, I acknowledge teacher development as an essential process that can allow teachers to make well-informed and accurate decisions in their teaching practice in an autonomous and self-reflective way. Based on this belief this research project leant towards the teacher development end in the following aspects: awareness-based, voluntary, bottom-up, internal, long-term, ongoing and continual. Thus, it was perceived that teachers needed to develop a critical perspective of teaching (awareness-based) which emerged from their own willingness to improve (voluntary, bottom-up, internal, non-compulsory, interest), and which was sustainable (long-term, ongoing, continual). Therefore, given the fact that the main focus of this study was, precisely, based on teacher professional development, these aspects were consistently and recurrently taken into account and referred to throughout the present research project.

On the other hand, the study leant towards the teacher training side of Woodward's scale in the following aspect: skill/technique and knowledge based, what Prahbu (1987) has called "equipping procedures." He justifies the need to use such procedures for teacher formation when teachers face different kinds of contextual pressures from institutions of formal education, from government, and from other sources (cited in Woodward, 1991:141). This view justifies my choice for the present study, as it was precisely the contextual pressures (challenges, constraints, policies, and vision), which made a teacher training approach suitable for fostering the teachers' improvement. As discussed in section 1.3 above, teachers were expected to have

skills, techniques and knowledge that, unfortunately, their context had not given them; at least not properly and consistently. This was particularly true for the issue of methodology. Teachers were to teach the language effectively, but they did not have the necessary conditions, nor the appropriate guidance or knowledge to do so. The strong influence of context and the numerous challenges and constraints it poses for teachers, made it especially important to use the equipping procedures of a teacher training approach in this study.

In addition, based on my knowledge of the teachers' background learning/teaching experiences and current knowledge, it was my perception that a teacher training approach was suitable at that stage of their formation so that it could lead them to higher levels of professional improvement. Although I believed that all of the teachers were definitely on the pathway to teacher development, they still needed relevant and substantial guidance, help and support along the way. In this regard the insights provided by Woodward (1991:132) best reflect the way I viewed my role and responsibility in helping the teachers: "...what is our own role? Is it not to find out what trainees can do already, fit in with that, and then open out some new options for them to consider?"

Consequently, it was my belief that the skills/techniques/knowledge aspects from Woodward's scale were particularly appropriate to unfold new options for the teachers so that they could enhance their knowledge and teach more effectively within their existing conditions. This involved helping them to use more participatory approaches, expanding their teaching techniques and strategies, and widen their range of classroom activities and tasks (see the teacher training plan in chapter four). Obviously, this teacher training process did not intend to have an imposed, directive, top-down dimension. Rather, as Woodward suggests above, I tried to establish a teacher training process in which teachers' current repertoire and background learning/teaching experiences were regarded as the starting point from which they could continue to build-up their knowledge.

Within this approach there was constant interaction between trainee knowledge, ideas, beliefs and practice and those of the trainer. My definite intention was to make, as Mann suggests, "a shift towards ensuring that training integrates and maintains a development imperative" (2005:105). As Johnson (2000:1) proposes "teachers are capable of and ultimately responsible for their own professional development but...certain structures must be in place for teachers to be empowered to do so". Finding ways of creating these structures for teacher development taking into account the influence of context on teachers' thinking and actions is a very important issue. Using Mann' words above, I believe that integrating a "development imperative" in the training process of the teachers' participating in this study was one way of creating these structures.

Woodward (1991) points out that scales "can encourage a gradually evolving and changing view of many valid points spread out along the middle of a scale from one end or extreme to the

other” (p. 148). An important aspect of this study, the evolving process of Action Research in the classroom, fell in the middle of Woodward’s ‘product vs. process’ scale (see table 4 above). The product was important; that is teachers identified a situation, problem or limitation that was relevant for their specific lessons and they aimed at solutions and improvements. Thus, teachers ended up with a concrete end product which proved accomplishment much in the same way that course certificates do. Nonetheless, the process was also important. That is the different stages of the research cycle (problem identification, data collection, plan of action, implementation and final evaluation) provided teachers with the opportunity to put into practice their creative skills and build on their existing knowledge. Action Research is certainly a very interesting aspect of the present research project, as the process is perceived as a useful way to lead teachers to higher levels of self-reflection and improvement (see chapter five, 3 for a description of this process).

In addition, the evolving/changing view emphasized by Woodward is also applicable to the ‘done with experts vs. done with peers’ scale. She points out that “in order to understand what your present practice is, or what you do, you have to become aware of what you do and, in order to compare and contrast, become aware of what other people do” (p. 129). This shared awareness process adds an even more enriching element to this research project: a dimension of human collaboration. This is why the X has been placed in the middle of the two processes. On the one hand, experts were involved in the process to help teachers to become more aware of their pedagogic options. On the other hand, the close contact with peers provided the teachers with the opportunity to learn from each other and share experiences and knowledge.

To sum up, the discussion above highlights how *teacher training* and *teacher development* approaches were considered important processes to help teachers to deal with the serious difficulties derived from their contexts and become more effective teachers. These two approaches are closely interlinked as they are operational processes of teacher education and their main aim is to contribute to teachers’ growth and professionalization.

3. CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE TEACHERS

A language teacher’s job involves a number of multifaceted areas and lots of challenges. In order to be able to deal with all of these effectively, there are also a number of key characteristics that teachers need to have or develop and a series of conditions that need to be met. These characteristics and conditions are: *teacher personality traits and qualities*, *teacher belief and principles*, *teacher professional competence*, *teacher knowledge base*, *teacher roles*, *teacher performance* and *teacher change*. Certainly, these aspects condition and determine greatly the efficiency of the teacher in teaching the language and her/his ability to evolve over time.

3.1 Teacher personality traits and qualities

Harmer (1998) provides a global definition that somehow encloses the essence of good teachers. He says that a key element is that good teachers are more concerned with their students' learning than they are with their own performance as teachers (Harmer 1998:3). Indeed, teachers who bear in mind that their primary responsibility is to help learners learn effectively are usually able to cope with limitations, transmit enthusiasm and confidence, and provide a supporting atmosphere for language learning.

Yet teaching a language is much more than just good intentions. It actually requires a whole set of qualities that enable teachers to do so effectively. Concerning these qualities, Tomlinson (2003:3) asks the following question: "what is a good language teacher? Are the characteristics of a good language teacher self-evident or is there disagreement about them? Are they universal or are they culture specific?" In responding this question he concludes that a good language teacher:

- is patient and supportive
- has a good sense of humor
- is enthusiastic about teaching and positive towards their learners
- is a confident teacher with positive self-esteem
- is interesting, stimulating and creative
- is a good communicator
- is flexible
- takes initiative
- is sensitive to the needs and wants of each of their learners
- teaches responsively

These characteristics are clearly personal qualities or personality traits: patience, sense of humor, flexibility, sensitivity, enthusiasm, positive thinking, confidence, self-esteem, creativity, and the like. Alcaraz and Moody propose some similar characteristics which they categorize into four basic qualities; they are: vocation for teaching, a dynamic and open personality, humanistic interest, and willingness to receive in-service-training (cited in Madrid 1995: 118). Cross (2003: 41) defines similar traits defining them as "attitudes" and adds teacher motivation to the list. In addition, Bardhun (2002: 11) suggests: congruence, unconditional positive regard, and empathy all of which she relates directly to student success.

Because of their personal dimension, it is generally agreed that these qualities are, for the most part, innate and internally driven. Nevertheless, it seems that exposure to effective teacher education approaches may help teachers develop these important qualities, as well. Cross refers to such qualities as "factors that are more easily 'caught' than taught, and teacher educators are role models in these respects"(Cross, year:41) while Tomlinson (2003) refers to them as "attributes that can...be nurtured and supported through a teacher development approach"

Nunan and Lamb (1996) have gone farther by referring to the qualities related to teachers' duties and involvement in participatory learner-centered approaches. They call them

“managerial qualities” which have to do with a teacher’s abilities to provide a supporting language teaching-learning environment. These qualities are reflected in table 5 below:

Table 5

Teachers’ managerial qualities

Managerial quality	Language teaching contents
1. To know what he or she wants to happen and cause it to happen	Developing aims and objectives of a lesson or sequence
2. To exercise responsibility over resources and turn them to purposeful account	Making effective use of resources
3. To promote effectiveness in work and search for continuous improvement	Motivating learning towards better learning strategies
4. To be accountable for the performance of the unit he or she is managing	Being accountable to parents, head, and learners
5. To set a climate or tone conducive to enabling people to give of their best	Establishing rapport with learners and maintaining good classroom organization

(Nunan and Lamb 1996: 2)

To sum up, there are several important qualities that enable teachers to provide students with an appropriate learning environment. Some of these qualities are inborn (like vocation for teaching); others might be the result of teachers’ life experience (self-esteem; for instance); and some others seem to be developed through educational and professional experience, which deal directly with the effectiveness of the instructional processes (like the managerial qualities presented in table 5 above). Whether naturally driven, experiential, or fostered by teacher education, it is clear that these qualities are important aspects that effective teachers should have. Thus, any effective teacher development program must take into account this personal and inherent human dimension.

In order to gather other elements that shed some more light to understand the complex world of language teachers, it is necessary to go a little further in this analysis of the characteristics of good teachers. Bearing this in mind, in the following session teacher perceptions about language teaching and learning will be explored. In sections 1.1 and 1.2 above I have pointed out that teacher beliefs about language learning and teaching are affected by their own experiences as language learners and by their teacher education programs. These beliefs, in turn, exert powerful influence on the number of choices teachers make on an everyday basis when planning, evaluating and implementing their lessons. Let us examine closely some other possible sources of teacher beliefs and their implications for teacher development programs.

3.2 Teacher beliefs

No matter what field they work in, teachers undertake a number of different tasks in the classroom. According to Richards and Lockhart (1994:29) these tasks involve selecting learning activities, preparing students for new learning, presenting learning activities, asking questions,

conducting drills, checking student understanding, providing opportunities for practice of new items, monitoring student learning, giving feedback on student learning, and reviewing and re-teaching when necessary.

Such responsibilities are greatly influenced by the teachers' perception of the world, their background knowledge, their ways of thinking, their way of seeing and analyzing things, and their attitudes. In other words, the decisions and action that teachers carry out in their teaching practice is markedly influenced by their own experiential views and beliefs. Richards and Lockhart continue to state that "What teachers do is a reflection of what they know and believe... teacher knowledge and 'teacher thinking' provide the underlying framework or schema which guides the teachers' classroom actions" (Richards and Lockhart 1994: 29).

Clark and Peterson (1996) recommend that if a teacher's performance in undertaking their multiple tasks is to be understood, their beliefs and ways of thinking have to be analyzed and taken into consideration in the first place. They go on explaining that the perception of teaching includes a "cognitive, an affective and a behavioral dimension" (cited in Richards and Lockhart 1994: 29).

As part of human experience, teachers have gone through a number of events that exert great influence on the way their thinking is directed, and the reasons that they have to attach to certain teaching philosophies and procedures. Richards and Lockhart (1994:30-31) have identified some of the possible sources of teacher beliefs related to this experiential dimensions. Four of these sources are of particular interest for the purpose of the present study. They are discussed below.

3.2.1 Teacher own experience as a language learner

As discussed in section 1.1 above, teachers are greatly influenced by their own educational background experiences as language learners, particularly if they are not graduated teachers, or if they have had little or no exposure to different teaching approaches. In such circumstances, the logical model to follow is, for the most part, directed and influenced by the experiences and kinds of education that they were exposed to as students. Inevitably, teachers will tend to assume that their educational background was good enough to adopt the approaches of their former teachers as part of their own teaching procedures. As you might expect, the influence of these experiences as language learners affects the teachers' beliefs at a subconscious level. Very often teachers are not even aware of the phenomenon.

3.2.2 Teacher experience of what works best

Along the complex and very often difficult pathway to developing their teaching practice, teachers might have found that some procedures, techniques or activities work better than others, for particular purposes. For example, in a large class teachers might feel that having students sit in rows works more effectively than having them working in pairs or in groups. Teachers might feel reluctant to adopt or use the last kind or interaction as it might cause

significant disruption, noise and disorder in the classroom (particularly if such an approach is being used for the first time). Thus, teachers can make the decision of having students sit in rows because it works best to keep discipline under control. Nevertheless, this approach to classroom management is carried out at the expense of experimenting other possible ways of helping students learn the language more efficiently.

3.2.3 Teacher established practice

This area is related to the teacher's styles and preferred practice within the institution. These preferences and styles can be derived from two different sources. First, the teachers' own perception of how a language should be taught. Their perception in this concern may or may not have been learnt through formal teacher education programs. Second, what teachers are prescribed and allowed to do within the established practice and policies of their institutions and the decision-making framework that rules the system.

These two aspects are closely interconnected and teachers, consciously or unconsciously, stick to certain patterns based on these two conditioning factors. For instance, teachers might have good background knowledge and effective teaching beliefs about how language should be taught, but their schools do not allow any innovation and/or change. Or, the institution might have flexible policies, but the teachers might not be well informed of effective pedagogical procedures. Teachers established practice has a lot to do with unthinking and routine actions that prevent teachers from moving on professionally speaking (see section 3.7 below for an explanation of the phenomenon).

3.2.4 Teacher beliefs derived from an approach or method

Teachers' fondness of particular teaching methodologies can exert great influence on their beliefs about how to conduct their teaching practice. This knowledge ultimately determines the kind of method that they decide to use, particularly if the method has gained certain popularity or fame, or if the teachers themselves feel identified with the approach.

Along the past few decades teachers have been exposed to a number of different methods and approaches to teaching, based on particular linguistic theories on second language acquisition, each claiming to have the "magic recipe" for helping learners acquire a language. The list is quite long: the Grammar Translation Method, the Direct Method, Audiolingual/Audiovisual Method, Total Physical Response, Task Based Learning, Suggestopedia, Content Based Approach, and the like.

Depending on the method, teachers are suggested to perform a particular role. According to Richards and Rodgers (2001:28) these roles are related to the following:

- (a) The type of functions teachers are expected to fulfill, whether that of practice director, counselor, or model, for example.
- (b) The degree of control the teacher has over how learning takes place.

- (c) The degree to which the teacher is responsible for determining the content of what is to be taught.
- (d) The interactional patterns developed between teachers and learners.

The teachers' choice of method is the determining factor influencing the kind and nature of the classroom interaction and their own roles. Concerning this, Richards and Rodgers (2001) point out that:

The role of the teacher will ultimately reflect both the objectives of the method and the learning theory on which the method is predicated, since the success of a method may depend on the degree to which the teacher can provide the content or create the conditions for successful learning. (29)

Although it is generally positive that teachers have knowledge of a variety of methods, the amount of information that is available might make teachers feel extremely overwhelmed and anxious. As a consequence, they might feel hard-pressed to, unreflectively, use techniques or principles that are inappropriate for their students' particular characteristics, just for the sake of claiming that they are using a particular method to develop their teaching practice.

The arbitrary and uninformed use of a particular teaching model seems to have an ineffective, counterproductive side. It is argued that "the linguistic trends have been defined by theorists whose role has been dominant, whereas the practitioners -the teachers- have been relegated to a role of reproducers" (Cerezal, 2005: 23). Nunan (1991) affirms that most methods do not correspond to the classroom reality and what happens there in terms of teaching and learning, as they (the methods) have been transferred into the classroom (cited in Cerezal, 2005:23). Another important point that is appropriate to make here, is a criticism of the so-called eclectic method that many teachers claim to use in their classroom practice. In this respect, Kumaravadivelu (1994:30) argues that this approach "invariably degenerates into an unsystematic, unprincipled, uncritical pedagogy" and criticizes the fact that teachers with poor professional training lack the abilities to use this method in a "principled way". He says that these teachers end up using a compilation of aimless techniques from different sources and they call their approach "eclectic".

The long tradition of teaching methods has certainly opened many doors and provided important insights to the processes of second language acquisition. Nonetheless, teachers should have the necessary knowledge and critical abilities to analyze them (see teacher knowledge base in section 3.4 below). Through this analytical perspective, they will be able to make well-informed decisions to integrate, combine, adopt or adapt optional approaches within their teaching models repertoire. Hence, the importance of enhancing teachers' research skills so that teachers can take a more active role in the decision making of what is to be taught and how it is to be taught (see section 4.2 below for a description of this reflective process).

All the sources described above affect teacher perception of what teaching and learning involves. As Woods⁸ (1996:69) states, “teachers ‘interpret’ a teaching situation in the light of their beliefs about the learning and teaching of what they consider a second language to consist of; the result of this interpretation is what the teacher plans for and attempts to create in the classroom.” Thus, it is clear that teachers’ beliefs exert a strong influence on the pedagogic choices they make inside and outside the classroom. Perhaps the greatest challenge that these beliefs pose to teacher education programs, is to find effective ways to lead teachers to defy and question their own framework of reference with a critical view, for the sake of their own development. As Freeman and Richards (1996) suggest “understanding teachers’ conceptualizations of teaching, their beliefs, thinking, and decision making can help us better understand the nature of language teacher education and hence better prepare us for our roles as teacher educators” (Freeman and Richards, 1996: 5). Understanding teachers is the main reason why the present investigation consistently takes into account the beliefs of the teachers participating in the study.

3.3 Teacher professional competence

Key aspects of good language teachers are also those concerning their professional qualification. Richards (2001:99) provides a list of essential elements that teachers should have or develop in order to be able to cope with the demands of their jobs and address students’ needs efficiently. The following are some of these elements along with a description and interpretation of each.

- *Language proficiency*

As we shall see in section 3.5 below one of the roles attributed to teachers is that of a model. Indeed, in the many events going on in the (usually long-term) language-teaching process, teacher language proficiency is crucial for what the students are to perceive, learn and produce in the classroom. Therefore, adequate teachers’ proficiency levels in all language areas provide students with enough exposure to good language use that can help them develop their own language proficiency successfully.

- *Teaching experience*

The more a teacher has been in contact with a variety of teaching-learning processes, the better. There is a popular Spanish saying that goes “la práctica hace al maestro” (practice makes perfect). Although the majority of recently graduated teachers would agree that the selection of teachers based on experience takes away job opportunities from them, it is true that experience

⁸ Woods, D. (1996) is the author of the book “Teacher cognition in language teaching: beliefs, decision-making and classroom practice” based on an ethnographic study he conducted with eight ESL teachers in Canada. The study was longitudinal and focused on the cognitive processes through which teachers plan and make pedagogical decisions. The study tackles the issue of teachers’ beliefs, assumptions and knowledge (or BAK as Wood has coined it). One of the remarkable features of this study is that the teachers participating in the study were not treated as a group, but as individuals.

has a great deal to do with good teaching. If teachers have had enough exposure to a great range of teaching settings, different kinds of positions, and/or kinds of students, their experience probably enables them to be considered effective teachers. Nevertheless, the kind, nature and effectiveness of the approaches used by the teachers evidently influence and condition the characteristics of the teachers' teaching experiences

- *Skill and expertise*

On the whole, teacher skill and expertise are related to the teachers' aptitudes; what teachers are good at doing. There are a number of different fields in which teachers might have been trained (or got experience from) that qualifies them to perform particular roles such as teacher trainers or academic coordinators of ELT, ESL or EFL programs. In addition, skill and expertise includes the teachers' ability to work with different students' levels and/or ages (children, adolescents or adults), or the ability to develop their teaching flexibly based on current and innovating teaching approaches.

- *Training and qualification*

These two areas refer to teacher educational backgrounds. Training and qualification are closely related to the participation in teacher training and development opportunities. This involves all kinds of courses taken such as Master's degrees or postgraduate courses in different areas of expertise. Training and qualification also involves the knowledge acquired by teachers through their working experience.

3.4 Teacher knowledge base

Much has been said about teacher knowledge what teachers need to know in order to achieve professional competence. Following the insights provided by Tomlinson (2003), presented in 3.1 above, he continues to say that a good language teacher:

- has a large and varied repertoire of pedagogical procedures,
- makes principled and modified selections from their repertoire in relation to the needs, wants, learning style preferences and expectations of their learners, their own personality, beliefs and teaching style preferences, and the social and educational cultures of their teaching context,
- is a proficient user of the target language,
- is positively aware of how the target language is used for communication,
- is positively aware of the cultures of the learners and of users of the target language.

(Tomlinson 2003:3)

On the whole, the elements mentioned relate to what students would expect from their English teacher: good pedagogy and methodology; awareness of their learning needs, styles and preferences; good command of the target language; solid knowledge of the cultural/intercultural aspects of the language; and the like. All of these areas are directly related to the elements

highlighted in the teacher professional competence (section 3.3 above). Carter (1990) condenses the teacher knowledge base in three categories:

- (1) Teachers' information processing, including decision making and expert-novice studies;
- (2) Teachers' practical knowledge including personal knowledge and classroom knowledge, and;
- (3) Teachers' pedagogical knowledge; that is the way teachers understand and represent subject matter to their students.

(Carter, 1990: 299)

All of the elements in these categories are part of the knowledge that teachers can get from teacher training and development programs. The key questions to make here are: is that kind of knowledge enough for a language teacher? What kind of knowledge makes the whole baggage that English teachers need in order to be professionally competent? Generally speaking, the kinds of knowledge proposed do not vary significantly. What follows is a compilation of the categories proposed. For the scope of this research project the categories of teachers' knowledge listed by Roberts (cited in Richards 2001: 209-10) are suitable because, on the whole, they comprise the essence of teacher knowledge base. Personal insights as well as references to other authors' proposals of kinds of knowledge will be integrated throughout this revision.

3.4.1 Personal Practical knowledge

This knowledge is about the teacher's personal beliefs and principles and his or her individual approach to teaching which includes the teacher's own repertoire of classroom techniques and strategies. Broadly speaking as Carter (1990) explains, "...it refers to the knowledge teachers have of classroom situations and the practical dilemmas they face in carrying out purposeful action in these settings" (Carter 1990: 299). Several authors have referred to practical knowledge as the kind of knowledge that teachers themselves generate as a result of their experiences as teachers (Elbaz, 1981, 1991; Fenstermacher (1994; Meijer et al., 1999; Zanting, 2001; Zanting, Verloop & Vermunt, 2003). Thus, practical knowledge is the result, to a great extent, of the teacher's style and own production which she /he uses to deal with her/his teaching practice. From these descriptions it can be inferred that three important elements interact in teacher personal practical knowledge, the teacher herself/himself, the subject matter and the teaching situation. What follows are some of the characteristics of personal practical knowledge:

- a) It is personal and unique
- b) It is contextual: defined in and adapted to the classroom situation
- c) It is based on experience; it originates in, and develops through, experiences in teaching
- d) It is often tacit; teachers are often not used to articulating their knowledge;
- e) It guides teaching practice
- f) It is content related; it is related to the subject that is being taught.

Meijer, Verloop, and Beijaard (1999: 60)

Teacher practical knowledge allows teachers to make decisions and act on-the-spot. This is known as knowledge-in-action which is informed and sustained by personal practical knowledge. Golombek (1998) suggests that...

...personal practical knowledge informs practice, first, in that it guides teachers' sense-making processes; that is, as part of a teacher's interpretive framework, it filters experience so that teachers reconstruct it and respond to the exigencies of a teaching situation. Second, it informs practice by giving physical form to practice; it is teachers' knowledge in action. (459)

Knowledge in action goes together with reflection-in-action a cognitive condition that allows teachers to deal with situations at the moment they occur (see section 4.2.2 below). This is why personal practical knowledge is strongly tied to context. Teachers put it into practice as a response to a perceived need in a given teaching situation. As Golombek (1998) explains further "Because teachers use this knowledge in response to a particular context, each context reshapes that knowledge. In this way, second language teachers' personal practical knowledge shapes and is shaped by understandings of teaching and learning" (p. 459).

3.4.2 *Content knowledge*

This knowledge relates to teacher understanding of the subject of TESOL, e.g. pedagogical grammar, phonology, teaching theories, second language acquisition, as well as the specialized discourse and terminology of language teaching. As Lafayette (1993) states this kind of knowledge involves the teacher proficient use and usage of the target language in communication as well as good awareness of cultural and intercultural aspects of the language (Lafayette, 1993:127). He suggests the integration of a language analysis component into the core curriculum areas of teacher education programs. According to him, the language analysis component should include the following kinds of knowledge:

1. knowledge of the nature of language and the significance of language change and variation which occur over time, space and social class;
2. knowledge of theories of first and second language acquisition and learning;
3. knowledge of the phonological, morphological, syntactical, and lexical components of the target language;
4. knowledge of how communication occurs in real life, to include: (a) grammatical and lexical elements and (b) analysis of discourse and communication strategies

(Lafayette, 1993: 152)

3.4.3 *Contextual knowledge*

This knowledge is the teacher acquaintance with the school or institution, school norms, and knowledge of the learners, including cultural knowledge, and other relevant information. For Hudelson and Faltis (1999:33) this kind of knowledge is crucial for teacher development. They state that teachers should know well issues such as their legal obligations and duties with students and parents and with the school. According to them this kind of knowledge empowers teachers as it raises their awareness of the sort of changes and improvements they can make

inside the particular institutional structure. Since contextual knowledge depends largely on the teacher given teaching situation it is perceived as relevant, flexible, and far-reaching. More importantly, contextual knowledge is essential for enabling the teachers to become active change agents. As Hudelson and Faltis (1993) comment further:

Thus, it is important for prospective teachers learn about how they can become actively involved in the political and social structure of school governance so that they can advocate for the changes that are necessary to transform their classroom into active social learning environments. (33)

Contextual knowledge involves at least four other sub-areas of knowledge which are considered highly important for teachers to operate efficiently in their situational contexts. These are: *human development, school law and policy issues, curriculum and organization and practicum experiences* (Hudelson and Faltis, 1993:27-33).

a) Teacher knowledge in human development

This kind of knowledge refers to the necessary conditions for people development at physical, intellectual and social levels. People need and deserve to live worthy lives with access to the necessary resources to do so, such as education, health and work. This is what human development is all about: the creation of opportunities for people to live a decent, long, productive and healthy life as members of a given community. It is about nurturing people's own capabilities and expanding their choices for human development. Social justice, equity and welfare are all central to this development. Teachers, therefore, need to be well informed of this issue in order to devote efforts to contribute to their student's sustainable development in their communities.

b) Teacher knowledge base on school law and policy issues

The teacher knowledge base on school law and policy issues depends largely on the given conditions as well. School law is the law as it relates to education. Every educational system develops its own structure and standards of behavior to rule the instructional processes. Such regulations are usually based on particular vision and mission statements. Teachers have to be fully aware of what these law and policies (and vision/mission) enclose. This knowledge gives the teacher the necessary foundation to state his/her opinion, fight against bias and injustice, and suggest and promote changes and substantial transformations.

c) Teacher knowledge base of curriculum and organization for teaching

Curriculum relates to the organization of the entire process of language instruction in all its global and specific areas that has its main impact at the classroom level. The curriculum is the overall framework that involves important aspects of the program such as the body of knowledge to be transmitted, the operational educational process to follow and the products to be achieved. Concerning this, Richards states that curriculum deals with all the activities students engage in, which include "not only what pupils learn, but how they learn it, using what

supporting materials, styles and methods of assessment and in what kind of facilities” (Richards 2001: 39). Nunan and Lamb (1996) agree with this view when they say:

Classroom decisions and the effective management of the learning process cannot be made without reference to the larger context within which instruction takes place. The context and environment of the learning process, including the curriculum plans that should drive the pedagogical action, are critically important...In other words; classroom decisions cannot be made without reference to structures operating outside of the classroom. (20)

So, it is clear that curriculum cannot be separated from its context. On the contrary, *curriculum reflects the context* and most probably its principles reflect the ways of thinking and the socio-cultural aspects of the particular society. Given the importance of curriculum in *what is to be taught, how it is to be taught* and *under which conditions it is to be taught*, teachers cannot be isolated from curriculum issues. Rather, teachers should have a solid knowledge base of curriculum for language instruction and, in an ideal world, active participation in its design, organization and implementation.

d) Teacher knowledge of teaching practice: practicum experiences

As the previous three kinds of knowledge, the teaching practice, alternatively called practicum or school practice (“Práctica Profesional” at UNAN-León), is related to the training that teachers go through when they are student teachers at the PRESET stage (see section 4.1.6 below for further clarification). All teacher education programs around the world have this curricular component integrated into their study plans. The organization and timing most probably varies but, the goal is the same, to train student teachers in order to be competent teachers through real-time teaching practice. Wallace defines teaching practice as “the opportunity given to the trainee to develop and improve her professional practice in the context of a real classroom, usually under some form of guidance or supervision” (Wallace, 1991: 121). Such guidance is often provided by a teacher trainer, usually called mentor, from the teacher education program of the particular university. In order to undertake this practice there is some kind of liaison between the teacher education program and the local school (s) or institution (s) where they will take place.

The knowledge developed through the practicum experiences is critical for the teacher future performance as a practicing teacher. In section 1.2 above I have discussed the dangers of not providing high quality in the process. Since it is a training time, the teacher will most probably learn what their mentors teach them; hence the importance of giving to this training process “a development imperative” (see section 2.5 above). Hudelson and Faltis (1993) highlight the significance of this process:

We know that student teachers tend to be socialized into teaching by the professionals with whom they interact in the field setting. In addition, teachers have a tendency to teach either the way they were taught or the way that the teachers

with whom they carry out field experiences teach...We believe that it is essential that student teacher' field experiences be with teachers who work from a worldview of critique and change and who utilize innovative instructional strategies... In addition, it is absolutely essential that the practitioners have outstanding abilities in the languages that they are teaching. Student teachers must have excellent language models as well as pedagogical models. (38)

Two important points are worth making here about the nature of the knowledge of the teaching practice. First, it is knowledge acquired through interaction, experience and sharing. I have furthered this information in section 4.1 below about collaboration as an effective tool for teacher development, because I consider the teaching practice as a collaborative process where knowledge exchange takes place. Secondly, such knowledge is highly influenced and determined by the situational context where the practice is undertaken. Depending on the educational context this might have either negative or positive outcomes. The knowledge that emerges out of this experience might be optimal if the process is carried out taking care of quality issues. Nevertheless, if quality is at stake the results could not be as positive as expected, in which case the student teacher will have significant gaps in their knowledge base.

3.4.4 Pedagogical content knowledge

This knowledge according to Schulman (1987) “represents the blending of content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular topics, problems or issues are organized, represented, and adapted to the diverse interests and abilities of learners, and presented for instruction” (Schulman, 1987:8). This suggests that pedagogical content knowledge, or PCK as it has turned to be known, enables teachers to carry out important tasks in their teaching practice at the classroom level such as plan, adapt, and improvise. That is, it provides the teachers with the pedagogical tools to structure and re-structure content for teaching purposes effectively. PCK, then, is crucial for teachers' competence and expertise as it concentrates major aspects of their work as teachers. Richards (1991:76) goes beyond in his conceptualization. He argues that PCK is a central issue in Second Language Teacher Education (SLTE). He defines it as “the core of theories, concepts and practices regarding second language learning and teaching that form the content of Second Language Teacher Education”. Moreover, he suggests the following four main sources of pedagogical content knowledge.

1. Expert opinion: This source provides the perspectives of specialists and experts regarding what is relevant and necessary for future teachers to know
2. Tasks analysis: This is an experiential source of the teacher pedagogic content knowledge. It stems from examination and reflection in context of the tasks teachers carry out in their teaching practice and the abilities or skills they need for such tasks.
3. Teacher perceived needs: This refers to what the teachers themselves identify as priority areas to focus on in their professional development

4. Current practices: refers to the actual academic training that second language programs offers to teachers

(Richards, 1991:77)

On the whole, the sources Richards suggest involve a training dimension: external to the teacher (the suggestion of experts, the training provided by teacher education programs) and a development dimension: internal, emerging from the teacher (the knowledge derived from teachers' own experiences and the one emerging from their own needs). Because of the value of their training and development dimension to build on teacher pedagogical content knowledge these sources have important implications for planning, organizing and establishing effective teacher education programs.

3.4.5 *Reflective knowledge*

Reflective knowledge enables the teacher to self-evaluate his/her performance in and out of the classroom for the purposes of on-going improvement as a practicing teacher. This knowledge is the foundation of the reflective teacher, an approach widely used in teacher training and teacher education programs nowadays. Indeed, an effective way of approaching teacher development is that teachers learn how to reflect critically on the many events taking place in the classroom, and promote changes from their own analytical perspective. Pollard (2002: 41) states that "The model of a reflective teacher suggests that critical reflection and systematic investigation of our own practice should become an integral part of our daily classroom life." Within this critical reflection, teachers analyze, interpret, get feedback, evaluate, and make pertinent changes in a cyclical process aimed at improving their teaching practice. Because of the relevance of reflective knowledge for teacher sustainable development, sections 4.2 and 4.3 below are focused on further insights about this issue.

3.4.6 *Tacit knowledge*

Knowledge that cannot be explained easily is referred to as tacit knowledge, a term coined by Polanyi (1966) which refers to knowledge we are not aware of we have. He claims that "we know more than we can tell...most of this knowledge cannot be put into words" (Polanyi, 1997: 136). The fact that *tacit knowledge* cannot be described makes it necessary for teachers to look for mechanisms for making it evident. Znesovic and Scholl, (1996) state that "the process of having to explain oneself and one's ideas, so that another teacher can understand them and interact with them, forces team teachers to find words for thoughts which, had been teaching alone, might have been realized solely through actions" (Znesovic and Scholl, (1996, 79). Tacit knowledge, therefore, has important implications for the collaborative work among peer teachers, an issue discussed in 4.1.4 below.

A final remark about the language teacher knowledge base is that this is not a definite, concrete, and complete field as it might well be in other academic disciplines. Rather, in spite of

all the valuable findings about teacher knowledge base emerging from research in the past few decades, there still seems to be uncertainty about what teachers need to know. As Schrier (1993) points out:

...central to developing the knowledge base in foreign language education is understanding what the teachers have received in their content area preparation, how they perceive this preparation to be reflected in their teaching assignments and what they believe is needed for their own professional growth. (112)

Bigelow and Walker (2004) share this perception when they state that “in the field of teacher education research the voices of teachers have moved much more to center stage in the discussions about what makes sense for teachers to know and be able to do” (Bigelow and Walker 2004). So, it is clear that teacher knowledge base is a complex web of interrelated elements that together constitute the basis of professional development. It is also clear that given this complexity, it has to be acquired in stages taking solid and consistent steps in each effort of professionalization. This complexity explains and justifies the need to offer the language teacher a process of continuing education that allows him/her advance further each time. Overall, the kinds of knowledge explored here content, practical and personal, pedagogical, contextual, reflective and tacit represent important elements that determine to a great extent the qualification and competence of the practicing teacher. Nonetheless, the last word has not been said about what teachers need to know. The knowledge that emerges from the teacher situational contexts and from their own experiences, particularly, can shed valuable light on the process of understanding and expanding the language teacher knowledge base.

3.5 Teacher roles

Madrid (1995) stresses the importance of teachers’ roles by stating that the degree of success or failure of a language lesson is highly determined by the teacher. He defines the teachers’ presence in the classroom as “indispensable” and highlights their importance over that of resources used in the instructional processes such as books or tape recorders (Madrid 1995: 109).

Theorists have defined the nature of teacher roles with a number of different terms. A traditional role might be one in which teachers follow a teacher-centered, authoritarian approach in order to fulfill the established practice prescribed by their institutions (see section 3.2.3 above). In this regard Richards and Lockhart state that “different teaching settings... create particular roles for teachers based on the institutional administrative structure, the culture operating in each institution, and its teaching philosophy” (Richards and Lockhart 1994: 98).

Fortunately, this perception of teacher roles has been rejected in order to give path to new and more naturalistic views of language teaching, centered in the learners. Regarding this Yalden (1995) comments that:

Perceptions of the language teachers' role have changed considerably since the 1930's. Language teachers are no longer seen exclusively as individuals who hold and transmit language (like any other teacher), but as people who assist the learner to develop a natural capacity to communicate in another language. (51)

The dimension of teacher roles within the scope of such an approach is what concerns us here. Harmer points out that "within the classroom our role may change from one activity to another. If we are fluent at making these changes our effectiveness as teachers is greatly enhanced." (Harmer 2001:57) The following roles have been suggested to foster this effectiveness.

- *Teachers as facilitators*

The main and probably most important role is the one of teachers as facilitators. Within this view, the teacher role is diametrically opposed to the traditional teacher-centered role. Teachers as facilitators provide students with interesting, appealing and challenging tasks (often negotiated with students). The teacher's level of intervention (and presence) in the classroom under this approach is intended to be as unobtrusive as possible once he/she has provided students with suitable activities to work on.

- *Teachers as mediators*

Because of the complexity of the learning process, teachers should use appropriate and effective teaching approaches. In this concern Ur attributes teachers the role of "mediators" (between the subject matter and the students). Through such mediation, "the teacher can provide a framework for organized, conscious learning, while simultaneously being aware of - and providing opportunities for - further more intuitive acquisition" (Ur 1991: 10).

- *Teachers as monitors*

Within this role the teacher promotes students' autonomy by letting them construct their learning independently making sure the intended practice is being carried out appropriately and providing help when needed. Within the role of monitors teachers should move around, paying close attention to students' performance and making herself/himself available for students' questions (see 3.6.3, effective approaches to practice, below)

- *Teachers as language models*

This role is particularly important in teaching situations where the teaching context does not count on resources such as cassettes, tape recorders or DVD players which is often the situation in many educational institutions in Nicaragua. As students are only exposed to the language provided by the teacher (probably during the development of the whole course) he/she must have appropriate proficiency levels and make sure to use natural, clear and comprehensible language. Adequate command of the target is an important aspect highlighted in the section of teachers' professional competence (3.3 above)

- *Teachers as providers of comprehensible input*

The suggested approach in language learning is that students do most of the talking. Harmer (1998) suggests that STT (Student Talking Time) should be maximized “as they are the people who need the practice” (Harmer, 1998: 4). Nevertheless, he also admits that good TTT (Teacher Talking Time) “may have beneficial qualities...if teachers know how to talk to the students then the students get a chance to hear language which is certainly above their own productive level, but which they can more or less understand” (Harmer 1998: 4). Providing students with language items that are a little beyond their understanding and productivity level has been coined by Krashen as *comprehensible input* (Krashen, 1981:33). The teachers’ role under this approach is crucial to both optimize students’ opportunity to talk, and provide students with exposure to clear and comprehensible language.

- *Teachers as assessors*

This dimension of teacher roles has to do with the teacher appraisal of the student success in the acquisition of the language. Under this role, for instance, the teacher collects relevant information (tasks, assignments, tests) that reflect student knowledge and gives him/her feedback with sensitivity and support. The teacher lets the student know in a clear way what is it that she/he needs to succeed in order to provide a measure against which to test her/his knowledge.

- *Teachers as needs analyst*

This dimension of teacher roles deal with the teacher’s close examination of the student needs and interests. Under this role teachers collect relevant information about students’ knowledge of particular language skills. The teacher uses the information for the purpose of planning based on the students’ weaknesses, or to address the students’ future professional needs within a given situational context. Concerning this role Richards (1995) comments: “the teacher determines students’ individual needs following institutional procedures (e.g. a structured interview and uses the information obtained for course planning and development” (99).

- *Teachers as motivators*

Teachers have to ensure that they provide students with a relaxing, unthreatening, lively classroom atmosphere that enhances learning and leads students to success. The role of teachers as motivators, according to Ur “simply means that among other things we do to increase our students’ motivation, strategies to increase the likelihood of success in learning activities should have a high priority” (Ur 1991: 275). For students success is a powerful source of motivation and teachers have to be aware of this fact (see success orientation in section 3.6.2 below).

The teachers' roles just described are of special importance for the scope of the present study. There are some other roles proposed which are worth taking into consideration as well, such as tutors, prompters, or instructors. As Harmer (2001) points out:

The role that we take on is dependent ... on what it is we wish the students to achieve ... What we can say, with certainty, is that we need to be able to switch between the various roles ... and then, when we have made the decision, however consciously or subconsciously it is done, we need to be aware of how we carry out that role and how we perform. (63)

Ultimately, common sense, knowledge of the students, knowledge of the teaching situation, and goals formulated are important influencing factors in the teacher's choice of one role or another. Teachers are to have great levels of flexibility and be very well informed in order to do so effectively.

3.6 Teacher performance

EFL teacher performance involves a great deal of complex and very often difficult decisions in and out of the classroom. These decisions for the most part, deal with selecting the most effective ways to present, introduce, explain, clarify, provide practice, and favor students' interaction so that they have appropriate exposure to the target language. According to Blum (1984) the following classroom practices are typical of effective teachers:

1. Instruction is guided by a preplanned curriculum
2. There are high expectations for student learning
3. Students are carefully oriented to lessons
4. Instruction is clear and focused
5. Learner progress is monitored closely
6. When students do not understand, they are re-taught
7. Class time is used for learning
8. There are smooth, efficient classroom routines
9. Instructional groups formed in the classroom fit instructional needs
10. Standards for classroom behavior are high
11. Personal interaction between teachers and students are positive
12. Incentives and rewards for students are used to promote excellence

Cited in Nunan 1996: 117

Four major tasks will be tackled here: *planning, presentation, practice, and classroom management and interaction*. These tasks are highlighted and prioritized over others since they are directly related to the teacher's ability to combine all her/his kinds of knowledge for teaching purposes (see teacher knowledge in section 3.4 above).

3.6.1 *Effective approaches to planning*

Planning is concerned with the different steps teachers take and with the decisions they make in preparing their lessons. Planning determines the kind, nature, and characteristics of the language teaching-learning process that take place in the classroom. Nunan and Lamb (1996) highlight the importance of this planning process and relate it to the degree of failure or success of the accomplishment of the goals of a particular lesson. They state that:

The potential success or relative failure of a lesson will often be determined by the amount of planning and preparation the teacher is able to devote to the lesson, class or unit of work, and the extent to which the preparation of lesson and units of work is tied to teacher' overall pedagogical goals. (43)

In planning their lessons teacher should take into account a number of elements such as the kind and amount of language to be introduced, taught and practiced, the nature of the classroom interaction, and the kind of activities that will take place. Lesson planning is focused on the structuring and organization of lesson as a whole for the purposes of dividing its different components into manageable units. It is basically the framework that determines, establishes and links the main stages of a lesson before it actually takes place. Concerning the practical nature of lesson plans, Harmer states that "planning helps because it allows teachers to think where they're going and gives them time to have ideas for tomorrow's and next week's lesson" (Harmer 1998: 121). In order to aid to this reflective process, planning should include important elements such as learning contents, materials and resources, aims, kinds of activities, kinds of interaction, and teaching procedures. The main purpose is that the teachers have clear guidelines in order to organize, develop, and implement their lessons trying to expand and optimize students' participation within the time frame available.

According to Rosenshine and Stevens (1986) in structuring effective lesson teachers should make sure they do the following (some of these aspects will be expanded in *effective presentation, effective practice* and *effective classroom interaction* below):

- Begin a lesson with a short review of previous, prerequisite learning.
- Begin a lesson with a short statement of goals.
- Present new materials in small steps, with student practice after each step.
- Give clear and detailed instructions and explanations.
- Provide a high level of active practice for all students.
- Ask a large number of questions, check for student understanding and obtain responses from all students.
- Guide students during initial practice
- Provide systematic feedback and corrections.
- Provide explicit instruction and practice for seatwork exercises, and where necessary, monitor students during seatwork.

(Cited in Richards and Lockhart 1994: 114-115)

Richards and Lockhart (1994: 118-125) provide some useful guidelines related to the organization and planning of effective lessons. They refer to these elements as the four structuring dimensions of lesson planning: *Opening, sequencing, pacing, and closure*. What follows is a brief description of these dimensions.

- *Openings*

As the name suggests, openings are the ways or procedures to begin a lesson to catch students' attention towards the main objectives of the lesson. This is especially important when students have just finished a class of a different kind (which is often the case of secondary

school instruction). It is suggested that this stage should last at least five minutes and is considered to be a very important stage for what students are going to learn in the lesson.

Openings reflect a number of decisions that teachers make either consciously or unconsciously. There are a number of options available for teachers. For instance, describe the main goals of the lesson, state the main skills to be covered, link the lesson with the previous one, do something to motivate students (warm up activities), describe the activities, tell students what they are expected to do, and the like. The important thing is to achieve students' cognitive and affective disposition for what is to come in the development of the class.

- *Sequencing*

Structuring a lesson relates directly to the way the lesson is organized in its different stages, as lessons do not consist of a single activity. Sequencing deals particularly with the different activities and sub-activities that will be carried out as part of the lesson. The sequencing used as part of the internal structure of a lesson is largely determined by the principles underlying the method that the teachers decide to use. In sequencing the activities of a lesson, the teacher analyzes the particular language items to be taught, sets the main objectives and divides the lesson into several clearly distinguished and connected activities and sub-activities that will lead students towards the achievements of the objectives formulated.

Experienced teachers often have a mental format in mind when they think of a particular kind of lesson such as a reading lesson, a listening text or a composition. They are often able to make smooth and accurate transitions between one activity and the next, taking advantage of the time available. Less skilled teachers, on the other hand, struggle with finding ways to carry out such transitions, tend to blend activities together and/or fail to monitor the classroom events effectively. Written guidelines in the form of a lesson plan are of great help for these teachers to guide the actions in the lesson.

- *Pacing*

Pacing is concerned with the time allocated to carry out each of the different activities planned for a particular lesson. As a lesson consists of a series of activities and sub-activities, teachers have to be particularly careful when planning such activities so that they can be undertaken within the time frame available. Pacing is especially important when planning a lesson, since it allows teachers to make realistic decisions about how much time will be devoted to each activity and/or sub-activity and when to make the transition to a new one. This time transition communicates both teachers and students a sense of development and completion.

Because of the importance of pacing, special measures should be taken in a lesson. For instance, teachers should avoid unnecessary and long explanations that take more time than the one planned and expected. Also, teachers should use a variety of carefully timed activities rather than spending the entire lesson in one long activity. In addition, teachers should pay special attention to the selection of activities with appropriate levels of difficulty, set realistic time

limits for activities, and monitor students when carrying out the activities to make sure they do not spend more time than the necessary (see teacher roles in section 3.5 above).

- *Closure*

Closure is as important as the previous three ways of structuring a lesson. As its name suggests closure marks the end of the class. Basically, closures are aimed at revising the contents taught in the lesson, consolidate students' knowledge of the different aspects covered and prepare them for further learning. By doing this, teachers can make sure that the class has a coherence and is perceived as a whole by students. There are several strategies available to teachers to use closures effectively. Among others, teachers can summarize the main points of the lesson, revise the contents covered, link the lesson to the main objectives of the class, relate the lesson to previous and forthcoming lessons, and praise students for their work in specific parts of the lesson.

Summarizing the information above, in planning effective lessons, teachers should make sure that they integrate and include revision of previously taught contents, objectives, presentation, gradual and balanced introduction of new contents, and enough opportunities for all students' practice. In addition, teachers should include detailed and clear explanations, procedures for leading students towards initial practice, and constantly checking students' understanding of the new subject matter. Moreover, appropriate feedback aimed at consolidating the basic aspects of the language covered in the development of the lesson should not be missing in an effective language lesson.

3.6.2 Effective approaches to presentation

Effective presentation is concerned with the teacher skills to present the new materials so that they are accessible to student initial learning. For teachers, this involves the skillful and gradual introduction of the bit of language to focus on in a way that is comprehensible to students (as this will be their first encounter with the skill). The general purpose is to activate learners' conscious attention and prepare their minds for the subsequent enhancement of learning in the practice stage. In order to do this in a suitable way, Ur (1996:12) suggests that teachers should take into account the following characteristics of effective presentation:

- *Attention*

Teachers should make sure that the new learning material is interesting and lively enough in order to catch students' interest from the very beginning of the lesson. In this way students will know that something important will be covered and that they need to pay close attention to the material presented in order to follow conveniently the flow of the class in the coming stages.

- *Perception*

The teacher has to make sure that the learners are to see and hear the target material clearly. This also means that the teacher probably needs to provide further repetition and explanations in

order to strengthen and consolidate students' initial perception of the target material. This will need some kind of response from the learners so that the teacher checks and makes sure that they have in fact perceived the material accurately.

- *Understanding*

In order to guarantee students' understanding of the presented material, this should have some kind of connection with students' existing perception of the target item, their reality, and/or things they already know. In this sense the teacher might need to explain and make links with previously covered material. Again, students' feedback and contribution in this concern will provide the teacher with a clear vision of whether the students have understood the new material and if further explanations, illustration or examples are needed.

- *Short-term memory*

In the presentation stage the teacher has to take into account students' short-memory span (especially for establishing a good basis for subsequent effective practice). Students might have grasped the initial presentation of the target item, but it will be until further practice takes place that students will have the chance to consolidate it (see effective approaches to practice in 3.6.3 below). Teachers should take into account students' special characteristics and learning styles (visual, kinesthetic, and aural) so that the target material has the impact that fits all students' characteristics.

In addition, when presenting new materials teacher should provide students with clear, precise and comprehensible explanations and instructions. Harmer states that "there are two general rules for giving instructions: they must be kept as simple as possible, and they must be logical" (Harmer 1998: 4). Certainly, the way teachers handle this important stage will determine and condition to a great extent the success or failure of the subsequent stages of the lesson.

Ur (1991: 16-17) suggests a series of guidelines to take into consideration for effective practice. These include preparation, making sure students are paying attention, the presentation of the information more than once, brevity, the use of illustrations and examples, and making sure students provide feedback. Some target items are more difficult to present than others, and teachers should know this in advance. Written notes in the lesson plan are very helpful tools for teachers to provide further clarification, explanations and illustrations to overcome the possible problems.

3.6.3 *Effective approaches to practice*

Let us consider the following definition of practice:

Practice can be roughly defined as the rehearsal of certain behaviors with the objective of consolidating learning and improving performance. Language learners can benefit from being told, and understanding, facts about the language only up to a point: ultimately, they have to acquire an intuitive, automatized knowledge which will enable ready and fluent comprehension and self-expression. And such

knowledge is normally brought about through consolidation of learning through practice.

(Ur, 1991: 19)

According to this definition, the main goal of effective practice is that students are able to master the target item without relying on the teacher or other learners. Practice, then, is perceived as the necessary stage through which students will be able to achieve this independence. Within this perception, three main stages are considered as very important in effective practice: *Verbalization, automatization and autonomy*.

Verbalization means that the target item or skill needs to be demonstrated. Once the teacher has presented and exemplified a particular language item through *verbalization*, students are guided to practice the particular skill on their own. At first, they may do this hesitantly and may need correcting in the form of further telling and/or demonstrations. Later, they may do it right as they keep thinking about it. It is at this point that they start practicing by performing the language behavior once and again. This is when the process of *automatization* takes place. Once they have mastered the skill, they begin to improve, which gives path to *autonomy*. Table 6 summarizes this three-stage process of practice.

Table 6

Skill learning

VERBALIZATION →	AUTOMATIZATION →	AUTONOMY
Teacher describes and demonstrates the skilled behavior to be learned; learners perceive and understand	Teacher suggests exercises; learners practice skill in order to acquire facility, automatize; teacher monitors	Learners continue to use skill on their own becoming more proficient and creative

Ur 1991: 20

The following aspects are the characteristics of effective practice as suggested by Ur (21-23):

- *Validity*

Validity is related to the establishment of practice activities that are intended to accomplish the goals formulated. Teachers have to be consistent and coherent and provide the specific practice students need to master the specific target language item or skill originally planned.

- *Pre-learning*

This refers to the proper introductory mastery of the skill. Teachers cannot expect that students will be able to produce language skillfully from the very beginning. Obviously, their first attempts (pre-learning) will be hesitant as they are struggling with new knowledge. However, pre-learning is a necessary stage that needs students' encouragement, as it will be the basis for further reinforcement and consolidation.

- *Volume*

Volume refers to the appropriate amount of skill practice that can be done within the time frame of the lesson. The more students practice the skill, the better they will acquire it. Teachers have to be especially careful that the time of the lesson is used productively for effective practice.

- *Success orientation*

Students consolidate the skill by doing it right. Teachers have to select, design and administrate practice constantly checking that students succeed in their attempts to learn the new skill. This characteristic of good practice is what is known as *success orientation*.

- *Heterogeneity*

As very often happens, learners might have different levels of knowledge within a particular classroom. When planning and designing the activities for the practice of a specific skill, teachers need to take this into consideration and provide skill practice that is heterogeneous; thus addressing all students' needs. Teachers can do this by providing more challenging and/or further practice for the most advanced students.

- *Teacher assistance*

In order to make sure students have enough opportunities to practice the target skill or language item in a suitable way, teachers need to make sure they provide the help and support students need to succeed in the mastery of the skill. This monitoring aspect of teachers' work is an important element of effective practice. By doing this, teachers will be able to assist students at different stages with the possible problems they can experience (see teacher role as monitor in section 3.5 above).

- *Interest*

The interest of the activity should not rely on getting the answers right, as this can cause considerable levels of boredom and monotony. For this reason, the activities chosen for the practice of a specific language skill or item must raise student's interest because of the nature of the practice activity itself (a game-like fun task, attractive and interesting materials, challenging and appealing tasks, and the like).

3.6.4 *Effective approaches to classroom management and interaction*

Teacher performance also relates to the teacher's ability to organize classroom instruction using a variety of approaches. Since language learning is, essentially, an interactive process, the language teacher should provide students with the conditions and opportunities that facilitate this interaction. For Breen and Littlejohn (2000) effective interaction "refers to the number of ways in which classroom instruction is organized so that students have real-time opportunities to interact. It involves decisions on, who will work with whom, in what ways, with what resources and for how long, upon what subject matter, and for what purposes" (Breen and Littlejohn, 2000: 8). Whereas Breen and Littlejohn seem to be concerned with variety, Ellis (1985) seems to focus on quality when he indicates that "a great deal of time in teaching is

devoted both to interaction between the teacher and the learners, and to interaction among learners themselves. The quality of this interaction is thought to have a considerable influence on learning” (cited in Richards and Lockhart 1994: 138). Thus, both variety and quality are equally important aspects for student interaction and teacher performance is a key element in providing them effectively.

The most common pattern of interaction within a classroom is that known as “IRF”–Initiation- Response–Feedback (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975). According to this model it is the teacher who initiates the interactional exchange (usually in the form of a question) one of the students answers, then the teacher provides feedback (assesses, corrects, comments) and initiates the next question (cited in Ur 1991: 226). This pattern is characteristic of a teacher-centered approach, as the way interaction is initiated and conducted is always determined by the teacher and students have a very passive role. As mentioned elsewhere, this approach has been seriously questioned since there is much more Teacher Talking Time (TTT) than Student Talking Time (STT). There are a number of more effective ways to handle the language learning processes so that students are provided with more opportunities to interact.

In table 7 below several different examples of possible interactional patterns within the classroom are presented and described.

Table 7

Different patterns of classroom interaction

INTERACTION PATTERNS
<p>Group work Students work in small groups on tasks that entail interaction: conveying information, for example, or group-decision making. The teacher walks around listening, intervening little if at all.</p>
<p>Closed-ended teacher questioning (IRF) Only one ‘right’ response gets approved.</p>
<p>Individual work The teacher gives a task or a set of tasks and students work on them independently; the teacher walks around monitoring and assessing when necessary.</p>
<p>Choral responses The teacher gives a model which is repeated by all the class in chorus; or gives clues which is responded in chorus.</p>
<p>Collaboration Students do the same sort of tasks as in individual work; but work together, usually in pairs to try to achieve the best results they can. The teacher may or may not intervene.</p>
<p>Student initiates, teacher answers For example in a guessing game: the student thinks of questions and the teacher responds; but the teacher decides who asks.</p>
<p>Full-class interaction The students debate a topic or do a language task as a class; the teacher may intervene occasionally to simulate participation or to monitor.</p>
<p>Teacher talk This may involve some kind of silent student response, such as writing from dictation, but there is no initiative on the part of the student.</p>
<p>Self-access Students choose their own learning tasks and work autonomously.</p>
<p>Open-ended teacher questioning There are a number of possible ‘right’ answers, so that more students answer each cue.</p>

These activities have been categorized below in terms of the degree of teacher's and students' involvement and participation in each of them; that is to say from the "most teacher-dominated to the most student-dominated"(Ur 1991:238).

- Teacher talk (Teacher very active, students only receptive)
- Choral responses (Teacher active, students mainly receptive)
- Closed-ended teacher questioning (IRF) (Teacher very active, students mainly receptive)
- Open-ended teacher questioning (Teacher and students fairly equally active)
- Student initiates, teacher answers (Teacher and students fairly equally active)
- **Full class interaction (Student active, teacher mainly receptive)**
- **Individual work (Student active, teacher mainly receptive)**
- **Collaboration (Student active, teacher mainly receptive)**
- **Group work (Student active, teacher mainly receptive)**
- **Self-access (Students very active, teacher mainly receptive)**

As observed, the most effective activities suggested for classroom interaction are those characterized by the students' active involvement, higher degree of autonomy and collaborative work (see the items in bold). These activities provide students with a more active role in their learning process and with considerable independence from the teacher. In addition, their amount of language practice and exposure to the target language is highly maximized.

The approaches to effective classroom interaction and the appropriateness of some activities to favor students' interaction and decrease the degree of control of the teacher, require skillful teacher management in grouping students. Teachers make choices about the way they organize the classroom setting. A number of factors such as the teachers' own preferences, school policies, classroom size, or number of students determine these choices to a great extent. In some cases it is only possible to have students sit in rows as the conditions of the classroom do not allow other kinds of seating arrangement. Harmer comments that "there is no real limit to the way in which teachers can group students in a classroom, though certain factors such as overcrowding, fixed furniture, and entrenched students' attitudes may make things problematic" (2001:114)

Nevertheless, in most cases it is the teacher' choice, ultimately, the determining factor in the way they group their students. Richards and Lockhart point out that "the interactional dynamics of a classroom are largely a product of choices the teacher makes about the learning arrangement he or she sets up within a lesson" (Richards and Lockhart 1994: 146). Variety is absolutely necessary. The following are some possible of organizing classroom instruction.

- *Whole class*

The teacher stands at the front leading students' learning process. This arrangement is typical of the IRF interaction pattern mentioned above in which the teacher initiates the exchange, students respond, and then the teacher provides feedback. This seems to be the most common ways of grouping students in traditional classrooms. As Richards and Lockhart affirm

“research on teaching suggests that whole class-instructional methods are the most commonly used in public school teaching, particularly in the beginning of a lesson” (Richards and Lockhart 1994:148). Nonetheless, there are times in which it is necessary and even beneficial that the teachers use this approach (when presenting new language items, giving instructions and guidelines, clarifying students’ doubts and checking particular language items).

- *Individual work*

Students work on their own independently from the teacher and from other students’ in a particular task that has been assigned by the teacher. In individual work students are given a great deal of responsibility, independence and autonomy. Ur defines individual work as “individualization”. She maintains that effective individual work “does imply a serious attempt to provide for differing learning needs within a class and to place a higher proportion of responsibility for learning on the shoulders of the learners themselves” (Ur 1991: 233).

- *Pair work*

The learning task is organized so that a student works with a partner. In pair work students can “practice the language together, study a text, research language or take part in information-gap activities...they can write dialogues, predict the content of reading texts, or compare notes on what they have listened to or seen” (Harmer 2001:116).

- *Group work*

Students work in larger groups is useful when pair work is insufficient for providing students opportunities for practice and interaction. Moreover, group work activities can be the follow up of pair work activities and vice versa. Examples of group work activities might be writing a collective story, brainstorming, discussions and debates, problem-solving tasks, preparation of a presentation or a role-play, and games and competitions. Groups should be small enough so that all students are provided with enough opportunities to participate. Group work (as well as pair work) maximizes students opportunities to participate and interact, promotes cooperative work, and gives students considerable independence from the teacher.

Grouping students and classroom interaction are closely related to each other as in order to promote students’ interaction the teacher has to provide a variety of physical arrangements as well. The different ways of grouping students just mentioned involve different ways of seating organization (such as orderly rows, circles and horseshoes or separate tables). Obviously, the feasibility of each of these approaches is highly determined by the physical conditions provided by the school in terms of furniture, space and number of students in the classroom.

It is clear that there is more than one way of organizing and conducting classroom interaction available to teachers. The suitability of each depends largely on the kind and focus of the teaching situation and its main goals. As Harmer points out “...teaching a class as a whole group, getting students to work on their own, or having them perform tasks in pairs or in groups all have their own advantages and disadvantages; each is more or less appropriate for different

activities” (Harmer 2001:114). Ultimately, teachers’ common sense, their beliefs about language learning, and the way they view their role and performance (and the students’) are the final determining elements of the kind and quality of interaction that is established within the classroom.

To sum up, it is clear that a teacher’s job involves a number of multifaceted and complex tasks. This section has tackled four of the major tasks of the teacher at the classroom level: planning, presenting language items, providing practice and managing classroom interaction. For each of these tasks different elements that need to be taken into account for effective teacher performance have been discussed. On the whole, it can be said that the ability of the teacher in carrying out these important pedagogical actions, most accurately reflects the effectiveness of his/her approach in the classroom.

3.7 Teacher change

Significant and long-lasting change can only be carried out over time. There are particular ways of thinking that teachers learn along their lives and internalize as part of their background knowledge. As discussed in section 3.2 about teacher beliefs above, teachers’ views of teaching stem from a variety of sources. However, not all of these learned elements contribute to teacher development. Thus, teacher development programs need to take into consideration what needs to be done in order to help teachers change and “de-learn” ineffective ways of thinking and actions.

But, what is change? According to the Merriam Webster dictionary on line change means “to make or become different. It implies making either an essential difference often amounting to a loss of original identity or a substitution of one thing for another”. So, in changing there is difference involved as well as a loss and a substitution of something. In the field of language teaching this “something” might be a belief, a procedure a technique, an approach, a method, or a routine. According to Woods (1996: 252) “Teacher change involves two interrelated aspects. The first aspect involves changes in conceptions...The second aspect involves changes in behavior: planning, action and the overlap between them”. So, teacher change is directly related to the teachers’ beliefs and actions and how they relate to each other.

3.7.1 *Reasons and needs for teacher change*

A key question raises now: Why do teachers need to change their beliefs and actions? Let us take, for example, the case of those teachers who in the development of their teaching throughout the years, get to a point in which their classroom actions become “fossilized”. That is, teachers go through the same classroom routines over and over again with no significant change (see teacher established practice in section 3.2.3 above). This, in itself, can bring about a number of negative implications for both the professional growth of teachers and student successful language acquisition. In his article: *Observation for training, development, or Assessment?* Maingay (1988) defines this phenomenon as “ritual teaching behavior.”

By ritual teaching behavior I mean teaching that is unthinking; that is or has become divorced from the principles behind it. It is teaching behavior that is purely imitative; or it is teaching behavior that has set into patterns that no longer reveal awareness on the teacher's part of why he or she should be teaching in that particular way. (118-119).

According to Woods, “the discrepancy [between beliefs and actions] could occur in a case where some unit of behavior has become an unconscious routine and carried out as an unanalyzed chunk. In such a case, the individual may not be aware of a particular behavior which has been internalized previously...” (Woods, 1996: 252). So, ritual teaching behavior can also be the result of teacher unawareness that a particular belief does not have correspondence with his/her action. More often than not this is the case of language teachers. Because of a number of reasons teachers (particularly inexperienced ones) struggle between what they believe and what they do in the classroom. In a previous study based on teachers' beliefs (see background studies in chapter two) significant inconsistencies were found between teacher beliefs and actions at the classroom level mainly in: methodology used, approaches to error correction, classroom management, activity preference, and use of the target language, among others. The findings revealed that the reasons of this disagreement was, the result of: teacher unawareness, the negative influence of instructional contexts, and established teaching practice (Chavez, 2006:34-35).

The answer to the question above about why teachers need to change their beliefs and actions seems obvious now. Change is absolutely necessary for language teachers as it helps them to go on with their professional growth and development; it prevents them from routine and fossilization, and; it facilitates the process of achieving consistency between their beliefs and actions. More importantly, the benefits of teacher change are to have its greater impact with students at the classroom level.

3.7.2 Conditions for teacher change

The discussion above poses another important question: How do teachers change? To answer this question is necessary to refer to the issue of effective and ineffective teaching procedures: A teacher should ask him/herself the following question on a regular basis: to what extent is my teaching approach being effective in fostering my students' successful acquisition of the language? In an ideal world, in answering this question the teacher a) observes critically his/her teaching situation, b) identifies the problem (s) he/she faces in the classroom, c) collects information to know the sources of the problem, d) looks for adequate solution (additional and new techniques, resources and materials) to solve the problem(s), e) makes adequate changes and improvements to his/her approach, f) evaluates to what extent the changes have been successful, g) acts accordingly and, h) begins the introspective process again.

The process just described is, in essence, the cycle of Action Research in the classroom. Without any doubt such an approach is very beneficial for both teachers and students as it has proved to be an effective way of improving the teaching learning processes (see section 4.2.7

below for an expansion of Action Research in the classroom). Moreover, being able to have such levels of reflection is a salient characteristic of teachers who are at a teacher development stage. These teachers usually know in an intuitive way where to go about changes and improvements in the classroom. Nevertheless, what about the teachers who have not achieved such levels of reflection? How can they acquire these analytical skills? Research suggests that at least three conditions need to be met if sustainable and long-lasting change is to take place: teachers need to be informed, teachers need to be convinced, and teachers need to be motivated.

- Teachers need to be informed

The first condition for teacher change is that *they must be informed* of the basic rules that underlie the philosophy of good teaching: the golden rules of the profession. As opposed to “ritual teaching behavior” Maingay presents the term “principled teaching behavior.” He defines it as the term...“to describe teaching that is informed by principles that the teacher is aware of. By ‘principles’ I do not necessarily mean anything particularly abstract or difficult: the principles may quite simply be the reason for doing something” (Maingay, 1988:119). So, it is absolutely necessary that teachers know well the reasons, causes and effects of their pedagogical choices in the classroom and that such choices should have an effective, practical and logical nature. In other words, the decisions are made of (and emerge from) the teacher knowledge base, (content, pedagogical, contextual, reflective and practical) presented in 3.4 above.

The long tradition of teaching methods has certainly opened many doors and provided teachers with important insights about the processes of language acquisition. Being informed also means that teachers should have the necessary knowledge and abilities to analyze these methods with a critical mind, and act accordingly (Kumaravadivelu, 1992, 1993a; Richards & Lockhart, 1994; Rivers, 1992; Stern, 1992). Through this analytical perspective, teachers will be able to make well-informed decisions to integrate, use, combine, adopt or adapt optional approaches as part of their teaching repertoire. Teacher ability to reflect critically has important implications in teacher decision making regarding methods (see section 4.2 for a detailed explanation of this reflective approach).

- Teachers need to be open-minded

The second condition for teacher change is that teachers’ need to be somehow convinced of their need to try new alternatives and, in general, be flexible and open-minded. Prabhu⁹ (1987) refers to this condition as the “sense of plausibility” a kind of mental and attitudinal condition that allows teacher change. He argues that teachers are to be free of external pressures (e.g. mandatory statutory implementations) so that this condition can operate. That is the sense of plausibility

⁹ Dr. N. S. Prabhu conducted a five-year classroom research in India called The Bangalore/ Madras Communicational Teaching Project (1979-1984). Task based teaching was the specific methodology used in the study. The basic assumption underlying the study is that language form is best learnt when there is focus on meaning and not on form. Dr Prabhu is the author of the book “Second Language Pedagogy” (1987) where he presents and discusses his findings

allows teachers to be receptive to new methodological perceptions when “there is no compulsion to adopt new routines...the sense of security is largely protected and teachers’ existing perception may then begin to interact with the new one and be influenced by it”. Prahbu believes that “a good educational system” should take this “sense of plausibility” into consideration when planning curricular changes. He maintains that:

A good system of education, from this point of view, is not one in which all or most teachers carry out the same recommended classroom procedures but rather a system in which (1) all, or most teachers operate with a sense of plausibility about whatever procedures they choose to adopt, and (2) each teacher's sense of plausibility is as ‘alive’ or active, and hence as open to further development or change as it can be. (106).

Certainly, institutions, authorities and policy-makers in charge of educational decisions worldwide should be informed of this research finding and take it into account before imposing a particular curricular and/or methodological guideline to language teachers.

- Teachers need to be motivated

The third condition for teacher change is that teachers actually need to be motivated to change. Woodward notes that in order to be motivated “There must be understanding and reasoning and the desire to change. There must also be an ability to relate what is going on outside with what is going on inside the person” (Woodward, 1991:129). But, what is it that drives teachers to want to change and continue to grow professionally? And, how can teachers arrive to such understanding and reasoning?

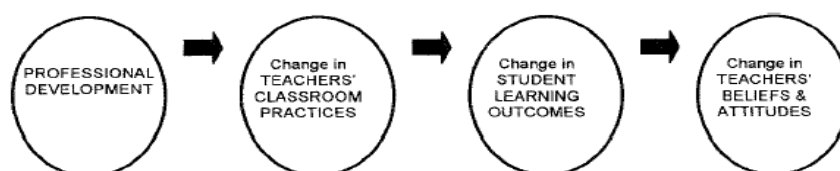
There might be several motivational sources that promote teacher change: to update their knowledge, to increase their competence and qualification, and to avoid monotony and routine, among others. Indeed, all of these reasons are valid aspirations for most teachers. Nevertheless, research has shown that the most powerful source for teachers wanting to become better teachers is to enhance students’ learning outcomes (Harootunian & Yargar, 1980; Fullan, 1999; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996).

In his article “Professional Development for Teacher Change” Guskey (2002) points out that “Professional development programs are systematic efforts to bring about change in the classroom practices of teachers, in their attitudes and beliefs, and in the learning outcomes of students” (381). The reason why teachers are interested in engaging in such programs is the improvement of student learning. He states that “what attracts teachers to professional development...is their belief that it will expand their knowledge and skills, contribute to their growth, and enhance their effectiveness with students”. He suggests that any teacher development program should be up to these teachers’ expectations and motivational sources. Moreover, he maintains that “teacher development programs that fail to address these needs are unlikely to succeed” (382).

On the other hand, according to his view, the procedures used by most traditional teacher development programs to address the issue of teacher change are inaccurate. Such programs are

aimed at altering the professional practice, beliefs and understanding of teacher approaches in order to enhance student learning. The assumption is that such changes in teachers' attitudes and beliefs will lead to specific changes in their classroom behaviors and practices, which in turn will result in improved student learning. Studies in the field (Huberman & Crandall, 1983; Huberman & Miles, 1984; Guskey & Huberman, 1995) suggest that the order of the events in this approach (first, change in the teachers' attitudes and beliefs; then, change in teacher classroom practice; and, last, change in student learning outcomes) is inaccurate, particularly for experienced teachers (382). Guskey suggests an alternative model of teacher change which is presented in figure 1 below.

Figure 1
A model of teacher change



Guskey, 2002: 383

The model shows the same three major goals of teacher development programs just outlined, but in a different sequence from the traditional way. The order it proposes is: first, change in the teacher classroom practice; then, change in student learning outcome; and last, change in the teacher beliefs and attitudes. Guskey maintains that significant teacher change only occurs after teachers “gain evidence of improvements in student learning” generated by a determined innovation in their classroom practice. Such innovation can be a change in the teachers’ classroom procedures, a new teaching approach, or the integration of new materials. If there is a lack of evidence of positive change in students’ learning (in response to the innovation) significant change in the attitudes and beliefs of teachers is unlikely to occur (Guskey, 2002:383).

Two important aspects of Guskey’s model are worth highlighting here. The first aspect is the issue of teacher motivation. It seems that the interest in fostering student learning is what actually triggers teacher change in the first place. The second aspect is the practical and operational dimension of the model. It is only upon seeing positive change in student outcomes (as a result of change in a particular classroom practice) that real teacher change takes place. This suggests that change in teachers’ attitudes and beliefs, is a consequence and not a cause of change in the learning outcomes of students. This model, which I believe relates to the practical and innovative nature of the reflective teaching model, has important implications for the aims of the present research. These aims are focused on consistent, sustainable and effective change in the beliefs of

the teachers participating in the study (see characteristics of effective teacher development programs in section 4 below).

To summarize, this section has presented some important aspects related to the characteristics of teachers: their qualities and personality traits, their beliefs about language teaching and learning, their professional qualification, knowledge and roles, their performance in key aspects of language instruction, as well as, the process of teacher change. It is clear that all of the elements together make a quite complete (and complex) profile of the language teacher. In the next section, the issues to be discussed are directly related to the characteristics of effective teacher development processes taking into account all the elements that teachers need to deal with effectively within their contextual realities.

After analyzing all the multifaceted and interlinked elements involved in enabling teachers to develop their teaching practice efficiently it becomes evident that teacher' professional qualification is something impossible to achieve on a short-term basis. Rather, the sum of all these aspects is the result of an ongoing, permanent, systematic and long-term teacher education process. Hence the importance of establishing high quality teacher training/development programs that allow teachers to go on in their professional lives in a steady way. What follows is a description of the characteristics of an effective teacher development process and the essential elements it should integrate.

4. CONDITIONS FOR AN EFFECTIVE TEACHER DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Interesting insights that were identified as appropriate to take into account within the scope of the present research project are the ones described in Karen Johnson's article entitled "Innovations in TESOL¹⁰ teacher education: A Quiet Revolution" (Johnson, 2000 1-7). The article is the introductory chapter of the book *Teacher Education* which is a compilation of case studies carried out by teacher educators worldwide in the field of language teacher-education. The four conditions addressed in this last section of the literature review: *a collaborative effort*, *a reflective process*, *a situated experience* and *a theorizing opportunity*, are the same aspects highlighted by Johnson in those studies. On the whole, the four elements are considered distinctive aspects enclosed in the nature and characteristics of an effective teacher development process. Because they remarkably resemble the particularities of the present research project, these aspects have been used as guidelines.

4.1 A collaborative effort

EFL/ESL teacher collaborative efforts for teacher professional development have been taking increased popularity over the past few years around the world. The basic commonplace truth that

¹⁰ TESOL, founded in 1966, is a professional association recognized worldwide. It stands for Teachers of English to Students of Other Language.

“two heads think better than one” can be applied here. Then, the logic would be: three heads think better than two, four better than three, and so on, which implies that every new person that joins adds all the richness of his/her personal experiential knowledge to the collective reflective process. Znesevic and Scholl refer to collaboration as resulting in “heightened reflection” He says that “collaboration – shared responsibility inside and outside the classroom – gives teachers an opportunity for heightened reflection. The need to synchronize teaching acts requires team teachers to negotiate and discuss their thoughts, values and actions in ways that solo teachers do not encounter” (1996:79)

So, collaboration involves important mental processes and human acts such as, reflecting, sharing, synchronizing, negotiating and discussing. For teachers, the benefits and advantages of working in collaboration are numerous. I have identified five of such benefits and advantages: *collaboration for creating teacher community, collaboration for meaningful learning, collaboration for understanding beliefs, collaboration for recognizing knowledge, and collaboration for scaffolding.*

4.1.1 Collaboration for creating teacher community

First and foremost, I would like to refer to the human dimension of collaboration. Collaborative work in language teaching is related to the need of “creating community” in the area. Teachers are not islands and such a sense of community can be very powerful to prevent them from having feelings and mental states of isolation. Collaboration is certainly a powerful means that gives teachers a sense of place and a “place to stand” (Clarke, 2003:117-119). This feeling of belonging, in turn, contributes to the enhancement of the teacher knowledge of human development in an experiential manner. As Kohonen (2002) remarks: “cooperation...helps the participants to understand their experiences better and also enriches them with their shared understanding. Through such processes teachers can arrive at an experiential understanding of their work and themselves” (Kohonen, 2002:48-49).

On the other hand, it seems that the efforts of creating community among English teachers can contribute considerably to the professionalism of the ELT field. According to Penny Ur (2002) this professional image implies that we, English teachers, “...are a community. We are an identifiable group, whose members are interested in interaction with one another for the sake of learning, and also for the enjoyment of exchanging experiences and ideas with sympathetic colleagues” (Ur, 2002: 391)

4.1.2 Collaboration for meaningful learning

The second advantage I see relates to how collaboration contributes to meaningful learning. Vygotsky¹¹ (1978) maintains that learning is more likely to take place when individuals work in

¹¹ Lev Semiónovich Vygotsky (1896-1934) was a Belarusian social constructivist and psychologist whose works the field of psychology, pedagogy and psychopathology. He studied how the child’s higher mental functions developed historically within particular cultural groups, as well as individually through

collaboration on similar problems rather than working alone. He coined the term “zone of proximal development” (ZPD) to refer to this approach to learning. The premise is that individuals develop higher-level thinking skills when working with more advanced peers. As Vygotsky states, “it [the zone of proximal development] is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978: 86).

4.1.3 Collaboration for understanding beliefs

Third, collaboration is of great value to enhance teacher understanding of their language teaching and learning beliefs system. By talking about their teaching experiences teachers are able to go through a personal revision of their own principles and beliefs. In section 1.1 and 3.2 above I have discussed how beliefs shape teacher experience, how rooted they are in teacher’ mind and how particular ways of thinking can prevent teachers from moving on in their professional development. Sharing helps teachers to make these beliefs more evident and perceptible and to give path to new and more effective teaching principles. Moreover, by putting their beliefs into the right perspective through sharing and collaboration teachers can maximize the possibilities to achieve consistency between their beliefs and practice. The words of Edge (2002) best summarize this value of collaboration when he declares that “cooperation then helps the participants to understand their experiences better and also enriches them with their shared understanding. Through such processes teachers can arrive at an experiential understanding of their work and themselves” (cited in Kohonen, 2002:48-49).

4.1.4 Collaboration for enhancing knowledge

Collaboration is also helpful to unfold ways of doing and kinds of knowing. The whole mass of unrevealed teacher experiential knowledge has been described as *tacit knowledge* (see 3.4.6 above). Very often teachers are not aware of what, how, why, and how much they know until they share with others. Thus, sharing helps teachers to have greater understandings of their own knowledge. A current urgent need in the field of research in language teacher education is precisely to gain more evidence of the teachers’ kinds of knowledge, in particular the one that emerges from context. As Johnston and Irujo (2001) claim:

We still have precious little understanding of how teachers acquire the knowledge they have. We do not fully appreciate the huge variety of sources of knowledge that teachers draw on, or the different kinds of knowledge that may be needed in the vastly different contexts in which language teachers work. And we do not know nearly enough about how the

social interactions with significant people in his/her life. One of his major contributions to cognitive development was his theory that human mental functions were social in origins. His works, which were published after his death in 1934 and then banned in 1936, were not known in the West until 1958.

disparate kinds of knowledge — pedagogical, linguistic, institutional, interpersonal — intertwine and are played out in the context of teaching. (5)

The joint effort of collaboration can be helpful for the teachers to put their kinds of knowledge in perspective enabling them to understand it and enhance it. Moreover, teachers' collaboration in a shared and familiar context has the potential of helping them reveal and recognize their *tacit knowledge*.

4.1.5 Collaboration for scaffolding

A more common current term in the field of education, drawn from Vygotsky's work, is "scaffolding", defined as the help provided by a teacher or adult to support learning (Wood, Bruner and Ross, (1976: 90). More specifically for the issue of teacher collaboration with peers there is the term *reciprocal scaffolding*, a method that involves students collaboratively working to complete a task. The group can learn from each other's experiences and knowledge by asking questions. The scaffolding is shared by each member and changes constantly as the group works and interacts (Holton and Thomas, 2001:99-100). Scaffolding then makes it possible for teachers to continue to build on their existing knowledge with the help of peers or teachers who act as temporary supporters until real learning takes place.

4.1.6 Kinds of collaboration

Now, it is clear the multiple benefits and advantages of working with other people and how this process of sharing and collaboration can nurture teacher development. Nevertheless, in order that true collaboration can take place it is necessary that the people involved show the right qualities, attitudes and feelings along the whole process. Concerning this Edge (2002) points out that a teacher's self-development needs other people- colleagues and students, at least. He suggests three conditions for such a partnership: mutual respect, empathy and sincerity (cited in Kohonen, 2002:48-49). Bearing this in mind three kinds of collaboration will be tackled here: *collaboration with students*, *collaboration with peers* and *collaboration with more experienced teachers*.

1. Collaboration with students

As discussed elsewhere students are an important source of motivation for teachers. Research has shown how student learning outcomes can be **the** most determining factor in promoting change in teacher beliefs (see section 3.7 above). Thus, student contributions are a positive influence in the process of teacher development, as teachers are naturally motivated towards student successful learning.

Certainly, teachers can benefit enormously from the students' contribution particularly to get feedback on important aspects of the teaching-learning process such as, general development of the lessons, achievement of objectives, effectiveness of materials and activities, and so on. In addition, the teacher can get valuable information that helps him/her to establish good rapport with students such as their needs and interests, learning styles and motivational sources, among others. Darling-Hammond (1998) points out that teachers learn by observing and listening to their

students carefully and by looking at their work thoughtfully in order to understand what students believe about themselves what they care about, and what tasks are likely to give them enough challenge and success to sustain motivation (cited in Kohonen, 2002:47).

Taking students' insights into consideration is typical of a learner- centered approach. Within this approach there is constant adaptation of the teacher pedagogical choices to student learning needs, particularly for the issue of syllabus planning, implementation and evaluation. Thus, the syllabus is the product of a joint effort between teachers and learners rather than the systematic application of guidelines planned beforehand. As Harmer (2001) points out:

In recent years under the influence of humanistic and communicative theories... great emphasis has been placed on "learner centered teaching" that is teaching which makes the learners' needs central to the educational process. In this framework is students' needs which should drive the syllabus, not some imposed list; it is the students' learning experience and their responses to them which should be at the heart of a language course. The measure of a good lesson is the students' activity taking place, not the performance of the teacher. (56)

A learner-centered program, then, is characterized by high flexibility on the part of the teacher and by students' active participation and involvement in their learning process. Within the scope of this model, collaboration is systematically integrated into the program as there is some kind of negotiation going on between the students and the teacher on important aspects of the teaching-learning process. Concerning this Nunan states that: "important in planning, presenting and evaluating outcomes will be joint consultation and negotiation between teachers and learners "(Nunan, 1988:20).

Hutchinson and Water (1987) propose a learning-centered approach (an approach which is focused on maximizing learning) instead. They argue that completely learner-centered programs do not exist, as in most instructional contexts, syllabus guidelines are institutionally pre-determined. Because it is not completely feasible to put this approach into practice, they proclaim that "the approach should be viewed as a theoretical attack on establish procedure than as a practical approach to course design" (p. 70). I agree that most teachers are limited by institutional policies and pressures in terms of syllabus and curriculum, which makes the approach difficult to implement (this is, indeed, the case of the teachers participating in this study). Nevertheless, what concerns us here is the basic principle of collaboration of the approach for the purpose of teacher development. I strongly believe that collaboration, negotiation and joint consultation between teacher and students, can always be applicable to some extent in all language teaching-learning situations, particularly at the classroom level.

2. Collaboration with peers

Collaboration with peers is another useful approach for teacher development. The basic premise is that teachers working in the same field actually face the same contextual challenges and, therefore, can give each other mutual support in dealing with these challenges. This shared

knowledge of contextual issues can enable teachers to look for joint solutions that can be of help for all the teachers participating in the collaboration actions. Bardhun consistently supports this view when she says that “...we need to focus on how to help ourselves, and the people who are best qualified to provide job-related help and support are the people on the job: our fellow teachers”(Bardhun, 2002: 12). Teachers can carry out this collaboration through the creation of support groups, often called teacher development groups, and through critical friends.

- Teacher development groups

Teacher development groups have a number of benefits for teachers at both personal and professional levels. Let us take for example burnout stages in which teachers feel particularly stressed, anxious and unmotivated. This might happen because of different reasons such as overwork and great challenges (or lack of them) at work. Maslach (1982) describes the phenomenon:

Burnout is a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment. It culminates in a build-up of negative feelings about our students, colleagues and administration. As motivation decreases and frustration increases, we lose the desire and energy to be creative, developing teachers. Physical and emotional stress plays on self-esteem and we lose the sense of being in charge of our lives. (3)

At this stage teachers need alternatives that help them to survive in such dreadful times and be able to go on with the development of their professional lives. One effective way of getting this help is through teacher development groups: teachers who get together on a regular basis for the purpose of sharing and collaboration. Bardhun indicates that “peers can provide help, comfort, insight, comparison, rewards, humor and escape. A teacher development group can be any form of co-operative an ongoing arrangement between two or more teachers to work together on their own personal and professional development ”(Bardhun, 2002: 12).

Thus, teacher development groups are also useful ways to deal with practical aspects of the profession. They can be the structure where teachers have the opportunity to address a number of issues about language learning and teaching in their own teaching contexts. As Johnson states, teachers “engage in the meaningful exchange of ideas and experiences based on their understandings of themselves as teachers, of theories and pedagogies presented in their academic course work, of the students they teach, and of the day-to-day realities of their teaching contexts” (Johnson, 2000:2-3). The possibility of exchanging ideas and ways of understanding with their fellow teachers in context is what makes teacher development groups a useful way for teacher improvement. Bardhun (2002) emphasizes the value of teacher development groups by stating that:

...by forming your own ELT development groups, you can work in a supportive climate...developing yourselves personally and then daring to let those personal changes influence who you are in the classroom and in your schools. It's not easy, and yet it may be the most important risk that you'll ever take. (13)

Moreover, teachers working in collaboration can achieve significant change at a more global level. This is the case of the model proposed by Hudelson and Faltis (1993) called the “collaborative resonance model” an approach to collaboration that involves teacher educators, practicing teachers and student teachers. The model involves working together in the schools “to critique existing practices and to make substantive changes in the teaching and learning that occurs in the schools. Thus, the goal of the collaborative resonance model is the transformation of teaching” (Hudelson and Faltis 1993:33). This is indeed an added value (and a significant challenge too) of teacher development groups, the possibility to make changes in institutional policies and practices about the organization of language learning and teaching.

- Critical friends

Working with a partner can contribute to teacher development in a very practical manner. On the whole, it provides the participating teachers with the possibility of enhancing their teaching skills, and enriching their teaching experience through close collaboration in and out of the classroom. Farrell (1998) comments that “colleagues can engage each other in systematic reflection and thus direct each other’ professional self-development” Farrell, 1998:13). So, the goal of critical friends is to make joint efforts for the professional development and improvement in the teaching practice of the participating teachers. There are a number of possibilities for working with critical friends such as planning lessons, designing and sharing materials, co-teaching, presenting workshops in collaboration, conducting research and doing peer observation (for an expansion of peer observation see section 4.3.1 below).

3. *Collaboration with more experienced teachers*

Collaboration with more experienced teachers might have a very positive influence on the process of teacher development. Nevertheless, the term “more experienced” might have negative connotations as it tends to create divisions (more experienced vs. less experienced teachers). The truth is that, properly done, teachers can benefit enormously from interacting and collaborating with more experienced colleagues. Hudelson and Faltis (1993) maintain that “...Individuals move beyond their present understanding as they collaborate with those more expert than they” (p. 28). As discussed previously, this kind of collaboration favors the development of higher thinking skills which are the basic principles of Vygotsky’s “zone of proximal development” and of the process of scaffolding (see 4.1.2 above). The key issue is to establish optimal procedures and create adequate structures so that teachers can get the most out of the experience. Special care should be taken to maintain an attitude of openness, flexibility and collegiality at all times by the parties involved. Because they are central to this discussion, collaboration with more experienced teachers in two important teacher education stages will be described: *pre-service education and training* and *in-service education and training*.

- *Collaboration at the pre-service education and training stage (PRESET)*

Teachers start to have collaboration with more experienced teachers ever since they are in pre-service education and training programs (PRESET). This is the stage where, among other aspects, the student teacher or “trainee” is gradually introduced in the world of language teaching often being guided or supervised by a mentor or cooperating teacher; the “trainer”. This kind of training at the PRESET stage is often called “the practicum”, or (at UNAN-León, in the Nicaraguan context) “Práctica Profesional”.

During this training time it is expected that the trainee learns the skills, strategies and techniques of the profession. Common syllabus areas suggested are, among others, *pedagogic techniques, materials development, management skills, professional knowledge, applied theory, and Lift (Language improvement for teachers)* (Cross, 2003:42). A major focus during such education programs is the practicum where the pre-service teacher is placed within a school setting. The trainee begins as an observer and shadows an experienced teacher, gradually taking more and more responsibility until he/she finishes the process as a skillful teacher.

Pre-service education and training is definitely a time of modeling and imitation. Woodward sees modeling as a major task of a trainer, “if it is the case that people learn, change or reason better when they are helped to build and adjust mental models, then helping them to do this maybe one of our responsibilities as trainers”(Woodward, 1991:131-132). Wallace calls it the Craft model (1991) a model in which:

the wisdom of the profession resides in an experienced professional practitioner: someone who is expert in the practice of the “craft.” The young trainee learns by imitating the expert’s techniques and by following the experts’ instructions and advice...By this process expertise in the craft is passed on from generation to generation. (6)

As discussed in 2.2 above the approach *trainer* vs. *trainee* has been seriously criticized because of its strong emphasis on the transmission of skills. I really do not see any problem with this approach if it is carried out properly (qualified trainers, a sound and well-structured curriculum, good synergies with local educational institutions). On the contrary it is absolutely necessary. Indeed, if trainees are exposed to good models they will have more probabilities to succeed in becoming competent teachers. The significant problems arise when/if the PRESET program is not well organized and planned and when/if the teacher collaborator is not qualified enough. As emphasized elsewhere, teachers will tend to replicate the inaccurate model. Woodward makes a clear description of this risk, “the disadvantages of models are that we may copy without understanding, or copy without realizing we are copying or copying something which is imperfect in itself” (Woodward, 1991:83). Sadly enough as England states “Too many programs...do not prepare teachers fully for ELT work” (England, 1998:21) this is very often the case, and a reason to make conscious and consistent efforts to offer quality in this important stage. Experts’ effective collaboration is crucial in the PRESET program not only to provide the skills needed but to foster a teacher development perspective.

- *Collaboration at the in-service education and training stage (INSET)*

Pre-service education and training (PRESET) is naturally followed by in-service education and training (INSET), the next step in teacher development. Upon graduation from the PRESET program the teacher begins his/her professional life as a practicing teacher and becomes an in-service teacher. Thus, in-service education and training refers to all kinds of efforts that the teacher makes for professional improvement from this starting point throughout his/her entire life as a teacher. Henderson provides the following global definition of the process: “In-service training may, in the most general sense, be taken to include everything that happens to a teacher from the day he takes up his first appointment to the day he retires which contributes directly or indirectly to the way in which he executes his professional duties” (Henderson, 1978:11).

More specifically, in-service training refers to the kind of structured collaboration and support teachers can get from more experienced teachers in teacher education programs with focus on continuing teacher education. In her article “Promoting Effective Professional Development”, Liz England (1998) provides interesting insights about both INSET and PRESET programs, stating that the two processes “are natural partners in ELT professional development” (England, 1998:22). She emphasizes the importance of giving a follow up to teacher development taking into account the teachers’ current state of training, experience and strengths. She also stresses the value of the process as a joint collaboration effort:

An in-service training program is an opportunity for teachers and program directors to draw on the strengths, training, and experience of teachers and to develop teachers’ skills in an English Language teaching program. An in-service training program provides the environment for teachers to gain an identity as individual professionals, to work as part of a team of colleagues and to develop rapport with the program director. (21)

The in-service training program is usually carried out in the form of workshops, seminars and conferences or specialized courses such as postgraduate courses and Master’s degrees. These kinds of courses are offered by ELT programs at the university level, which may or may not be the university that the participating teacher graduated from. This poses an important question, how to provide the participants with the kind of continuing education that they need taking into account their current knowledge. As England (1998) claims “...there is a need for coordinated and structured teacher preparation. Academic staff in pre-service preparation programs around the world need to join hands with their colleagues who are managing ELT programs to create a coordinated effort for pre-service and in-service professional development” (England, 1998: 19). So England’s call is basically to join efforts to establish PRESET and INSET programs which are well-structured and coordinated. In this way, the process of teacher education is consistent and coherent and can provide the “scaffolding” that teachers need to improve their professional competence. As Smith points out “somehow the teacher education program is expected to lead the teacher to a better understanding of her own assets, beliefs, and values, and to help the teacher

steadily improve her competencies” (Smith as cited in Bailey et. al., 1996:27). The in-service training offered in the form of a postgraduate course in TEFL (2007-2009), main context of the present study, was an attempt to create this scaffolding structure for the professional improvement of the participating teachers (see Research Methodology in chapter four).

To sum up, collaboration can have a number of benefits for language teachers, such as, create community, foster meaningful learning, understand beliefs, recognize knowledge, and scaffold all of which are important acts for people interaction and development. Moreover, it is clear that the alternatives of collaboration presented here: with students, peers and teacher educators have important implications for teachers at both personal and professional level. The next characteristic of an effective teacher development process which has a more personal dimension is equally important: the teacher ability to reflect on his teaching.

4.2 A reflective process

The second aspect that is directly related to an effective teacher development process is the issue of reflection. For the purpose of examination and clarification of the concept it is important here to direct attention to what reflection is. Let us have a look at the following general definitions provided by different authors. Reflection...

- “...refers to an activity or process in which an experience is recalled, considered, and evaluated, usually in relation to a broader purpose. It is a response to past experience and involves conscious recall and examination of the experience as a basis for evaluation and decision-making and as a source for planning an action” Richards (2004)
- “...enables the practitioner to assess, understand, and learn through their experiences. It is a personal process that usually results in some change for the individual in their perspective of a situation or creates new learning for the individual” Johns (1995)
- “...(is) a process of reviewing an experience of practice in order to describe, analyze, evaluate and so inform learning about practice” Reid (1993:3)
- “...(is) a generic term for those intellectual and effective activities in which individuals engage to explore their experiences in order to lead to a new understanding and appreciation” Boud et al. (1985:19)
- “...(is) a positive active process that reviews, analyses and evaluates experiences, draws on theoretical concepts or previous learning and so provides an action plan for future experiences.” Kemmis (1985)

In all these definitions of reflection, the common and salient term is *experience* (past and future) which is combined with words like *evaluation*, *assessment*, *examination*, *exploration*, *analysis*, *understanding* and *reviewing*. There are some other important words like: *personal process*, *active process*, *individual*, *intellectual*, *decision-making*, *planning action*, *practice* and *change*. If we are to take all these terms in order to make up a new general definition that tries to condense all the information, it would be something like: *Reflection is an active personal process*

in which an individual uses her/ his intellect to evaluate, assess, examine, explore, analyze, review, and understand past experiences in order to learn, make decisions, and plan change of actions for future experiences.

Now, in the field of education, teaching should necessarily be a reflective process since teachers are going through *new experiences* on an everyday basis at the classroom level. Reflection so conceived involves a conscious effort of analyzing those experiences on the teacher's mind in order to use the resulting information as the basis for further pedagogical choices. This reflective process also involves the assessment of the teachers' previous experiences as a learner and as a teacher.

4.2.1 Critical thinking, a necessary condition for reflection

There are specific conditions that need to be met in order that the process of teacher reflection runs smoothly. In section 3.4.5 above reflective knowledge, defined as the teachers' ability to reflect on and assess their own practice, is presented as one of the necessary kinds of knowledge for teacher qualification. Teachers are to have or develop skills that allow them assume a critical attitude in and out of the classroom towards the many aspects of their teaching practice. This ability to reflect, according to Kohonen (2002), is the teacher role that makes her/him a "reflective practitioner".

...the teachers' role is that of a reflective practitioner. Teachers need to assume a critical stance also towards their profession in order to understand the constraints imposed on their work by external circumstances. In this orientation teachers need to assume an autonomous, active professional identity involving an element of continuing professional development. (41)

Thus, being critical allows the teacher to transcend the walls of the classroom and adopt a more active and determining attitude towards their instructional context. As discussed elsewhere teachers are perceived as change agents who are to defy and question unfair and inadequate external conditions that affect their teaching. But, in order to do this, teachers have to, first, "understand the constraints" that context poses to them. They should also understand and question their own internal processes; that is to say those attitudes, personal traits and, beliefs that prevent them from professional growth. The only way they can do this is by developing critical thinking skills.

Elder and Paul (1994) describe critical thinking as the "ability of thinkers to take charge of their own thinking" This ability, they explain further, "requires that they [thinkers] develop sound criteria and standards for analyzing and assessing their own thinking and routinely use those criteria and standards to improve its quality" (Elder and Paul, 1994: 34-35). So, critical thinking is a process in the individual's mind that allows her/him to take control of her/his thinking by developing certain standards of analysis. The ultimate goal is the quality of reasoning. Such criteria and standards are represented by a whole set of attributes that enable teachers to think critically. Ellis (1997) suggests some of these attributes: "...critical thinkers: distinguish between fact and opinion; ask questions; make detailed observations; uncover assumptions and define their

terms; and make assertions based on sound logic and solid evidence”. In her book, *Peak Performance*, Ferrett, (1997) expands the range by adding other important attributes. According to her view, a critical thinker:

- asks pertinent questions focused on the issue at hand
- assesses statements and arguments for value, objectivity and focus
- is able to admit a lack of understanding or information
- has a sense of curiosity and is an active investigator
- is interested in finding new solutions always seeking for continuous improvement and understanding of the world
- is able to clearly define a set of criteria for analyzing ideas
- is willing to examine beliefs, assumptions, and opinions and weigh them against facts
- listens carefully to others and is able to give feedback
- sees that critical thinking is a lifelong process of self-assessment
- suspends judgment until all facts have been gathered and considered
- looks for evidence to support assumption and beliefs
- is able to adjust opinions when new facts are found
- looks for proof that a set of statements is true and represent the best fact available
- examines problems closely
- is able to reject information that is incorrect or irrelevant
- takes on the role of lifelong learning as a challenge and applies to that challenge to make contributions in the world

In analyzing all of these attributes some major categories can be made. There are, for instance, those attributes that clearly relate to *inquisitiveness of mind* (questioning, assessing, having a sense of curiosity, investigating, examining problems and looking for solutions, and taking life-long learning as a challenge). Some others reflect *self-appraisal and evaluation skills* (examining beliefs, assumptions, and opinions, weighing them against facts, defining a set of criteria for analyzing ideas, and realizing that critical thinking is a lifelong process of self-assessment). There is a third group that reflects *openness, flexibility and tolerance* (admitting lack of understanding, listening carefully to others and being able to give feedback, and adjusting opinions when new facts are found). Finally, there are those attributes that reveal *logic, integrity and a sense of justice* (suspending judgment until all facts have been gathered and considered, looking for evidence to support assumption and beliefs, adjusting opinions when new facts are found, looking for proof, and making contributions to the world).

All of these traits: *inquisitiveness of mind; self-appraisal and evaluation skills; openness, flexibility and tolerance; and; logic, integrity and a sense of justice* are, essentially, clear indications of human growth and development. Moreover, they are unequivocal signs of intelligence and intellectual maturity. It is obvious that acquiring all of these critical thinking skills is a long-term enterprise. This fact has important implications for the process of teacher development. It means that in the several stages of the teacher education process, there should be plenty of opportunities that enable teachers to acquire these important critical thinking attributes. Thus, teachers will be fully equipped to address both the challenges posed by their contexts and those experienced by the problems they might face in the classroom. More importantly, teachers will be able to transmit the same critical thinking attitude to their students,

which will guide students towards both effective language learning and successful professional orientation.

4.2.2 *Kinds of teacher reflection*

Schön (1983) defines two kinds of reflection: *reflection-in-action* and *reflection-on-action*. According to him reflection-in-action is thinking and doing at the same time. It deals with the mental processes teachers go through at the moment of experiencing a particular educational situation. The teacher faces the situation in light of what he/she knows and uses this knowledge to find and put into practice an immediate and feasible course of action. Schön describes the process:

The practitioner allows himself to experience surprise, puzzlement, or confusion in a situation which he finds uncertain or unique. He reflects on the phenomenon before him, and on the prior understandings which have been implicit in his behavior. He carries out an experiment which serves to generate both a new understanding of the phenomenon and a change in the situation. He does not keep means and ends separate, but defines them interactively as he frames a problematic situation. He does not separate thinking from doing...Because his experimenting is a kind of action, implementation is built into his inquiry. (68)

Conversely, *reflection-on-action* is thinking that takes place in retrospective. The teacher consciously recalls the situation, reflecting on the different events that happened as a result of the reflection-in-action process. In other words, there is interaction between the two ways of reflection. As Schön explains (1983: 26) “We reflect on action, thinking back on what we have done in order to discover how our knowing-in-action may have contributed to an unexpected outcome”

There is a further kind of reflection suggested: *reflection-for-action*. This kind of reflection is different in nature and in purposes as it intends to generate actions. Killian and Todnew (1991:15) state that *reflection-for-action* is the outcome of the other two kinds of reflection and that “we undertake reflection not so much to revisit the past or to become aware of the meta-cognitive process one is experiencing but to guide future action”

All types of reflection have important implication for language teachers. *Reflection-in-action*, for instance allows them to address the multiple issues in the classroom at the time they are actually taking place. Two things are of particular interest about *reflection-in-action*. First, how it helps teachers to deal with an unpredictable situation: e.g. a technique that is not working properly, instructions that are not getting through, an interactional activity that is not motivating students, and the like. The teacher, then, acts accordingly while the situation is taking place. Second, how *reflection-in-action* enables teachers to put into practice their tacit knowledge to deal with the situation. Moreover, it allows teachers to move from the unknown to the known thus making their tacit knowledge explicit. According to Dewey (1933) reflection is an “active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends” (Dewey, 1933:118).

Reflection-on-action, in turn, implies a further level of analysis of the *reflection-in-action* process. The teacher recalls the experience after it took place, which allows him/her to use higher thinking skills and mental processes to make sense out of the experience. Dewey suggests that five aspects are present in this recalling process:

1. Suggestions, in which the mind leaps forward to a possible solution.
2. An intellectualization of the difficulty or perplexity that has been felt (directly experienced) into a problem to be solved.
3. The use of one suggestion after another as a leading idea, or hypothesis, to initiate and guide observation and other operations in collection of factual material.
4. The mental elaboration of the idea, or supposition as an idea or supposition (reasoning, in the sense in which reasoning is a part, not the whole, of inference).
5. Testing the hypothesis by overt or imaginative action.

(Dewey 1933: 199-209)

The last kind of reflection, *reflection-for-action* has a more practical nature and purposes as it allows teachers to make the real changes. The teacher is expected to review the situations or event and take an active role in making attempts to improve the situation or solve the problem. This kind of reflection is what guides the teacher's future thought and actions.

I believe that all three kinds of reflection are useful for teacher improvement in different manners and at different times. The important thing to bear in mind is not the distinction, but the way in which each kind of reflection contributes to teacher understanding. What matters is that, when reflecting, teachers get involved in a process in which they are constantly questioning their practice, making assumptions, revealing, recycling and getting new knowledge, testing hypothesis, making decisions, and integrating changes on the basis of a conscious and informed analytical process.

4.2.3 *Reasons for teacher reflection*

There are a number of reasons why teachers should reflect on their teaching practice. Generally speaking, I would say, to get higher levels of professional expertise, to understand the process of language teaching and learning in a better way, and to be able to address student learning needs more efficiently. More specifically, reflection can be of valuable help for teachers to:

- ...find solutions for practical issues in the classroom. As mentioned elsewhere teaching a language is a complex process and as such it poses a number of challenges to teachers. During their teaching practice teachers might get to a point in which they feel overwhelmed by these challenges and by the fact that they do not have appropriate solutions at hand. Teachers need practical solutions and reflection is a powerful source to generate them.
- ...avoid routine actions and ritual teaching behavior. In section 3.7.1 above we have defined this kind of behavior as unprincipled and unreflective. Critical and reflective thinking is a powerful tool for self-awareness. Thus, by becoming reflective, teachers avoid mechanical

teaching, and are able to go on growing and improving professionally in a lifelong process. As Richards states “critical thinking can help teachers move from a level where they may be guided largely by impulse, intuition, or routine to a level where their actions are guided by reflection and critical thinking” (Richards 1990:5).

- ...revitalize teacher motivation to teach. There are particular times in teachers’ life when they might feel extremely tired and lacking enthusiasm and interest in teaching. This mental condition that can sometimes become physical is called burnout (see section 4.1.6). Teaching reflectively can provide new opportunities for the teacher to see dimensions in teaching that she/he had not seen before, with a renewed interest and from a different perspective.

4.2.4 Advantages of teacher reflection

The advantages of reflection are numerous and varied. Through reflection teachers develop and enhance important qualities and skills for language teaching and learning. The following are a few of them:

- Reflection promotes teacher independence and autonomy

No one is to tell a reflective teacher what to do as the teacher himself/herself is in the position of knowing. She/he is the one facing the teaching situation and, therefore, the situation is in her/his hands to deal with effectively. Mann highlights this fact when he states that “more reflective teachers are better able to monitor, make real-time decisions and respond to the changing needs of learners more than less reflective teachers”. (Mann, 2005:108).

- Reflection fosters teacher flexibility, creativity and motivation

Learning is an unpredictable process, for the most part. The teacher does everything in his/her hand to control all aspects of his/her teaching so that learning actually takes place. But, every experienced teacher knows that particular classroom practices can work well with certain students but not with others. Being reflective allows the teacher to adapt to the situation accordingly. This ability is what Pennington refers to as “a reflective/developmental orientation” which, on the one hand, leads to improving classroom processes and results and, on the other, contributes to teacher confidence and motivation (Pennington, 1992:51).

- Reflection enhances teacher experiential knowledge

In analyzing classroom experience the teacher makes necessary adjustments and changes dictated by trial and error. That is, experience combined with reflection dictate the course of the teaching actions and events which are under constant evaluation. According to Richards and Lockhart, although important, experience alone is not enough for teacher professional growth. From their view, experience has to be coupled with reflection in order to be effective. They conclude that “experience is the starting point for teacher development but in order for experience to play an important role it is necessary to examine such experiences systematically”. Richards and Lockhart 1994:4).

- Reflection increases teacher awareness and fosters change

In reflecting on the multiple and very often complex events that take place in the classroom, the teachers gain new understanding of such events. Thus, the teaching experience so conceived is a constant process of evolution through which teacher is constantly renewing and recycling information. This information raises teacher awareness and the possibilities to change increase as well. Roberts perceives the process of reflection as an imperative for change. He states that processes such as self-monitoring and self-evaluation are the “only possible basis for long term change” (Roberts 1998:305).

- Reflection helps teachers to achieve coherence

It is through a reflective attitude that teachers can make the real interconnection of all the aspects that intervene in their teaching practice such as personality traits, role, performance, knowledge, beliefs, and the like. According to Woods beliefs, assumptions, and knowledge, (BAK, as he has coined it) are cognitive processes that interrelate and are used in the decision making processes of the teachers (Woods, 1996:199). Critical reflection is, in essence, the process through which such interrelation takes place effectively for teaching purposes.

- Reflection helps teachers fulfill their social role as change agents

In becoming reflective practitioners, teachers also become independent and well informed social agents able to analyze and assess situations critically and promote change. Such a professional attitude is likely to cause a beneficial effect on students. Bartlett (1990) maintains that reflection leads to systematic practice testing and “also challenges us to think about the influence we directly or indirectly exert on the formation of society in our role as teachers...Becoming reflective also extends beyond ourselves, making possible a similar form of self-inquiry in students”(Bartlett, 1990: 213-214).

4.2.5 Focus of reflection in language teaching

Critical reflection in language teaching begins with questions on the teacher mind about different aspects of his/her teaching. These questions can be as multiple, varied and complex as the process of language teaching and learning can be. In the book, *Reflective Teaching on Second Language Classroom*, a classic in the field, Richards and Lockhart (1994) present a set of questions that can potentially be the focus of teacher reflection. These questions, which are the basis of the structure of the book, are presented below:

- How can I collect information about my own teaching?
- What are my beliefs about teaching and learning, and how do these beliefs influence my teaching?
- Where do these beliefs come from?
- What kind of teacher am I?
- What beliefs do my learners hold about learning and teaching?
- How do these beliefs influence their approach to learning?
- What learning styles and strategies do my learners favor?
- What kind of planning decisions do I make use of?
- What kind of on-the-spot decisions do I make while I teach?
- What criteria do use to evaluate my teaching?

- What is my role as a teacher?
 - How does this role contribute to my teaching style?
 - How do my learners perceive my role as a teacher?
 - What form or structure do my lessons have?
 - How to communicate goals to my learners?
 - How effectively do I utilize learning opportunities within a lesson?
 - What kinds of interaction occur in my classroom?
 - What interactional styles do my learners favor?
 - What kind of grouping arrangements do I use and how effective are they?
 - What kind of learning activities do I employ?
 - What is the purpose of these activities?
 - What patterns of language use occur when I teach?
 - How do I modify my language to facilitate teaching and learning?
 - What opportunities do learners have for authentic language use in my classroom?
- (Richards and Lockhart 1994:1-2)

The list of reflective questions is quite long, but by no means exhaustive. On the whole, the aspects relate to the teacher, the student, the teaching and learning process and the nature of language. Among the different issues that emerge are those related to the *teacher beliefs* (kinds of beliefs, main source, and influence on the teaching process), *student beliefs* (kinds of beliefs, main source, and influence on the teaching process), *student learning styles and strategies*, *decision making* issues, *evaluation* issues, *teacher role* and *teaching style*, *lesson structure*, *educational goals*, *classroom management* and *interaction*, kinds and purposes of *learning activities*, and *language use*. Notice how many of these aspects emerge from the core stages of language teaching and learning: *planning*, *implementation* and *evaluation*.

So far, I have discussed what reflection is, what it involves, what elements are necessary conditions for reflection, its advantages and benefits, and the importance of reflection for language teachers. Likewise, the notion of critical thinking as an important condition for reflection has been tackled. In addition, I have described three important models of reflection *reflection-in-action*, *reflection-on-action* and *reflection-for-action* which are distinct but related ways of reflection. The first model is carried out on-the-spot, the second in retrospective, and the last for the purposes of action and change. Finally, I have presented a set of focused questions in different broad areas which are useful suggestions to foster teacher initial reflection.

In the next section three current structured methods for teacher reflection will be presented and discussed: *Reflective Teaching*, *Exploratory Teaching*, and *Action Research* in the classroom. All of these models are aimed at promoting teacher involvement in the processes of exploring the language teaching-learning process from their own perspective, giving them the opportunity of formulating theories for the purposes of the enhancement of their teaching practice.

4.3 A theorizing opportunity

Popular perception regards theorizing as something quite intimidating as the term seems to imply some kind of unapproachable activity mainly carried out by scientists or experts in a given area of knowledge. But, what exactly is it to theorize? The Webster dictionary on line

suggests interesting definitions of this and related concepts. Thus, theorize is to formulate theories; speculate, hypothesize, imagine, conjecture, make inferences or propose a theory about something. Now, let us take hypothesize which seems to be the term most related to scientific work. Hypothesize is defined as a) to meditate on a subject; b) to reflect c) to recycle knowledge in light of experience or personal knowledge and d) to understand phenomena. Putting all of these definitions together it is clear how they relate to the issue of teacher reflection and to the development of critical thinking skills outlined in the previous section. It is also clear that theorizing does not need to be regarded as something exclusively done by research specialists or by scientists as it involves common mental processes such as speculate, imagine and make inferences. Moreover, in the field of language teaching as already discussed, leaving the issue of theorizing exclusively in the hands of experts has caused a number of problems of isolation and divorce between theorists and language teachers. Teachers, indeed, have the legitimate right to do the task themselves.

Thus, teachers become theorizers (a) when they construct their own language teaching theory based on their own experience in the classroom and, (b) when they transform this understanding into purposeful action for practical and meaningful purposes in context. It is an effective way for teachers to go from practice to theory and the other way round, which allows them to recycle knowledge emerging from experience over and over again. In this process of understanding a number of elements come into play including teacher background knowledge, learning experiences, and contextual knowledge as Freeman and Richards (1996) suggest:

...second language teachers incorporate and make use of the theoretical ideas and theories as well as the pedagogic principles they acquire during professional educations. This process of reconstructions, access, and use it is not haphazard but is shaped by experience, previous knowledge, personal beliefs, and responses to both macro- and micro level contextual factors in their classrooms, schools and communities. (5-6)

Nonetheless, to lead teachers through such a conscious level of reflection requires a series of steps in the ladder of teacher professional development which is a challenge that should be assumed as part of the responsibility of teacher education programs. Many experts and teacher educators have called for this responsibility throughout the years. Nunan (1992), for instance, emphasizes that “if the teacher-researcher movement is not to become yet another fad, then significant numbers of teachers, graduate students and others will need skills in planning, implementing and evaluating research” (Nunan, 1992: xii). Freeman (2002) accurately points out that “the central challenge for teachers, like any of us, is to find meaning in our experience. If teachers’ mental lives are storied or narrative webs of past and present experience, if their knowledge is reflective of their positions in the activity of teaching, then it makes sense that reflective practice must become a central pillar in teacher education”(Freeman, 2002:11). Schulman (1987) calls for teacher education programs that help student teachers acquire skills and

theoretical understanding of their teaching ways through reflection on practical experience (Shulman, 1987: 19).

Now, the premise of language teachers as investigator stated in the introduction of this literature review makes much more sense. Within this role teachers engage in a creative process in which they test, question and challenge their personal language theories through trial and error which allows them to become theorizers of their own practice. Because of its autonomous and personal nature, this level of awareness takes teachers to higher levels of understanding of their own classroom situation and to the subsequent enhancement of the effectiveness of their teaching skills. Within the model of the teacher as a researcher there are several alternatives available for teachers ranging from the least structured way of reflecting on a regular basis through more elaborated and refined ways. Three of such alternatives are described below: *Reflective Teaching*, *Action Research in the Classroom* and *Exploratory Practice*.

4.3.1 *Reflective teaching*

Reflective teaching is a simple model for theorizing in which the teacher consistently and systematically integrates into her/his teaching aspects of the *reflection-in-action*, *reflection-on-action* and *reflection-for-action* approaches described above. The reflective teacher reflects while teaching and teaches while reflecting, keeping an inquisitive mind in the different stages of planning, implementation and evaluation of her/his lessons. For instance, she/he may choose to focus on trying to find the answers or solutions to specific issues such as a discipline problem, or a lesson plan that did not work the way it was expected. Or, the teacher can focus on a particular technique that he is trying for the first time and on students' reaction to the new approach. The possibilities are unlimited and as varied and multidimensional as the teacher's multifaceted practice.

Thus, as discussed elsewhere, this reflective process is the basis for changes in the teacher beliefs and actions as teachers consciously and systematically keep track of the different aspects of their teaching. Concerning this Bartlett (1990) points out that: "reflective teaching is not an easy process. It involves a major shift in emphasis in our thinking and acting. Becoming reflective forces us to adopt a critical attitude to ourselves as individual... teachers--to challenge our espoused personal beliefs about teaching" (Bartlett, 1990: 213-214).

The reflective teacher model has been consistently supported by a number of authors and studies over the past few decades (Bartlett, 1990; Carr, W. and S. Kemmis, 1986; Elbaz, F. 1988; Farrell, 1998; Nunan and Lamb, 1996; Pennington, M. 1992; Pollard, 2002; Richards and Lockhart: 1994, Schön, 1983). Within this model the teachers get involved in an ongoing cyclical process in order to "become active agents of their training and competent researchers of the cause and effects of the classroom events" (Madrid, 1996:121). The way the model operates is through the teacher close observation of - and reflection on - the classroom events. Usually, there is a

cycle in the process of reflection. Richards (1991: 89) states that such cyclical process should consist of three different, but interrelated processes, which are shown in table 8 below.

Table 8

The Process of Reflection

PROCESS	DESCRIPTION
<i>The event itself</i>	The starting point is an actual teaching episode, such as a lesson or other instructional event. While the focus of critical reflection is usually the teacher's own teaching, self-reflection can also be stimulated by observation of another person's teaching.
<i>Recollection of the event</i>	The next stage in reflective examination of an experience is an account of what happened, without explanation or evaluation. Several different procedures are available during the recollection phase, including written descriptions of an event, a video or audio recording of an event, or the use of check lists or coding systems to capture details of the event.
<i>Review and response to the event</i>	Following a focus on objective description of the event, the participant returns to the event and reviews it. The event is now processed at a deeper level, and questions are asked about the experience.

Thus, in the process of reflection: 1) the teacher identifies a particular situation that affects her/his teaching: *the event itself*, 2) the teacher observes the occurrence and collects information: *recollection of the event*, and, 3) the teacher uses the data to reflect on the situation from different perspectives and acts accordingly: *review and response to the event*

Teachers might decide to go through this reflection process in their classrooms independently, or, they might want to do it on a collaborative basis along with a colleague or several colleagues. Alternatively, teachers might choose to give their reflection a more structured dimension and decide to involve students and use data collection instruments such as surveys and interviews to find their perception on particular targeted aspects. All these approaches to collect information are equally valid and useful to aid teacher reflection on their own teaching practice. They are also widely used for more structured ways of reflection such as conducting classroom Action Research. The approaches that will be described here in some detail are self-observation, peer observation, diary writing, and surveys and questionnaires.

- Self-observation

Reflection can be carried out through self-observation. Within this approach to reflection the teacher keeps systematic track of his/her own performance. Pollard (2002: 41) states that “the model of a reflective teacher suggests that critical reflection and systematic investigation of our own practice should become an integral part of our daily classroom life.” Within this regular process of critical reflection, teachers analyze, interpret, get feedback, evaluate, and make pertinent changes in a cyclical process aimed at improving their teaching practice. As part of the

reflection the teacher thinks about the classroom experience and asks herself/himself questions about *what went well* and *what didn't* and *why*. The possibility of reflecting on their own teaching and of making changes based on that reflection gives teachers considerable autonomy and enhance their decision making skills. Concerning this, Bartlett (1990) states that:

...asking what and why a question gives us a certain power over our teaching. We could claim that the degree of autonomy and responsibility we have in our work as teachers is determined by the level of control we can exercise over our actions. In reflecting on the above kind of questions, we begin to exercise control and open up the possibility of transforming our everyday classroom life. (267)

Self-observation can be carried out through a variety of sources such as self-reports, writing diaries or autobiographies, and recording lessons.

- Peer observation

I have stressed the value of collaboration with peers for teacher development in section 4.1.6 above. Peer observation is about the collaborative work of two or more teachers who make joint efforts to observe classroom activity for the purposes of mutual improvement. Richards emphasizes the practical, reflective, and experiential dimension of peer observations when he notes that “peer observation can provide opportunities for teachers to view each other’s teaching in order to expose them to different teaching styles and to provide opportunities for critical reflection on their own teaching” (Richards, 2004: 3). In observing each other’s teaching the possibilities are numerous as the teaching-learning processes can be observed from different perspectives. An important step of the process is to make decisions on the specific focus of the observation which can include any particular aspect of the class that the teacher is interested in improving. Alternatively, the observation can be focused on observing the effectiveness of a particular teaching method, the implementation of new materials, and the integration of innovations in the classroom.

In order for the observation to be effective it is necessary that the teachers agree on several important aspects such as how the observer will collect the information, time issues, and the like. Usually, peer observations have a particular structure. Richards and Lockhart (1993: 147-150) suggest *the pre-observation orientation session, the observation and the post observation*. These are outlined below:

a) *The pre-observation orientation session*

Prior to the observation, the teachers meet to talk about general aspects of the lesson to be observed such as the kind and number of students, the teacher’ approach to teaching, potential problems to arise, and the like. The teachers make decisions on the focus of the observation and on the kind of data to be collected. They also agree on the procedures of the observation to collect the data. These procedures can include:

- Quotations: the observer writes down the exact words of the teacher at specific times of the lesson (for example when giving instructions)

- Broad descriptive narrative: the observer writes a narrative where the main events and behaviors observed during the lesson are summarized
- Narrow descriptive narrative: the observer writes a narrative where particular events and behaviors observed during the lesson are summarized. For instance, the observer describes what a single student (or the teacher) did and said throughout the lesson.
- Coding forms: the observer checks the appropriate category on a set of coded categories of classroom behaviors whenever a behavior is displayed during the lesson.
- Timed samples: the observer writes down specific kinds of behavior observed at specified times during the lesson.

b) The observation

The observer carries out the observation focusing on the target aspects and collecting the necessary data through the prearranged procedures.

c) The post-observation

The observer reports on the information collected and discuss it with the teacher. The post-observation should take place shortly after the observation so that the classroom events and behavior observed are fresh on the teachers' minds.

Peer observation has a number of benefits for teachers: a) it is an excellent alternative for scaffolding, particularly in those contexts in which teachers do not count on specialized support for improvement. Besides, the whole process is carried out without fear of negative judgment in an atmosphere of collegiality and mutual understanding; b) the results are valid and relevant since the observation is carried out by people who know the field and the many aspects involved in the process; c) it provides mutual benefits for both the teacher observed and the observer. The observed teacher can usually get valuable feedback for practical issues. The observer, in turn, can benefit from the other teacher's approach for expanding his/her own teaching techniques, self-evaluating and, in general, reflecting on the teaching process. Wallace (1998) emphasizes the reciprocal value of peer observation when he comments "we may work with other colleagues to observe one another's teaching...In this case we are benefiting from other colleagues' perception and they from ours" (1998: 106). Because of the significance of the information collected through peer observations, the approach is widely used for data collection in more structured models of reflection such as Action Research in the classroom (see section 4.3.2 below).

- Diary writing

Diary writing (also called journal writing or logs) is a procedure that has gained significant valued as an instrument for teacher reflection. Diary writing can have a number of valuable uses. The main goal is to record information about experience for the purposes of analysis and

further reflection. Diary entries can be written by the teacher on a regular basis and at particular times; for instance, at the end of class time, while students are involved in a particular activity, or later on during the day. Alternatively, diaries can be used to recall teacher experiences as learners (to bring to consciousness beliefs about teaching and learning for example). Diary writing can also be promoted in collaboration with students or with peers, following specific procedures for writing and reading entries. For example, there can be some kind of written exchange between the teacher and the students or peers; the teacher reads the students or peer diary entries and responds. The students or peers, in turn, do the same in a collaborative dialogue aimed at fostering further issues for reflection on a particular experience, situation, topic or event.

Diary writing can be time consuming, but its benefits in promoting teacher reflection surpass time constraints. The personal dimension of the writing activity is what makes it a valuable tool to get significant information. As Wolf (1989: 54) states: “in writing a journal we take something from inside ourselves and we set it out: it is a means of discovering who we are, that we exist, that we change and grow”. Richards (2004) lists some useful insights about diary writing for teacher reflection and self-development. He states that the goal of journal writing is:

1. to provide a record of the significant learning experiences that have taken place
2. to help the participant come into touch and keep in touch with the self-development process that is taking place for them
3. to provide the participants with an opportunity to express, in a personal and dynamic way, their self-development
4. to foster a creative interaction
 - between the participant and the self-development process that is taking place
 - between the participant and other participants who are also in the process of self-development
 - between the participant and the facilitator whose role it is to foster such development

(Richards, 2004:5)

- Surveys

Surveys are also an alternative available to teachers for the purpose of reflection. Richards and Lockhart state that “surveys and questionnaires are useful ways of gathering information about affective dimensions of teaching and learning such as beliefs, attitudes, motivation, and preferences, and enable a teacher to collect a large amount of information relatively quickly” (1994: 10). Thus, surveys are optimal means to have access to people’s thinking as the participants provide first hand real and reliable information. For instance, surveys can be used if the teacher wants to know all students’ opinion about particular didactic materials, or a teaching method, or certain learning activities. Brown and Rodgers share a similar position “in fact, language surveys can be used to answer any research questions that requires exploration, description, or explanation of peoples’ characteristics, attitudes, views and opinions” (2002:243). In order to be effective surveys should be designed to be as unobtrusive as possible. That is to say that they should not affect the nature of the language teaching-learning process. As Jagger (1988) points out:

The researcher does not “do” anything to the objects or subjects of research, except to observe them or ask them to provide data. The research consists of collecting data on things or people as they are without trying to alter anything. A survey researcher might want to know about teachers’ honest attitudes, toward their school principals, unaltered by the act of asking. The more intrusive a survey, the lower the chances that it will accurately reflect real conditions

(Cited in Nunan 1992: 140-141)

There is an important distinction between two kinds of surveys to be made: *interview research* and *questionnaire research*. Interviews are considered the most direct way in which teachers can obtain information about a particular matter. They are usually carried out in a face-to-face format, though some interviews can be carried out by email or on paper. Interviews are of an open-ended nature and provide the interviewee with the opportunity to express freely their concerns and insights about the issue in question. Questionnaires, on the other hand, are of a more controlled nature; they can include open and close-ended types of questions. The teacher should take special care when designing questionnaires (whether including open or close-ended questions) as they shouldn’t lead answers in any way, and ambiguity should be avoided. If designed adequately, both questionnaires and interviews can be of valuable help to collect data for teacher reflection.

To summarize, it is clear that the reflective teaching model provides the language teacher with real-time opportunities for theorizing. It is a relevant, useful, practical and analytical task that establishes the basis for teacher change and development in context. In order to carry out the reflection process effectively, the teacher has a number of options available. The options presented here for the reflective teacher are self-observation, peer observation, diary writing and surveys which are considered useful methods to foster teacher reflection. The next model that will be presented, as an effective way to theorize, is Classroom Action Research

4.3.2 Classroom Action Research

Action Research¹² in the classroom is a current and widespread approach for theorizing in the field of language teaching. I have mentioned elsewhere some of the criticisms made to the many approaches and methods for language teaching that have been suggested over the past few decades. The major criticism has been that the teachers, the main actors in charge of the teaching process, were left behind in the methodological suggestions proposed. Because of this criticism it has been strongly recommended to enhance teachers’ research skills so that they can be active agents in exploring and improving their teaching situation. Action Research in the classroom, or CAR as it is generally known now, is probably the most salient current sign of this change of direction (Burns, 2005; Carr and Kemmis, 1986; Kemmis, S & McTaggart, R.

12 Action Research is a term originally coined by psychologist Kurt Lewin (1946) to describe research involved in social action to accomplish greater understanding of our societies and make positive changes. He regarded Action Research as a set of spirals “each of which is composed of a circle of planning, action and fact-finding about the result of the action” (Lewin, 1948:206).

(eds.) 1988a Nunan, 1992; Nunan and Lamb, 1996; Wallace 1988). CAR intends to provide the teachers with the necessary research tools and skills so that they take the role of investigators and autonomous problem solving agents within their classrooms.

For this purpose CAR provides teachers with a structured way of reflecting on their teaching as Wallace' definition suggests: "Action Research is a way of reflecting on your teaching. It is done by systematically collecting data on your everyday practice and analyzing it in order to come to some decisions about what your future practice would be" (Wallace 1998:4). These decisions are actually the basis to undertake action, hence its name, which is aimed at solving the problem identified, improving a particular aspect, or carrying out change. Indeed the most interesting and practical dimension of CAR is that the research process involves a plan of action. Burns (2005: 58) emphasizes this particularity of the approach when she comments "A central aspect of AR is the simultaneous focus on action and research. The action component involves participants in a process of planned intervention where concrete strategies, processes or activities are developed within the research context". Thus, the plan of action is an intervention plan that has a practical and relevant outcome: the improvement of the teaching-learning process in whatever the focus of the research is. For Burns (2005) this intervention:

...through action occurs in response to a perceived problem, puzzle or question – a gap between the ideal and the reality that people in the social context perceive as in need of change. The gap might relate to teaching, learning, curriculum or syllabus implementation, as well as aspects of school management. (58)

The underlying premise is that language teaching should not be guided by a predetermined set of methodological prescriptions and that teachers have the right to make well informed decisions about what is to be taught and how it is to be taught. In other words CAR provides the framework for teacher autonomy and participation in central aspects of the language teaching-learning process. Cerezal suggests this role as "an active role for teachers, who design her or his own content and tasks, classroom interaction, materials, methodology, evaluation...instead of a passive role which means dependence on other people's designs and methods" (Cerezal, 1995: 129) So, within this role of the teacher as classroom researcher the possibilities for improvement are numerous, as it is precisely at the classroom level where the language teacher has considerable degree of decision-making. According to Wallace (1998) the focus of CAR can potentially be classroom management, appropriate materials, particular teaching areas (e.g. reading, oral skills), student behavior, achievement or motivation, and personal management issues (Wallace 1998:19). The list of questions suggested by Richards (see 4.2.5 above), based on the core stages of language teaching and learning: *planning*, *implementation* and *evaluation* are also valid issues to take into account as the focus of AR in the classroom.

Reflection in CAR is carried out in a structured and organized way. As most models of teacher reflection the process starts with a question or questions in the teacher's minds about a particular problem or challenge experienced in the classroom. From that moment on, the teacher

undertakes a series of procedures or steps, called the research cycle, aimed at improving a situation, finding solutions or answers to a problem or carrying out change. Different authors suggest variations of the cycle. Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), for instance, propose a four-phase cycle which they describe and represent as a spiral of events. These four phases are: Planning, Action, Reflection, and Observation.

1. *Plan*: prospective to action, forward looking and critically informed in terms of: i) the recognition of real constraints; and: ii) the potential for more effective action
2. *Action*: Deliberate and controlled, but critically and informed in that it recognizes practice as ideas in action mediated by the material, social and political ‘struggle’ towards improvement
3. *Observation*: Responsive, but also forward looking in that it documents the critically informed action, its effects and its context of situation, using eyed-open and open-minded observation plans categories and measurements.
4. *Reflection*: Evaluative and descriptive in that it makes sense of the process, problems issues and constraints of action and develops perspectives of the issues and circumstances in which it arises.

(Cited in Burns 2005:59)

The main criticism of this approach is that the cycle is oversimplified and it does not reflect all the aspects of the AR phases. Nevertheless, the cycle is still valid and widely used at the present time because of its practical and uncomplicated nature.

Ur, (1996) who states that AR “is based on a cycle of investigation, action and re-investigation.” proposes the following cycle of seven stages:

1. A problem is identified
2. Relevant data are gathered and recorded
3. Practical action is suggested that might solve the problem
4. A plan of action is designed
5. The plan is implemented
6. Results are monitored and recorded
7. If the original problem has been solved, the researcher may begin work on another; if not, the original problem is redefined and the cycle is repeated

(Ur, 1996: 328-329)

Burns (1999) describes an AR study in Australia in which the teachers participating “perceived AR as a series of ‘interrelated experiences’ involving eleven identifiable phases” (Burns, 1999: 35). These interrelated experiences which include the report writing and presentation of results are described below:

1. *exploring*: feeling one way’s into research topics
2. *identifying* fact finding to begin refining the topic
3. *planning* developing and action plan for gathering data
4. *collecting* data: using initial data-gathering techniques related to the action
5. *analyzing*, reflecting: analyzing data to stimulate early reflections

6. *hypothesizing*, speculating: predicting based on analysis and reflection
7. *intervening*: changing and modifying teaching approaches
8. *observing*: noticing and reflecting on the outcomes of the changes
9. *reporting*: verbalizing and theorizing the process outcomes
10. *writing*: documenting accounts of the research
11. *presenting*: giving reports/presentations on the research

Regardless of the model proposed, there are always essential elements that represent the core of the CAR process. Overall the cycle should involve the identification of a problem (alternatively, the integration of an innovation) the data collection through different kinds of instruments (diaries, surveys, interviews, recordings, observations, and the like) the analysis of the information, the intervention plan, some sort of evaluation of the results, and plan for further action. Depending on the results, the original problem is further explored, or the teacher identifies another problem which starts a new cycle of research. In each one of the stages of the research cycle there is an important process taking place in the teachers' minds the process of theorizing. More importantly, CAR provides teachers with the opportunity of taking this theory to practice through the implementation of relevant actions around the phenomenon observed. Probably this is the most practical and innovative dimension of CAR, its contribution to teacher independence, autonomy and decision making processes all of which emerge from the teacher's own experiential knowledge and reflection. As Wallace points out "Action research presupposes that there are certain areas of professional action where teachers can choose to do one thing rather than another and to evaluate the results" (Wallace 1998:22). CAR is, then, a powerful means for teacher professional development which is entirely in the teacher hands.

4.3.3 *Exploratory practice*

Exploratory practice (EP)¹³ is an alternative to theorize proposed by Dick Allwright, (1991) which aims at helping teachers integrate research with pedagogy as a regular practice for teacher development. The basic goal is to provide teachers with reflection tools that do not represent an extra effort for them and "make a contribution to the quality of life in the language classroom" (Allwright 2003: 120). Allwright claims that the widespread call for teachers to become researchers might "be an unacceptable burden to add to those they are already suffering from in their daily lives as classroom teachers" (Allwright, 1993: 125) in terms of work, timing and of the necessary research skills (design, collection and analysis of data, for example). EP advocates the use of "familiar" research procedures instead of "academic" research techniques to carry out the exploratory process (Allwright & Lenzuen 1997: 73). Thus, EP offers

¹³ Allwright (1999) acknowledges that Exploratory Practice has been derived for the most part from the work of teachers (with whom he has worked closely in the research field) from different settings, Minneapolis, Cyprus and Turkey and Rio de Janeiro in Brazil. For the most part the work carried out in Brazil at the Cultura Inglesa in Rio (a non-profit language institution with hundreds of teachers and thousands of students) and perceived needs gave rise to the principles of the approach. Teachers experienced heavy workloads which represented a serious limitation for doing research. This work was described in the paper "Exploratory Practice: work at the Cultura Inglesa, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil" published by Language Teaching Research (Allwright, and Lenzuen, 1997: 73-79)

“suggestions for linguistically productive ways of developing classroom understandings” not as something extra but as intentional use of real class time to exploit current classroom practices for that aim (Allwright, 2003: 121).

Allwright acknowledges the benefits of Reflective Teaching, which he defines as a process of “contemplation for understanding,” and of Action Research, which he defines as a process of “action for change”. He puts forward his approach of Exploratory Practice, a process of “action for understanding”, as another useful and practical approach for teacher development. As he explains “the three processes set out correspond...to the essence of three sets of practical proposals for what teachers...can do to further their own development: Reflective Practice, Exploratory Practice, and Action Research” (Allwright, 1999).

Thus, Exploratory Practice is defined as “a potentially productive way of integrating research into teachers’ normal practices” (Allwright, 1991, 1993; Allwright and Bailey, 1991). That is, within the everyday pedagogical actions that teachers carry out in the classroom they plan and integrate systematically activities aimed at widen their knowledge of particular situations in the classroom. This pedagogical approach to do research should not interfere with the teacher practice in any way. On the contrary, it should be a part of it. As Allwright (1999) explains; Exploratory Practice (is):

the deliberate exploitation of standard classroom language learning and teaching activities as the means for collecting data on what happens in the classroom, preferably making at the same time a direct contribution to the learning, and certainly without lessening in any way the value of lessons as language learning lessons. (4)

Unlike the “problems” of AR, exploratory practice addresses “puzzles”, situations or issues about which the teacher wants to widen her/his knowledge. Allwright (2003) argues that the negative connotation of the term “problem” can prevent teachers from carrying out research. Teachers’ self-esteem and prestige is at risk when admitting in front of their colleagues and authorities that he/she is a “problematic” teacher. He explains further that even though using a different term might be considered some kind of euphemism, it does actually cause a positive effect on the teachers’ morale and motivation. On the other hand using “puzzles” instead of “problems” does provide room to reflect on positive events (rather than problematic issues). As Allwright clarifies:

I advocated working with ‘puzzles’, rather than ‘problems’. This was partly to avoid the negative connotations of ‘problem’, given that many teachers around the world feared that admitting to classroom ‘problems’ might endanger their contracts, and partly to involve areas of classroom life that were not obviously ‘problematic’ (the unexpectedly great success of an activity with just one particular group of learners, say), but which they might well want to try to understand better. (117)

The basic process of Exploratory Practice involves eight steps or procedures, which are briefly described below:

Step 1: Identify a puzzle area. This is the starting point; puzzle is used to avoid the negative connotation of problem and to give path to both positive and negative events in the classroom.

Step 2: Refine thinking about that puzzle area. Defined as a key stage in which teachers develop the ability to mentally explore a particular event before making precipitated judgments or explanations.

Step 3: Select a particular topic to focus on. Once the area has been refined on the teacher's mind she/he can direct her/his attention to a more focused topic to explore

Step 4: Find appropriate classroom procedures to explore it. The list of classroom procedures presented is not exhaustive as there are many activities that teachers carry out in their teaching practice.

- Group work discussions
- Pair work discussions
- Surveys
- Interviews
- Simulations
- Role-plays
- Role-exchanging
- Diaries
- Dialogue journal writing
- Projects
- Poster sessions
- Learner to learner correspondence

Step 5 Adapt the classroom procedures to the particular puzzle to be explored.

The teacher plans ways to integrate the procedure for exploring the issue and puts "learning on the classroom agenda"

Step 6 Use them in class This is where the practical aspect of the approach takes place. The important thing to highlight here is that along with being a normal classroom activity the teacher uses the procedure as input for the process of exploring and understanding the puzzle.

Step 7 interpret the outcomes It is central to the approach because it is basically learning from the experience. Great levels of understanding of the puzzle are to take place here

Step 8 Decide on their implications and plan accordingly

- The original puzzle took a different dimension; there is a need to "move slightly to a different conception of it"
- Enough will have been learned to move in a different direction (another puzzle)
- Enough will have been learned that justifies a change in the classroom (if this is indicated in the process of exploration).
- Enough will have been learned as to share the findings with colleagues

(Allwright, 1993: 132-134)

Allwright (1999) proposes that in order to satisfactorily introduce a reflective approach in the classroom through ER, the process should meet the following six design criteria or principles:

1. Understanding must be put before/instead of action for change.
2. There must be no hindrance to language teaching/learning, and preferably a positive contribution to it.
3. Whatever is to be the subject of work for understanding or change must be seen to be relevant by those centrally involved.

4. Whatever work is involved must be indefinitely sustainable, not conducive to early "burn-out."
5. Whatever is involved must bring people together (teachers with teachers, teachers with learners, learners with learners, teachers with researchers, etc.) in a positive collegial relationship.
6. Whatever is involved must promote the development (seen in terms of developing understanding) of all concerned (teachers and/or learners).

(Based on Allwright, 1999)

Allwright's ER approach has gained popularity over the past few years. In 2003 there was a special issue of the journal *Language Teaching Research* (7) devoted to the principles of the approach and its development over the last ten years. More recently, the book, "The Developing Language Learner: an introduction to Exploratory Practice" (Allwright & Hanks, 2008), describes research projects around the world in which teachers found the ER approach useful for investigations focused on learner development. So, it seems that the approach has found a place in the research field of language teaching and learning.

There are some similarities between Explorative Practice and Classroom Action Research. ER is similar to CAR in that it is a reflective process, it has a particular structure or cycle and it aims to the teacher professional development. Nevertheless there are some basic differences as well. The first feature is the integration of research within the teacher's normal activities in the classroom. Certainly, for some teachers the role of researcher can be extremely overwhelming not only because of the academic research skills needed, but because research is time consuming (and time is an issue for most language teachers). Secondly, the practicality of the procedures proposed for collecting data, and how learning is put in the first place; that is, the exploration is not carried out at the expense of the teaching point in the classroom. A major challenge for teachers is to expand and adapt their classroom practices so that they have the potential to provide relevant information. I really do not think this is a major problem as teaching is the teachers' area of expertise. The final difference is how the process of exploration doesn't necessarily lead to change, which is contrasted with change as one of the main goals of CAR.

Certainly, some approaches to theorize can be more complex, structured and sophisticated than others. Personally, I do not think that the similarities and/or differences are important in the least. My objective here is not to advocate that some approaches are better than others. On the contrary, I want to put forward that all the three models proposed here are alternatives for teachers to develop sustain and maintain an inquisitive mind towards in their teaching practice. Indeed, nowadays teachers have more options to explore their teaching and become independent and autonomous agents than they ever had before. Professional development, as the ultimate goal of reflection, is what really counts and matters.

Undoubtedly, the dimensions of teacher as investigators have significant implications for teacher education programs. As Pollard (2002:36) remarks "If trainees are to move on to develop a more realistic understanding of the processes involved in effective teaching, they need to be encouraged to look critically at the teaching procedures they have established and to

evaluate their effectiveness”. All the three approaches suggested here, *Reflective Teaching*; *Action Research* and *Exploratory Practice* each with its particular characteristic can potentially be used in language teacher education programs as effective models to provide teachers with the opportunity of theorizing. Such opportunity is in sum, an effective means of bridging the gap between theory and practice in a way that is meaningful to teachers. Combining their background knowledge concerning language teaching theories and practice, with their experience in the classroom leads teachers to theorize which, in turn, results in contextualized improvement. In the next section some other important insights regarding teacher professional development in context will be tackled.

4.4 A situated experience

Teachers develop their pedagogical actions mostly within the boundaries of their situational contexts; that is to say, the educational institutions (school, college, university) where they exercise their teaching practice. Educational institutions are, so to speak, the precise context where teachers spend most of their time; first, carrying out their practicum at PRESET levels, and at INSET levels teaching, socializing and interacting with students and colleagues, planning the actions in the classroom, evaluating and the like.

In section 3.4.3 above I highlighted the importance of teacher contextual knowledge, that is knowledge about their situational contexts in several important areas such as the curriculum and organization of instruction, the institution norms and educational policies (mission, vision, teaching philosophy), and their rights and obligations with the institution, students and parents. Such knowledge, which is the result of constant interaction with the situational context, allows teachers to operate efficiently within their institutions.

The institutions are, in turn, responsible for creating a supporting atmosphere for the teachers to develop their teaching practice with optimal conditions so that student learning, the ultimate goal of teaching, takes place. Such institutional conditions certainly exert great influence on the teachers as they determine the way the teaching-learning processes are planned, organized and established. The kind, nature, and quality of the language processes as well as the conditions for teacher development depend greatly on the school policies and on the “culture of the institution” defined by Richards and Lockhart as “the particular ways of thinking and doing things that are valued in the institution” (Richards and Lockhart 1994:32). Within the teachers’ situated experience in their particular institutions there are three particular aspects worth exploring: the teaching context, the human resources, and the teachers’ working conditions.

4.4.1 *The teaching context*

The teaching context is concerned with the instructional settings and learning conditions such as physical conditions, managerial and administrative support, resources available and the ways processes are organized and structured in general. These conditions “determine the kind and quality of the teaching processes” (Richards 2001: 207-208).

Size and staff structure: The number of teachers working in an institution certainly exerts great influence on the way the teaching processes are organized and conducted. Teachers working in similar areas can have many opportunities to interact and work cooperatively. Cooperative work, as discussed above, contributes significantly to teacher development as teachers can help each other by giving feedback; sharing experiences, observing classes, and the like (see sections 4.1 and 4.3.1).

Equipment and resources: These relate to the technological resources and equipment such as tape-recorders, TV sets, computers, over-head projectors, photocopy machines, and video machines available to teachers. In some institutions there is special concern in investing in these resources which results in increase improvement of the teaching processes and in a considerably decrease of the teacher workload. On the contrary, in institutions where these resources are missing, teachers' morale, motivation and stress levels can be sensibly affected because of the heavy workload.

Support staff: The administrative support provided by the institution. An adequate team of efficient people on which teachers can rely for duties such as typing, duplicating, and general paper work, can be of great help for teachers. Teachers can then devote all their efforts to the planning, implementation and evaluation of their lessons; thus enhancing the quality of the processes. If, on the contrary, this support is not available or lacks quality, the teachers might need to invest valuable time on non-instructional duties that represent extra work. In the Nicaraguan context this happens very often, and normally no financial recognition is given to the teachers for doing this.

Teacher work space: The private (or collective) space provided for teachers so that they can have appropriate working conditions for tasks such as students counseling, staff meetings, lesson planning, or simply stay during break time and during time between lesson. Concerning this Richards states "one way of determining how seriously a school regards its teachers and the work they do is the work space it provides for its teachers" (Richards 2001: 208).

Teacher resource room: For teachers it is of outmost importance to count on a center where they can get enough information for the successful development of their lessons. This includes access to Internet and to a variety of textbooks, resource books, course guides, and materials such as EFL/ESL magazines that help them to widen and update their knowledge of current methodological issues.

Teaching facilities: These are the spaces provided by the institution other than the classroom such as language labs, self-access centers, and libraries. The lack of these facilities limits sensibly what teachers can do for planning effective lessons.

Class size: The group size in a language classroom should have a maximum of fifteen students. Large classes make it extremely difficult for teachers to handle the processes effectively, and

students' successful learning is sensibly affected. The situation worsens when the classrooms are too small for a large group. Both large classes and inadequate classrooms are frequent phenomena in the Nicaraguan ELT instructional contexts.

The teaching context depends largely on the kind of school, the school policies and priorities, and the financial resources available. In state institutions, this obviously depends on government budget policies and priorities. Nevertheless, special efforts should be devoted to the improvement of the physical conditions, resources and facilities within the institution if high quality is to be provided. Negligence, indifference and lack of vision in this concern affect negatively the effectiveness of the teaching-learning processes.

4.4.2 *The human resources*

Human resources are related to the kind of organization of the school or hierarchy; that is the people in charge of different responsibilities and duties at different levels such as principals, sub-principals, coordinators and teachers). Let us analyze such organization in the following two examples of schools

- *Example one*

The school operates strictly on a hierarchy: one principal, several senior teachers, and a large number of regular teachers. The senior teachers make most of the key decisions. The regular teachers do most of the teaching and more or less have to do whatever they are asked to do. Teaching schedules are issued, but there is little monitoring of what teachers actually teach or how they teach it. The students, too, have very little choice over the courses they study. They are streamed into science or arts sections, based on teachers' predictions of student ability and exam results.

- *Example two*

There is no fixed hierarchy within the school. A number of us have to serve as coordinators, but these roles rotate and everyone must do it in turn. Likewise, there is no fixed curriculum or courses which students must follow: Instead, counselors work with the students when they come into the program and we develop courses, which are tailor-made for the students' needs. Within the classroom, the content of the course is negotiated between teachers and students.

(Richards and Lockhart 1994: 98-99)

In these two examples the institutional atmosphere and organization are diametrically opposed. The first is a traditional structure in which a core group of people is in charge of the big decisions. The teachers have limited range of involvement and participation in decision making policies which involves important aspects such as curriculum issues. Teachers do what they are told, usually in an isolated way, that is teach (transmit knowledge) using the materials suggested, and following the school policies in terms of classroom management. Students' participation is very limited. They learn (receive knowledge) in the way the processes have been previously structured by the institution. There is little follow-up or "monitoring" of the processes going on in the classroom. In many cases, the "monitoring" carried out might be the result of some problems detected (such as students' discipline or performance problems) or the school authorities just want to verify that the teacher is following the policies prescribed. In both cases the purpose of these observations is the assessment of teacher performance. The

person in charge of these observations is normally a member of the hierarchy of the school, or somebody appointed (who may or may not be qualified in the area).

The second example reflects a different kind of institutional organization in several important senses. Firstly, there is no fixed “hierarchy” and teachers are given a greater degree of participation and considerable freedom in the decision-making policies. Secondly, teachers are allowed to work cooperatively in the structuring and organization of the teaching-learning processes. The fact that they are allowed to take turns in order to coordinate the teaching-learning processes suggests two significant things. On the one hand, that teachers can make decisions concerning the structuring and organization of the processes (as they take turns to serve as coordinators), and on the other, that the follow-up or “monitoring” of the processes is carried out by qualified people. Thirdly, there is no pre-fixed curriculum and/or materials. Rather, the program is “tailor-made” according to students’ needs. Finally, students have a greater involvement in what is to be taught. The contents of the program are negotiated between students and teachers, an important aspect of learner-centered approaches (see 3.1 and 4.1.6 above).

These examples reflect accurately two different perceptions of the teacher roles in the instructional processes. The suitability of the second institutional organization over the first is evident. It is clear that within the institutional framework, the establishment of flexible policies and the integration and consideration of both teacher and student insights in the organization of the teaching-learning processes play an important role on their effectiveness. Moreover, “the culture of the institution” in the second case determines and conditions important issues such as the possibility of making improvements in the teaching-learning processes. As Morris (1994) points out:

Schools are organizations and they develop a culture, ethos or environment, which might be favorable or unfavorable to encouraging change and the implementation of innovations. A school with a relatively open climate, where the teachers collaborate with each other and where the principal (or senior teachers) are supportive of teachers, is more likely to implement a change. In contrast, a school where the principal focuses on administrative matters, the teachers work in isolation or in narrow subject-based groups and where there is no mechanism to discuss and try to solve problems is less likely to change.

(Cited in Richards 2001:97)

4.4.3 *Teacher working conditions*

Teacher working conditions depends largely on institution policies as well. Moreover, important issues such as hiring teachers are determined by these policies. In this concern Richards (2001) states:

Institutions also differ greatly in their levels of professionalism. In some institutions, there is a strong sense of professional commitment and a culture of quality that influences every aspect of the institutions’ operations. In others, the driving force of the school may be monetary. As a cost-saving measure, heavy reliance is made on part-time teachers or teachers with little training and experience. (97)

As described in the context of the research (chapter two) the hiring of EFL teachers with little or no training and experience is a common phenomenon in Nicaragua (and probably one of the main causes of the low quality of the processes). As Richards suggests above, such policies are closely related to the institution's perception of professionalism and quality, and to its driving force. The following important aspects are influenced by these policies as well.

- *Teacher timetable and release*

Some teachers face extremely heavy schedules. This situation is detrimental of the quality of their work as they have little time to plan and evaluate their lessons. For teachers working under these conditions, anything that represents extra work for them might be carried out reluctantly. Regarding this Richards (2001:99) states "some teachers might welcome the chance to try out a new syllabus or material. Others may resent it because they see it as disrupting their routine and not offering them any financial or other kind of advantage." Certainly, school policies in terms of teachers' working time and release condition greatly influence the implementation of changes and innovations.

- *Teacher professional treatment, status, and financial recognition*

The professional treatment of teachers is another indicator of the quality levels of the language instructional processes in some institutions in terms of teachers' status and financial recognition. Unfortunately, these important elements are very often put aside for the sake of cost-saving policies in many educational institutions. As a consequence, teachers are not treated according to their professional skills. In the Nicaraguan context this causes that the profession is regarded as low status within the community. Regarding this Leung and Teasdale (1998:5) point out that, "the status of teachers in mainstream education in many parts of the world is problematic and one of the main obstacles they face" (cited in Richards 2001:205). In the Nicaraguan context, as it has been pointed out already, many teachers suffer from poor employment conditions and have to work two or three shifts during the day, as their salaries are very low. Along with causing extreme workloads, teachers' morale is highly affected and their motivation significantly decreased. This study evidenced these conditions in section

- *Teacher training and development opportunities*

Language teachers need to update their knowledge of the variety of aspects involved in their teaching practice, as the field is constantly in motion. Not doing so implies that the teachers get isolated from new and innovative trends in the area and that their knowledge gets stuck. The institution has to devote special concern and efforts to support the teachers with regular training and development opportunities (a detailed description of these two processes is provided in section 2 above). Consistent policies in this concern, which include both time release and financial support, are revealing indicators of the quality of the institution. Richards (2001) maintains that:

Teachers need to develop long-term career goals and expand their roles and responsibility over time if they are to continue to find teaching rewarding. A quality institution provides opportunities for teachers to develop their careers. ESL/EFL is a rapidly changing field, and teachers need regular opportunities to update their professional knowledge and skills. For instance, participating in conferences, workshops and in-service seminars. (206)

When the institution is really concerned with providing good in-service training, the teachers acknowledge the efforts. The impact is perceived in the teachers' attitude towards their work and on the actions at the classroom level. In this sense England (1998) states that apart from the professional help (in terms of the knowledge gained) "in-service teacher education has immediate and positive feedback on overall program morale and particularly student satisfaction" She explains forward that teachers participating in such training efforts to enhance their teaching skills are naturally "happier", "more invested in their teaching", and "more committed to the students" than those teachers who do not have the opportunity of in-service training (England, 1998: 26).

- *Teacher appraisal system*

This is a very important element of any instructional process is teachers' assessment. If teachers are expected to develop professionally and improve their teaching practice, it is necessary that institutions establish just, systematic and consistent appraisal systems. This process should be carried out by qualified staff on a non-judgmental basis and for the purposes of providing teachers with positive feedback. Few things can be more frustrating for teachers than being "evaluated" by an external person who does not have the skills to do so, for the only purpose is to find out what "went wrong". This is a very common phenomenon in the Nicaraguan context with the so-called "supervisions", a term both feared and respected by Nicaraguan teachers. These observations often focus on superficial procedures rather than on the core elements of lessons and/or on key aspects of teachers' performance. In this concern, Ur (1991: 322) provides the following insights: "Few institutions have systematic teacher-appraisal systems; and where these do exist, they are very often for hiring-and-firing purposes rather than to assist professional improvement and learning. The effect may therefore be stressful and demoralizing rather than helpful." She further explains that is necessary to carry out some regular appraisal for the teachers' benefit so that they can move ahead in the development and improvement of their teaching practice. This is why in those institutions where effective appraisal systems are inadequate or missing, it is highly recommended to establish processes of peer observation in which teachers can offer support to each other in a collegial and understanding manner (see section 4.3.1 above).

As shown the educational institution can play a supporting or obtrusive role in the process of teacher development and it seems such role can be influenced by societal factors. This is accurately acknowledged by Kohonen (2002) when he states

A school is naturally a part of its surrounding society, sharing its values, traditions and current trends – but not in an entirely straightforward way. It creates a community of its own that reflects the prevailing culture in society, while adhering to its own educational and schooling traditions. (40)

So far, I have highlighted four important conditions as characteristics of an effective teacher development process throughout a teacher's entire career. I have taken these characteristics as the most salient constructs of the present study. Thus, the process of becoming effective teachers is marked by a *collaborative effort*: from teacher-training and development programs at both the INSET and the PRESET levels through solid teacher education programs. Within this collaborative process the help of good teacher educators is crucial as well as collaboration with peers. Students' insights are of great value for teachers' professional development as well, as students are a natural source of motivation for teacher improvement. The second condition for an effective teacher development process is described as a *reflective process* in which teachers are able to reflect critically on their professional practice in planning, implementing and evaluating their lessons. This is directly to the third condition in which teacher development is perceived as a *theorizing opportunity* that provide teachers with the challenge of becoming theorists of their own practice thus gaining considerable independence and autonomy in their teaching practice. The last condition is related to the teacher contextual conditions provided at the institutional level. Thus, teacher development is also a *situated experience* affected by the conditions provided by their institutions.

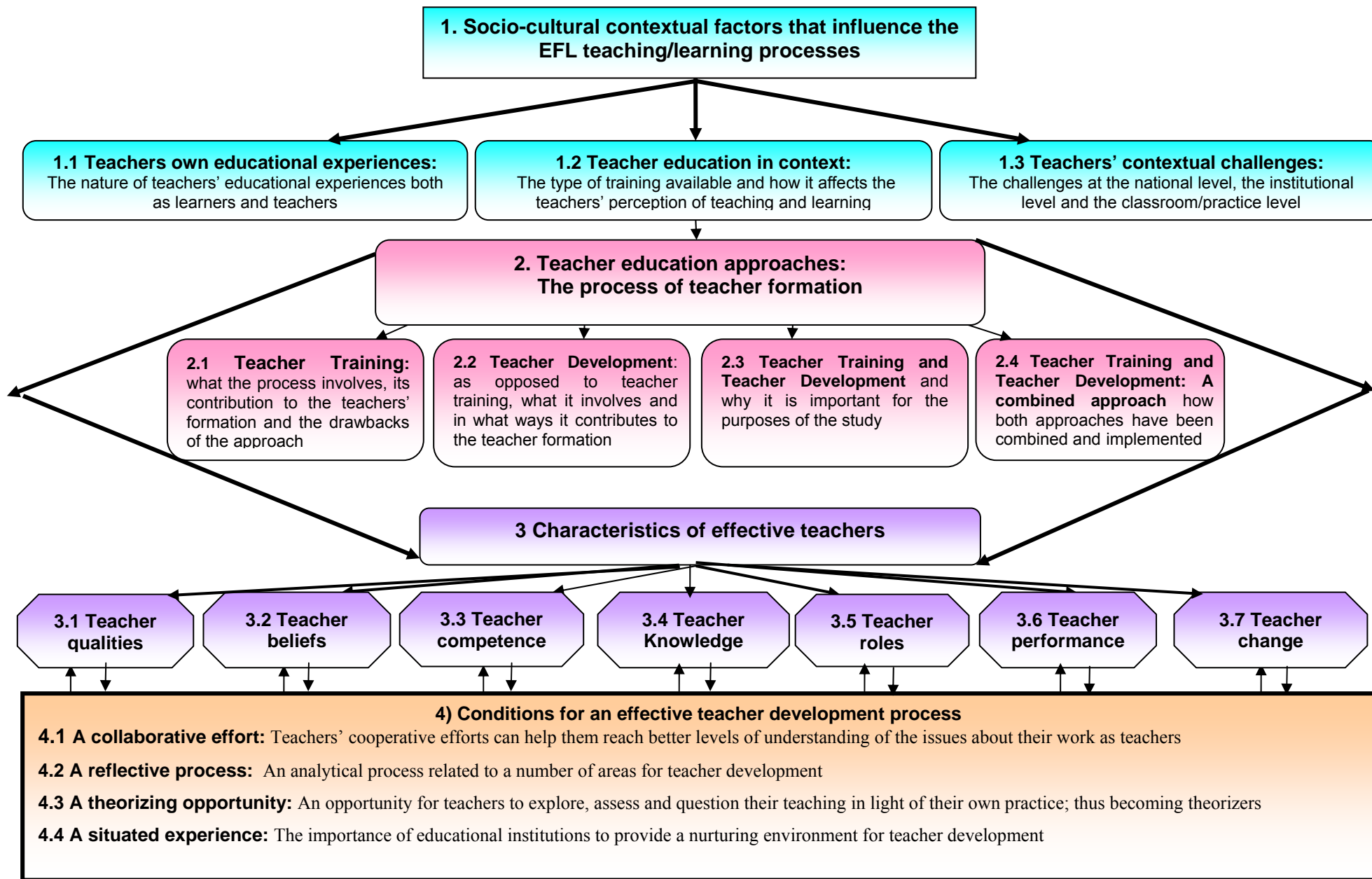
Coincidentally, all of these characteristics seem to fit into what (Kohonen, 2002) refers to as transformative learning. He states that “the teachers' professional growth and the possibilities of supporting the process through in-service teacher education have been discussed in recent literature with reference to transformative learning” The four characteristics just mentioned are included in the passage below:

Teacher learning therefore needs to be connected with actual teaching [a situated experience] supported by ongoing theory building [a theorizing opportunity]. The purpose of the reflective work is to integrate their beliefs and images, their theoretical knowledge and their classroom experience into...experiential understanding [a reflective process]. The transformation process often involves experiences of cognitive and emotional dissonance and feelings of uncertainty and ambiguity. A supportive environment is therefore necessary for this intensive work on self-understanding [a collaborative effort]. (47)

This concludes the theoretical aspects underlying the present study. On the whole, all the aspects covered have contributed to shed significant light on the targeted elements addressed through the data collection instruments. Thus, the theoretical issues presented and discussed will be systematically mentioned and referred to throughout the section of the data analysis, interpretation and results. Figure 2 below gives an overview of all the aspects tackled in this literature review all of them, as widely discussed, are directly connected with language teachers and teacher education programs.

Figure 2

Theoretical issues about teachers and teacher education



Chapter 4



Research methodology

This section will provide a detailed description of the nature and characteristics of the study. This will be followed by the factors involved in the identification and selection of the research topic, along with the specific framework in which the investigation was carried out, and the different stages involved in the process of planning, design, and development of the research. Likewise, there will be a thorough description of the research instruments, data interpretation, and the measures taken to address important issues such as validity and reliability. Finally, the selection process of the teachers, their characteristics, and the action plan of the research will be thoroughly described.

1. KIND OF STUDY

1.1 The qualitative nature of the study

The methodology of this investigation was based on the paradigm of the qualitative research tradition. The strong contextualized nature of the project demanded this approach to research. As Denzin and Lincoln remark, “qualitative research focuses on the study of things in their natural settings attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011: 3). The teachers were, for the most part, immersed in their natural environment (the institutions, classrooms, training program) and connected to the basic issues of their profession, (the problems and professional challenges in their teaching practice). A thorough analysis and exploration involving teacher knowledge, beliefs and performance within their contextual conditions, could only be carried out through a qualitative approach. On the other hand, as Richards (2003) asserts, qualitative research is justified and advisable in studies in which there is a small population (as in the case of this study), which demand different data collection, and different perspectives to approach the analysis of data. Quantitative information is used only when necessary and when it will contribute to complement information and enlighten a particular research question (Richards, 2003:10)

1.2 Characteristics of qualitative research

But, what exactly is the aim of qualitative research? And, more precisely, what are its major features? Qualitative research is intended to search meaning, the kind of meaning that emerges out of the participants’ insights around the topic being researched. In this case, the study intended to illuminate (search for meaning) teachers’ (the participants) beliefs, knowledge and performance (the topics being researched) first in their original state and then as a result of the

intervention plan. The research project matches the characteristics of qualitative research outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994). Such characteristics are listed below. This is followed by an explanation of how each of these features related to the scope of the study.

Characteristics of Qualitative Research

- It is conducted through and intense and/or prolonged contact with a “field” or life situation
- The researcher’s role is to gain a “holistic” systemic, encompassing, integrate overview of the context under study: its logic, its arrangement, and its explicit and implicit rules
- The researcher’s attempts to capture data on the perceptions of the local actors “from the inside” through a process of deep attentiveness, of empathetic understanding...
- A main task is to explicate the ways people in particular settings come to understand, account for, take action, and otherwise manage their day to day situations.
- Relatively little standardized instrumentation is used at the outset. The researcher is essentially the main “measurement devise” in the study.
- Most analysis is done with words. The words can be assembled, sub-clustered, broken into semiotics segments. They can be organized to permit the researcher to contrast, compare, analyze, and bestow patterns upon them.

Miles and Huberman (1994: 6-7).

1.3 Qualitative research and the scope of the study

The characteristics of qualitative research listed above are presented now in relation to the scope of the study in order to show the reasons why it was accurate to base the study on the qualitative paradigm.

- *It is conducted through and intense and/or prolonged contact with a “field” or life situation*

The study was longitudinal in nature taking place from 2008 to 2010. I was in permanent contact with the teachers in the “field”, which involved multiple interactions with them through the training program and the research procedures. This kind of contact had a number of benefits for the development of the research, as it allowed me to access the teachers’ reality in a more perceptible way.

- *The researcher’s role is to gain a “holistic” systemic, encompassing, integrate overview of the context under study: its logic, its arrangement, and its explicit and implicit rules.*

This characteristic matched the contextualized feature of this study. The situational context, as discussed elsewhere, was a major focus of the investigation. The premise was as Freeman and Johnson (1998) suggested that context is central in any study attempting to gain knowledge of teacher practice. They point out that “teacher-learners and their learning processes can only be adequately documented or understood if the sociocultural contexts in which these processes take place are explicitly examined as part of that research process” (Freeman and Johnson, 1998: 408). The qualitative approach actually helped me as the researcher to gain this holistic perspective. Moreover, it was confirmed that context is a very influential variable, as it affected the teachers and the results of the investigation.

- *The researcher’s attempts to capture data on the perceptions of the local actors “from the inside” through a process of deep attentiveness, of empathetic understanding*

My position as a local English teacher and as a teacher educator allowed me to understand the processes that the teachers went through in their efforts for professional development. As explained in section 2.1 below, my interest, motivation and awareness of the conditions surrounding the study were important tools to make sense out of the data collected in light of the research questions. In addition to my knowledge, this was possible because of the organization of the study, the data collection procedures and the kind of data obtained. The exploration was further enriched by the perception of trainers and collaborators, which contributed to the validity of the results (see 2.4.2 below). The qualitative feature of this investigation allowed me to “see teacher learning”, which “emerges from a process of reshaping existing knowledge, beliefs, and practices” (Johnson and Golombek, 2003:730). In this investigation this reshaping process took place as a result of the intervention plan.

- *A main task is to explicate the ways people in particular settings come to understand, account for, take action, and otherwise manage their day to day situations.*

The main setting of this study was each of the teachers’ classrooms where the impact of the program was more strongly perceived. The exploration of the teachers’ beliefs and performance at the classroom level shed significant light on the teachers’ knowledge, the sources of their teaching beliefs and the kinds of views they held regarding teaching and learning. Moreover, teacher behavior was understood taken into account the institutional context, which shaped it and conditioned it. The documented process before and after the plan of action shed significant light on the changes that the teachers went through in each of the research areas.

- *Relatively little standardized instrumentation is used at the outset. The researcher is essentially the main “measurement devise” in the study.*

This investigation was characterized by the use of varied and unconventional research instruments. For instance, the initial exploration of the teachers’ view involved an academic essay, which revealed the teachers’ perceptions about the major problems they were facing. Likewise, most of the information in the other stages emerged out of document analysis such as opinion essays, diaries and pedagogical materials like lesson plan. Qualitative evaluations were also used to measure the effectiveness of the training program, which involved the perception of both trainers and teachers. The “measurement devise” in all cases was my perception and knowledge of the situation. Bias and subjectivity was avoided through the triangulation method described in 2.4.2 below.

- *Most analysis is done with words. The words can be assembled, sub-clustered, broken into semiotics segments. They can be organized to permit the researcher to contrast, compare, analyze, and bestow patterns upon them.*

The data collected was mostly qualitative as it emerged from written documents such as journals, essays and pedagogical materials like lesson plans. The classroom observations required broad descriptive narratives that were then interpreted, and so were the interviews that

required note taking. All of these data represented in essence the bulk of information generated by the study based on the different target aspects of the investigation. This information required processing compiling, coding, interpreting, comparing and looking for patterns; in light of the research questions (see 2.4.2 below). Quantitative information was used to further complement particular research concerns; e.g. specific information about the teachers' working conditions, number of students and the like.

1.4 Action Research to study Action Research

Within the different methodological and theoretical approaches of the qualitative tradition, several types of studies are suggested (e.g. ethnography, case study, grounded theory, and Action Research, among others). In the case of this study, the suitability of Action Research was obvious for several reasons. Firstly, the phenomenon studied involved “a gap between the ideal and reality” (Burns, 2005: 58) that needed to be addressed. The teachers were facing a number of contextual problems that affected their professional development (e.g. lack of training opportunities); they had limitations in their knowledge base, low reflective skills, and significant discordances between their teaching beliefs and performance at the classroom level.

Secondly, the situation demanded an intervention plan. Being a longitudinal study it was necessary that such an intervention had several stages, (the action research cycles) that allowed planning actions; reflecting on them; monitoring them and evaluating them. Thirdly, it was necessary to help the teachers increase their reflective skills through structured reflection. The approach used for this endeavor was Action Research in the Classroom. This task would require providing teachers with consistent support. Thus, it was necessary to use a flexible research methodology that allowed making changes and adaptations along the process. Finally, Action Research has a powerful social transformation focus. Elliot (1991:69) defines Action Research as “... the study of a social situation with a view to improving the quality of action within it”. Since the problems were so deeply rooted and influenced by socio-cultural contextual factors, the situation demanded teacher change and improvement within the given conditions.

In his book *Qualitative inquiry in TESOL*, Keith Richards (2003, 8-9) highlights three compelling reasons for carrying out this type of research; a) because of the need to get close to practice; b) because it is a person-centered enterprise and therefore particularly appropriate to our work in English teaching; and, c) because of its transformative potential for the researcher. Indeed, the benefits of Action Research were numerous for both the teachers in improving their teaching practice and for me, as a teacher educator, in finding better approaches to teacher training and development.

Furthermore, the project falls into what Miles and Huberman (1994) call a vein of Collaborative Social Research which is the kind of investigation carried out in social settings for the purposes of social transformation. As they suggest, “the aim is to transform the social

environment through a process of critical enquiry – to act on the world rather than to be acted on” (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 5-6). It is collaborative because it depends on the efforts of the researcher, the target population and all the participants who contribute to the process of transforming reality. This study, as stated elsewhere, represented a significant effort of several actors, the teachers, the trainers and the external collaborators.

2. ORGANIZATION OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

The project as already mentioned took place between the year 2008 and 2010. There was an entire previous organization around it. The starting point was the identification and selection of the research area, which involved a draft proposal of the program. This was followed by the design of the research, which included the formulation of the research objectives and decisions about the research cycle and the research instruments. Likewise, the preparation involved the selection of the target population and the refinement of the proposal. All of these research activities are listed in table 9 below.

Table 9

Chronogram of Research Activities

Main Research Activities	Complementary activities	Period
Identification and selection of the research area: the draft proposal	Procedure for official institutional approval Contact with trainers Search for candidates	Apr-May Jun-August 2007
Research design: formulation of research objectives, research questions and the research cycle	Reading related literature Writing up	September 2007
Research design: data collection instruments	Reading related literature Writing up	September 2007
Selection of teachers	Administration of proficiency exam, interview and essay writing	October- November 2011
The design of the plan of action	Reading related literature Writing up	December 2011
Implementation of the plan of action	Scaffolding: <i>introspection</i> and <i>collaboration</i>	Jan 2008- May 2010

2.1 Identification and selection of the research area

How did the idea of doing research in this area evolve over time? And, more importantly, why did I decide to embark myself in conducting this particular research and not another? I must admit that the selection of the research area was motivated by both personal and professional reasons. On the one hand, personal motives awakened my interest in helping teachers develop professionally. I am an English teacher by vocation and conscious choice, and a teacher educator by circumstantial professional options. Although I appreciate my work as a teacher educator very much, my heart is in language teaching, a professional task that I have

done for over twenty years. Within this time my work involved teaching English at primary and secondary school level for fifteen years. This extended experience provided me with the necessary background knowledge to understand the numerous contextual challenges that language teachers face within the given context. Thus, the study as a whole was, consistently based on a humanistic and sympathetic interest in the teachers. The first reason, then, was an implicit willingness and concern to vindicate EFL teachers, praise their efforts, highlight the importance of their work, and make a contribution to their professional development.

On the other hand, within my professional responsibilities as a teacher educator at UNAN-León I have been working with teachers at both the PRESET and INSET level for the past twelve years. My professional path in these academic levels has taken me through the research field in language teacher education. In the year 2006, as an academic task of my doctorate studies, I conducted an investigation with a group of teachers of the Saturday English Program at the PRESET level. This study, which has been thoroughly described in chapter two (4.2), shed light on the process of teacher formation on a number of aspects such as teacher beliefs, knowledge and performance in the classroom. A number of recommendations for the improvement of the program emerged as a result of this process. The study enlightened me to undertake a similar inquiry at the INSET level as my doctoral dissertation. Having identified a number of gaps in teacher knowledge base I decided to draft an academic proposal, which was the basis of the training program to be offered. This program would be the immediate context of the investigation and a significant part of the intervention plan. The proposal was further enriched by the insights of the teachers through the initial exploration.

Some complementary actions took place within this time. These actions involved all the procedures to launch the academic program. Such procedures included the official presentation of the proposal for approval at the Faculty of Educational Sciences and Humanities, the contact with trainers for organization purposes, and the schedule of the program. In additions, during this time, there were significant efforts to search for candidates. Such efforts involved advertising procedures in the English Department, the local schools and institutions and the national conference organized by ANPI in the year 2007 (see publicity brochure in appendix 5).

2.2 Research objectives, research questions and the research cycle

The investigation was planned to be carried out in four major stages or cycles. The general objective of the investigation was to explore the process of teacher development as a result of a reflective process based on an Action Research methodology. In particular, I intended to achieve the following specific objectives:

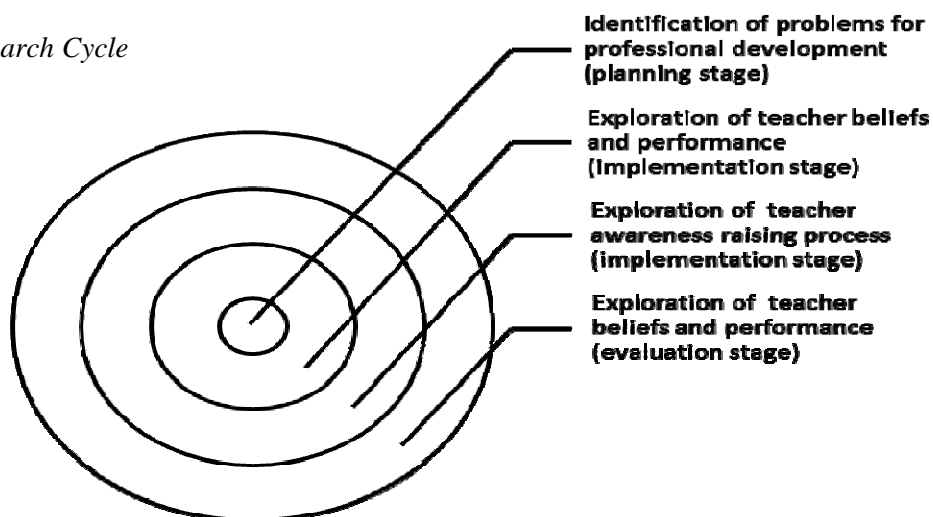
- e) To gather relevant information about the problems that the teachers face in their professional development and find out their training needs once they finish their pre-service education and training program at UNAN-León.

- f) To explore the original state of teachers' beliefs and knowledge about language teaching and learning, and the influence these exert on their performance in the classroom.
- g) To explore the process of teacher reflection and the evolution of teacher beliefs and knowledge as a result of exposure to relevant guidance during the development of the research projects
- h) To evaluate the relevance and effectiveness of the program and assess the differences in teacher knowledge, beliefs and performance.

For each of these objectives there were specific research questions to be answered in each cycle; and each cycle had a major purpose for the entire study. This organization had enormous advantages as it allowed enough flexibility for changes and adjustments. Such flexibility was absolutely necessary, given the number of problems presented during the development of the study. The following figure shows the research cycle. This is followed by a description of each stage, the research questions within, and a brief description of the major activities.

Figure 3

The Research Cycle



2.2.1 *The identification of teachers' contextual problems and training needs*

This was the initial planning stage prior to the plan of action. It involved the exploration of the teachers' views about the problems hindering their professional development. The information provided by the teachers was further enriched by the results of the previous study, which allowed the refinement of the draft proposal. The research questions in this stage were the following.

- *What problems do EFL teachers face for their professional development after their PRESET program?*
- *What are their training needs at the INSET level?*
- *What knowledge areas should be integrated into the plan of action?*

The answers to these research questions allowed the identification of the teachers' training needs, and guided the actions towards the training program, the *Postgraduate course in TEFL*. The research instruments used in this stage were the essays about teacher development and a personal interview.

2.2.2 *The exploration of the teachers' teaching beliefs and performance, and their views about their own development*

This was a baseline stage to gain knowledge about the initial state of the teachers' teaching beliefs and performance and their views about their own development. This information was important in order to have a starting point for comparing study results. The exploration took place in the implementation stage at the beginning of the training program and it involved searching for answers to research questions about teacher beliefs and classroom performance. It also involved the teachers' perception regarding their own professional development.

- *What are the sources of teachers' beliefs?*
- *What is the current state of the teachers' beliefs and performance at the classroom level?*
- *How do teachers view themselves and their own development?*

The trainers' views were very important here as their contributions shed significant light on the teachers' beliefs. Likewise, they provided important information about the effectiveness of the program. The assessment of the teachers, beliefs and performance allowed making necessary adjustment to the next stage. Two important processes, *introspection* and *collaboration* were planned for the upcoming stage, which would be a stage focused on reflection. The research instruments used here were journal writing, opinion essays and classroom observations

2.2.3 *The exploration of the teachers' reflection and awareness raising processes*

This implementation stage was crucial for the study as it involved the process of structured reflection through Action Research in the Classroom. The previous stage had shed significant light on the potential problems that the teachers could face in undertaking such an effort. In this stage the two scaffolding processes, *introspection* and *collaboration*, were integrated. This scaffolding allowed most teachers to succeed in the design, implementation and evaluation of their AR projects. There was major participation of the trainers and external collaborators in these two scaffolding processes. The research questions were the following

- *What effect will a reflective process through Action Research have on teachers' thinking?*
- *What major problems will they experience? How can they be helped?*
- *Is Action Research, as a way of teacher reflection, adequate to the context?*

The answers to these questions documented the entire process of teacher reflection and allowed me to see the evolution of their thinking on the number of issues that emerged. Likewise, it was possible to identify the potential problems that teachers can face when doing action research and the suitability of the approach for the context. The research instruments used in this stage were journals and interviews. In addition, important data emerged from classroom discussion and planning documents, such as the templates for the organization of the teachers' AR projects.

2.2.4 *The exploration of the teachers' beliefs and performance*

This stage involved the evaluation of the impact of the plan of action in each of its different components. This was a post-intervention stage. The teachers' views and performance were

explored in the same fashion of the baseline stage in order to compare the changes as a result of the intervention. The research questions were the following.

- *What will the impact of the action plan be?*
- *What differences will there be in the teachers' beliefs and performance?*
- *How will the teachers view the problems for their professional development after the program?*

The focus of the research questions allowed assessing the changes in teacher beliefs and performance after the plan of action. In addition, the exploration shed significant light on the effectiveness of the training program, and the necessary changes to make for future programs at the INSET level. The stage involved the participation of the teachers, the trainers and my own perception as the researcher. The instruments used were the same as in the baseline study, namely surveys, classroom observations, interviews and essay writing. For the assessment of the effectiveness of the training program specific evaluation formats were used.

2.3 The data collection instruments

The research instruments involved a variety of instruments. Some of them were standardized while some others were designed to serve the purposes of this particular research. In the second case, special efforts were made to avoid bias and ambiguity. For instance, some of the instruments were piloted in the first study. Likewise, some of the trainers and collaborators provided valuable feedback about the instruments before applying them.

On the whole, it was intended that the research instruments were part of the normal activities to be done during the development of the program. In this regard, Wallace's (1994) suggestion about "a complementary approach" was taken into account. He claims that research shouldn't represent extra workload and that it should be carried out in a "complementary" way as part of routine activities. He states that "the most convenient approaches for professionals to put into effect are extensions or elaborations of what they would be doing anyway" and goes further by stating that most data collection instruments are "potentially intrusive techniques" (Wallace 1998: 42-43). Nevertheless, by using a complementary approach, researchers can minimize the danger of disruption and get more valid results.

Within this approach the most important research procedures took place as part of the activities of the *Postgraduate Course in TEFL*, which was the framework of the project. The data collection process in stage two, three and four took place within this framework. Several of the data collected corresponded to normal activities within particular courses that I taught. For instance, journal writing and the classroom observations took place during the development of the courses *Principles and Methods in TEFL* and *Action Research in the Classroom*. On the other hand, my position as the Academic Coordinator of the Program entitled me to carry out different follow up activities. One of such activities was the evaluation of the different courses of the program which intended to assess their impact and effectiveness. This methodology

allowed me to gain a well-documented perspective of the different issues under investigation.

The data collection instruments are described in table 10 below.

Table 10

Data collection instruments

Data collection instruments	Prior to the plan of action	Beginning plan of action	During the plan of action	At the end of the plan of action
Essay writing	√	√	√	√
Interviews	√	√	√	√
Reflective journals		√	√	
Lesson planning		√		√
Planning sheet AR projects			√	
Teaching learning belief questionnaire		√		√
Learning activity preference survey		√		√
Classroom observations		√		√
Qualitative evaluation by trainers			√	
Qualitative evaluation by teachers			√	

As shown, there were several different kinds of data collection instruments. The table shows the moment in which each instrument was applied; prior, at the beginning, during or after the plan of action. The instruments used at the beginning of the plan of action, the baseline of the study, and the ones used at the end were intended to be the same. This was particularly important to be able to compare the teachers' approaches and views using the same criteria to assess the changes. On the other hand, the use of different kinds of instruments increased the validity of the study as it allowed observing the issues under analysis in depth and from different perspectives.

Each research instrument was designed to collect specific pieces of information. Nevertheless, each was also designed and conceived in order to have some kind of interrelation or connection with the others. This was especially helpful to explore the information from different perspectives. The instruments are described below. Some of them have been grouped for a better description of their purpose and nature.

2.3.1 Document analysis

The documents analysis involved unconventional instruments such as the opinion essays, planning and pedagogical documents, and evaluations. These instruments were used because of the contextualized nature of the project. The information unfolded by this means shed significant light on the research questions as it provided first-hand information from the main actors.

- *Essay writing*

Opinion essays were used in every stage of the research process as they provided rich data that shed light on teacher thinking. The essay topics were all central to the investigation. Thus, each essay had its particular purpose as described below.

1. *Problems for teacher development* (October-November 2007 and II Semester of 2009)

This instrument was used on two occasions. At the beginning of the program as a requirement for all teachers interested in integrating into the program, and at the end of the program when the teachers finished their training courses. The teachers were asked to write about three major problems for the professional development of EFL teachers in the Nicaraguan context, how the problems affected their performance, and what they believed should be done to solve the situation.

The main objective of this instrument was to identify those factors that the teachers regarded as affecting their practice. The teachers contributed valuable information that allowed me to detect the specific problems they were personally facing, and their own stance and attitude toward such problems. At the beginning of the program this information guided the course of action, as it showed those aspects in which the teachers could be helped to improve, which led to the areas of the training program. At the end of the program, the information was useful to compare and contrast the information and assess the changes in teacher perceptions and performance.

2. *Importance of critical thinking skills for EFL teachers* (I Semester 2008)

This essay required for the teachers to read an article about critical thinking skills and react to the information through an opinion essay. There were two objectives for this particular task. On the one hand, find out teachers' views and knowledge about critical thinking skills, and their openness towards evolution and change. On the other hand, it was expected that the writing task triggered teacher awareness of the importance of critical thinking skills in their teaching practice.

3. *Personal perceptions about Reflective Teaching* (I Semester 2009)

This writing task was carried out during the introspection process in stage three as part of the guided process to teacher reflection. The task was connected with one of the assigned readings: Thomas Farrell's article *Reflective Teaching, the Principles and Practices* (Farrell, 1998). The teachers had to react to this article through the writing of an opinion essay about the different aspects addressed in the text. Again, the aim was two-fold: find out how teacher thinking was evolving as a result of the introspective process, and increase teacher awareness of the options available for them to become more reflective teachers.

- *Planning template for the Action Research projects* (I Semester 2009)

The template that the teachers used for planning their research projects was a valuable source of information. The main aim of this instrument was to explore the evolution of teacher thinking in the planning process of their AR projects: the topics selected, the target students, the objectives of the research, and the general organization of the project. The information in this format was also valuable means for discussion in the tutorial sessions (see appendix 6).

- *Lesson planning* (I semester 2008 and II Semester 2009)

The analysis of the lesson plans used in the lessons observed was a helpful research tool. The approaches to lesson plan were explored during the first and second cycle of the classroom observations (see appendix 7)

- *Qualitative evaluations for both teachers and trainers* (I-II Semester 2008 and I Semester 2009)

The qualitative evaluations consisted of a set of open-ended questions about different aspects of the training program such as contents, achievement of objectives, major problems, man achievements, the participant s' strengths and the like. Both teachers and trainers provided their insights at the end of each course, throughout the development of the program. The questions in both evaluations were similar in nature, which was useful to be able to compare and contrast the information. The objective was to get first-hand information from both the teachers and the trainers in light of the research questions (see appendix 8).

2.3.2 *Language teaching-learning beliefs questionnaire* (March 2008 and August 2009)

This instrument was a close-ended questionnaire consisting in twenty statements. The questionnaire explored the teachers' beliefs on a number of language teaching-learning aspects such as students' aptitude, learning styles, the role of the teachers, the use of different teaching techniques, and the like. It was administrated at the beginning and at the end of the program to compare and contrast the differences in teachers' perception and assess the changes. Each time the information was useful to compare the teachers' beliefs with their performance at the classroom level (see appendix 9).

2.3.3 *Teacher Learning Activity Preference survey* (March 2008 and August 2009)

This survey consisted of thirty statements focused on exploring the teachers' views about different teaching activities. It covered a wide range of issues, such as the preferences for teaching the language skills, and the use of different didactic resources and materials. Also, the survey addressed error correction, autonomous learning, group and pair work, and the integration of ludic activities in the classroom. The instrument, like the previous one, was used at the beginning and at the end of the program and it was a useful means to assess the changes in the teachers' beliefs and their performance at the classroom level (see appendix 10).

2.3.4 *Interviews*

The interviews took place in every stage of the research project. The purpose of these interviews was directly connected with the contextualized nature of the project, which demanded good knowledge of the conditions surrounding the teachers' teaching practice. Thus, the interviews were useful to find out the major problems that the teachers experienced. Likewise, it was possible to gain relevant knowledge about the institutions, such as internal policies and the number of professional tasks involved in the teachers' work. This information was crucial in stage three, as it was possible to know the negative influence that contextual

factors exerted on teacher performance and on the development of the research projects. Thus, I increased my awareness that the teachers needed extra help in order to be able to complete their projects, which led to the integration of the two scaffolding processes: *introspection* and *collaboration*.

The interviews consisted on two kinds of questions. The first questions focused on general information such as the kinds of school and institutions they worked at (for instance, whether private or public), and their work shifts. The other kind of questions related to more specific issues. These included, among other things, information about the conditions provided for language instruction such as didactic materials and textbooks used, the program followed, and the lesson planning approaches. In addition, the kinds and numbers of students, access to equipment and photocopies, and particular school policies such as the established appraisal system (see appendix 11).

2.3.5 *Reflective journals* (I semester 2008 and I semester 2009)

The objective of journal writing was two-fold too. On the one hand, it was used as a research instrument and, on the other, as a means to foster teacher reflection. Journals were used in two stages of the investigation; at the beginning of the process and in stage three, time in which the teachers conducted their AR projects. At the baseline stage, the reflective process took place during the course *Principles and Methods in TEFL*. The purpose of the journals at this stage was to explore the process of teacher thinking on a number of aspects related to their teaching practice, their views about themselves, their sources of teaching beliefs, and their beliefs about teaching and learning. In addition, the teachers' reflected on their weaknesses and strengths and on their main motivational sources. The following are these initial reflective questions.

- *Journal entries at the baseline stage*
 1. What is the source of my ideas about language teaching?
 2. Where am I in my professional development?
 3. What are my strengths as a language teacher?
 4. What are my weaknesses as a language teacher?
 5. How can I improve my language teaching?
 6. How am I helping my students?
 7. What satisfaction does language teaching give me?
 8. Am I dissatisfied with my teaching? Why?

Each of these questions was a diary entry which, afterwards, was the object of in-depth classrooms discussions. The information that emerged out of the analysis at this baseline stage shed significant light on the original state of teacher thinking, and on the relationship between their beliefs and practice.

- *Journal entries during the AR projects*

These journal entries took place in stage three during the course *Action Research in the Classroom*, which was the peak time for teacher reflection. One year had passed since the teachers started their training program, so their knowledge base had improved and their reflective skills had increased. Three journal tasks took place, each of which had specific questions for the teachers to reflect on, and write their insights. There were specific purposes underlying these tasks, which are described below.

1. First journal task

The first set of reflective questions for the journal entries were similar in nature to the reflective questions used at the baseline stage. The purpose was to find out the changes in teachers' perceptions about a number of research questions namely, their beliefs, knowledge and motivational sources. In addition, the questions intended to foster teacher reflection on the number of aspects affecting their practice, which were potentially connected with the lack of consistency between their beliefs and classroom performance.

1. Where am I standing at the moment in my teaching practice?
2. What's the current situation in my classroom?
3. What's the relationship between my beliefs and my actions? In which cases are they consistent? In which cases are they inconsistent?
4. What are my strengths as a teacher at the moment?
5. What are my weaknesses as a teacher at the moment?
6. What are my main sources of motivation at the present time?
7. What dissatisfies me in my teaching practice?

As in the baseline stage, each of these questions was a diary entry. The teachers' insights provided valuable information about their knowledge and beliefs, and about the changes they went through as a result of the training process.

2. Second journal task

The second journal task intended to explore the teachers' awareness raising process. This journal task was a single reflective question. The teachers should write their insights after reading the initial research report. The report provided a detailed account of how the discordance between their beliefs and practice affected the teaching-learning process. This information generated a rich classroom discussion on the number of problematic aspects affecting their teaching practice. Both the first and second journal tasks in stage three were part of the initial introspective activities intended to serve as scaffolding for the Action Research Projects. In fact, as a result of these preliminary reflective tasks, the teachers were able to pinpoint potential research areas.

3. Third journal task

The third journal task was directly connected with the research projects. The teachers were asked to write their insights about a particular troublesome aspect identified in their classrooms and provide a detail account in their journals. The purpose of the task was to help the teachers

focus on specific aspects affecting their practice that could be potential research topics. Moreover, the questions intended to guide the teachers through the process of selecting and designing their research projects, as each question was connected to a research aspect

Reflective question	Research aspect
1. What happened? What's the origin of my concern?	<i>Research area</i>
2. Who was involved?	<i>Target population</i>
3. Why did the event bother me?	<i>Background information</i>
4. How did the event affect me? The students? The class?	<i>Scope of the problem</i>
5. What could the possible cause be?	<i>Hypothesis formulation</i>
6. What could the possible solution be?	<i>Hypothesis formulation</i>
7. How can I know more? What information will I need?	<i>Research procedures</i>

All the journal tasks shed significant light on the effect of structured reflection through Action Research on teacher thinking. The teachers' insights in response to each of these reflective tasks allowed me to document the process. Thus, I realized that in order to be able to use Action Research as a means to structure reflection these teachers needed some scaffolding strategies. This reflective process that I have called *introspection* was one of such strategies.

2.3.6 Classroom observations (I Semester 2008-II Semester 2009)

The classroom observations were valuable means to find out first-hand information about the teachers' approaches and about the relationship between their beliefs and practice. There were two cycles of classroom observations. The first cycle took place at the baseline stage of the project in the first semester of the year 2008. The framework of these observations was the course *Principles and Methods in TEFL*. The second cycle of classroom observations took place within the course *Action Research in the Classroom* on the II Semester of the year 2009

At the baseline stage, the teachers were observed in order to explore their teaching approaches and the relationship between such approaches and their teaching beliefs. The processes observed shed significant light on the major problems that the teachers experienced in their teaching practice, which were the basis for intensive discussions. The second cycle of classroom observations took place at the end of the training course. The process shed significant light on the changes that the teachers went through as a result of the training process. The target aspects observed were the following.

- Integration of language skills
- Approaches to presentation and practice
- Approaches to classroom instructions
- General organization of the lesson opening, structure and closure stages
- Classroom interaction- student-student, teacher-student interaction patterns
- Student performance during pair work or group work activities
- Teacher talking time vs. student talking time
- Approaches to error correction
- Time management of the lesson
- Use of didactic materials (textbook, complementary materials)
- Use of the target language vs. use of the mother tongue)

Both teachers' beliefs and knowledge were at play in these target aspects, which required a careful data collection process. In order to record the information, a classroom observation format was designed. This instrument allowed rating the teachers' performance against established criteria, and writing broad descriptive narratives that were then analyzed and interpreted (see appendix 12).

2.4 Analysis and interpretation of data in qualitative research

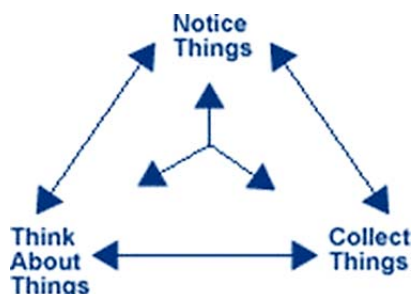
The nature of qualitative research requires a descriptive interpretive kind of analysis. In this study, most of the data were generated in words which represented the teachers' concepts, ideas, attitudes, perceptions and knowledge stimulated by the research questions of the study. It was therefore important to find the adequate methodology and procedures to make sense out of this information, and interpret it to illuminate the phenomenon under study. In this case the four specific objectives and the corresponding research questions highlighted in section 2.2 above made up the core of the study.

Qualitative data is concerned with extracting meaning out of words, as opposed to quantitative research that is concerned with presenting results and explanations to phenomenon in quantitative terms. This does not mean that qualitative data cannot be quantified. On the contrary, it means that special steps are to be taken in order to perceive the meaning in words in light of the research questions. This, of course, requires particular techniques that allow the researcher to see the hidden message in the data generated through qualitative instrumentation.

Seidel, (1998:57) suggests a model that explains the procedures involved in the analysis of qualitative data. He compares the process of doing qualitative as similar to the process of solving a jigsaw puzzle. Seidel's model of qualitative research, which is represented by figure 4 below, accurately resembles the process that I went through in making sense out of the teachers' perceptions to answer my research questions.

Figure 4

The Data Analysis Process



(Seidel, 1998)

As shown, analysing qualitative data involves collecting things (in this case teachers' perceptions), noticing things, (the patterns that emerged in the process), and

think about things, (the analysis of the patterns). As shown, Seidel's pattern is cyclical, which means that while thinking about things, it is possible to notice new things that might require the collection of new information for further analysis.

The analysis of the information in this investigation involved an exhaustive and careful process that allowed me to put the pieces of the puzzle together and make sense out of the teachers' insights. Such analytical process guided me to the answers of the core questions of the research. The analysis represented a variety of methods as there were different kinds of information, which is typical of qualitative research. As Denzel and Lincoln (2011) state,

qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials... that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives...Accordingly, qualitative researchers deploy a wide range of unconnected methods, hoping always to get a better fix on the subject matter at hand (4-5)

2.4.1 Compiling, categorizing and interpreting data

In order to make sense out of qualitative information, it has to be compiled, coded and categorized using matrixes, patterns, charts or graphics that allow the researcher to be able to see the hidden message and make proper interpretations. Many of these techniques were used in the present study. The data required careful reading of the information in search of patterns and categories that were then conveniently grouped extracting the main ideas, and or using codes for data display and consequent interpretation.

- *An example of the process*

Let us take, for example, the journal questions in the baseline stage. Here the teachers provided answers to eight reflective questions related to how they viewed themselves. The questions revolved around their ideas about teaching, their professional development, their weaknesses and strengths as teachers, the need for improvement, and their motivational sources. The information was conveniently condensed, grouped, and categorized. The categories that emerged were related to a number of issues derived from the teachers' teaching practice such as motivation, knowledge and teaching beliefs.

Questions seven and eight related to the issue of teacher motivation (*What satisfaction does language teaching give me? Am I dissatisfied with my teaching Why?*) When reading the information in the journals, I underlined the main ideas. This allowed me to extract the essence of the message about teachers' motivation and exclude the unnecessary information. This was the first step of the process.

The second step of the analysis was to organize these main ideas listing them together, both sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction, as shown in table 11 below

Table 11

Analysis of the teachers' sources of motivation: listing them together

Analysis of the teachers' sources of motivation		
Step 2: Listing them together		
TC	SATISFACTION	DISATISFACTION
A	The contribution to the professional formation of students in a significant way	Not being acknowledged efforts properly (low salaries) Not being able to solve problems like lack of materials and students' desertion (Problems are beyond the teachers' scope)
B	Being part of students' professional preparation	None
C	Being part of students' professional preparation "that is important for me, providing my students with helpful tools, the same way that has happened to me"	The top-down decisions made about language instruction that don't take into account the teachers' perception
D	Helping students open their minds by communicating in a different language	Lack of appropriate conditions for teaching

The table only shows the perceptions of four teachers as a sample of the process. From these teachers' comments it was possible for me to see what the sources referred to. In the sources of satisfaction, for instance, the four teachers referred to students in one way or another either contributing to their professional lives (teachers A, B and C), or achieving language teaching-learning goals (teacher D). In the sources of dissatisfaction, on the other hand, all the three teachers who provided their insights referred to contextual issues such as low salaries and materials (teacher A), top-down decisions (teacher C) and lack of appropriate conditions for teaching (teacher D). Additionally, teacher A stated that students' desertion was a source of dissatisfaction which was somehow different from the other contextual problems. All of these patterns were identified, and categories of information were created. The teachers' perceptions were grouped conveniently under such categories, which was the next step in the analysis. This is shown in table 12 below.

Table 12

Analysis of the teachers' sources of motivation: creating categories

Analysis of the teachers' sources of motivation Step 3: Creating categories
SATISFACTIONS REFER TO:
<p><u>1. A sense of personal and professional fulfilment</u></p> <p>Enthusiasm towards teaching "I enjoy my classes, I enjoy my work" (TE) Working on the chosen area (TH) Interest and enthusiasm towards teaching: "I love to teach; that's my life. This I do this I have" (TI) Fulfilling professional goals (TJ)</p> <p><u>2. Contribution to students' success and professionalization</u></p> <p>The contribution to the professional formation of students in a significant way (TA) Being part of students' professional preparation (TB), (TC) Being part of the students' language learning process (TN) Helping students open their minds by communicating in a different language (TD) Transmitting both academic aspects and values (moral principles, human relationship, etc.)</p> <p><u>3. Students' perceptions</u></p> <p>Counting on students' respect and recognition (TK) Students' trust, being a model for them (TN)</p> <p><u>4 Achieving language teaching-learning goals</u></p> <p>Achieving class objectives (TG, TO, TM, TD) Seeing students' putting into practice language taught (TL) Knowing that students are learning to communicate in a different language (TF, TH, TJ, TK, TM)</p> <p><u>5. Relationship with students (reciprocal learning)</u></p> <p>Knowing that students are learning the language more and that the benefit is mutual (the teacher learns from students as well) (TF) Sharing knowledge and learning from students (TI) Being able to share experience and knowledge (TN) Good interaction with students (participation and practice) (TG)</p>
DISSATISFACTIONS REFER TO:
<p><u>1. Students</u> (teachers' concerns regarding students are directly linked to the effectiveness of their own performance) Students' lack of motivation when activities don't work as expected (TF, TG, TM) Students' failure "I still have to make classes more dynamic and know how to motivate students; some of them fail" (TG, Students' learning difficulties (TH) Not being able to deal with students' differences (TI) Difficulties to make classes attractive to students (TL) Not achieving teaching goals (TG, TO)</p> <p><u>2. Contextual conditions</u> (a sense of powerlessness and frustration because of conditions for language learning; e.g. lack of social recognition and general institutional support to improve the area. Teachers feel that problems are beyond their scope) Not being able to solve problems like lack of materials and students' desertion (TA) Not being acknowledged professional efforts properly (salaries) (TA, TM, TO) "But sometimes I reflect on the kind of educational system we have. I can't see interest of the government in improving teaching processes or teachers' salaries Lack of appropriate conditions for teaching (TD) Evaluation is an overwhelming task because of the number of students (TN) Time constraints (TN) The top-down decisions made about language instruction that don't take into account the teachers' perception (TC)</p>

As shown, five categories related to teacher satisfaction emerged: a sense of personal and professional fulfillment, contribution to students' professionalization, students'

perceptions, achieving language teaching-learning goals and the relationship with students. The sources of dissatisfaction, on the other hand, were focused on two major aspects, student-related factors and contextual problems. Through this way of data display, it was possible for me to see the patterns in the teachers' perceptions. For instance, by counting the number of teachers in each category it was clear that the teachers' major motivational source was achieving language teaching-learning goals. The next step was obviously, attributing meaning to the data; making the interpretation of the information, which was facilitated by the data display. The interpretation of this information can be found in chapter 6, section 2.4.4 under the heading *teacher motivation*. A similar procedure was followed to extract meaning out of the journal entries at the end of the investigation, which allowed me to compare the results in both stages, and assess the changes in the teachers' perceptions.

This was obviously, one way of approaching the analysis and interpretation of the qualitative data generated in this study. Since this investigation involved several kinds of data collection instruments, the procedures to analyze, compile and interpret the information that emerged were varied. But, this is what can be expected in a qualitative study; a variety of information that signifies a very creative process for the researcher. As Coffey and Atkinson (1996) state, "Analysis is not about adhering to any one correct approach or set of right techniques; it is imaginative, artful, flexible, and reflexive. It should also be methodical, scholarly, and intellectually rigorous" (Coffey and Atkinson 1996:10). I believe that the present study fulfilled all of these analysis features, which is revealed by the connection of the information. The consistency of the data analysis is also shown by the procedures to guarantee the validity of the study, which is described below. Other examples of data compilation and categorization can be found in appendix 13,

2.4.2 Procedures to validate the information

Validity and reliability are central terms to establish the trustworthiness of research. As for validity, it refers to what extent the results obtained are in agreement with the original research questions; that is whether the researcher really covered the intended field. There are two kinds of validity, internal validity and external validity. Nunan states that internal validity is related to the "interpretability" of research, whereas external validity is focused on "generalizability" (Nunan 1992: 15). The former deals with the credibility of the interpretation of the results in light of the original research question, the latter with the possibility of generalizing results from samples to the population. In this regard, I cannot be categorical about the generalization of the results in this study. Although I believe that the results of this investigation might be of interest to teacher education programs in general, I can only make modest assertions of generalizability in similar contexts. Nonetheless, given the contextualized nature of the study, I believe it is possible that the results can be generalized in the Nicaraguan context.

Concerning reliability, the key terms are consistency and replicability. Reliability can also be internal and external. According to Brown and Rodgers, internal reliability is the degree to which the results reflected would be the same if re-analyzed by an independent researcher. External reliability, on the other hand, deals with the consistency of results if the research were to be replicated (Brown and Rodgers 2002:241). In this regard I believe that the detailed explanation and documented process of the research safeguards the reliability of the study.

There are some procedures suggested to researchers to validate the results of their investigations. I took into account some of these procedures and applied them in my study to make sure the results were valid and reliable. Such procedures are described below.

- *Triangulation*

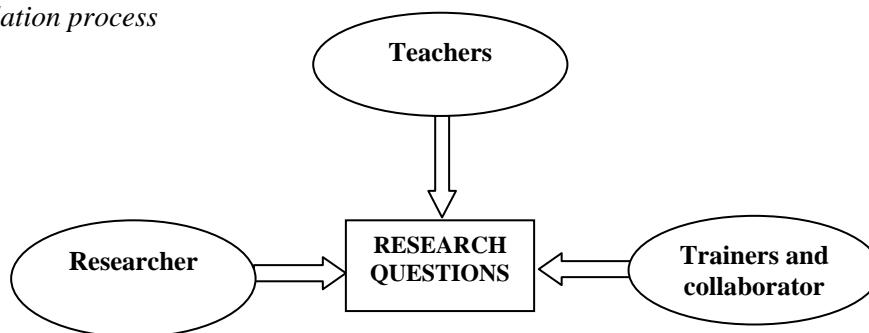
In order to guarantee the validity and reliability of the present research outcomes, thus establishing their credibility; I took special measures as suggested by experts in the research field. These measures were based on the triangulation procedures suggested by Brown and Rodgers (2002). Triangulation means the validation of the information looking at the research question from different perspectives. As they explain: “if you can examine your data from at least two points of view, you will maximize the possibility of getting credible findings by cross-validating those findings” (Brown and Rodgers 2002:243). Although several kinds of triangulation procedures are suggested, two of them were the ones used in this study: method triangulation and data triangulation.

Method triangulation deals with the use of different data collection instruments, which, as described above, involved ten different instruments. As discussed, each instrument was intended for a particular purpose and was designed to be interconnected with the others. This was the case of the classroom observations, the surveys and questionnaires which complemented each other to shed light on the teachers’ beliefs and performance. Likewise, even though this study was qualitative in nature, I did use some quantitative information to further illuminate the issues under investigation. For example, some of the questions in the interviews dealt with numbers of students and weekly working hours, which shed significant light on the conditions surrounding the teachers’ professional lives at the time they conducted their research projects.

Data triangulation, on the other hand, involves examining the research questions from different points of view. In the case of this investigation, several perceptions converged to shed light on the research questions: the teachers, the trainers and collaborators, and my own perception as the researcher. This approach was systematic throughout the research process. The triangulation in this investigation can be represented by the following figure.

Figure 5

Triangulation process



In qualitative studies a great deal of importance is given to the perception of the researcher and the subjects participating in the study. It is based on the premise that “human behavior cannot be understood without incorporating into the research the subjective perception and belief system of those involved in the research, both as researchers and subjects” (Nunan 1992: 54). One of the characteristics of this study was collaboration at all levels. The collective effort involved all the major agents’ perception to shed light on the research issues. In fact, as shown by figure 5 in no stage of the research the results were based solely on only one person’s views. The contributions of each of these actors or informants to the validity and reliability of the study are briefly outlined below.

- The role of the teachers

The teachers were the main informants in the investigation. Their willingness to collaborate with the investigation by providing all the necessary information was revealed by the amount of information provided in the journals, the interviews and the qualitative evaluations. Their perceptions were characterized by openness, honesty and relevance. The teachers’ “voices”, their actual words, are the best evidence of these characteristics as they are present all throughout this research report.

- The role of the trainers and collaborators

The trainers’ and collaborators’ perceptions were crucial for the results of the investigation. The trainers, for instance, were in an optimal position as informants since they were in contact with the teachers, and were able to perceive their weaknesses and strengths in the particular knowledge area. Likewise, they were in the proper position to provide valuable insights about the effectiveness of the program through the qualitative evaluations. The collaborators, on the other hand, had a different kind of contact with the teachers, which made it possible for them to see the process from a different perspective. This was the case of the evaluators who assessed the research projects, and the external collaborators who provided feedback about the teachers’ research reports.

- The role of the researcher

Miles and Huberman (1994) highlight the participation of the researcher as “instrument” of the investigation by stating the suitability of his or her position. They highlight the researcher’s

participation by describing some specific features such as, familiarity with the phenomenon and the setting under study, strong conceptual interests, and good investigative skills (Miles and Huberman (1994: 38). As mentioned before, my position as a local English teachers and a teacher educator was a significant advantage as I was familiarized with the context and knew first-hand many of the aspects unfolded by the investigation. This background knowledge enabled me to make sense out of the information and draw logical conclusions in light of the research questions.

2.5 Selection of teachers

In order to guarantee the success of the program it was important to take a series of steps. These steps involved the fulfillment of the official institutional procedures for approval of the program, which took place between July and September of 2007. During this time I made contact with the trainers to explain the proposal, discuss their integration dates and the potential contents of the course program. In the meantime, there were significant efforts in the search for candidates. These efforts involved advertising procedures in the English Department, local schools, and at the national conference of ANPI in the year 2007. The efforts also involved the presentation of the proposal to both the American Embassy and the Ministry of Education for sponsorship to the teachers participating.

2.5.1 *Inclusion criteria*

There were particular features that the teachers participating in this study should have and particular steps that they should take, which corresponded to the inclusion criteria of the investigation. Such criteria involved the following requirements.

1. Candidates should hold a Major in English. Graduates from UNAN were prioritized. Graduates from other universities would be considered depending on the demand.
2. Participants should be in-service English teachers working at any local school, or educational institution. The candidates had to present a letter from their institutions.
3. Candidates should pass a proficiency test, which consisted on a practice paper TOEFL test. The minimum grade on this exam should be 450 points. The exam involved an academic essay.
4. Candidates should hold an interview in English. The interview focused on the situation surrounding the teachers' teaching practice and on the reasons why they wanted to integrate into the program.

The selection exam was administrated on five different opportunities from the 21st of September to the 19th of October. A total of 22 candidates applied to the program out of which 18 teachers were considered suitable candidates that fulfilled the requirements. At the beginning of the program three teachers dropped out. Fifteen teachers completed the eight courses of the program.

2.5.2 The selected teachers

All the teachers participating in the study graduated from the Teacher Education Program at UNAN-León. I informed the teachers that in integrating into the program they would be participating in a research project. I explained the research objectives and that being a part of the study would represent providing data and allowing me to observe their lessons. All the teachers were willing to participate in the study. Confidentiality was assured and so were ethical considerations. In order to protect their identities, a coding system was used conveniently. The following table provides information about the teachers.

Table 13

Teachers' information

TC	Gender	Age	Graduation year	Graduated from		Teaching Experience
				Saturday English Program	Regular English Major	
A	M	45	2002	√		20
B	M	26	2006	√		7
C	M	27	2003		√	3
D	F	30	2001	√		10
E	M	29	2006	√		8
F	F	37	2001	√		10
G	F	30	2001	√		10
H	M	29	2005		√	3
I	M	27	2006		√	3
J	F	24	2006		√	2
K	M	23	2007		√	1
L	M	24	2007		√	1
M	F	27	2003		√	3
N	M	27	2007		√	1
O	F	28	2005		√	2

Out of the 15 teachers, nine of them were male, and six were female. Teacher ages ranged from 23 to 45 years and the average age was 28. Six teachers graduated from the Saturday English Program and nine from the Regular English Major. In total seven generations of teachers between 2001 and 2007 were represented in the study. Three teachers, teacher D, F and G graduated in 2001. One teacher, teacher A, graduated in 2002 and two teachers, C and M, in 2003. Teacher H and teacher O both graduated in 2005. Four teachers graduated in 2006, teachers B, E, I and J, and three others, teachers K, L and N had just graduated in 2007 just a few months before the program started. In relation to teaching experience, several teachers had little experience, which ranged between one and three years. They were teachers C, H, I and M (3 years), teachers J and O (2 years) and teachers K, L and N (1 year). The teacher with the highest teaching experience was teacher A, who had been teaching for 20 years. This was

followed by teachers D, F and G who had been teaching for 10 years and teacher E who had 7 years of experience.

3. THE TRAINING PROGRAM

The major framework of the plan of action consisted of a tailor made teacher training program entitled *Postgraduate Course in TEFL*. The program was launched at UNAN-Leon with the academic support of the Universidad de Alcalá and the Instituto Tecnológico de Costa Rica (ITCR). The Program involved eight courses which together aimed at fulfilling the training needs identified at the baseline stage of the research.

3.1 Development of the program

The program took place from 2008 to 2010. Originally, it was intended to last one year, but because of contextual constraints it extended to two years (such constraints are widely described in section 4 of chapter six). The following table shows the courses taught, the teacher trainers in charge, and the chronological development of the program.

Table 14

The development of the Program

Course Title	Trainer	Date
<i>Technological Resources for TEFL</i>	Professor Ileana Mora ITCR	Jan 21-25, 2008
<i>Principles and Methods in TEFL</i>	Professor Edipcia Chávez UNAN-León	April 18-June 28, 2008
<i>Techniques and strategies in TEFL I (Reading and Writing)</i>	Professor Michèle Delaplace UNAN-León	April 18-June 28, 2008
<i>Lesson Planning in TEFL</i>	Professor Rosangela Baggio U. de Alcalá	August 4-15, 2008
<i>Teaching EFL with a learner-centered approach</i>	Professor Manuel Megías U. de Alcalá	August 4-15, 2008
<i>Techniques and Strategies in TEFL II (Listening and Speaking)</i>	Professor Francisco Parajón UNAN-León	Sep 19-Nov 28, 2008
<i>Planning Materials and Units of Work in TEFL</i>	Professor Michèle Delaplace	Sep 19-Nov 28, 2008
<i>Action Research in the English Classroom</i>	Professor Edipcia Chávez	March 6-May 29, 2009
Remedial Plan: Qualitative Research Instruments	Doctor Edwin Marín ITCR	April 24-25 2009
Remedial plan: How to write AR Research Projects	Doctor Manuel Megías	January 29 2010

The eight courses took place in intensive and extensive sessions between the years 2008 and 2010. The Program required two remedial plans that were integrated during the development of the course *Action Research in the Classroom*. Six trainers from the institutions participating

were in charge of the program. Two professors from the Instituto Tecnológico de Costa Rica participated: Professor Ileana Mora who taught the course *Technological Resources for TEFL* and Doctor Edwin Marín, who was in charge of the Remedial Plan *Qualitative Research Instruments*. Doctor Manuel Megías from the Universidad de Alcalá, Spain taught two courses; *Teaching EFL with a Learner-centered approach* and the remedial plan *How to write AR Research Projects*. Professor Rosangela Baggio, also from the Universidad de Alcalá, taught the course *Lesson Planning in TEFL*. Professor Michèle Delaplace from UNAN-León was in charge of teaching two courses, *Techniques and Strategies in TEFL I (Reading and Writing)*, and *Planning Materials and Units of Work in TEFL*. (Professor Delaplace was also an evaluator of the Action Research Projects developed by the teachers). Professor Francisco Parajón, also from UNAN taught the course *Techniques and Strategies in TEFL II (Listening and Speaking)*. Finally, my participation as a trainer of the program involved teaching two courses, *Principles and Methods in TEFL* and *Action Research in the Classroom*

Within the collaborative focus of this study, the plan involved the participation of other important collaborators, who contributed to the success of the program in different ways. The following table describes the collaborators and their participation in the program.

Table 15

External collaborators

Collaborators	Institution	Participation
Professor Anne Coyne	University of Nebraska	Academic support
Professor Joan Latchaw	University of Nebraska	Academic support
Professor Elisabeth Bisanz	Centro de Idiomas UNAN-León	External evaluator
Professor Martha Chavarría	UNAN-León	External evaluator
Professor Martha C. Laguna	UNAN-León	External evaluator
Professor Victorino Rojas	UNAN-León	External evaluator

Professor Anne Coyne and Professor Joan Latchaw contributed to the program in providing academic support during the development of their Action Research projects. They provided valuable feedback to the teachers' in light of the improvement of their research reports. This feedback was useful to plan the contents of the Remedial Plan, *How to Write Research Reports* integrated in the year 2010. On the other hand, the program counted on the participation of faculty from UNAN-León who acted as external evaluators. This was the case of Professor Elisabeth Bisanz, from the Centro de Idiomas of UNAN, Professor Martha Chavarría, current head of the English Department; and Professor Martha Celia Laguna and Professor Victorino Rojas, both current members of the English Department. These professors participated as members of the evaluator board in charge of the assessment of the teachers Action Research

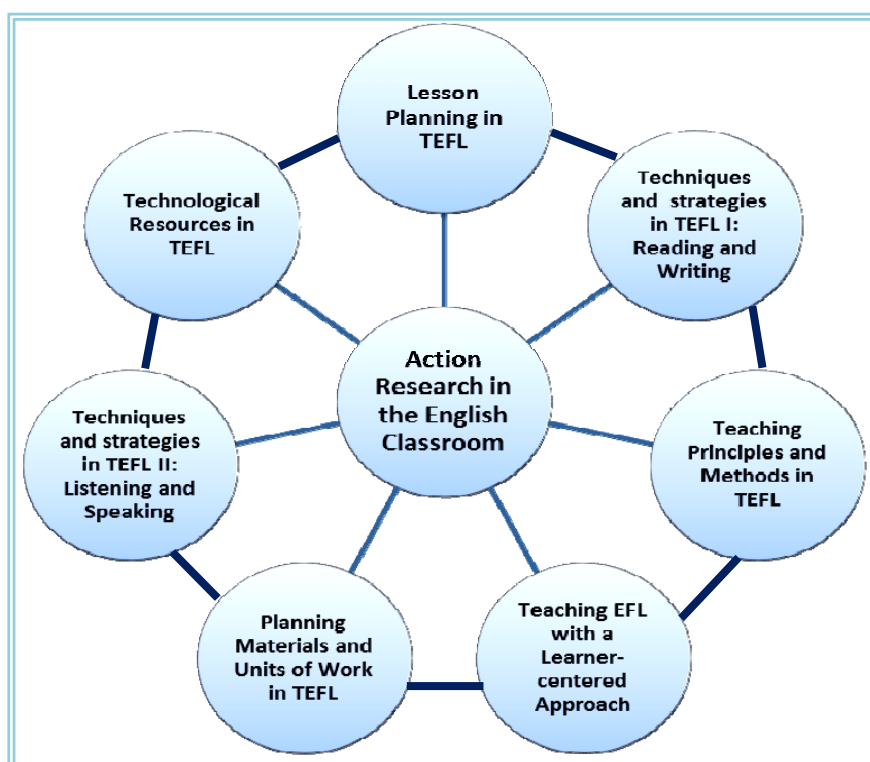
projects. In addition to evaluating the teachers' performance in doing research, they provided valuable feedback for the improvement of the research projects.

3.1.1 Objective and contents of the Program

The general objective of the program was to contribute to the professional development of the teachers through the improvement of their teaching approaches in a number of aspects. It also aimed at increased the teachers' reflective skills. The Program, as mentioned before, was planned and organized on the basis of the teachers' needs. Each of the courses had specific objectives and covered particular content areas that intended to increase the teacher knowledge base. The courses were interrelated as shown in figure 6 below.

Figure 6

The interconnected nature of the training program



As shown each course stood on its own, as each had its particular course contents and objectives. But the courses were also interconnected among themselves. The plan was a response to the problems faced by the teachers, which were all related and strongly based on the situational context. The cohesive nature of the study plan embraced the premise that interconnected problems needed interconnected actions.

The seven courses in the outer circles were taught as a prelude of the Action Research course in the inner circle. Each of these courses had specific aims and content areas to enhance the teachers' knowledge and skills to improve their professional qualification as EFL teachers. Thus, *Technological Resources in TEFL* aimed at providing the teachers with the necessary

skills to use technology for teaching purposes, and *Teaching Principles and Methods in TEFL* intended to enhance the teachers' knowledge about the different methodologies available for language teaching. The course *Techniques and Strategies in TEFL I* intended to improve the teacher skills for teaching *Reading and Writing*, and the course, *Techniques and Strategies in TEFL II* focused on *Listening and Speaking*. On the other hand, *Lesson Planning in TEFL*, aimed at improving the teachers' abilities to plan their lessons and *Teaching EFL with a Learner-centered Approach*, was focused on increasing the teachers' awareness of the importance of the student in their learning process. *Planning Materials and Units of Work in TEFL* in turn, aimed at improving the teachers' skills to design, create and adapt teaching materials. Finally, the course Action Research intended to help teachers develop a critical and reflective attitude towards their teaching practice, and their ability to improve and change particular troublesome situations at the classroom level. The courses are described in more detail below. They are presented in chronological order.

1. Technological Resources in TEFL

General objective: To analyze and use different technological resources available for language teaching.

The course provided the teachers with exposure to a variety of educational resources available on the web and training on how to use equipment to support the language teaching-learning processes. The course was an important means for the teachers to obtain materials for their lessons. It was closely related to the course *Planning Materials and Units of Work*, as the computer skills that the teachers learnt were useful for the materials designed in this course. Likewise, the computer skills were also useful for the other courses that involved assignments to be done and sent through computers (see course program in appendix 14)

2. Principles and Methods in TEFL

General objective: To raise teacher critical awareness of the principles behind teaching approaches and foster teacher reflection on their own language teaching-learning beliefs.

The course program aimed at providing teachers with a well-informed and critical perspective of the different teaching methods proposed for language teaching in terms of their advantages and disadvantages for classrooms in the Nicaraguan context. This critical perspective was crucial to overcome the traditional methods for teaching English and to generate conscious and well-informed decisions for the use of more participatory approaches in the classrooms. The course fostered teacher critical reflection on the teachers' learned language teaching-learning beliefs on a number of aspects (e.g. the language, the learner, the learning process, the teacher, and so forth), and on how these beliefs affected their teaching practice (see course program in appendix 15).

3. Techniques and Strategies in TEFL I : Reading and Writing

General objective: To provide the teachers with strategies for teaching reading and writing as well as the background knowledge of the main principles behind these skills.

This course was oriented to the teaching of two of the macro-skills: Reading and Writing both independently and in an integrated way. The teachers increased their background knowledge on the main theories behind teaching Reading (top-down, vs. bottom-up approaches) and Writing (process/product writing). Likewise, the teachers acquired a variety of strategies for teaching the skills. Their own language proficiency increased as a result of the interaction with the course contents (see course program in appendix 16)

4. Lesson Planning in TEFL

General objective: To raise teacher awareness of the role of lesson planning in the teaching process and the importance of its different elements.

This course addressed issues related to the main components of lesson planning. It also focused on important structural aspects of lesson planning such as opening, pace, sequencing, linking and closing. The approaches presented and discussed provided the teachers with options on how to optimize class time and promote student interaction. Throughout the development of the course the teachers analyzed different models for lesson planning and created tailor-made lesson planning templates adequate to their context, needs, students, and teaching styles. The course contents were connected with the course *Planning Materials and Units of work* (see course program in appendix 17)

5. Teaching EFL with a Learner-centered Approach

General objective: To raise teacher awareness of the importance of the learner in the process of learning EFL.

The major aspects tackled within this course were focused on the students. Thus, the course contents addressed important student-related factors such as motivation, learning styles, learning strategies and student background knowledge. In addition, the course emphasized nontraditional teaching models where both the teacher and the student assume more effective roles in the instructional process. Thus, within this approach the teacher plays different roles such as, motivator, facilitator, guide and the like. Students, on the other hand, take a more participatory role as active agents responsible for their learning. The course also provided a variety of techniques in the management of classroom interaction, particularly with large groups (see course program in appendix 18).

6. Techniques and Strategies in TEFL II: Listening and Speaking

General objective: To provide the teachers with an experiential framework of strategies for teaching listening and speaking

This course addressed the presentation and effective practice of two macro skills; Listening and Speaking. Thus, the major efforts within this course were aimed at providing teachers with

a variety of ideas, classroom dynamics and techniques for teaching these two skills. Within the teaching of Listening they learned different kinds of activities to deal with listening exercises at different stages (pre, while, post). Speaking, on the other hand, involved a variety of activities to promote student interaction through pair work and group work. Likewise, the course integrated effective techniques for grammar practice, error correction, vocabulary and pronunciation. Additionally, the course provided the opportunity for teacher improvement through the approach of making professional presentations (see course program in appendix 19).

7. Planning Materials and Units of Work in TEFL

To apply simple techniques to change and adapt teaching materials, taking into account student learning styles and preferences, the teacher style and the teaching context

The course aimed at providing teachers with skills to design their own instructional materials creatively and effectively. Consequently, the teachers were exposed to different types of classroom materials and they had to apply simple techniques to change – adapt - modify these materials, taking into account a number of factors: the group of students, their learning styles and preferences, their own teaching styles, the institution, and the general context. Thus, the teachers learned ideas for making worksheets and supplementary materials for their lessons. The practical approach of the course led the teachers to the design, implementation and evaluation of teaching units (see course program in appendix 20)

8. Action Research in the English Classroom

General objective: To help teachers develop a critical and reflective attitude towards their teaching practice and the ability to improve and change particular troublesome situations at the classroom level.

This course provided the basis for the methodology of action research in the classroom and the skills to identify problems or areas for improvement, formulate hypotheses, design data collection instruments, and analyze and interpret data, among others. The course was an important means that provided teachers with the necessary knowledge for the research work carried out at the end of the course. Within the course contents the teachers internalized a better understanding of reflection as a means for their own development. In addition, they learned the main theoretical principles behind the concepts of *Reflective Teaching*, *Teachers as Investigators* and *Action Research* Through their interaction with the course contents and doing research, the teachers developed a more critical and reflective attitude and the ability to assess, innovate and improve particular situations affecting their teaching (see course program in appendix 21).

3.1.2 Methodology

The course was based on a combination of two approaches: teacher training and teacher development. Through teacher training, the teachers acquired the techniques, skills and knowledge to operate more efficiently within the existing contextual conditions. For this

purpose, the teachers' current repertoire and background teaching-learning experiences were the starting point from which they continued to build-up their knowledge. On the other hand, the teacher development dimension of the program enhanced the teachers' reflective skills. Likewise, teachers' independence and autonomy and their ability to be proactive and become change agents in their classrooms were systematically promoted. Thus, no particular technique, strategy or activity was presented as a recipe to be followed. On the contrary, teachers were encouraged to be critical about the pedagogical suggestions presented when trying them into their classrooms. Effectiveness for their own practice would depend on a number of aspects derived from their own teaching styles, their students, and the teaching context.

Based on this approach, the program involved both theoretical and practical aspects in each of the courses. On the one hand, the teachers had exposure to relevant knowledge and skills, and on the other, the principles behind such knowledge and skills were extensively covered and analyzed. Consequently, the course methodology focused on participatory classes that involved reflection and discussion of essential aspects for each component of the course. Likewise, the teachers were constantly exposed to analysis and interpretation of relevant related readings in each of the modules. The methodology also involved field work, which was the practical application of the learned skills and knowledge. The fact that the teachers were in-service teachers allowed them to implement these pedagogical tools in the classroom, which made it possible for them to theorize in their own practice.

3.1.3 Evaluation

The evaluation of the program was both formative and summative. Formative evaluation allowed gathering feedback about the improvement that the teachers were making, and summative evaluation was useful to assess their proficiency at the end of each component. This approach allowed assessing both the process and the product. Although each trainer had her or his own evaluation system, these two principles of evaluation were consistently applied.

Within this framework, objectives achievement was measured on the basis of the teachers' individual performance as a result of the interaction with the course contents. Nonetheless, evaluation also involved the assessment of the teachers' participation and performance in different academic tasks done in groups, pairs and/or individually. In this regard, a variety of assessment procedures that demonstrated the teachers' acquired skills were integrated. These tasks involved presentations, participation in discussions, and the design of particular activities or tasks. Specific creative tasks such as the development of didactic materials and classroom activities were systematically used as criteria of learning outcomes. As a final requirement for graduation, the teachers developed and presented their research projects in the classroom. Teacher performance in these projects was assessed based on established criteria. The team of external evaluators was in charge of the assessment, which guaranteed the validity and objectivity of the results and the quality of the program.

Chapter 5



Data presentation and analysis

In this chapter the results of the data collected through the research instruments described in the previous section, will be presented and discussed. The main purpose is to provide a detailed discussion of the core information that emerged in the research process, along with the main results. The information has been grouped according to the four major stages of data collection of the study. At the end of each stage the most relevant findings are presented. The stages are:

Stage 1: Prior to the plan of action: The identification of teachers' contextual problems and training needs, and the design of the plan of action of the research.

Stage 2: At the beginning of the plan of action: The exploration of the teachers' original language teaching beliefs and performance.

Stage 3: During the development of the plan of action: The exploration of the teachers' reflection and awareness raising processes

Stage 4: After/at the end of the plan of action: The exploration of the teachers' beliefs and performance, the evaluation of the training program and the final exploration of teacher development.

1. STAGE ONE/PRIOR TO THE PLAN OF ACTION: IDENTIFICATION OF CONTEXTUAL PROBLEMS AND TRAINING NEEDS, AND THE PLAN OF ACTION OF THE RESEARCH

1.1 Main problems for teacher development and teacher training needs

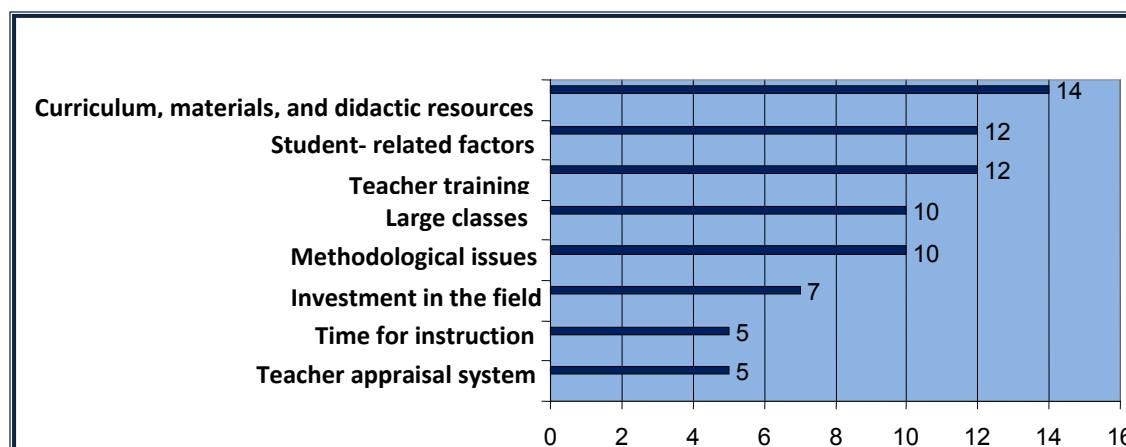
The research question presented and discussed here is related to the problems teachers experienced in their professional development and their training needs. These will be described thoroughly as the information gathered was crucial in leading the direction this project eventually took. Most of this information was collected through the essay administered as part of the requirements of admission to the training course. Nonetheless, these issues are recurrent themes also raised by other instruments throughout the data collection stages. On the whole it was intended:

- To put together and analyze those factors that the teachers identified as key aspects affecting their teacher development process.
- To explore teachers' attitudes towards the problems they face. Whether teachers saw the obstacles as something depending on others (contextual, external) to be solved or if, on the other hand, they viewed themselves (personal, internal) as having some kind of participation in the solutions.
- To identify those aspects within the scope of the research project, that could provide room for teacher development through teacher training
- To identify the teacher training needs in order to formulate the plan of action.

The results are shown in figure 7 below

Figure 7

Limitations and problems for teacher development



As shown, the teachers mentioned a number of problems, which have been presented from the most to the least recurrent answers. At first sight the data showed that teachers' awareness of limitations and problems caused by their context was high. Teachers knew very well their contextual conditions and the kind of problems these posed to their teaching practice (each of these problems will be discussed in detail in section 1.1.1 below).

It must be admitted that the information collected in this stage was not surprising. Based on previous research in the area (see chapter two, section 4) and on personal knowledge of the context in TEFL, I expected to find exactly the kind of problems identified by the teachers. Nevertheless, for the purposes of the present study it was important to explore how teachers viewed themselves in relation to the problems in order to recognize those factors that showed teacher awareness of their own importance in solving them. So the search was focused on aspects that were more related to their choices, contributions and perceived responsibilities as teachers than to their contextual problems per se. This is based on the premise that teacher development is an internally driven process, independent from others and that teachers are change agents who can make the difference for the better within their own contextual realities.

Bearing this in mind, teacher responses regarding the solutions of the problems were labeled either external, referring to other actors (society, government, educational authorities, schools and institutions), or internal, referring to something that teachers could or should contribute.

Figure 8

Responsibility for solving problems

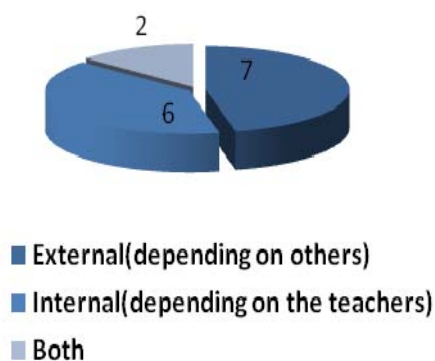


Figure 8 provides a global perspective of teacher perception regarding whose responsibility it is to solve the problems identified. Seven out of the 15 teachers consistently maintained that it is the task of educational institutions entirely. Six others perceived their own participation as important to overcome the problems. The particular focus of these teachers was the problem of student-related factors. There were only two teachers whose answers showed that they assigned responsibility to institutions, but also assumed that part of the solutions are in their hands.

This initial exploration revealed that the teachers' awareness of their importance in overcoming problems needed to be raised. What follows now are some more detailed findings regarding each of the contextual problems identified by the teachers.

1.1.1 Curriculum, materials and didactic resources

The problem of curriculum and materials is the most recurrent problem. The majority of the teachers, 14 of them, identified this as a serious obstacle for their professional development. On the whole, teachers stated that curriculum and materials were often obsolete and disconnected from the students' real lives. When describing the way the phenomenon affected them, teachers provided a number of answers which, in short, reflected their concern for not having core guidelines and the adequate materials and resources to conduct instruction effectively. What follows are some of their comments on this issue.

- *There is not an appropriate program that provides the framework for language instruction.*
- *There is lack of coherence and appropriateness in what is to be taught.*

- *The instructional processes are affected as a whole as there are not good conditions for language learning.*
- *There is a lack of supporting materials, such as dictionaries, videos and good libraries.*
- *It's (the material) not good enough for all students, it does not take students' particular characteristics into account.*
- *Students do not pay real attention to the class; there is lack of participation and therefore they do not learn well.*
- *Students don't get an adequate exposure to the target language by using modern and updated didactic materials (movies, documentaries, internet; etc.).*
- *There is a wide selection of books in use, which most of the time are unrelated to the needs and interests of the students.*
- *Materials and programs do not fulfill student needs and requirements.*
- *There are not enough activities for all skills.*
- *In following the current curriculum guidelines, teachers face extreme difficulties to teach properly.*
- *Teachers' have problems in going on professionally speaking as they have to follow pre-established guidelines with inadequate resources.*

So, the teachers' concerns regarding materials and curriculum were directly related to the instructional process (inappropriate curricular guidelines, lack of resources), students (participation, needs, interests, and learning styles) and their own professional development (the problem was perceived as preventing them from improving). *Curriculum*, one teacher said, *prevents teachers from making changes and adjustments*. This is true, to some extent. As shown in chapter two, research in the field (Chavez, 2006; Luxon & Luxon 1993; Tijerino et al, 2004) shows that even under these contextual conditions teachers have considerable range of action, particularly at the classroom level, which is indeed a rich source to foster teacher development. Undoubtedly consistent curriculum guidelines are necessary in any instructional process.

Nevertheless, when such guidelines are nowhere to be seen and educational authorities proclaim that there is freedom to use whatever materials teachers prefer; such circumstances would favor possible meaningful changes. Teachers need to be prepared to plan and implement such changes, though.

But, what did teachers think about their own involvement in curriculum and materials issues? Only two out of these 15 teachers accurately said that EFL teachers should be a part of the decision-making process regarding curriculum and materials. One of them said: *Teachers are the principal actors of this process, and they should be involved in all curriculum reforms*. The other said, *English teachers have to be taken into consideration in order to implement changes*. Clearly, the root of this problem did not relate exclusively to prepackaged, inadequate curriculum and materials, but to the problem of not taking teachers into account for the decision that is made in this regard. Indeed, teachers should not only be the ones teaching, but also the ones in charge of making decisions regarding the kind, content and methodology of language

instruction. As discussed in the section of teacher' contextual knowledge in chapter two (see lit. review 3.4.3) teachers should be active agents in curriculum issues. Only two teachers seemed to have realized this, which shows the urgent need for helping them develop critical and reflective awareness of their own contribution to overcoming this specific problem. Moreover, it was clear that teachers needed to widen their contextual knowledge regarding program and materials issues.

1.1.2 Student-related factors

The second recurrent problem related to problems posed by students. 12 out of the 15 teachers mentioned problems in this area. The lack of motivation of students towards learning the language (n=10), disinterest (n=7), and boredom (n=7) were major problems directly related to three other problems: curriculum and materials, large classes, and methodology. Some others were: mixed ability classes (n=4), disruption and indiscipline in the classroom (n=5), students' learning styles (n=5), and students' low awareness of the usefulness of language in real life (n=3).

The fact that the teachers showed such high levels of interest in their students indicated three interesting findings, which are described below. The quotes from the teachers provide evidence for each of these findings

- a) The teachers connected students' performance to their own performance as teachers.
 - *We can lose the interest of our students and they might think that we are not good teachers or that we are boring teachers* (comment about how traditional methodology affects students).
 - *Teachers are not successful because their students don't learn well* (comment about students' final level of language proficiency when they finish their studies).
 - *The teachers are the first tools that students have to achieve communicative competence* (comment about teacher roles).
 - *Total commitment, total involvement, and total physical, intellectual and emotional connection between teachers and students are necessary elements to send and receive messages in the foreign language successfully* (comment about teacher-student interaction in the classroom).
- b) The teachers showed great awareness and concern regarding student success.
 - *Students should be guided to be more involved in their own learning in order to succeed* (comment about students' lack of participation and involvement).
 - *We have to encourage students to develop all English skills that help them fulfill the requirements in this era of globalization* (comment about the importance of English for their students' professional lives).
 - *How can teachers tailor their teaching to fit the different learning styles of students? This is a real challenge for any teacher since a particular learning activity may not be*

appropriate for all the students (comment about students' personal characteristics and learning styles).

c) The teachers assumed responsibility in overcoming the problems.

- *This problem requires creative solutions; teachers need to begin with the recognition of individual student differences; this will help teachers determine who needs more or less help* (comment about students' personal characteristics and learning styles).
- *We have to take care of our teaching. We have to do everything to be prepared to help our students become better students* (comment about teachers' roles and methodology).
- *Teachers are the best part of the solution* (comment about students' lack of participation).
- *In order to get better and more motivated students, teachers should be more interested in improving themselves* (comment about students' lack of motivation).
- *The fundamental and significant mission is to encourage the discouraged students...we need to convince them that the acquisition of the language is their responsibility. However, in order to do so the first one to be motivated is the teacher....thus the teacher has to be enthusiastic and set goals for them to achieve* (comment about students' lack of motivation).
- *Teachers should investigate to get more information about the level they are teaching and get new materials* (comment about the problem of inadequate materials).
- *The problem of low motivation can be overcome if the teachers' own attitude towards the language and to the task of teaching is positive and suitable* (comment about students' unwillingness to learn the language).

These three findings are closely related to each other since they all show how teachers viewed their roles in relation to students. Their comments showed their humanistic interest towards students and their vocation for teaching (see teacher qualities in chapter IV, section 3.1). Teachers provided evidence of how successful learning on the part of students is connected to their own realization as teachers and how important it is for them to know what students might think, believe, or perceive of their performance as teachers. On the other hand, the information shows the teachers' concern for fulfilling their students' learning needs. Moreover, the ultimate goal of the teachers was to be able to deal with the particular characteristics of their students in an efficient way in order to enhance their learning outcomes.

Interestingly enough, as already stated, teachers held the system responsible for not providing adequate conditions for language learning. Nevertheless, when it came to student problems there was a high degree of awareness by the teachers of their own responsibility in overcoming such problems. As one teacher stated, *we need to make changes for the better and give our best to foresee the upcoming problems, and try to find solutions ahead of time in order to prevent them*. In fact, every problem related to students, was immediately associated in one

way or another to their own performance as teachers. This attitude showed that most teachers had a great awareness of their students' needs, which is an ideal condition for initiating teacher change and improvement. As discussed in the literature review (chapter IV, 3.7), one of the main sources of motivation for teacher change is precisely student learning outcomes. This particular finding which is present everywhere in this research report shows that the attitude of the teachers was optimal grounds to take consistent steps towards their improvement.

1.1.3 Teacher Training

Most of the teachers (n=12) referred to the lack of teacher training as affecting their professional lives. Teachers stated the urgent need to participate in further professionalization opportunities, such as postgraduate courses, workshops, conferences or opportunities to participate in international language training courses. Interestingly enough, all of these teachers said that the responsibility for providing adequate training opportunities was the task of others (educational authorities, schools and institutions). This seems to be a logical attitude since teachers were not really recognized their efforts to get training beyond their graduate studies. As shown by the following comments teachers acknowledged the importance of teacher training to improve the quality of their teaching, as well as the different areas in which they needed further training:

- *The great demands and competitiveness in the world we are living in, the new technologies, the cultural changes, and scientific advances that are taking place nowadays all over the world demand an endless renovation of school: that's why it urges the need of permanent training. Few or none of such opportunities are offered to EFL teachers.*
- *Because there is a lack of teacher training, the quality of teaching is not high.*
- *The Ministry of Education does not provide training programs to improve the quality and effectiveness of language instruction.*
- *Good language instruction is determined by the teachers' experience and knowledge.*
- *Teachers lack important knowledge about such areas as syllabus design and how to use modern technology.*
- *Teachers don't have enough ideas to implement new methods and strategies in their classes.*
- *Teachers do not know enough strategies for teaching.*
- *Teachers don't have practical tools to improve their teaching.*
- *Teachers are not updated in modern strategies and techniques for teaching because of a lack of support from their institutions.*

The first thing that catches attention at first sight is that teachers mentioned training areas (program design, the use of technology, methodology, and teaching strategies and techniques) that should have been addressed in their PRESET program at university. As corroborated

afterwards, during the development of their training course, the teachers had significant gaps in these and other areas of their knowledge base (see section 4.2.4 below). This particular finding has important implications for the organization and structure of the English Studies curriculum in PRESET programs at UNAN. An evaluation of the qualification of graduates is highly recommended. For this particular group of teachers their need was going to be addressed through a Postgraduate Course. But training at the INSET stage should not be focused on such basic areas of teacher knowledge base.

On the other hand, teachers were aware of their need for further training, but they were also disappointed by the lack of institutional support and by the educational policies in this regard. According to the wage policies for teachers in Nicaragua, teachers (at the secondary school level) are paid an insignificant additional amount of money for postgraduate courses (20 to 30 cordobas monthly; about one dollar). At the university level only Master's programs are recognized and there are very few opportunities of this nature in the country. Less relevant training sessions, like short courses and conferences are not recognized at all. Moreover, teachers state that they face extreme difficulties to even attend the conferences offered once a year by ANPI, the Nicaraguan Association of English Teachers, (see chapter V, section 3.3 for information about this association). Not all practicing teachers can attend because of economic constraints and lack of institutional support. In many cases teachers have to pay for a substitute to teach their lessons during their time at the conference.

If further teacher training cannot be accomplished through institutional means, then what is left for teachers is to take this responsibility on their own. But this requires a financial effort that most teachers in Nicaragua cannot afford. In this sense it must be acknowledged that all the teachers participating in this study integrated into the postgraduate course offered by UNAN using their own financial resources. Taking into account all the interfering contextual factors, their receptive attitude towards teacher training has special significance for the purposes of the present study. Such an attitude shows the teachers' determination to go further in their professional lives.

These findings about teacher training needs helped to define the contents of the Postgraduate course, the training program that was aimed at providing teachers with the pertinent help they needed at that particular moment (see main conclusions of this stage in 1.3 below).

1.1.4 Large classes

The problem of large classes was probably one of the most disturbing problems affecting teachers, particularly because it directly affected them at the classroom level: their own performance, the nature and characteristics of the processes, and students' successful acquisition of the language. The following are some of their comments in this regard:

- *The classrooms are designed for 30 students and they (directors, institutions, MINED) admit up to 70 students.*
- *Teachers are teaching 60-70 students trying to solve problems that are common in classes of this proportion; like the problem of disruption and discipline.*
- *There are a great number of students in some classrooms and that environment makes it very difficult to develop a lesson.*
- *Having too many learners per classroom prevents teachers from attending individual student's needs so as to keep a motivating environment.*
- *The environment (in large classes) makes teaching very difficult. It affects student attention span and important issues, such as evaluation, which is carried out in an inappropriate and stressful atmosphere.*
- *Many people might say that overcrowded classrooms do not pose a problem, but in fact they do. It's hard for teachers to work on some classroom dynamics because of the time they spend trying to explain to the whole big group the activity that will be developed.*
- *It is very difficult to put interactional activities into practice. Some activities take longer than expected because of the amount of students.*
- *Dividing large groups into smaller numbers of students will contribute to create a better atmosphere to work.*
- *Transmission of knowledge is limited because there is lack of space for moving around the classroom (the teacher meant that lack of mobility around the classroom prevented him from helping students learn).*

Interestingly enough, the concerns regarding large classes as mentioned by the teachers were all associated in one way or another with student learning. Large classes, they said, prevent them from creating an adequate environment, integrating interactional activities, and developing their lessons efficiently for the sake of student learning. This recurrent problem, teachers said, does not only affect their own motivation and work capacity, but also students' motivation and performance as well.

Certainly, overcrowded classrooms promote indiscipline and disruption, they also take away from students the opportunity to participate, and prevents students from having more personalized attention by the teacher. This problem was directly connected with the issue of traditional methodology, as teachers were hard-pressed and tended to assume teacher-centered approaches to be able to cope with the amount of students. It has to be admitted that this approach to teaching is the "easiest" way to handle the teaching-learning processes affected by large classes. Nevertheless, such approaches seriously affect the successful language acquisition of the students, since they are regarded as mere receptors of knowledge.

Nonetheless, in spite of the seriousness of the problems teacher awareness and concern regarding this particular problem were optimal grounds for fostering improvement in this area

which was the major aim of this research project. Thus, the plan of action of the research would intend to provide teachers with a wide range of options to lessen the impact of this problem.

1.1.5 Methodological issues

The main problem that teachers perceived regarding methodological issues was that traditional approaches for language teaching were widely used. This problem was directly associated with several other problems, such as large classes, time for instruction, curriculum and materials, and the like. The following comments shed some more light on how teachers viewed the problem:

- *Inappropriate methodology causes students' lack of participation in class, making them more receptive than participative.*
- *Traditional methods do not promote students' participation and involvement.*
- *Students get bored and lose interest in learning.*
- *Lack of interest of students in learning the language.*
- *Students learn about vocabulary and grammar instead of how to communicate in English. At the end of the process they cannot speak the language.*
- *Teachers need to learn the newest methods of teaching English to improve the language teaching process.*
- *Teachers are not aware of new methods, strategies and techniques for teaching EFL.*
- *English is not taught communicatively.*
- *Teachers are not teaching English as a communicative language because many of them use the traditional pedagogy where students learn about grammar and vocabulary instead of communication.*
- *It is necessary to do a critical and reflective assessment of the role played by methods in the educational process*

The patterns of how teachers were affected can be clearly observed. Teachers' main concerns were, once again, focused on how students were affected. Lack of participation and involvement, students' passivity, boredom, lack of motivation and interest, and final learning outcomes were all seen as direct consequences of the use of traditional methodology. On the other hand, teachers acknowledged that such traditional processes do not foster effective language acquisition as the language was not being taught in a communicative way. Teachers stated the urgent need for adequate training so that they could teach the language more effectively. Implicit in their call was the need of having a training program that helped them view methods reflectively. Consequently, expanding the teachers' knowledge base of teaching methods was one of the issues addressed by the plan of action, through the integration of a course about language teaching methodology (see chapter four, section for a description of the course).

1.1.6 Investment in the field

Only seven teachers stated the problem of lack of investment in the field directly. However, the other eight referred to the phenomenon in an indirect way when describing the number of limitations and problems they faced in their particular institutions and classrooms. There was actually an implicit call to institutions and national educational authorities (somehow apprehensive as *teachers need to be in good terms with the authorities*) asking for better working conditions. What follows are the teachers' comments about the way they were affected by this problem:

- *Poor classroom conditions, low salaries, large classes, scarcity of materials and equipment greatly affect the quality of the processes and student as well as teacher motivation.*
- *Although teaching quality should not be directly related to salaries, it does affect teachers. A good salary will make teachers feel more satisfied and motivated.*
- *Because of low salaries teachers are not motivated and they do not give the best of themselves.*
- *Teachers are not motivated and they don't want to continue working for this Ministry (of Education) due to the poor salaries.*
- *In a country where the demands of education are high and the budget is restricted, education cannot be successful.*
- *A limited budget for education causes a number of problems, such as lack of teacher training opportunities, and lack of research projects in the area.*
- *The government has to improve education in our country, provide the teachers with all the necessary tools, and reduce the number of students per group.*

As shown above, the problem of investment in education is associated directly to the lack of quality in the instructional processes, student and teacher motivation, and to the conditions of language instructions (large classes, scarcity of materials, lack of equipment and didactic resources). These problems are aggravated by the fact that teachers do not get appropriate financial recognition, which they mentioned repeatedly. Teachers also see a direct correlation between investment in education and the lack of training opportunities. In fact, low concern for the improvement of the area is evidenced by the lack of financial support for teacher training and development opportunities. Certainly, the possibility to change and improve in this particular area was not in the teachers' hands and it was way beyond the scope of the present research project.

1.1.7 Time for instruction

The frequency and length of instruction was also labeled as an issue that equally affects teachers, students, and the instructional processes. Once again, teachers' concerns were directly related to the students. The problem of time for instruction was, in turn, associated with the

problem of large classes, student motivation and participation, and traditional methodology.

What follows are the teachers' comments in this regard:

- *It is impossible to develop all the activities planned. There is not enough time.*
- *Teachers cannot dedicate enough time to each activity and the activities cannot be developed as they should be.*
- *If the students need to practice any given topic, the teacher has to show a quick way to do so, in order to keep on task.*
- *The time given does not help teachers to develop the class in an integrated way.*
- *There is a lack of student participation and involvement and not enough time for personal attention.*
- *Not enough time to develop high quality lessons in an integrated way*
- *Students cannot learn much in such a short period of time.*
- *Time constraints prevent teachers from attending individual student needs and causes lack of motivation on the part of students.*

It was not in the teacher's hands, (nor within the scope of the research project) to solve this particular problem, as the decisions are made by educational authorities and policy makers. In fact, time and length of instruction has been a major issue in the EFL context in Nicaragua for years. But, teacher comments shed interesting light on how to provide realistic solutions. For instance, teachers said they experience problems with the development of language activities and student participation both of which have important implications for lesson planning. In fact, as a result of this analysis, lesson planning was integrated as one of the components of the postgraduate course to help teachers cope with the problem of time. Other problems associated with time constraints were: integration of abilities, teachers' roles, students' motivation, and language acquisition. Time for instruction was, without a doubt, another interesting challenge for teacher professional development that this research project would try to address.

1.1.8 Teacher Appraisal System

Interestingly enough during this initial exploration only five teachers said that teacher appraisal systems or "supervisions" were a major problem. Later on in the interviews it was found out that most young teachers working at the university level had never had any kind of classroom observation. Among the comments given by the teachers who had been observed (at secondary school levels) the following have particular relevance:

- *Directors and technicians from MINED are not prepared to supervise the class because they don't know anything about English.*
- *There are many teachers who are evaluated and supervised by directors and not by experienced people who can guide them through the process to get better results. Because of the lack of (financial) resources schools can't pay those experienced people.*
- *Supervisions are inadequate because they are carried out by unqualified people*

➤ *Teachers are not guided by experienced and qualified professionals in the field.*

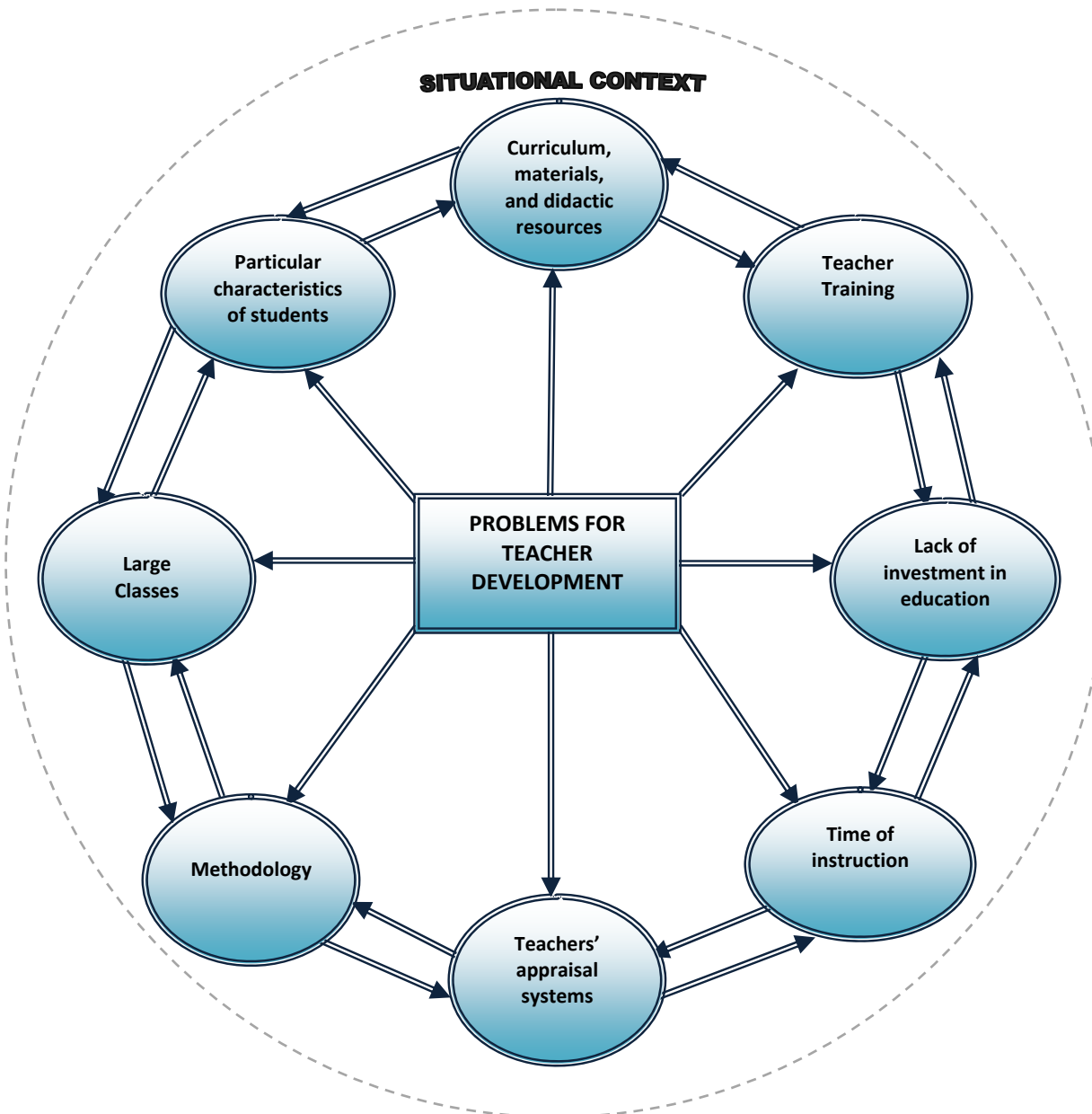
From these comments the teachers' main concern about their appraisal systems are easily identified. For the most part those teachers who had been observed had an apprehensive and tense attitude towards the process. They definitely viewed it as an event aimed at judging their work in a negative way. They also resented the fact that their current appraisal systems were not carried out by qualified professionals. On the other hand, those teachers who had never been observed longed for the pertinent academic help. Teachers identified an area which could help them improve professionally speaking, if carried out properly. This information was crucial to lead the classroom observations and to look for mechanisms in the teacher training course so that teachers could have mutual academic collaboration with their peers (see chapter IV, critical friends in 4.1.6 and peer observation in 4.2.6).

1.2 Interconnection and association of problems as perceived by teachers

The power and influence of the situational context can be clearly seen in these teachers' identification of problems. Moreover, it is clear how the problems were intrinsically interconnected influencing one another and affecting teacher performance significantly. Both the influence of context and the interconnection of problems are described in figure 9 below.

Figure 9

Interconnection of problems within the situational context



The figure shows how the teachers viewed the problems. They perceived them as interconnected and taking place within the framework of their situational context. The following teachers' comments reveal this interconnection.

- Teacher training + methodological issues
Teachers have a lack of training in English teaching methodologies and strategies.
- Methodological issues + student-related factors
There is no new ways to teach English so that students could find the class more interesting and feel highly motivated.
- Methods + teacher training + student related factors

Methodology is another problem because we don't know or we don't count on plenty of information about it or we use the same methodology and our students' get bored.

- Teacher training + didactic resources + student-related factors

Both well trained teachers and good didactic resources would not be effective if students do not have enough motivation for learning; if this is the case, teachers face a big challenge since their ability to enhance students' interest and motivation is tested.

- Investment in the field + large classes

This (lack of investment) is the main cause of having sixty students per class.

- Investment in the field + lack of materials

Another thing related to money issues is the lack of materials, equipment, books, and all the vital elements of the teaching process.

- Materials + teacher training + student-related factors

When the teachers are not prepared with enough materials and they are not trained in the use of teaching techniques, it's so hard to help students acquire abilities and skills to command the language.

- Materials + lack of motivation + methodology

If you don't have didactic resources you will have bored students; this lack of motivation is worsened by teachers' traditional methodology: writing vocabulary, reading stories, teaching about grammar structure and assigning vocabulary.

- Investment in the field + teacher training + methodology

For this reason the Ministry of Education should invest more in workshops about new methodologies to teach English in a communicative way, and encourage teachers to participate.

- Materials + student-related factors

The lack of material is a big problem for me because I need to look for them and it is difficult to find adequate materials for these particular students.

- Curriculum, materials + teacher appraisal system

There is liberty in the field (decisions about class content). However, when they supervise the English classes they ask for the planning based on the old program (secondary school teacher)

1.3 Main findings from stage one: Identification of problems and training needs

The objectives of this first exploratory stage of the investigation were fulfilled. First of all, the main problems affecting teacher development were evidenced these problems were curriculum, materials and didactic resources, students' characteristics, teacher training, large classes, methodological issues, investment in the field, time for instruction, and teachers' appraisal system. Most problems were clearly the result of the major decisions in education that are usually made in a top-down matter as a result of particular policies. Overall the information

in this stage consistently supports the view that context cannot be separated from the instructional processes and that any attempt to help teachers improve should take into account its powerful influence (see chapter IV, section 1). Indeed, corroborating the kind of contextual problems experienced by the teachers was important as it provided a clear picture of the varied ways in which such problems interconnected posing significant challenges and limitations for the teachers.

Now, the most important aspect of this analysis is that it went beyond the mere identification of problems. This addresses the second objective of the stage: to explore teacher attitudes towards the problems they face. Whether teachers saw the obstacles as something depending on others (contextual, external) to be solved or if, on the other hand, they viewed themselves (personal, internal) as having some kind of participation in the solutions. There was consistent evidence that teachers' awareness of their own responsibility needed to be raised as almost half of them held the system entirely responsible for the solutions of the problems. Indeed, this information was very useful to plan actions that could promote higher levels of teacher awareness on the potential contribution they can make towards lessening the impact of the problems.

The third objective of the exploration: to identify those aspects that could provide the room for teacher professional development, and the fourth objective: to identify the teacher training needs in order to formulate the plan of action of the research, complement each other. They were fulfilled too. In fact, it is here where the identification of problems took a more practical dimension: to provide teachers with consistent help within their existing contextual conditions realistically. On the whole it can be said that out of the eight major problems identified by the teachers there is only one that poses serious limitations to do something about it. That is the problem of lack of investment in education. However, in the case of the other seven problems, it was perceived that there were alternatives for change and improvement that could take place through the plan of action - in the field of teacher training. This might seem idealistic but it is not. What follows is a brief summary of the problems, their effect on teachers, the grounds to claim that teacher training would be a useful means to soothe their negative effects, and, more importantly, the alternative of solution that emerged as part of the plan of action (for a detailed description of this plan see chapter 4)

- *Curriculum, materials and didactic resources*

Most teachers identified curriculum, materials and didactic resources as a serious problem (affecting the instructional process, the students, and their own professional development). Curriculum was perceived as a problem because the lack of consistent guidelines to rule the instructional process, and material and didactic resources because they were limited and obsolete. Most teachers did not see their own participation as relevant in trying to solve these problems. On the whole, they saw the solution as something that needed to be addressed

exclusively by educational authorities. Thus it was perceived as very necessary to raise teacher awareness that they could actually do something to minimize the effects of the problem, particularly, because they had considerable range of action to implement changes at the classroom level. On the other hand, teachers needed help to enhance their skills and knowledge so that they could be able to adapt and improve their own materials. Two courses in the postgraduate course intended to provide teachers with consistent help in this concern: *Technological Resources in TEFL* and *Planning Materials and Units of Work in TEFL*

- *Particular characteristics of students*

Problems posed by characteristics of students were identified by the majority of the teachers. Issues of lack of motivation and participation, boredom and disinterest were seen everywhere in the teachers comments. Teachers were also concerned with how other major problems like curriculum and materials, large classes and traditional methodology affected the students. The problem of mixed-ability groups and students' lack of awareness of the importance and usefulness of the language in real life were also recurrent themes. The teachers' comments in this regard show that they: a) *connected students' performance to their own performance as teachers*, b) *had great awareness and concern regarding their students' success*, and, c) *assumed responsibility in overcoming the problems*. These particular findings corroborate the discussion in the literature review (chapter three, section 3.7) that what motivates teachers to change the most is student learning outcomes. Interestingly enough teachers took full responsibility of these problems and showed great eagerness to overcome them. Thus, the steps to take in this concern were clear. The plan of action would integrate a component that could provide teachers with ideas to be able to handle problems related to students in a more efficient way. The course: *Teaching EFL with a Learner-centered Approach* intended to achieve this aim.

- *Teacher Training*

The fact that most teachers mentioned the problem of teacher training as a significant problem, justified the effort of designing an intervention plan aimed at providing them with the necessary training they needed to improve their teaching practice. It was clear that context (namely, educational authorities in schools and institutions) would not provide the teachers with this opportunity. The comments of the teachers showed their disappointment and discouragement with this fact. In response to this lack of concern each teacher made a significant financial effort to integrate into the training course showing their eagerness and motivation towards training. The comments about their specific training needs and methodological problems shed significant light on the kind of training to provide them with, and the areas to integrate in the training course. In short, teachers stated they needed ideas to: improve the quality and effectiveness of language instruction, plan their lessons more effectively, be updated in the use of new technologies, and expand their range of practical

strategies and techniques for teaching. Interestingly enough, teachers identified training areas that should have been covered during the development of their PRESET program at university. That teachers had such basic gaps in their knowledge base has important implications for the PRESET programs of EFL teachers at UNAN-León.

Teachers' interest in their training was particularly important for the purposes of the present research project, and for planning the curriculum components of the training program. On the one hand, teachers' desire to improve was a conscious choice. They were naturally motivated to their professional improvement. As discussed in the literature review, motivation is an important condition for teacher change (see chapter IV, section 3.7). On the other hand, teachers showed openness towards learning. Such an attitude is one of the attributes of critical thinking, and critical thinking is, in turn, optimal grounds for teacher reflection (see chapter IV, section 4.2.1). The integration of the module of Action Research into the plan of action intended to nurture this self-awareness attitude. Other courses that were perceived as options to fulfil the teachers' training need were: *the use of technological Resources in TEFL*, *Lesson planning in TEFL*, *Techniques and Strategies in TEFL I (with a focus on reading and writing skills)*, and *Techniques and Strategies in TEFL II (with a focus on teaching speaking and listening skills)*.

- *Large classes*

Most teachers identified large classes as a problem affecting their performance, the nature of language instruction and students' successful learning. This problem, which is experienced by teachers everywhere in the Nicaraguan educational context, proved to be one of the most disturbing. Having a large group of students in a classroom promotes indiscipline and students' lack of attention and participation. In addition, students' motivation is also seriously affected. Once more, teachers showed their concern about students by stating their frustration for not being able to give them personalized attention. The teachers' own work capacity and job satisfaction was significantly affected as well, since they felt unable to develop the lessons using dynamic and interactional activities. Previous research (see chapter VI) shows that, because of the problem of large classes, teachers feel pushed to use traditional procedures (e.g. having students sit in orderly arranged rows) and methodology (e.g. assuming teacher-centered roles). It has to be admitted that the approach works for keeping discipline in the classroom. Nevertheless as students' have a more receptive than productive response, their language acquisition is seriously affected. The good news was that teachers were highly aware of the problem and willing to change for the better. Several courses would be providing teachers with options to implement in their classroom in order to overcome the problem: *Techniques and Strategies in TEFL 1 and 2*, *Teaching EFL with a Learner-centred Approach*, *Lesson Planning in TEFL*, *Planning Materials and Units of Work in TEFL* and *Action Research in the English Classroom*.

- *Methodological issues*

The main problem highlighted here was the issue of traditional methodology for teaching the language. Teachers perceived this problem as directly related to other problems, such as large classes, time for instruction, and curriculum and didactic materials. Once again, according to the teachers, the consequences of an inappropriate methodology had their impact on students (lack of motivation and participation, disinterest, boredom, and the like). Moreover, teachers showed awareness that traditional methodology focused more on teaching about the language (focus on form) than teaching the language for communication (focus on meaning). Teachers expressed the urgent need to enhance their knowledge base on modern methodology and approaches for teaching the language more effectively. Clearly, teachers' claim was to have more pedagogical options to both teach the language communicatively and enhance their students' participation, motivation and learning outcomes. This need led to the integration of the courses *Principles and Methods in TEFL*, *Techniques and Strategies in TEFL 1 and 2* into the training program.

- *Time for instruction*

Although only five teachers identified this problem as affecting them directly, the classroom observations carried out later on evidenced that time for instruction was an issue. This problem was related to other problems, such as the use of traditional methodology, students' participation and large classes. The most significant difficulty was experienced at the time of developing a lesson. Teachers said they were not able to provide enough practice for the different skills, implement varied activities, and promote students' participation successfully. Previous research in the field (see chapter VI) showed that the teachers tended to plan lessons that either consisted of one long activity or, were made up of several activities in a row without checking students' understanding. Time limitations exerted great influence on the teachers' decision to do so. Thus, teachers needed ideas on how to optimize class time taking care of important aspects, such as timing, flow, transition and progression of activities. Also they needed ideas on how to structure their classes paying attention to elements such as opening, sequencing, pacing, and closure. All these aspects were clearly related to the issue of lesson planning and implementation which led to the integration of the course *Lesson planning in TEFL* into the teacher training course.

- *Teachers' appraisal system*

The problem of not having a consistent system of observation and feedback that helped teachers improve their teaching practice was identified by only five teachers. However, later on, in the interviews, the teachers admitted that not having adequate academic follow up to improve their teaching practice was a problem. Most recently graduated teachers working at UNAN had never had any kind of classroom observation, and/or support for improvement during the time they had been teaching. The teachers who had been observed (mostly at secondary school

levels) complained of the quality of the observation. On the whole, the observations, (most of the time called “supervisions”) are aimed at providing judgmental opinions about the teachers’ work focusing on issues of formally established procedures (like calling attendance) rather than on other important aspects of the class, like methodology, kinds and nature of interaction, student participation, and the like. On the other hand, they stated that the so called supervisions were carried out by unqualified people, who did not have the right level of expertise to provide the academic help that the teachers needed. Given the fact that an effective teacher development process is characterized by collaboration of different kinds, the classroom observations carried out as part of the research project intended to provide teachers with useful academic help. Another kind of collaboration was going to take place during the development of the module of *Action Research in the Classroom* where the teachers would have the opportunity to work collaboratively with a partner (s) doing peer observations. The purpose was to help teachers to establish systems of collaboration that were sustainable.

It is clear, then, how each problem experienced by the teachers led to the integration of particular components in the teacher training course, major framework of the research. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the other courses would not play an important role in providing options to solve that particular problem. Rather, it means that special care was taken to provide focused training with courses that, because of their nature, were optimal options for particular problems. For instance, for the issue of students’ characteristics the academic option that emerged naturally was the course *Teaching EFL with a Learner-centered Approach*. But, obviously other components would also play an important role in providing techniques, strategies and pedagogical suggestions to overcome the problem. In other words just as teachers’ problems exerted influence one on another, the courses were intrinsically related, as well.

This first exploratory stage of the research was undoubtedly crucial for the direction of the project. Not only because it led the plan of action of the research, but because it shed significant light on the major contextual problems teachers’ faced and on the many interconnected ways in which their teaching practice was affected. It was also possible to know the teachers’ perceptions and attitudes as a response to these problems. On the whole, it was encouraging to know that in spite of the significance of the problems there was room for improvement which was going to be carried out through the intervention plan.

2. STAGE TWO/AT THE BEGINNING OF THE PLAN OF ACTION: THE EXPLORATION OF THE TEACHERS’ ORIGINAL LANGUAGE TEACHING-LEARNING BELIEFS AND PERFORMANCE

The research questions in stage two focused on a deeper level of understanding of the teachers’ thinking: the sources of their beliefs, their views about language-teaching and learning

and how these related to their performance and actions in the classroom. In addition, because of the direct and closer contact with the teachers at this stage the discussion is framed within a more personal perspective on how teachers viewed their own development and what they regarded as important elements to foster an optimal TD process.

Thus, there were two main objectives underlying this stage:

1. To explore the original state of teachers' beliefs about language teaching and learning and the kind of influence that such beliefs exerted on their performance in the classroom.
2. To know the teachers' perceptions about themselves, their qualities, knowledge, perceived role, the stage of their own professional development and the kind of conditions they believed should be in place in order to foster their teacher development.

The information that emerged was collected through the journals, interviews and classroom observations. The themes that emerged in the analysis have been grouped into the following five major categories:

- Sources of teacher beliefs
- Teacher beliefs and performance regarding language teaching and learning
- Teacher beliefs and performance regarding students
- Teacher beliefs about themselves
- Teacher development as perceived by teachers

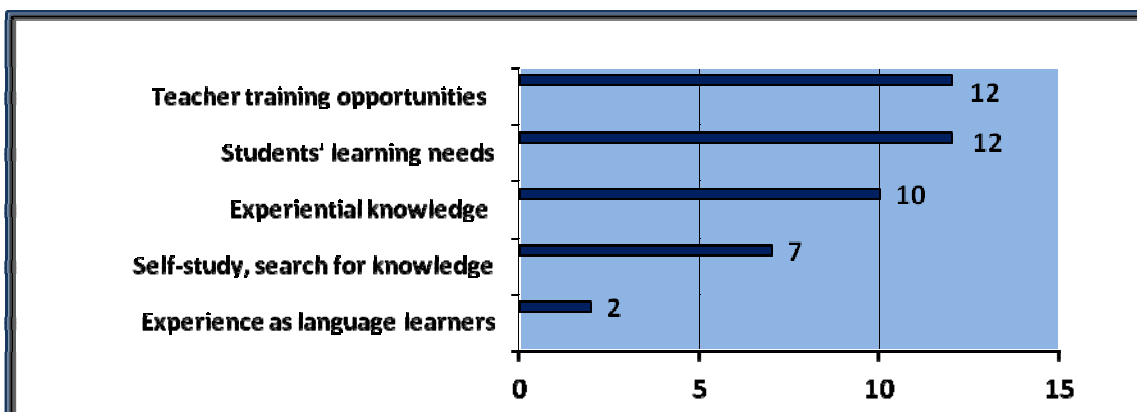
2.1 Sources of teachers' beliefs

The data evidenced findings that, in one way or another, recurrently appeared all over the data collected: the sources of teachers' beliefs. Teacher beliefs proved to emerge from a variety of sources ranging from teacher training opportunities to their experience as language learners.

Figure 10 below shows these sources in detail.

Figure 10

Teachers' beliefs: Where did they come from?



As shown, five main sources were identified by the teachers. Remarkably, one of the most recurrent answers was teacher training (n=12), the area they formerly identified as a major current contextual problem (n=12). Thus, the teachers acknowledged the contribution of their

teacher training program, but at the same time they recognized they needed more academic help. This information was consistent with the perception of the teachers (n=10) that their professional development should be optimized through teacher training (see section 2.5.4 below).

Interestingly enough, the second source of beliefs was students' learning needs (n=12 teachers). This piece of information was not entirely new either. As shown in the previous section, the second major contextual problems for the teachers were the ones posed by the personal characteristics of the students. Thus teachers acknowledge that dealing with all these characteristics has helped them shape their beliefs about language learning. The importance of students for teachers is also discussed in the section about the teachers' motivation (section 2.4.4 below).

The next two main sources of beliefs were the teachers' experiential knowledge (n=10) and self-study skills (n=7), two areas which, because of their independent nature can be discussed together. Here it is clearly seen the unsupportive influence of context on teacher thinking and views. Evidently, context had posed significant challenges for teachers, as they had not been given enough support for professional improvement. Most teachers had to rely on their own efforts in the search for knowledge to deal with the demands of their profession. The important thing to bear in mind was to what extent, these two sources had been effective in providing the teachers with relevant knowledge and skills for their teaching practice. The findings in section 2.2 below revealed that even though teachers had many positive aspects in their performance at the classroom level there were also significant shortcomings.

The last source identified was definitely an unexpected finding. Only two teachers admitted that their sources of teaching ideas emerged from their former experience as language learners, for better or worse (see comments in table 16 below). The research literature is filled with studies of findings about how teachers' experience as language learners shapes their knowledge about teaching (see lit. review 1.1). Nevertheless, these teachers seemed not to give it too much importance (at least not consciously). Three possible situations (or a combination of them) are possible explanations to the phenomenon.

1. The teachers' language learning experience might not have been that positive, which is quite possible in the Nicaraguan TEFL context. As one of the teachers said "my teacher never made me feel excited or willing to take the English class".
2. The teachers had developed a critical view of language teaching. Generally speaking, as it will be expanded below, most of the teachers held non-traditional ideas about their roles as teachers (see section 2.4.3).
3. Teachers were not consciously aware of the influence of their experience as language learners on their performance as teachers.

In table 16 below some of the most relevant comments of the teachers about each source are presented:

Table 16

Teachers' comments about the source of their beliefs

SOURCE	COMMENTS
Teacher Training	<p>“Teachers (trainers) encouraged me and taught me helpful ideas and tools to teach English in the classroom”.</p> <p>“My professors taught me how to improve in the classroom...this is because of the experience they have”.</p> <p>“It’s very important to take different ideas and learn from the teachers that have more experience than me”.</p> <p>“It helps teachers to improve their teaching by providing them with new tools to get better”.</p> <p>“When the teacher has this kind of knowledge he/she is able to bring a variety of activities...”</p> <p>“Now I am more aware of actions in the classroom”.</p>
Students	<p>“My desire to provide a learning atmosphere”.</p> <p>“I organize and prepare my class in dependence of how students are learning”.</p> <p>“Students’ needs are more than these boring grammar classes”.</p> <p>“My students are my inspiration...I think of them when I am preparing my classes”.</p> <p>“I think that students are very much linked to their surroundings and their interest in the modern world”.</p> <p>“I think that teaching must be focused on students’ real needs”.</p> <p>“Consciously I feel the need to improve my teaching methods as I see my students’ needs”.</p> <p>“We cannot teach if students are reluctant to learn”.</p> <p>“I do everything I can...and still I don’t motivate my students”.</p> <p>“In spite of the fact that I don’t like teaching, I try to do my best; I think students deserve the best from their teachers, and we are there to do that”.</p>
Experiential knowledge	<p>“I still remember when I began to teach English in high school, because I had no idea about teaching methods, techniques and strategies for language teaching and learning”</p> <p>“Modelling and changing all that needs to be modelled and changed”.</p> <p>“I started teaching English empirically...but I knew nothing about methodology, techniques, methods and students’ necessities”.</p> <p>“Not always you learn from others, sometimes you make your own activities”.</p> <p>“We as teachers develop our knowledge, techniques and skill while we plan our lessons”.</p> <p>“I also have five years of experience and this helps to get knowledge of what students want or need”.</p> <p>“I noticed that English was more than copying and repeating vocabulary”</p>
Self-study and search for knowledge	<p>“However, the main source is my knowledge”.</p> <p>“I didn’t know how to teach a class, I couldn’t do a lesson plan. I began to search and asked my friends about it”.</p> <p>“I try to improve day after day. I am in this moment like a ‘sponge’ absorbing...”</p> <p>“From TV programs I get some phrases that I put into practice in my classroom”.</p> <p>“I started to read and learn about teaching by myself...through Internet”.</p> <p>“We always have to be self-taught and improve our language teaching process in order to teach in a better way”.</p>
Experience as language learners	<p>“My source of ideas for teaching comes from the good teachers I had”.</p> <p>“My ideas about teaching sprang from the necessity of having qualified teachers in the classroom”.</p>

Identifying the sources of teachers' beliefs in the first data collected was of major significance, primarily to shed light on the kinds of beliefs teachers hold concerning three major aspects of their work as language teachers: the *teaching and learning* process, the way *students* learn and themselves as *language teachers*. The information was collected all through this initial stage of the data collection, by means of the journals, interviews and classroom observations. Nevertheless, there were two particular instruments aimed at collecting specific information about how teachers viewed the language teaching-learning process and the students. These instruments were the *Language Teaching Learning Belief Questionnaire* and the *Language Teaching Activity Preference Survey* (see chapter four for a description of these instruments). The information gathered was grouped according to specific categories and the findings were contrasted with those of the observations. This was a useful step to find out to what extent the teachers' beliefs were consistent with their actions in the classroom. In order to triangulate the data for validation purposes the information was also complemented by the journal entries. All of this will be dealt with in the following sections.

2.2 Teacher beliefs and performance regarding language teaching and learning

In relation to language learning and teaching four major themes or categories will be presented. Each category has specific topics and each topic, in turn, focuses on particular language teaching/ learning beliefs. Themes and topics are listed below:

- Global views about language learning
 - The goal of language learning
 - The role of the target language
- Error correction in language teaching
 - Meaning vs. form
 - Fluency vs. accuracy
 - Error correction in early stages
 - Error correction in oral practice
- Materials and resources: use of the textbook, pictures, films, and videos
 - Use of a textbook
 - Use of the notebook
 - Use of pictures, films and videos for language teaching
- Teaching the language skills and sub-skills
 - Preferred language areas
 - Teaching integrated language areas

2.2.1 *Global views about language learning*

The target topics in this category are the goal of language learning and the role of the target language in the classroom; two key aspects that determine the kind and nature of language use in any instructional process.

Concerning the goal of language learning, the views of the teachers about two statements were explored. The statements were: *Language learning should improve if used for communication* and, *native-like pronunciation is not a useful goal in language learning*.

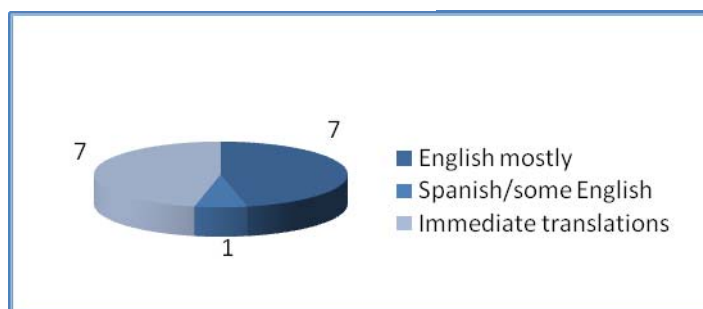
Regarding the first statement, the majority of teachers (n=14) agreed that the process of language learning improves if the language is used for communication purposes. This vision, which acknowledges the inherent major purpose of language as a means of communication, was considered as generally positive. It meant that the teachers were quite aware that their major goal as language teachers is to teach their students how to communicate in the target language. Nevertheless, this importance was not reflected in the classroom observations as only in four out of the fifteen classes observed, the teachers provided evidence of implementing activities with a really communicative purpose. The information had important implications to focus teacher training on raising teacher awareness on the discrepancy between their thinking and actions regarding the communicative purpose of the language. Clearly, teachers needed ideas on how to expand their range of communicative activities in the classroom, as well.

In relation to the second statement, ten teachers agreed that it is not useful to strive for native-like pronunciation in language learning. Indeed, an inherent premise of current modern language teaching methodologies is the acknowledgment of the globalized nature of the language. Most teachers seemed to agree with this. The other five teachers (one strongly disagree; four disagree) believed that native-like pronunciation was a useful goal. The implication of the information was clear, it was necessary to discuss with the teachers the dimension of English as a global language to help them reconsider their views.

Concerning the perception of the teachers about the role of the target language in the classroom, the specific item was: *Students should be speaking from the first day of learning a new language.* Most teachers (nine) agreed with this statement. Six teachers (one strongly disagreed; five disagreed) were against this view. This time teachers' views seemed to be more in agreement with their practices in the classroom. Figure 11 below shows the kind of language used as a means of communication in the classroom observations.

Figure 11

Language used as a means of communication



In the case of seven teachers the language used mostly as a means of communication was English. These teachers struggled to get the meaning across and seemed to be quite comfortable speaking the target language. Students seemed to be quite comfortable with the teachers' approach as well. Nevertheless, the kind of language used was an issue. Some teachers, for

instance, adapted their speech to facilitate student understanding, which resulted in the exposure of students to unauthentic language. There were only two cases in which teachers' use of the target language was considered appropriate.

One teacher used Spanish mostly and seven others used translations in both directions (but mostly from English to Spanish). There were a number of reasons that teachers stated for doing that, such as the educational background knowledge of students (some students coming from rural areas), the contextual conditions (overly crowded classrooms) and time issues (class periods too short teachers had to rush). The findings about the role of the target language revealed that effective use of the target language in the classroom was something that teachers should address. Discussions about the issue took place in the course *Principles and Methods in TEFL*.

2.2.2 Error correction in language teaching

The topics in this category are related to meaning vs. form, fluency vs. accuracy and about the treatment of student errors. Some interesting findings emerged from the teachers' views in this regard. For instance for the issue of meaning vs. form the statement was: *In communication meaning is important, form is of little importance*. Most teachers (n=11) stated their agreement with this view. The statement for fluency vs. accuracy was: *It is important that sentences be grammatically correct when spoken*. The teachers' opinions here were divided: half agreed and the other half disagreed. Regarding correcting errors the statements were: *If learners are allowed to make errors these will be hard to correct later* and: *In oral practice, the teachers should not correct students' errors during practice*. Most teachers agreed (n=13) that errors should be corrected. Nevertheless, most of them (n=14) agreed, too, that during oral practice students should not be corrected.

Generally speaking it can be said that the view of the teachers regarding meaning was consistent with their opinion, stated above, that a language should be used for communication. This view was also consistent with the views that errors should not be corrected during oral practice. However, the same view about meaning was not quite consistent with the view about form, as half of them stated that it is important that sentences are grammatically correct when speaking. The same happened with error correction in general. Most teachers considered that errors should not be allowed as they will be hard to correct later. The majority of teachers, as we shall see in their views and actions in relation to the language skills and sub-skills (section 2.2.4 below), were very fond of grammar which explained the discordance.

Interestingly enough, classroom observations revealed that the great majority of teachers (n=12) did not correct students' mistakes at all. Only three showed evidence of doing so. Among the behaviors observed for correcting, the following are worth mentioning: (a) the teacher corrected the mistake immediately, (b) the teacher asked other students to correct (c) and/or the teacher tried to make student self-correct. In the cases that errors were not corrected a

number of reasons were identified: (a) the teacher did not notice the error; (b) the teacher purposely omitted correcting it (which was the result of teacher beliefs); (c) the teacher wanted to move on with her lesson because of time pressures; (d) the teacher was more concerned with her/his own performance because of the observation, and; (e) the teacher did not know how to correct the mistake.

These findings made it very clear that teacher awareness regarding error correction needed to be raised. It was necessary for teachers to realize that their beliefs regarding errors did not always correspond with their behaviors and decisions in the classrooms. They also needed to expand their classroom techniques for error correction.

2.2.3 Materials and resources

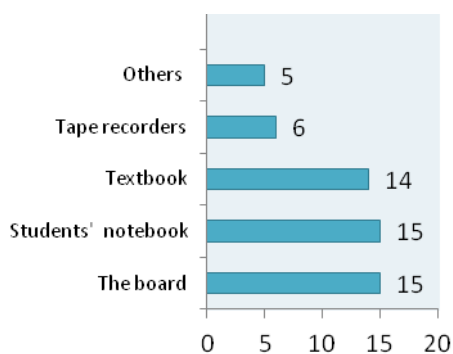
Materials and resources, as already discussed, were an issue for teachers. In fact, teachers had identified this area as one of the most overwhelming contextual problems they faced. In their answers about their preferences regarding the use of pictures, films and videos the majority of them (n=12) said that they liked to teach using these resources and the same thing happened with the use of recorded materials (n=15). About the use of textbooks and notebooks, 15 of them said that they preferred that the students had their own textbook. Only nine teachers stated their preference for having students write everything in their notebooks. One of the main problems observed in traditional classrooms in Nicaragua is, precisely, that teachers tend to promote a lot of note taking to cope with problems like indiscipline, time pressure and lack of teacher confidence.

Figure 12 shows information about the materials used in the classroom observations. As observed, teachers were quite consistent with their views regarding the use of books and notebooks. Textbooks were used in the majority of cases (n=14). More copies (n=9) than original samples (n=5) were used. This caused problems of clarity of the information because of the quality of the copies. It was perceived that a textbook gave teachers security and increased their self-confidence which explains their fondness of the resource. However, one of the major problems observed was the teachers' strong tendency to go through the activities in the book one after the other.

In the classrooms observed the students used the notebook in the majority of cases (n=15). In seven cases they spent significant class time in taking notes. All the teachers used the board mostly and only in five cases teachers used materials that they had designed on their own. Time constraints and lack of training and knowledge in materials design were mentioned as the major reasons for not integrating their own teaching materials.

Figure 12

Materials and resources used



The teachers preference in using equipment and extra materials , such as tape recorders, DVD's and films contrasted significantly with what they did in practice as no teacher, for instance, used films or videos and tape recorders were used only in six cases. Some teachers stated that they needed to have access to these kinds of resources in the classroom as it was very inconvenient to carry the tape recorders around from one classroom to the other, particularly when the teacher had to move from one building to another. Although this was true in some cases, the general perception was that most teachers avoided using recorded materials because of lack of confidence in integrating learning activities of this kind.

The relevance of this information regarding materials is that it was an area in which, in spite of limitations, (or perhaps because of them) teachers were aware of their importance and willing to improve what was in their hands to improve. The fact that most teachers did not use materials created on their own made it clear that teachers needed help to design their own materials, which, in turn, would help them be less dependent on the book, the notebook, and the board. It was also important to provide the teachers with the skills and knowledge to be able to use equipment and recorded materials more confidently in their classrooms. The courses that were intended to provide this help were *Techniques and Strategies in TEFL 1 and 2*, and *Planning Materials and Units of Work in TEFL*. Also it was expected that in the module of AR teachers would select problems related to the use of materials in the classroom.

2.2.4 Teaching the language skills and sub-skills

This category is based on the teachers' thinking and approaches regarding the teaching of the skills and sub-skills of the language. The focus of this discussion is the preferred language areas and the approaches to teaching them in an integrated way.

- *Preferred language areas*

When being asked about the language areas they liked to teach, teachers' answers showed that they had preference for listening and speaking activities (n=15, n=12) over reading and writing (n=9, n=9). In the case of the language sub-skills, pronunciation was on top (n=15), followed by vocabulary (n=12) and grammar (n=8). Nevertheless, at the time of the classroom observations the situation was somehow different in some of the areas. Table 17 below illustrates clearly how teachers' preferences differed from their actions in the kind of activities that they implemented during the classroom observations.

Table 17

Teacher beliefs and actions regarding the language areas

LANGUAGE AREA	TEACHER BELIEFS	TEACHER ACTIONS
<i>Reading</i>	9	6
<i>Writing</i>	9	2
<i>Listening</i>	15	2
<i>Conversation practice</i>	12	5
<i>Grammar</i>	8/9	8
<i>Pronunciation</i>	15/15	6
<i>Vocabulary</i>	12/11	13

The most neglected areas, so to speak, were writing and listening. As shown, only in two cases the teachers' performance (against nine teachers' beliefs) provided evidence of integrating practice for writing. As for listening, 15 teachers had said they liked these kinds of activities. Nevertheless, in practice, only two teachers integrated some kind of listening activities for comprehension purposes (with pre, while, post stages and using the tape recorder). In the few cases in which the teachers tried to speak the target language most of the time the students' had some exposure to listening, but this was not considered listening activities per se. In section 2.2.3 above it was stated that the possible reason teachers had for not integrating listening activities was the need for further training in the area. The findings here confirmed that this was, indeed, the case.

Although nine teachers had stated they liked reading comprehension activities, there was evidence of integrating these kinds of activities only in six cases. There were four major shortcomings in this area.

- a) The issue of pre, while and post reading stages to enhance students' reading comprehension skills.
- b) The treatment of new vocabulary, (in some cases lists of words were translated into Spanish before actually reading the text),
- c) Checking student understanding of the text. There was a lack of follow up to the reading comprehension exercises
- d) Very few attempts to relate the text to students' lives (background knowledge, opinions; etc.) and, in general, most teachers did not take advantage of the text to go beyond for further practice.

In relation to speaking, 12 teachers had said they liked to integrate conversation practice in class. However, in the observations, only five teachers integrated speaking activities. In most cases the kind of speaking activity was a mechanical dialogue practiced in pairs or groups; sometimes with demonstrations in front of the class. The major problems observed were that when practicing the dialogue in their pairs or groups students would not be doing the task properly: They were either translating, or speaking Spanish most of the time.

Regarding grammar, the teachers' views seemed to be more according to their actions. Eight of them said they liked grammar activities (likewise nine said that the most important part of a language is its grammar) and in the classes observed there were eight teachers whose lessons had grammatical contents. Apart from the strong focus given to form, the major problem observed was that the whole classroom activity revolved around that particular item for a long time.

Teaching pronunciation was another example of discordance between teacher beliefs and performance. Fifteen teachers stated their preference for teaching pronunciation (information

further reinforced by the question about preference for repetition practice; 15 teachers). But, in the classroom observations, pronunciation activities took place only in six cases. An important finding about how the practice of pronunciation took place was that in the majority of cases the activity was repetition drills; only in one case the teacher integrated an activity for practicing intonation.

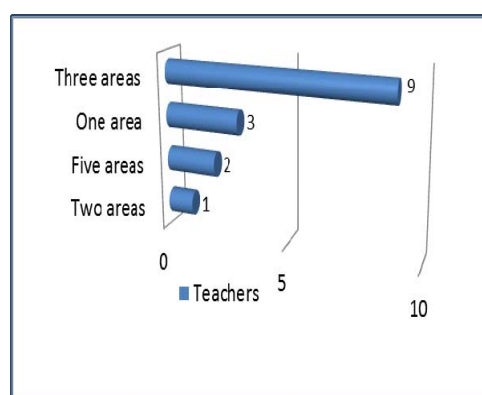
- *Teaching integrated language areas*

The majority of teachers (n=10) disagreed that the language skills should be taught separately in the early stages. Indeed, one of the modern approaches in teaching EFL is that the language should be taught in an integrated way to facilitate student acquisition. In most cases the perception of the teachers supported this view.

The teachers' views seemed to be more consistent with their actions this time as, in the classroom observations they provided evidence of acting accordingly. Figure 13 shows the number of skills and sub-skills that were the focus in each class observed. In nine cases the teachers taught three areas, in one case the teacher taught two areas; and in two cases the teacher taught five areas. There were three cases in which the teacher devoted the whole class time to teach only one area. The major difficulties observed in the case of the

Figure 13

Integration of language areas



integration of skills, were problems of pacing, sequencing, making transitions, giving instructions, keeping class attention, and timing. Most teachers seemed to be rushing to try to fulfill the activities on time which caused difficulties to implement the activities effectively. In addition there was the problem of those teachers who had focused the class on only one aspect, which was in two cases vocabulary teaching and in one case a grammatical content.

In general, although there were shortcomings in their approaches teachers held modern views regarding the teaching of the language skills and sub-skills. Furthermore, it can be said that most teachers' views of teaching English in an integrated way were consistent with their actions in the classroom as they carried out tremendous efforts to provide effective instruction in all language areas. Thus, it was expected that their improvement in these areas would be a natural and spontaneous outcome resulting from their natural inclination to teach. Teachers needed to widen their array of techniques, strategies and pedagogical options to: become more skillful in teaching grammar in a more communicative way, expand their range of activities for teaching pronunciation, promote meaningful writing, integrate communicative activities, and teach listening and reading using pre, while and post stages. The courses that would focus on these issues in the program were: *Techniques and Strategies in TEFL 1 and 2*. It was also

expected that in the course of Action Research in the classroom the teachers selected topics focused on the improvement of their approaches to teach the language areas.

2.3 Teacher beliefs and performance in relation to students

The teachers' concern about students was present all over the information provided by the teachers (see teachers' contextual problems in 1.1.2, students as a source of teaching beliefs in 2.1, and students as a source of teacher motivation in 2.4.4). Thus, the present section shows the findings of specific beliefs and actions related to the students in light of their language learning process. Such findings revolve around four major topics: *student learning styles*, *student independence and autonomy*, *student use of the language in real life*, and *student participation and involvement*. Again, the information provided, mainly collected through the two surveys about teachers' beliefs, will be further enriched by information collected through the classroom observations and/or by any other data collection method that relates to the specific aspect.

2.3.1 *Student learning styles*

Two initial statements somewhat related to each other tackled the issue of student learning styles: *some people have a special aptitude for language learning*, and, *everybody can learn an FL following the same teaching techniques*. The aim was to find out the opinions of the teachers about student differences and whether they were aware of the importance of using adequate teaching techniques taking into account such differences. All the teachers unanimously agreed with the first view. This first answer showed correspondence with the second, as most teachers disagreed (n=14) that the same teaching technique is valid for all students. The significance of this information is that most teachers had a high degree of awareness regarding student needs and particular learning styles, an element constantly shown by other findings. In the journals, for instance, the teachers stated once and again that they needed to expand their teaching techniques to address those characteristics effectively. As it will be shown in section 2.4.4 below, teacher genuine interest in fulfilling student learning needs was a powerful source of motivation.

There were three other questions aimed at exploring further the teachers' views about student learning styles. Such questions were focused on vocabulary teaching, a language area that, as discussed, was one of the prioritized aspects that teachers taught in the classes observed. The main aim was to find out to what extent teachers were aware of the fact that there are different kinds of students (*visual, kinesthetic, aural*) and whether they were *for* using different strategies for teaching vocabulary taking into account such differences. The statements and views of the teachers are shown in table 18 below.

Table 18

Teacher views about student learning styles

Language teaching preference	Teachers' views	
	Good	Best
<i>Students should learn vocabulary words by seeing them</i>	11	3
<i>Students should learn vocabulary words by hearing them</i>	9	4
<i>Students should learn vocabulary by doing something with the words</i>	7	7

Most teachers seemed to agree with the view student learning styles demands helping them learn by using a variety of means. As shown, 14 teachers agreed that vocabulary words should be presented in a way that students can see the words (*visual students*), 13 teachers that students should have exposure to hearing the words (*aural students*), and 14 teachers agreed that students' should do something with the words (*kinesthetic students*). However, at the time of the classroom observation, little evidence was seen in the use of such approaches. This was best shown by (a) the tendency to group students as a whole class (in the majority of cases; see section 2.3.4 below); (b) the lack of visual aids other than the board; (as discussed above, only 5 teachers used materials prepared by themselves and not all of them were visuals); (c) the use of the board effectively to catch students' attention; and (d) the limited amount of activities in which students were actually "doing something" for learning (like following and giving instructions, solving a problem, etc.). Teachers did their best to teach their classes, no doubt, and they were indeed aware of student differences, needs, and particular learning styles. Nevertheless, they needed to be able to deal with such differences effectively. This need was recurrently made evident by other findings related to the characteristics of students.

2.3.2 Student independence and autonomy

Another concern was how to foster student autonomy and independence in language learning. In fact, teachers saw this task as significant in their roles and responsibilities as teachers (see section 2.4.3 below). Table 19 shows some of the views regarding teachers' specific preferences to promote student autonomy inside and outside the classroom.

Table 19

Teacher views about promoting student autonomy and independence

Language teaching preference	Teachers' views	
	Good	Best
In class		
<i>As a teacher I like to explain everything to the students</i>	8	4
<i>I like to let the students find their own mistakes</i>	7	6
<i>I like to give students problems to work on</i>	10	4
At home		
<i>I like students to study English by themselves</i>	6	3
<i>Students should learn by reading newspapers, etc.</i>	11	
<i>Students should learn by watching TV in English</i>	8	6
<i>Students should learn by using cassettes</i>	6	5

Regarding preferences in the classroom, most teachers were fond of providing thorough explanations to the students. This explained and was consistent with the recurrent teacher-centered approaches in most classrooms and the tendency to organize instruction as a whole class (see section 2.3.4 below about student participation). The preference for student dependence on the teacher's explanation did not quite show agreement with the other three views which were more focused on how to promote and develop student autonomy: thirteen teachers stated they liked their students to self-correct, and fourteen teachers that they liked to integrate problem solving activities as part of the classroom activities.

The classroom observation shed significant light on the issue. About self-correction only in one case the teacher provided evidence of promoting student self-correction (errors, in general were an issue as shown in section 2.2.2 above). In relation to the students' talk about their interests; there were very few occasions on which teachers attempted to encourage students to do so. Finally, in spite of the teachers' stated preference for problem solving activities, only in one case there was evidence of the implementation of such activities (If I were you...).

Promoting student autonomy outside the classroom was another issue. As shown, for each of the four statements most teachers' views were *for* enabling students to reinforce the language outside the classroom, either alone or by using additional resources. Thus, nine teachers stated their preference for promoting student self-study skills, eleven for student practice by reading; fourteen for student practice by watching TV and eleven for student practice by listening to cassettes in English. Again, the attempts of the teachers' to conduct this kind of reinforcement outside the classroom were barely seen. In fact, in the classes observed, teachers' guidelines for students to carry out independent work (homework) were seen only in two cases (a writing task and a vocabulary exercise). However, none of these assignments was related to the additional resources stated in the teachers' preferences.

The information collected here revealed several important findings: (a) that the conscious views of the teachers were consistent with their concern and interest towards the students. That is to say, teachers genuinely wanted to do their best to promote student independence; (b) that the views of the teachers were once again, in disagreement with their performance in the classroom; (c) that teachers needed to go through an awareness raising process that helped them reach consistency between their thinking and actions and; (d) that teachers needed ideas to develop student autonomy for a more effective language learning process.

2.3.3 *Connection of the language to students' real life*

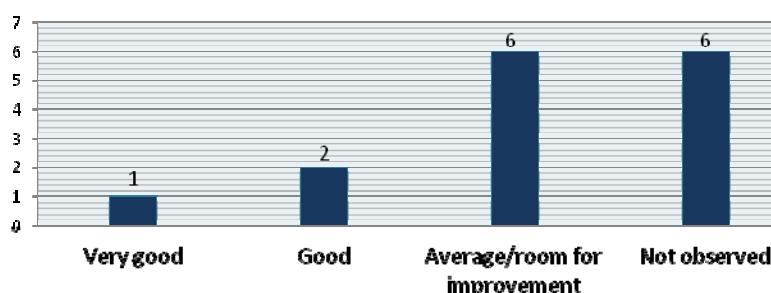
Another important aspect related to the students was the approaches of the teachers for relating language content to the reality of students. All the teachers stated that they liked to promote students' talk about their interest and, in general, promote motivating non-traditional activities. For instance, the statement *I like to take students out as a class to practice English* provoked seven responses *for* and eight responses *against* this practice. The obvious reason for

these answers is that taking large groups of students out of the classroom was very unlikely in most teachers' situational contexts. Some other statements related to the teachers' preference to promote student practice of the language outside the classroom: (a) in shops and daily life; (fifteen teachers) (b) talk to native speakers; (fourteen teachers) and, (c) talk to friends in English; (fifteen teachers).

On the whole, the teachers were aware of how important it is for students to use the language in real life in order to maximize their opportunities to practice it and learn it more effectively. In other pieces of information through the journals and the interviews, some teachers had expressed their concern about raising student awareness of the practical use of the language in real life. No doubt, teachers' awareness in this regard was high. Nevertheless, in practice, there was evidence that the teachers experienced difficulties in making the actual connection of class content to student reality. Figure 14 below shows how this issue was dealt with in the classroom observations.

Figure 14

Teacher ability to relate class content to student reality



As observed, in six cases teachers did not provide any evidence of relating class content to students' real life, and in six other cases the attempts of the teachers were considered as in need of improvement. Only three teachers provided evidence of making efforts and succeeding in this regard (the class content was related to a) holiday celebrations, b) health problems and c) movies and entertainment). The degree of success of such efforts was perceived through the reactions and levels of participation of students. In spite of the problems, the situation was optimistic as teachers had shown great interest in helping students learn through the connection of the language to their realities. Academic help in this regard was a feasible thing to do within the scope of this research project through the different components of the training program. Interestingly enough, all of the courses had (each within its particular focus) a strong focus on providing them with necessary skills and relevant knowledge to fulfill this particular need.

2.3.4 Student participation

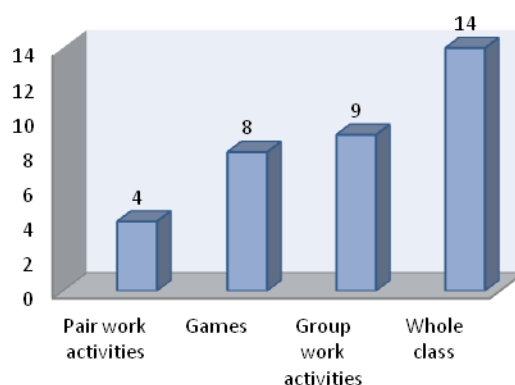
The perceptions of the teachers of how to promote student participation were quite in agreement with modern views in language teaching. They believed that it was important to

implement activities, such as pair work, group work and games in the classroom, all of which are aimed at fostering students' participation. This was reflected in their answers about the preferences for each kind of activity: use of games (n=12), pair work (n=15), group work (n=12) and whole class activities (n=11).

In order to contrast the information above with the teachers' actual actions, Figure 15 below describes how the issue of classroom activities was dealt with in the classroom observations. The prevailing way of grouping students was as a whole class (n=14 teachers). Group work activities were used in nine cases, games in eight cases and pair work activities in four cases.

Figure 15

Classroom activities

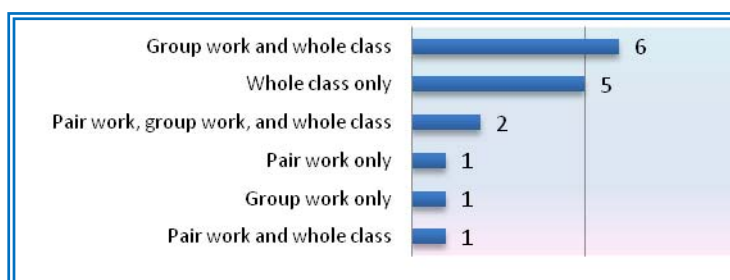


In the activities as a whole class, teachers were conducting instruction at all times: explaining, asking questions, clarifying, encouraging students' participation, and directing classroom activity in general. In such cases the Initiation-Response and Feedback (IRF) approach was used mostly to promote participation in the classroom (see chapter IV, 3.6.4). Group work activities were mostly to practice conversations that the students would volunteer to present in front of the class, to do vocabulary or grammar exercises or to do comprehension checks from a reading text. In the pair work activities observed students practiced dialogues, did information gap activities or brainstormed ideas together in a pre-reading activity. Games were used in eight cases, six of the teachers used *the hangman*, and two others used TPR activities.

The same information about classroom activities is presented in figure 16, but this time from the perspective of variety.

Figure 16

Variety in grouping students



As shown, the preferred approach was group work and whole class (n= 6) followed by whole class only (n=5). Pair work, group work and whole class work were combined in two cases, pair work only in one case, group work only in one case too, and the same thing happened with pair work and whole class combined.

The findings in the teachers' efforts to foster motivation and the state of student participation are presented in figures 17 and 18. The scale to measure the behavior had three categories, *very good*, *good*, and *room for improvement*. The criteria in the first case were teachers' behaviors, their attitudes towards students (whether enthusiastic, encouraging, outgoing) and the effectiveness of their actual actions in the classroom. In the second case the parameters were the students' behavior, (whether interested, apathetic, enthusiastic) and the degree of involvement in the classroom tasks. As shown there is a direct correlation between the ability of the teacher to motivate students and student actual participation. There was room for improvement in the majority of the cases in both aspects.

Figure 17

Teacher ability to motivate students

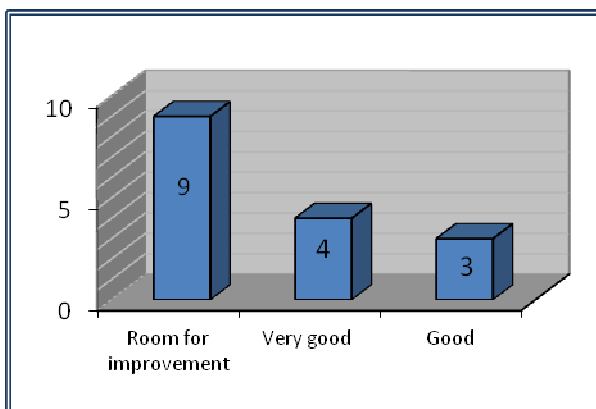
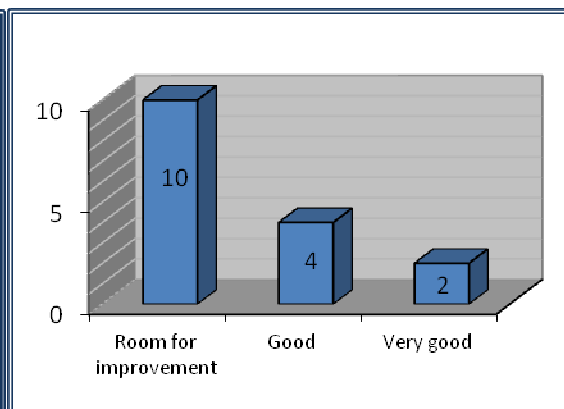


Figure 18

Student participation



From the information collected about student involvement and participation it was clear that the teachers did their best to motivate students and provide effective instruction through the use of a variety of approaches. Evidently, the teachers made efforts to match their beliefs with their behaviors in the classroom in this regard. Nevertheless, they were experiencing problems to do so particularly in:

- a. Assuming teacher-centered roles when organizing instruction as a whole class. Teachers needed to do less Teacher Talking Time (TTT) and provide more opportunities for Student Talking Time (TTT).
- b. Promoting students' interaction even when addressing them as a whole class; most of the interaction was from the teacher to the students.
- c. Effective ways of integrating pair work and group work (organization, instructions, timing) to maximize students' opportunities to practice the target language.

- d. Monitoring students' work to make sure they did the task properly (in many cases students were talking about something else, doing another task, or doing the activity in Spanish, and teachers were unaware of this).
- e. Giving a follow up to students' work to get feedback from them (there was a lack of comprehension checks when students finished a particular task).
- f. Effective ideas to integrate games (organization, instructions, timing) and expand their range of options.
- g. Providing variety of activities within a lesson's time, making smooth transitions from one activity to the other.

All of the above required that teachers expanded their knowledge and enhanced their reflection skills. It was perceived that the conditions were optimal to do so. All teachers had a rich field in the classroom where they had considerable freedom for decision making in light of the improvement of their language instruction.

2.4 Teachers' beliefs about themselves

This section will tackle the findings of the perceptions of teachers about specific aspects related to themselves as teachers. The information concentrates on their beliefs about four particular characteristics that, generally speaking, determine to a great extent the performance of language teachers (see a description of each of these aspects in the literature review, section 3). Such characteristics are: *teacher qualities and personality traits*, *teacher knowledge*, *teacher roles*, and *teacher motivation*. The information presented was mainly collected through the journals and the interviews but, again, the findings are enriched with information collected through the classroom observations and the surveys as well. The discussion is focused on the interpretation of the perceptions of the teachers which very often leads to connections with other pieces of information.

2.4.1 *Teacher qualities and personality traits*

One of the questions in the diary was focused on how the teachers viewed their main strengths as language teachers. A great deal of the information was focused on their qualities and personality traits. These are listed below, from the most to the less frequent answer.

- a) Sociability/good relationship with students/trust
- b) Enthusiasm/interest/positive thinking
- c) Sense of humour
- d) Self-confidence
- e) Collaborative attitude
- f) Dynamism
- g) Flexibility and open-mindedness
- h) Creativity
- i) Patience
- j) Responsibility

The teachers' views about their own qualities did not differ from what was discussed in the literature review about effective teachers (see section 3.1). There were five qualities that teachers placed on top as important traits of their work as teachers. Teachers identified *good relationships* (n=11) and *enthusiasm/interest towards teaching/positive thinking* (n=10) as their main strengths. They also identified *sense of humour* (n=8), *self-confidence*, (n=7) and, finally, a *collaborative attitude* (n=6).

That the teachers identified their qualities and personality traits was very important for the research as it contributed to characterize teachers from their own perspective. Certainly, they were a group of people very much focused on fulfilling their work as teachers in the best possible way. Their vocation for teaching and humanistic interest towards students was obvious. In fact, their propensity to give students a high priority was shown once again as most of them placed *good relationship with students* (n=11) on top. An interesting piece of information was that few teachers identified *open mindedness/flexibility* (n=4) as part of their qualities. As discussed in the literature review (4.2.1) such qualities are very necessary attributes for the development of critical thinking skills. It was perceived that most teachers did actually have these attributes. This was best evidenced by the very fact of their integration to the postgraduate course, and by their attitudes and behaviours throughout the development of their training process. Teachers did not know it consciously, though. Therefore, one of the tasks to be addressed would be to help teachers make these qualities evident, nurture them and enhance them throughout the development of the teacher training course (evidence of teacher change in this regard is found in stage three; section 3.2.4, 3.3.5 and 3.8.4).

2.4.2 Teacher knowledge

The question in the journals about the weaknesses and strengths of teachers provided a number of contributions focused on the teachers' knowledge. For this reason, there are recurrent references here to the kinds of teacher knowledge base as presented and discussed in the literature review (3.4). As shown in table 20 below, five categories of knowledge emerged.

Table 20

Teacher knowledge

CATEGORY	STRENGTHS	TC	WEAKNESSES	TC
Knowledge of methodological issues	Ability to use different kinds of methodology	M	Not enough ideas about teaching techniques and strategies to conduct language instruction	D, F, K, E, P
	Good at teaching grammar	F	Difficulties to deal with large classes effectively	B, C, E, F, H, M, O
Total № of teachers		2		11
Knowledge of materials design and implementation	Ability to use materials for teaching in real time	F	Lack of training to design own materials/Lack of ideas to design authentic and updated materials/ Need to create or develop materials, but not enough time	C, H, E, J, M, N, O, p
	Ability to create own material linking it to students' reality	E		
	Ability to use additional complementary materials and resources	P		
Total № of teachers		3		8
Knowledge of lesson planning and/or time management skills	Lessons planned thoroughly	F, J, P, O	Problems in lesson planning in terms of: Objectives formulation/Time constraints in the classroom/ Time constraints outside the classroom	A, J, C, E, F, N, P
Total № of teachers		4		7
Knowledge of how to optimize the use of the target language		-	Not knowing how to use English in class all the time/ How to encourage students to speak/ How to help students communicate in the target language	L, N, P, T, G, K, J, M, E
Total № of teachers		---		9
Knowledge of how to deal with the particular characteristics of students	Ability to motivate students	H	Not knowing how to raise students' motivation/to deal with students boredom and tiredness	N, O, P, D, J, P
	Awareness of students' needs	A, C, B, D, F, H, I, J, N		
	Ability to help students become autonomous learners	M	How to motivate students in the middle of extreme classroom conditions	B
	Ability to link class activities to students' everyday life	O	How to deal with students' behavior problems/How to catch students' attention	I, I
Total № of teachers		12	How to deal with mixed-ability students	P
Total № of teachers		12		10

- *Knowledge of methodological issues*

The problem of methodology is present everywhere in the first and second data collected: from the identification of the teachers' contextual problems, (section 1.1.5), through their teaching views and performance in the classroom (section 2.2), to the perception of how to nurture their teacher development process (section 2.5.4). Only two teachers identified strengths in their methodological knowledge, one of them in the range of methodological strategies and the other in the ability to teach grammar. The great majority (n=11) expressed their needs to improve, particularly to expand their teaching techniques and be able to deal with large classes more effectively. The teachers identified gaps in their *pedagogical content knowledge* which prevented them from enhancing their *personal practical knowledge*. Throughout the development of their training process major efforts were carried out to help teachers fulfill these specific needs. Key components to achieve this aim were: *Principles and Methods in TEFL*, *Techniques and strategies in TEFL 1*, and *Techniques and Strategies in TEFL 2*.

- *Knowledge of materials design and implementation*

Only three teachers identified strengths in materials design and implementation. The abilities of these teachers with materials focused on adequate use of materials in time, design of materials taking into account student reality, and the use of complementary materials. However, many other teachers (n=8) considered the issue of materials design and implementation a significant gap in their knowledge to be able to teach their classes effectively. In the classroom observation few teachers provided evidence of using their own materials (n=5) which is consistent with the teachers' identification of their own weaknesses. At least three kinds of knowledge were involved here: *contextual knowledge*, *pedagogical content knowledge* and *practical knowledge*. The courses *Technological Resources in TEFL*, *Designing Materials and Planning Units of Work*, and *Lesson Planning in TEFL* were aimed at helping teachers improve in this area.

- *Knowledge of lesson planning and/or time management skills*

Only four teachers identified strengths in their ability to plan their lessons and the strengths were focused for the most part on careful and systematic planning. On the other hand, seven other teachers identified limitations in their ability to plan the lesson, particularly in objectives formulation and issues of time (inside and outside the classroom). Through the interviews it was found out that most teachers planned their lessons using their own format (n=11) and only in four cases they used the format provided by the institution. Thus, there was ample room for improvement in this area as teachers had considerable freedom in their approaches to planning. The kinds of knowledge involved here were again *pedagogical content knowledge*, *contextual knowledge* and *practical knowledge*. The course *Lesson Planning in TEFL* would help teachers to enhance their skills in this area.

- *Knowledge of how to optimize the use of the target language*

No teacher identified strengths in this area. On the other hand, nine teachers stated that they needed to increase their knowledge in order to be able to use the target language in class effectively. Another concern was how to encourage the students to use the target language in class, and how to help them use it for communication purposes. These weaknesses identified by teachers are consistent with their beliefs regarding the nature and role of the target language. Their concern to help students use the language in class corresponds with their views that language learning improves if used for communication (n=14) and that students should be speaking from the very early stages of their learning process (n=9). On the other hand, the classroom observations provided evidence that is consistent with this need as well. Ways to optimize students' use of the target language, (pair work and group work), clarity of instructions, and teachers' effective use of the target language (authentic, real-life like language) were all areas in which the teachers needed improvement. Thus, it was clear the implications of this finding mainly for the teacher *content knowledge* (defined as the knowledge of the subject matter; its use and usage) and for other kinds of knowledge, *pedagogical*, *practical* and *contextual*, which were related to the issue as well. In all courses in the teacher training course the trainers would use approaches intended to serve as models of effective use of the target language in the classroom. Likewise pedagogical suggestions to optimize student practice in the oral skills were to take place in the module of *Techniques and strategies in TEFL 2*.

- *Knowledge of how to deal with the particular characteristics of students*

The identification of weaknesses and strengths in the teacher knowledge regarding the particular characteristics of students continue to reveal that students were the teachers' main motivational source. The strengths identified were focused on the ability to raise student motivation (n=1), awareness of student needs (n=9), ability to foster student autonomy (n=1) and ability to link class content to student real lives (n=1). Weaknesses, on the other hand, were focused on not being able to motivate students (n=7). Students' boredom, tiredness and contextual conditions were mentioned as the main causes. Other weaknesses were not knowing how to deal with behavior problems or catch students' attention (n=2), and not knowing how to deal with mixed-ability students (n=1).

It was interesting to find out that the strengths identified by the teachers were primarily focused on their awareness of student needs. The information in the section of teacher beliefs and performance regarding students (2.3 above) is virtually filled with findings that show the great concern of teachers about students (needs, preferences, autonomy, and the like). Certainly, the teacher awareness of student need was high and teachers knew it. Nevertheless, in practice, they needed to find the mechanisms to translate such awareness into effective procedures, tasks, and activities in the classroom to help students learn the language effectively. On the other hand there was the issue of motivation. One teacher identified strengths in motivating students but for

seven others motivation was a major problem. This information correlates with the findings of the classroom observed. In the case of nine observations the ability of the teachers to motivate students was considered as in need of improvement. Likewise, there was room for improvement in student participation in ten cases. A specific module that would focus on these issues was the course: *Teaching EFL with a learner-centered approach*.

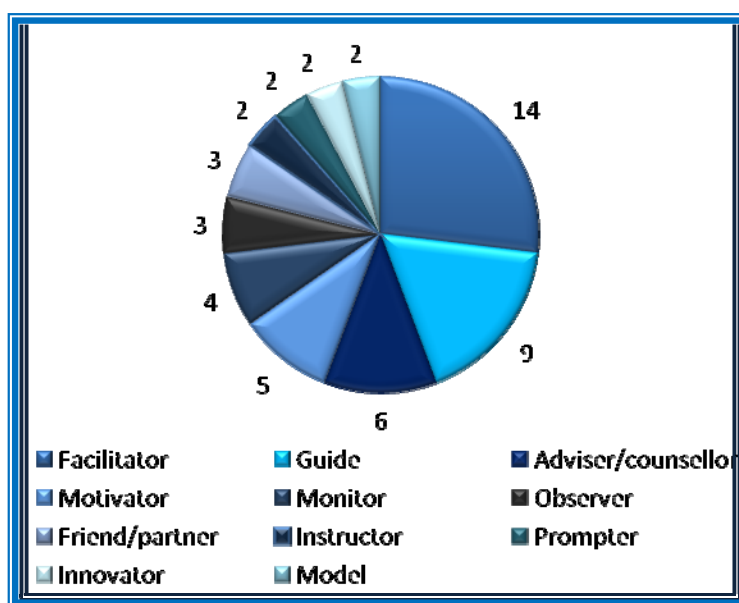
The findings in this section revealed that the teachers were quite aware of the areas in which their knowledge base had significant gaps. All the areas they identified: methodology, materials design and implementation, lesson planning, the use of the target language, and how to deal with the particular characteristics of students corresponded to the areas in which significant shortcomings were detected in the classroom observations. The teachers' self-identification of gaps in their knowledge base validates these findings. Moreover, this information served as the confirmation of the relevance and accuracy of the courses selected for the improvement of the teachers.

2.4.3 Teacher roles

This section will focus on the perception of teachers about their roles as language teachers. As discussed in the literature review (3.5) the ability of the teacher to play different roles in the classroom is a key factor for effective language learning. Thus, it was important to find out the teachers' opinions in this regard. In one of the surveys teachers were given the statement: "Teachers should be facilitators rather than directors". All of them agreed with this view. In order to corroborate this perception, through a written task in the course *Principles and Methods in TEFL*, the teachers were asked to provide five roles that they believed the language teacher should play in the classroom. Being a facilitator was one of the roles they mentioned in the majority of cases. Their answers are presented in figure 19 below

Figure 19

The roles of the language teacher



As shown, the most recurrent role mentioned was the one of *facilitator* (n=14), followed by *guide* (n=9), *adviser* (n=6), *model* (n=9) and *monitor* (n=4). As teachers were definitely fond of the role of facilitators it was important to find out what the role involved for them. In order to do this they were asked to provide a full description of teachers' responsibilities when being facilitators. The most important points of their descriptions are presented below. According to their views when teachers are facilitators in the classroom:

- Learning is focused on students
 - Students are given the chance to participate actively.
 - There is more student-student interaction than teacher-student interaction.
 - Students interact with the teacher and with the other students.
 - The teacher focuses his/her teaching on the students' learning.
 - The teacher is not the principal person in the classroom, the students are the center.
- Student autonomy is promoted
 - Students get the knowledge on their own
 - The teacher allows students to have some freedom.
 - Most of the responsibility to learn is based on the students.
 - The teacher has to help the students to learn the knowledge by doing.
 - The teacher teaches the class, but allows students to work by themselves with their own creativity and independence.
- Teachers provide the tools for effective learning
 - In this role the teacher just facilitates students' work.
 - The teacher guides and facilitates students' learning process.
 - The teacher makes learning easier and more meaningful through the different activities developed in class.
 - The teacher answers whenever the students don't understand something.
 - The teacher facilitates all the information related to the topic of the class.
 - The teacher is always doing something different. He/she creates many things with few materials.
 - The teacher gives instructions and the students produce.
 - The teacher facilitates the means and tools to learn the foreign language.
 - The teacher gives students enough tools and encourages them to improve.
 - The teacher helps students through the whole class development and offers techniques to apply and steps to follow.
 - The teacher facilitates learning by moving around the class talking just when necessary to make sure students are doing what they are supposed to do.

From this categorization it is easily seen that the teachers had an accurate perception of what involves being a facilitator in the classroom. Certainly, *focusing learning on the students*, *promoting their autonomy*, and *providing them with the tools for effective learning* are all main features of the role of teachers as facilitators. But, to what extent the views of the teachers were consistent with their actions? As discussed in section 2.3.4 in the classroom observations most teachers were seen as *directors* rather than *facilitators* (presenting information, explaining, clarifying, assigning responsibilities; and the like). Clearly, the teachers' beliefs were in disagreement with their behaviors in this regard. There were several possible explanations of this contradiction : (a) contextual problems like limitations of class size and timing the former prevented teacher from moving (not in all cases) the latter from carrying out all activities that the

teacher had planned; teachers were seen in many cases as *in a rush*; (b) teachers liked the role of facilitators because it is a popular one, but they had not yet internalized it as part of their beliefs systems (c) teachers did not have enough information about how to play the role in practice. Each of this might have been the cause of the problem. Nevertheless, whatever the reason, it was crucial to raise teachers' awareness of the inconsistencies between their beliefs and practice in this regard, which would be the next step of the research project.

2.4.4 Teacher motivation

In the journals, the teachers were asked to provide information about their main motivational sources: the kind of satisfactions they found in teaching, and the elements that caused dissatisfaction in their work as teachers. The findings are presented below:

- *Sources of job satisfaction*

- a. A sense of personal and professional fulfilment

One of the main motivational sources of teachers was a deep feeling of personal and professional achievement. Most teachers showed enthusiasm and eagerness towards teaching as it was the area they had chosen to work on. Some of the comments that evidenced this finding were “I enjoy my classes, I enjoy my work”; or “day by day my enthusiasm for it (teaching) grows...despite the limitations that sometimes are like obstacles...however...I go on”; or “I love to teach; that's my life. This I do, this I have” This sense of fulfilment was definitely a key element for the teacher improvement as teachers liked their work in the first place. They were naturally motivated to continue to develop professionally.

- b. Achieving language teaching-learning goals

For the teachers to be able to achieve their class objectives was a considerable source of motivation too. Most of them expressed that seeing students' putting into practice the language taught and knowing that they were learning to communicate in a different language was something that encourages them to keep going and improving. This finding once again confirms the discussion in section 3.7 of the literature review that student learning outcomes exert significant influence on teacher change and development.

- c. The contribution to students' success and professionalization

Another source of satisfaction was their contribution to the professional lives of students. For teachers, as already mentioned; the students' success was their own success. They perceived language learning as a significant way of helping students succeed in their professional formation. As two of the teachers stated: “it is rewarding to help students open their minds by communicating in a different language” and, “that is important for me, providing my students with helpful tools, the same way that has happened to me”

- d. Students' perceptions

Students' opinions of their work were also very important for teachers. Counting on their respect, recognition and trust was something that they valued highly. Moreover, students'

acknowledgement motivated them to go beyond the mere act of transmitting knowledge. They felt the responsibility of being models that should also transmit values and moral principles.

e. The relationship with students

Most teachers stated that the relationship with students was also a significant source of satisfaction. An interesting aspect worth mentioning is that one of the reasons why teachers valued this relationship was because of the collaborative nature of the relationship. It is worth mentioning here that an effective teacher development process, as described in the literature review, is characterized by collaboration at different levels and with different people. Within this perspective, collaboration with students is crucial (see lit. review section 4.1.6). The teachers' comments provided evidence of this reciprocal interchange "knowing that students are learning the language more and that the benefit is mutual"; "being able to share experience and knowledge"; "I am not dissatisfied with my teaching because meanwhile I am teaching I am developing my knowledge".

- *Sources of job dissatisfaction*

a. Problems with students

As discussed above, students were a source of satisfaction for teachers when they succeeded. Nevertheless, they were also a source of dissatisfaction when things did not work the way the teachers planned or expected. The main aspects that caused frustration were: *lack of motivation, learning difficulties, individual differences, and academic failure*. From the comments of the teachers it was evident that their concerns with student performance were directly linked to the effectiveness of their own performance. As one of the teachers put it "I still have to make classes more dynamic and know how to motivate students; some of them fail"

This finding unfolded several important aspects: (a) that teachers were actually aware of most of the problems they faced with the students; (b) that they were not satisfied with their ways of dealing with such problems; (c) that this awareness needed to expand to the realization of the contradictions between their beliefs and practice; (d) that through reflection (journals writing) teachers themselves had identified some of the areas where they needed to improve; (e) that they were willing to do what was in their hands to do so, and, finally; (e) that all of these problems were within the teacher range of action.

b. Problems with the situational context

Not surprisingly, most teachers mentioned the issue of contextual conditions as one of the major sources of dissatisfaction in their teaching practice. Their context was the ever-existing problem. A generalized sense of frustration was perceived in teachers' answers because the conditions provided for language learning were not optimal. Their complaints were focused on the lack of social recognition to their work as teachers, (e.g. salary issues), the lack of institutional support to improve the area, (e.g. teacher training) the lack of adequate conditions

for teaching (e.g. materials, groups size, classroom conditions, time and length of instruction), and decision making policies (e.g. for the issue of materials and programs).

The dissatisfaction of the teachers with their situational contexts was somehow expressed with a feeling of powerlessness and disillusion as they felt that problems were far beyond their reach. To put it in one of the teachers' words "...sometimes I reflect on the kind of educational system we have. I can't see any interest of the government in improving the teaching processes" Teachers were right in the way they perceived these contextual problems as many of such problems were not in their hands to solve. Nevertheless, as discussed elsewhere there were many areas where teachers could make changes for the better at the level that was within their range of action: the classroom.

2.5 Teacher development as perceived by teachers

One of the questions in the journal was: *where am I in my professional development?* The purpose of this question was to generate the teachers' reflection on what teacher development meant for them, and how they viewed their own growth and progress as teachers. Thus, the findings and discussion presented in this section focus on the teachers' insights in this concern. The teachers' perceptions regarding three major issues will be tackled here: *the teachers' stage of professional development; the teachers' attitude towards learning and the teachers' attitude towards change.*

2.5.1 *Stage of professional development*

Many of the perceptions of teachers' about their development were focused on its ongoing, indefinite nature along their professional lives. Most teachers defined themselves as being in the early stages, and expressed their willingness to move on. Moreover, they highlighted the fact that teacher development is their responsibility, and as such, it is a personal process of discovery, growth and improvement. Some of the comments that best reflect these views are presented below.

- *It's difficult to define which stage I am now...but...I'm discovering myself...what kind of teacher I am.*
- *I, as a professional, am responsible for my own progress and growth...and always ready to move forward.*
- *My teaching experience is little, but professionalism is my responsibility. I can say I will get better with time.*
- *My professional development is still in progress, because we are meant to form ourselves during our entire careers.*
- *I feel satisfied with my job, with what I do, but I know I still have plenty of things to learn about language teaching and learning...it is an endless process.*
- *My professional development is in its early stages due to my little experience in the teaching field.*

2.5.2 *The teachers' attitude towards learning*

Teachers showed a receptive and open attitude towards learning. So far, they had shown a great identification with students in many senses. Their comments about the stage of their professional development shed some more light on the issue. Teachers felt learners themselves. As discussed in the literature review a receptive attitude towards learning is an attribute of critical thinkers and, critical thinking is, in turn, an important condition for teacher reflection (see 4.2.1). The following are some of the teachers' comments in this regard.

- *I consider that I am at the beginning of my professional development. I feel that every day I get a new idea to improve my teaching practice.*
- *I am at an intermediate stage, but I have too much more to learn.*
- *I still need more academic preparation to increase and develop more teaching skills.*
- *I am starting as a professor; I need to learn much more.*
- *Every day I have the chance to learn more and now I'm learning to be a learner, so I can be a good teacher as well.*
- *I have increased my knowledge and experience as a professional, but I still need to learn more.*
- *I try to do my best every day that is why I am in this course, to increase my knowledge.*
- *My knowledge is now based on the training I got at the university, but we have to innovate, be creative, and learn more about how to teach.*
- *I am committed and eager to learn and give more of what I know...even though I might not have quite enough experience to be considered an effective teacher; I am giving my best ... to improve my teaching skills so my students can all benefit from what I know.*
- *Since this is a process, it is important to know that we need to get better and better constantly that is why it is learning and learning never ends.*

2.5.3 *The teachers' attitude towards change*

The last aspect that emerged from the teachers' comments refers to their positive attitude towards change to be able to develop professionally. Clearly, the possibility of improvement through change was something that most teachers were eager to do. Moreover, it seemed that teachers saw change as an imperative in order to be able to deal with the current demands of their work. The following comments provide consistent evidence of this third aspect.

- *I think we as teachers need to keep changing and getting better, because we always learn something new.*
- *I feel all of this (the postgraduate course) is a little difficult for me, but I am going to continue to learn how to make my teaching better and, if it is, necessary to make changes that help students to learn easier.*
- *It is necessary to be with open and critical thinking to make changes if they are necessary.*
- *I am doing what I like and what I got prepared for. But we have to keep changing... a professional keeps going never stays the same...*
- *The great demands and competitiveness in the world we are living in, the new technologies, the cultural changes, and scientific advances that are taking place nowadays all over the world*

demand and endless renovation of school: that' why it urges the need of permanent training. Few or none of such opportunities are offered to EFL teachers.

- *Teaching English as a Foreign Language is not an easy task even more when we as teachers don't have the necessary training and means to develop or work well. Nonetheless, we can improve it by starting to analyze our personal conditions and capabilities. Then, we should take steps which permit us achieve what we lack in order to offer a better service.*

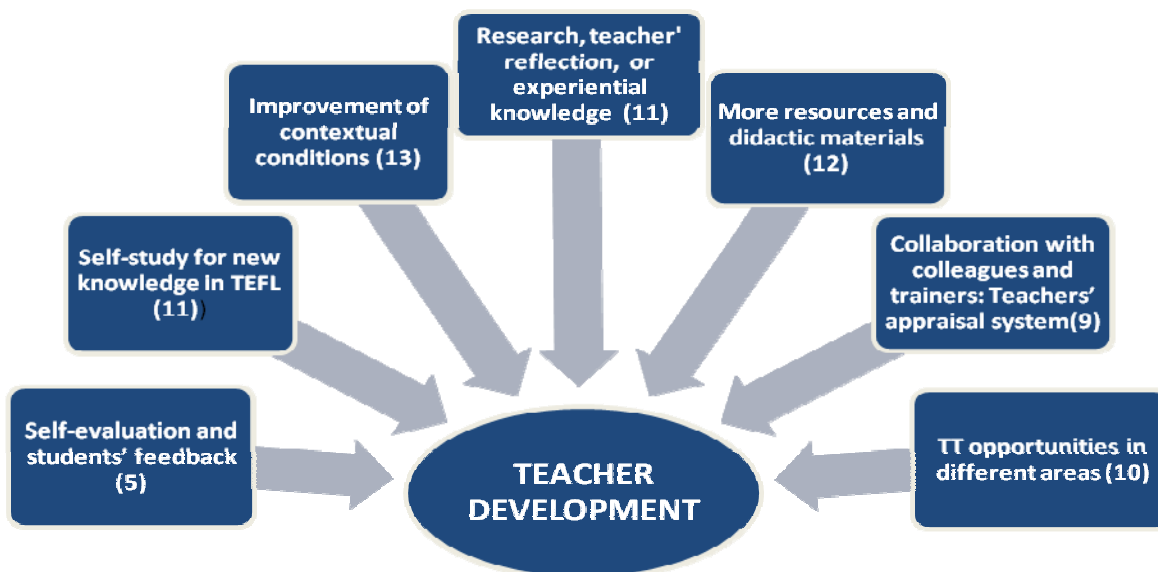
The teachers' positive attitude towards their professional improvement through learning and change revealed a high possibility of generating the proper conditions for sustainable development. The important thing would be to identify the kinds of procedures to follow or steps to take that could lead teachers towards this ambitious aim. The further information provided by teachers in the development of the research would shed considerable light on this issue (see 3.2.1 Conceptualization of Reflective Teaching in Stage 3 below).

2.5.4 Necessary conditions for teacher development

Teachers were asked to state the kind of steps that should be taken to nurture and promote their teacher development consistently. Their contributions are shown in figure 20 below.

Figure 20

Conditions for teacher development



The conditions mentioned were quite related to the problems they stated at the beginning of the research project (section 1.1 limitations and problems for teacher development). To some extent it was logical to find that for each problem stated there was an equivalent solution. Thus, for the problem of curriculum, materials and didactic resources (n=14) they would say more resources and didactic materials (n=12), for the problem of lack of investment in education (n=7) they would claim for improvement in the contextual conditions (n=13), which involved the problems of large classes, time and length of instruction, teachers' financial recognitions, and the like. Nonetheless, it was not the purpose of the present research project to look for non-

existent and impractical solutions to real problems. Rather, the major aim was to find out realistic alternatives that emerged from the teachers' own perspective which is indeed the nature of the conditions provided by the teachers in figure 20 above. They will be discussed below along with some of the quotes from the teachers.

- By conducting research, reflecting on teaching, or by experiential knowledge

The teachers were used to deal with problems on their own. Their experiential knowledge had been so far an important source of knowledge. So they had come to an alternative that pretty much matched the autonomous way in which they had been dealing with problems up to the moment, because of the constraints posed by context. They presented a new element though, the element of reflection. Chances were that such an element had been the result of the training process they were going through.

- *It is necessary to be with open and critical thinking to make changes if they are necessary.*
- *Observing students' needs purposes and reasons for learning, and then create an atmosphere (adequate) for their learning.*
- *...the best way to improve ...is through teacher's reflection and research.*
- *I think that every time I learn from my mistakes I am changing and will also try to improve, that is very important.*
- *I think I can improve by overcoming my own mistakes and better myself by learning every day.*

- By updating and putting into practice new knowledge learned through self-study

This is another condition proposed by the teachers that matched the independent way in which they had got used to look for ideas for teaching. This strategy that had emerged from the teachers themselves to cope with their contextual problems was certainly a key element to take into account for the purpose of the teachers' sustainable development and change.

- *Being open to the new trends and moves in the literature about teaching-learning process...is a necessity in my life as a teacher.*
- *I would have to read more about methodologies and teaching approaches and learn how to apply the procedures properly.*

- By having teacher training opportunities in different fields

The teachers acknowledged the benefits of the training course as they stated how beneficial it was for them and how it was helping them to improve:

- *I think the best way to improve my language teaching is by putting into practice what I am learning in this course.*
- *The way I have to improve my language teaching is through this kind of course.*
- *Teacher training opportunities are very good and helpful for teachers, and for me is the best way to improve my teaching.*

Moreover, it was perceived that the training process they were going through was helping them to identify areas of further training. Some of the areas they mentioned were: *special didactics, classroom dynamics and teaching techniques, advanced conversation* for the

improvement of the spoken abilities, *linguistics and literature, curriculum design, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Students' Portfolios* and *Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL)*. Addressing all of these training needs was certainly not within the scope of the present research project. Nevertheless, it was interesting to corroborate how the exposure to pertinent training had made teachers realize further training areas.

- By sharing with colleague and trainers, by self-evaluation and through students' feedback

Sharing was also a new element perceived as emerging from their teacher training course, and the opportunity to reflect on their teaching both individually and with their peers. Again, carrying out joint efforts with their peers was viewed as a potential way of promoting and sustaining teachers' development. Likewise, the integration of self-evaluation and student evaluation systems were without a doubt powerful means for fostering change and improvement in the classroom.

- *...if I have a doubt about any topic I can ask another teacher about it.*
- *By putting into practice what I have learnt from my professors and other people too.*
- *It could be a good idea to ask a colleague to observe one of your classes in order to get another point of view.*
- *How can I know my mistakes? By asking students so that they evaluate my work with a survey.*
- *How can I improve my language teaching? It's simple, by evaluating how good I am doing in my teaching.*

To sum up, important aspects related to the complex world of the teachers emerged from this initial exploratory stage. These aspects, focused on the initial state of the teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning and about the students, which were then contrasted with their actual practice in the classroom. In addition, the teachers provided valuable information about the way they viewed themselves, their qualities, roles, main motivations and how they perceived their development. Furthermore, the teachers provided insights of what they considered optimal conditions for their professional growth, improvement and change. The most important conclusions of the stage and their implications for the research project will be presented in the next section.

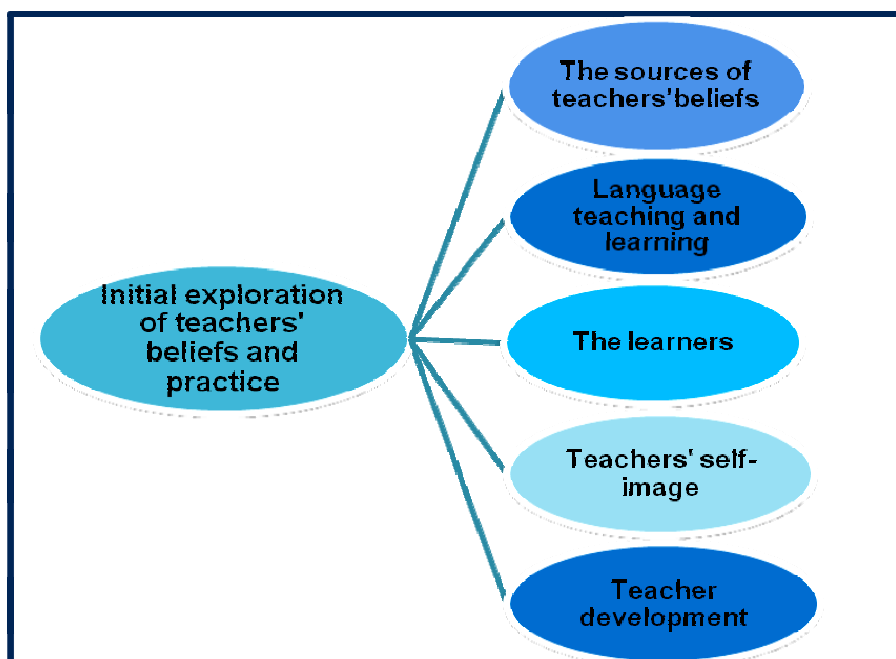
2.6 Main findings from stage two: Initial exploration of teachers' beliefs and practice

There were two main objectives to answer the research questions in this stage. The first was to explore the original state of the teachers' beliefs about language teaching and learning and the effect that such beliefs exerted on their performance in the classroom. The second objective was to know the teachers' perceptions about themselves, their qualities, knowledge, perceived role, the stage of their own professional development and the kind of conditions they believed should be in place in order to foster their teacher development. On the whole, the two main objectives

of the stage were fulfilled. The major aspects about teachers' beliefs and actions that emerged in this stage are presented in figure 21

Figure 21

Initial exploration of teachers' beliefs and practice



As shown, the five major aspects were directly connected with the teachers' practice: the sources of teachers' beliefs, language teaching and learning, the learners, the teachers' self-image, and the teachers' perception of their own professional development. The main findings in each of these aspects will be presented below.

2.6.1 The main findings about the sources of the teachers' beliefs

Probably one of the most salient aspects of this exploration was the major influence of context on the teachers' beliefs, an issue highlighted in the literature review (see section 1). The findings in this stage clearly show how the process of teacher development could not be separated from their context particularly because the teachers' beliefs were intrinsically related to it. This major influence is best reflected by the significant interconnections of the findings about the teachers' beliefs with other pieces of information where context is an issue. For instance, all the information about the sources of the teachers' beliefs is related in one way or another to the identification of contextual problems (1.1) and to the optimal conditions for teacher development (2.5.4). Not only did context determine the perceptions of teachers of the problems they faced, but in a similar fashion context also shaped their responses as a way of dealing with such problems. What follows are the aspects that evidence this major influence.

1. Teacher training

Teacher training was identified as a major contextual problem, as a source of teaching beliefs and, later on, it was defined as an optimal condition for teacher development. This

identification clearly revealed the teachers' acknowledgement of their training as their major source of ideas for teaching. However, at the same time it showed the teachers' awareness of the areas where they had significant problems (contextual problem) and their claim of the need to solve these problems (optimal contextual conditions for an effective teacher development process).

The information confirmed the shortcomings of the training provided to the teachers at the PRESET stage (situation that was discussed in the main conclusions of stage one in 1.3 above) which were made more evident in the classroom observations. The teachers struggled to achieve consistency between their beliefs and actions to provide effective language instruction in several important areas of the process (see conclusions in this regard in 2.6.2 below). In trying to put together the knowledge they had learned in their initial training, such shortcomings were revealed (the specific conclusions of the limitations in the knowledge base of teachers will be presented in section 2.6.4 below).

2. The awareness of student needs

The fact that the teachers regarded students as their second main source of beliefs was also interlinked with their contextual problems. Students were a major source of concern (section 1.1.2) and the teachers acknowledged the influence of the students in providing them with insights for teaching. That is, as a response to the contextual problems posed by the characteristics of students (interlinked with other major problems like large classes) the teachers had developed great awareness of the students' needs (2.4.2). Thus, they regarded their teaching beliefs as emerging from this kind of interaction with the students. This explains the frustration of the teachers for not being able to provide effective instruction. Teachers did not lack awareness; they lacked effective ideas and specific training to deal with the problems.

3. The teachers' response to contextual constraints

The identification of experiential knowledge and independent search for knowledge as sources of beliefs revealed the teachers' skills in dealing with the constraining influence of context. Unconsciously, the teachers looked for ways to enhance their skills and knowledge through the process of teaching itself (trial and error), asking colleagues, searching for information of the web, and reading books, in order to supply for their training needs. This was considered as a direct result of the need to go beyond the skills and knowledge that their context had provided them with. Moreover, the fact that teachers mentioned self-study and experiential knowledge as a way of optimizing their teacher development processes (section 2.5.3) revealed a measure with which they were quite familiarized. Such an internal agenda, characteristic of a teacher development process (see chapter IV, 2.4) was something that teachers should consciously realize and continue to explore and optimize.

4. *The teachers' previous experience as language learners*

A surprising finding about the teachers' beliefs was that they did not consider their experience as language learners a significant source of beliefs. Only two teachers regarded such experiences as having some kind of influence in the way they actually taught, and one of them with a very critical stance. One thing was actually true, most teachers (with a few exceptions in some areas) held non-traditional views regarding language learning and teaching. The times when they would assume traditional roles (e.g. teacher-centered approaches) was perceived as being caused by a number of factors such as the lack of consistency between their beliefs and actions, lack of pedagogical ideas to teach in a more effective way and /or the direct influence of context (e.g. large classes, little time for instruction). The reason that teachers did not consciously regard their language learning experience as having some influence on their beliefs was quite simple: the teachers' high awareness of their situational context. They acknowledged and criticized the constraints in the system and the methodology used was one of the most significant ones. Teachers' experiences as language learners might have had an influence on the teachers' beliefs and actions, but there was a conscious rejection to such influence.

2.6.2 *Main findings about the teachers' beliefs and actions regarding teaching and learning*

As highlighted above most teachers held modern views about language learning and teaching in several aspects. In some cases such views were consistent with their actions. Nevertheless, in the great majority of the cases there were serious inconsistencies. What follows are the main conclusions in this regard. For each area there is a brief description of the situation along with the implications of the findings for the research.

- About the goal of language learning

Most teachers believed that the goal of language learning is communication. This view about language teaching and learning did not quite correspond to their actions as in the classroom observation few activities had a really communicative purpose.

Implications: (1) The teachers needed ideas on how to expand their range of communicative activities in the classroom. (2) It was also necessary to raise their awareness regarding the communicative nature of the language and the inconsistencies between their beliefs and practice in this regard.

The teachers agreed that students should be speaking the language since very early stages. They showed consistency between their beliefs and actions as several of them used the target language most of the time. The problem here was the use of unauthentic language (with a few exceptions). In several other cases the teachers used immediate translations from one language to the other and, in one case; the means of communication was Spanish mostly.

Implications: (1) The teachers needed to be aware of the usefulness of providing students with as much exposure to authentic language as much as possible. (2) It was necessary to bring into

discussion the negative effect of translations on student language proficiency. (3) The teachers would benefit from expanding their strategies for effective use of the target language in the classroom

- About error correction

The teachers believed that meaning is more important than form and that during oral practice students should not be corrected. But, they also believed that errors should be corrected in early stages and that grammatically correct sentences are important in speaking. Clearly the teachers were divided between meaning and form and accuracy and fluency. The dilemma was made more evident in the classroom observations as errors were not corrected in the majority of cases.

Implications: (1) The teachers' awareness regarding when and how to correct students' errors needed to increase. (2) It was necessary for teachers to realize that their beliefs regarding errors did not always correspond to their behaviors and decisions in the classrooms. (3) The teachers needed to expand their classroom techniques for error correction.

- About materials

The teachers showed fondness of using the textbook, having students write everything on their notebooks and the use of pictures, films and videos. The classroom observations showed that teachers would follow the activities in the books one after the other. Very often the teacher used the board to write information that then the students would copy on their notebooks. Only in few cases teachers used materials that they had designed on their own. The stated preference of resources, such as videos and films contrasted with the practice, as no teacher used these resources. Tape recorders were used in a few cases and there was room for improvement in all of them.

Implications: (1) The teachers acknowledged the benefits of using recorded materials but lacked confidence in integrating learning activities of this kind. (2) It was necessary to provide them with the skills, knowledge and strategies (pre, while, post stages) to be able to use equipment and recorded materials more confidently in their classrooms. (3) The teachers needed help to be able to design and implement their own materials, which, in turn, would help them be less dependent on the book, the notebook, and the board.

- About teaching the language areas

The teachers showed preference for listening and speaking activities over reading and writing. In the case of the language sub-skills, pronunciation was on top followed by vocabulary and grammar. Nevertheless their practice showed agreement only in the teaching of vocabulary and grammar. The less taught areas were listening and writing followed by speaking. Reading was problematic in the sense that there was no full exploitation of the texts. Pronunciation was only taught through repetition. Conversation practice was often dealt with through mechanical dialogues in pairs or groups; (students would be translating, or speaking Spanish) often with

demonstrations in front of the class. Grammar was taught structurally and, in many cases, the classroom activity revolved around the particular grammar point for a long time.

On the other hand teachers, showed fondness of teaching integrated skills, a modern view in language teaching. This time they showed consistency between their beliefs and actions. In several cases the teachers made attempts to teach with an integrated approach (2 teachers=5 areas, 9 teachers=3 areas, 1 teacher= 2 areas, 3 teachers= 1 area). Most teachers carried out tremendous efforts to provide effective instruction in all language areas. Nevertheless, there were shortcomings in classroom instructions, timing, pacing, sequencing, monitoring students' work and making transitions between activities.

Implications: Improvement of the teachers' approaches to teach the language areas was needed particularly in (1) teaching grammar in a more communicative way, (2) expanding their range of activities for teaching pronunciation, (3) promoting meaningful writing, (4) integrating activities with a real communicative purpose, (5) teaching listening and reading using pre, while and post stages, (6) dealing with lesson planning and, (7) integrating the language skills and sub-skills more effectively.

2.6.3 Main findings about the teachers beliefs and actions regarding learners

- About student learning styles

Most teachers had a high degree of awareness regarding student needs and particular learning styles, which was constantly revealed by other findings. For the teaching of vocabulary specifically most teachers showed agreement in using different strategies taking into account the different kinds of students (*visual, kinesthetic, aural*). Teachers stated their preferences for teaching vocabulary words by using the following strategies: by having students do something with the words, by student exposure to hearing the words and by student exposure to seeing the words. Nonetheless, the classroom observations provided little evidence of the teachers' use of such strategies in their lessons.

Implications: (1) The teachers' high level of awareness regarding student needs could be used as the starting point to help them become more efficient in dealing with student learning styles at the classroom level. (2) The teachers needed to be aware of the fact that there were discordances between their beliefs and practice in this regard. (3) The teachers needed to expand their knowledge of how to deal with student learning styles at both theoretical and practical levels. (4) It was necessary to help teachers improve their teaching techniques in using the board and in designing visual materials.

- About student independence and autonomy

Fostering student autonomy and independence in language learning was a task that teachers regarded as significant in their roles and responsibilities as teachers. Although they were fond of

explaining everything to the students (situation confirmed in the classroom observations) they had preferences for activities aimed at promoting student independence in the classroom (by self-correction, by talking about their interests and by problem-solving tasks) and at home (by independent study, by reading papers, by watching TV in English). Teachers' practice revealed few cases in which student self-corrected and the same happened with students' talking about their interests and with the integration of problems solving activities. Assigning students the kinds of tasks described to be carried out at home was barely seen too.

Implications: (1) The conscious views of the teachers were consistent with their concern and interest towards promoting student independence. (2) Their beliefs were again, in disagreement with their performance in the classroom. (3) The teachers needed to go through a reflective process that helped them reach consistency between their thinking and actions in this regard. (3) The teachers needed ideas on how to develop student autonomy for a more effective acquisition of the language.

- About the connection of the language to student real life

One of the teachers' major concerns was to raise student awareness of the importance of the language in real life (information present in the surveys, journals and interviews). In fact they stated their preference to promote student practice of the language outside the classroom: (a) in shops and daily life, (b) by talking to native speakers, (c) by talking to friends in English. Nevertheless, in practice there was evidence that the teachers experienced difficulties in making the actual connection. In the observations there were nine cases in which evidence of such efforts was provided, one teachers' performance was considered very good, two teachers were considered good, and in the case of six teachers, there was room for improvement.

Implications: (1) The teachers' major interest in fostering students learning through the connection of the language to their reality was an optimal basis for improvement. (2) Academic help to provide them with the necessary skills and relevant knowledge to fulfill this particular need was feasible through specific components of the training course. (2) Such help should be focused on ideas on how to connect class content to the areas of interest of students in real life.

- About student participation and involvement in their learning process

The teachers' perceptions of how to promote student participation were quite in agreement with modern views in language teaching. They believed, for instance, that it was important to implement activities, such as pair work, group work and games in the classroom, all of which are aimed at fostering students' participation and motivation. The classroom observations showed evidence of using group work in several cases but there were limitations with the kinds of tasks assigned (to practice mechanical conversations, to do vocabulary or grammar exercises or to do comprehension checks from a reading text) pair work was used in a few lessons and

some sort of dynamic activities like warm up, games, competitions or fillers were observed in some other lessons too. Evidently, the teachers were making efforts to act in accordance with their beliefs to promote student participation and involvement. Nevertheless in the majority of cases the teachers used whole class as the way of classroom management. In such times the teachers would be conducting instruction at all times: explaining, asking questions, clarifying, encouraging students' participation, and directing classroom activity. On the other hand there was a direct correlation between the ability of the teacher to motivate students and student actual participation. Improvement was needed in the majority of the cases in both aspects.

Implications: There was room for improvement in the teachers' approaches to classroom management and interaction particularly in: (1) assuming less teacher-centered roles when conducting instruction as a whole class (the teachers needed to talk less and provide more opportunities for students to talk), (2) promoting students' interaction even when addressing them as a whole class, (3) maximizing students' opportunities to practice the language through the effective integration of pair work and group work, (4) assuming effective roles as facilitators and monitors of students' work, (5) giving a follow up to students' work for feedback, (6) expanding their range of options for the integration of ludic activities and, (7) providing variety of activities within a lesson's time, with smooth transitions from one activity to the other.

2.6.4 Main findings about how the teachers' viewed themselves

The teachers' insights shed significant light on the way they viewed themselves at both personal and professional level. This information was very helpful in order to be acquainted with the teachers' personalities, and perceived levels of expertise. The information was also helpful to compare it and contrast it with other findings about the teachers' beliefs and actions. This time however, the insights came from their own perspective of their work as teachers. The specific findings about how the teachers view themselves were focused on their qualities and personality traits, knowledge, roles as language teachers, and motivational sources.

- About teacher qualities and personality traits

Most of the qualities that the teachers identified as part of their characteristics were related to their rapport with students. Thus, good relationships, enthusiasm and interest towards teaching, sense of humour, self-confidence, and a collaborative attitude were the most recurrent qualities. Their vocation for teaching and humanistic interest in students was evident as they always placed them in the first place. But teachers had some other qualities that they did not mention, probably because of the reason that one of them stated "it is difficult to portray yourself". Most of them were also characterized by open-mindedness, flexibility and positive thinking. These qualities were considered optimal grounds for the development of a more

reflective attitude towards teaching. Therefore, one of the tasks to be addressed would be to make these qualities more perceptible, cultivate them and enhance them throughout the development of the plan of action.

- About teacher knowledge

The teachers identified five categories of knowledge all of which had also been revealed either explicitly or implicitly in other areas of the initial exploration. Again, it can easily be perceived that the state of the knowledge base of teachers had a direct interrelation with their situational contexts. On the other hand, this information served as the definite confirmation of the accurate selection of the components to fulfill the teachers' training needs. These findings also had implications for the kinds of teacher knowledge base stated in the literature review. Thus, direct reference is made to this knowledge for each of the areas identified by the teachers, as well as to the specific courses intended to address the perceived needs.

1. Knowledge about methodological aspects

One of the knowledge areas was focused on methodological aspects, a problem formerly identified as a major contextual problem. The majority of the teachers expressed their needs to improve in this area, particularly to expand their teaching techniques and be able to deal with large classes more effectively.

Implications: (1) Issues of methodology are enclosed in both pedagogical content knowledge and personal practical knowledge. (2) Throughout the development of the plan of action major efforts were carried out to help teachers fulfill these specific needs. Key components to achieve this aim were: Principles and Methods in TEFL, Techniques and strategies in TEFL 1, and Techniques and Strategies in TEFL 2.

2. Knowledge about materials design and implementation

A second area identified was materials design and implementation, a situation corroborated by the classroom observations. Very few teachers used materials that they had created on their own.

Implications: (1) Three kinds of knowledge were involved here: contextual knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, and practical knowledge. (2) The courses Technological Resources in TEFL, Designing Materials and Planning Units of Work, and Lesson Planning in TEFL were aimed at helping teachers improve in this area.

3. Knowledge of lesson planning and implementation

The teachers expressed their limitations in their ability to plan lessons and the findings in the classroom observations revealed how they struggled with lesson structuring and organization and with issues of pacing, sequencing, making transitions and timing. There was ample room for improvement in this area as teachers had considerable freedom in their approaches to planning.

Implications: The kinds of knowledge involved were, again, pedagogical content knowledge, contextual knowledge and practical knowledge. Lesson Planning in TEFL and Designing Materials and Planning Units of Work would help teachers to enhance their skills in this area.

4. Knowledge about target language use

How to optimize the use of the target language was a great concern of the teachers. The teachers knew their limitations as they stated their need to increase this kind of knowledge to be able to provide more effective instruction. Two specific concerns were how to encourage the students to use the target language in class, and how to help them use it for communication purposes. It was a fact that most teachers held non-traditional views about the use of the target language in the classroom as they had stated their agreement that the goal of language learning is communication. Nevertheless, the classroom observations showed disagreement with their actions as there were limitations in their approaches to use the language effectively. In several cases translations were observed, as well as excessive use of the mother tongue, and the use of adapted and unauthentic speech. Furthermore, ways to optimize students' use and practice of the target language, (pair work and group work), and how to deal with instructions, were areas in which the teachers needed improvement as well.

Implications: The role, goal and nature of the language are aspects clearly enclosed in content knowledge (defined as the knowledge of the subject matter that is focused on its use and usage). Other kinds of knowledge, such as pedagogical, practical and contextual were related to the issue as well. In all the courses of the program the trainers would use approaches intended to serve as models of effective use of the target language in the classroom. Likewise pedagogical suggestions to optimize student practice in the oral skills were to be addressed in the module of Techniques and strategies in TEFL 2 and in Teaching English with a Learner-centered approach.

5. Knowledge about how to address the characteristics of students

Finally, and not surprisingly, the teachers identified constraints in their knowledge about how to deal with the particular characteristics of students. This is the only area in which the majority of the teachers identified strengths. Such strengths were focused on the awareness of student needs. The identification of the weaknesses was a clear sign of this awareness. Specifically teachers needed to know: how to deal with behavior problems, how to catch students' attention, how to motivate them, and how to deal with mixed-ability students. Certainly, teacher awareness of student need was high. However, at the level of practice the teachers needed to find the mechanisms to translate such awareness into effective procedures, tasks, and activities in the classroom.

Implications: Practical, pedagogical, content, and contextual knowledge were all involved in this area. A specific module that would focus on issues related to the students was the course: Teaching EFL with a learner-centered approach. Nevertheless, the teachers would find consistent help in Lesson Planning in TEFL, Designing Materials and Planning Units of Work, Principles and Methods in TEFL, Techniques and strategies in TEFL 1, and Techniques and Strategies in TEFL 2.

The findings on teacher knowledge base revealed the teachers' perceptions of the areas in which their knowledge base had significant gaps. All the areas identified were quite in agreement with the shortcomings detected in the classroom observations. On the other hand, the fact that teachers identified their own weaknesses and strengths was certainly an important step in the development of another important kind of knowledge base, *reflective knowledge*. Now that such self-awareness had started to take place it would be easier to put all the information together for the purposes of discussion, further reflection and subsequent improvement and change. It was expected that the module of *Action Research*, particularly, would help the teachers to take consistent steps to continue to enhance their reflective skills.

- About teacher roles

The teachers viewed their own role as language teachers as that of facilitators, a role emphasized in modern language teaching approaches. The teachers' conceptualization of the role was accurate. Thus, they believed that when teachers are facilitators: learning is focused on the students, student autonomy is promoted, and the tools for effective learning are provided. This view was contrasted with the actual performance of the teachers in the classroom as teachers were seen more as directors than as facilitators.

Implications: The disagreement was caused by a number of reasons (or a combination of them) contextual problems, the need to internalize the role, and the lack of knowledge on how to assume the role effectively. It was necessary to bring the issue into discussion to raise teacher awareness of this discordance in order to foster change and improvement. In addition, it was necessary to provide teachers with pertinent pedagogical suggestions on how to assume different effective roles in the classroom and what such roles imply.

- About teacher motivation

The sources of teacher motivation revolved around: their personal and professional fulfilment, the achievement of language teaching-learning goals, the contribution to students' success and professionalization, the perception and opinions of students, and the relationship with them. Interestingly enough, there is only one motive directly related to the teachers' own personal and professional levels. The other four sources are related to the students in one way or another.

Implications: The sense of fulfilment was definitely a key element for the teacher improvement as teachers liked their work in the first place. They were naturally motivated to continue to develop

professionally. On the other hand, the teachers' identification of elements related to the students as motivational sources revealed and confirmed: (1) that student learning outcomes exerted significant influence on the teachers, an aspect discussed in section 3.7 of the literature review, (2) that teachers perceived language learning as a significant way of helping students succeed in their professional formation (3) that counting on the respect, recognition and trust of students was something that motivated them to go beyond the mere act of transmitting knowledge, and (4) that teachers perceived the process of teaching as a collaborative process in which sharing knowledge with students takes place.

On the other hand, the aspects that caused dissatisfaction were focused in the first place on the problems posed by students. As discussed above, students were a source of satisfaction when they succeeded. Nevertheless, they were also a source of dissatisfaction when things did not work the way the teachers planned or expected. The main aspects that caused frustration were: lack of motivation, learning difficulties, individual differences, and academic failure.

Implications: The situation confirmed (1) that the teachers were actually aware of most of the problems they faced with the students; (2) that they were not satisfied with their ways of dealing with such problems; (3) that such awareness needed to be expanded to the realization of the contradictions between their beliefs and practice; (4) that through reflection (journals writing) teachers themselves had identified some of the areas related to the students in which they needed to improve (5) that they were willing to do what was in their hands to do so, and, finally, (6) that all of these problems were within the teacher range of action.

As it could be expected, the other major source of dissatisfaction for the teachers was precisely the challenges imposed by their situational contexts. As expressed elsewhere, teachers stated their frustration and disappointment with the conditions provided for language instruction. Some of the aspects mentioned were the lack of social recognition, the lack of institutional support to improve the area, the lack of adequate conditions for teaching, and the way decision making policies were established.

Implications: The dissatisfaction of the teachers with their situational contexts was expressed with a feeling of powerlessness and disillusion as they felt that problems were far beyond their reach. Teachers were right in the way they perceived these contextual problems as many of such problems were not in their hands to solve. Nevertheless, as discussed elsewhere there were many other areas where teachers could make changes for the better at the level that was within their range of action: the classroom.

2.6.5 Main findings about teacher development

The findings presented here are focused on the teachers' views of their professional development from a deeper professional and personal level. Their perceptions in this regard

revealed how they regarded their own development, (in which stage they thought they were), and their attitude towards learning and change.

1. Stage of teacher development

Many of the perceptions of teachers' about their development were focused on its ongoing, indefinite nature along their professional lives. Most teachers defined themselves as being in the early stages, and expressed their willingness to move on. Moreover, they highlighted the fact that teacher development is their responsibility, and as such, it is a personal process of discovery, growth and improvement.

2. The teachers' attitude towards learning

They showed a receptive and open attitude towards learning which was revealed by the great identification they had with students in many senses. Their comments about the stage of their professional development shed some more light on the issue. Teachers felt learners themselves. As discussed in the literature review a receptive attitude towards learning is an attribute of critical thinkers and, critical thinking is, in turn, an important condition for teacher reflection.

3. The teachers' attitude towards change

On the whole the teachers had a very positive attitude towards change. Clearly, the possibility of developing professionally through change was something that most teachers were eager to do. Moreover, it seemed that teachers saw change as an imperative in order to be able to deal with the current demands of their work.

Implications: The attitudes towards teacher development and learning revealed that the conditions for consistent improvement were a given. The teachers fully realized their need to move on professionally since they considered their current knowledge as insufficient to cope with their numerous and varied professional challenges. It was perceived that the realization of the responsibility for their own development was being fostered, to some extent, by the reflective process that the teachers were going through with the writing of journals. On the other hand, the teachers' positive attitude towards change revealed a high possibility of sustainable development.

- Necessary conditions for teacher development

The conditions identified were quite related to the contextual problems they stated at the beginning of the research project. To some extent it was logical to find that for each problem stated there was a corresponding solution. Nonetheless, it was not the purpose of this research project to look for unrealistic, impractical solutions to real problems. Rather, the major aim was to find out realistic alternatives that emerged from the teachers' own perspective. The aspects that fulfilled this condition were the following:

1. Conducting research, reflecting on teaching, or experiential knowledge

Certainly, teachers were used to deal with problems on their own. Their experiential knowledge had been so far an important source of knowledge. So they had come to an alternative that pretty much matched the autonomous way in which they had been dealing with problems up to the moment, because of the constraints posed by context. They presented a new element though, the element of reflection. Chances were that such an element had been the result of the training process they were going through.

2. Updating knowledge through self-study and putting it into practice

This is another condition proposed by the teachers that matched the independent way in which they had got used to look for teaching ideas. This strategy that had emerged from the teachers themselves to cope with their contextual problems was certainly a key element to take into account for the purpose of change and sustainable development.

3. Having teacher training opportunities in different fields

The teachers acknowledged the benefits of the training course as they stated how beneficial it was for them and how it was helping them to improve. Moreover, it was perceived that the training process they were going through was helping them to identify areas of further training. Some of the areas they mentioned were, *special didactics*, *advanced conversation* for the improvement of the spoken abilities, *linguistics and literature*, *curriculum design*, *English for Specific Purposes (ESP)*, *Students' Portfolios*, and *Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL)*. Although addressing all of these training needs was not within the scope of the present research project, it was interesting to corroborate how the exposure to pertinent training had made teachers realize further training areas.

4. Sharing with colleagues and trainers, self-evaluation and students' feedback

Sharing was also an element perceived as emerging from the teacher training course, and the opportunity to reflect on their teaching both individually and with their peers. Again, carrying out joint efforts with their peers was viewed as a potential way of promoting and sustaining teacher development. Likewise, the integration of self-evaluation and student evaluation systems were without a doubt powerful means for fostering change and improvement in the classroom.

Implications: the views stated by the teachers as optimal conditions to foster their teacher development do not differ from the characteristic of an effective teacher development process as discussed in the literature review (see chapter IV, section 4). The teachers provided evidence that they perceived their development process as: (1) a collaborative effort, something to be undertaken with students, their peers and trainers, (2) a reflective process, an insightful process that can provide them with the necessary understanding to improve their work, (3) a situated experience, an experience to be carried out in their own situational contexts, most precisely in their classrooms, and (4) a theorizing opportunity: an opportunity to develop knowledge and

approach new understanding of their work as teachers. Indeed all of these characteristics were the intended ones for the present research project.

The findings in this stage served to gain significant knowledge about the original state of the teachers' views, attitudes, motivation, knowledge and performance. This knowledge, in turn, corroborated that the teacher training - teacher development approach of the project was an accurate decision to address the teachers' professional needs. This was best reflected by their awareness of the emerging, evolving nature of their teacher development process, which was identified as a positive condition to help teachers move to higher levels of professional growth. In addition, the teachers' honest recognition of their constraints, revealed a considerable open-minded attitude towards external help. In fact, such an attitude was considered a demand for pertinent help. Thus, the academic help was being focused on providing them with the skill-technique and knowledge base components of a teacher training process, which they certainly needed. Such process, in turn, was aimed at leading teachers to a higher development stage characterized by an autonomous internal and personal agenda in the teachers' pedagogical decision-making processes (see chapter IV, 2.5).

On the other hand, the exploration evidenced that although the teachers had many positive aspects in their beliefs, actions, and knowledge, there were also significant weaknesses. Thus, the information in this exploratory stage was useful to refine actions throughout the development of the research process to nurture and enhance those positive aspects and address the major weaknesses. As discussed, the state of their beliefs and actions particularly deserved special attention to help them achieve consistency and to expand their knowledge base in the target areas identified. Nevertheless, there were just too many areas and trying to address them all within this research project was unrealistic. This is when helping teachers develop a reflective attitude comes into play for the purposes of sustainable development. An analytical and reflective approach to teaching would help teachers continue to improve in an independent way along their professional lives. In this sense, all the components of the teacher training course intended to promote this reflection imperative in the particular knowledge areas. Another important initial step in the development of this reflective perspective had started to take place through the process of journal writing. The next step was to raise the teachers' awareness of the current state of their beliefs and how these exerted great influence on their actions at the classroom level. The main findings of this exploration would be essential elements for such awareness process. Nonetheless, the major efforts in fostering the teachers' reflection would be undertaken in the development of the Action Research course, through the design, and implementation of their research projects. All of this would take place in the third stage of the research.

3. STAGE THREE/ DURING THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PLAN OF ACTION: THE EXPLORATION OF THE TEACHERS' REFLECTION AND AWARENESS RAISING PROCESS

The research question in this stage is focused on the journey towards teachers' structured reflection through Action Research. This section discussed the main findings in the efforts to provide teachers with useful structures and tools to build on their emerging awareness to higher levels of reflection.

This stage has as a major framework the course *Action Research in the Classroom*, which was intended to be the adequate environment for the teachers' reflective process. Moreover, the major tools and skills for the teachers' reflection, were thought to be acquired through the main contents of this course and, evidently, through the AR projects in their classrooms. Consequently, the entire stage was devoted to the provision of these reflective tools.

At the time of the implementation of the AR course the teachers had been in the program for one year. All the other courses had taken place and there had been processes of tasks accomplishment and course assessment for each of them (see in chapter 4 the contents of these courses and in section 4 below the evaluation of the program). So, at the moment of the AR course, the teachers had a whole mass of relevant information that was intended to fill in the original gaps identified in their knowledge base. The Action Research course was, in fact, the perfect finale of the program as it gave the teachers the opportunity to put together all the acquired knowledge for practical purposes: the solution of real problems in their classrooms. Therefore, a follow up was given to the state and development of teachers' beliefs with their newly acquired baggage of information. Within this analysis several aspects emerged: the teachers' conceptualization of reflective teaching, teacher qualities, teacher knowledge, and teacher motivation. Another important aspect of the teachers' reflection process involved the exploration of the teachers' reactions to the results of the previous stage; that is to say their major strengths and weaknesses, the origin of their teaching beliefs, how these were structured, and the consistencies and inconsistencies between their beliefs and practice, among others.

On the other hand, a great deal of attention was given to how teachers interacted with the course contents and concepts: grasping them, making sense out of them, internalizing them and finding the useful and practical part for their professional growth...through the design and implementation of their own AR projects. This was achieved through the follow up given to the teachers to provide them with assistance to identify and develop their research topics. The final aspect of the exploration of the teachers' reflective process is the description of the main results in the evaluation of the AR research projects designed and implemented by the teachers.

3.1 Guided process to teacher reflection

The teachers' reflection process was a guided process. It was guided since the beginning of this investigation in the previous stages. Nevertheless, it became more structured as teachers

moved on in their training/development process by acquiring new skills and knowledge in the key areas of their teaching practice described elsewhere. The course *Action Research in the Classroom*, particularly, intended to be the grounds that could nurture the teachers' reflection process in a consistent way. Thus, the teachers' preparation for their AR projects was a process that consisted of a series of steps planned in advance. This guided process is described below.

Table 21

Guided process to teacher reflection

A C T I O N R E S E A R C H I N T H E C L A S S R O O M	Event/Step	Scaffolding	Date (s)	Significance
	1. Conceptualizing Reflective teaching	Introspective analysis 1 Reading and writing about Reflective Teaching	March 20 2009	Teachers internalize the major concepts of teachers' reflection
	2.Exploring teacher professional development	Introspective analysis 2 First journal entry based on a series of reflective questions regarding their teaching practice	March 20 2009	Teachers reflect on major issues of their teaching practice.
	3.Raising teacher awareness	Introspective analysis 3 Class discussion and exploration of teachers' thoughts about their teaching beliefs and actions	March 27 2009	Teachers reflect on the relationship between their beliefs and actions as EFL teachers.
		Introspective analysis 4 Second journal entry based on the exploration of teachers' beliefs and actions	March 27 2009	
	4. Identifying and selecting the research area	Introspective analysis 5 Third and final journal task about a specific target situation in the classroom	April 3 2009	Teachers identify potential research topics and specific related matters.
	5.Designing, developing and implementing the research projects	Collaborative stage 1 Meetings with peer to address particular issues of their research projects <i>Remedial plan 1</i>	Apr 27-June 29	Sessions to provide teachers with significant help in the design and implementation of AR projects
	6.Writing the Research Report	Collaborative stage 2 Meetings with peer to address particular issues of the written report. <i>Remedial plan 2</i>	Feb 8 –March 22 2010	Sessions to provide revisions and suggestions to the writing process of the different areas of the research report
7.Assessing the Action Research Projects	Collaborative stage 3 Public presentation of AR projects in front of a board of evaluators The teachers' self-evaluation	April-May 2010	Assessment of AR projects by external collaborators from the English Department	

As shown, the course *Action Research in the Classroom* was the framework in which most reflective events took place. Each event or step is presented with its respective reflective instrument or collaborative process, which have been put under the heading scaffolding. Processes of scaffolding, meaning temporary support measures for teachers to continue to build on their existing knowledge, are widely described in the literature review (see section 4.1.5). Each step and event is presented with the date it took place and its significance for the project. Likewise, each step had a purpose and there was a logical progression from one to another. All of these steps/events were documented and used as part of the methodology of the Research. The documents that emerged as a result of this reflective process were the ones telling “the story” of how the process of teacher reflection really took place. Major efforts to foster teacher reflection were carried out in steps one through four, which consisted of five different kinds of introspective analyses leading teachers to the identification and selection of their research topics. Steps five through seven, on the other hand, are called collaborative stages because they involved the participation and support of different people at key points of the reflective process.

Thus, the results here are focused on the evidence of reflection that the teachers were providing along the process; how they were evolving and the differences that could be perceived with their initial stage. The main findings of all this enriching process of exploration, reflection and interpretation will be presented in detail below.

3.2 Conceptualizing Reflective Teaching

The first introspective analysis took place through the teachers’ conceptualization of Reflective Teaching, which was achieved with a reading and a writing task. The writing task was connected with one of the assigned readings: Thomas Farrell’s article *Reflective Teaching, the Principles and Practices* (Farrell, 1998) which the teachers read thoroughly. In this article Farrell examines the different approaches to teacher reflection and proposes a model for practicing EFL/ESL teachers that includes observation, journal writing, group discussion, and critical friends (also called peer collaboration). The article matched accurately the nature and level of teacher reflection that we were trying to reach, which was the reason why it was chosen. The main objective was to increase teacher awareness of the options available for becoming more reflective teachers. After reading it, the teachers had to write an opinion essay about it as a course assignment. The content of the article along with the teachers’ insights were the object of extensive discussion during class time.

The teachers’ insights consisted of a number of contributions all of which were categorized according to five major emerging attributes. According to the teachers’ perception distinguishing features of *the reflective teacher* are: *analytical skills* (14), *knowledgeability*, (14) *resourcefulness* (13) *open-mindedness* (10) and *professional growth* (9). Now, let us analyze in detail each of these attributes in light of the teachers conceptualization.

3.2.1 Analytical skills

The most noticeable attribute that the teachers identified as a characteristic of *the reflective teacher* was the ability to analyze his/her teaching beliefs and actions. Within this perception *the reflective teacher*:

- ...asks questions to herself/himself about her/his teaching
- ...exposes her/his beliefs and teaching practice to close scrutiny
- ...explores experience and questions effectiveness of teaching
- ...takes the necessary time, commitment and dedication to reflect on her/his work critically
- ...comes to a halt for a deep reflection on the effectiveness of her/his teaching
- ...focuses reflection on the three important stages of teaching: planning, implementation and evaluation
- ...identifies and selects target areas to improve
- ...discovers and prevents problems
- ...finds solutions and ways of doing things
- ...renovates her/his teaching framework (from theory to practice and/or vice versa)
- ...assesses her/his performance objectively and acts accordingly
- ...improves her/his performance in light of students' feedback
- ...avoids fossilized routine actions
- ...questions her/his past experience as a language learner and places herself/himself in students' position
- ...promotes students' reflection
- ...is aware of important aspects related to teaching in and out the class

All of these reflective-analytical actions (question, think, scrutinize, explore, reflect on, renovate, assess, discover) resemble the characteristics discussed in the literature review regarding critical thinking as a necessary condition for reflection (4.2.1). Logically, the teachers connected the analytical attributes of critical thinkers to their teaching actions: e.g. "practice"; "target areas" "teaching framework"; "planning, implementation and evaluation" which was considered a great achievement at this stage. More importantly, the teachers' insights were directly connected with *Reflective Knowledge* as discussed in the literature review (3.4.5) which concerned them as teachers, (e.g. "questions past experience"), their students (e.g. "promotes students' reflection") and the teaching process (e.g. "avoids fossilized actions"). It was clear at this point that something had been triggered on the teachers' mind as a result of this initial step to reflection.

3.2.2 Knowledgeability

The second most prominent characteristic was the issue of knowledge which teachers considered a very important attribute of reflective teachers. Thus, their contributions in this regard were that *the reflective teacher*:

- ...makes well-informed and accurate pedagogical choices for effective teaching
- ...applies and assesses new methodologies
- ...is aware of contextual limitations and knows how to cope with them
- ...acts in a purposeful and independent manner
- ...plans lessons carefully

- ...analyzes topics and contents to teach from the simplest to the most complex challenges
- ...integrates activities to foster participation and interaction
- ...promotes innovations and changes
- ...looks for new strategies on the basis of experience
- ...checks every aspect of her/his teaching (methods, activities, strategies)
- ...uses helpful tools to improve performance
- ...improvises and adapts to any sort of materials
- ...takes action in an adequate time span

All kinds of knowledge (as discussed in the literature review) are involved in these attributes; *Pedagogical Content Knowledge* (3.4.4) being one of the most noticeable: “plans lessons carefully”, “analyzes topics and contents to teach from the simplest to the most complex challenges”, “checks every aspect of teaching” and “integrates activities to foster participation and interaction”. Another kind of knowledge involved is *Personal Practical Knowledge* (3.4.1). For instance, “looks for new strategies on the basis of experience”, “uses helpful tools to improve performance”, “improvises and adapts to any sort of materials” and “takes action in an adequate time span”. *Content Knowledge* (3.4.2) is also referred to (“applies and assesses new methodologies”) as well as *Contextual Knowledge*, (3.4.3) “is aware of contextual limitations and knows how to cope with them”. The significance of this information for the intended aim is that, unconsciously, teachers were relating the issue of reflection to important skills and knowledge of their teaching practice; knowledge that according to the initial exploration they needed to reinforce in several areas. In referring to these kinds of knowledge, chances were that the courses taught as part of the plan of action had helped them to fill the gaps identified (see 2.4.2). Moreover, this finding indicated that the process of reflection was taking a more practical dimension by helping teachers to be aware of what they knew and how they knew it; thus making their “tacit knowledge” evident (see lit. review 4.1.4).

3.2.3 Resourcefulness

This attribute emerged as a result of the teachers’ insights regarding the creation of conditions for student learning, which they considered a sign of teacher reflection. Within this conceptualization, *the reflective teacher*:

- ...makes efforts to be a better teacher for students; cares about students
- ...plans actions that are productive for students
- ...promotes interaction with/between students
- ...motivates, encourages and praises students
- ...improves student learning
- ...provides learning opportunities for every student
- ...adapts the program to students’ needs in real life
- ...makes the teaching-learning process more effective, dynamic and enjoyable
- ...leads students to make progress and succeed in the target language
- ...is creative, dynamic and original
- ...brings into the class new and fresher ways of getting knowledge
- ...shows enthusiasm and dedication
- ...promotes the use of the language for communicative purposes

- ...examines her/his relationships with students, and makes conscious efforts to know them and understand them

One of the salient aspects of these reflective teaching actions is that most of them are directly related to the students: “is a better teacher for students”, “cares about students”, “plans actions productive for students”, “motivates, encourages and praises students”, and “improves student learning”. Likewise, the actions refer to the teacher relationship with students: “examines her/his relationships with students, and makes conscious efforts to know them”. Teachers’ concern for students was highlighted in the initial exploration. The remarkable aspect now is the connection reflective teaching + resourcefulness + student learning which was not seen in the initial exploration, at least not at this level. A second important aspect to notice is the teacher managerial qualities reflected (see lit. review 3.1): “brings into the class new and fresher ways of getting knowledge, “makes the teaching-learning process more effective, dynamic and enjoyable”, “is creative, dynamic and original” and “shows enthusiasm and dedication”. A final important aspect is the complexity and variety of teacher actions in order to create conditions for student learning: “provides learning opportunities for every student”, “adapts the program to students’ needs in real life”, “leads students to make progress and succeed in the target language” These teaching actions resemble the principles of learner-centeredness, an approach widely covered in the training course, which suggest an increase in teacher awareness of such principles (see lit. review 4.1.6)

3.2.4 Open-mindedness

Open-mindedness is a condition for teacher change (see lit. review 3.7.2). That teachers had a receptive and positive attitude towards learning and change, was a finding of the initial exploration. It was also considered important at that time to raise the teachers’ awareness of these innate attributes to strengthen their reflective process. Their insights in this regard, one year later, showed a connection of their conceptualization of reflective teaching with their innate openness and interest towards learning and change which seemed to be a sign of an increase in the teachers’ awareness. Hence, *the reflective teacher*:

- ...gets advice on how to improve her/his teaching to be more critical, gain self-confidence be more creative and dynamic and increase her/his teaching techniques
- ...includes new ideas and undergoes some changes and adjustments in the process of her/his teaching practice
- ...gets others opinions in order to have a reference to start changing (behavior, planning, methodology, etc.)
- ...moves away from a traditional framework of action
- ...gains personal experience and constructs her/his own theory from practice
- ...changes points of view/is willing to change
- ... is aware of limitations and of the need to change
- ...learns from mistakes
- ...changes some pre-established concepts that tend to be confusing
- ...deliberately changes attitudes towards teaching in a particular way
- ...has a self-taught attitude

The most visible aspect here is *the reflective teacher* portrayed as a learner who enriches her/his knowledge either with some others' help: "gets advice on how to improve her/his teaching" and "gets others opinions in order to have a reference...", or independently: "has a self-taught attitude" "gains personal experience and constructs her/his own theory from practice" and "learns from mistakes". The other relevant finding is how teachers connected reflective teaching with change: "changes points of view", "is willing to change", "moves away from a traditional framework", "includes new ideas and undergoes some changes and adjustments...", "deliberately changes attitudes towards teaching in a particular way", "is aware of limitations and of the need to change", and "changes some pre-established concepts that tend to be confusing". Both change and collaboration as discussed in the literature review are powerful tools for teacher development (see 3.7 and 4.1 respectively). The significance of this information was how teachers' receptive attitude to change and sharing could actually help them reach higher levels of professionalism through Action Research in the classroom.

3.2.5 Professional growth

Here the teachers portrayed *the reflective teacher* as an individual concerned with her/his professional development. Within this perspective, *the reflective teacher*:

- ...participates in professional development opportunities, such as meetings with peers, conferences, seminars and classroom observations.
- ...shares with other teachers
- ...gains experience and knowledge within her/his professional community
- ...establishes professionalism and respect towards the profession within the community
- ...aims at self-improvement and professional qualification
- ...explores her/his teaching through research
- ...is updated in modern methodology and up to current challenges (high quality education)
- ...improves her/his professional development by means of reflection
- ...grows substantially in knowledge and experience
- ...creates links/mechanisms/structures/frameworks to constructively criticize her/his work (such as group discussion, journals, critical friends)

Thus, *the reflective teacher* aims at reaching/achieving higher levels of professionalism at different levels, in different areas and through different means. Once again the issue of collaboration is present, but at a more professional level characterized by teacher autonomous decisions: "participates in professional development opportunities...", "shares with other teachers" and "gains experience and knowledge within her/his professional community". On the other hand, there is an element of value and dignity stated here: "establishes professionalism and respect towards the profession within the community", which clearly showed the teachers' implicit call to be considered professionals (and probably, to raise this awareness) in their community. Knowledge, self-improvement and experience are elements of professional growth as well: "is updated in modern methodology and up to current challenges", "aims at self-improvement and professional qualification and "grows substantially in knowledge and

experience”. Last, but certainly not least, there is the element of teacher reflection as a sign of professional maturity: “explores her/his teaching through research”, “improves her/his professional development by means of reflection” and “creates ...mechanisms...to constructively criticize her/his work”. The most important conclusions to draw here is that teachers had made different connections between the issue of reflection and professional development, through the different ways of professional growth mentioned here.

This analysis shows that teachers had been able to build a quite complete and elaborate picture of *the reflective teacher* who is *analytically skillful, resourceful, open-minded, knowledgeable* and *professionally oriented*. Through this conceptualization it was clear that there were significant differences between the teachers’ thinking and knowledge at that moment, and their thinking and knowledge at the initial exploration stage. Evidence had been provided that their analytical skills as well as their knowledge had increased significantly. Moreover, teachers seemed to have internalized how important it was for their professional development to be able to develop a reflective attitude, optimal grounds to continue to build on towards their AR projects. The next step was to gather further information to confirm these presumptions.

3.3 Exploring the process of professional development

The second introspective analysis was a journal task intended to foster teacher reflection on their teaching situation at the time, both in thoughts and in actions. The questions were very similar to the ones used in the first series of journal entries in stage two. The main objective was to guide the teachers’ process to self-evaluate their performance in the different aspects of their teaching practice. The information that the teachers provided was also valuable means for them to compare the changes in their approaches and perceptions after one year of exposure to different kinds of knowledge. The questions asked were an adaptation from the questions proposed by Richard and Farrell (1998: 24). They are the following:

- *Where am I standing at the moment in my teaching practice?*
- *What is the current situation in my classroom?*
- *What is the relationship between my beliefs and my actions?*
 - a) *In which cases are they consistent?*
 - b) *In which cases are they inconsistent?*
- *What are my strengths as a teacher at the moment?*
- *What are my weaknesses as a teacher at the moment?*
- *What are my main sources of motivation at the present time*
- *What dissatisfies me in my teaching practice?*

These questions were clearly directed to a deep examination of themselves as EFL teachers, their approaches, the relationship between their beliefs and practice, their weaknesses and strengths, and the motivational aspects leading their professional life. Since the teachers had to reflect critically on those aspects that caused dissatisfaction, the reflective questions were also

part of the preparation as a prelude for the teachers' reactions to the initial exploration of their beliefs and actions. A number of important issues about teacher development, teacher knowledge, teacher qualities, and teacher motivation, emerged out of this reflection. This information was also a valuable means for guiding teachers to the selection of their research projects; issue discussed in part 3.5 below.

In order to make connections between the different findings, the teachers' contributions here were analyzed in light of the emerging attributes of *the reflective teacher* that they had provided, namely, *analytical skills, resourcefulness, open-mindedness, knowledgeability and professional growth* (see 3.1 above).

3.3.1 Increasing professional competence

It is important at this point to remember the main findings at the second stage regarding teachers' self-assessment of their professional development. Most of them were aware of the incipient nature of their professional life and openly admitted it (see 2.5.1 above). One year later the teachers once again, had a reasonable, down to earth perception of their professional development as they admitted it was still in progress (or as they said: "at the development stage", "in the middle of the road", "getting its course") and that they needed more experience and preparation.

- *I believe I am in a stage where I need more experience and preparation to overcome some difficulties.*
- *I'm in the middle of the road to get my goals as a teacher, because I'm actually learning the strategies, techniques and all that stuff about teaching. So, I'm not a beginner, but I'm not an experienced teacher either.*
- *I am at the development stage...I'm more aware of what I'm teaching, students' motivation, their weaknesses, my weaknesses.*
- *I would say that my experience in the field of teaching is getting its course.*
- *I'm willing to prioritize the important aspects related to my growing as a professional.*
- *I have come to increase my level of English, step by step, little by little, with many difficulties but making an effort to get to improve in the language...in my personal development.*

Nevertheless, the teachers also recognized the value of the knowledge and skills they had learnt in their training program as well as the worth of their own effort in the process. Moreover, there are new reflective elements here that came to enrich their perception like the willingness "to prioritize aspects" and being "more aware" of their teaching practice. Interestingly enough, some of the attributes of *the reflective teacher* (as defined by the teachers above) connected with these perceptions are *analytical skills, open-mindedness and professional growth*.

3.3.2 Reflecting on experience for students' learning outcomes

The teachers provided evidence of having increased their reflectivity levels for the sake of student learning outcomes. In order to describe their development stage, teachers stated that they were at a point in which their major efforts were devoted to fulfill students' learning needs, and increase their interest and motivation.

- *I'm much more concerned with my teaching pre; while and after teaching a group of class in order to improve over time.*
- *I'm aware I need to work hard to get very good results and see the effect on my students.*
- *I still need to overcome some problems in my teaching, but now I know how to solve some things that bother me. At least I can try something out to get a possible solution to the problems I face as a teacher*
- *Students have a lot of weaknesses in their learning process and in their skills development...I think I have to react and give them a solution.*
- *I'm thinking how I can do to change students' learning behavior.*
- *I am standing as a facilitator for my students because I need to supply interest and variety to increase their motivation.*
- *I can teach in different levels, different kinds of students and I try to cover their needs.*
- *I'm being more reflective and selective thinking about students' needs and my role to support their learning in the classroom.*
- *All the time the teacher needs to try to get the interaction in class and know her/his real role as a teacher.*
- *I hope that my classes have better results and, of course, that my students learn more and enjoy what they are learning. This is the most important.*

All kinds of important areas were implicit in the teachers' reflection here: student characteristics, teacher and student role, student motivation and participation, classroom dynamics, class interaction, and skills development, among others. All of these areas revolved around students, which meant at this time that the teachers had refined their reflective skills to focus on particular student problems. The teachers' concern for students was not something new; the level of refinement and complexity of such concern was.

There was another element worth noticing. In the previous exploration teachers provided evidence that they had a strong willingness to solve students' problems; in fact, they felt they should solve most of those problems (see 1.1.2 above). Nevertheless, the situation was hopeless somehow as most of them admitted not knowing how (the problem of large classes, lack of student motivation, etc.). At the time of these results, however, teachers showed determination to solve students' problems in an autonomous way. This element, which was reinforced by the

information in the next journal entry, would prove to be essential for the teachers' work with their AR projects (see 3.3.4 below).

In linking these findings with teachers' conceptualization of *the reflective teacher*, all the attributes identified are remarkably present here: *analytical skills, resourcefulness, open-mindedness, knowledgeability and professional growth*.

3.3.3 Learning new knowledge and implementing changes

The last piece of information the teachers provided regarding their professional development is that they were at a stage of learning and change. These two elements had been identified as driving forces for the teachers' development in the initial exploration (see 2.5.2 and 2.5.3 above). They continued to have a relevant place in their priorities. Moreover, the teachers' perception about their professional stage one year later revealed that their initial attitude was, in fact, perfect grounds to help teachers move on in their professional improvement.

- *I need to change and reflect about teaching behavior, putting into practice new trends in my teaching practice.*
- *I have made some changes in my teaching with things, I have to confess, were wrong.*
- *I try to do my best every day that is why I am in this course, to increase my knowledge.*
- *I am trying to find a method or strategies to put into practice my knowledge got in different seminars, courses or congresses.*
- *I always try to focus on my teaching...I like to be informed of the new teaching approaches.*
- *I would say that I'm in a position where every little piece of advice will help me improve my teaching performance.*
- *I am committed to maintain an active attitude because whatever I learn or know about the language will surely have an effect on the way I teach and how students learn.*
- *I feel comfortable because I've learnt more strategies and techniques and put them into practice.*

The teachers' contributions this time gave the impression that they were willing to go beyond the mere intention. Moreover, many of them had started to make changes in their approaches already. Learning and change had seemingly complemented each other to take teachers to the practical level of implementing actions. This assumption is revealed by their phrases "will have an effect on the way I teach", "put strategies and techniques into practice", "made changes" and "improve teaching performance". All of the attributes of *the reflective teacher* as described by teachers are present in these perceptions: *analytical skills, resourcefulness, open-mindedness, knowledgeability and professional growth*.

3.3.4 *The situation in the classroom*

The second question in the journal was about the problems that teachers were facing at the classroom level at that moment. This reflection provided the teachers with a global view of their teaching practice which allowed them to take a stand regarding the situation in their classrooms. This was a necessary step to continue to refine the reflection process to help them identify potential research topics. Consequently, the analysis intended to raise the teachers' awareness regarding what could be realistically changed in light of their AR projects. For the purposes of the investigation, the information provided would be useful to find out how the views about their teaching practice had evolved over time. So, what was the current situation in the teachers' classroom this time? What kind of challenges were they facing?

It is convenient at this point to refer to the major problems that teachers were experiencing in their teaching practice at the beginning of this research. Although the exploration at that moment was of a more global nature, the information does shed light on how much the teachers had changed. First of all, they originally identified several troublesome problem areas, all of which the teachers perceived as connected to their contextual conditions (curriculum and materials, investment in the field, student characteristics, large classes, time for instruction, and teachers' appraisal system, among others). It is important to highlight here several important aspects about that original exploration: (1) that context had a strong influence on the teachers' practice, (2) that the teachers' greatest concern was student learning outcomes, (3) that the teachers' awareness about their own involvement in solving their contextual problems (materials, curriculum, large classes) was low (most teachers held the system responsible), and, (4) that the situation was different when problems related to students, as teachers acknowledged responsibility. Particular problems posed by the students at that moment were: lack of motivation, disinterest, boredom, behavior problems, student learning styles, mixed ability classes, and student low awareness of the practical side of the language.

The new information provided by the teachers revealed that the contextual problems had completely been placed in a secondary position as only a few teachers referred to contextual conditions as major problems. Nevertheless, the concerns about students were numerous, and in all kinds of areas. All the areas of concern as well as the teachers' views are presented below.

a) Contextual problems

- *A rigid plan or program from my institution.*
- *The lack of materials to help the teaching process.*
- *We have to follow many step; many requirements to teach English and if we want best methods to teach it we have to take care of not being rebel teachers against the Ministry's program.*
- *There is also a different way of evaluation and it changes the way of teaching, so we have to adapt materials, methods, aims, etc. Nowadays it's very hard to work in here*

- *No books, no materials, no resources. This causes lack of SS motivation*
- *Now I am working with more students than years before. I am doing an effort to work as best as I can*

As it can be perceived from these teachers' comments; some of them continued to acknowledge the negative influence of context, which was reasonable. These teachers were clearly discouraged when referring to the contextual conditions at primary and secondary education where major problems continued to exist in the area (program, materials, resources, large groups, and the like). The teachers clearly made reference to this situation as it was difficult for them to put into practice the new actions learned in the program. As one of the teachers explained "there is a different way of evaluation and it changes the way of teaching". Nevertheless, the current situation at that level, as it was discussed in the context of this investigation (see chapter two) admitted meaningful changes which was evidenced by the two research projects that were implemented at this level (see section 3.8 below). Another interesting piece of information that emerged here is evaluation, a problematic area which had not been directly addressed by the training program.

b) Students' affective factors

- *Students don't pay attention in class; they do other activities and don't attend all classes.*
- *The situation in my classroom is really hard because I try to help students have self-confidence to speak so that they feel more comfortable.*
- *There are students who express they dislike to study English...they don't enjoy the class and take a negative attitude towards the activities.*
- *I consider myself an open minded person and responsible with the tasks but sometimes is annoying that some students are irresponsible and not devoted to the class.*
- *In the classroom I perceive lack of motivation, lack of practice in prior stages and poor vocabulary.*
- *The students' motivation is lower.*
- *It seems to me that on occasions students do not value what I do for them.*

c) Students' background knowledge

- *...many of them just know some vocabulary and basic grammar rules, but they are not able to communicate at all.*
- *My biggest problem at the moment is that my students face problems with speaking. They just know some basic vocabulary...it's a real challenge for me to make them speak in class.*

d) Use of the target language

- *My students have limitations in their learning process. Actually, students do not talk in English only a minority of them does it. They want to speak Spanish and that the teacher explains in Spanish...I'm trying to motivate them*
- *Another thing is that they don't like to speak English only Spanish...they don't like to participate in class.*
- *Students are afraid of speaking and participating whatever the activity carried out is.*

e) Mixed-ability groups

- *Groups are multi-level class where the more competitive ones do not give a chance to the others to participate.*
- *There are many students with different levels of English from beginners to intermediate.*

f) Classroom management and organization of instruction

- *Because of my beginning in the field of teaching, I still fight with the best way to organize the classroom. I do not only refer to students' behavior, but to the way I deliver instruction.*

Several important findings emerged out of this information. First, the teachers had kept, in essence, the same perception about the students; that is to say that student learning outcomes continued to be the focus of the majority of the teachers. Second, the concerns about students, were basically the same initial ones (motivation, interest, behavior, etc.), but they had evolved significantly. This was reflected, once again, by the complexity and variety of problems identified and how they were interrelated. For example, the use of the mother tongue related to affective factors (students' fear of speaking); student background knowledge was related to affective factors (students' self-confidence was low) and also to the use of the mother tongue (students preferred to speak Spanish); classroom instruction was related to mixed ability groups, and so on and so forth. Third, the teachers had refined and focused their attention on a number of problems that related to their everyday reality in the classroom, which had important *Implications* for the selections of their research topic. Fourth, the teachers had changed their perspective of contextual problem. It was not that they were not aware of context, or that they considered it irrelevant. On the contrary, it was clear that their perception had changed to give path to new ways of perceiving problems and of facing them. This revealed that the teachers had increased their awareness that it was no use complaining about problems but being proactive about them. Some of the teachers' comments above give evidence of this new awareness, and also the following ones:

- *My challenge is to make students move one step further in the process of learning the language.*
- *The situation in my classroom is like the one in an opening business, finding the way to get customers' attention.*

- *I'm aware I need to work hard to get very good results and see the effect on my students.*
- *I try to advise them and play the role of motivator so they get a more positive attitude...*
- *I do not want to be a liar...my class has become somehow monotonous and not so attractive... I perceive that I am an energetic and easy-going professor, but I am also predictable and that doesn't help too much.*

Most probably this change of perception had been triggered by the training course combined with a recent turn in most teachers' professional life as they had been hired to work at UNAN as hourly paid teachers (see section 3.6.7 part c. below for details of this situation). The conditions surrounded teachers were perceived as a good opportunity for increasing their professional competence through research. Context was posing a new challenge for the teachers, and they were ready to assume it.

3.3.5 Teacher qualities

In the initial exploration, several qualities had been identified as distinctive teacher qualities (see 2.4.1 above). The two top qualities were *good relationships with students* and *motivation towards teaching*. Other qualities were *sense of humour*, *self-confidence*, and a *collaborative attitude*. Some other less common traits identified were open-mindedness, flexibility dynamism, creativity, patience, and responsibility. The considerations about the teachers' own self-characterization at that time were that it was necessary to provide them with the necessary conditions that could make some qualities they already had more evident; for example, *flexibility* and *open-mindedness*, necessary conditions to be more reflective.

The findings in stage three showed that teachers had changed their perception as the two top qualities identified this time were self-confidence (n=12) and open-mindedness (n=10). They also mentioned motivation towards teaching, (n=9), and good relationship with students (n=8),

a) Self-confidence

An increase in teacher self-confidence was perceived everywhere in this stage. Several elements were identified as being connected with this increase: a sense of professional competence, an increase in teaching knowledge, independent decision-making, student comprehension and student learning outcomes. All of this was revealed by the following comments:

- *I feel comfortable with my knowledge...its' enough to teach what students need to learn.*
- *I feel more competent now since I have been growing in experience and knowledge through practice.*
- *I am proficient in the language...I consider myself a good speaker of English.*
- *I have good knowledge of English which I think my students appreciate.*
- *I feel self-confident and more motivated to continue growing as a teacher.*
- *If I have a problem in the classroom I will find a way to solve it.*

- *I have improved my lesson planning skills with different kinds of activities and skills.*
- *I like being able to put into practice all the new tools I have learned.*
- *I am using all resources at hand and searching updated information in order to provide enough practice and opportunities for students' participation.*
- *I teach the class using all means to convey meaning; for example using gestures, drawings, synonyms, etc.*
- *I can create my own materials for the lessons and I can also integrate a variety of activities.*
- *My students understand the class when I explain.*
- *I use different activities in my plans to provide variety and my students like to participate in all the activities I plan.*

b) Open-mindedness

Open-mindedness was an attribute present in the teachers' perception of *the reflective teacher* (3.2.4), and it was then mentioned in the teachers' stage of professional development (3.3.3). Here the attribute was "owned" by most teachers as one of their qualities. The distinguishing features here are sharing and collaboration, receptivity to change and learning, reflection and awareness, and willingness to implement new ideas. The comments that provided evidence of these findings are:

- *I accept other teachers' ideas for making changes in my teaching.*
- *Listening to my colleagues' opinions has helped me to recognize my mistakes and try to do it better next time.*
- *I have acquired more knowledge now through this course...to let me advance by means of reflection and awareness of my teaching.*
- *Now I feel I can integrate many new ideas for students to work and communicate but I still complain about availability of resources.*
- *I'm also reflecting more on how to improve things when I teach.*
- *I can use different methodologies according to students' characteristics and learning styles.*
- *I am always learning something new every day.*

c) Motivation and sociability with students

These were two qualities that complemented each other. Information provided elsewhere recurrently showed that the teachers' motivation was strongly driven by students (see 3.3.7 below). This finding was reinforced here. One of the elements present was the teachers' vocation for teaching and the conviction that, in exercising their teaching practice, their professional competence would improve. Another element was teachers' positive attitude towards student learning. Teachers had faith in students. They believed that "everyone can learn" and wanted "to give opportunity" to students to experience this on their own. Moreover, a

key element for this learning process to take place was perceived to be the result of the reciprocal effect of teachers' and students' closeness, good relationships and trust.

- *Another thing is that I believe everyone can learn, just we have to find the way together (students and teachers).*
- *I give opportunity to my students to prove themselves that learning English is possible if they want.*
- *I am very motivated to learn more to improve my teaching skills.*
- *I am in the right profession because I love teaching.*
- *...another one is that my students trust me and I think that's important because I can demand more from them in class.*
- *Good relationship with my students.*
- *Being available to help my students personally when they look for me.*

The other teacher qualities that were identified less commonly in the first exploration: a collaborative attitude, dynamism, creativity, patience and responsibility are implicitly included in most teachers' input everywhere else in this stage.

3.3.6 Teacher knowledge

In the initial exploration, five categories of knowledge emerged: knowledge of methodological aspects, knowledge of materials design and implementation, knowledge of lesson planning, knowledge of the target language, and knowledge of students. Some of the most important findings in that exploration were that: (1) teachers had significant gaps in their knowledge base of teaching methods; (2) teachers needed significant help to be able to cope with the limitation of materials; (3) teachers needed ideas for effective planning; (4) teachers' ideas to optimize language use were limited; (5) most teachers had good knowledge of students' characteristics, but they lacked ideas about how to handle the complexity of student-related issues, such as learning needs, learning styles, motivation and multilevel groups (see section 2.4.2 above).

These limitations, which were corroborated through the classroom observations, were connected with all kinds of teacher knowledge base, namely, *contextual knowledge*, *content knowledge*, *pedagogical content knowledge* and *practical knowledge*. The findings provided important input for the program intended to fulfill the teachers' training needs. The same categorization was used in the new exploration of teachers' knowledge one year later and the results are presented in table 22 below.

Table 22

Teachers' perception about their knowledge

CATEGORY	STRENGTHS	TC	WEAKNESSES	TC
Knowledge of different methodological issues/teaching techniques/activity implementation/classroom management	Ability to use different kinds of methodology, techniques and resources for teaching purposes	A,B, C,E,F ,G,I,J, K,M, N,O	Need to expand ideas about teaching techniques and strategies in specific cases (e.g. teaching writing, listening, pronunciation, integration of skills, variety of activities, classroom dynamics, teaching large classes, explaining grammar points)	C, D, K, L, M, N
Total Nº of teachers		12		6
Knowledge of materials design and implementation	Create own materials for a variety of purposes, kinds of students and teaching situations, (authentic materials, search the internet, etc.)	B,F,G , I,K, L, M,N	---	
Total Nº of teachers		8		-
Knowledge of lesson planning and/or time management skills	Skills in structuring the lesson plan	C,F,G ,N,O	Problems in lesson planning in terms of: Objectives achievement/finding time self-assessment, pacing, sequencing and making transitions	E, I,K M
Total Nº of teachers		5		4
Knowledge of the target language and how to optimize its use in the classroom	Good proficiency level	B, K, L,N	Need to improve language skills (pronunciation, fluency, speaking, increase vocabulary, make oral presentations, give classroom instructions)	A, E C, F, D, G, O
Total Nº of teachers		4		9
Knowledge of how to deal with the particular characteristics of students	Ability to motivate students and foster participation/interaction/communication in class Awareness of students' needs Ability to get students' trust and reliance Awareness of students' learning styles (integration of a variety of resources)	D, I, L, M, F, N,J, O	Not knowing how to promote students' interaction and participation/raise students' motivation/deal with students boredom and tiredness Not knowing how to handle particular problems with student characteristics (behavior learning styles, attitudinal problems, mixed-ability students)	F, I M,N, F B, F, D, I J, O P
Total Nº of teachers		8		10

- *Knowledge of methodological issues*

As shown, most teachers (n=12) considered they had strengths in the use of different kinds of methodology, techniques and resources for teaching purposes which contrasted with the initial exploration in which only two teachers believed they had strengths in this area, (one of them focused on teaching grammar). Regarding weaknesses, six teachers admitted they still needed to reinforce their skills in teaching which is less than the previous exploration in which the majority of the teachers (n=11) stated they needed help in that area. The weaknesses at that time, focused on not having enough ideas about teaching techniques and strategies to conduct language instruction, and dealing with large classes. In this stage, teachers stated they needed effective ideas to cope with the problem of large classes too, (a challenge posed by context that

is still a reality in most educational institutions in Nicaragua as discussed in chapter two). Nevertheless, there were other new elements present in the identified weaknesses: teaching individual language areas (listening, writing and pronunciation) teaching integrated skills, using effective classroom dynamics and explaining grammar points. All of this information about the teacher's strengths and weaknesses in teaching methods has important implications. On the one hand the teachers believed they had reinforced their methodology; a perception supported by the teachers' comments everywhere else in this exploration. On the other hand, the teachers had refined their perception in being able to identify their weaknesses, which was an indication of an increase in the teachers' reflective skills. The evaluation of the courses "Methodology in TEFL" *Techniques in TEFL 1*, and *Techniques in TEFL 2*; courses that intended to help teachers in this regard will shed more light on the issue of methodology (see section 4 below).

- Knowledge of materials design and implementation

Previously, only three teachers had identified strengths in this area and most teachers had stated that they needed ideas to be able to deal with the issue of materials for instruction effectively. This time the situation reflected that eight teachers perceived an improvement in their ability to design materials and implement them in their lessons. Nevertheless, no teacher mentioned weaknesses in this area, which at first was difficult to understand. At the time of this exploration though, several teachers were still working on the assignments of the course on *Materials Design and Implementation*, which had taken place during the previous semester to help teachers cope with their limitations in this area. A few teachers had finished their assignments. Nevertheless, some others were in the process of designing and implementing materials which might explain why no information was provided about their weaknesses (further information about this is provided in the evaluation of the program in section 4).

- *Knowledge of lesson planning*

In the previous exploration, four teachers identified strengths in their ability for planning lessons, and seven that they had problems particularly in structure, objectives formulation and time management. This time five teachers stated they had skills in structuring their lesson plans and four that they still had weaknesses. The weaknesses revolved around the achievement of objectives, time management and finding ways for effective self-assessment. In addition, there were problems with lesson stages, such as pacing, sequencing and making transitions. All of this reflects, once again, the teachers' refinement of important issues (e.g. lesson stages and self-assessment) that had not been present in the first exploration. This demonstrates an increase in teacher awareness and knowledge of lesson planning aspects. The interview at this stage revealed that all teachers were using their own lesson planning formats and that the course *Lesson Planning in TEFL* had provided them with significant knowledge to structure their plans.

- Knowledge of the target language and how to optimize its use in the classroom

In the past, most teachers (n=10) identified weaknesses in this area. Their concerns in the first exploration revolved around not knowing how to use English in class all the time, how to encourage students to speak and how to help students communicate in the target language. These concerns were still present at the time of the exploration which was reflected by the teachers' insights regarding the situation in their classrooms (3.3.1 above). Nevertheless, the identification of limitations here was more focused on their own linguistic abilities (pronunciation, fluency, speaking, and vocabulary range, making oral presentations, giving classroom instructions). This reflected a positive change in the teachers' perception regarding their own linguistic skills. Teachers were more aware of the need to provide students with effective language models, an element barely seen in the previous exploration.

- *Knowledge of how to deal with the particular characteristics of students*

The previous exploration revealed that the teachers had a high awareness of students' learning needs (nine) and that it was necessary for most of them (n=11) to reinforce their knowledge on how to deal with students' particular characteristics. A number of different areas were related to this need: motivation, participation, attention, learning styles, behavior, etc. In this stage teachers continued to show their concern about students which is shown in many of their insights throughout. Some teachers stated strengths in their ability to motivate students, foster participation in class and get students trust and reliance. This is consistent with the finding about the teachers' inclination to socialize with students (see 3.3.5 and 3.3.7). Another important strength is related to students' needs and learning styles. Some teachers stated to have gained knowledge on integrating a variety of resources to address all students' needs, issue that was covered in the course *Teaching EFL with a Learner-centred Approach*. Nevertheless, teachers kept stating problems posed by students' characteristics, such as how to promote students' interaction and participation, how to raise students' motivation, how to deal with student's boredom and tiredness and how to handle students' particular characteristics, such as behavior, learning styles, attitudinal problems, mixed ability students, and so on and so forth. It was quite possible that this persistent concern was also influenced by the teachers' recent integration as university teachers. Challenges with university students were certainly varied and numerous.

The relevance of all this information is that it shed significant light on the stage of the teachers' knowledge after the courses of the training program had taken place. It was clear that there had been changes: *reinforcement* of all kinds of teacher knowledge base, *expansion* of teaching tools and skills, and *refinement* of perceptions. More importantly, it was clear that teachers had established new priorities to continue to expand their knowledge in particular areas which is an unequivocal sign of reflective skills. The connection between the areas identified by

the teachers as their priorities, and the selection of research topics would be another proof of the teachers' awareness process (see section 3.5 below)

3.3.7 *Teacher motivation*

Motivation was an important issue to address at this stage to foster the teachers' reflection on their main sources of job satisfaction and dissatisfaction. For the investigation, it was particularly important to be able to compare their views at that time with their views one year before. The discussion is presented making comparisons between the two kinds of findings.

- *Sources of job satisfaction*

In the previous exploration, the findings revealed that teachers were motivated because of their own personal and professional goals, and because they wanted to contribute to the success of students' professional life. The findings also revealed that students' perception of their work was a highly motivational element, as well as the relationship with students (which was perceived as a relation of reciprocal collaboration). Because of these motivational sources, the teachers were naturally inspired to become better teachers.

The new findings showed that the teachers' motivational sources at this stage were: *the fulfilment of their social role, their professional development, students' learning outcomes, the relationship with students and colleagues, and the possibility of learning new knowledge.*

a. *Fulfilment of social role*

All the teachers showed high level of enthusiasm and eagerness towards teaching English which they considered the fulfilment of their social function. This was consistent with the previous finding regarding their contribution to students' professionalization. This time they added their commitment to contribute to the development and progress of the country. This expansion of perception meant an increase in the teachers' awareness of their role as social change agents. The teachers' vocation had transcended the walls of the classroom, which was considered a great step in their reflection process. A reflective and critical attitude would certainly help them fulfil their role as teachers in a better way.

b. *Professional development*

All teachers agreed that professional development was one of their main motivational sources. Teachers perceived teaching as the platform from which they could access further professional opportunities. Thus, professional development was an important driving force that led teachers to move on in their desire to be better teachers. This was obviously linked with the possibility of higher professional positions; a legitimate ambition indeed. An example of this was the wish to be hired permanently as UNAN's teacher, an aspiration that had probably been activated by their recently acquired job. University levels were seen as the ultimate goal to reach in terms of professional competence: to gain experience as a professional, to have a better academic status, and to get a better financial recognition. Unfortunately, this working condition did not last long for most teachers (see section 3.7.6 below).

c. *Student learning outcomes*

As it was expected student learning outcomes continued to be the teachers' motivational driving force *par excellence*. The teachers had a sense of fulfilment in helping students learn as well as in transmitting values (moral principles, human relationship, interculturality, etc.). As one of the teachers said "...my students are the reasons of my every day teaching efforts" This motivational aspect was present in the teachers' identification of qualities (3.3.3). They genuinely wanted students to learn and be able to use the language for its intended real purpose: communication. So, the teachers felt highly motivated whenever they achieved this goal. Student interest, enthusiasm and motivation were powerful drives that helped teachers put contextual limitations aside and focus on their lessons.

d. *Relationship with students and colleagues*

As in the previous exploration, the interaction and relationship with students continued to be an important source of motivation for the teachers. The new element this time was the interaction with colleagues. The element of collaboration with colleagues was present, originally, in the teachers' identification of the necessary conditions for teacher development (2.5.4), then, in the teachers' conceptualization of *the reflective teacher* (3.2.5) and in the description of the teachers' qualities (3.3.5). This change was, no doubt, fostered through their interaction during the training course and the peer collaborations during the classroom observations. The teachers' had internalized the importance of their relationship with colleagues for their professional growth, and had taken it to their motivational levels.

e. *Learning new knowledge and change*

The teachers' natural inclination and openness towards learning and change was mentioned in the description of their development stage (3.3.3), it was present in the teachers' qualities (3.3.5), and continued to be an issue here at the level of motivations. This was made evident as most of them openly admitted their satisfaction with the postgraduate course. For all teachers learning through relevant teacher training was the opportunity to improve both linguistically and in the acquisition of the knowledge to be effectively equipped for their jobs as teachers. This urgency to continue to learn was the result of their new working conditions at the time. Once again, context was demanding from the teachers to be able to cope with the new challenges, and the teachers valued the training course as an important means to fulfil them.

- *Sources of job dissatisfaction*

Previously, teachers had described the problems posed by students as their main sources of dissatisfaction (lack of motivation, learning difficulties, individual differences, academic failure, etc.) which they connected to their own performance. One of the main findings at that time was that there was ample room for change in this area. The other significant sources of demotivation were the problems posed by their situational contexts (lack of optimal conditions, decision making policies, and salary issues, among others) which provoked a general sense of frustration

and powerlessness as teachers felt they could do nothing to improve this situation. Nevertheless, the findings revealed that there were several aspects prone to improvement at the classroom level. The new findings about the teachers' source of satisfaction were focused on *students' lack of motivation and failure, lack of social recognition and contextual constraints*.

a. Student lack of motivation and failure

Student lack of motivation continued to be the teachers' greatest concern and a considerable source of dissatisfaction. The teachers kept linking students' success to their own performance making connections at the level of planning and implementation (e.g. "not being able to fulfil class objectives", "plans that don't go well", and "activities that don't work as expected"). One of the worst problems was the fact that some students only worried about earning a grade. These students were not really interested in learning the language as an integral part of their professional formation. Students' lack of interest in learning the language proved to be so important, that most research topics were focused on making improvements in this area (see section 3.5 below).

b. Lack of social recognition

The teachers felt motivated by the fulfilment of their social role as teachers. Obviously they had expectations of retribution, an element already present in their conceptualization of *the reflective teacher* (3.2.5). They expected social recognition from the other social agents involved in the education process (students, institutional authorities, society). From students, they expected the fulfilment of their learning tasks; from institutional authorities, they expected the due academic and financial recognition for their work; and from society, they expected respect and acknowledgment towards their professional status as teachers. Logically not having this acknowledgment exerted a negative influence in their moral and self-confidence as teachers. The worst problem mentioned in this regard, was the underestimation of the teaching profession reflected by the low salaries (a critical problem in Nicaraguan educational system as discussed in chapter two).

c. Contextual constraints

The last source of job dissatisfaction identified, were the problems posed by context. For the teachers it was "too much of a challenge to teach properly". And it was true, sadly. At this point it was perceived that the teachers were tired of dealing with so many limitations, namely the lack of appropriate conditions for teaching, not having enough resources at hand, and the lack of support for teaching properly (in schools teachers are not allowed "to make noise in class"). Another important problem that undermined the teachers' motivation was time constraints and workloads which gave them very little time (or no time at all) for tasks other than planning or evaluating. As one of the teachers said "evaluation is an overwhelming task because of the number of students" Time constraints and workloads proved to be a serious

limitation that affected teachers' attendance to the collaborative sessions to guide the teachers' research projects, which will be described in section 3.6.7 below.

The teachers certainly provided much more input about their motivational sources than they did in the first exploration. Some of the information provided coincided with the one provided originally. But there were new added elements and much more revealing insights about their motivational drives, which was considered the result of a deeper and a more enriching reflection process.

This concludes the exploration of the first step in the guided process of the teachers' reflection, which was focused on a number of important aspects of their teaching practice: their development stage, the identification of problems at the classroom level, their knowledge, qualities and motivational sources. All of this was contrasted with the initial findings. On the whole, it was evidenced that the teachers had expanded their knowledge, refined their perceptions, and increased their reflective skills significantly so as to move to the next step of reflection. This new step was intended to raise the teachers' awareness on the consistencies and inconsistencies between their beliefs and practice.

3.4 Raising teachers' awareness

The third introspective analysis was focused on raising teacher awareness about the consistencies and inconsistencies between their teaching beliefs and actions. For this purpose the teachers were given access to the written results of the initial exploration (see stage II above). This was certainly a major event in the guidance to reflection as it was one of the most enlightening moments of the entire reflection process.

3.4.1 *Troublesome aspects in the classroom*

As an initial effect of the exploration, the teachers showed great interest in the major issues of the exploration, namely, the sources of their beliefs, their beliefs about teaching and learning, about themselves and about their professional development. Special attention was devoted to the findings about the classroom observation, where the conflict between teaching beliefs and teaching actions was evidenced. After analyzing the information, the teachers openly admitted the discordance between what they believed and what they actually did in the classroom. They also presented arguments, stated reasons, and defended their points. The process was a rich discussion that led to the reconsideration of many aspects of the teaching-learning process, major objective of the exploration. After the discussion, the teachers brainstormed a list of the troublesome aspects in their teaching practice at the classroom level, which are presented below.

- The role of the teacher vs. the role of the students
- Teacher Talking Time (TTT) vs. Student Talking Time (STT)
- Dealing with group management
- Monitoring students' work
- Asking questions in the classroom

- Promoting communicative skills
- Giving feedback to students' performance
- Providing variety of activities in the classroom
- Correcting students' errors
- Integrating games and competitions in the classroom
- Evaluating students' work
- Dealing with motivational problems
- Teaching English in an integrated way
- Teaching individual language areas
- Giving classroom instructions
- Using English in class
- Integrating complementary teaching materials

As shown, there was a rich contribution of ideas all of which were generated by the exploration. At a glance it is possible to see that several of the issues in the list had been present in the teachers' exploration of their weaknesses: e.g. teaching individual language areas, dealing with motivational problems, giving classroom instructions, and promoting communicative skills (see 3.3.6). This is a significant finding that, on the one hand, gives validity to the process of exploration and, on the other, proves the effectiveness of the reflection process in raising the teachers' awareness of important aspects of their teaching practice. The list was by no means exhaustive. It didn't have to. The concerns belonged to this particular group of teachers, in that particular context, and at that particular time. The value of the information was, precisely, its pertinence and refinement. It was the result of a long process, and it was produced by the main actors involved. Thus, the number and complexity of issues involved were clear indicators that the teachers' awareness regarding their teaching practice had increased significantly. Slowly but surely, the teachers were on their way to higher reflection stages.

3.4.2 Teachers' perceptions

The fourth introspective analysis of teachers' thinking was based on a journal task that was connected with the previous exploration of teachers' beliefs and actions, in order to get the most out of the reflective experience. Consequently, the teachers were asked to write an essay about their insights and perceptions as a result of the experience of revising important aspects of their teaching practice. There were several underlying reasons for asking the teachers to write their insights. First, it was important to continue to raise awareness about the specific and real aspects affecting their teaching practice, at a more personal level. Second, the information collected would provide important insights about the teachers' reflective process. Finally, it was expected that the teachers' perceptions were a step closer to the identification of potential problems for their AR projects, as it turned out to be the case. The results of this reflection are presented in table 23 below.

Table 23

Effects of the initial exploration of teachers' beliefs and actions

Teachers' perceptions	TEACHERS														
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	
Bridging the gap between beliefs and practice				√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	
Improving professional competence		√		√		√	√			√	√	√	√		
Acknowledging the complexity of teaching	√					√	√	√	√	√				√	
Recognizing the importance of beliefs in teaching practice		√			√			√		√	√	√	√	√	
Reflecting on the influence of beliefs		√			√		√	√		√	√	√	√	√	
Identifying the difficulties in reconciling beliefs and practice	√	√	√	√	√							√	√		
Recognizing the importance of collaboration				√	√	√	√	√							

1. *Bridging the gap between beliefs and practice*

The teachers' were very honest and direct with their perceptions. As shown, in most cases the greatest impact was perceived in their determination to achieve consistency, look for solutions and ways to solve the problems. Their main motivational drive was well known: students. On the whole it was perceived that realizing the inconsistencies between beliefs and practice motivated teachers to take a proactive attitude around the problem. As one of the teachers accurately stated, "the ideal actions are to reflect on the mistakes and look for possible solutions" Thus, most teachers were willing to take reflection to the field of actions: finding solutions, changing beliefs, simplifying the gap between beliefs and actions, and making improvements. This determination can be perceived in their comments below.

- *It was an instrument for us to be more conscious about our jobs as professionals.... not only reflecting about the issues that we have as English teachers, but do something to improve and overcome the boundaries that limit us as teachers.*
- *It is possible to change the way we teach if we change our beliefs; so I need to take some steps and encourage myself to make changes in my field.*
- *The exploration of my beliefs and actions had a revolving idea...find a possible solution on how to deal with the misrepresentation of (my) beliefs and actions*
- *I see myself in the situation to explore new ideas and even practice new beliefs I used to refuse in order to look for alternatives which respond to students' needs.*

- *We need to work out problems by using our strengths and the things learnt with the errors....dissatisfactions will affect us as much as we let them do.*
- *I am just a professor willing to take the problem in his hand and simplify the existing divergence between (my) beliefs and actions.*
- *I realize that it is time to make necessary changes in my teaching actions.*
- *Therefore, I am convinced that I can improve my teaching as other teachers have done.*

2. *Improving professional competence*

The teachers' reflection on their beliefs and actions was also perceived as a learning opportunity; a way to professional competence. An open-minded attitude was a distinguishing feature of these teachers throughout the training process, which is confirmed here by their receptive attitude to the results of the exploration. Thus, the situation was approached in a very positive way. Teachers received the information gladly as it helped them be more conscious of both their weaknesses and their strengths. On the other hand, being able to bridge the gap between their beliefs and actions was a sign of professional development, as it can be perceived from the following comments:

- *It became a source of reflection to think about the weak and strong points concerning my teaching practice.*
- *It let me analyze some of my weaknesses and be conscious of them. Previously...I did not even think about my weaknesses or my strengths as a teacher. However, this was something I used to meditate on as soon as I finish every session of class.*
- *Weaknesses and strengths are together. We cannot think of a teacher without weaknesses, but we cannot think of a teacher without strengths either.*
- *Having reflected on my beliefs and actions made me think about my real teaching skills. I have also seen that I do not only have weaknesses...my strengths...could help students to realize that they need to try hard to learn English.*
- *Some of the information gave me the opportunity to reflect on my professional development, because our learning never ends.*
- *I am optimistic and I consider that I have the potential to improve what makes me stay behind the dreamed professor.*
- *I realized that I have to be critical on every aspect of my teaching practices so that professional growth shows in my beliefs and actions.*
- *Besides, we can improve our methodology and principles and at the end we'll see that our effort for changing and improving the way we teach would not have been in vain.*
- *I realize that my actions are not according to my beliefs and that I should do some changes in order to improve my professional development and growth as a teacher.*
- *It's good to be critical teachers...it makes us notice we have to change Now I intend to join my beliefs and actions to be successful and be more professional.*

3. *Acknowledging the complexity of teaching*

The exploration was also useful for teachers to be more aware of the complexity of teaching and of the number of difficulties they experienced in their teaching practice. This was also the intended purpose of this reflection: raise the teachers' awareness of the many aspects involved in the teaching process, the challenges teachers face and what it takes to address such challenges. Using the words of one of the teachers, the exploration helped them "visualize teaching".

- *...to know where I am as a teacher at this moment, the effects of my teaching on my students, what teaching involves, what I have to do...this is about my performance in and out of the classroom, my role and my motivation in my classes.*
- *...it kind of opened my eyes to visualize that teaching doesn't consist of a random selection of choices; rather it is a methodical process which demands a lot of time and a good precision to develop the objectives effectively.*
- *...it made me feel that we as teachers face many difficulties in the classroom and also when planning our lessons.*

4. *Recognizing the importance of beliefs*

Most teachers understood the message well. They acknowledged having developed a stronger and clearer view of their teaching beliefs and their importance on effective teaching practice. Because of the number of aspects addressed by the exploration, teachers understood in a better way that their beliefs exerted great influence on what they used to do in the classroom. Thus, beliefs determined the effectiveness of their teaching actions. The effectiveness of their teaching actions, in turn, determined the success in student learning outcomes. Teachers realized that the agreement between effective beliefs and effective actions was crucial for such success.

- *The initial exploration of my beliefs and actions helped me understand better the real objective of teaching effectively. It really helped me focus on the agreement that should be between beliefs and actions.*
- *After I finish reading all the information regarding my beliefs and actions I can see that things are not going in the same direction.*
- *...setting the difference among beliefs and actions is a way of saying who you are, how you are, and why you are the way you are...it just makes me think that we cannot pretend or act in a way that does not match the perception of who we really are.*
- *It's been good to know that I have some weaknesses between my beliefs and my actions so now I am aware of that.*
- *I have come to know that my beliefs and actions are not consistent because I cannot perceive outstanding changes in my students' performance.*

- *Only when teachers keep progress records of their own performance they can begin to see when teaching and learning have or have not been successful.*
- *In order to have positive results I have to go back and think over what my real beliefs are.*

5. *Reflecting on the influence of beliefs*

Another positive aspect of the exploration was that some of the teachers went beyond in the scope of their reflection. They pointed out other important elements, such as the sources of beliefs and the causes and effects of the contradiction between beliefs and practice. This complexity of thoughts and perceptions was considered an added value fostered by the exploration. Thus, teachers analysed the sources of their beliefs and the potential harmful influence of previous models at PRESET stages in the adoption of ineffective teaching beliefs and practices. This finding was consistent with the original results in which teachers identified their previous experiences as emerging from their training program. Nevertheless, at that time the teachers seemed to be unaware of the possible flaws. Here, most teachers were really critical about these programs. The influence of PRESET programs on teacher beliefs was an issue widely discussed in the literature review (4.1.6)

- *I understood where my beliefs come from; this is very essential in our teaching.*
- *I can say that I have seen negative aspects in my own teaching and pretty much the same things that I did not like about some of the professors I had.*
- *I know my beliefs sprang from my education and that it is possible to change for the better.*
- *I stop for a moment to reflect on what are the causes of the contradictions between our beliefs and actions.*

6. *Identifying the difficulties in reconciling beliefs and practice*

Although most teachers showed determination in bringing their beliefs and actions together, they also stated the constraints in doing so. Comments like “it is difficult to control” or “it is difficult to achieve one’s goals” “we change the way” reflected that the teachers acknowledged the difficulties in increasing self-awareness that things are not working properly. There were many reasons. One of them was affective factors impeding an honest analysis of their teaching beliefs. As one of the teachers stated, “...we don’t like hurting ourselves”. Others constraints mentioned were a lack of awareness as a result of not having the right guidance and abilities. As another teacher said “just when the teacher has the right information and skills she/he is able to know why she/he does what she/he does” Another interfering factor was contextual constraints such as the physical conditions in the classrooms, lack of resources, inaccurate curriculum guidelines, and restricting policies by educational authorities. Even students’ disposition was perceived as exerting a negative influence on the teachers’ beliefs and actions. Context, indeed, has been identified as a potential hindrance for the teachers’ professional development

throughout the findings of this investigation (see lit review, 1). All of these limitations are reflected in the teachers' comments below.

- *I know this is hard to control at first, but if we look for the solution with patience and resolution we'll get good results so that we can get more mature in our teaching-learning process.*
- *Talking about what I preach and practice, honestly, it is difficult to accomplish one's main goals to develop as a professional, but I try harder each time I am teaching.*
- *I was really surprised (by the exploration)...it was like a bell ringing...we know what to do, but sometimes we change the way.*
- *I strongly believe that just when the teacher has this information and skills he/she is able to know why she/he does what she/he does.*
- *It's difficult to find your personal weaknesses because we don't like hurting ourselves*
- *Sometimes I am not aware of my atmosphere; sometimes students have problems, feel tired, are exhausted, have a lot of assignments and lots of pressure as well.*
- *We think in one way and we have to act in another way...we have to adapt our beliefs to the ones that the Ministry wants...*
- *Sometimes as teachers we think we can develop this topic but when you remember we have to follow those steps...you change all the activities to fulfill their (authorities') expectations.*

7. *Recognizing the importance of collaboration*

Another benefit of the exploration was the teachers' recognition of the importance of collaboration for bridging the gap between teaching beliefs and actions. In this sense they acknowledged two kinds of collaboration: teacher training (which included repeated references to the postgraduate course) and sharing with their colleagues. The teachers perceived the practical side of training which was focused in helping them have more accurate teaching views and more effective teaching actions. They had already identified this kind of collaboration as useful to help them improve professionally (2.5.4) and as a source of motivation (3.3.7). Here the teachers refined their views by providing reasons as to why they regarded this kind of collaboration a useful one. Collaboration was an issue widely covered in the literature review as an important support framework for understanding beliefs (see lit. review 4.1.3). The following are some of the teachers' comments in this regard.

- *This exploration has been very enriching because I have been trained in different skills that were my weaknesses and I am sure by the end of this postgraduate course I will have overcome my difficulties and developed professionally.*
- *It is necessary to train teachers with theoretical practice, didactical and methodological knowledge to develop their teaching practice in the different classrooms.*

- *I think that being clear about my own beliefs and doing more of what I have to do to get better, my students will benefit from the experience I am accumulating now with this course and the reflection on my work*
- *There is a relationship between my beliefs and actions...all the time I need to put into practice all I learned in different workshops and some advice from other colleagues.*
- *I had never read information about other colleagues' performance and I must recognize it is very useful because we are working at different stages but facing similar problems concerning our work and our students' perceptions/opinions about English.*
- *I realize that we have similar views and many challenges to improve our teaching.*

As shown above, very important insights emerged out of this exploration which shed significant light on the advances of the teachers' reflection. The exploration served its intended purpose; foster teacher reflection on the major discordances between beliefs and actions. Consequently, the teachers had the opportunity to interact with the number of aspects involved in the exploration, which led to two important results. On the one hand, the teachers identified a number of troublesome aspects in the classroom, each of which could potentially become a research topic. On the other hand, the teachers put into practice their analytical skills to reflect on the exploration. This process resulted in a number of contributions that evidenced the complexity and depth of their perceptions, the evolution of their reflection as well as their intended future actions. Major emerging issues were: *the gap between beliefs and practice, professional competence, the complexity of teaching, the influence of beliefs on the teaching practice, the difficulties in reconciling beliefs and practice and the importance of collaboration to achieve consistency.*

3.5 Identifying and selecting the research area

Along with the reflective process teachers were having exposure to information about the identification and selection of the research area. The accompanying reading materials were from Wallace's *Action Research for Language Teachers* (1998). Thus, this fifth and last introspective analysis was directly connected with the course contents. The particular content that gave rise to these journal entries was, precisely, how to identify and select a research topic. As a logical progression of the previous stages, and in light of this content, the teachers were asked to focus their reflection at a more practical level. Thus, they were asked to select the group of students with which they wanted to do their research, observe and keep track of a particular troublesome event, and write about it. For this purpose, the teachers were provided with a journal task consisting of a set of reflective questions about that specific experience in their classrooms. The main objective of these questions was to help teachers focus on *one* particular aspect affecting their teaching practice that could eventually become a research topic. Both *reflection-on-action* and *reflection-for-action* were at play in this introspective task (see lit. review 4.2.2).

The journal task consisted of several reflective questions each of which had a particular purpose to guide the teachers in the process of selecting and delimiting their AR topic. The idea was that the teachers chose a researchable topic directly connected with their experience in the classroom. This is shown in table 24 below.

Table 24

Reflective questions and research issues

Reflective questions	Research issue
What happened? What's the origin of my concern?	Research area
Who was involved?	Target population
Why did the event bother me?	Background information
How did the event affect me? The students? The class?	Scope of the problem
What could the possible cause be?	Hypothesis formulation
What could the possible solution be?	Hypothesis formulation
How can I know more? What information will I need?	Research procedures

The questions were related to a number of research issues. The first two, for example, were related to the *research area* itself (what happened? /what's the origin of my choice?). Through these two questions the teachers would have the opportunity to refine their perspective of the problems that they had been identifying in the previous steps, this time at the classroom level. The list of issues that emerged of the exploration of teaching beliefs and practice was expected to help teachers refine their search (see 3.4 above). The next question, (who was involved?) was clearly connected with the *target population* or participants; whether a group of students or the whole group, and/or the teacher herself/himself. Following is the question related to the *background information* (why did the event bother me?). This question intended to help teachers reflect on the reasons why the event was a problematic situation and why it was worthwhile investigating. This would also help the teachers set the stage for the rest of the research plan. The *research scope* was the focus of the next set of questions (how did the event affect me? my students? the classroom environment? my teaching?) These questions were intended to help teachers define and explain the topic or problem and make all possible connections with their teaching practice. The next two questions were both related to *hypothesis formulation* about the possible causes of the problem and the possible solutions. The last question was related to the *research procedures*; the kind of data collection instruments that would be helpful to find out information about the particular problem identified. The following teachers' accounts in table 25 below illustrate clearly the introspective process that all teachers went through as a result of their interaction with these research questions. This is followed by the findings in each of them.

Table 25

Teacher reflection on teaching

Reflective questions	Research Issue	Teacher L	Teacher M
What happened? What's the origin of my concern?	Research area	Recently some students were not able to develop a speaking activity they were supposed to perform. At the time of the presentation they had not prepared the activities.	Students brought their pictures but in spite of having had enough time to prepare their presentations just a few of them could carry out the activity without reading.
Who was involved?	Target population	My group of students in year II of Biology.	A group of students in year II of the General Studies Year
Why did the event bother me?	Background information	It bothered me because I thought everything was okay. In case of having had any difficulty they should have asked me...they had two weeks to do it.	The situation bothered me because I want them to put into practice what they are learning not to keep it as useless information...
How did the event affect me? The students? The classroom environment?	Scope of the problem	They expressed they lacked the strategies for speaking They were really frightened of being in front of their classmates...I understood they were nervous They were waiting for the time I corrected them	Even if they know how to say something they don't do it because they are afraid of making mistakes Students who participate actively are usually the same ones. Students usually want to work with the same partners.
What could the possible cause be?	Hypothesis formulation	I think the cause of students' fear is that they are unable to perform well, and another reason could be the type of assignments they have to do. They were not used to present a topic or an activity in English in front of the class	The lack of real situations where they can put into practice what they are learning. ...it's possible that most of them don't practice alone or with somebody else after class. They possibly don't feel confident enough to talk in front of their classmates.
What could the possible solution be?	Hypothesis formulation	The solution for this problem is difficult to find, since it is about a topic in which students must put great efforts to overcome the problems. I have thought about some activities that could help them overcome their fears, which I think are normal in students who are starting to learn a new language.	A possible solution could be integrating more pair and group work so they feel more confident with their classmates and they can also ask their classmates for help...I have observed that some of them are doing that...working with somebody else makes them feel more comfortable.
How can I know more about it? What kind of information will I need to collect?	Research procedures	Before making any decision, I want them to express their ideas through a survey. I want to know about their real feelings and interests towards the class and their attitudes inside and outside the class. This also involves their opinions about me. I am interested in searching about my students' development in communicative activities. I am thinking about writing eventual entries in my diary in order to keep meaningful information about their development. I also have in mind to get some peer observations with a colleague to get relevant opinions and advice to...overcome the problem we are facing in class. Finally, I will carry out an action plan which I expect may change...the situation...	I need information about the advantages of using pairs and group work to increase student interaction... I also need to observe students behavior in individual activities, pairs and groups. I need to take notes during the development of the activities or after the lesson so I can put into practice theory to reality and...do a proposal to improve the situation. I will use journals to keep a record of events during the development of the activities; a questionnaire in order to get information about students' preferences when working by themselves in pairs or groups. Finally I will need a colleague to observe the class so I can compare my findings and observations with his or hers.

3.5.1 Research areas and target population

The reflective process led the teachers to the identification of priorities and areas of concern. From the two teachers' accounts above it can be perceived that most teachers continued to be consistent with their high levels of interest in student learning. This tendency exerted great influence on the identification and selection of possible research areas. Table 26 below shows information about each of the teachers' research areas, the students and the kinds of programs where the research projects took place.

Table 26

Research areas and target population

TC	Research Area	Year	No. of students	Major/studies	Faculty/Program/Institution
A	Communicative activities and student motivation	II	40	Law	Juridical Sciences
B	Communicative activities and aural skills	II	23	Business Administration	Economical Sciences
C	Pair work and group work in large classes	II	40	Law	Juridical Sciences
D	Basic writing skills	7 th	25	Secondary school	Madre María Luisa School
E	Communicative activities	I	45	Social Work	Educational Sciences and Humanities
F	General Pronunciation skills	II	20	System Engineering	Science and Technology
G	Using visual aids	I	20	PEM Physical Education	Educational Sciences and Humanities
H	Participation in speaking activities	III	30	Marketing	Economical Sciences
I	Reading comprehension skills	I	41	Group 11AEG	General Studies Year
J	Effective teacher roles	II	50	Pharmacy	Chemical Sciences
K	Overuse of the mother tongue	II	12	System Engineering	Science and Technology
L	Communicative activities and student interaction	II	30	Biology	Science and Technology
M	Communicative activities and student interaction	I	29	Group 29 AEG	General Studies Year
N	Pronunciation of technical language	III	34	System Engineering	Science and Technology
O	Communicative activities and students oral skills	II	31	Clinical Bioanalysis	Medical sciences
Total number of students			470		

As shown, most teachers selected research areas related to communicative activities (TA/TH/TE), which were combined with some other sort of focus: developing oral and aural skills (TB), student interaction (TL/TM), and student motivation (TA). This choice shows that the teachers were focused on developing both students' awareness of the real use of the language and their communicative skills. This was consistent with the teachers' original beliefs that language learning should improve if used for communication. Since the exploration had revealed serious gaps between teacher beliefs and actions in this area (see 2.2.1 in stage II), it was clear that the teachers had decided to find out what was happening on their own. It was significant that most teachers had chosen this area as it seemed to indicate their conscious

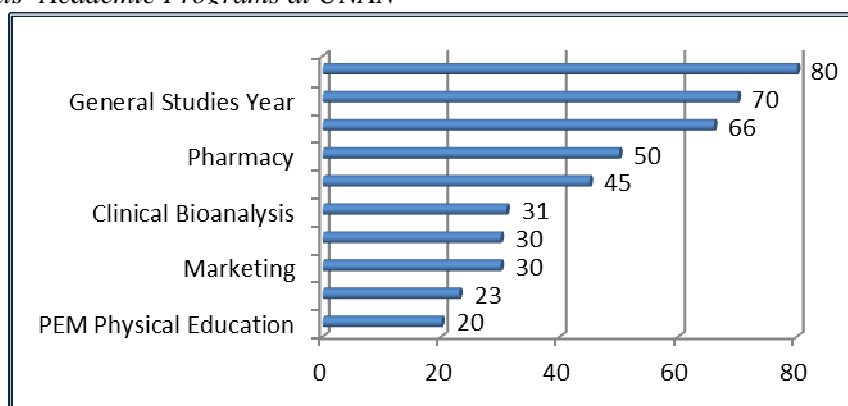
efforts to align their beliefs and actions. A second area of concern was classroom management. Two specific topics were: pair work and group work in large classes (TC) and effective teacher role (TJ). The third area of concern was related to the language skills and sub-skills, such as basic writing abilities (TD), reading comprehension skills (TI), and pronunciation (TF/TN). A fourth area was related to teaching materials (TG). The fifth area was related to students' overuse of Spanish in the English class (TK).

The teachers' identification of selective research areas was consistent with their identification of priorities to increase their knowledge (see 3.3.6), which indicated that the teachers had gained considerable awareness of their own development needs.

On the other hand, this increase in teacher awareness seemed to have been influenced by the teachers' work challenges. As shown in table 26 above, originally the total population of students participating were 470, out of which 445 (95%) were university students at UNAN-León. Only 25 (5%) students were secondary school students (7th graders) at a public school called Madre María Luisa (these figures eventually changed because of unexpected events as it will be detailed in 3.6.7 below). UNAN students belonged to different Academic Programs as shown in figure 22 below.

Figure 22

Students' Academic Programs at UNAN



The students were enrolled in ten different university Programs of seven different Faculties at UNAN-León: Economical Sciences, Juridical Sciences, Educational Sciences and Humanities, Chemical Sciences, Science and Technology, Medical Sciences and the General Studies Year. Thus, there were 80 students from the Major in Law: two groups of students in year II (40 students in each); 70 students from the General Studies Year (I year of University Studies at UNAN); 66 from System Engineering: two groups in year II (30 and 12 students) and one group in year III (34 students). From the Major in Pharmacy there were 50 students of year II; the Social Work students were 45 in year I; the students from Clinical Bioanalysis were 31 in year II; from the Biology Studies there were 30 students in year II. The last three groups of students belonged to year III of Marketing (30), year I of the Major in Business Administration (23), and year I of the Physical Education Program (20).

This description of the kinds of students, study fields, and university programs involved gives an idea of the complexity of the professional task that the teachers were facing at the moment. The students were very varied and heterogeneous, which made the teaching focus differ significantly. For instance, for all the students in year II the focus was general English, whereas for all students in year III the focus was ESP (English Specific Purposes). It is worth mentioning here that these students were the target population of the teachers' AR projects, but the teachers' workload at that moment involved many more groups (see section 3.6.7 for a detailed description of the teachers' contextual challenges at the time of the AR projects).

3.5.2 Background information about the problem

In the majority of the cases, the event that triggered the research topics was related to student motivation for learning the language. This was the cause of a number of other problems: low attendance, lack of participation, and poor academic performance. Likewise, the lack of motivation was connected with students' low speaking skills for specific oral tasks, such as making basic presentations. The problems in many cases affected the relationship between teachers and students directly. Teachers' affective factors, such as motivation and self-confidence were at play in most cases. One teacher, for example, felt extremely frustrated by the situation in which the same students would be the ones always on-task, while the same others would refuse to get involved. The situation got to a point in which the latter preferred to fail the class than participate. Another similar case was the one in which the teacher was facing low attendance because students underestimated the class. Some of these students even decided to study their materials at home to get ready for exams. Something similar happened to the teacher who had given students all the possible guidelines and information for a specific speaking task, but students did not use the information and decided to read instead of talking spontaneously. Similar other cases where those in which students didn't do the task assigned (or did it reluctantly), insisted in speaking Spanish, using translations, or doing some other unrelated tasks (students prioritized other subjects over English). Thus, some teachers expressed a feeling of powerlessness as they could do nothing at the moment to resolve the situation of those specific students. This is consistent with the finding that one of the highest sources of teacher demotivation were the problems caused by students (3.3.7). Clearly, most teachers had refined their sense of righteousness that it was not correct that students underestimated the class and did not value their efforts for helping them learn. Obviously, there were a number of factors involved in this phenomenon, but the very fact that the teachers had given so much importance to this area reflected an important increase in their reflective skills. Thus, the sense of teacher professionalism is strongly perceived here, as the teachers were more aware of student responsibility with their learning and of their own role, involvement and value in the process.

On the other hand, some other teachers' concerns seemed to be focused on the "how to" side of the problems. For example, dealing with particular language skills (pronunciation,

writing, reading comprehension skills), playing effective teacher roles, providing effective instructions, and dealing with large classes. The information is consistent with the teachers' identification of the areas they needed to reinforce in their knowledge base (see teacher knowledge in 3.3.6 above). The teachers had truly refined their perception to identify relevant problems. More importantly, they had started to make the proper connections between their knowledge and beliefs taking reflection to the level of classroom performance. The following teachers' comments provide anecdotal evidence that the teachers' concerns legitimately emerged out of classroom experience:

- *It affected me because I felt frustrated somehow... I thought I was doing everything OK and I couldn't feel the same after that class.*
- *I get easily discouraged when students tend to be inconsiderate, not supportive and irresponsible with their own learning.*
- *Students express they have their handouts and they don't need to attend the class because they can study at home.*
- *...students interest in the class; they believe that English is not necessary for their career...the students are not motivated to participate.*
- *...students' perception of English, because in most cases they don't have a clear vision of what this language is useful for.*
- *The assignment was delivered two weeks beforehand. At the time of the presentations most of the students had not prepared their activities*
- *No matter what kind of activities I brought to the class, just the same students were really on task; while the others were just sitting.*
- *Students translate what the teacher says in English, probably to make sure they understand.*
- *Student said that the class should be in Spanish or that the explanations are in Spanish.*
- *I started to talk in English...the students looked at me and didn't say anything. This was a bad experience for me. I felt horrible.*
- *The class was supposed to be communicative but it was a mixture of a lot of Spanish and very little English.*
- *I finished reading and most of the students started asking how to pronounce specific words...I felt bad because it would take them plenty of time to improve that skill.*
- *I asked my students to write a paragraph; they were very excited, but the task was not good.*

3.5.3 Scope of the research problem

The problems had different dimensions and levels of impact; the teacher, the students, the classroom environment and the teaching process. On the whole, as mentioned above, teachers felt both personally and professionally affected (professional performance, self-confidence and

motivation). Student learning was directly affected as well in each of the problems detected: participation in class was low and there was slow and poor development of skills (listening, speaking, writing, vocabulary and pronunciation). The classroom environment was affected in different ways as well; using one of the teachers' words: "communication was not taking place". There were also high levels of disruption (e.g. students talking among themselves; students' involvement in other tasks) which caused teachers' frustration. On the other hand, the teaching process was being affected at the level of class structuring (see literature review 3.6). For instance, the lack of student comprehension of the different tasks affected the pace of the class, making it difficult for the teachers to follow the lesson plan and fulfil the learning objectives. There were also problems in essential stages of the class such as; *presentation* (e.g. lack of understanding of teacher talk and classroom instructions); *practice* (students' monopolizing classroom activity while the others kept silent; use of Spanish, lack of pronunciation skills, too basic writing skills, low vocabulary range, etc.); and *production* (e.g. lack of participation, low interaction, low skills to do basic writing assignments). The following teachers' comments reflect these different dimensions:

- *In this situation it was impossible to follow the steps of my plan and develop my objectives for this class.*
- *My main objectives for the class weren't achieved at the end. It also affected the classroom environment because the activity didn't seem to be an English communicative act.*
- *The classroom environment is affected because these students talk and interrupt the rest of the class which affects the other students' concentration.*
- *The situation bothered me because I want my students to put into practice what they are learning not to keep it as useless information.*
- *Most of the time the same students are the ones participating in the class so I try to motivate the rest of the students by calling their names.*
- *Students who participate in the activities during the development of the class are usually the same ones.*
- *I've been observing the groups I have in charge and they have very poor vocabulary and low reading skills*

3.5.4 Possible causes

Most of the teachers did not have any problem in hypothesizing the causes of the problem, which made it clear that their perception had refined throughout the reflective process. There was only one case in which the teacher did not provide any information in this regard, (the teacher whose students' had low attendance to class). But in the other cases a number of possible causes (obviously depending on the nature of the problem) were identified. On the whole, the problems were related to five different sources: *contextual conditions*, *teacher*

approaches student particular characteristics, student background knowledge, and student affective factors.

- *Contextual conditions*

There was only one teacher who related the problem to these conditions: the teacher whose topic was focused on optimizing class time through pair work and group work. For this teacher the difficulties for students' interaction emerged directly from these conditions: large number of students, inappropriate hour of the day, and too little time for instruction.

- *Teaching approaches*

As mentioned elsewhere, in most cases the teachers took responsibility for the problems as being caused by their teaching approaches. For instance, assuming that they needed ideas for that particular area (pronunciation, writing, reading, teacher roles), or accepting that their teaching actions had gotten routinized (same activities; same approach once and again).

- *I always do the same roles and the same activities; for that reason my students feel bored in class.*
- *I do not use too many funny activities and students tend to get bored. I am somehow predictable.*
- *The possible cause can be that I use the same activities and the same roles and students know all the time what my next step is.*
- *Maybe I am not using appropriate activities for pronunciation practice or they do not like the activities I implement.*
- *The pronunciation problems affect my teaching. I think: "what am I going to do to solve this situation?"*

- *Student characteristics*

Interestingly enough, some of the problems related to student characteristics (such as mixed-ability and different learning styles) were perceived as resulting from faults in teacher performance as well. For example, not meeting students' expectations and/or not addressing their learning needs (lack of adequate activities, little connections of class content with real-life situations).

- *I wasn't really meeting their needs, (it could have been) my teaching style, the activities, some students tardiness, multilevel class, shy students, off-task students, etc.*
- *The problem was that the situation for speaking was not that attractive to them and the grade of difficulty was too high.*
- *The lack of real situations where they can put into practice what they are learning...it's possible that most of them don't practice alone or with somebody else after class.*

- *Student background knowledge*

Student background knowledge was another major cause identified, which was, in turn, perceived as resulting from previous exposure to inappropriate/traditional methodology

(grammar translation approach, teacher-centered processes, no focus on communication, etc.). Because of this problem, students had poor or too basic skills in the language and little familiarity with more participative approaches. This was a phenomenon described in the literature review as one of the biggest challenges that teachers face at the classroom level: defy students' previous learning patterns and behaviour (see section 1.3.3).

- *...the prior stage of their exposure of the language, they have always been taught in Spanish and didn't have really interest in communicative activities.*
- *The possible cause could be the poor teaching in high school and the traditional methods to teach the second language.*
- *Their English background is very poor and it would take them plenty of time to improve that skill (pronunciation).*
- *...maybe... lack of vocabulary and that's why they don't want to speak...or perhaps they have the vocabulary but they are reluctant to speak because they don't like it.*
- *For most students this is the first time they are taught in English so they did not pay attention or were interested in acquiring new vocabulary.*
- *It's very difficult to communicate with students who hardly ever like to communicate using English.*
- *When we have to check the exercises, students don't like to give the complete answers. They just say the number or the letter of the answer.*

- *Student affective factors*

The problems were also perceived as being caused by student affective factors, such as shyness, fear of making mistakes, lack of self-confidence, low interest and lack of motivation. Here, the teachers related the problems to students' poor background knowledge. Nevertheless, as frustrating as these problems were for the teachers, they also related them to their own performance (e.g. unattractive topics, too high level of difficulty, and inadequate treatment of error correction)

- *It affected the environment in the class, since they were waiting for the time I corrected them, so they were like afraid of saying something.*
- *The cause is that they feel unable to perform well and another reason could be the type of assignment they had to do.*
- *It was so difficult to communicate with some of them. I think that my first problem was the motivation of my students to learn the language.*
- *Most of my students don't like to practice pronunciation when they are in the English class they do not speak and participate in the activities because they are afraid that other students might laugh at their pronunciation.*

- *I observed they were really frightened of being in front of their classmates...at the end they confessed me that they were not really used to present a topic or an activity in English in front of the class. I understood they were nervous.*
- *Most of my students do not like to practice pronunciation because they are afraid of speaking.*
- *It affects me because even if they know something they don't do it because they feel afraid of making mistakes.*
- *Another possible answer or explanation is that they are afraid of making mistakes because they don't want their classmates to laugh at them in the classroom.*

From the teachers' insights above, it can be perceived that the basic original concern of teachers for student learning had transcended into a much richer understanding of the amount of factors that could be affecting the teaching process. This fact in itself was valid evidence of the qualitative evolution of their reflective process. Moreover, at this point most teachers had realized at least two important facts: that they needed to gain enough knowledge in order to be able to cope with the situation, and that the solution of the problems was in their hands, for the most part.

3.5.5 Possible solutions

The teachers showed determination towards the resolution of the problems and hypothesized possible ways of solving them. The solutions proposed were focused on three major strategies: *studying the problem*, *changing teaching approaches* and *empowering students*.

- *Studying the problem*

This was, indeed, the most obvious solution; teachers knew that they needed to devote attention to the issue of reflection and analysis of the problem as a significant way of gaining knowledge. Knowledge would, in turn, give them the possible alternative of solutions. It was at this point that the teachers made the conscious decision of conducting their Action Research on those particular areas. Basically, they were at the beginning of the research cycle, having selected their research topic and planning to study it. They had encountered "a gap between the ideal and reality" (Burns, 2005:58); their reality in the classroom, with which they were obviously not satisfied.

- *I want to research the reasons these students have to be demotivated.*
- *I strongly believe that the possible solution is the Action Research I'm carrying out to put into practice communicative activities.*
- *I would like to look in detail how students interact during an information gap activity and in this way know why not all students participate in the activities.*
- *For this reason I want to investigate through Action Research in the classroom and design and action plan.*

- *My teaching is much more focused on trying to understand what was going on than just teaching.*
- *I am interested in searching about my student development in communicative activities.*
- *Changing teaching approaches*

Once more teachers' open attitude towards change was perceived here. They welcome change and improvement as a way of solving the problems, which was the next step of the research cycle: the intervention plan. Although at that moment it was not possible for them to precise the actions, teachers did hypothesize solutions, such as "change activities" "use different roles" "prepare suitable activities", "put into practice new activities and skills", "create a good environment in the classroom", "implement activities that optimize class time", and "offer more practice".

- *The possible solution is that I need to change activities and use different roles in the class and not the same. I need to be an unpredictable teacher...that my students don't know my next step in the class.*
- *Plan activities for pair and group work for all skills, listening, speaking, writing, etc.*
- *It's necessary to create a good environment in the classroom for students' participation and a good relationship between the teacher and the students.*
- *Another possible solution can be to prepare more suitable activities for them to start the journey of a good speaking experience.*
- *Expose students to interactive activities where they have the chance to practice more and get rid of their shyness.*
- *I thought about some activities that could help them overcome their fear.*
- *I need to put into practice new activities and tasks to develop students' pronunciation skills.*
- *I want to have better learners and help students to be good professionals, but if I want to have this, first, I need to change my teaching and then I can expect more from them*
- *Comprehension requires thinking, knowledge of vocabulary and analysis. Those are important skills. My proposal is to offer students more reading practice.*
- *Empowering students*

The teachers' suggested solutions were a prelude of the features of their action plans which were aimed at empowering students for meaningful learning. Teachers' identification with students is strongly perceived here (see 2.5.2 in stage II) as their insights about students' learning process were very similar to the insights about their own learning. Thus, the teachers' intention was to help students gain knowledge and learn skills as they themselves were doing. The process they suggested for students' empowerment had the basic same characteristics of their own development process, namely, adequate guidance, learning tools and strategies, collaboration,

reflection, and independent learning. This finding was made evident through the following comments.

- *...integrate activities that give students tools and strategies to succeed in oral tasks.*
- *Integrating more pair and group work so that they feel more confident with their classmates and they can also ask their classmates for help...to the ones who know a little more.*
- *I have a challenge, give students tools and teach them how to use them in order to accomplish their development as learners in different fields where the language is useful.*
- *Students need to work more on their reading skills; that way they will learn more vocabulary and will have a topic to discuss about and develop speaking as well...with more reading practice they will be able to reflect on important issues.*
- *I could provide them with pronunciation tools and double check whether or not it works for them.*
- *I am trying to increase their self-confidence in this area. We work from the easiest to the most difficult.*
- *Give some steps to write better logical sentences and then challenge them to write a paragraph.*
- *I think with some reading practice they will be able to reflect on important issues.*
- *It's necessary to provide students with strategies so they can do self-study...three hours a week is not enough for their development.*

3.5.6 Research procedures

The questions about research procedures referred specifically to the kind of data collection instruments that the teachers decided to use to gather information about their particular topics. As already mentioned, the teachers were following the guidelines provided by Wallace's *Action Research for Language Teachers* (1998). Consequently, the research procedures involved surveys, interviews, diaries (teacher and student), field notes, peer observation, self-observation, and self-evaluation. The particular instruments selected by each of the teachers are shown in table 27 below.

Table 27

Research procedures

RESEARCH PROCEDURE	TEACHERS													
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	I	J	K	L	M	N	O
Surveys	√				√	√	√	√	√	√	√		√	√
Interviews	√			√	√					√				√
Teacher Diary		√	√	√		√	√	√		√	√	√	√	√
Student Diary				√	√				√					
Questionnaires		√		√		√						√		
Field-notes							√					√		√
Peer-observation	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Self-observation									√					
Self-evaluation							√	√	√					

As shown, all teachers planned for using peer-observation as part of their research procedure (see section 3.6.2 below for a detailed description of the peer formation process). The next most used instrument was the teacher diary as eleven teachers used them in their projects. This was followed by surveys (closed-ended questions) which were included in the case of ten teachers. Interviews were selected in five cases and questionnaires (open-ended questions) in four cases. Student diary, field notes and self-evaluation were each planned to be used in three projects. The less chosen research procedures was self-evaluation as only one teacher decided to use this instrument to collect relevant data.

This concludes the discussion of the teachers' guided process towards the basic organization of their Action Research projects. As shown, in each guided question the teachers addressed a research issue in a simple and practical way. Thus, the process led to several important research steps: the identification of the research problem, the selection of the target population and the delimitation of the research scope. The teachers also refined their reflective skills by hypothesizing possible causes of the problems and possible ways to solve them. Likewise, they put into practice their decision-making skills by selecting the research instruments that would be suitable for their particular problem.

It was at this point very clear that the assistance to the teachers for the identification and selection of the research areas had been effective. Through the guided questions, the teachers had taken consistent steps towards more conscious reflection on their teaching practice. The best evidence of this finding is the relevance of the selected topics, which had emerged out of genuine areas of concern. Moreover, *reflecting* on their *situated experiences* with the proper *collaborative effort* had fostered the teachers' skills to start *theorizing* about their practice which was the intended purpose (see literature review section 4). The continuation of the efforts would be based on giving a follow up to the reflective process to help teachers continue to take steady steps in the design and implementation of their Action Research projects.

3.6 Designing, developing and implementing the Research Projects

This is the first of three processes that are called collaborative because they involved the participation, in one way or another, of different people, namely, the teachers, their students, the researcher, the trainers, and external collaborators. This collaboration was useful to set adequate frameworks so that teachers could develop, implement and evaluate their research projects successfully. Establishing adequate frameworks and structures of collaboration for teacher development, is an issue widely discussed in the literature review (see 2.5 and 4.1).

3.6.1 *Tutorial sessions*

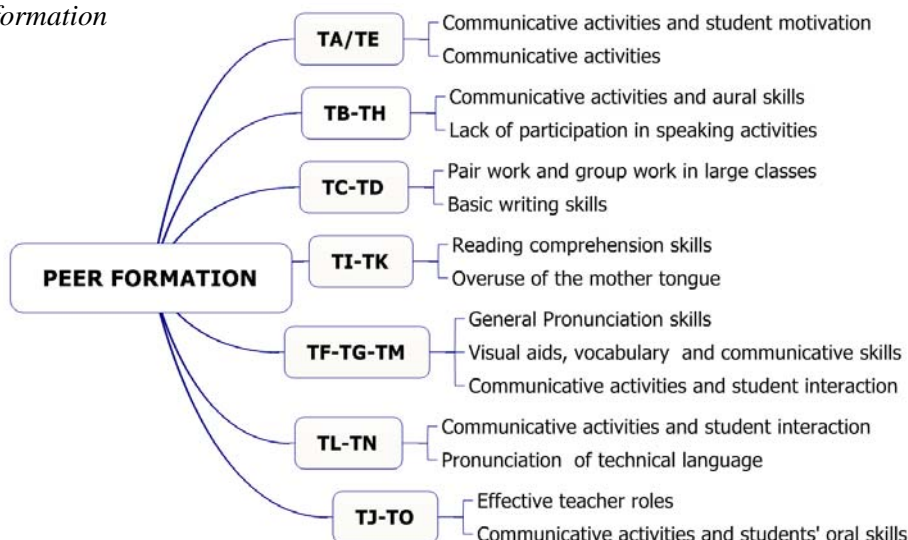
These tutorial sessions were intended to accompany and assist the teachers in their efforts to go beyond the identification of their research areas. The next stage would involve for them a number of steps, from narrowing down the areas into researchable topics through structuring the research proposal and implementing it. For this purpose, teachers were assigned particular tasks along the way. During the tutorial sessions, a follow up would be given to these tasks and new ones would be assigned; depending on the evolution of each project. Likewise, particular problems would be addressed. A timetable was set in order to organize the work. The sessions would take place once a week for a period of threemonths (Apr-Jun 2009) for a total of 10 meetings. The sessions would run parallel with the design and implementation of the AR projects. All of the actions and events described in this section took place within this framework.

3.6.2 *Peer collaboration*

One of the most important steps to take before starting the actual work was the organization of peer work. As discussed in the literature review (see section 4.3.1), peer collaboration is of utmost importance in classroom action research. The teachers were aware of this. In previous stages they had already given evidence that collaboration was a priority for them (see sections 2.5.4, 3.2.5, and 3.3.5 above). Thus, they were convinced that peer work would be a good way of providing each other with valuable help and support to conduct their research projects. Moreover, the teachers had created such good collegial relationships among themselves that they were naturally motivated to join with their peers. Although no influence was exerted on their selection of peers, they were advised to use some criteria, such as similarity of research topics, affinity and close living area. The selection of peers was really important as they would be working together during the entire process. Likewise, they would attend the tutorial sessions together. Figure 23 below shows how teachers organized themselves.

Figure 23

Peer formation



The figure shows the teachers' peer formation along with their corresponding research areas. Thus, teacher A and B were working together in the same area: communicative activities. Likewise, teacher B and teacher H had research areas with similar focus as both were based on the improvement of the speaking abilities. Teacher C and D did not have similar topics but they were both secondary school teachers. Besides, teacher C provided teacher D with the conditions to work with his group as teacher D was not working at the moment. In the case of teacher I and K they had each unique topics; teacher I focused on reading comprehension skills and teacher K on the overuse of the mother tongue. These teachers decided to work together because of affinity. There was one case in which three teachers decided to work together, teacher F, G and M. They had gotten used to help one another during the development of the course and became close friends. There were no similarities originally as teacher G's area was visual aids, teacher M would work on communicative activates and teacher F on general pronunciation. Nevertheless this situation changed when teachers narrowed down their research topic (see section 3.6.3 below). Teacher L and N decided to work together because of affinity as they were close friends, too. Nevertheless, the topics were not related (communicative activities and pronunciation of technical terms). Although teachers J and O did not have similar topics, the nature of their respective research areas lent itself to make possible connections (effective teacher roles and communicative activities).

Promoting teachers' peer work was one of the most important initial steps in order to provide the teachers with a solid scaffolding system based on mutual help (see section 4.1.5 in the literature review). This was particularly true for the peer observations, which all teachers had decided to use as data collection instruments (see 3.5.6 above). In total 22 peer observations took place. The following account was taken from the research project of teacher O whose focus

was communicative activities. Teacher J who was concerned with effective teacher roles was in charge of the peer observation.

It was carried out only twice during the term due to the strike; the first day was on May 13, 2009 and the second day was on June 19, 2009. The necessity of a second point of view arises as an old proverb says “two heads better than one”...The procedure was carried out according to the three stages referred by Keith A. Achenson & Meredith Damien Gall: *planning conference*, *observation* and *data collection* and *feedback conference*.

Planning conference: My peer and I met to focus on the topic and emphasize the main points involved in this research. For this, I formulated some questions to guide my partner on the study related to the use of the language, kinds (of) activities, teacher-students’ interaction, didactic material, development of the lesson and so on.

Observation and data collection: My peer collected all information related to oral skills and she wrote some relevant notes.

Feedback Conference: We discussed about the execution of the observation and we analyzed strengths and weaknesses of the teacher and students’ development. So I got the information required for this work.

Several important aspects are worth highlighting in this teacher’s account. First, the teacher describes the pre, while and post stages that are suggested for observation of classroom activity by most experts in the area (see lit. review section 4.3.1). Second, in each stage the teacher refers to specific actions that involved both the teacher observed and the teacher observer, which shows the worth of collaboration. Finally, the joint actions described by the teacher are relevant and directly connected with the problem under study. Similar descriptions are repeated in each of the research projects that were successfully undertaken.

3.6.3 *Narrowing down the research area and formulating objectives*

The teachers had identified relevant areas to investigate, out of classroom experience. The next step was to narrow down the area to make it a researchable topic. Simultaneously, they would need to decide what their purpose was; that is to say they needed to make decisions about their general and specific topics. They would discuss the issue with their peers to give each other feedback. Giving their concern a more precise focus was not an easy task for the teachers. This is an understandable phenomenon as each of the problems could be addressed from a number of different perspectives. Likewise, it was difficult for them to formulate the objectives of the research as they tended to confuse general objectives with specific objectives and the other way round. These difficulties were perceived as emerging from their background knowledge as their PRESET program included little or no training in research skills. Nonetheless, after the appropriate guidance the teachers were able to narrow their research topic and formulate their objectives successfully. Table 28 shows the original area, the research topic narrowed down and transformed into a *working title* (Wallace, 1998:24) and the general objectives for each project.

Table 28

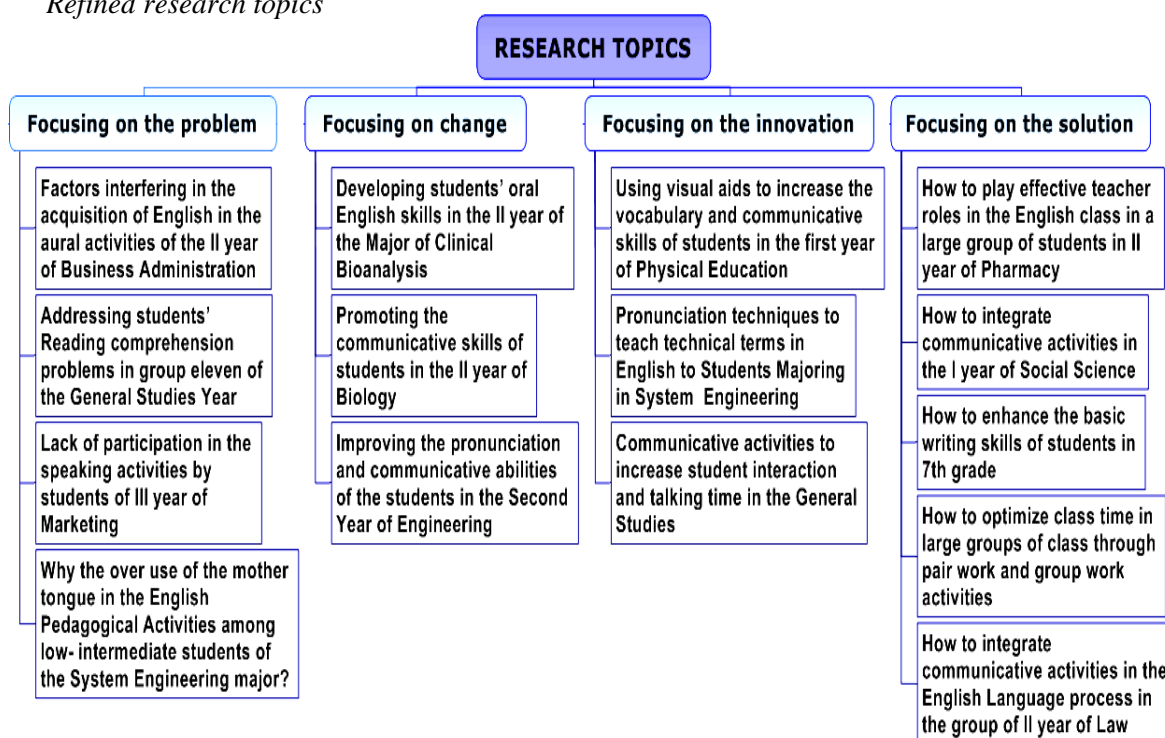
Research areas, research title and general objectives

TC	RESEARCH AREA	RESEARCH TITLE	GENERAL OBJECTIVE
A	Communicative activities and student motivation	How to integrate communicative activities in the English Language process in the group of II year of Law at the Faculty of Law of UNAN-León.	To discover ways to increase motivation through a variety of communicative activities in the classroom.
B	Communicative activities and aural skills	Factors interfering in the acquisition of English in the aural activities of the II year of the Business Administration Major of UNAN-León CUR Somotillo.	To determine the aspects that affect students use of the target language in communicative activities
C	Pair work and group work in large classes	How to optimize class time in large groups of class through pair work and group work activities	To determine if group work and pair work activities are successful in large groups where class time is limited.
D	Basic writing skills	How to enhance the basic writing skills of students in 7th grade at Madre María Luisa school, in León Nicaragua.	To optimize the basic writing skills of 7 th grade students in secondary education
E	Communicative activities	How to integrate communicative activities in the I year of Social Science at the Faculty of Educational Science and Humanities of UNAN-León	To explore ways to increase the amount of successful communicative activities within the English classroom
F	General Pronunciation skills	Improving the pronunciation and communicative abilities of the students in the Second Year of Engineering at UNAN-León.	To improve students' pronunciation skills for more accurate and fluent oral communication skills
G	Using visual aids to teach vocabulary	Using visual aids to increase the vocabulary and communicative skills of students in the first year of PEM in Physical Education at UNAN León.	To determine the improvement of students' vocabulary and communicative skills through visual aids
H	Participation in speaking activities	Lack of participation in the speaking activities by students of III year of Marketing at UNAN-León.	To discover why the students of III year Marketing do not participate in the speaking activities in the classroom.
I	Reading comprehension skills	Addressing students' Reading comprehension problems in group eleven of the General Studies Year (AEG) at UNAN-León	To provide students with a variety of tools for the enhancement of their reading skills
J	Effective teacher roles	How to play effective teacher roles in the English class in a large group of students in II year of Pharmacy at UNAN-León.	To explore and put into practice different kinds of roles teacher roles to teach English effectively in a large group of students.
K	Overuse of the mother tongue	Why the over use of the mother tongue in the English Pedagogical Activities among low- intermediate students of the System Engineering major at UNAN-León?	To find the when and why for the overuse of the mother tongue and enhance students' use of the target language in pedagogical activities
L	Communicative activities and student interaction	Promoting the communicative skills of students in the II year of Biology at the Faculty of Sciences and Technology of UNAN-León.	To enhance students' communicative skills effectively so they can interact with each other in the classroom
M	Communicative activities and student interaction	Communicative activities to increase student interaction and talking time in the General Studies, at UNAN – Leon.	To increase students' interaction and talking time using pairs and groups work in the process of TEFL
N	Pronunciation of technical language	Pronunciation techniques to teach technical terms in English to Students Majoring in System Engineering at the Faculty of Science and Technology at UNAN-León.	To help students get acquainted with pronunciation techniques of technical terms as well as discrimination of proper sounds.
O	Communicative activities and students oral skills	Developing students' oral English skills in the II year of the Major of Clinical Bioanalysis at UNAN-León	To promote students' acquisition of effective oral skills through different kinds of speaking tasks in the classroom

It is evident how the research areas evolved into more refined and focused topics all of which were clearly researchable. Most teachers considered important to include the target students and their academic programs. This shows both that the topic had emerged out of classroom experience and that the guided questions had exerted some influence on the process (second question: who was involved?). Some teachers widened their area to integrate new elements and links. That is the specific case of the teachers working together (teachers F, G and M). Originally, their projects did not have any connection, but eventually they did when teachers G and F integrated a communicative element. This was the result of the interaction of the three teachers during the peer work sessions. Evidently, these teachers had found out that it was important for them to have common points for a better collaboration process. The following figure shows the refined research topics showing particular patterns.

Figure 24

Refined research topics



As shown, there were some interesting patterns in the research titles. Some teachers, for instance, included the problem: *Why the overuse of the mother tongue...?*, *Lack of participation in speaking activities...*, *Addressing students Reading Comprehension problems...*, *Factors interfering in the acquisition of English...*, making it very clear that their major concern was to find out reasons, causes and explanations. Some others focused on the change or improvement: *Improving the pronunciation abilities of the students...*, *Promoting the communicative skills...*, *Developing students' oral English skills* which integrated the intended purpose. Some other teachers, alternatively, decided to present their topics as innovations: *Pronunciation techniques to teach technical terms in English...*, *Using visual aids to increase the vocabulary and*

communicative skills....which is consistent with the nature of the topics. Both imply a concrete product as a result of the research (techniques and visual materials). Finally, there were teachers who presented their research topics from a practical perspective: *How to integrate communicative activities...*, *How to optimize class time in large groups...*, *How to enhance the basic writing skills...*, *How to play effective teacher roles*. These teachers implied that their major interest was to enhance their knowledge and widen their skills to solve that particular problem.

Regarding objectives, some other interesting patterns can be found too. It is convenient to remember here that teachers had hypothesized ways of solving the problems identified in the process of guided reflection (see 3.5.5 above). Thus, they stated that possible solutions could be: *studying the problem*, *changing teaching approaches*, and *empowering students*. The element of change is implicit in both research topics and objectives. The other two solutions, *studying the problem* and *empowering students* are clearly perceived in the general objectives as shown below.

- *Studying the problem*

The following general objectives describe several analytical processes, such as discover, find out, explore, and determine, which denote the teachers' intention to find answers to questions, solutions to problems, facts, and explanations about their reality. This complexity of mental processes also resembles the *analytical skills* and *open-mindedness of the reflective teacher* as portrayed by the teachers in section 3.2.1 and 3.2.4 above.

- To discover ways to increase motivation through a variety of communicative activities in the classroom.
- To discover why the students do not participate in the speaking activities in the classroom.
- To find out the when and why for the overuse of the mother tongue and enhance students' use of the target language in pedagogical activities.
- To explore ways to increase the amount of successful communicative activities within the English classroom.
- To explore and put into practice different kinds of roles teacher roles.
- To determine the improvement of students' vocabulary and communicative skills through visual aids.
- To determine the aspects that affect students' use of the target language in communicative activities.
- To determine if group work and pair work activities are successful in large groups where class time is limited.

- *Empowering students*

The following objectives, on the other hand, are formulated in a way that clearly denotes the teachers' intention to empower students through a variety of actions, such as increase interaction, improve pronunciation skills, enhance communicative skills, and the like. These actions resemble *resourcefulness* and *knowledgeability*, attributes of *the reflective teacher as* described by the teachers (3.2.2 and 3.2.3 above).

- To increase students' interaction and talking time using pairs and groups work in the process of TEFL.
- To improve students' pronunciation skills for more accurate and fluent oral communication skills.
- To enhance students' communicative skills effectively so they can interact with each other in the classroom.
- To optimize the basic writing skills of students.
- To provide students with a variety of tools for the enhancement of their reading skills
- To help students get acquainted with pronunciation techniques of technical terms as well as discrimination of proper sounds.
- To promote students' acquisition of effective oral skills through different kinds of speaking tasks in the classroom

It is convenient at this point to bear in mind that the teachers had gone a long way since the time when they first identified the problems affecting their teaching practice. They had managed to refine their research topics successfully, which marked the completion of the first part of the journey. During this process, teachers showed a considerable degree of independence and decision-making. Moreover, the fact that the teachers' original solutions and the refined information were similar in nature shows consistency and a logical evolution of the teachers' thinking processes. So it seemed that the established structure of reflection and collaboration was serving its intended purpose. At that specific moment the teachers were ready to move on to the next step which would be the planning stage.

3.6.4 Planning and implementing the research project

The process of planning the research was intended to run smoothly and with minor difficulties. Given the fact that all the teachers had a tight agenda with their workloads, it was important to facilitate their planning process. So, teachers were not asked to write a research proposal. Instead, they were provided with a planning template containing several formats for them to include all the important information of the research. This information included the research focus, general and specific objectives and a calendar with slots to specify all the operational actions of the research day by day. The following table is an example of this calendar with activities planned by teacher G for the month of May.

Table 29

Sample planning calendar

MAY				
MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
4	5	6	7	8
Searching information about visual aids	Observation of the problem/ reading about the eight intelligences	Tutoring session/ prepare the test of Multiple Intelligence	Apply Multiple Intelligence Test/ Diary	Analysis of answer of Multiple Intelligence Test
11	12	13	14	15
Meeting to design observation questionnaire	Self-evaluation test after the class/ Diary	Tutoring session 130 – 2:30	Diary	
18	19	20	21	22
	Diary/ peer observation before Plan Action	Analysis of first Peer observation	Data collection/ diary	Reading about visual aids
25	26	27	28	29
Analysis of students' observation	Exam II bimensual / Peer observation	Tutoring session	Diary	Prepare objectives for second peer observation

As observed, the teacher used the calendar format to integrate all the major events of the research, namely, searching and reading related information, designing, applying and analyzing the instruments, the peer work, and the tutorial sessions. In this case the teachers' topic was: *Using visual aids to teach vocabulary and communicative activities*, to be conducted with the students of year I in the Physical Education Program at the Faculty of Educational Sciences.

On the other hand, there was also a format to plan the data collection process before and after the plan of action. Table 30 below shows the actual planning of teacher M.

Table 30

Sample data collection instruments

INSTRUMENT	OBJECTIVE	DATE (S) TO BE APPLIED	DATE (S) TO BE ANALYZED
Self-observation (field notes)	Explore students' situation, background knowledge, and ways of interaction during the class. (SS weaknesses and strengths)	May 8 th , 19 th , and 22 nd , 26 th . June 2 nd , 5 th .	May 9 th , 20 th , and 24 th , 27 th . June 3 rd , 7 th .
Survey (questionnaire)	To know students' difficulties and preferences when working in class.	May 19 th .	May 20 th .
Peer coaching	To obtain more data on the first findings.	May 22 nd .	May 24 th .

As shown, this format was useful for the integration of the objectives of each instrument as well as the dates in which they would be applied and analyzed. In this case the sample shows the data collection instruments that the teacher intended to use before the plan of action; field notes, a survey and peer observations. The objectives were all exploratory (know students'

background knowledge, and preferences). The peer observation would shed more light on the problem. A similar process would take place after the plan of action to assess its impact on the issue under investigation. In this case the teachers' topic was: *Communicative activities to increase student interaction and talking time* to be conducted with students of the General Studies Year.

The template also integrated Wallace's (1998) multiple-time line format per week for the major processes of the research. This format is different from the planning calendar in that it focuses on a global view of the process from the beginning until the completion deadline. Thus, using this format, the teachers would make time decisions regarding planning, reading related literature, data collection, analysis, and the writing of the report. The sample below shows the global planning of teacher K whose topic was: *Why the over-use of the mother tongue in pedagogic activities*, to be carried out with the students enrolled in year II of the System Engineering Program at the Faculty of Science and Technology.

Table 31

*Multiple-time line format***MULTIPLE – TIME LINE FORMAT**RESEARCH PROJECT: Why the over-use of the mother tongue in pedagogic activities in students from System Engineering at UNAN-Leon?BEGINNING OF PROJECT 30/04/09 COMPLETION DEADLINE 19/06/09

WEEK N°	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
PLANNING		Choosing the research title. Writing general and specific objectives.	General objectives Specific objective Title.	Writing survey questions.		Writing observation guide for peer.		Writing Research project.
READING				Reading and taking notes of Bibliography		Choosing relevant information for theoretical background	Choosing relevant information from the internet	
DATA COLLECTION		Self-observation	Writing in the diary	Peer observation	Applying survey Questions.	Writing observation guide for peer. Analyzing peer-observation ideas about class.		
ANALYSIS						Analysis of survey. Analyzing peer-observation ideas about my class	Writing Comments on survey	
WRITING-UP		Title, general and specific objectives		Writing survey questions.		Applying plan of action. Writing observation guide for my peer.		Writing Research project

Note: This table was adapted from Wallace, M. J. 1998 *Action Research for Language Teachers*

Considerable time of the tutorial sessions was spent on the major research issues involved in the planning stages, which were contained in each of these formats. The idea was to provide teachers with the adequate guidance to revise research objectives, clarify general and specific aspects, give advice on bibliography, provide them with reading materials, suggest internet sources and, in general, troubleshoot potential problems. One of such problems was the difficulties experienced by teachers with the data collection instruments which made it necessary to integrate a remedial plan in the process.

3.6.5 Data collection instruments, the remedial plan

This was the first of two remedial plans integrated as a result of the perceived needs of the teachers. In this case it was the process of data collection, particularly the issue of analysis and interpretation of the research instruments. The basic concepts and processes had already been covered during the development of the course *Action Research in the Classroom*: the kinds of data collection instruments available for teachers, what each instrument consisted of and how they could use them to gather relevant information. All teachers had already designed their instruments, issue widely covered during the tutorial sessions. Some of them had already designed and applied their instruments and some others were half of the way.

Compiling the information for the purpose of analysis and interpretation was one of the major problems experienced by the teachers. Consequently, a tailor-made training workshop in this area was integrated. This workshop was presented by Dr. Edwin Marin, from the Instituto Tecnológico de Costa Rica within the framework of a university cooperation agreement. The course was a two-day hands-on workshop (Apr 24-25 2009) that tackled important issues regarding qualitative research methodologies. Dr. Marin provided teachers with an overview of the different kinds of the data collection instruments focusing on the ones teachers had decided to use in their research projects (see 3.5.6 above). In addition, he widened the teachers' knowledge about triangulation processes; data interpretation and display of qualitative information. This course proved to be very useful for the teachers as most of them would get involved in the process of making sense out of the data to illuminate their corresponding research problem. In addition, teachers were one step closer to the plan of action, key element of the AR process.

3.6.6 Tutorial sessions and completion of AR projects

The tutorial sessions were held from April to June of 2009. I, as the mentor, had full availability and flexibility in terms of timetable. The teachers could change the time whenever they needed it previous notification, which recurrently happened during the process. Thus there were ten sessions of 2 hours each for a total of 20 hours. This is shown in table 32 below.

Table 32

Peer attendance to tutorial sessions and project status

Date →	Apr 27-30	May 4-8	May 11-15	May 18-22	May 25-29	Jun 1-5	Jun 8-12	Jun 15-19	Jun 22-26	Jun-Jul 29-3	Total hours attended	Project status
Week→ Peers ↓	W1	W2	W3	W4	W5	W6	W7	W8	W9	W10		
A	√	√	√	√	x	x	x	x	x	x	8	Not completed
E	√	√	√	√	x	x	x	x	x	x	8	Not completed
D	√	√	√	x	x	√	√	x	x	x	10	Completed
C	√	√	√	x	x	x	√	x	x	x	10	Completed
O	√	√	√	√	x	√	√	√	x	x	12	Completed
J	√	√	√	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	6	Not completed
H	√	√	√	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	6	Not completed
B	√	√	√	x	x	√	√	x	x	x	10	Completed
L	√	√	√	√	√	√	x	x	x	x	12	Completed
N	√	√	√	√	√	√	x	x	x	x	12	Completed
G	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	x	x	x	14	Completed
F	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	x	x	x	14	Not completed
M	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	x	x	x	14	Completed
I	√	√	√	√	√	x	x	x	x	x	6	Not completed
K	x	√	√	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	4	Completed

The table shows the teachers organized by peers and their attendance to the tutorial sessions. The last column shows the final status of the AR projects. Only nine out of the fifteen projects were fulfilled.

As shown, the attendance to the tutorial sessions was quite consistent for the first three sessions. These sessions were the ones focused on the initial planning steps described in 3.6.4 above. All teachers fulfilled these tasks. Nevertheless, problems started to arise towards week 4 when five teachers missed the tutorial session; this increased to ten teachers in session 5, and then decreased to seven teachers in session 6, which kept the same in week 7. From week 8 to week 10 only one tutorial session took place (week 8, teacher O).

With regards to peer attendance, (teachers who attended with their peers all/most of the time) the most persistent were teachers G, F and M who had a total of 14 hours attended. These teachers showed great commitment and responsibility with their tutorial sessions and benefited enormously

from them. The next two peers that showed consistency were teachers L and N who attended a total of 12 hours. These teachers had also showed the same behavior along the course and worked very well together. The others who showed regularity in the peer sessions (although fewer sessions were attended) were teachers C and D who attended 10 hours. Although teachers A and E attended the sessions together, they only attended 8 hours.

In relation to individual attendance, the teacher who attended the most was teacher O with 12 hours. In this case the peer tutorial sessions did not work well as teacher J just attended 3 sessions (6 hours). The next two teachers who attended more sessions than their peers were teacher B and teacher I (10 hours each). Their peers (teacher H and teacher O respectively) only attended 6 hours each.

This information reveals that there is a relationship between attendance to tutorial sessions and completion of the project. The teachers who attended more sessions were, for the most part, the ones who fulfilled their projects: teachers B, C, D, G, L, M, N and O. There were two exceptions, though. One was teacher F who attended all the sessions along with peers, but did not complete the project. The other exceptional case was teacher K who just attended 3 sessions (6 hours) and completed the project. This teacher had shown remarkable independence and self-taught skills along the program, which explains the reason. On the other hand, the teachers who attended less sessions and showed less persistence in peer work did not fulfill the project. That was the case of teacher H, J and I (3 sessions; 6 hours each), and teachers A and B (4 sessions 8 hours each).

With this information, it would seem reasonable to conclude that the teachers who were more committed to their peer work and to attendance to tutorial sessions managed to complete their research projects. Thus, this reasoning would logically lead to the conclusion that the ones who showed less commitment were the ones who did not fulfill their projects. This explains the situation...partially. But, there is still the phenomenon of the last three tutorial sessions from June 15 to July 3 to which only one teacher attended (week 8, teacher O). The reasons were strongly linked to the situational context. The teachers did not have real time. These three weeks coincided with the final evaluations of the semester. Thus, the teachers were absolutely busy designing their exams, marking them, preparing their final reports, and the like. This was also a time in which most of them were implementing their action plans and collecting relevant information about it. There were, indeed, many contextual factors interfering in the teachers' performance at that important moment, some of them potentially harmful.

3.6.7 Contextual challenges for teachers' professional practice

This section describes the contextual conditions surrounding the teachers' teaching practice at the moment of the design and implementation of their AR projects. It also describes the major impact that context had on the teachers and on the development of their research projects.

a) Teachers' workload: institutions and work shifts

As mentioned above, all the teachers experienced tremendous problems in attending the last three tutorial sessions. This was the result of the amount of work they were facing at the moment with the final students' evaluations. Unfortunately, this was a time in which several teachers could not move on with their efforts for professional improvement. The exploration of teachers' professional commitments at that time would shed some more light on this issue. Table 33 below shows information about the teachers' general workload.

Table 33

Teachers' workload: Institutions

TEACHING INFORMATION													
T	INSTITUTION (S)			KIND OF INSTITUTION		EDUCATIONAL LEVEL				SHIFTS			
	1	2	3	Private	Public	Prim.	Second.	Univ.	*Other	Morn.	After.	Eve.	Sat.
A		√			√√		√	√		√		√	√
B		√			√√		√	√	√	√	√		√
C			√	√	√√	√	√	√		√	√		√
D		√			√√	√	√		√		√		√
E		√			√√		√	√		√	√		√
F		√		√	√		√	√		√	√		√
G			√	√	√√	√		√	√	√	√		√
H	√				√			√		√			√
I		√			√√		√	√	√	√	√		√
J	√				√			√		√			
K		√			√√			√	√	√	√		√
L		√			√√			√	√	√	√		√
M		√			√√			√	√	√	√		√
N			√	√	√√			√	√	√	√		√
O	√				√			√	√	√	√		√

The table shows information about the teachers' workload. As discussed in the context of the research (chapter two), in the Nicaraguan educational context it is very common that teachers work in two or even three institutions because of the low salaries. The majority of the teachers were working in two institutions at the time of the projects (A, D, B, E, F, I, K, L and M), most of them public. Three teachers (C, G and N) were working in three institutions. Just three teachers (H, J and O) worked in only one institution. On the other hand, most teachers were working in public institutions. This implied that the conditions for teaching were difficult (large classes, not enough

resources, many teaching hours), as opposed to the conditions provided at private institutions (generally better).

In relation to the educational level, almost all the teachers were working at University levels at UNAN-León which implied lots of challenges in terms of materials, students' heterogeneity and the nature of the programs (see part c. below). Likewise, some teachers were working at other institutional levels at the same time; primary, secondary or all together (teachers C, D and G). Another burden to the already heavy teachers' workload was the fact that they were teaching different shifts (three in most cases). For instance, all teachers except for teachers D and H were working mornings, afternoons and Saturdays. Teacher A also worked three shifts, but mornings, evenings and Saturdays.

This multiplicity of tasks obviously involved different kinds of students, different programs, an array of lesson planning, and various kinds of assessment systems. Moreover, most teachers faced different contextual conditions and institutional policies that, most probably, were restraining in many senses.

b) Teachers' workload: Students

In addition to working several shifts at different institutions and educational levels, most teachers faced a large number of students. The following table shows the largest and smallest groups they had and the total amount of students.

Table 34

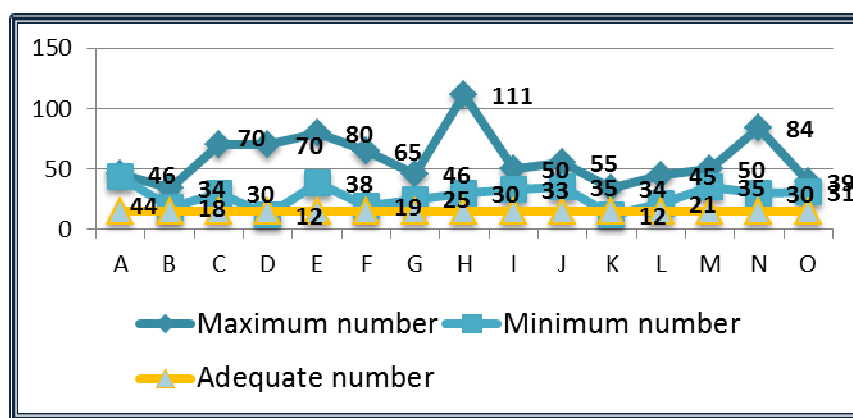
Teachers' workload: students

TC	Largest groups	Smallest group	Students per teacher
A	44	46	330
B	18	34	235
C	30	70	820
D	12	70	300
E	38	80	538
F	19	65	420
G	25	46	395
H	30	111	377
I	33	50	173
J	35	55	160
K	12	34	72
L	21	45	130
M	35	50	177
N	30	84	264
O	31	39	139
Total number of students			4530

In total the teachers were in charge of more than 4500 students. This represents an average of 302 students per teacher. The teachers who had the most students were teacher C (820), teacher E (538), teacher F (420), teacher G (395), teacher H (377), teacher A (330) and teacher D (300). It is important to bear in mind here that the students belonged to different educational levels and academic programs at primary, secondary and university levels. Logically, the students had significant differences in ages, background knowledge, learning needs, learning styles and interest. The other important element to point out here is the amount of students that the teachers had per classroom. Figure 25 below presents the information above from a different perspective.

Figure 25

Minimum and maximum number of students per class



The information presented shows the large number of students that most teachers faced. The upper line refers to the maximum number of students, and the line in the middle reflects the minimum number. The last line represents the number of students generally considered optimal for language learning (15).

As shown, there were extreme cases like the critical problem of teacher H who had 111 students in one class. All the other teachers had considerable amounts of students in their largest classes: 84 (TN), 80 (TE), 70 (TC and TD), 65 (TF), 55 (TI), 50 (TH), 46 (TA and TG), and 45 (TL). The teachers whose largest groups had fewer students were teachers B and K (34 students each).

On the other hand, the line in the middle shows the minimum number of students per classroom that the teachers faced. Most teachers had over 25 students up to 44. Only four teachers had smaller groups: teachers D and K (12 students each), teacher B (18) and teacher F (19), but these groups were the exception and not the rule. It is clear that, in most cases, both the maximum and minimum amount of students per classroom were far away from the suggested amount of students to establish a language learning process efficiently. Large classes were teachers' everyday reality during the development of their AR projects.

c) Teachers' work at UNAN-León

At UNAN there had been a significant increase in the integration of English in most academic studies in all Faculties. This was the result of new curriculum policies of UNAN's authorities, who valued English as an important professional tool for graduates. In order to cover this need, all of the teachers except for one (TD) had been hired to work as hourly teachers. An hourly contract at UNAN does not have permanent nature. The teachers are hired to teach a determined amount of hours based on decisions made by the English Department. The contract can or cannot be renewed depending on a number of factors. At the time of the AR project some teachers had already been working at UNAN under these conditions for certain time; some others had just been hired. There was only one teacher who had been working there for four years (TH), and seven teachers had two years of experience (TB, TC, TF, TI, TK, TM, TO). Four teachers had been working for one year (TE, TJ, TL and TN), and three teachers had just been hired the previous semester in 2008 (TA, TC and TG).

On the whole, this status as university teachers was a good sign that the teachers were moving on in their professional careers, and that their efforts for professionalization had been recognized. The Postgraduate Course in TEFL that they were taking was an important qualification that helped them to fulfill the established selection criteria. On the other hand, working at UNAN provided the teachers with the opportunity to conduct their AR projects with university students. Indeed, this was an important opportunity for professional growth (see target population in 3.5.2 above). Table 35 below shows the teachers workload at UNAN during the development of their AR projects.

Table 35

Teachers' workload at UNAN-León

T C	YEAR	UNIVERSITY STUDIES	FACULTY/PROGRAM							Nº SS
			JURIDICAL SCIENCES	EDUC. SCIENCES	MEDICAL SCIENCES	ECONOMICAL SCIENCES	CHEMICAL SCIENCES	SCIENCE & TECH	GENERAL STUDIES	
A	II-III	Law	√							64
	III	Actuarial Science						√		44
B	II	Social work		√						80
	II	Business Adm.				√				23
	II	Veterinary						√		28
C	II	Food Technology						√		24
	II-III	Law	√							40
	II	Soc. Work		√						40
E	II	Pre-school Educ.		√						45
	I	Social Science		√						45
F	II (2)	System Eng.						√		140
	III	Business Adm.				√				80
	II	Law	√							35
G	II	System Eng.						√		19
	III	Marketing				√				35
	III	Economy				√				90
	II-II	Preschool Educ.		√						40
G	I-II	Physical Educ.		√						50
	II	Social Com.		√						46
H	I	AEG							√	45
	II-III	Marketing				√				120
	II	Economy				√				111
I	III	Nursing Science			√					20
	I (4)	AEG							√	158
J	II-III	Pharmacy					√			170
	II-III	System Eng.						√		40
K	II	Biology						√		22
	III	Statistics						√		12
L	II (2)	Biology						√		39
	II (2)	Chemistry						√		71
M	I (4)	AEG							√	165
N	II (2)	Economy				√				94
	II(2)	Comp. Science						√		93
	III	English Studies		√						58
O	II	Nursing Science			√					39
	III (2)	Pharmacy					√			69
	II	Clin. Bioanalysis			√					31
Total number of students										2325

The table shows the teachers' workload at UNAN-León. As shown, they were working in several academic programs of all the faculties at UNAN. At the Faculty of Science and Technology the teachers taught English in Actuarial Sciences (TA); Veterinary (TB); System Engineering (TE, TF, TK and TN); Biology (TK and TL); Statistics (TK); and Chemistry (TL). At the Faculty of Educational Sciences the teachers taught in the Social Work Program (TC); Preschool Education (TC and TG); Social Science (TE); Physical Education (TG); Social Communication (TG); and the English Studies (TN). At the Economical Sciences the teachers taught in Business Administration (TB and TE); Marketing (TF and TH); and Economy (TF, TH and TN). Two teachers taught in the

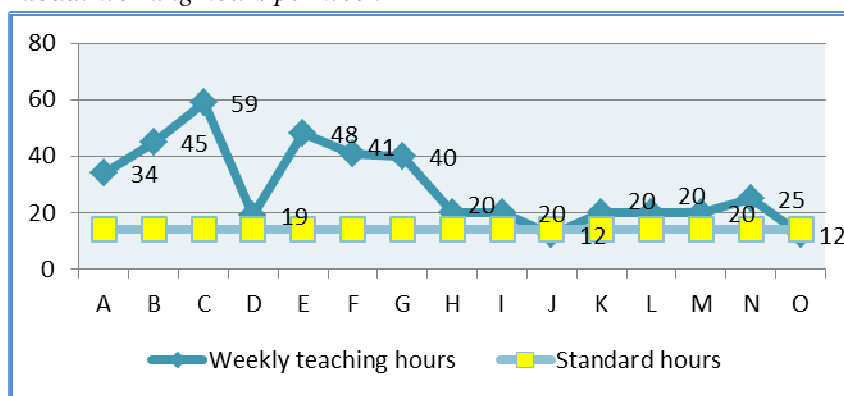
Nursing Science Program at the Faculty of Medical Sciences (TH and TO). At the Faculty of Chemical Sciences the programs involved were Pharmacy and Food Technology. The Program of Law at the Faculty of Juridical Sciences was taught by teacher A, C and F. Finally, three teachers taught in the General Studies Year (AEG), which is the first year of university studies (TH, TI and TM). In total the teachers were in charge of 2325 students enrolled in all of these programs at UNAN-León.

Another important aspect to observe is that the great majority of teachers were in charge of teaching two, three, four and even five different courses at UNAN. This implied significant differences and challenges for the teachers in each of these programs. For example, in many cases the teachers had to design the syllabus for the class (called “microprogramación”) and look for adequate materials. Another important difference was the nature of instruction. For instance, all students in year II took General English classes. For these classes there were books previously established. Nevertheless, for all students in year III the focus of the class was ESP. This implied that the teachers needed to look for adequate materials for the classes. So, those teachers who had three different groups of year III had to look for materials for each of these specialized classes.

It is important to bear in mind that teachers’ work at UNAN was only part of their professional task. As shown previously, they were simultaneously working in two or three institutions and in different working shifts. The following table shows the number of working hours that each teacher had at the time they conducted their AR projects.

Figure 26

Teachers’ workload: working hours per week



The blue line in Figure 26 shows the amount of hours that every teacher was working per week. It is important to clarify that these hours correspond to the time that the teachers were in the classroom teaching the students. The time for other important pedagogic tasks, such as planning and evaluation is not included here.

As a point of reference, the figure also shows a yellow line which represents the standard number of hours that UNAN has established for its professors (14). Although this is not a straitjacket, (particularly now that there are serious budget problems at UNAN), many directors of programs and heads of departments take this criterion into account when assigning the teachers' workload. This is done this way because university teaching is very demanding and time consuming.

Most teachers went beyond UNAN's standard with their heavy workload, which was carried out with a great diversity of students and in different institutions and working shifts. As shown, the teacher who had the heaviest workload was teacher C (59 hours), this was followed by teacher E (48 hours), and teacher B (45 hours). Other teachers with a heavy workload were teacher F (41), teacher G (40) and teacher A (34). Most of the other teachers were between 25 (TN) and 20 hours (TH, TK, TL, TM). The only two teachers with a reduced number of hours close to UNAN's criteria were teachers J and O (12 hours each).

It is understandable then why six of the teachers did not complete their research projects (TA, TE, TF, TH, TI and TJ). They were very affected by workload as described below.

- TA had 34 hours and 330 students in three different programs at UNAN (Law, Actuarial Science and Social Work), and students from year I-V at secondary school. This teacher worked three shifts in two different institutions.
- Teacher E had 48 hours, 538 students in three different programs at UNAN (Social Work, System Engineering and Business Administration), and students from year I-V at secondary school. This teacher worked three shifts too.
- Teacher F worked 41 hours, three shifts. This teacher had 420 students in four different programs at UNAN (Law, System Engineering, Marketing and Economy), and secondary school groups (I-V).
- Teacher H was working 20 hours a week and had 377 students. This was the teacher who faced the large group of 111 students in the Economy Program in Somoto (a branch of UNAN-León in the North of Nicaragua). This teacher's workload involved 5 different groups and two shifts.
- Teacher I was working two shifts 20 hours a week, and had 177 students. This teacher, whose work involved four groups of students in the General Studies, was also facing economic and personal problems.

- The last teacher who did not complete the project was teacher J. This teacher's workload was not too heavy (12 hours, 160 students; one working shift). The reasons for not moving on were strictly personal.

As for the other teachers (TB, TC, TF, TG, TK, TL, TM, TN and TO), it is indeed a great achievement that they could manage to finish their projects. They had as much work as the teachers who didn't finish. The factors that allowed these teachers to succeed within extreme contextual conditions have not been addressed by this investigation. They are certainly an interesting area for further studies.

Thus, the findings here revealed that there was a direct relationship between the teachers' performance and their working conditions, which were the major reasons why the teachers could not focus on their training properly. Contextual conditions had affected teachers' performance at all levels (see in stage 4 below the evaluation of the program by the trainers). Nevertheless, the teachers would still face the greatest challenge of all with a new constraint posed by context.

d) Unexpected problems

All the research projects were in progress and about to finish by mid-June. Most of the teachers (included the ones who did not complete the projects) were still meeting with their peers, observing lessons and so on. The projects should be ready to be handed in and presented on July 24th and 31st. The plans were that from the last day of the semester, (Jun 19th) until the due date of the projects, the teachers had one month to write the research report and get ready for the presentation.

At the beginning of July the teachers were attending a workshop organized by the English Department. The workshop was based on how to teach writing (Jul 6th-10th) and was presented by Professor Joan Latchaw from the University of Nebraska, Omaha (UNO). This training was thought to be an optimal opportunity for the teachers to reinforce their writing skills in light of their research projects.

As it could be expected all the teachers were exhausted by that time. The situation was so difficult that they sent me a formal letter on the 3rd of July asking to postpone the date to hand in the AR projects for the 30th of August. The letter was signed by twelve of the teachers. Their arguments were work pressure, which was certainly understandable. Their great concern can be perceived in the following extract of the letter, "currently we are overwhelmed by the final reports and evaluations and current training...we have advanced significantly in our projects, but we want to give you a high quality and objective assignment". Thus, we agreed that the new date would be the 30th of August. A new cycle of tutorial sessions would be available for all teachers, if needed.

In addition to the amount of work, the teachers were also facing the problem of how to put together all the information of their research for writing the final report. In this regard, both

Professor Joan Latchaw and Professor Ann Coyne (also a Professor from the University of Nebraska, Omaha) provided me with valuable feedback on the teachers' weaknesses. This was done within the framework of the course about how to teach writing that was taking place. One of the teachers, (TM), had advanced her research report and asked both Professor Coyne and Professor Latchaw for their feedback. Teachers' M work was a sample of the kind of problems most teachers were probably facing. Thus, through this information the teachers' potential problems for writing the research report were identified. This information was eventually used for a remedial plan on how to write the research report. However, at that time, to all purposes the teachers would be presenting their projects in August.

It was the middle of July when the news arrived. All the teachers were called for a meeting at the English Department. In the meeting they were informed that because of budget cuts UNAN-León would not be able to hire hourly English teachers for the coming semester. Instead, students in the highest levels of the English Program would be teaching the lessons as "alumnos ayudantes". All of a sudden the teachers were, basically, out of work. As it could be expected, the news caused great commotion and influenced on the teachers' morale and motivation negatively. Moreover, the entire process of teacher reflection through the AR projects was jeopardized. Some teachers had pending tasks with their groups, which they were planning to fulfill at the beginning of the new semester. Fortunately, most of the teachers who finished their projects were able to cope with this problem, except for one (teacher C) who had too many aspects pending. This teacher had to start the investigation all over again with a group at secondary school (see section 3.8 below).

After this event, I had a meeting with the teachers on the 31st of July to find out what the situation was and do some damage control. Thus, it was agreed to provide teachers with all the possible support to finish the research project. Given the fact that some teachers had pending information from the students, they would get in touch with the new teacher assigned to be able to collect that information. A timetable was set for additional tutorial sessions on the week after the meeting to find out the state of each project. In these sessions it was clear that teachers needed more time, so they had an entire semester to finish their reports. The date of the final reports was postponed for the beginning of the year 2010. This was expected to give all teachers the opportunity to catch up with all the pending work.

3.7 Writing the research report

The teachers needed extra help with their research report. Certainly, this was one of the main weaknesses of the training program, which should have integrated a course on advanced academic writing. It was assumed that the teachers' abilities would refine along the development of the

course, as to be able to cope with the complexities of writing a research report. Obviously, this was not the case. Even though some of the teachers had very good writing skills, they still needed proper guidance on how to put together their research information in a coherent report.

Pertinent help was provided through a remedial plan offered by Dr. Manuel Megías from the University of Alcalá. This plan would take place at the beginning of the year 2010, on January 29. For the contents of this course the feedback provided by Professor Latchaw and Professor Coyne was taken into account, along with other weaknesses previously identified. There were basically two kinds of problems. The first kinds of problems were related to the structure of the research report and to the content of each of the sections. These weaknesses are described below.

a) The Research Question

- Explaining the research question and making it evident throughout the report.
- Focusing on the research questions in the data interpretation, with proper connections to the findings and to the literature reviewed.

b) The Research Methodology

- Describing how the study was set up; the kinds of students, the data collection instruments and its objectives (what, where, when, and for what purpose).
- Explaining the kind of information collected and the procedures used for analyzing the information.
- Describing the plan of action: why it was decided to put into practice that particular plan of action, what was pursued, what results they got and how such results (either positive or negative), were directly connected with the research questions and with decision-making.
- Clarifying the sources of the activities they put into practice (whether created by them, adapted or adopted).

c) The Literature Review

- Connecting the information to their research question or hypothesis and use the information to build up their arguments (not just list, describe and/or mention a number of sources without any connection).
- Dealing with references: paraphrasing, citing actual quotes, citing authors indirectly.
- Acknowledging other people's writings properly to avoid plagiarism.
- Tackling the conventionalities of writing the bibliography.

d) The results and discussion

- Connecting the results and discussion with the research question and with the general and specific objectives of the investigation.

The second kinds of problems were focused on basic mistakes in grammar, punctuation, use of tenses, subject-verb agreement, spelling, and run-on sentences. Likewise, there were basic weaknesses in writing the thesis statement, developing topic sentences, presenting arguments with adequate supporting sentences, and establishing adequate linking between paragraphs and between the different sections of the research project.

Thus the weaknesses were related, on the one hand, to the lack of background knowledge in writing research reports and, on the other, to the writing abilities per se. The teachers with the latter problem would obviously require much more personal effort than just attending a short training course. They had to take independent time to improve their writing skills, and they were advised to do so.

Because of the practical nature of the remedial plan, most teachers acknowledged it was helpful for their pending writing task. At the end of the session the new and definite dates to present the research report were decided. This new deadlines were April 15th, 22nd and 29th. To give teachers a follow up with pertinent assistance they would continue to attend tutorial sessions. This new cycle took place from February to April. It was focused on giving individual feedback to the teachers about the writing process of the research report. In addition, the teachers would receive, by email, practical recommendations for the format of the research report (see appendix 22). With all of these measures it was expected that the teachers could finish their projects. The teachers who were committed to take all of these steps were the ones who fulfilled their projects.

3.8 Assessing the Action Research Projects

The Action Research projects were a requirement of the course *Action Research in the Classroom* and the exit criteria of the Postgraduate Course in TEFL. Thus, especial measures were taken to assess the teachers' performance in a valid, objective and reliable way. This section describes the process of evaluation of the AR projects and the criteria that was used for this evaluation. It also describes the timing and procedures.

The evaluation involved the public oral presentation of the research reports in front of a board of external evaluators. The assessment was based on both the written project and the oral presentation. Obviously, the highest value was given to the written project. Thus, 80% of the grade was for the written report, and 20% for the oral presentation for a total of 100 points.

The collaboration this time involved the participation of several professors from the English Department, who were willing to provide their valuable support to the assessment process. They were: Professor Martha Chavarría, current head of the English Department, Professor Michèle Delaplace who was also a teacher trainer in the Postgraduate Course, Professor Martha Celia

Laguna and Professor Victorino Rojas. An external evaluator was also invited to participate: Professor Elizabeth Bisanz, who graduated from the last Masters' Programs offered by the English Department. The teachers should give a hard copy of the project to the evaluators one week in advance. The following table shows the organization of the presentations:

Table 36

Timetable for the presentation of the Action Research Projects

TC	Research Projects	Evaluators	Date	Time
N	Pronunciation techniques to teach technical terms in English to Students Majoring in System Engineering at the Faculty of Science and Technology at UNAN-León.	Michèle Delaplace Edipcia Chavez	April 15, 2010	3:00-3:30
L	Promoting the communicative skills of students in the II year of Biology at the Faculty of Sciences and Technology of UNAN-León.			3:40-4:10
O	Developing students' oral English skills in the II year of the Major of Clinical Bioanalysis at UNAN-León	Martha Chavarria Edipcia Chávez	April 22, 2010	2:00-2:30
C	How to optimize class time in large groups of class through pair work and group work activities			2:40-3:10
G	Using visual aids to increase the vocabulary and communicative skills of students in the first year of PEM in Physical Education at UNAN León.			3:20-3:50
B	Factors interfering in the acquisition of English in the aural activities of the II year of the Business Administration Major of UNAN-León CUR Somotillo.	Martha Celia Laguna Edipcia Chávez	April 29, 2010	2:00-2:30
M	Communicative activities to increase student interaction and talking time in the General Studies, at UNAN – Leon.			2:40-3:10
D	How to enhance the basic writing skills of students in 7th grade at Madre María Luisa school, in León Nicaragua.	Victorino Rojas Edipcia Chávez	May 13, 2010	4:00-4:30
K	Why the over use of the mother tongue in the English Pedagogical Activities among low- intermediate students of the System Engineering major at UNAN-León?	Elisabeth Bisanz Edipcia Chávez	May 21 2010	2:00-2:40

Note: Because of UNAN' dismissal, teacher C conducted the same research topic but with a different group of students: seventh graders at secondary school levels

As shown, the evaluations took place on five different dates. Although this was not the original plan, it had to be done this way so that the teachers who were still in the process of writing could gain some more time. Thus, the period extended to the month of May. The teachers who had finished their reports by the due date were the ones presenting first. It was a public event so all the teachers could benefit from the presentation of their peers. There were six rounds of presentations. Each time the evaluator team was formed by one of the external evaluators and the researcher. The first two teachers presenting were teacher L and N on the 15th of April. The week after, on the 22nd of April, the teachers presenting their projects were teachers O, C, and G. Teachers B and M

presented on the 29th. This was followed by teacher D who presented on the 13th of May. The last presenter was teacher K on the 21st of May.

3.8.1 The assessment criteria

For the assessment of the projects, the evaluators were provided with templates for each of the teachers to evaluate both the written report and the oral presentations (see appendices 23). The evaluation of the written reports involved a variety of aspects, each of which had a set of rubrics linked to performance and to the achievement of the specific learning objectives of the course. On the one hand, there were those aspects related to the organization and content of specific sections, such as the introduction, the context, the literature review, the methodology and the data analysis. On the other hand, the evaluation was focused on those aspects that revealed sufficiency in the teachers' research skills to address effectively important elements of research, such as establishing research validity, describing findings and outcomes, drawing conclusions, and stating implications for professional practice, among others. In addition, the aspects assessed were also focused on the quality and consistency of the written document, e.g. mechanics, use of figures and tables, referencing, and the like. The assessment criteria were based on a scale from 0 to 2 that determined the level of performance in each particular behavior. Thus, 0 was a behavior not observed (not evidence provided), 1 a developing behavior (below expectations) and 2, a proficient behavior (expectations met).

On the other hand, the oral presentations involved five major areas assessed: the content of the presentation, coherence and organization, creativity, the visual materials, and the presenters' speaking skills. Each of these areas had its corresponding rubric to assess achievement. The criteria this time was based on a four-level scale ranging from 1 to 4 (1 poor, 2 fair, 3 good, and 4 exceptional). The teachers had half an hour to present their projects, after which there were ten minutes for answering the evaluators' questions.

On the whole, the evaluation evidenced the teachers' different levels of proficiency in their research skills. The evaluators provided valuable feedback to each teacher about the weaknesses and strengths found in her/his project. Likewise, each teacher was provided with recommendations for improvement in specific aspects of the research. There was a grade assigned, but it would be valid until the teachers integrated the recommendations into their corresponding reports. The teachers had to do so in a period no longer than 15 days after the feedback was given. Once the changes were made they would give the final version of their projects. The process was documented in a written report, sent to the evaluators for revision and, finally, sent to the teachers. The most important aspects of this feedback process are presented below.

3.8.2 Main strengths of the AR projects

On the whole, the evaluators acknowledged two important aspects that were common in most research reports. The first aspect was that the reports integrated all the components of an investigation. The second aspect was related to the contextual information contained in the reports. Most projects showed good teacher knowledge and awareness of important issues, such as the instructional context, the materials, the program and the kind of students. The teachers awareness of contextual issues was an issue recurrently present throughout this investigation. The evaluators also highlighted other positive aspects of the research projects. These aspects were focused on particular areas of the written report, the oral presentation and attitudinal aspects. The feedback provided in each case integrates the teacher it refers to.

- *The research questions and objectives*

These strengths reflected teacher skill in researching a relevant topic and formulating objectives directly connected with the issue under investigation. The evaluators also highlighted the uniqueness of some of the topics and how they emerged from classroom experience.

- *Unique research question among all the AR projects. It is an up-to-date and interesting topic; focused on a neglected area: writing. It tackles the issue of why teachers put writing aside. It is challenging and at the same time realistic to achieve: the goal of providing the students with the basic skills for writing. (Teacher D)*
- *A very consistent and interesting research which demonstrates that a teacher can change the focus from a traditional teacher-centered approach to a more challenging, student-centered one by implementing motivating, interesting speaking activities. (Teacher L)*
- *The research tackles important aspects of the issue under investigation from a practical side related to the teacher's everyday tools for teaching, such as the lesson plan and the kinds of activities to integrate to promote students' oral skills in the target language. (Teacher O).*
- *The research question and objectives are relevant and directly related to the teachers' practice and students. It shows the teacher's awareness of the major problems faced by students in learning vocabulary. (Teacher G).*
- *The research question is very interesting, meaningful, and challenging to achieve: the goal of enhancing students' production of the target language. It is also relevant and directly related to the teachers' teaching practice, students, and teaching context. (Teacher K)*
- *The objectives are well formulated matching the kind of study; they are clear, precise, and realistic to achieve showing high teacher's reflective level (to vary, adapt, change*

traditional way of teaching; find out difficulties, increase teacher's awareness of students' needs. (Teacher M)

- *The topic is relevant, up-to-date, accurate and directly related to students' current learning needs. The whole research was based on the teachers' previous assumptions (hypotheses) about the issue, which reflects a high level of teacher reflective skills. The objectives are well-formulated and directly related to the research question .(Teacher B)*

- *The literature review*

Other positive aspects found in some of the projects were connected with the literature review. The major strengths in this area were focused on the connection of the information with the research topic and how it sustained the issue under investigation.

- *Well sustained theoretical guidelines with insights and quotations from experts in the field, which makes a strong theoretical framework...these guidelines that are explained and described in the literature review support, sustain and lead the research work from the beginning to the end. (Teacher N).*
- *The literature review presents excellent key points and relevant concepts and theory directly related to the research topic. (Teacher L).*
- *The literature review presents important concepts related to the problem under study. It is logical and well organized. (Teacher C).*
- *The concepts are relevant and directly related to the research question. There are excellent examples of techniques and strategies to enhance students' writing skills. (Teacher D).*
- *It is varied, sufficient and relevant. It presents very good choice of interesting information in the research field. There are discussions about concepts and theory closely linked to the research topic. (Teacher K).*

- *The results and discussion*

The arguments presented in the section of results and discussion, were also considered strengths in some of the cases. Clarity, accuracy and relevance were the distinguishing features.

- *The section of results and discussions is well-explained, clear and accurate. The statistics used introduce scientific accuracy into the work. The results are presented in a very precise, meticulous and transparent way. (Teacher L).*
- *Relevant information was derived from the data which were in turn categorized forming meaningful groups directly connected to the issue under investigation: the when and why of student overuse of the mother tongue in classroom activities. Thus it is clear how the initial diagnosis is connected with – and leads to – the plan of action. (Teacher K).*

- *The research cycle and the plan of action*

In some other cases, the features of an Action Research methodology, such as the research cycle and the plan (s) of action (s) were considered strengths of the projects. Moreover, teacher reflective skills and pedagogic abilities were highlighted.

- *The research cycle is well documented. It is clearly seen that the different actions of the research were the result of thorough planning and implementation. Another strong point is that two plans of actions were put into practice. (Teacher M)*
- *The two plans of actions that were designed show that the research process was ongoing, systematic and consistent. (Teacher G)*
- *The Plan of Action is relevant and directly focused on the problem. It reflects high reflective skills on the part of the researcher and excellent pedagogic abilities to look for adequate options and solutions to overcome the problem. (Teacher K)*

- *The conclusions and recommendations*

Some of the recommendations emerging out of the research were labeled as relevant, interesting, and *connected* with the problem investigated and with the teacher practice.

- *The recommendations are relevant and directly related to the objectives and topic under investigation. (Teacher M)*
- *The conclusions summarize and cover the major points of the investigation and reflect its pedagogical implications for the teaching practice at the classroom level. (Teacher K)*
- *The problem studied is relevant, interesting, and closely related to the teachers' praxis, students and teaching context. A number of relevant recommendations emerged from the study (Teacher C).*

- *The writing style*

In some projects the writing constraints were overcome. Thus, the research reports were considered adequate to the standards of research reports.

- *Very few mistakes, mechanics is correct; very well written, generally speaking. It is easy to read, and at the same time the report includes specific terms related to the field of education in the area researched. These terms and expressions are recurrent throughout the research report. (Teacher N)*
- *Very well-written and neat research report with elegant language that highlights the researcher's personal writing style. (Teacher L)*
- *Good layout, it has a clear sequence; it's easy to follow; generally speaking the document is well written, concise, and coherent. There are logical transitions from one section to the other and it contains all the elements of a research report. (Teacher C)*

- The research can be transformed into a publishable article and/or a practical workshop to be shared with colleagues (Teacher K)
- *Attitudinal aspects*

The evaluators also highlighted the teachers' personal attitude and good disposition shown in the oral presentation and demonstrated throughout the different stages of the research work. Interest, enthusiasm and motivation were the distinguishing features.

 - *The research reflects the teacher' awareness of the problems of students in learning vocabulary and in developing communicative skills, and the teacher's interest in looking for solutions to overcome the problems.* (Teacher G)
 - *The strongest point is the enthusiasm, interest and motivation that the teacher researcher showed throughout the research work. We can feel that the teacher researcher is highly interested in this particular area; pronunciation.* (Teacher N)
 - *The level of enthusiasm and motivation shown throughout the research work. Both the written report and the oral presentation reflect the teacher interest. This attitude led to systematic and conscientious actions in the search of answers to overcome the problem of student overuse of the mother tongue in the EFL classroom.* (Teacher K)

- *The oral presentation*

In some of the projects the strengths identified were related to the teachers' performance in the oral presentation. Moreover, in the oral presentations the teacher clarified aspects that had been left ambiguous in the written report (teachers were asked to clarify them). In some cases the teachers' oral skills were what provoked the positive feedback. In some other cases it was the means used as visual materials to present the different areas of the research.

- *The researcher sets a good example. The research topic is related to the use of visuals and both the written document and the presentation provide good use of visual information.* (Teacher G)
- *Clear articulation, adequate pronunciation and fluency made it easy to follow the main stages of the research process.* (Teacher N)
- *Good transition from one area of the research to the next. The researcher's oral skills clarified unclear aspects in the written report.* (Teacher B)
- *Very good performance; the major points of the research process were presented in a detailed, clear and graphic way good use of multimedia materials which made the description of the development of the research process clear and effective.* (Teacher L)

3.8.3 *Main weaknesses of the AR projects*

The evaluators also highlighted the major problems found in the projects. These problems also related to the aspects mentioned above. Although many good aspects were found in the areas described, there was also room for improvement in all of them.

- *The literature review*

Certain dissociation between the literature review and the research question was identified in some cases. In some others, particular key concepts and theory for the research question were either not fully explained, or completely missing. For example, many of the research projects were related to the issue of communicative activities to promote classroom interaction. Nevertheless, important aspects, such as pair work and group work were missing in some cases. Likewise, given the fact that the teachers faced large classes, some reference was expected to the phenomenon of mixed-ability classes. The issue of Teacher Talking Time (TTT) vs. Student Talking Time (STT) fitted into this topic, as well.

On the other hand, in some reports there were few references. In some others, even though some important concepts were tackled in the literature review, there was no in-depth analysis of what experts say in certain areas, just description of a number of sources. By the same token, some of the reviews had problems in referencing. There were too long quotes and missing references. Sometimes authors were not given due credit which made it difficult to know which words belonged to the teacher, and which words belonged to the authors cited.

- *The recommendations*

In some cases the recommendations, which are essential to any research work, reflected separation and dissociation from the research question and objectives. In some other cases the recommendations were mixed with other sections (like the discussion and results sections). In other cases there were very good recommendations, but a poor organization made it difficult to see their relevance (e.g. the recommendations were presented as a list of isolated points).

- *The conclusions*

In some cases the conclusions had very good information but poor writing skills made them weak. In some other cases the research question was not re-stated, and there was no summary of the different aspects tackled and/or of the implications for professional practice.

- *The discussion and results*

Some projects showed limitations in the way the results were presented which was perceived as vague and general. The results needed to be explained and described accurately in order to actually show the findings of the study (not just say “the vast majority of students...”). It was necessary that the teachers referred back to the data to integrate numbers and percentages in order to overcome this

difficulty. On the other hand, in some projects important visual information was missing or used inappropriately (e.g. tables and graphics did not really contribute to the comprehension of the information presented)

- *The plan of action*

In some cases the plan of action was not fully exploited as it did not reflect clearly the connection/links with other aspects of the research. This caused that the plan of action did not quite match the relevance of the work in several different ways. For instance, it seemed too weak compared to all the richness of the literature review. Other weaknesses were that the nature and characteristics of the plan of action did not make an effective link with the initial diagnosis, as to make the need for that action evident. Part of the problem, again, was caused by poor writing skills that did not allow the teacher to present this important step effectively. Thus, poor organization made the plan of action seem de-contextualized when, in reality, the activities planned were directly connected with the issue under investigation. It is important to bear in mind that good contextualization of the research was one of the strengths, identified by the evaluators, common to all the teachers.

- *The introduction*

The major problems found in the introduction were both related to poor writing skills and to the lack of familiarity with the type of writing. In some cases the introduction was so general and vague that it did not reflect the background information of the problem and the reasons of the study. In addition, the introduction did not mention how the research project was organized, which did not help to follow the logical flow of the document.

- *The writing mechanics*

Some research projects had major problems with mechanics (typos, grammar, punctuation, etc.) that prevented the reader from fully understanding key points of the research. Moreover, coherence was at risk at certain points as sometimes there was no logical link from one section to another. In addition, in some cases the teachers' writing style was not clear because of poor referencing skills.

- *The research methodology*

The problems identified with the research methodology were perceived as emerging from a lack of research skills combined with poor writing skills. These two limitations caused lack of clarity in important processes and procedures, such as the research cycle and the research instrument, which in some cases were not thoroughly described and defined. In addition, in some projects it was not evidenced how the data was put together for the purposes of analysis and interpretation. For instance, the triangulation method used to guarantee the validity of the study was not detailed in the

section of methodology. Although categories and themes were present in all projects, (emerging from the triangulation process), it was not clear how such information emerged in most cases.

On the other hand, in some projects the research stages were not well documented. Although these stages were briefly mentioned at some point, the actual process that the teachers went through was not described in detail. This weakness was perceived as emerging directly from the extreme difficulties that the teachers experienced at the very end of the implementation of the research projects.

3.8.4 Recommendations for improvement

Based on the previous problems, the evaluators made the following recommendations for improvement in each of the areas.

- *The introduction*
 - *Describe all the areas of the research report in the introduction. This section should be divided into paragraphs each with a topic sentence that reflects the relevance of the work; why it was made and how it was organized. Use the following questions to complete/complement/improve the introduction: What was the relevance of the work? What did the researcher want to gain professionally? Who would benefit? The researcher? The students? The institution? What kind of benefits would these be?*
- *The literature review*
 - *About the references: Use MLA style to improve the Lit. Review. Revise thoroughly the following: citing literally, quotations, paraphrasing, long quotes, etc.*
 - *About the information off topic: either integrate the links that connect the information with the research question or eliminate the information.*
 - *Include references in the literature review where the concepts suggested are integrated. There should be at least a summary of the main characteristics of the method and why it is considered relevant to the research topic.*
- *The research methodology*
 - *Integrate a full description of the methodology of the research, such as the AR cycle, the selection of the research topic, the research design, the application of the data collection instruments, the analysis of the information and the implementation and evaluation of the plan of action.*
 - *After the analysis of data there should be a conclusion summarizing the findings and making the connection with the plan of action.*
 - *Make reference to the appendixes and specifically refer the reader to them (particularly for the research data collection instruments).*

- *Describe the peer observation process, when? Who? What aspects were observed?*
- *Given the useful, practical and innovative nature of the peer observation, the procedures and stages of the process should be fully documented: what happened prior, during and after the observation.*
- *The actual procedure of triangulation carried out to analyze the information and put it together should be clearly and fully described in the methodology section (if possible with graphic information).*
- *The plan of action*
 - *There should be a full description of how the initial diagnosis led to the plan of action. Its main characteristics, in light of the research question, objectives and the literature review should be highlighted. It is important to remember that the plan of action is the alternative approach proposed to ease the problem.*
 - *The connection between the action plan and the diagnosis should be clearly perceived: what were the problems and the solutions (all of it directly connect with the objectives of the research).*
 - *Make the connection between the plan and the research question clear, why this plan and not another? What made it special? What were the characteristics (relate this to the lit. review) that made of the activities in the plan a good way of solving the problem.*
 - *Mention and discuss the characteristics that make the activities presented “effective” Also, refer to the authorship of the activities suggested: where do they come from? What is the source?*
- *Discussion and results*
 - *Include qualitative or quantitative information that show the frequency with which a particular phenomenon was observed.*
 - *Include graphics used for the analysis at appropriate parts of the report, either inside the report or in the appendix: to graphic results, emphasize a particular point, compare particular situation; etc.*
 - *Write an introductory paragraph explaining the kind of analysis that is involved.*
 - *The process of the peer observation should be described thoroughly and the guide used for the peer observation should be integrated in the appendix.*
 - *In the analysis of data, the categories that emerged of the analysis should be clearly seen. For this purpose it is important to use the categories as headings.*
 - *Improve the narrative style (not only statistics or numbers, but the actual interpretation of data with insights from the teacher and connection with the literature when necessary).*

- Summarize the main findings in the diagnosis (major problems, weaknesses, etc.) and make the connection with the research topic.
- Do not present the findings from the point of view of each instrument, but from the categories that emerged from the triangulation process/method in light of the research question.
- *Conclusions and recommendations*
 - Group the recommendations into appropriate related groups that show the areas in which recommendations are made.
 - There should be a summary of the major concepts tackled by the study. The section should be rich in appreciations emerging from the study focused on relevant areas of the teachers' work in the selected research topic.
 - Integrate and highlight the actual implications of the research for the teacher's professional practice:
 - What were the teacher's perception/beliefs about the research question before?*
 - What new insights have been gained?*
 - What are the changes that the teacher has gone through professionally speaking?*
 - What would the teacher do differently next time?*
- *Organization and revision of the document/editing and proofreading*
 - Check mechanics: grammar, plurals, non-count nouns, the use of punctuation marks and prepositions, spellings, pronouns etc. Be careful with run-on sentences, word order, and word choice! It is highly advisable to get the help of a peer to proofread the whole document.

The evaluation process of the AR projects was indeed a very good experience for the teachers' professional growth. They had accomplished an important professional goal with the presentation of their research projects. Thus, the evaluation of their AR project marked the final stage of their reflective process. It had been a long journey since they first started the exploration in their classrooms. As discussed, they had experienced a number of problems along the way, in spite of which they were able to fulfill the challenge. Furthermore, the fact that the presentations had involved the collaboration of external evaluators was very positive. Most of the evaluators had been their teachers, which contributed to increase the teachers' self-esteem and sense of professional growth. The experience was in many senses a way of social recognition, which the teachers strived for and certainly deserved.

3.8.5 *The teachers' self-evaluation*

In order to complete the cycle of reflection it was important to find out the teachers' perceptions about the process. Consequently, shortly after the presentation of their projects the teachers were asked to provide their insights through a survey (see appendix 24).

This survey aimed to get firsthand information from the teachers about how they had internalized the process of structured reflection. For this purpose, they were asked to define Action Research, and complete a series of reflective thoughts: what reasons they could find to undertake AR, the major problems they faced, the changes they had gone through and the most important thing they had learned. What follows are the most salient aspects of this exploration.

a) Teachers' conceptualization of Action Research

Teachers' insights about Action Research and about the reasons to conduct AR projects clearly reflected two kinds of conceptualizations, a technical basic one that shows an accurate description of the process, and a more personalized one that also reflects an accurate description of the process but from the teachers' own perception. These two conceptualizations show two different levels of reflection and knowledge acquisition.

- *Technical basic conceptualization*

Regarding the basic concepts of AR there were those that reflected the teacher knowledge of the technicalities of AR and the different processes it involves. For example:

- *AR is carried out in order to find a problem, collect data about this specific problem...to assess the collected information and finally to find possible solutions to this problem.*
- *...a systematic process in which you can evaluate and identify the students' problems in language learning*
- *...A systematic inquiry involving one or more people to collaborate, self-reflect and undertake actions on such inquiry critically*
- *An investigation that involves you and your students to reflect on your teaching and research a problem in your classroom.*
- *Know what the problems are, how they happen and how to get results and possible solutions to make of this problem a possibility of changing things.*
- *Identify the real problem, use peer observation and diaries to collect information ...design a plan to solve the problem and analyze the results.*
- *Identify students and teacher problems to solve the problems...it's necessary to plan some strategies and methods to implement during the AR.*

- *It is an investigation, a way of planning or exploring what is happening around us, taking into consideration the following aspects: the identification of the problem, the problem itself, the population on which we are going to focus the investigation,*

By reading these definitions it is clear that all these teachers had learned the basic knowledge of what the essence of AR is: a systematic process, an investigation carried out in the classroom in collaboration with students and peers. The definitions also show the teachers' awareness of the elements of the AR cycle: finding/identifying/exploring a problem, collecting data about it, designing a plan, implementing it, and evaluating the results. Clearly, teachers had grasped the concepts of AR and understood precisely what its purpose is and what it involves. What this meant is that after finishing their AR projects the teachers had enough familiarity with the process as to be able to go on working in the area independently. They no longer lacked the necessary basic knowledge to conduct research as when they started the course. Moreover, something had definitely triggered on the teachers' minds about the value of reflection through Action Research, which had been made evident through their AR projects.

- *Personalized conceptualization*

On the other hand, there were teachers that went beyond the technicalities of AR and adventured their own conceptualization as shown below:

- *AR is carried out to have a better understanding of the problems presented in our daily craft. It is also put into practice to obtain relevant data used to make important decisions when teaching the language.*
- *AR is a process of self-monitoring in which the participants gets involved in a cycle of planning, acting, observing and reflecting on an issue or problem happening in the class, which not only affect students, but teachers' performance, and thus the progress of learning.*
- *AR is when every professional questions himself/herself in order to improve or solve a situation which takes part in a group or society observing, planning, acting and reflecting on what to do next.*
- *It is a means of communication between your ideas and the real situations which we have to cope with...an important tool for teachers who are willing to put ideas into concrete results. It is merely putting thoughts into a leading force for applying changes*
- *AR is a pedagogical tool that teachers can use in the classroom to develop, reflect on, and improve their teaching style and practices.*
- *It is carried out in order to find the reasons which cause a problem or misbehavior in a group or society and offer possible solutions*

- *...improve or provoke better participation from students who are the principal element why and Action Research is carried out...it is also aimed to answer a personal question or questions a teacher might have within his her teaching development in order to reflect on the results and future plans.*
- *...improve or bring solutions to a detected problem through the different research cycles that guide the whole process from the very beginning to the end (observing, reflecting, planning and acting).*

Although the same aspects of the previous conceptualizations are present (the elements of research, the reasons to undertake it and the participants), there is something different about these second group of teachers' insights. The first difference is obviously the wording; language is used in a richer and more descriptive manner. The second difference is the originality of the thoughts which do not seem to have been pre-coined or pre-established; e.g. "a pedagogical tool", "putting thoughts into a leading force for applying changes" and "misbehavior in a group". The uniqueness of these definitions shows higher levels of professional maturity. The third difference is the level of reflection. Terms as "self-monitoring", "better understanding", "reflect on future plans", "answer a personal question", and "improve teaching style and practices" clearly show that the teachers had taken the issue of conducting AR in the classroom to a further, more internalized level.

This personalized conceptualization indicated that these teachers' awareness and levels of reflection were higher than their peers in the first group. Such elaborate insights reflect that they had adopted a reflective attitude as part of their professional baggage to detect and address problems in the classroom on their own. Moreover, these teachers were ready for any kind of challenge in the research field independently. Their excellent academic performance during the entire course and in their research projects was the definite evidence of this finding.

b) Problems in undertaking the AR projects

There were two kinds of limitations identified by the teachers. A first group of limitations was the teachers' background knowledge of research. The second group was related to the contextual conditions that surrounded the teachers' professional lives at the time of the projects.

- *Background knowledge*

The lack of previous preparation and practice was something that really affected teachers as for all of them this was the first time they conducted research. Consequently, the teachers experienced problems at different levels: planning, organization, selection of the research topic, designing the data collection instruments and the writing process of the research report. It was very difficult for most teachers to complete their research projects with all due quality. Even though the remedial

plans helped, the original gaps in their background knowledge were reflected in their final reports. This limitation is consistent with the weaknesses identified by the evaluators in section 3.8.3 above.

- *I was not well prepared about what to do; about the real steps to follow.*
- *I didn't have enough experience in researching, so it made me feel a little lost sometimes.*
- *At the beginning it was sort of difficult to plan the whole thing as I wasn't used to plan these kinds of things.*
- *...define a real urgent problem my students presented since they really had many difficulties that needed to be assisted...deciding which area was the most suitable to study took most of my effort.*
- *In the data collection it was difficult to design and set out the peer observations criteria*
- *There were lots of information; I did not know what to do with it, so that everything had sense.*
- *Organizing the whole mass of information gathered through the research process was difficult.*
- *Honestly, I think I needed more training on writing these kinds of texts which is not an easy task, especially when you have to follow specific criteria to edit research projects.*
- *The way of writing a formal paper...the fear of plagiarism...when to use quoted phrases or just simply mention the writer's point of view.*
- *Contextual problems*

The influence of context on the teachers' performance was widely discussed in section 3.6.7 above. From the teachers' point of view, there were several dimensions in which context affected them both directly and indirectly.

First of all, the teachers complained that time didn't allow them to do what was necessary to carry out their research. Evidently, timing was a constraint due to the amount of work they faced at the time of the development of their projects. The workload they were facing at the time exceeded in many ways the standards for language teaching: amount of students, students per group, different institutions, and working shifts, among others. Several areas and levels of the research process were affected by this: the general research process, the application of the research instruments, the implementation of the plan of action, attendance to tutorial sessions and the peer observations. These problems are reflected in the following comments.

- *I had difficulties to find time to do research as I would have wished (the general research process)*

- *One of my biggest problem was the lack of time I had to develop my action research with my first sample group...I couldn't finish my project so I had to do it again with a new group of students.* (the general research process)
- *It was difficult to find the time to carry out the peer observations as my colleague and me had very different schedules* (the research instruments)
- *I developed all the activities concerning to the stages of my plan of action but implementing the plan of action was not fully completed* (the plan implementation)
- *There was not enough time to attend the tutorial sessions* (the tutorial sessions)
- *It was hard to find the time to write and put the information together* (the writing process)

The second dimension of the problems posed by context was the teachers' dismissal from UNAN. Because of this problem they needed to look for the mechanisms to complete the pending information. In most cases, the teachers needed to talk to the new teacher in charge in order to be able to get in touch with their students. There was one teacher who had to begin all the process again with a new group of students. The teachers' did not refer specifically to how their dismissal affected their motivation. Nonetheless, this was made evident by the way they decreased their pace and involvement towards the end of the course.

The third dimension was the withdrawal of their peers. It is important to bear in mind that this problem was indirectly caused by context, as these teachers quit the program because of work pressures. This affected the teachers who stayed in the program because the feedback from their peers was not complete. Thus, they had to look for another teacher's assistance, which was difficult since all the other teachers were busy. In these cases, I helped the teachers cope with this limitation by observing some of the lessons.

The last dimension of context related problems was economic problems. All over the development of the AR course, the teachers needed specific information from the library; from Internet; from bibliography suggested in tutorial sessions. On the other hand, they needed to pay for their own research materials such as surveys and interviews to apply, the draft versions of their project for revisions, and the final printed version. All of this required significant investment of money which was a serious problem considering that the teachers had lost one of their jobs.

c) Teacher change

It was evident throughout the entire process of this investigation that the teachers had an innate openness towards change. This was made evident in the hypothesis of the solutions to the problems and in the focus and objectives of their research projects (see section 3.5.5 and 3.6.3 respectively). Thus, teacher change was another issue tackled by the teachers' self-evaluation to explore where

this natural inclination had taken the teachers at the end of their structured reflective process. The teachers provided interesting insights that shed light on the kinds of changes they had gone through. Four kinds of change were identified: *changes related to the research question, changes in general teaching approaches, changes in the teachers' reflective skills and changes in teachers' beliefs about students.*

- *Changes related to the research question*

The changes related to the research questions were specific changes connected directly with the issue under investigation. An increase in teacher confidence was perceived as parallel to an increase in teacher *practical and pedagogical knowledge* to deal with the particular aspect or area. This knowledge was related to a number of teaching areas, such as planning, providing practice, using variety of activities, addressing students' needs, integrating new teaching materials, increasing students' motivation. This is reflected in the following teachers' perceptions:

- *I think that my teaching has gone through the following changes: an increase of techniques to teach vocabulary to reinforce students' speaking skills and ideas to use visual materials to help students' motivation.*
- *I feel more confident when teaching pronunciation...I take pronunciation problems as a challenge to overcome.*
- *Now when I present new vocabulary... I give students guided practice and then they have to produce.*
- *I feel I'm more prepared to find practical solutions for students' speaking problems.*
- *I found out that by giving the students the correct and proper motivation they can achieve their goals in writing.*
- *It has deepened my skills in seeking a variety of ways to solve students' speaking problems and reach all learners.*
- *I learnt there are many things I can do for improving my teaching and students' attitude towards the class.*

- *Changes in general teaching approaches*

These types of changes were of a more general nature related to their teaching approaches. The teachers here reflect what they used to do and what, as a result of the research project, had improved.

- *I used to be a traditional teacher who used to lead teacher-centered lessons*
- *We teachers need to be ready to make changes and improvements at the classroom level*
- *I prepare my classes in a better way to motivate students to participate in class. My lessons are better prepared.*

➤ *I am now open to new methods of teaching.*

- *Changes in the teachers' reflective skills*

These kinds of changes reflect an increase in teacher perception and awareness levels about the different aspects of the teaching practice (the teacher, the learner, the teaching-learning process). This increase involves the teachers' analytical and critical thinking skills, and solving problem ability. The salient aspects of this change of perception are *awareness-raising, self-reflection, self-discovery, self-improvement* and *professional development*.

➤ *This study helped me a lot to become a more reflective teacher...it strengthened my professional development. Another thing I learned is to be critical with the different aspects of my teaching.*

➤ *In general, my knowledge, expertise and self-reflection have grown significantly. I'm aware that problems in the classroom can have a solution if treated accordingly.*

➤ *It was worth the time dedicated to it because I perceive self-improvement.*

➤ *It is an endless road because the more you search the more you get to find. It's a new world opened to all those who risk themselves to a new and unforgettable adventure which will be troublesome to some extent.*

➤ *Carrying out this AR project has awakened my analytical ability to identify problems in class.*

➤ *Now I do try to be much more aware of what's going on with the class and students*

➤ *I learned that most difficulties teachers face in their practice can be overcome if we (teachers) are critical and constantly reflect on our practice, but more importantly to take actions whenever we see a problem emerge.*

➤ *How I can improve my teaching performance and the capability every teacher has to solve students' trouble are the most significant gains I obtained from my AR;*

➤ *I realize what is working and what isn't...not only that but try solve the problem during and after class*

➤ *The personal satisfaction of discovering I can be better than what I am, but especially the satisfaction of being able to help students*

➤ *I think that I have come through a lot of changes in my professional development as now I think that teaching a language is more than going into the classroom with an X number of students and teach them the topic of the day...it is more than that, it is enjoying with them what is going on in class.*

➤ *I learned that, as teachers, we have to handle different aspects student behavior, the teaching- learning process, teacher role, student role, the classroom environment, the*

materials, methodology, dynamics...so that the teaching flows in a good way... if teaching does not function, is because something is wrong and we have to be alert.

- *Changes in teachers' beliefs about students*

These kinds of changes involve a refined perception of students' participation and involvement in the learning process. The teachers' deep concern for students' learning had been another permanent element always present in the exploration of teachers' thinking (1.1.2, 2.1, 2.4.4, 3.3.2, 3.3.4, 3.3.5, 3.3.6, 3.3.7, 3.5.2, 3.5.5 and 3.6.3). This shows consistency in teacher beliefs and reflects a genuine desire of the teachers to find out better ways for helping students acquire the language. Thus, their reflective process had served its intended purpose in increasing both the teachers' awareness of students and their knowledge to deal with their different characteristics. The salient aspects here are related to learner-centered processes, such as *student learning styles, student needs, student motivation, student background knowledge, independent learning and student self-awareness.*

- *Students learn in different ways...teachers need to create new strategies and techniques*
- *I first think on my students' needs...on what they first want to know about English...to encourage them to learn the language.*
- *I now consider my students not only an input receiver but as a whole complement in the learning process having to do with their own ability to acquire knowledge*
- *Students' background knowledge is important and as teachers we have to teach the class according to the students' need, we have to attract students' attention with good dynamics, methodology and the material required.*
- *I am more aware of the difficulties students may face...I am more prepared to find practical solutions.*
- *I learned through AR that when students are conscious of their own learning they enjoy it and have a purpose to achieve their goal*
- *Being aware of what works best for my students has deepened my awareness of the need to be experienced and fluid in seeking a variety of ways to reach all learners*
- *I admit I am still kind of passive towards students' needs in the classroom but this kind of exercise (Action Research) has made my teaching more concerned.*
- *I try to engage students in the act of self-studying*
- *Doing AR helps students and it helps me to assess problems*
- *Students' motivation towards the class discourages them from enhancing their own learning*

This concludes the third stage of the present investigation. As discussed, its main objective was to provide teachers with systematic guidance towards the successful development of their AR projects. The entire process was based on teacher reflection. This approach intended both raise the teachers' awareness of the importance of self-reflection and increase their research skills and knowledge. The guidance involved a series of research steps and stages all through the process; from the selection of the research area to the writing of the report. Two remedial plans, as well as tutorial sessions were also a part of this guidance. The stage concluded with the assessment of the AR process which involved the help of external collaborators. Both the process and the product were taken into account. In addition, as an essential part of this process, the teachers' self-evaluation completed the cycle. All of this resulted in a rich process that shed significant light on the development of teachers' knowledge and beliefs and on the state of their reflective skills.

3.9 Main findings from stage three: The process of teacher reflection

Teacher reflection was a major challenge in this study. It involved a significant effort to help teachers become more reflective through adequate scaffolding structures. The aim was to increase teacher awareness of their teaching practice and help them align their beliefs and actions in a more consistent way. This was achieved through a guided process to Action Research, major event of the process. Thus, the framework of this stage was the course *Action Research in the classroom*, optimal setting for such an ambitious endeavor.

The teachers' knowledge had evolved in different areas as a result of exposure to one year of training. This background knowledge was a key element in the new task they were about to undertake: the planning, implementation and evaluation of AR projects in their classrooms. Thus, they were provided with the necessary tools to conduct their research projects. The process involved the participation and collaboration of different people, the teachers, the students the researcher and external collaborators. The guided process took place in several carefully planned steps. Each step involved either a reflective task for the teachers, or an action connected with their research projects. Likewise, each step or event was in itself part of a scaffolding process that served as the platform from which teachers could move on in their reflective process.

The two kinds of scaffolding processes for teacher reflection were: *introspection* and *collaboration*. Introspection consisted of a series of tasks aimed at helping teachers reflect on a number of issues related to their teaching practice. The major reflective events that took place as a result of this guidance were: *the conceptualization of reflective teaching, the exploration of teacher professional development stage, the process of raising teacher awareness on beliefs and actions,*

and *the identification and selection of research areas*. These actions took place as a preparation for the teachers' research projects.

As a logical progression, the introspection stages were followed by three collaboration stages. These stages consisted of assistance and support to the teachers in light of the major task that they were carrying out: their research projects. This involved the participation of external collaborators who provided the teachers with help in different areas at key moments of their projects: *the design and implementation of the research process, the writing process of the research report, and the evaluation of the research projects*. The main findings in each of these scaffolding processes will be described below.

3.9.1 *Main findings in the conceptualization of reflective teaching*

The teachers internalized reflective teaching in very peculiar and interesting ways. Thus, they defined *the reflective teacher* as someone who has five specific features: *analytical skills, knowledgeability, resourcefulness, open-mindedness and professional growth*. For each of these five attributes the teachers provided characteristic actions.

- *Analytical skills*

The main attribute that the teachers perceived as characteristic of *the reflective teacher* was the ability to use analytical skills in his/her teaching practice. According to the teachers' view, such analytical skills allow teachers to undertake a number of complex thinking processes, such as question, scrutinize, explore, reflect on, renovate, assess and discover. Analytical skills are related to both critical thinking and *Reflective Knowledge*; both of them important elements directly connected with reflective teaching (see lit. review 3.4.5 and 4.2.1).

Implications of the finding: (1) The teachers related the analytical processes to target areas of their teaching practice, such as their role as teachers, the students and the learning process. (2) They identified skills that they would need to explore those target areas through their AR projects.

- *Knowledgeability*

Knowledge had taken an important place in the teachers' priorities to be professionally competent. This was perceived as the influence of training on the teachers' thinking processes as it had helped them fill the gaps identified in their knowledge base. The teaching actions described related to several kinds of knowledge base: *Pedagogical Content Knowledge, Personal Practical Knowledge, Content Knowledge and Contextual Knowledge*.

Implications: Knowledgeability as an attribute of the reflective teacher emerged out of the reflection on their own process of knowledge acquisition. This characterization was evidence that

the process of reflection was helping teachers make their “tacit knowledge” evident (see lit. review 4.1.4).

- *Resourcefulness*

Resourcefulness was an attribute directly connected with the proper conditions for student learning. This finding confirmed that the teachers’ high concern for students learning was a permanent issue in their tasks as teachers. The teaching actions described within this attribute portrayed all kinds of steps and measures that teachers should take in order to improve student learning. Some of the salient aspects emerging in this attribute were *teacher-student relationship, teacher and student motivation, student needs, student interaction, and teacher managerial qualities.*

Implications: (1) The teachers made the connection that reflective teaching leads to resourcefulness, which results in student learning. This connection was not seen in the initial exploration. (2) The actions described by the teacher within this attribute resemble many of the principles involved in a learner-centered approach. This increase in teacher awareness of such principles was perceived as a result of their training program

- *Open-mindedness*

The teachers had showed a positive attitude towards learning and change throughout the entire process of this investigation. Nevertheless, they were either unaware of these natural traits or didn’t relate them to their teaching practice. Thus, one of the tasks undertaken was to make them evident. Within open-mindedness as an attribute of *the reflective teacher*, learning involves both independent and collaborative processes for self-improvement. Change, on the other hand, relates to attitudes, beliefs and actions in order to move away from a traditional framework.

Implications: The emergence of open-mindedness as an attribute of the reflective teacher provides evidence that the teachers were able to “own” these attitudes and relate them to teaching. This awareness is significant because the teachers were about to embark in their structured reflective process with a clear view of the main goals: change and improvement in their teaching practice.

- *Professional growth*

Professional growth was another salient characteristic of *the Reflective Teacher* as portrayed by the teachers. Within this perspective a number of actions typical of reflective teachers were mentioned. These actions included both independent and collaborative activities. The underlying concepts were decision making, teacher autonomy, teacher development, professionalism, professional community, self-improvement, and teacher as a researcher, among others.

Implications: (1) The teachers identified the processes and steps that guarantee an effective development process, and related it to Reflective Teaching (2) Professional growth involved collaboration with colleagues, which was going to be an essential element in their reflective process. Once again, the teachers provided evidence of their willingness to share with their peers (3) Stating professionalism within the community was a demand for social recognition and respect. A similar claim was identified when the teachers revealed their motivational drives.

On the whole, this initial introspection revealed that teacher thinking had evolved for the better. It had become more complex and elaborate than it was before the training. The teachers had been able to portray *the reflective teacher* with attributes that they themselves were developing enhancing or refining: *analytical skills, resourcefulness, open-mindedness, knowledgeability, and professional skills*. The first scaffolding process had fulfilled its intended purpose; foster the teachers' reflective skills as a basis for the coming reflective events.

3.9.2 Main findings in the process of teacher professional development

Here the teachers reflected on major issues of their teaching practice, namely teacher development, teacher knowledge, teacher qualities, and teacher motivation. What follows are the main findings in each of these aspects.

- *Teacher development*

On the whole, the teachers' self-characterization reflected a realistic view of their development which was similar to the one in the first exploration. The teachers knew the state of their professional growth and recognized to be "at the development stage". Three major features were identified within this perception. The teachers realized that they were *increasing their professional competence, reflecting on experience for student learning, and learning new knowledge for implementing changes*.

Regarding the increase in their professional competence, the influence of their training was clearly perceived. The teachers acknowledged the worth of the knowledge and skills they had learnt in their training program. They also recognized the personal efforts that they had invested in the process. Significant signs of a reflective attitude were their willingness to prioritize aspects, and be more aware of their teaching practice.

On the other hand, teacher reflection for student learning outcomes reflected the teachers' ongoing interest for students. The teachers provided evidence of having increased their reflectivity levels to fulfill students' learning needs, and increase their interest and motivation. The salient aspects here were student learning styles, teacher and student role, student motivation, classroom dynamics, class interaction, and skills development, among others.

The final elements present in teacher thinking here were both learning and change. Both of these processes had been recurrently present throughout the process. Learning and change were present in the teachers' natural inclination to improve and then in their conceptualization of *the reflective teacher*. In this introspection the teachers showed determination. The basic message was that they were learning for implementing changes in their classrooms

Implications: (1) Acknowledging an increase in professional competence, reflecting on experience for student learning outcomes, and learning for implementing changes were all views that indicated a refinement in the teachers' perception. (2) Their contributions in each of these aspects were closely connected with the attributes of reflective teaching identified in the previous introspective stage, namely analytical skills, resourcefulness, open-mindedness, knowledgeability and professional growth. This indicated a logical and consistent flow in the evolution of the introspective process.

- *The situation in the classroom*

This step helped teachers identify potential research topics at the classroom level. The intention was to raise teacher awareness about what could be realistically changed in light of their AR projects. The results of this reflection were contrasted with the original exploration of teachers' contextual problems which were focused on a number of aspects, such as curriculum and materials, investment in the field, student characteristics, large classes, time for instruction, and teachers' appraisal system, among others. The findings at that time revealed that the teachers perceived little room for improvement. For most of them the situation was hopeless because context determined the conditions.

Teacher thinking one year later reflected an increase in the teachers' awareness of their own involvement in solving the problems. The situation was, in fact, reversed. This time most of the challenges were perceived as approachable and resolvable by means of teacher intervention. Context did have some influence in preventing teachers from making significant changes at the level of evaluation, curriculum guidelines and methodology. The areas in which teachers perceived they could potentially intervene were students' affective factors, students' background knowledge, target language use, mixed-ability groups and classroom management. This change of perception was not solely attributed to the training course, but to the integration of most teachers at UNAN to teach English in the different studies, where the teachers faced numerous challenges. On the whole, the new conditions were perceived as a good opportunity for increasing the teachers' professional competence through research.

Implications: (1) Most teachers were no longer dependent on contextual limitations to make improvements in their classrooms. Such an attitude was optimal for the research task they would soon undertake. (2) The teachers had started to focus on potential research issues most of which were related to students. (3) The research topics eventually selected were directly connected with these original concerns, which reflect consistency in the teachers' beliefs and actions.

- *Teacher qualities*

The teachers' identification of traits was contrasted with their original views. The main findings at the time were that the teachers valued good relationships with students and were naturally motivated to teach. On the other hand, the teachers had low awareness of their natural openness towards learning and change. Giving the importance of these traits for teacher reflection, one of the main goals of the training course was to make them evident.

The new traits identified by the teachers were self-confidence, open-mindedness, motivation and good relationship with students. Self-confidence had emerged out of the increase in their professional competence, knowledge acquisition and student learning outcomes. *Open-mindedness*, on the other hand, was also present in the teachers' conceptualization of the reflective teacher and in the description of their development stage. The last two traits, student motivation and relationship with students complemented each other and were an unequivocal sign of the teachers' vocation and motivation toward teaching.

Implications: (1) The teachers' self-confidence increase as a result of the improvement in their professional competence. Thus the teachers felt empowered to deal with classroom issues. (2) The teachers' identified open-mindedness at the level of their own qualities which indicated that the teachers' had internalized and owned the attribute. Both attributes were important traits for the research task that the teacher were about to undertake.

- *Teacher knowledge*

Teacher knowledge had significant changes too. In the original exploration, the teachers revealed they needed to increase their knowledge of methods, material design, lesson planning, language use, and how to deal with student-related problems (large classes, student motivation, etc.). Nonetheless, strengths were identified too. This was the case of teachers' contextual knowledge, such as knowledge of the teaching context, school policies, and students. This strength was also present in the feedback that the external evaluators provided about the Research Projects (see section 3.9.7 below).

After the training, the teachers identified improvement in the use of different kinds of methodology, techniques and resources for teaching purposes, and knowledge in materials design and implementation. They also stated that their knowledge for planning lessons had improved. In

fact, in the classroom observations it was confirmed that most teachers used a planning template that they had created in the course *Lesson Planning in TEFL*.

About materials design, there was an improvement in the ability to design materials, but not all of the teachers admitted this. At the time of this course they were being affected by overwhelming workload. This reduced the efficacy of the training as they had little time for the assignments of the course *Designing Materials and Planning Units of Work* which was intended to help teachers cope with the limitation of materials

Another area in which the teachers showed improvement was the ability to motivate students, foster participation in class and get students trust and reliance. Some teachers stated to have gained knowledge on integrating a variety of resources to address students' needs, issue that was covered in the course *Teaching EFL with a Learner-centred Approach*.

On the other hand, the teachers reported weaknesses in their knowledge base in several areas: methodological knowledge, lesson planning, and knowledge of how to optimize the use of the target language in the classroom. There were also weaknesses related to how to deal with student particular characteristics.

Regarding methodology, the teachers reported weaknesses focused on effective ideas for teaching large classes. This problem was indeed a serious limitation, which is discussed in the finding about the teachers' contextual challenges (see 3.9.5 below). The teachers also identified weaknesses in specific areas: teaching individual language areas (listening, writing and pronunciation) teaching integrated skills, using effective classroom dynamic and explaining grammar points. About lesson planning, the weaknesses revolved around the achievement of objectives, time management and finding ways for effective self-assessment. In addition, there were problems with lesson stages, such as pacing, sequencing and making transitions. The weaknesses in the target language were focused on specific areas too (pronunciation, fluency, speaking, and vocabulary range, making oral presentations, giving classroom instructions). Finally, the weaknesses identified in the problems posed by students' characteristics were focused on how to promote students' interaction and participation, how to raise students' motivation, how to deal with student's boredom and tiredness and how to handle students' particular characteristics (such as behavior, learning styles, attitudinal problems, and mixed ability)

Implications: The teachers revealed several interesting aspects about their knowledge base: (1) there had been changes as a result of the training: reinforcement of all kinds of teacher knowledge base, expansion of teaching tools and skills, and refinement of perceptions. (2) The teachers had established new priorities to continue to expand their knowledge in particular areas, which was a

clear sign of reflective skills. (3) There was a connection between the prioritized knowledge areas and the selection of research topics, which, again, reflects consistency in teacher beliefs.

- *Teacher motivation*

The teachers' original views about their motivational sources had similarities and differences with their views after the training. Initially, the teachers stated they were motivated by their professional goals and by the contribution to students' professionalization. Other motivational sources were students' opinion of their work and the relationships with students. The new findings revealed that the teachers' motivational sources after their training were the fulfilment of their social role, their professional development, student learning outcomes, the relationship with students and colleagues, and the possibility of learning new knowledge.

So, although the teachers kept, in essence, their major concern about students they had also integrated a new element which was related to their professional lives: the fulfilment of their social role. The teachers stated that their contribution to the development and progress of the country was a major source of motivation. Although students were not the first priority of the teachers here, they were implicitly present. Fulfilling the social role was not separated from the students. On the contrary, their social role was directly related to student learning.

The causes of job dissatisfaction, on the other hand, were originally connected with problems posed by students (lack of motivation, learning difficulties, individual differences, academic failure, etc.) and by contextual factors (lack of optimal conditions, decision making policies, and salary issues, among others) which provoked a general sense of frustration and powerlessness as teachers felt they could do nothing to improve this situation. Nevertheless, the findings revealed that there were several aspects prone to improvement at the classroom level.

The new teachers' insights revealed that the sources of job dissatisfaction kept essentially the same: students' lack of motivation and failure, lack of social recognition and contextual constraints. Student failure and contextual constraint continued to be major problems for the teachers. The lack of social recognition had taken a different dimension though. The teachers demanded such recognition from the other social agents (students, authorities, society). This included commitment from students, proper economical retribution from authorities and acknowledgement and respect from society.

Implications: (1) There was an increase in the teachers' sense of professionalism and awareness of their role as change agents. The teachers called for respect from students, authorities and society to the teaching profession. (2) There was also an increase in the teachers' awareness of the importance of collaboration for their professional development. (4)The motivation to continue to learn was the

result of the challenges posed by context, this time in their work as university teachers. (5) The teachers valued the training course as an important means to face these challenges. (6) It was relevant for the teachers to carry out their AR projects at that particular moment.

3.9.3 Main findings in the awareness raising process

This introspection explored the teachers' reflection on the gaps between their beliefs and practice as EFL teachers. Major issues of this analysis were: *the sources of teacher beliefs, beliefs about teaching, and beliefs about learning*. Another focus of the exploration was *teacher performance* in the classroom where the conflict between beliefs and actions was evidenced. Two major results emerged of this analysis: the identification of *troublesome aspects at the classroom level*, and the *teachers' perception about the discrepancies between their beliefs and actions*. Each of these will be described below.

- *Troublesome aspects in the classroom*

As a result of the reflection, the teachers brainstormed and discussed troublesome aspects in the classroom. The aspects were related to a number of areas, such as teacher and student role, classroom management, student motivation, error correction, classroom dynamics, classroom interaction, the teaching of language skills and sub-skills, and the role of instructional materials, among others.

Implications: (1) The number and complexity of issues involved were clear indicators that the teachers' awareness of problematic areas had increased significantly. (2) Each of the aspects that emerged out of the reflection was a potential research topic, which revealed that the scaffolding measure was serving its intended purpose. (3) There was a connection between the issues raised by the exploration and the weaknesses in teacher knowledge, which revealed consistency in the reflective process.

- *Teachers' perceptions*

The reflection process also revealed the teachers' perception at a deeper and more personal level. Thus, the teachers provided insights that exposed their thinking as a result of the exploration of their teaching beliefs and actions. The most important feature of this reflective process was the teachers' awareness of the complexity of teaching, the influence of beliefs on the teaching practice, and the difficulties in reconciling beliefs and actions. On the other hand, the teachers provided evidence of their determination to achieve consistency and of how important collaboration was (with peers, with students, with trainers) for this purpose. More importantly, the exploration revealed the teachers' awareness that aligning their beliefs and actions was a way of professional development.

Implications: (1) The introspective process had made it possible to have access to teacher thinking on a number of important issues regarding their beliefs and actions. (2) The complexity and depth of teacher thinking was evidenced as well as their intended future actions to align their beliefs and actions. (3) The introspective process triggered more refined and focused teachers' reflection on the potential problems in the classroom as a result of disassociation between beliefs and actions.

3.9.4 Main findings in the process of selecting the research area

The teachers identified potential research topics and specific related matters as a result of the introspection. The guided reflection involved a set of questions each of which was connected to a particular research issue: *the research area, the target population, the background information, the scope of the problem, hypothesis formulation and research procedures*. The main findings in each of these are presented below.

- *Research area and target population*

The reflective process led the teachers to the identification of priorities and areas of concern all of which reflected the teachers' high levels of interest in student learning. Thus, the areas involved were *communicative activities, oral and aural skills, student interaction, student motivation, pair work and group work in large classes, effective teacher role, basic writing abilities, reading comprehension skills, pronunciation, teaching materials and students' overuse of Spanish in the English class*. The total population of students participating were 470, out of which 95% were university students and 5% were secondary school students. UNAN students were enrolled in ten different university Programs belonging to seven different Faculties.

Implications: (1) The research areas were consistent with the teachers' priorities to increase their knowledge base and with the troublesome aspects identified in the previous introspective stage. This indicated considerable consistency in teacher thinking. (2) The heterogeneity of students, study fields, and university programs involved, showed the complexity of the professional task that the teachers were facing at that moment.

- *Background information*

In the majority of cases, the event that triggered reflection was related to *student motivation* for language learning. This was the cause of a number of other problems: *low attendance, lack of participation, and poor academic performance*. Likewise, the lack of motivation was connected with students' *low speaking skills* for specific oral tasks, such as making basic presentations. On the other hand, some other teachers' concerns seemed to be focused on the practical side of the problems. For example, dealing with particular *language skills (pronunciation, writing, reading*

comprehension skills), playing *effective teacher roles*, providing *effective instructions*, and dealing with *large classes*. The problems in many cases affected the relationship between teachers and students directly. Affective factors, such as teacher motivation and self-confidence were at play in most cases. Thus, teachers expressed a feeling of powerlessness to resolve the situation.

Implications: (1) The teachers' concerns legitimately emerged out of classroom experience. (2) The teachers had refined their perception to identify relevant problems that were difficult for them to resolve. (3) The teachers had made the proper connections between their knowledge and beliefs taking reflection to the level of classroom performance. (4) The teachers had refined their sense of righteousness that it was not correct that students underestimated the class. (5) A higher sense of professionalism is perceived: the teachers were more aware of student responsibility, and of their own role, involvement and value in the process.

- *Scope of the problem*

The problems had different dimensions and levels of impact; the teacher, the students, the classroom environment and the teaching process. The teachers were affected both personally and professionally (professional performance, self-confidence and motivation). Student learning was directly affected as a result of the lack of motivation, low participation in class and poor development of language skills. The classroom environment was affected as there were high levels of disruption which caused the teachers' frustration. The teaching process was being affected at the level of class structuring (e.g. pace, and sequence) and planning (fulfilment of learning objectives). There were also problems in the essential stages of the class: presentation practice and production.

Implications: (1) There was an increase in teacher awareness of the complexity of the process and of the numerous elements affecting both their teaching practice and students learning (2) The teachers realized that the main objective of the language communication, was not being fulfilled (3) There was ample room for improvement in each of these areas.

- *Possible causes*

The problems identified were related to five different sources: *contextual conditions*, the *teacher approaches*, *student particular characteristics*, *student background knowledge*, and *student affective factors*.

Originally, *contextual conditions* had been the major cause of problems stated by the teachers. This time only in one case, the problem of large classes, the contextual conditions were directly identified as the major cause. Thus the major weight of possible causes was focused on the other sources. As for the *teaching approaches*, the teachers openly admitted they needed ideas for the particular problematic area and/or that their teaching actions had gotten routinized. *Student*

particular characteristics (e.g. mixed-ability; learning styles) were also identified as possible causes. Nevertheless, the problem was also perceived as resulting from faults in teacher performance (e.g. not meeting students' expectations and/or not addressing their learning needs). *Student background knowledge* was another major cause identified. This problem resulted from previous exposure to inappropriate/traditional methodology. Thus, students had poor or too basic skills in the language and little familiarity with more participative approaches. Finally, the problems were connected to *student affective factors* (e.g. shyness, fear of making mistakes, lack of self-confidence, etc.). The teachers related these problems to *student background knowledge*. However, they related them to their own performance as well (e.g. unattractive topics, level of difficulty too high, and inadequate treatment of error correction).

Implications: (1) the basic original teachers' concerns for student learning had transformed into a much richer understanding of the causes of the problems. (2) The teachers took responsibility for the problems in most cases, which reflected a much mature and professional attitude. (3) One of the biggest challenges that teachers faced at the classroom level was to defy students' previous learning patterns and behaviour.

- *Possible solutions*

The teachers proposed three major strategies: *studying the problem*, *changing teaching approaches* and *empowering students*. In *studying the problem*, the teacher proposed to devote attention to reflection and analysis as a significant way of gaining knowledge. Knowledge would, in turn, give them the possible alternative of solutions. The solution of *changing teaching approaches* reflected once again the teachers' open-mindedness. They welcome change and improvement as a way of solving the problems. The last proposed solution, *empowering students*, reflected the teachers' intentions to provide students with the conditions for meaningful learning

Implications: (1) The teachers showed determination towards the resolution of the problems as they have found a situation with which they were not satisfied. (2) The teachers' suggested solutions were a prelude of the features of their action plans which was reflected in their general objectives. (3) The process they suggested for students' empowerment had the basic same characteristics of their own development process (guidance, tools and strategies, collaboration, reflection, and independent learning.

- *Research procedures*

The introspective process was useful to help teachers decide the kinds of data they would need to find out more about the problem. Thus, they chose different kinds of data collection instruments

to gather the necessary information. The other instruments used were surveys, interviews, questionnaires, teacher and student diary, field notes, and self-evaluation.

Implications: (1) The teachers put into practice their analytical skills in selecting the research instruments suitable for their particular problem (2) All the teachers found the peer observations useful for their research, which reflects teacher awareness of the importance of collaboration for the improvement of the teaching practice.

3.9.5 Main findings in the design and implementation of the AR projects

This first collaborative process involved the provision of the necessary conditions so that teachers could develop and implement their research projects successfully. It was a collaborative stage because of the involvement of different people: the teachers who were carrying out the investigation and working in peers for mutual help; the students who were participating in the research as the target population; and the help of an external collaborator who helped solve problems found along the way. In addition, it involved my participation as the teachers' mentor in tutorial sessions that took place along the process for a period of three months. All of the findings described here took place within the framework of this collaboration.

Implications Adequate structures and frameworks of collaboration were provided along the process to guarantee optimal conditions for teacher development.

- *Tutorial sessions*

The tutorial sessions served the purpose of providing teachers with assistance and support during the different stages of the research process. Thus, a follow up was given to all individual projects, assigning tasks, giving feedback and assigning new ones in a close and dynamic interaction along the process. In addition, particular problems were addressed and a follow up was given so that the teachers could overcome these problems.

Implications: After the identification of the research areas, this scaffolding measure allowed most teachers to move on from narrowing down their areas of concern into researchable topics, through structuring the research proposal and implementing it.

- *Peer collaboration*

For the organization of peer work the teachers had the freedom to organize themselves as they preferred. But, they were advised to use some criteria, such as similarity of research topics, affinity and/or close living area. Seven clusters of teachers were formed out of which there were six pairs and one group of three. The formation of the teams was carried out without any problem as the

teachers were naturally motivated to join with their peers. The major tasks that the teachers carried out together with their peers were: attending tutorial sessions, providing each other with support and help, and participating in the peer observations.

The peer observations were crucial for the development of all research projects. There were 22 peer observations in total. The process in all cases involved pre, while and post stages with specific tasks to complete in each. This included planning the aspects of the observation (pre), completing the information (while) and giving feedback on the aspects observed (post). All the teachers made detailed accounts of the process of peer observation in their research projects.

Implications (1) The training course had nurtured interaction and a good collegial relationship among the teachers, which facilitated peer work. (2) Peer work was a very important step in order to provide the teachers with a solid scaffolding system based on mutual help. (3) The teachers' awareness of the importance of collaboration had raised; peer formation was a smooth process. (4) The joint actions carried out by the peers were all relevant and directly connected with their corresponding research project.

- *Narrowing down the research area and formulating objectives*

Narrowing down the area of concern to make it a researchable topic and formulating the objectives of the research were hard tasks for the teachers. The process of fine-tuning involved support in the tutorial sessions and feedback from peers. In the end, the research areas evolved into more refined and focused topics all of which were researchable. In the process of producing a working title and developing objectives some teachers made changes so as to match their topics with their peers'.

The research topics had four different patterns. Some teachers worded their research topic focusing on the problem, which reflected their interest in finding out reasons and explanations about the phenomenon. A second group of teachers, on the other hand, presented theirs from the point of view of the intended change. Interestingly enough, the research topics involved were all focused on students' communicative skills. This evidences the teachers' greatest concern: help students use the language for communication purposes. A third group of teachers presented their topics as innovations. This is consistent with the nature of the research topics that suggest the integration of new elements into the process. The last group of teachers presented their research topics using "how to", which reveals the teachers interest in finding solutions through the acquisition of new knowledge and skills.

The objectives of the research shed some more light on the teachers' thinking process when refining their areas of concern. Previously, they had hypothesized possible solutions which involved

studying the problem and *empowering students* along with the element of change. These two proposed solutions were present in the general objectives of the research topics. On the one hand, the objectives related to *studying the problem* denote the teachers' intention to find answers to questions, solutions to problems, facts, and explanations about the matter. The mental actions: discover, find out, explore, and determine, resemble the *analytical skills* and *open-mindedness* of *the reflective teacher* as portrayed by the teachers. The objectives related to *empowering students*, on the other hand, are objectives focused on providing students with skills and knowledge to cope with the specific problem. These objectives resemble *resourcefulness* and *knowledgeability*, attributes of *the reflective teacher* as described by the teachers.

Implications: (1) *The scaffolding process had been effective to provide the teachers with the necessary help to pinpoint problems and solve them along the way.* (2) *The teachers had managed to refine the research areas turning them into topics clearly researchable.* (3) *The teachers demonstrated considerable independence and decision-making skills along the process.* (4) *The teachers' original solutions and the refined topics and objectives were similar in nature which reflects consistency and a logical evolution of the teachers' thinking processes.* (5) *The teachers were ready to move on to the next step, which was the planning stage.*

- *Planning and implementing the research project*

Scaffolding in the planning stage involved simplifying the process through formats and templates. This allowed the teachers to plan the major events of the research in a fast and efficient way. These documents included calendars with slots, tables to fill in information, and planning sheets to complete with relevant information (the data collection instruments, the plan of action, tutorial sessions, the reading of related literature and the writing process of the research report, among others). Considerable time of the tutorial sessions was devoted to give a follow up to the teachers and help them solve the problems identified in this stage. At this point the major limitation was the process of data analysis and interpretation.

Implications: (1) *The teachers found the usefulness of the formats to plan the basic stages of the research and all other relevant information.* (2) *All the teachers fulfilled this task, which was monitored along the first three weeks of the tutorial sessions.* (3) *The problems identified with the research procedures led to the integration of a remedial plan.*

- *Data collection instruments, the remedial plan*

The compilation of the information for the purpose of analysis and interpretation was one of the major problems experienced by the teachers. The course offered by an external collaborator was a response to the demands of the teachers for extra help. This remedial plan that consisted of a

tailor-made training workshop in this area, tackled important issues regarding qualitative research methodologies

Implications: (1) This scaffolding process widened the teachers' knowledge about triangulation processes; data interpretation and display of qualitative information. The course proved to be very useful for the teachers to illuminate their corresponding research problem.

- *Tutorial sessions and completion of AR projects*

Attendance to the tutorial sessions was consistent at the beginning of the process, but started to be irregular on the fourth week. Most of the teachers who finished their projects (nine) were constant with their attendance. The ones who showed less commitment (six) quit the program. Towards the seventh session even the teachers who had been constant stopped attending. There was a direct relationship between teachers' absences and the amount of work they were facing; it was the time for them to design, administrate and mark exams, and work on final academic reports.

Implication: (1) The interference of context in the scaffolding process started to be perceived as it was affecting the teachers' performance in many different ways. (2) The measures had to be refined in order to help teachers cope with the problems as they were emerging.

- *Contextual challenges for teachers' professional practice*

The contextual conditions surrounding the teachers' teaching practice at the moment of the design and implementation of their AR project were not favorable. Context affected the teachers' performance in numerous ways as the workload was extreme for most of them. They had to work in different institutions, on two or three shifts and with different kinds of students of dissimilar academic levels (primary, secondary, university). Altogether the teachers were in charge of more than 4,500 students which represent a median of over 300 students per teacher.

At UNAN the teachers attended more than 2000 students enrolled in different academic programs. The teachers had important challenges at this level as in many cases they had to work on the syllabus, design materials, and teach English for specific areas. At the end of the semester the teachers were told that they would not be rehired for the coming term, which affected the development of the reflective actions significantly.

Implications: (1) Because of work overload, six teachers quit the program; these teachers were some of the most affected ones. (2) The nine teachers who stayed in the program experienced numerous limitations to be able to complete the AR projects, which affected their performance and the quality of the projects: on the one hand, the teachers' dismissal affected their motivation; on the other, it affected the development of the AR projects as some teachers had pending tasks with their

students. (4) *Damage control was made. Thus, the completion of the projects had to be postponed for the entire semester.*

3.9.6 *Main findings in the writing process of the research report*

The teachers received assistance for the writing process. This support involved the participation of external collaborators to put together a remedial plan. Pertinent feedback was available for the contents of this plan, which reflected that the teachers needed to refine their skills to write the research report. The problems related to both the structure of the research report and the teachers' writing skills.

Implications: (1) The problem was caused by the teachers' lack of background knowledge in this kind of writing and in doing research. (1) One of the main weaknesses of the plan of action was not having integrated a course on advanced academic writing before the Action Research course. (2)

The remedial plan helped to solve the problem as most teachers acknowledged it was useful for their pending writing task. (3) The teachers were able to move on with the fulfillment of their research projects.

3.9.7 *Main findings in the evaluation process of the Action Research Projects*

This process involved two kinds of evaluations: on the one hand, the assessment of the research projects with the collaboration of external evaluators; on the other hand, the teachers' self-evaluation of their performance in doing Action Research.

1. *Evaluation by the external collaborators*

The Action Research projects were a requirement of the course *Action Research in the Classroom* and the exit criteria of the Postgraduate Course in TEFL. The process involved the collaboration of external evaluators who assessed the research projects based on a series of predetermined criteria. The evaluation involved both the written document and the teachers' oral skills in presenting their research project.

Implications: (1) The integration of external evaluators guaranteed a valid and objective evaluation process (2) The teachers were provided with valuable feedback for improvement.

a. *Main strengths of the AR projects*

On the whole, the evaluators acknowledged two important aspects that were common in all research reports: the *completeness of the projects* and the *contextual information* contained in the reports. The teachers' *positive affective factors* (motivation, interest, and enthusiasm) were also highlighted in most cases (transmitted in both the written document and the oral presentation).

On the other hand, there were positive aspects in the *research questions and objectives*, such as relevance, good formulation of objectives, and the innovative nature of the projects. Another aspect that called the evaluators' attentions in some of the projects was the *literature review*. The positive aspect highlighted here was how the review of the literature sustained the issue under investigation. Likewise, the *results and discussion* were considered strengths in some cases where the teachers showed clarity, accuracy and relevance (the connection between the research question and the results of the investigation). Other strengths were the *research cycle* and the *plan of action*, which in some cases were considered well documented and directly connected with the research issue. The final elements that called the evaluators' attention in some cases were the *conclusions and recommendations*, which (a) were directly connected to the topic under study and (b) reflected the implications of the study for the teachers' teaching practice.

There were also strengths in the *writing skills* and in the *oral presentations*. In the first case, four out of the nine projects were considered adequate to the standards of academic writing. In most cases there was room for improvement, though. The *oral presentations*, on the other hand, revealed strengths in four cases. In one case the positive comment referred to the teacher's skills to present visual information (aspect directly connected with the research area). In the three other cases, the teachers were proficient in their speaking skills. This helped them to cope with the limitations of the written report, as they were able to clarify ambiguous aspects.

Implications: (1) Teacher awareness of contextual issues (e.g. the instructional context, the materials, the program and the kind of students) was an issue recurrently present throughout this investigation, which was made evident in the evaluation. (2) The research projects evidenced the teachers' interest, motivation and concern towards student learning, which was another regular element. (3) It was evidenced how the initial diagnosis led to the evolution of the project, which revealed the efficacy of the guided process. (4) The teachers' reflective skills and pedagogic abilities were highlighted in the systematic and ongoing nature of the research project. (5) Most of the teachers had been able to cope with the research problem which was reflected in the recommendations. (6) In some projects the writing constraints were overcome, as the research reports were considered adequate to the standards of research reports.

b. Main weaknesses of the AR projects

The major problems found in the projects related to most of the aspects mentioned above. In some of the cases the problems were direct limitations of specific research projects. In some others the evaluators considered that, even though there were strengths in particular areas, there was also room for improvement.

First of all, the weaknesses were related to the *literature review*. Certain disconnection between the literature review and the research question was identified in some cases. In some others, particular key concepts and theory for the research question were either not fully explained, or completely missing. Furthermore, there were few references and a lack of in-depth analysis in some cases. There were also problems in referencing and in giving due credit to the authors cited.

There were also major problems with the *research methodology*, which caused lack of clarity in important processes and procedures not thoroughly described and defined. The *plan of action*, for example, was perceived in some cases as not fully exploited and/or disconnected from other parts of the research report (e.g. the literature review or the initial research question). In addition, in some projects it was not evidenced how the data was put together for the purposes of *analysis and interpretation*. For instance, the *triangulation method* used to guarantee the validity of the study was not detailed in the section of methodology. Although categories and themes were present in all projects, it was not clear how such information emerged in most cases. On the other hand, in some projects the research stages were not well documented. Although the stages were briefly mentioned at some point, the actual process that the teachers went through was not described in detail. This weakness was perceived as emerging directly from the extreme difficulties that the teachers experienced at the very end of the implementation of the research projects. The shortcomings in the *research methodology* were significantly minimized during the oral presentations as the teachers could clarify the imprecise aspects. Moreover, evidence was provided in the presentation that the teachers had the information and resources to re-structure the report in order to complete the missing information, thus increasing the quality of the document.

The *recommendations and conclusions* showed disassociation with the research question, a mixture with other areas in the research report, and lack of clarity of the suggested improvement. In other cases there were very good recommendations, but a poor organization made it difficult to see their relevance.

Finally, in some cases the limitations were directly connected with the *writing skills* which made it necessary for the teachers to make major changes and improvements in the research report. Unfortunately, the relevance of the investigation was not clearly perceived because of this serious limitation. For instance, in the section of *discussion and results*, the major problems were ambiguity and/or too general information. The *introduction* is another example of how writing limitations affected the quality of the report. In several cases the introduction did not present effectively what the research question tackled, or it did not provide enough background information as to evidence the need of the research. Likewise, the introduction in some cases did not address the content of the report effectively, which did not allow following the flow of the document properly.

Implications: (1) Even though the teachers struggled to complete their research reports in time and form and had adequate scaffolding processes, there were still limitations identified in the research report. (2) The limitations in the teachers' writing skills combined with a lack of research skills caused lack of coherence, clarity and relevance in certain areas of the report. (3) The limitations emerged from the situational context. On the one hand, the educational context (PRESET) had not given the teachers enough background knowledge in both writing and research skills. On the other hand, the contextual conditions (teacher workload, teachers' dismissal, etc.) did not allow the teachers to focus on their research projects adequately, which was reflected in their final reports

c. Recommendations for improvement

The evaluators made specific suggestions for improvement in each of the areas. They recommended the teachers to work on the changes and improvements before handing in the final report to the library. The recommendations are briefly summarized below.

About the *introduction* of the report, it should reflect the relevance of the work, provide background information and describe the organization of the report. In addition the introductions should integrate the benefits and beneficiaries of the investigation and the general implications of the project for their own teaching practice.

On the other hand, the *literature review* should include references using MLA style. Thus, the teachers needed to revise quotations, paraphrasing, long quotes, etc. Also they suggested eliminating information off topic, integrating relevant missing concepts, and making proper connection with the research topic throughout the report.

Other recommendations were made about the *research methodology*. In this regard, there should be a full and clear description of the following aspects: the *selection of the research topic* the *research design*, the *data collection* process, the *research cycle*, the *analysis* of the information and the *implementation* and *evaluation* of the *plan of action*. Other suggestions were describing each of the *research instruments* thoroughly; explaining timing, objectives and procedures.

In relation to the *plan of action* there should be a full account of how the initial diagnosis led to the plan of action. The description should include the major characteristics of the plan in light of the research question and objectives. There should be a logical connection between the problem and the plan of action. The activities suggested for improvement should be clearly described and the changes outlined in light of the objectives of the research. That is to say what made the activities effective (or ineffective if that was the case). Also, the teachers should clarify the authorship of the activities suggested and acknowledge the source.

The section of *discussion and results* should include qualitative/quantitative information to show the frequency, manners or behaviors of the particular phenomenon observed. Graphics

information should be included to illustrate results, emphasize a particular point, or compare a particular situation. In presenting the results, the categories that emerged out of the analysis should be clearly seen. The narrative style should not only present statistics or numbers, but the actual interpretation of data, with insights from the teacher and connection with the literature when necessary. In addition there should be a summary of the main findings making the connection with the research topic.

The *conclusions and recommendations* should be grouped accordingly into appropriate related areas where the recommendations were made. A summary of the major issues tackled by the research should be provided. The section should be plenty of insights that emerged out of the study and in direct relationship with the research question. In this section the implications of the study for the teachers' practice should be clearly seen (new insights, changes of beliefs, improvement in practice).

The last set of recommendations was based on the written organization of the projects. Thus, the teachers had to proofread, edit and organize the document thoroughly. The revision should include content, organization, grammar, use of connectors and mechanics. Major revisions should be made to the writing style as to fit into the conventionalisms of academic writing. It was highly advisable that the teachers got the help of a peer for feedback

Implications: (1) The recommendations provided the teachers with valuable feedback in order to improve their research reports. (2) Thus the teachers should revise their corresponding projects and deliver the final version to fulfill the academic criteria of the course and of the entire program. (3) The recommendations shed light on the kind of contents that could potentially be integrated into a future training course on writing research reports.

2. The teachers' self-evaluation

The teachers' perceptions about the process are discussed here. The insights presented deal with how the teachers internalized the major concepts of Action Research, the major problems they faced in undertaking their projects, and the changes they perceived as a result of doing research. Connections are made here with previous findings.

a. Teachers' conceptualization of Action Research

The teachers internalized Action Research in two different ways. One group of teachers demonstrated having learned the concepts in a technical way. This *technical basic conceptualization* provided an accurate description of the process and reflected the teacher knowledge of the essence of AR and of the elements involved in the process. The other definitions involved a *personalized conceptualization*, different in nature and content from the first definitions.

The differences were focused in the wording (which was richer and more elaborate) originality (the definitions clearly belonged to the teachers) and reflection level (the thoughts revealed a deeper introspective level than the ones in the first group).

Implications: (1) The basic technical conceptualization revealed that the teachers had gotten enough familiarity with the process of conducting Action Research. They no longer lacked the necessary basic knowledge as when they started the course. (2) The personalized conceptualization indicated that these teachers' awareness and levels of reflection were higher than their peers in the first group. The elaborate insights indicated that they had adopted a reflective attitude as part of their professional baggage. Their academic performance throughout the course was the definite evidence of this finding. (3) All the teachers were ready to move on working in the area independently.

b. Problems in undertaking the AR projects

The teachers referred to two kinds of limitations and the two of them related to their situational context. The first limitation was the teachers' educational background knowledge and the second emerged out of the contextual conditions that surrounded them during the time they conducted their projects.

- *Educational background knowledge*

On the one hand the lack of previous preparation and practice in the research field was a serious limitation. For all of them, it was the first time that they undertook research. The university courses they had taken beforehand (in the few cases that this happened) were way too vague and general. This, of course, affected the teachers' ability to put their concerns together and structure them as an investigation (planning, organization, selection of the research topic, designing the data collection instruments, implementing the projects). The other limitation was the teachers' writing skills. On the one hand, none of them had had experience in writing research reports. On the other hand, most of the teachers' writing skills were too basic as to reach the standards of an academic report, such as an investigation. The two remedial plans intended to solve the problem and they succeeded in the sense that teachers had a better idea of what they needed to do. Nevertheless the gaps were too wide as to be completely addressed this way.

Implications: (1) The same problems had been identified by the external evaluators in the assessment process; the teachers' perceptions confirm the findings. (2) The limitations in the teachers' research skills have important implications for the PRESET program offered by the English Department at UNAN. The teachers graduated at different times and in no case there was

an indication of strengths in the research area. (3) The limitations in the writing skills suggest that the training in this area at the PRESET level had weaknesses too. Again, the fact that the teachers graduated from different programs reveals that the limitation had not been addressed in a period of seven years.

- *Contextual problems*

Contextual problems affected the teachers in several significant ways both directly and indirectly. First of all, the teachers' workload affected as they did not have enough time to dedicate to their projects. The workload they were facing at the time exceeded in many ways the standards for language teaching: amount of students, students per group, different institutions, and working shifts, among others.

Secondly, their dismissal from UNAN did not allow them to fulfill the projects with the proper quality. They also experienced problems as their peers could not cope with work pressures and decided to quit the program. They had to look for ways to obtain the pending information.

Finally, the teachers experienced economic problems to cope with the expenses derived from making copies of the research instruments, internet service and transportation (to the library, tutorial sessions, and peer meetings). The problem increased when they lost their job at UNAN and they should cover the expenses of the hardcopies of their research projects.

Implications: (1) The different ways in which contextual problems affected the teachers had been identified along the process of this investigation which confirms the findings. (2) Workload problems affected the general research process, the application of the research instruments, the implementation of the plan of action, the attendance to tutorial sessions and the peer observations. (3) There was a decrease in the teachers' motivational levels as a result of their dismissal. (4) The teachers had to rush to get the information from students which necessarily affected the quality of the research projects. (5) The fact that their peers dropped out from the program affected the consistency in the feedback processes.

- *Teacher change*

From the teachers' own perspective four kinds of changes identified as a result of doing Action Research: *changes related to the research question, changes in teaching approaches changes in the teachers' reflective skills and changes in the teachers' perception and knowledge of students.*

Changes related to the research question

The changes related to the research question were specific changes. They involved having gained knowledge and skills in different areas and actions of their teaching practice , such as

planning, providing practice, using variety of activities, addressing students' needs, integrating new teaching materials and increasing students' motivation.

- *Changes in general teaching approaches*

These types of changes were of a more general nature, related to their teaching approaches. The teachers here revealed what they used to do and what, as a result of the research project, had improved. The reported changes were: moving away from a traditional approach, willingness to innovations at the classroom level, better lesson preparation, and openness to new ways of teaching.

- *Changes in the teachers' reflective skills*

These kinds of changes reflect an increase in teacher perception and awareness levels about the different aspects of the teaching practice: the teacher, the learner and the teaching-learning process. The salient aspects of this change of perception are *awareness-raising, self-reflection, self-discovery, self-improvement* and *professional development*.

- *Changes in the teachers' knowledge and perception of students*

These kinds of changes involve a refined perception of students' participation and involvement in the learning process. The salient aspects here were related to learner-centered processes, such as *student learning styles, student needs, student motivation, student background knowledge, independent learning* and *student self-awareness*.

Implications: (1) There is consistency in teacher thinking as they stated changes in the hypothesis of the problem and in the objectives of their projects. The changes that they reported after were the kinds of changes they wanted and expected. (2) An increase in teacher confidence was perceived as parallel to an increase in teacher practical and pedagogical knowledge to deal with the particular aspect or area. (4) The changes in the teacher reflective skills involved the analytical and critical thinking skills, and the solving problem ability. The changes in teacher perception and knowledge were focused on students, which revealed a connection between change and the teachers' motivational sources.

Stage three was marked by changes resulting from both the teacher training process and the AR projects. Thus, as a result of their training the teachers provided evidence of change in different aspects of their teaching practice. On the whole, from the teachers' own perspective, it was evidenced that they had expanded their knowledge, refined their perceptions, and increased their reflective skills in different important areas of their teaching practice. This improvement was further consolidated by the teachers' reflection process during the development of their AR projects. As a result of this process the teachers revealed several types of change: in relation to the problem studied, in their general teaching approaches, in their reflective skills and in their perception of

students. The consistency of these changes and how they were reflected in practice would be corroborated by the classroom observations. In addition, the trainers' and teachers' perception about each of the courses of the plan of action would shed some more light about teacher performance and about the effectiveness of the plan. All of this will be tackled in stage four below.

4. STAGE FOUR /AT THE END OF THE PLAN OF ACTION: THE EXPLORATION OF TEACHER BELIEFS IN PRACTICE, THE EVALUATION OF THE PROGRAM, AND THE FINAL EXPLORATION OF TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

At the end of stage three the teachers' perceptions provided evidence of a better preparation and a more mature attitude towards their profession as English teachers. As a result of doing Action Research, the teachers revealed having gained new insights in different areas: the problem under study, their teaching approaches, their reflective skills, and their perception of students.

The research question in the present stage focused on the impact of the program and the results obtained. Thus, the exploration this time tackles the teachers' views from different perspectives. Firstly, the stage integrates an analysis of the teachers' beliefs and performance. This exploration is similar to the one that took place in stage two, at the beginning of their training, which focused on specific areas related to language teaching and learning. Secondly, the stage includes the evaluation of the effectiveness of the training program as perceived by both the trainers and the teachers. Finally, the teachers' perception of their professional development at the end of the program is presented and discussed. Similarly to the original exploration, the information is focused on the major problems affecting their development.

4.1 Teacher beliefs in practice

The initial exploration revealed that, although the teachers had significant strengths, there were also inconsistencies between what they believed and what they actually did in the classroom. This contradiction was brought into play during the guided reflection process in stage three (see 3.4), which resulted in significant teacher awareness of troublesome aspects in the classroom. The exploration of the changes in teacher beliefs and performance here is focused on the same areas of the initial exploration. The discussion focuses on a comparison of the results in both stages to point out the differences in the teachers' approaches.

In order to present the results there will be a brief summary of the initial exploration at the beginning of each section, which will be followed by the presentation and discussion of the results in the final stage, making proper connections between the two in order to compare the results and draw conclusions. This procedure will provide an accurate perspective of how teachers' beliefs and

performance evolved in real practice, as a result of the plan of action, Thus, the aspects that will be tackled involve *language learning, error correction, material and resources, the language areas and the students.*

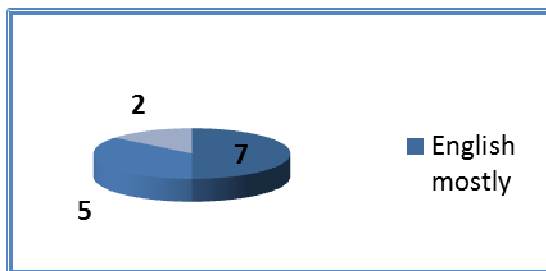
4.1.1 About language learning

Two important issues that determine the kind and nature of language use in an instructional process were tackled here: the goal of language learning and its role in the classroom. The initial information revealed that most teachers were fully aware of the communicative purpose of the language. Nevertheless, at the time of the classroom observations few of them provided evidence of real focus on communication, which revealed one of the most significant discordances between teacher beliefs and performance. This made it necessary to both raise the teachers' awareness of the contradiction and enhance their knowledge of real communicative activities. On the other hand, regarding the role of the language in the learning process, most teachers believed that students should have exposure to speaking since very early stages. The fact that some teachers disagreed with this view revealed the need to address the issue of the dynamic role that the spoken language should play in an efficient instructional process, even at the very beginning. The classroom observations revealed inconsistencies in this regard; even in the case of those teachers who believed that students should be speaking the language since early stages. The teachers struggled with finding ways to get the meaning across, very often using unnatural language (slowing down, pronouncing word by word, and/or splitting up sentences). In the case of the second group of teachers, either Spanish was the medium of communication most of the time, or immediate translations (in some cases some sort of "spanglish") were used.

In the present stage the teachers provided evidence that their views had kept basically the same. Most of them agreed that a language should be used for communication purposes and five of them disagreed. On the other hand, ten of them agreed that students should be speaking the language since early stages, and five disagreed. The behavior observed at the classroom level concerning the language used as a means of communication, shed some more light on this issue. This is shown in figure 27 below.

Figure 27

Language used as a means of communication



As shown, seven teachers used English most of the time. This time the teachers showed more real, clear and accurate use of the language than in the first cycle of observations. The teachers used a range of classroom techniques to get the meaning across (words in context, exemplifications, drawing, gestures and body language, definitions, and the like). Likewise, teachers' speech was adapted in terms of difficulty as to match students' language level without sounding unauthentic. The improvement in language use revealed an increase in the teachers' awareness of their own importance as language models for an effective learning process. This awareness was also identified by the teachers as an achievement in the evaluation of the training program, (see 4.2.7 *teacher awareness of their own role and performance* and 4.3.9 *teacher reflection at the end of the project*). The role of the teacher as a language model for an effective learning process was discussed in the literature review (see lit. review 3.5).

Three other teachers had a good approach in the lessons using English most of the time. But, whenever there was a problem with students' understanding they would speak Spanish to clarify doubts or check comprehension. It was clear that these teachers were aware of the importance of target language use in the classroom. Nonetheless, at some points they experienced problems which made them switch to Spanish. In their explanation at the post-observation, they admitted that grammar was one of the reasons why they would use the mother tongue. Another reason was to save time and be able to move on with the development of the class.

Finally, two teachers continued to have an approach similar to the one they had before the plan of action took place. That is to say, they kept using translations or mixing English with Spanish. The teachers admitted they did it because of students' low level of understanding, time issues, and the complexity of the class. These were the cases, discussed in section 4.1.4 below, in which the class was devoted to three language areas (e.g. grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation) in a mixture of the Grammar Translation Method and the Audiolingual Method.

The outcomes in the teachers' approaches revealed that the teachers in the first and second group improved as a result of confronting their beliefs and action. This finding confirms that certain teaching behavior can be the result of lack of awareness. On the other hand, the approaches of the two teachers' in the third group basically remained unchanged. This suggests that there is a point in a teachers' career when some behavior is so rooted in the teacher's repertoire that it become his/her teaching style. In these cases the teachers experience more difficulties to change. Preventing this problem is certainly a very good reason to provide teachers with reflective skills and effective

classroom techniques at the PRESET level; an important implication for the Teacher Education Program at UNAN-León.

4.1.2 About error correction in language teaching

The teachers' views and actions tackled here relate to error correction in language teaching. The views analyzed were meaning vs. form, fluency vs. accuracy, error correction in early stages, and error correction in oral practice. Most of the teachers' initial views in this regard revealed high awareness of the importance of meaning over form in communication, which was consistent with their views that a language should be used for communication. There were some divided opinions regarding fluency vs. accuracy. Concerning the views that sentences should be grammatically correct in speaking, half of the teachers agreed and the other half disagreed. Thus, it was concluded that teachers' fondness of teaching grammar was connected with these two views. Regarding error correction, most teachers agreed that errors should be corrected in early stages, but that in oral practice the teachers should not correct students' errors. The classroom observations showed that in spite of holding modern views regarding error correction, most teachers did not correct students' errors. Only in a few cases the teachers provided evidence of addressing this issue; and even in these cases there was room for improvement. All these findings made it evident that it was necessary to help teachers realize the divergence between their beliefs and actions, and enhance their techniques for error correction. Both of these issues were addressed through the plan of action.

The new information revealed a division in the teachers' views regarding meaning vs. form. Most teachers (n=9) agreed that meaning is more important than form in communication, but a few of them (n=6) still regarded form as more important. These views were consistent with their majoritarian opinions regarding the importance of grammatically correct sentences when speaking. The views here were similar to the original ones which revealed that the teachers' fondness of grammar had kept invariable. Likewise, the views that errors should not be allowed in early stages changed slightly as only eight teachers agreed (as opposed to thirteen in the first exploration). Similar number of teachers (n=9) agreed that errors should not be corrected during oral practice (as opposed to fourteen in the first exploration). In the classroom observation only five teachers provided evidence of correcting students' errors, two more than the ones in the original exploration. The teachers provided valid reasons for this omission: class time (not enough to devote it to provide feedback to students), students' shyness, (they did not want to embarrass them), noise and disruption (in several cases the large number of students and the noise coming out of the classroom) made it difficult for the teacher to distinguish the error. This information reveals that in spite of the fact that teachers had raised their awareness, error correction continued to be an issue. It was also

confirmed that the inappropriate contextual conditions continued to exert negative influence on the teaching-learning process.

4.1.3 About materials and resources

In the original exploration the teachers showed awareness of the importance of materials and resources to support their teaching practice. Thus, they stated their preference for the textbook, student use of the notebook, and other resources such as pictures, films and videos for language teaching. The classroom observations showed that the teachers were extremely bond to the textbook, which they used to follow in a sequential way. It was perceived that the textbook gave the teachers security, which explained their fondness of the resource. Likewise, both the teacher and the students would spend considerable class time writing (the teacher on the board, and the students in their notebooks). On the other hand, even though the teachers showed fondness of using films and videos, there was no evidence of the use of this resource in the lessons observed. Tape recorders were used in very few cases. In this regard it was perceived that most teachers avoided using recorded materials because of lack of confidence in integrating learning activities of this kind. There were also few cases in which the teachers provided evidence of designing and integrating materials created on their own. These findings evidenced the need to provide the teachers with effective ideas for designing their own materials. This would help them be less dependent on the textbook, the notebook, and the board. It was also important to provide the teachers with the skills and knowledge to be able to use equipment and recorded materials more confidently in their classrooms. All of this was addressed through particular components of the training program.

The new information about the teachers' beliefs revealed that all the teachers kept stating preferences to use the textbook and audiovisual resources. Likewise, the teachers continued to show preference for student use of the notebooks. The classroom observations revealed interesting tendencies in the teachers' performance, which is shown in the following table.

Table 37

Materials and resources used

MATERIALS AND RESOURCES USED					
<i>TC</i>	<i>Board</i>	<i>Notebook</i>	<i>Textbook</i>	<i>Equipment</i>	<i>Others</i>
A	√	√			Realia: students' belongings and classroom objects
B	√		√	√	Strips of paper
C	√	√	√		Realia: objects in the classroom
D	√		√		Visuals/drawings/activity sheets
E	√	√			Worksheets
F	√		√		Worksheets and flashcards
G	√		√	√	Visual aids/pictures/flashcards Realia: students' toys
I	√		√	√	Teachers' own voice for a listening exercise
J	√		√	√	Transcript of listening exercise Worksheet for students' interview
K	√		√ √	√	Strips of paper/ drawings and cards/worksheets
L	√		√	√	Realia: Drinks Worksheets for students' interview
M	√		√	√	Strips of paper/drawings and cards
N	√		√	√	Worksheets and pictures
O	√		√	√	Flashcards, strips of paper Realia: a plastic bag

As shown, the teachers were consistent with their views about using textbooks for language teaching. In the majority of the cases the activities planned emerged out of the contents in the textbook. This time, nevertheless, the teachers showed less inclination to follow the textbook activities exclusively, as all the teachers without exception integrated other materials in their lessons. These complementary materials, which have been listed under the column others, were varied in nature. Among them there were real objects (realia) such as classroom objects, students' personal belongings, students' toys, fruit, vegetables, and drinks. Other materials used were worksheets, activity sheets, and strips of paper for the students to use in pair work or group work (for interviewing their partners, writing down information, or mingling). Visual aids such as cards, flashcards, pictures and drawings were included as well as a tapescript for students to check their answers in a listening task. The teacher's own voice was listed as complementary materials, as well. The teacher used his own voice to do a listening activity, originally planned with a DVD player that did not work. In using these extra activities, the teachers showed less dependence on the textbook and on students' notebooks, which differed considerably from the lessons observed in the initial exploration. Moreover, as shown in 4.1.4 below, each of these resources represented different activities and approaches to classroom instruction in all language areas.

On the other hand, even though all the teachers used the board during the development of the lessons, it was perceived as an optional resource rather than as the main means to handle class content, which was the case of the original exploration. Likewise, DVD players were used in nine cases with the corresponding recorded materials of the textbook (see the description of the approach to listening practice in 4.1.4 below). Other kinds of resources such as videos and films were not observed, mostly because the contextual conditions did not provide such resources in most cases.

On the whole, all the major differences in the teachers' approaches were perceived as a direct result of the plan of action. The teachers showed changes in their original views and performance regarding teaching materials. These significant changes, that resembled *resourcefulness* one of the attributes of *the reflective teacher* as conceptualized by the teachers in stage 3, were also identified in the main achievements of the training program (see section 4.2.7 below, *improvement in skills for developing teaching materials*).

Nonetheless, in spite of these improvements, it has to be acknowledged that no textbook adaptations of the kind expected after the course *Planning materials and units of work*, were observed. This confirms the trainer's perception that the course had been "rather just an introduction to textbook and materials analysis". Time constraints, organization problems, and the teachers' workload were the major reasons why the course contents were not covered in depth (see the evaluation of the program in 4.2.2 below).

4.1.4 About teaching the language skills and sub-skills

a) Teaching the language areas

Regarding the language skills, the original findings revealed teacher preference for listening and speaking activities over reading and writing. In relation to the language sub-skills, pronunciation was on top of the teachers' preferences followed by vocabulary and grammar. The classroom observations showed that there were discordances in this regard as the lessons were mostly based on vocabulary teaching and grammar, and the less taught areas were writing and listening followed by speaking, reading and pronunciation. In the cases that the teachers integrated practice for the different skills, there were significant shortcomings. For instance, writing practice would be relegated to homework without any kind of previous guidance. Listening for comprehension purposes (with pre, while and post activities) was integrated only in two cases. More often than not the students' exposure to listening practice would be the teachers' own voice (with significant shortcomings in terms of language authenticity). In relation to reading, there was a lack of pre, while and post stages, no treatment of new vocabulary, and a lack of activation of students' background knowledge. Speaking would consist of mechanical dialogues read in the textbooks and practiced in pairs or groups, often memorized and with significant pronunciation problems.

Grammar, which was the second prioritized area in the classroom observations, would take over the entire lesson which used to revolve around the particular grammar point. Pronunciation would be focused on repetition drills, and vocabulary teaching would concentrate on providing students with Spanish equivalent lists in some cases. This information evidenced the need to raise teacher awareness on the disagreement between their teaching beliefs and classroom performance. Most teachers held modern views for language teaching, but their actions did not quite match such views. Likewise, it was necessary to enhance the teacher knowledge on effective techniques for teaching the language skills and sub-skills.

The new information revealed changes in both the teachers' beliefs and actions, which is shown in table 38 below.

Table 38

Teacher beliefs and actions regarding the language areas

LANGUAGE AREA	TEACHER BELIEFS	TEACHER ACTIONS
<i>Writing</i>	8	5
<i>Reading</i>	8	5
<i>Listening</i>	13	9
<i>Conversation practice</i>	15	10
<i>Pronunciation</i>	13	9
<i>Grammar</i>	8	10
<i>Vocabulary</i>	12	14

As shown, there were minor changes in the teachers' beliefs regarding their preferences in teaching the language skills, as speaking and listening continued to have priority over reading and writing. Concerning the language sub-skills, pronunciation was, again, over vocabulary and grammar. This revealed that the teachers continued to consider speaking, listening, pronunciation and vocabulary very important areas to develop student oral communicative competence, which was the teachers' major concern.

There was an increase in the teachers' actions in the classroom in most areas. It was observed a major focus on vocabulary, speaking, pronunciation and listening. Like in the first observations, a grammar point was included in almost all lessons. Similarly, the less practiced areas were reading and writing. In relation to the correspondence between beliefs and actions, the major coincidences were found in vocabulary (fourteen teacher actions vs. twelve teacher beliefs) and grammar (ten teacher actions vs. eight teacher beliefs). There was less agreement between the teachers' beliefs and their actions in the case of speaking, reading and writing. The main features of the teacher approaches in teaching the language areas are presented below. The areas will be described in the order of recurrence of the teaching actions.

b) *Vocabulary*

This was the most practiced language area. The teachers would use a variety of resources for eliciting and practicing vocabulary (flashcards, real objects, cards, drawings). Some teachers would use the board to provide the words or expressions to be used in a particular activity. The approaches to the practice, presentation, or revision of lexical items were often connected with other areas (e.g. pronunciation/backchaining; reading comprehension/brainstorming; speaking/picture dictation).

c) *Grammar*

This was the second most practiced area. There were significant differences in the teachers' approaches to teaching grammar. The teachers would focus on grammar as a means to a broader functional purpose; for instance, a review of the uses of *can* and *can't* for students' creation of a "find someone who..." activity, or practice on *what's this/what's that* and *prepositions of place* to describe toy color, shapes and locations. In most classroom observations, this meaningful communicative focus was different from the traditional approaches observed in the original exploration.

d) *Pronunciation*

The teachers' approaches here concentrated on the pronunciation of troublesome sounds (e.g. *ed* endings in irregular verbs or tongue twisters), intonation (e.g. backchaining) or phonetic transcriptions (e.g. /su:t/) to familiarize students with dictionary use. There was also the pronunciation of vocabulary words and expressions that would be used for a particular purpose (e.g. a dialogue or a small talk).

e) *Listening*

The teachers provided students with two kinds of listening practice. The first kind was listening for the purpose of understanding target ideas, dialogues, stories, or instructions, among others. Thus, they integrated elements of *pre-listening* activities as a preparation for students understanding (e.g. playing a vocabulary game, asking questions about personal belongings or describing a partner's clothes); *while listening* activities (drawing, filling in the gaps, or ordering a story) and *post-listening* activities (comparing stories with a partner, matching words with definitions or creating a dialogue). The other kind of listening practice was exposure to the teachers' own speaking skills. Thus, the students had meaningful practice and input by listening to the teacher when handling the classroom activity (e.g. using classroom language, giving instructions, providing explanations, questioning and eliciting, and the like). Some teachers absolutely refused to speak the mother tongue in the classroom, and whenever students spoke Spanish, the teacher invariably answered in English. The students in most cases were familiar with this approach and showed high levels of comprehension of the teachers' spoken language.

f) *Speaking*

A variety of activities to provide speaking practice took place: guessing games and information gap activities, (e.g. who am I; picture dictation , dialogues back to back), ordering actions to retell an event (e.g. jigsaw stories), mingling activities (e.g. find someone who), categorizing information, (e.g. healthy/unhealthy food, kinds of movies, advantages and disadvantages of television), interviewing partners for a variety of purposes (e.g. likes and dislikes, opinions about movies, favorite sport, weekend activities, future plans and dreams), and exchanging assignments for the purpose of correction. Depending on the nature of the activities they would be carried out in pairs, groups or the class as a whole (see these approaches in section 4.1.5 below)

g) *Reading*

Although readings were used only in five observations, the teachers who used them also provided evidence of integrating pre, while and post activities: e.g. *pre-reading* /brainstorming vocabulary to be dealt with in the text; *while-reading*/completing with vocabulary words using contextual clues and; *post-reading* /talking about advantages and disadvantages; sharing opinions, agreeing or disagreeing on something.

h) *Writing*

Writing was an area in which serious constraints were identified. Even though some teachers admitted having preference for teaching writing (n=8), the reality at the classroom level showed discordances as only in five cases the teachers attempted to provide some practice. In all cases the approach was similar to the one used in the first observations: writing was assigned as homework (see in 4.1.5 below the kinds of writing tasks). There are several possible explanations to this phenomenon. First of all, time was not enough for the teachers to be able to develop this skill in the classroom, which is why they decided to let the students work on their own. This was in itself a good decision as it reflected the teachers' attempts to promote student autonomy. But there was no preparation for the task and no follow up (only in one case the teacher provided evidence of a follow up to the written assignment). Secondly, the teachers' concerns were most of the time focused on developing other language skills (e.g. students' speaking and listening) and writing was not included. This was reflected in the selection of the research topics as only one project was focused on developing students (basic) writing skills. Thirdly, the lack of focus on developing writing skills is a socio-cultural contextual phenomenon, which includes reading (generally speaking, both reading and writing are not given too much of attention). Fourthly, the teachers' background knowledge of strategies for teaching writing was low. Unfortunately, their PRESET program did not provide the teachers with the necessary training in this area. Finally, the course of the training program in which the teachers were to have training in this area did not have the

expected results. This opinion was shared by both the teachers and the trainer (see evaluation of the program in 4.2.2 below). Possibly, a combination of all of these elements was the cause of the poor development of this teaching skill. This information has important implications for both the PRESET and INSET teacher preparation programs at UNAN-León.

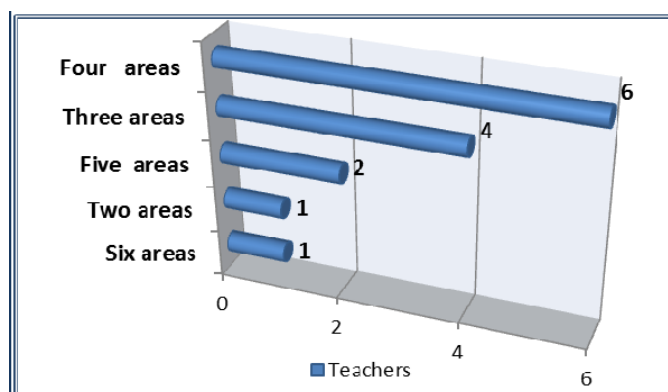
- *Teaching integrated skills and sub-skills*

The original findings revealed that the teachers held modern views regarding the integration of the language skills for an effective acquisition process. Their views were consistent with their actions as in most observations there was evidence of skills integration: nine teachers taught three areas, one teacher two areas, and two teachers taught five areas. There were three cases in which the teacher devoted the whole class to develop one area (in two cases vocabulary and in one case grammar). The classroom observations revealed that there were weakness in the pace and sequence of activities, as well as with transitions, classroom instructions and timing. This information made it evident that the teachers needed effective ideas to handle skills integration in a more effective way, which was addressed through several components of the plan of action.

The new information reveals that the teachers reaffirmed their views of the importance of teaching the language in an integrated way, which was consistent with their actions at the classroom level. This is reflected in figure 28 below.

Figure 28

Integration of language areas



The figure shows five different approaches in the classrooms observed. In one case the teacher taught six areas, which was a very particular case. The teacher wanted to explore and assess her different roles in each of the activities, and took advantage of the observation to get feedback in this regard. In one case too, the teacher taught two areas. Five areas were the focus of the class in two cases, three areas in four cases and four areas in six cases. The best evidence of the new teachers' approaches in teaching the language areas was provided by their lesson plans. In this regard, the

influence of their training was clearly perceived, as the teachers admitted using a planning template created collectively during the course. The common features in the lesson plans were clear descriptions of the practice and content areas, carefully detailed activities in each stage, and the integration of learning objectives, materials used, time, kind of interaction and procedures. In the evaluation of the training program, the teachers perceived the improvement in lesson planning as one of the main achievements of their training. They admitted having increased their awareness of the significance of lesson planning and having realized that lesson planning should be learner-centered in order to be effective. Likewise, they acknowledged having gained new perspectives about its structure and main components as well as about the creative nature of the process (see 4.2.7 below).

4.1.5 About student learning

a) Student learning styles

The teachers persistently showed a high degree of awareness of student-related factors throughout the development of this study. This awareness emerged out of their strong motivation towards satisfying the students' learning needs, which was a powerful drive for the teachers' desire to improve. Thus, the teachers were innately aware of the students' particular differences and learning styles. This was reflected in their original views that there are learners with special aptitudes and that not everybody learns using the same basic techniques. Likewise, the teachers showed agreement with the views that it is important to provide different kinds of students (aural, visual, and kinesthetic) with different options for language learning; for instance using visuals and auditory materials, or providing them with the opportunity to learn by doing. The teachers' actions were in disagreement with their views as in the classroom observations there was no evidence of using such teaching strategies. On the contrary, the processes lacked activities to address students' learning needs effectively. Thus, the information was useful to help teachers widen their knowledge and improve their teaching approaches in this regard.

The new information revealed that the teachers had kept their original views regarding learners' differences. Most of them acknowledged that some people have a special aptitude for language learning and that not everybody can learn an FL following the same teaching techniques. Some other views like the teachers' preference for vocabulary learning, revealed acknowledgement of learners' differences, as well. This is shown in table 39 below.

Table 39

Teacher views about student learning styles

Language teaching preference	Teachers' views	
	Good	Best
<i>Students should learn vocabulary words by seeing them</i>	4	7
<i>Students should learn vocabulary words by hearing them</i>	8	4
<i>Students should learn vocabulary by doing something with the words</i>	7	8

Like in the first exploration, the teachers' views showed preferences for vocabulary learning that addresses students' styles. Thus, eleven teachers acknowledged their preference for student learning through seeing the vocabulary words; twelve teachers stated their preferences for student learning by hearing the words and, finally, all the teachers agreed that student should learn vocabulary by doing something with the words. The integration of different kinds of materials in the lessons revealed that the teachers had not only preserved and nurtured their natural perception of students' differences, but also that they had adopted a more proactive attitude to provide them with meaningful practice (see 4.1.3 and 4.1.4 above). These findings are consistent with the teachers' identification of achievements in the evaluation of the program (see 4.2.7 below), as they acknowledged having increased their awareness of student-related factors.

b) Student independence and autonomy

In the initial exploration most teachers were fully aware of their responsibility in fostering student autonomy and independence in language learning. This was revealed by their views regarding specific preferences of tasks inside and outside the classroom. In the classroom, for example, they showed fondness of promoting self-correction, presenting topics related to student interest, and integrating problem solving activities. Outside the classroom the teachers showed inclination to assign activities for the students to do independently such as studying on their own, reading the newspaper in English and watching English TV programs and films.

In spite of these preferences, the teachers' views did not match their actions at the classroom level. Their role involved detailed explanations and very controlled activities that provided very few opportunities for student independent learning. Likewise, the integration of problem solving activities was barely seen. The same thing happened with student autonomy outside the classroom, as the teachers' attempts to guide students' towards doing meaningful activities outside the classroom were scarce. These findings revealed that the teachers' views were consistent with their concern and interest towards the students. Nonetheless, their performance in the classroom was in

disagreement with their views. Thus, it was evident the need to raise teacher awareness and enhance their skills to promote student autonomy and independent learning.

The new information about the teachers' views reveals that the teachers had in essence kept the same perception and preferences. That is to say, they were aware of the need to promote student autonomy and independence for successful learning inside and outside the classroom. Nonetheless, the teachers continued to view their own responsibility as involving explaining everything to students. The teachers' tendency to provide students with explanations was clearly an approach that they found effective to handle class instruction. This tendency was, undoubtedly, caused by the situational context. With so many students in one group, it is certainly easier to handle instruction that way. A significant difference was that the teachers had improved their skills in using the target language for directing the classroom activity. This approach was very familiar to the students, who showed high levels of understanding of the spoken language. The teachers had found a way to benefit students through a "traditional" practice, as in most cases their explanation provided students with exposure to real language.

Another difference was that most of the activities promoted were more student-centered. In order to handle class content the teachers made gradual moves from known materials to more elaborate contents for students' independent practice. This ability to provide models, structure or frameworks to learn the language skills was identified by the teachers as an achievement in the evaluation of the program (see section 4.2.7). The kinds of activities described in section 4.1.4 above reveal that the teachers had both raised their awareness and expanded their teaching techniques in this regard.

The teachers' approaches to promote student autonomy outside the classroom were revealed through the assignment of homework. Table 40 below shows the tasks assigned.

Table 40

Teachers' approaches to independent practice

TC	KINDS OF HOMEWORK ASSIGNED
A	Make questions and answers with borrow and lend using home things
B	Write about a personal hero
C	Answer post reading questions on the book
D	Write questions using (What's this/What are those?)
E	Writing questions and answers (do/does)
F	Drawing foods you like and dislike (children)
G	Make sentences/complete with appropriate prepositions
I	Do grammar exercises on the book/ Listen to a song for pronunciation practice
J	Write a short paragraph about personal dreams. Piece of writing would be used the next day for a classroom activity (find out the author)
K	Prepare an activity (<i>find someone who</i> with can/can't)
L	---
M	Write a movie review
N	Write a survey to find out partners' favorite TV programs
O	Write about a sportsperson who won an award

As shown, in some cases the teachers assigned students traditional tasks to do independently that were mostly focused on form, (questions with do/does, Wh questions, making sentences, etc.). Nonetheless, there were other assignments that had a more meaningful and motivating purpose (e.g. preparing a *find someone who* activity with can/can't, writing a survey to find a partners' favorite TV program and listening to a song). On the other hand, the teachers assigned writing tasks as homework. As discussed in section 4.1.4 above, writing was an area that the teachers needed to improve. Most probably their lack of confidence in teaching this skill was the reason why they preferred to assign it as homework. Nonetheless, the fact that the tasks were a follow up of the activities in the classroom, and the type of writing assigned show the teachers' attempts to promote student independence. Moreover, in doing these writing tasks, the students would need to look for the information in libraries or on the Internet. In this regard, although the teachers did not provide evidence in the final classroom observation, data provided in the evaluation of the training program revealed that some teachers had started to assign students tasks to do on the web (see 4.2.7 below).

c) Relating language learning to student reality

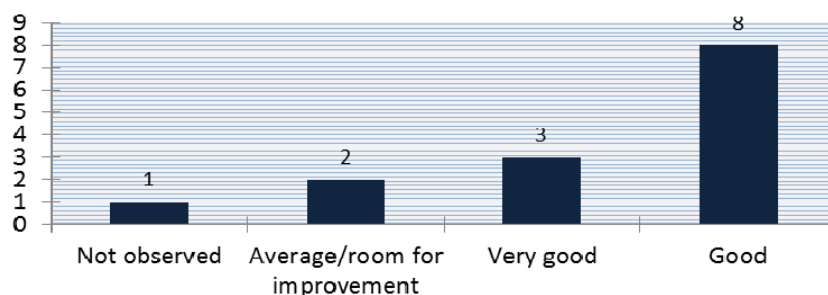
All through the development of this study the teachers showed great concern for raising students' awareness of the practical use of the language for their professional life. They knew that if students could see clearly how the language connects to their own personal aims, interests, and

likes, they will be more likely to value it. This would both increase students' motivation and maximize the opportunities of meaningful practice. Disagreement between the teachers' beliefs and performance at the classroom level was shown in the difficulties experienced by teachers in making the actual connection of class content to student reality. The observations revealed that only in three cases the teachers succeeded in relating class content to students' real lives. In six observations there was room for improvement in the teachers' ability, and in six others no evidence was provided. Several courses of the training plan were aimed at helping teachers increase their knowledge and skills to deal with this issue more effectively. Likewise, significant efforts were made to raise teacher awareness of the discrepancies between their beliefs and actions.

The new information revealed that the teachers basically kept the same views about relating class content to students' reality and that there were changes in their teaching practice in this regard. These changes are reflected in figure 29 below.

Figure 29

Teacher ability to relate class content to student reality



As shown, there were eight classroom observations in which the teacher's ability to relate class content to real life was considered good and appropriate, and three cases in which it was considered very good. In two cases there was room for improvement, and in one case no evidence was provided. One of the most common strategies used by the teachers was the activation of students' background knowledge. This was carried out through brainstorming ideas about a particular topic before presenting reading or listening materials (e.g. technological information sources, kinds of sports, TV programs, healthy/unhealthy food, kinds of drinks, etc.). Another way of relating class content to students' interests, likes and experiences was through elicitation techniques (e.g. what do you know about? have/do you ever? what do you think about? what would you do if? what is/are your favorite sports/TV programs/food?). Other strategies included integrating realia (e.g. drinks, school objects, foods, and toys), using pictures (e.g. popular movies) and doing simple drawings (e.g. animals, clothes, furniture). The students' participation as a result of all of these teachers'

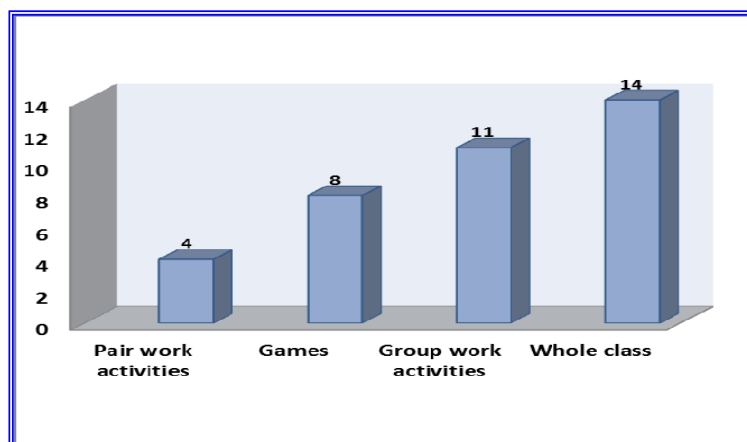
attempts to provide them with a meaningful learning process was favorable, as described in the following section.

d) Student participation

The teachers' greatest concern for student motivation and participation was widely documented during the guided process to reflection, stage in which such concern got to the point of guiding most of the teachers' AR projects. The teachers' beliefs were in agreement with modern language teaching views that in order to optimize students' participation in real class time, different ways of interaction should be promoted. Thus, they believed that it was important to implement activities, such as pair work, group work and games in the classroom, all of which are aimed at fostering students' participation. The classroom observation showed that the teachers' actions in this regard were quite consistent with their views. Thus, it was revealed that the prevailing way of organizing classroom instruction was as a whole class. It was during this time that the teachers tended to assume teacher-centered approaches providing explanations, asking questions and directing classroom activity in general. Group work was mostly used to practice conversations that the students would volunteer to present in front of the class, to do vocabulary or grammar exercises or to do comprehension checks from a reading text. In the pair work activities observed students practiced dialogues, did information gap activities or brainstormed ideas together in a pre-reading activity. This information was valuable to identify the kind of approaches that the teachers used, and find out what kind of problems they faced in promoting classroom interaction and student participation. On the whole, it was confirmed that the teachers were open to the integration of different ways of grouping students and that there was a correlation between the teachers' ability to motivate students and student participation. In both cases there was room for improvement.

The new information reveals that the teachers had kept their basic principles and preferences about whole class instruction, group work, pair work and the integration of games. The classroom observations revealed to what extent the teachers' views agreed with the classroom activities promoted. This is shown in figure 30 below.

Figure 30
Classroom activities



As shown, the teachers continued to have a preference for providing classroom instruction as a whole class. Like in the first cycle of classroom observations all the teachers used this approach for teaching their lessons. Eleven teachers used group work activities and four teachers used pair work. Eight teachers integrated games or some sort of competitions, which included the hangman, running dictation, team competition (sports) guessing games (Who am I?) a reading race (pair work for measuring each other's' reading speed), and Bingo to revise vocabulary items.

On the other hand, the variety of activities provided involved several ways of grouping students as shown in figure 31 below.

Figure 31

Variety in grouping students

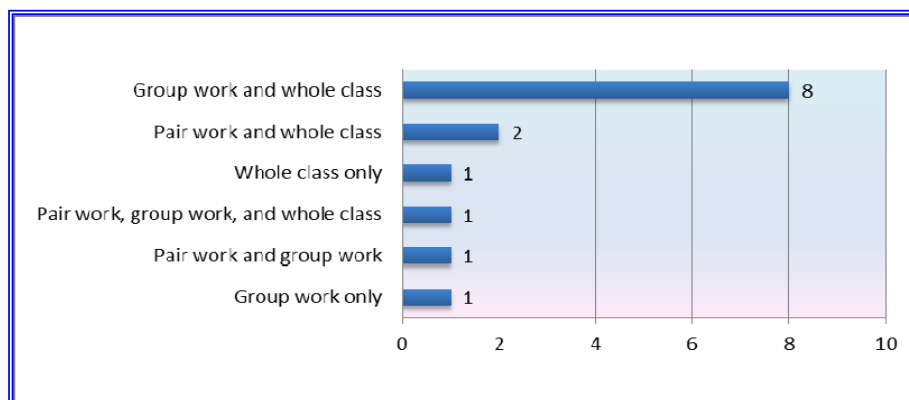


Figure 31 shows that group work and whole class was the most common combination of activities, was. This was followed by pair work and whole class activities together, which were used by two teachers. In one case the teachers used only the whole class approach. In another case the classroom activity involved three ways of grouping students, pair work, group work and whole class. One other teacher used pair work and group work, and there was one case in which the teacher only used group work.

All of the teachers' efforts in providing students with variety and with more meaningful opportunities for interaction resulted in better reactions from students. The teachers' ability to motivate students and the students' levels of participation are shown in figures 32 and 33 below.

Figure 32

Teacher ability to motivate students

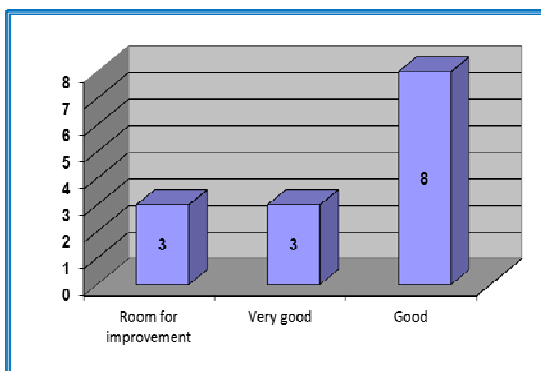


Figure 33

Student participation

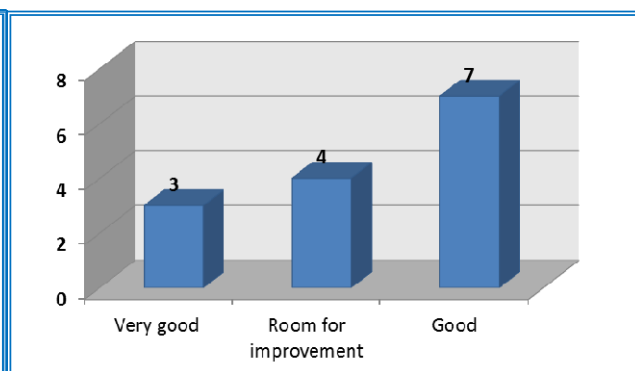


Figure 32 shows that in eight of the observations the teachers' ability to motivate students was considered good, in three cases it was considered very good and in three other cases there was room for improvement. As in the original observations the criteria were based on the teacher's enthusiasm towards the class, the kind of resources used, and the ways he/she organized and presented class content to catch students' attention. Figure 33, on the other hand, shows that student participation in the classroom activities was good in seven observations, in four cases there was room for improvement and in three cases student participation was considered very good. Similarly to the original observations, these perceptions were based on the global nature of the classroom activity and on the global responses and attitudes of students. Thus, participation was measured taking into account students' levels of interest, attention and involvement in the process. As shown, there is a relationship between the teachers' efforts to motivate students and the actual participation that took place. For example, the cases in which student participation was considered low were those few cases in which the teachers were involved in more traditional classroom instruction (e.g. providing grammar explanations and vocabulary lists on the board). On the other hand, students' participation was higher in those lessons in which the teachers provided graded activities with clearly perceived objectives and in which students got involved in motivating tasks in groups or with a peer. The results in both teachers' ability to motivate students and student participation show a significant difference with the results in the first cycle of observations. On that occasion there was room for improvement in the majority of the cases in both aspects.

Clearly, the teachers made efforts to match their teaching beliefs with their performance in the classroom. There had been significant advances and improvements evidenced by the kind and

nature of the classroom activity and by the responses of the students. Nevertheless, there were also weaknesses identified in the processes.

- The teachers' fondness of explaining everything did not allow students enough room to take the challenge of interacting with class content on their own. Students' bond to the teachers' explanations jeopardized their autonomous learning.
- The approach to classroom instruction as a whole class caused too much Teacher Talking Time in some cases. Students' attention span decreased and they got distracted.
- In most cases students understood teacher talk, but there was resistance to speak English. Students insisted on speaking Spanish. The teachers lost track of this because of a number of reasons (e.g. the number of students, the classroom conditions, and time).
- In some cases the number of students and seating arrangement did not allow teachers' free movement in group work activities. Thus the teacher was not able to monitor students' work and check their understanding effectively. On the other hand, in several cases students at the back of the classroom were not taken care of. As a result some students' problems were not addressed (e.g. passive, shy and undisciplined students)
- Class time did not allow teachers to cover class contents in depth, particularly those teachers who had planned the integration of practice in four language skills.
- In some cases the lessons objective was too broad to be achieved in one class (e.g. learn the pronunciation of past endings /ed/).
- Games would take too long. The teachers were unaware of this and kept on going. As a result, class time was not optimized.

Exploring teachers' beliefs in practice a posteriori was certainly a valuable process that illuminated their professional development process. It was clear that the action plan had served its intended purpose in fostering meaningful changes in both the teachers' beliefs and practice. On the whole, it can be positively asserted that the teachers achieved a higher level of professionalism as EFL teachers. Moreover, they had the opportunity to confront their beliefs in light of their practice. In the process they enhanced their knowledge to deal with the multifaceted aspects of their teaching practice. New challenges had emerged and many others would surely come, but it was perceived that the teachers were better prepared to address them. The following section will shed some more light on the effectiveness of the program from the point of view of the main actors: the teachers and the trainers.

4.2 Evaluation of the program

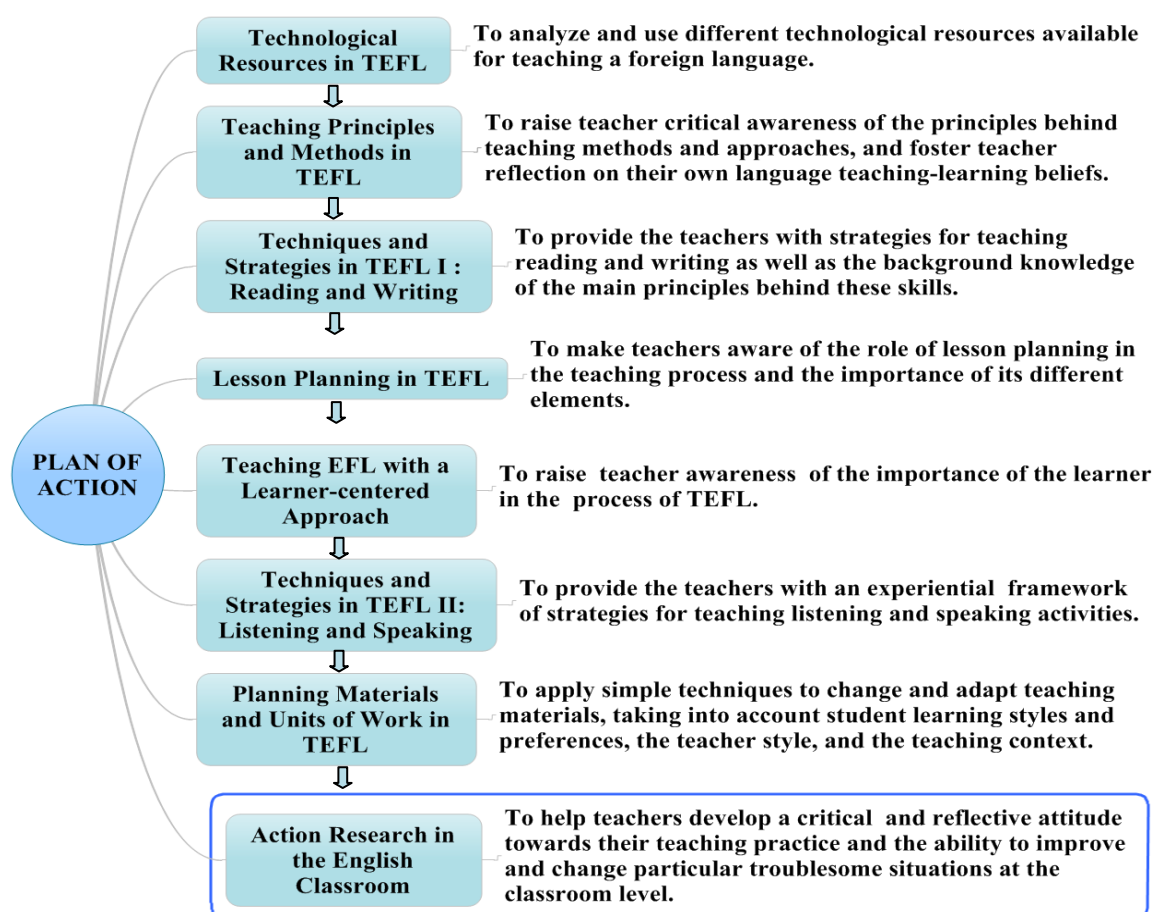
The present section discusses the results of the evaluation of the training program from the perspective of both trainers and trainees. The starting points are the focus and main objectives of the training program. This is followed by the fulfillment of objectives, the main strengths of the teachers as well as their main weaknesses and difficulties. In addition, the results show the trainers' opinions about the beliefs that the teachers needed to challenge, and their suggested area for Action Research. This is followed by the main achievements of the program, and the follow up suggested by both trainers and teachers.

4.2.1 Program focus and main objectives

The program involved eight different courses aimed at equipping teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge for professional improvement as EFL teachers. The focus and main objectives of each course are presented below.

Figure 34

Focus and main objectives of the program



As shown, the courses were interconnected and intended to provide the teachers with skills and knowledge in different areas as a prelude to the final course on Action Research. This interconnection is shown by the arrows. The idea was that by the time the teachers conducted their research projects they had enhanced their knowledge base. Such knowledge would enable them to carry out their projects in a more effective way. In addition, it was expected that each of the courses could exert positive influence on the teachers' decision-making skills when selecting the target area of their research projects, which indeed happened (see stage three above). Some of the courses had very practical objectives to accomplish. Consequently, the teachers were expected to: apply techniques to adapt and create teaching materials (*Planning materials and units of work in TEFL*), use technology for teaching purposes (*Technological Resources in TEFL*), and learn and expand their strategies for teaching the four macro skills (*Techniques and Strategies in TEFL I and II*). In addition, all of these courses addressed the main principles behind the different approaches presented and developed. Likewise, there were courses intended to foster teacher reflection on target aspects of their practice. For instance, *Principles and Methods in TEFL* intended to raise the teachers' awareness of their own language teaching-learning beliefs (about language, the learner, the learning process, the teacher, and so forth), and how these beliefs affected their teaching practice. At the same time the teachers had exposure to a review of different kinds of teaching methods and approaches, which were analyzed with a critical perspective. Another course of this kind was *Teaching EFL with a Learner-centered Approach* that addressed principles and concepts regarding the learner-centered curriculum. This course intended to raise the teachers' awareness of the importance of students in their own learning process. Similarly, *Lesson Planning in TEFL* aimed at fostering teacher reflection on the important role of lesson planning and its different elements. The final course, considered the crowning point of the entire plan, was *Action Research in the English Classroom*. The main objective of this course was to help teachers build on their understanding of reflection as a means of professional development. It also aimed at providing them with the tools to improve and change particular troublesome situations in the classroom, through the planning and implementation of their Action Research Projects. As discussed in stage three, there was a carefully planned scaffolding process to support teachers for this purpose.

4.2.2 Accomplishment of objectives

On the whole, all trainers had a positive perception of the teachers' performance in each of the courses. Nevertheless, not in all courses the trainers were completely satisfied with the achievement of objectives. The trainers' perceptions in this regard are presented in the following table.

Table 41

Trainers' perceptions about the accomplishment of objectives

Course	ACCOMPLISHMENT OF OBJECTIVES		Further information
	Fulfilled	Partially fulfilled	
<i>Technological Resources in TEFL</i>		<i>Somehow, not fully. Thus, some changes were done during the course.</i>	<i>Most teachers were not very familiar with technology, specially computers and the use of the internet</i>
<i>Principles and Methods in EFL I</i>	<i>Yes. The teachers were open and receptive towards the content of the course; their knowledge base in language learning theories and in teaching methods increased greatly</i>		<i>Nevertheless, the information was vast and deep. They need to go on reinforcing their knowledge of certain key concepts through independent study.</i>
<i>Techniques and strategies in TEFL I: Reading and Writing</i>		<i>Only 50% of the course objectives were accomplished.</i>	<i>The number of hours for two components made it difficult to cover all the material planned</i>
<i>Techniques and Strategies in TEFL II (Listening and Speaking)</i>	<i>Yes, because the teachers understood how important is to provoke a good environment (when integrating listening and speaking activities)</i>		<i>A framework was used, so they can transmit this experience to their students as well as the strategies when teaching listening activities.</i>
<i>Lesson Planning in TEFL</i>	<i>All the elements were analyzed and practical tasks designed</i>		<i>The teachers had the opportunity for practicing and reflecting in groups.</i>
<i>Teaching EFL with a Learner-centered Approach</i>	<i>Generally speaking the objective was accomplished.</i>		<i>Nevertheless, the teachers didn't have enough time to reflect on the concepts which were quite new to them.</i>
<i>Planning Materials and Units of Work in TEFL</i>		<i>I would say that the objective was not totally fulfilled. Most participants missed sessions, and did not hand in assignments on time.</i>	<i>Let's say the course was rather just an introduction to textbook and materials analysis.</i>
<i>Action Research in the English Classroom</i>		<i>The teachers struggled with all the different contents of the module; not all of the objectives were fulfilled.</i>	<i>Only nine, out of the fifteen teachers, completed their projects</i>

As shown, in four of the courses the trainers admitted having accomplished their objectives satisfactorily: *Principles and Methods in TEFL*, *Techniques and Strategies in Listening and Speaking*, *Lesson Planning in TEFL* and *Teaching EFL with a Learner-centered Approach*. On the whole, the positive outcomes concentrated on the openness and receptivity of the teachers towards the contents of the course, and their performance in completing the tasks assigned. Nevertheless, even though the outcomes were mostly positive, the trainers also recognized that there had been constraints posed by the teachers' background knowledge (new contents) and the nature of the contents of the course (too vast and deep information). Conversely, the trainers considered that the objectives had been partially fulfilled in the other four courses: *Technological Resources in TEFL*, *Techniques and strategies for teaching reading and writing*, *Planning Materials and Units of Work in TEFL* and *Action Research in the classroom*. In these cases the problems described were background knowledge (lack of familiarity with technology); time (not enough to cover the contents of two components, reading and writing); lack of commitment (the teachers missed sessions and did not hand in assignments); and difficulties to complete the final tasks (only nine teachers completed their AR projects).

On the other hand, the teachers' perceptions show similar results. The teachers were very critical with their self-assessment, and they were mostly in accordance with the trainers' views. The following table shows how the teachers assessed their own performance in each of the courses.

Table 42

Teachers' perceptions about their own performance in each of the courses

Course	Perception of own performance		
	Completely satisfied	Partially satisfied	Not satisfied
<i>Teaching EFL with a Learner-centered Approach</i>	12	1	1
<i>Lesson Planning in TEFL</i>	10	3	1
<i>Principles and Methods in TEFL</i>	10	2	2
<i>Techniques and Strategies in TEFL II (Listening and Speaking)</i>	9	3	2
<i>Techniques and Strategies in TEFL I (Reading and Writing)</i>	9	4	1
<i>Technological Resources in TEFL</i>	8	4	2
<i>Action Research in the English Classroom</i>	8	4	2
<i>Planning Materials and Units of Work in TEFL</i>	7	1	6

The table shows the courses in which the teachers felt more satisfied with their own performance were *Teaching EFL with a Learner-centered Approach*, (twelve teachers) *Lesson Planning in TEFL* (ten teachers) *Principles and Methods in TEFL* (nine teachers), and *Techniques and Strategies in Listening and Speaking* (nine teachers). This coincides with the trainers' perception as in these four courses they stated their satisfaction with the outcomes. On the other hand, half of the teachers showed less satisfaction with their performance in the course *Planning*

Materials and Units of Work (one teacher partially satisfied, six teachers not satisfied). This coincides with the trainer's views that the general objective of this course was not completely fulfilled. Similarly, in the course *Techniques and Strategies in Reading and Writing* nine teachers stated satisfaction with their own performance. Nevertheless, four teachers were partially satisfied and one was not satisfied. This coincides with the trainer's perception about having fulfilled only part of the course objectives. Other coincidences of the teachers' views with those of their trainers were found in the courses *Technological Resources in TEFL* and *Action Research in the English Classroom*. In both cases six teachers were not satisfied with their performance (four were partially satisfied and two were not satisfied).

The reasons for the unsatisfactory teacher performance in some of the courses showed agreement with the trainers' views. The problems mentioned were time, workload, missing sessions, lack of familiarity with technology (use of the Internet) and the teachers' background knowledge. Interestingly enough, the course *Planning materials and units of work* was one of the most mentioned as being affected by issues of time and work overload. There was evidence, discussed in section 3.6.7 above, that the teachers' were overwhelmed by work during the development of the program. The following are some of the teachers' comments about their performance

- *Yes, I am satisfied, but there was little time to develop the course. The presenter did her best simplifying the course contents (time-Technological Resources in TEFL).*
- *I'm not satisfied with my performance because I couldn't attend all sessions and be part of the discussions (missing sessions-Planning materials and units of work).*
- *Due to workload and time constraints I couldn't attend some lessons; therefore I couldn't clarify some doubts (work overload-Teaching EFL with a Learner-centered approach).*
- *I missed sessions and I couldn't get to have the opportunity to share knowledge with my classmates so that I could learn from them too (missing sessions-Planning materials and units of work).*
- *Even though I am satisfied with my performance, I feel I needed more time for the activities (time-Technological Resources in TEFL).*
- *I didn't send the final work on time. I had the assignment done, but I hadn't opened my email account (lack of familiarity with Internet use-Lesson Planning in TEFL).*
- *I am not satisfied at all in this module because I lost many sessions and even when I tried to get all the information and do all my work I feel I have gaps of information and practice about it (missing sessions-Planning materials and units of work).*

- *I dedicated too much time to the other courses and I couldn't finish the assignments of this course properly (time-Planning materials and units of work).*
- *We had too many activities and homework to do in that moment. It was difficult to dedicate time to this course (time-Strategies for teaching Reading and Writing).*
- *I faced many problems because I didn't know anything about computers...I didn't master the content of the courses, and I don't enjoy classes when I don't have mastery on it (background knowledge-Use of technological resources in TEFL).*
- *My particular problem was the short time to read the information, which was extensive (time-Principles and Methods in TEFL).*
- *My particular difficulty was that at the beginning of this module I didn't understand, and that was a little frustrating for me (background knowledge-Principles and Methods in TEFL).*

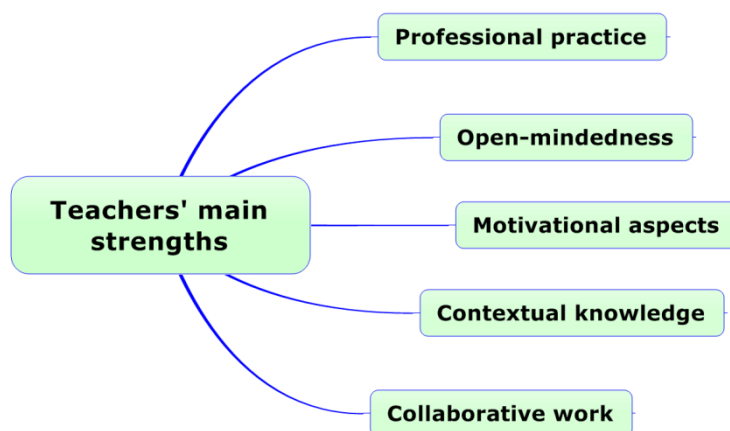
Overall, this information revealed that both teachers and trainers realistically agreed on the impact of the program. It was clear that most of the program objectives had been fulfilled and that there were a number of positive aspects, which were shown in the academic performance of the majority of the teachers. Nonetheless, there had also been limitations and both teachers and trainers were aware of them. The main strengths and weaknesses will be addressed in detail in the following sections to shed some more light on the effectiveness of the program..

4.2.3 Teachers' main strengths for the development of the plan

The trainers pointed out several positive aspects of the teachers, which they defined as strengths that contributed to the development of the training courses, and to the achievements of the program objectives. These aspects are shown in figure 35 below.

Figure 35

The teachers' main strengths as perceived by the trainers



The trainers identified particular characteristics of the teachers that were perceived along the development of this investigation, such as open-mindedness, motivation, and the teachers' attitude towards collaborative work. Another strength identified was the fact that all the teachers were in-service teachers, which facilitated the training process. Indeed, being teachers in practice was an advantage, as the teachers were able to implement the skills, strategies and knowledge acquired in their classrooms. Moreover, their condition as practicing teachers provided them with the opportunity to design and implement their AR projects with their own students. The teachers' professional practice was also the reason why they had good contextual knowledge, which materialized in their awareness of students, the teaching context and the elements of lesson planning (nonetheless, there were significant gaps in the teachers' knowledge in other important areas described in 4.3.4 below). The same strengths in the teachers' contextual knowledge had been recurrently present in previous stages, and were perceived by the external evaluators during the assessment of the AR projects (see section 3.8.2 above). All of this information related to the teachers' strengths as perceived by the trainers has special significance for this study. Their perception confirmed the suitability of the teachers as the target population for this study. The trainers' refer to these strengths in the following comments.

- *In general, attention, motivation and openness to learn were considered valuable attitudes towards the course. They valued the course as something relevant for their professional development, which was a positive element for their performance.*
- *Another important strength was their eagerness to collaborate and share with their peers.*
- *The teachers' attitude towards change was very positive. They were eager to make adequate transformations to their teaching in order to become better teachers.*
- *Their willingness to learn about computers in spite of the fact that most of them didn't have a computer at home or at work.*
- *Motivation towards their teaching, interest in the contents (one participant said they are like "sponges"). They have a positive attitude towards the course as they understand how important it is for the improvement of their teaching practice and for their professional development in general. Another strength is that (with some exceptions) most of them are not fossilized teachers; they are open to changes.*
- *They were already prepared and well-motivated to participate in all the tasks they were asked to develop. Most of the participants were eager to learn new things that they could later apply in their lessons. I think one important point in favor of the participants is the fact that all of them were in service teachers and know first-hand the problems their learners may have.*

- *It was the awareness of most of the elements of the lesson planning. I think it was also useful the fact that they were teachers, as it was easier to focus more on practice than on theory.*
- *The fact that they are young teachers, so they bridge the generation gap better than older teachers do. They understand better the needs, likes and preferences of their students who are teenagers and young adults. The topics they would choose are closer to the favorite topics of their students. They bring, let's say, a kind of "fresh" insight about their target population, the students.*
- *Some of them were very persistent in going on with their projects and had an innate curiosity towards the different components of the course. Another significant strength was their interest in moving on to a more advanced level of professionalism.*
- *The fact that most teachers were in charge of teaching groups of students made it possible they could carry out their research projects.*

4.2.4 *Main difficulties in the development of the program*

There were difficulties during the development of the program, experienced by both the trainers and the teachers, which affected the program and the teachers' performance at different levels and in different ways. Such difficulties revolved around the teachers' background knowledge, the situational context, and the organization of the program.

- *The teachers' background knowledge*

The trainers identified particular difficulties posed by the teachers' prior knowledge which affected the pace and development of their particular courses. Even in the course *Lesson Planning* in which the teachers had previous accurate information, the trainer acknowledged "a lack of coherence" at the time of implementation. In the other courses some sort of information gap was perceived. For instance, in the course *Technological Resources in TEFL* the trainer admitted that "the computer literacy was not the expected one", and that, (with some exceptions), "there was a lack of familiarity in using computers for language teaching". Similar problems were experienced in the course *Principles and Methods in TEFL* in which the lack of previous knowledge about language methods "exerted negative influence". For example, certain methodologies had to be "presented" since the teachers did not have previous knowledge about them. The same thing happened with certain key terminology of the module that the teachers did not know. The trainer of the course *Teaching EFL with a Learner-centered Approach* admitted that the contents of the module were "quite new for the teachers", and the trainer of the course *Techniques and Strategies in reading and writing* stated that the participants "barely had any background knowledge about the contents of the course". The trainer of the course *Planning Materials and Units of Work in TEFL*

attributed the novelty of materials design to the fact that they “did not really have an opportunity before to design their own materials”. In the course *Action Research in the classroom* the problems with the teachers’ knowledge were focused on the lack of “general research skills” and “too basic writing skills for academic reports” (issue widely discussed in the teachers’ self-evaluation in section 3.8.5 above). The following are some of the trainers’ comments about this difficulty.

- *They were aware of most of the lesson planning elements, but showed a certain lack of coherence when putting them into practice (it was evident during the practical tasks).*
- *Some of the teachers knew the basis on how to use some programs, but there were two students who had never used a computer before. Then, I had to start from the basis on how to use the computer, if I wanted them to learn something useful for their professional development.*
- *They address readings in a very simple way no skimming, scanning, no strategies at all, no treatment of vocabulary, they tended to follow the book and instructions.*
- *Most of them didn’t have a clear purpose when developing listening activities and just a few of them used to apply the pre, while and post stages.*
- *I have the impression that they had received a lot of information on which they could have based part of the new knowledge that, unfortunately, had not been satisfactorily assimilated or fully understood.*
- *As far as writing is concerned, I think they tended to eliminate writing from their teaching (only grammatical sentences or grammar exercise) they did not teach writing they did not have the background, their training was only tools (process writing).*
- *For most of them, materials design is something new, as most of them are young teachers. They did not really have an opportunity before to design their own materials, or adapt the one they use regularly. Most of them do not have much experience comparing the different types of textbooks, as they did not have the chance to use many of them.*
- *The lack of research skills was definitely a factor that influence negatively on the process. Most teachers had never carried out an investigation before. For the ones who had, the experience had not been enriching or rewarding. Because of this, most teachers regarded the whole process of planning and implementing their research projects as a difficult task.*

On the other hand, with the honest and realistic attitude that characterized them, the teachers were mostly in agreement with the trainers. Throughout the development of this investigation they acknowledged their weaknesses, which they were highly aware of. Actually, these gaps in their knowledge (identified in the original exploration) were precisely the reason why they decided to

integrate into the training program. The following comments reflect the teachers' agreement with the trainers' view about their background knowledge.

- *Previously, I learned a way of planning the lessons. But now I realize that to make a complete lesson plan I have to follow many more steps to make sure that my lesson plan will work in the right way.*
- *My difficulties were, believe it or not, the use of technology, computers and how to download information on the internet.*
- *We had to read a lot and to get the information from the Internet and it was a problem because I'm not very good in using the Internet.*
- *One of my biggest difficulties was to understand the concepts around multiple intelligences...it was difficult and a little confusing because some of them are similar.*
- *I did not know much about reading and writing strategies. That was a real setback for me because I had to search on the web or look for extra material regarding strategies for reading and writing activities.*
- *It was difficult for me to study and learn all the theory about principles and methods...understand people who give examples and describe their experience in implementing them.*
- *I met some trouble on the road of this module because I did not know much about reading and writing strategies. That was a real setback for me because I had to search on the web... for extra materials.*
- *I had a lack of understanding at the beginning of the Action Research course about what we were going to do. Also, it was difficult to select the topic and the objectives. I didn't know how to relate them.*
- *Reading and analyzing theory was not difficult; the difficult part was to put it into practice.*
- *I planned my classes, but I didn't realize what activity belonged to the pre, while and post reading or writing and I failed the final task...but the professor gave me another chance.*
- *My particular difficulties were how to design different activities for the three reading stages, because each stage has a specific function to activate student schemata.*
- *In this course I have faced several limitations and problems such as how to design and organize the interviews and the surveys and how to write the report to describe the different steps of the research.*

As shown, the gaps in the teachers' background knowledge at the beginning of the program were related to essential basic skills and knowledge such as technological skills (use of computers and the Internet), pedagogical knowledge (stages/strategies in reading and writing), research skills

and advanced writing skills (data collection; report writing) and analytical skills (study and analyze theory) among others. These findings have significant implications indicating weaknesses in the PRESET program offered by the English Department at UNAN. Thus, a curriculum revision of the courses in which the teachers should acquire this knowledge would be highly beneficial.

- *The organization of the program*

As shown above, there were difficulties for not taking into account more accurately the limitation in the teachers' background knowledge. It has to be admitted that the real problem was not the gaps in the teachers' knowledge base, but not having perceived their exact nature and dimensions at the appropriate time. This had implications for the organization of the whole program. In order to cope with the problem, the trainers were very skillful in making changes and adjustments to help teachers move on in their program, (e.g. adapt contents, provide personalized attention, and integrate remedial plans).

Other problems with the organization of the program perceived by both trainers and trainees were issues of time. The courses were organized in intensive and extensive sessions that were perceived as too concentrated for the amount of contents to be covered. This was the case of courses that demanded theoretical aspects such as *Principles and Methods in TEFL*, *Teaching EFL with a Learner-centered Approach*, and *Action Research in the Classroom*.

Another difficulty was the organization of the curriculum, not in terms of content but in terms of distribution of the courses along the development of the program. A specific example of this is the course *Techniques and Strategies in TEFL I*, which included *Reading* and *Writing* together. The trainer acknowledged not having been able to cover all of the contents of these two demanding areas. Other two courses that faced the same problem were *Lesson Planning and Teaching EFL with a Learner-centered Approach*, as they were concentrated in two weeks (one after the other in a row) in afternoon sessions.

All of these problems would have required changes and adjustments to the organization of the program. For instance, the teachers' background knowledge would have required a diagnostic test to find out the state of their knowledge, and a propaedeutic course to help them catch up with the program contents. Likewise, through the diagnostic test it would have been possible to identify missing elements to integrate (e.g. a course focused on advanced Academic Writing). On the other hand, the organization of the courses would have required to be restructured in time and distribution (e.g. more demanding courses would have been taught separately). All of these findings have important implications for the planning of similar professional development courses offered by the English Department at UNAN. The following are comments by both the trainers and teachers regarding the organizational constraints of the program.

- *Trainers' perceptions*
 - *More time was needed to cover some more examples and to listen to the teachers' doubts about their final research. They needed more time to explain the whole process in Action Research. (Action Research in the Classroom-Remedial plan on analysis of qualitative data)*
 - *One of the main problems was the limited number of hours for two components, which made it difficult to cover all the material planned. (Techniques and Strategies in TEFL I: Reading and Writing).*
 - *I must admit participants didn't have enough time to reflect on the concepts which were quite new to them (Teaching EFL with a Learner-centered approach).*
 - *They are full time teachers and most of them did not have time to read on their own. This made difficult for them to do the assignments and the readings at home (Techniques and Strategies in TEFL I: Reading and Writing).*
- *Teachers' perceptions*
 - *The time to search and apply the different aspects learnt in the module. The module was too short and sometimes we didn't have enough time to look for everything on the Internet (Technological Resources in TEFL).*
 - *I needed more time to study and read all the information as there were too many assignments (Principles and Methods in TEFL).*
 - *This course was very interesting for me...but time was against me because I had to read a lot of information and most of the time I couldn't do it (Principles and Methods in TEFL).*
 - *Two classes in a row were tiring and I was easily taken out of focus (Teaching EFL with a Learner-centered Approach and Lesson Planning in TEFL).*
 - *The short time was the problem because the professors brought us very important information and I couldn't read it all during that time (Learner-centered approach, Lesson Planning in TEFL).*
 - *I think that the material was very important, but the short time to read was the main problem because we had many assessments (Teaching EFL with a Learner-centered Approach).*
 - *Not enough time to develop all the assignments with ease. Plenty of materials to read... It was sort of difficult for me to hand in the homework on due time (Principles and Methods in TEFL and Techniques and Strategies in TEFL I: Reading and Writing).*
 - *There wasn't a good distribution of time for the development of the course. We didn't have enough practice. (Techniques and Strategies in TEFL II: Listening and Speaking)*

- *Contextual problems*

As discussed above, the situational context influenced on the teachers' background knowledge. Their PRESET Program had not given them all the necessary tools to address the content areas in their INSET Program more efficiently. Problems posed by context were described by the teachers in the self-evaluation of their AR projects. Nonetheless, the findings in the general evaluation indicated that these problems were present all throughout the development of their training program. On the whole, the teachers revealed lack of access to resources in the classroom (computers, internet, and projectors), economic problems, (transportation, materials, Internet service) institutional policies, time constraints and workload. Workload, particularly, was an ever-existing constraint that did not allow teachers to fulfill their academic tasks properly (assignments in most cases were delayed) and/or be consistent with their attendance (there were problems with missing sessions in all courses). What would seem to be a lack of teacher commitment was, in fact, the interfering influence of context on the teachers' performance (see teachers' workload in session 3.6.7). Other issues raised by context were socio-cultural factors such as the lack of reading and writing habits. As one of the trainers stated, most teachers didn't have "the culture of reading". All of these contextual factors combined with the organizational problems described above affected the teachers' performance significantly as their potentialities were not fully exploited. This is revealed by the following teachers' comments.

- *I'd like to have the opportunity to apply what I learn along the course in my classes, but I think that we don't have access to overhead projectors. Students also need Internet access (Technological Resources in TEFL).*
- *Not being able to put into practice certain methods as they demand the use of specific tools not available in the classrooms or schools (Principles and Methods in TEFL).*
- *Attendance was a difficulty because I had to commute every day and I couldn't afford it (Lesson Planning in TEFL).*
- *The time I had to hand in the assignments was one of the problems I faced. The extensive assignment we had to create was simultaneous with the tasks of my work at the university (Planning Materials and Units of Work in TEFL).*
- *It is difficult to create a student centered atmosphere when students (and your boss) are used to a particular traditional way of teaching (Teaching EFL with a Learner-centered Approach).*
- *Due to my absences because of workload I didn't get too much knowledge (Planning Materials and Units of Work in TEFL).*

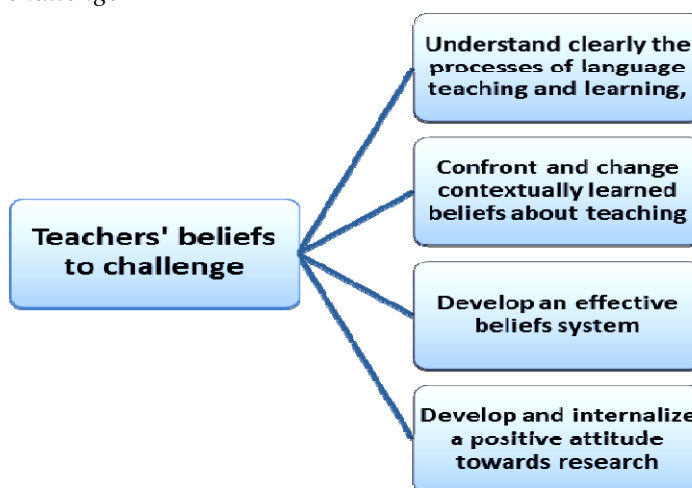
- *The biggest trouble that I faced was...time. I was so charged with my professional duties as a teacher that I hardly had time to plan and search for my project (Action Research in the Classroom).*
- *I could have done better if I had not had too much pressure of an overwhelming group of duties at work (Action Research in the Classroom).*
- *At first I was doing everything on time, but then as the course developed I was getting behind due to overload of work (Lesson Planning in TEFL).*
- *I learned many things in this module but I feel I didn't do my best, because of the reading part. It was difficult to find the moment to do it and I was kind of lazy, I admit it. (Principles and Methods in TEFL and Lesson Planning in TEFL)*

4.2.5 Teacher beliefs to challenge

Something important identified with the trainers' help were the original state of the teachers' beliefs. This was a significant step because each of the trainers had access to the teachers' ways of thinking within the scope of their training area. Their perception certainly shed light on the state of the teachers' beliefs prior to stage three; the guided process to teacher reflection. The information was helpful to focus the process of reflection with a clearer idea of the beliefs that the teachers needed to challenge. In addition, the trainers' perception confirmed and validated the findings about the teachers' beliefs that emerged in stage two. The trainers' insights and suggestions of what the teachers needed to improve, change, and/or refine in their beliefs system are presented in figure 36 below.

Figure 36

Teacher beliefs to challenge



- *Understand clearly the processes of language teaching and learning*

From the trainers' perception it was necessary that the teachers had full understanding of the process of language learning, taking into account their context and the kinds of limitations and conditions it posed to language instruction. Along with this understanding, the teachers needed to realize what effective language teaching involved, and how their own characteristics (qualities, roles, abilities) as language teachers contributed to such effectiveness. Likewise, it was important that they increased their critical awareness of other important aspects such as students' roles and the role of the teaching materials. Evidence of the understanding of these complexities was given during the guided process to reflection, which reveals that the guidance had been positive (see section 3.4.2 in stage three). The perception of the teachers about their achievements also revealed significant awareness in this regard (see 4.3.7 below). The trainers' views about this issue are presented below.

- *One very important idea most language teachers are urged to understand is what learning a foreign language entails; for example clear ideas about how a foreign language is internalized in a context where the target language is not spoken.*
 - *They need to understand that a good textbook does not make a good classroom, a good teacher with a nice group of students does. They need to be more creative, innovative and resourceful. They need to be more independent, and self-confident. Creating their own class with their own material and activities, is sometimes much better than just following the order of activities in a given textbook.*
- *Confront and change contextually conditioned beliefs and actions*

The trainers also perceived as necessary that the teachers confronted and changed the beliefs and actions resulting of the contact with their situational context (e.g. traditional teacher-centered approaches and grammar based lessons). In the original exploration it was confirmed the powerful influence of context on the teachers' views which conditioned and limited their performance, compelling them to teach traditional lessons (the teachers perceived little room for improvement: e.g. lack of resources). Again, the trainers' identification of this need contributed to continue to make efforts to help teachers achieve consistency (particularly, their suggestion that the teachers' beliefs should be confronted). As discussed in section 3.4 above, the learned beliefs about teaching and learning were an issue that provoked significant teacher reflection, particularly the use of a traditional methodology. Thus, they realized the lack of consistency between their teaching beliefs and their performance in the classroom. Evidence of change in this regard is found throughout the guided process to reflection. Likewise, in their achievements as a result of exposure to the program (see section 4.3.7 below) the teachers acknowledged that their teaching beliefs (formerly

conditioned by context), had evolved to allow for more innovative and modern views. In the second cycle of classroom observations it was made evident how most teachers were trying to adapt their approaches to both satisfy their students' needs and deal with contextual challenges effectively (see 4.1.5 above). The following trainers' comments show their perception about this issue.

- *For what I have noticed, they should be more student-centered when planning a lesson. My feeling was that to them the main point was the lesson itself and not the students and that in many cases (though not in all of them!) the lesson was mainly grammar based.*
- *Another difficulty was the traditional methodology participants are used to in their language lessons. Though most of them have a clear idea of the meaning of traditional teaching- which they relate to teaching grammar, many of the participants have a mistaken idea of what the concept "communicative" means as they tend to understand it mainly to including role-plays and discussions in their lessons. They generally forget the wider meaningful component of this type of methodology.*
- *It's not an easy question as teachers create their own beliefs along their teaching careers according to the type of learners they have and the learning environment they are immersed in. Theoretical proposals can look interesting but difficult to implement due to the former constrains.*
- *Their position that the use of technology for language teaching is too far for them to reach. The world is changing too fast and it may seem too far away now but they must be ready to use it effectively when the time will come.*
- *The teachers need to have opportunities in which they can confront their theories in language teaching with their real practice for the purposes of reflection.*
- *Develop an effective beliefs system*

Along with understanding and confronting their beliefs and actions, it was necessary that the teachers developed an effective beliefs system of their own. Thus, for such a system to be effective it had to be well-informed, experiential and based on reflection. This would allow them to approach the number of issues of their teaching practice effectively (e.g. realize that language teaching methods should not be used blindly, or analyze textbooks critically). In this process, the teachers needed to develop their own language learning theories and practical knowledge taking into account their style, their students and the context. For this purpose, their open-mindedness and natural inclination towards learning and collaboration were perceived as significant advantages. Changes in this regard were identified in the teachers' guided process to reflection, the second cycle of classroom observations, and the teachers' achievements in section 4.3.7 below. The following

trainers' comments reveal how they viewed the teachers' development of an effective beliefs system.

- *The teachers need to realize that language methods are for them to use, adapt and change for their own purposes; that no methodology or approach should be integrated unreflectively into the classroom.*
- *The teachers need to go on developing their “own” informed language teaching-learning theory. This will allow them to widen and consolidate their knowledge base which, in turn, will help them to develop their own teaching style, and become more mature teachers.*
- *They are young, they lack ideas about TEFL in general...they need to establish a kind of distance from the textbook...be very reflexive asking themselves a number of important relevant questions about the usefulness and relevance of textbooks.*
- *They need to continue reading and getting more relevant information about theories on second language acquisition and effective (and ineffective) teaching methodologies.*
- *Use the strategies and techniques in real practice so they can assess their effectiveness.*
- *Develop and internalize a positive attitude towards research*

Finally, there were suggestions about the importance of structured reflection through Action Research. The suggestions in this regard were that the teachers should “demystify” the process and develop an open attitude towards it. As discussed, the guided process to teacher reflection led to the design, implementation and evaluation of their research projects. Nevertheless, it was a difficult process as the teachers had not had any prior experience in the area. Evidence of openness to research was provided by the teachers' self-evaluation after the presentation of their research projects. Additionally, in the achievements as a result of the program (4.2.7), and in the follow up suggested (4.2.8) the teachers provided further evidence of their open attitude. The following trainers' comments give evidence of the suggested change.

- *It is necessary that they discard the idea that doing research is not for them. They need to demystify the term research and give it a more personal, relevant and practical connotation. The main purpose of research is to serve as means of reflecting. The teacher as researcher is certainly a necessary and relevant role of the modern language teacher.*
- *Overcome the fear to do research. Abandon the idea that AR belong to experts. It is a matter that fits into educators who really want to obtain positive results in their classrooms. They need to experience the practical and beneficial side of AR in their daily teaching practice.*

4.2.6 Action Research areas suggested

In addition to the suggestions to develop a receptive attitude towards research, the trainers provided valuable insights about the potential areas in which the projects could be carried out within the scope of their particular training area. The following table shows these suggestions along with the actual projects that took them into account.

Table 43

Action Research suggested by trainers and actual research projects

TRAINING AREA	ACTION RESEARCH SUGGESTED BY TRAINERS	ACTUAL PROJECTS THAT INTEGRATED THE SUGGESTION	FURTHER COMMENTS
Principles in language teaching	<i>Focus on language learning/teaching beliefs in light of effective practice at any stage (planning, implementation and evaluation) of lessons and in any area.</i>	<i>All teachers confronted their teaching beliefs in their particular research area.</i>	The guided process to reflection (<i>introspection</i> and <i>collaboration</i>) fostered this process.
Use of technology	<i>Know how to look for reliable sources in the internet for the research projects. Develop materials with the aid of computers. Computers and language teaching</i>	<i>All teachers use technology for their projects (search bibliography on the internet, designed didactic materials, wrote their research projects, presented their research project</i>	No teacher undertook a project focused on analyzing the use of computers in language teaching per se.
Reading and writing	<i>How to improve students' abilities for writing through the process/product approach. Develop writing and reading materials in the didactic units they will design.</i>	<i>Only two projects; one of them in writing and another in reading.</i>	The latter was one of the projects not fulfilled.
Speaking and listening	<i>Assess controlled activities to improve student listening and speaking skills. Integrate and assess pre, while and post listening and speaking activities taking into account students' needs, interests, and levels.</i>	<i>Generally, most projects focused on speaking activities of one kind or another (communicative activities, vocabulary learning, pronunciation)</i>	Few projects integrated the kinds of activities suggested though (pre, while and post)
Teaching with a learner-centered Approach	<i>Analyze the different aspects to be changed in a particular situation in light of the principles of a learner-centered curriculum Apply some of the principles of a learner-centered curriculum with a specific group of students and analyze its effectiveness.</i>	<i>All projects. The teachers integrated the principles of a learner-centered approach (created materials adapted for students' needs and interest, integrated motivating activities, took into account students' limitations and problems)</i>	Nonetheless, no teacher focused on the learner-centered approach per se, as suggested by the trainer.
Lesson Planning	<i>Compare the results obtained in a "traditional" class with the results</i>	<i>All teachers focused attention on their lesson plans mainly</i>	There was no such comparison, but all teachers

	<i>obtained in a class in which the teacher uses a different approach (e.g. learner-centered planning) where the focus is not on the grammar point.</i>	<i>on the activities suggested to address their particular research project.</i>	put forward the importance of their lesson planning and integrated innovations
Teaching materials	<i>Explore the new sources of materials currently available (TEFL sites on the web), Explore good classroom techniques for sequencing and pacing different types of activities and integrate them into a lesson plan. Undertake more comparative views of textbooks.</i>	<i>All projects. The teachers designed and adapted materials for their particular projects.</i>	Nonetheless, there were limitations identified by the evaluators about the sources of the activities suggested. This indicates that there might have been a mixture of materials created by the teachers, materials adapted and materials adopted.
AR in the classroom	<i>Take into account the number of issues raised in the initial exploration of their classroom performance to plan a change or an innovation in their teaching and give it a follow up.</i>	<i>All teachers' projects provided evidence of having taken into account the initial exploration for their projects.</i>	Evidence of this was provided during the guided process to teacher reflection in stage three

As shown, the trainers provided valuable insights about the potential areas in which the projects could be carried out. In most cases, the teachers addressed the research issue suggested by the trainers in their research projects. This was the case of the suggestions to confront teaching beliefs, use technology, approach lesson planning and design didactic materials. In the case of Action Research, the guided process to reflection in stage three provided definite evidence of how teachers took into account the issues that emerged in the process. In the case of Reading and Writing only two projects focused on these skills (one of them not finished) and in Listening and Speaking most teachers tackled the issue of oral communication, but no project was focused on the stages of listening. An important finding here is that the teachers focused their research projects from a practical side but not deepening too much on the target area. For example, the trainer suggested applying the principles of learner-centeredness and analyzing its effectiveness with a particular group of students. The principles were used in the sense that the teachers took into account the students in a number of ways, their interest, motivation, background knowledge, but no analysis was carried out on the principles of the approach per se. Another example is the issue of materials design. The trainer suggested comparative views of textbooks, which did not take place. The teachers used the knowledge in this area to integrate, adapt or create activities addressed to their research problem. This cautious way of addressing research was, no doubt, the result of novelty as it was the first time they carried out research. The teachers did not feel confident enough

as to pursue research from a deeper perspective. They preferred the practical side since their research skills were emerging.

4.2.7 Main achievements

The teachers' strengths described in 4.2.3 above, were optimal grounds for the development of the program. Because of such strengths a number of positive outcomes resulted of the teachers' interaction with the training courses, which have been discussed in previous stages. The influence of the training was particularly perceived during the guided process to reflection that took place in stage three, and in the final classroom observations. The achievements, according to the teachers' views, concentrated primarily on the target areas of the program.

a) *Enhancement of skills in using technology for teaching purposes*

The teachers identified as an achievement the skills acquired through the course *Technological Resources in TEFL*, which was the first course of the plan. It was closely related to the course *Planning Materials and Units of Work*, as the computer skills the teachers learnt were useful for the materials designed in this course. These skills were also useful for the other courses that involved assignments to be done and sent through computers. The teachers valued the program as an optimal opportunity to enhance their knowledge on how to use technological resources, such as computers and the Internet for teaching purposes. For all of them the course came to fulfill one of their most significant training needs, as they had never taken a course of this kind.

These resources were perceived as very valuable and practical to support their teaching practice through the immediate benefits (e.g. the variety of didactic resources available on the web for their lessons). Once again, the teachers revealed their concern for students by stating that the course was useful to integrate technology into their lessons, making them more interesting, varied and dynamic to promote their learning. Thus, the teachers with access to equipment started to present lessons using visual and auditory information through power point presentations. Some others innovated by assigning tasks for students to complete and give a follow up on the Internet. Some of the teachers already had computer skills, but for some others the course provided them with the necessary basic knowledge to start using technology as a regular professional instrument. Nonetheless, all teachers without exception stated they benefited enormously from having updated their knowledge in the use of these resources for language instruction. The following teachers' comments highlight these benefits.

- *I never received this kind of course; I got to learn to use power point and create some activities to enhance the students' learning process.*
- *I learned that some effort and technological knowledge are more than enough to create digital materials, appropriate to student needs.*

- *I can use technology to teach even if I don't have a computer in my school. I create the opportunities to do that.*
- *Now I know the importance of these resources in the process of teaching a language as the course has helped me to use a variety of materials available on the web.*
- *We teachers need to be well prepared to bring more knowledge and resources so that students learn more...all these tools helped me increase the motivation of my students.*
- *I learned that I have the chance to improve my lessons through the use of technological resources to offer students an interesting language learning process.*
- *I work with students and I assign them homework for them to work on the Internet. I found some information and I give them the webpages where they should work and investigate some specific information to make a presentation in class.*
- *It was really an important means for me to enhance my knowledge on the use of technology and its effective use on the design of instructional materials for my classes.*
- *The fact that I learned how to use computers and the internet together for educational purposes, mainly in the form of online-instructional guides for students.*

b) Development of strategies and techniques for teaching the language areas

Another achievement was related to their ability to teach the language skills and sub-skills. On the whole, it was perceived that the program had been useful for the teachers to concentrate, refine, enhance and improve the knowledge they acquired in their PRESET program for teaching the language skills. The development of this ability was mostly achieved through two courses of the plan: *Techniques and Strategies in TEFL I: Reading and Writing and Techniques and Strategies in TEFL II: Speaking and Listening*. Nonetheless, other courses focused on providing the teachers with effective tools for this purpose were, *Principles and Methods in TEFL, Teaching EFL with a Learner-centered Approach, Lesson Planning in TEFL and Planning Materials and Units of Work in TEFL*. On the other hand, the AR projects provided the teachers with the opportunity to put together all of this knowledge at a very practical level.

On the whole, the teachers acknowledged having acquired practical tools for language teaching at the level of planning, implementation, and evaluation. In this regard, common general features were teaching the language skills in an integrated way, and being able to promote student interaction in class. Most teachers felt they could handle the teaching of the skills using guidelines, samples, patterns or a structure to guide students' learning. Another common feature was their awareness that the language skills should be developed gradually, and the importance of well-planned and varied activities to do so. Thus, a great deal of attention was given to the integration of different stages or steps to provide the students with effective practice opportunities to develop the

skills. As discussed in section 4.1.4 above, the classroom observations provided evidence of this improvement in the teachers' teaching approaches.

On the other hand, aspects of learner-centeredness were also present. The teachers stated they tried to focus the lessons on their students, activating their background knowledge by providing them with relevant and interesting information based on real life. The classroom observations provided evidence of the teachers' efforts to connect class content to student reality (see 4.1.5 above) Likewise, the teachers highlighted having enhanced their knowledge regarding evaluation and assessment of the language skills and sub-skills. All of these features of teaching the language skills resemble the characteristics of effective language teaching, as described in the literature review (see lit. review 3.6.1-3.6.4). Finally, as an added value of the training program the teachers' also perceived improvement in the development of their own language ability (e.g. making effective presentations, developing better speech skills, and finding a different dimension in readings).

- *I could refresh the techniques of a better reading and writing teaching process...we put into practice all I had learnt during the Major.*
- *The variety of techniques and strategies that we studied in this course and how we can apply them in the classroom. I am much more concerned with how to develop these activities with my students.*
- *I learned many techniques about the implementation of interaction in class to effectively develop the different skills of the language.*
- *I realized that reading has to be well prepared so that students get to develop their skills. Writing has to be guided and clear for students.*
- *The importance of providing students with good samples and a structure they can follow when making presentations.*
- *I learned that whenever we apply an activity we have to follow a specific pattern so that students don't get lost.*
- *Speaking has to be developed gradually...and for that well planned activities are more than necessary.*
- *I can create authentic listening activities and guide my students through the pre, while and post listening stages.*
- *How to select the appropriate readings to use in class...what kind of activities we can use with students...so reading activities would be interesting and also students learn more about the topic...but the teachers needs to use interesting information based on real life.*

- *The most important thing was about the techniques and strategies that we can use to have a better reading class. It helped me become more dynamic and creative in the classroom regarding the teaching of reading and writing activities.*
- *It helped me to improve the management of students' speaking skills...without interrupting their motivation... and how to correct their mistakes choosing the right moment.*
- *It also made me change my opinion about when and how to correct students' errors...if the rest of the class can interact to help doing it.*
- *Now I am able to offer my students different listening activities and know how to evaluate them.*
- *I learned new dynamics to be applied in class regarding error correction and the effective presentation of vocabulary. I also learned how to apply unconventional strategies to teach effective listening comprehension and oral expression skills*
- *This module was useful for me because I improved my speaking skills and learned how to present different kinds of information.*
- *To find the other face of reading...because everybody thinks that reading is boring...but when we see it from a different point of view it could be interesting...so I started to find it interesting.*

c) *Development of reflective skills*

The teachers revealed having developed their reflective skills in important areas of their teaching practice. Thus, the development focused on: *a principled view of teaching, awareness of student-related factors and awareness of their own role as teachers.*

- *A principled view of teaching*

The teachers' insights provided evidence of having gained a more mature, well-informed and professional view regarding language teaching. The courses *par excellence* to achieve this aim were *Principles and Methods in TEFL* and *Action Research in the Classroom*. However, given the interrelated nature of the plan, all the other courses contributed to achieving this aim. On the whole, the teachers acknowledged having gained awareness of how to improve the process of TEFL by using a principled approach. Interestingly enough, their insights focused on having developed a critical perspective of the different methods in context. Within this view, important contextual factors, such as the kind of students, the resources available, and the nature of instruction were all considered key elements to take into account when selecting the teaching method.

On the other hand, the teachers stated that they considered methods as practical tools available to improve their classes, provide variety, and improve their strategies and techniques in the classroom. They acknowledged having enhanced their knowledge on the application of methods,

their principles, objectives, kinds of activities, and the like. Furthermore, the teachers' previous own assumptions and traditional views regarding teaching were brought into play. Thus, it seemed that they had internalized the importance of not following particular teaching views in an unthinking and routinely way.

Although the teachers learned theoretical aspects, they did so in practice as they had multiple opportunities to test the effectiveness of the ideas at the classroom level. Thus, it was clear that the teachers had increased their awareness of the complexity of language teaching. Signs of this awareness were given at the time of the teachers' guided process to reflection (see section 3.4.2). In addition, the teachers once more revealed their open and positive attitude towards making significant changes in the classroom (the teachers provided evidence of these changes in the classroom observations described in 4.1). This principled view of teaching, which was perceived as a sign of professional development, contrasted significantly with their original views before the plan of action. All the insights provided by the teachers here resembled the conditions for teacher change discussed in the literature review. According to these views the teachers have to be *open-minded, motivated, and well informed* (see lit. review 3.7.1).

- *I learned that there is plenty of research available in the field of methods to count on whenever we need to develop professionally in this area.*
- *I learned to develop a critical perspective on the different methods considering their advantages and disadvantages of their application in the Nicaraguan context.*
- *The correct application of methods their objectives and activities and in what way, moment, area and environment we can apply them...we can have the method, but it could not be good for the kind of students we have, or the class we are going to develop.*
- *I learned to recognize the variety of methods used in the acquisition process of English*
- *...it is not a rule we have to follow because we can adapt activities from different methods.*
- *I increased my knowledge of key terms in the area of TEFL and distinguish when and why use particular methods or approaches.*
- *The course helped me look over the traditional methods and become a decision maker on their use in order to be more effective in the class.*
- *I realized that I was using some of the methodologies empirically and I didn't know it. Now I can use different methodologies to bring variety into my classes so that students feel more motivated.*
- *The different types of methods we can use in the classroom. The concept of method, principles, activities... and...how our beliefs are developed into the classroom.*

- *I learned that all of us teachers have assumptions about teaching. It is just to analyze their effectiveness.*
 - *The strengths and achievements I got in this course were that I became aware of my role as a teacher, what guides my actions in the classroom and how to do things differently.*
 - *I learned about methods and how to apply them in my classrooms and I became more conscious of my own reality.*
 - *I learned that language is complex and when it comes to the teaching craft not everything can be taken for granted. We have the free will to teach our way.*
- *Awareness of student-related factors*

The teachers also revealed having increased their awareness of student-related factors. This achievement is not surprising, as the teachers had showed high concern for student learning at all times throughout the development of this study. Two courses strongly focused on this issue were *Teaching EFL with a Learner-centered Approach* and *Lesson Planning in TEFL*, but the other courses of the plan supported the views within their own particular focus. The teachers' awareness of the complexities of learning a foreign language stated above is directly connected with their new ways of understanding students. Moreover, they recognized the need to analyze students in order to identify their aptitudes and plan the possible activities for them to learn better. In this regard, they highlighted the importance of providing students with more learner-centered activities, as opposed to the traditional teacher-centered ones identified in the initial exploration of their teaching practice.

The teachers provided evidence of having internalized important insights regarding learner-centered approaches. First of all, their beliefs that students are different and therefore they don't learn the same way. Teaching should concentrate on helping them learn taking into account a number of factors, such as their ages, needs, and learning styles. Concerning students' differences, the teachers put forward the theory of multiple intelligences which had triggered their reflection on students' characteristics and on the importance of providing them with more meaningful language instruction. Similarly, the teachers acknowledged the relevance of affective factors, such as motivation, attitudes and personality traits.

On the other hand, they recognized that students are not empty vessels to be filled with knowledge. Rather, their previous experience can serve as a powerful means for them to continue to construct their knowledge; hence the importance of taking into account student background knowledge as a teaching strategy. Within the view of learner-centeredness, the teachers also pointed out students' responsibility and participation in their own learning process. Thus, they stated their intention to enhance students' capabilities so that they can build up their own knowledge. Evidence

of the teachers' efforts at the classroom level is provided in 4.1.5 above. The following teachers' insights reveal their views regarding student-related factors.

- *This course strengthened my skills to select appropriate activities in order to use a learner-centered approach and not a traditional centered-approach in my classroom.*
 - *I learned that students are the most important actors...and that the classes should be learner-centered in order to increase students' motivation and performance.*
 - *When teaching you should concentrate your efforts on making students the principal part of the process.*
 - *I became more aware of my students needs and conscious of their difficulties and of ways of helping them.*
 - *I was a little bit more focused on the program...I wanted to cover all the material and now I do it but according to the student learning pace, as I know that there are different learning styles and a variety of intelligences.*
 - *I realized, though I knew it before, that learners are different and do not learn in the same way. Thus, my teaching has to be centered on the students and do everything thinking on them.*
 - *I improved my lessons having in mind student problems and needs...I also think of appropriate activities for students who are slow and others who are quick at doing them.*
 - *Also I reinforced some important aspects related to the students, such as motivation, different kinds of students, their strategies and learning styles, and their individual capabilities to learn the language*
 - *It is very important the use of teaching techniques and strategies that help to relate language learning with student life and experiences.*
- *Awareness of their own teaching performance*

The teachers' awareness of student-related factors logically went hand in hand with the awareness of their own performance as language teachers. Issues regarding effective teacher roles and performance were approached in all the courses of the program, each focused on its particular target area. Overall, the efforts served their intended purpose. The teachers had become more conscious that taking into account students' learning needs necessarily involved a more proactive participation from them. Thus, they recognized the importance of qualities, such as motivation, flexibility and creativity in the process. They also acknowledged having become more aware of their teaching style and preferences. As they recurrently did throughout the development of this study, the teachers took complete responsibility for student learning. Nonetheless, this time they had a more professional, determined and informed way of approaching the issue. They provided

evidence of having gained fresher insights regarding their teaching actions as they openly admitted their limitations. What is more, the teachers recognized the influence that their beliefs and attitudes exerted on their teaching practice, and provided evidence of serious attempts to test their effectiveness for the sake of student learning. Once again, a sense of professionalism was perceived as the teachers put forward their social role as change agents, and their initiative and commitment to improve their professional skills. The following insights provide evidence of the teachers' self-awareness of their performance.

- *...because the role of the teacher is to provide as much positive practice as possible by talking to the students in English, by exposing them to a range of...materials in the classroom*
- *I'm now more aware of the importance of the new roles of the teacher in a student-centered classroom. Moreover, I learned different roles to be applied in a learner-centered environment.*
- *I learned that it is necessary to allow the students to build their own knowledge and to recognize the real function of the teacher in doing that.*
- *Now I am aware of the fact that teachers are the main source of motivation and that all difficulties in a classroom can be overcome if we as teachers follow the constant process of reflection.*
- *The course has allowed me to develop activities to motivate my students to have a more active role through activities that promote their participation.*
- *I learnt to become flexible and forget about having the control of the class. Students can do it, too.*
- *Most of the time teachers can be creative without even knowing that they can be like that... we realize how much we can offer to the students in the creation of new and motivating activities to improve our classes*
- *The most important thing I got to know is my teaching style... I got to know more about what I like to do and now I know how to do it in a better way.*
- *I became more conscious of my job and the course provided me with the guidelines for reflecting...I began to reflect on the way I used to teach and be more aware of my mistakes.*
- *I became more reflective to see not only students' problems, but my own problems and limitations as well, and if necessary make changes. In this way we can try to help students to be better learners and at the same time we develop our teaching in a better way.*
- *Because I started thinking on my teaching and how my students had been affected by it. So now I have become a supporting teacher.*

- *The achievement I got was the awareness of my own role as teacher...the beliefs that guide my actions in the classroom, and how to do things differently.*
- *My perception as a teacher has gone beyond what I thought a teacher was. Now I am positive when it comes to deal with students and I feel myself committed to my profession.*
- *It enlarged my reflection tools on how important the teacher role is as a change agent inside the classroom to improve the teaching and learning process of EFL.*

d) *Improvement in the approaches to lesson planning*

Lesson planning was another area that the teachers acknowledged having improved as a result of their training. This was clearly perceived in the classroom observations; particularly in the teaching process of the language skills and sub-skills (see 4.1.4 above). This is due to several factors. First of all, planning was one of the teachers' strength because of their conditions as in-service teachers (strength that was identified by the trainers in 4.3.3 above). Secondly, the course *Lesson Planning in TEFL* provided the teachers with fresh and relevant insights using a learner-centered approach, which helped the teachers to increase their knowledge and improve their skills in planning. Finally, the teachers had the opportunity to see the immediate benefits and results at the classroom level. All of these factors combined resulted in significant achievements in the teachers' approaches to lesson planning. On the whole the teachers reported that the process had helped them to: increase their awareness of *the significance of lesson planning*, view *planning as a creative process*, identify *its elements and structure*, and realize that *planning should be learner-centered*. The following comments give evidence of each of these achievements

- *The significance of lesson planning*

- *I learned the importance of lesson planning since it guides the process of teaching a lesson from the beginning to the end.*
- *The most important thing I learned in this module was that in a lesson plan the objectives should not revolve around grammar, but around student real use of the language.*
- *The most important thing I learned was about the implication of lesson planning in TEFL and the importance of having one for your everyday lesson.*
- *I realized the real importance and usefulness of the lesson plan for both teachers and students.*

- *Lesson planning as a creative process*

- *I know now that I have different options, not just one for teaching my lessons. I learned a variety of ways for lesson plan organization.*

- *It helped me grow as a professional because I learnt to analyze critically many different formats of lesson planning and give my opinion on how to make them more valuable and helpful for students.*
- *When having a well-structured lesson plan, classes are more successful...the lesson plan is my guidance...it is flexible, adaptable and can be improved every day.*
- *I was able to confirm my thoughts that there is no approach to lesson planning to set as the only one to follow.*
- *I got familiar with different formats for lesson planning, which are relevant and adapted to own needs and teaching style.*
- *The elements and structure of lesson planning*
 - *I reinforced my basic knowledge about planning and got to clarify initial doubts regarding the different phases of the lesson and how to make transitions from one phase to the other paying special attention to students' interest and time available.*
 - *Now I try to follow the steps of a better lesson plan. I'm very careful with the activities and transitions...also with the objectives and methodology for each class.*
 - *The most important thing was to be able to develop my own lesson plan taking into account all the necessary elements and procedures.*
 - *I improved the procedures on how to integrate logically sequenced activities. I also increased my knowledge of the main points in a lesson.*
 - *The most important thing that I learned in this module was how to identify and select sources of motivation because when you plan you need to include this important aspect*
 - *In my plans now I take into consideration important aspects as timing, pacing, progression, etc. for the effectiveness of activities when teaching a class.*
- *Lesson planning should be student-centered*
 - *This course helped me in different ways. First in my teaching plans when I plan activities I take into account students' learning styles...I also understood that the student not the teacher is the center of the class.*
 - *When I am planning my class I try to focus my objectives in my students. I became more aware of my students needs and conscious of their difficulties and of ways of helping them.*
 - *Be more aware of students' need when planning because a good lesson requires good planning. This also makes me a resourceful teacher*
 - *I became more critical when I plan my lessons and I had to put all the activities in such a way as to catch students' attention*

- *Students are the focus in our lessons, so we need to think about them when planning and when using activities.*
- *A lesson plan must be well structured and take into account students learning needs at all times.*
- *I got to know that I have to plan taking into account every student personality and not to plan my class as a whole. Honestly speaking, I had never thought before on activities for the weak students, and now I do.*

e) *Improvement in skills for developing teaching materials*

Another significant achievement was focused on the issue of developing materials for language instruction. Although there were problems of time and workload that affected the teachers' performance, there were improvements in the area. The teachers identified this improvement making it clear that they had gained enough knowledge and skills in the area as to continue to improve independently. The main course that addressed this issue was *Planning materials and Units of Work*. This course was closely supported by two other courses *Lesson Planning and Technological Resources*. The other courses also contributed to the improvement of teachers' knowledge on teaching materials, from their own specific focus. This was particularly true in the case of the course *Action Research in the Classroom*, in which the teachers had to create, design, adapt and integrate materials to address their particular research problem. The teachers' achievements in this area were focused on *a critical view of textbooks, approaches for adapting and designing materials, and skills in developing adequate materials for student learning*. This is revealed by the following teachers' insights.

- *A critical view of textbooks*

- *I realize that not everything in the book has to be taught and that activities can be adapted according to the available material and to students' needs and interest...I learn not to rely just on books.*
- *There's no good or perfect book for a class group... it is up to the teacher to make the most out of it.*
- *I got to know how to find the weaknesses and strengths of a book and add to a unit what is missing.*
- *I got to know that there is no perfect book...it is the teacher who has to mold it so students get to develop.*
- *I improved in different ways because now I know in which parts I need to include or reinforce some activities in my book.*

- *Approaches for adapting and designing materials*
 - *The most important thing was how to prepare a teaching unit using a coursebook...with this model I learnt more about the textbook structure and how to adapt it at three different levels: the level of activity, the level of the units, and the syllabus level.*
 - *Planning materials is a little bit more difficult than it seems. Three steps need to be followed if new activities are to be incorporated in the textbook.*
 - *I learned to design my own instructional material in a creative and effective way. I also learned to be very resourceful to work with worksheets and designing complementary materials using visual resources such as magazines, photos and newspapers as a means of instruction.*
 - *I learned how creative a teacher can be when planning his/her lessons...how to edit, replace, change or eliminate irrelevant activities.*
 - *Thanks to this course now I have more critical thinking skills and know how to make changes, adjustments and modifications to materials*
 - *This course demonstrated me that I have the freedom to choose and change activities, so that my class can have a better outcome.*
 - *Through this course I can design didactic units on my own. Now I do not follow a unit...what I do is that I study the unit and see...what is missing to work with it. It helped me to create my own activities according to my own needs*
- *Skills in developing student-centered materials*
 - *I learnt how important it is for the teacher to create didactic materials taking into account student conditions.*
 - *I learned how important it is when selecting materials and planning what is to be taught taking into account types of learning styles and students' interest.*
 - *I put into practice the didactic unit in the classroom and it gave me a great experience with my students.*
 - *Teachers should put their efforts in making students the principal part of the process and in preparing adequate activities and didactic materials for students. It's not easy, but it's worthwhile.*
 - *I got to realize the importance that we as teachers have in creating didactic materials taking into account the students' conditions.*
 - *Most of the time the teachers can be creative without even knowing they can be like that. And when we work on designing didactic materials we realize how much we can offer to our students in the creation of new and motivating activities to improve our classes.*

- *I know how to plan a course, organize information, adapt materials and be selective. I learned the importance of selecting and planning what is to be taught, taking into account types of learning styles and students' interest.*

f) *Development of a receptive attitude towards Action Research*

Developing a receptive attitude towards Action Research was the core objective of the course *Action Research in the Classroom*. The other courses of the program contributed to this aim by providing the teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge to carry out their research projects. As described in section 3.1 above, the process involved guidance and support through two important scaffolding processes: *introspection* and *collaboration*. Although the teachers experienced a number of limitations (mainly posed by the situational context) when conducting their Action Research projects, they acknowledged the benefits of the process. In the teachers' self-evaluation right after the presentation of their projects, they provided evidence of having internalized the elements of AR and increased their reflection levels significantly. Thus, teachers' receptivity towards AR was perceived at that moment and was further confirmed in the general evaluation of the plan of action. The development of such an attitude, undoubtedly, emerged out of the immediate and direct benefits in solving the target problems of their research project. The teachers reported different kinds of changes as a result of having conducted AR (see section 3.8.5 above). This finding confirms the theory stated by Guskey (2002: 383) that changes in teacher beliefs only take place after they have corroborated the effectiveness of the particular innovation (see lit. review 3.7.2). The underlying objective, though, was to help teachers demystify the process of doing research and make it approachable for them so they could become more reflective teachers and effective change agents in their classrooms. On the whole, the teachers' receptive attitude towards AR was perceived in their insights that AR is *an important means of teacher professional improvement, a valuable tool for teacher reflection and a useful process for teacher change and improvement*.

- *AR as a means of teacher professional development*

- *I thought a teacher's role was only devoted to teaching and the roles attributed to this task (helper, prompter, facilitator, etc.). A teacher can also be a researcher. Now I know the big responsibility we have to go beyond our limits to help not only students but also our growth as professionals.*
- *AR widened my knowledge and skills to overcome situations I considered as problems or limitations. Now I see them as a way to grow professionally.*
- *The importance of AR in any working area, especially in teaching...how necessary it is for one's own professional development.*

- *I reinforced my professional practice and development in a meaningful way. I can say that now I am more prepared and conscious of problems in a classroom, but also I'm ready to face and overcome them putting into practice everything I learned.*
- *This course has helped me develop professionally because now I have another point of view about the real situation in my work and about the possibility to create better conditions for my students.*
- *AR as a valuable tool for teacher reflection*
 - *The process of reflection through AR helped me identify strengths and weakness in my teaching practice in order to try to avoid making the same mistakes.*
 - *Finding out how the teaching profession really works. The process of AR has made me reflect on my way of teaching and on the way I have thought it was the correct way.*
 - *How AR can help me identify problems and difficulties, find out what is happening with the learners' learning process, think about it and reflect on how I can overcome them to improve my teaching process.*
 - *Keep track of common problems by observing students' attitude. What to do in order to face the problem identified. Take actions to overcome problems. Put into practice what I was taught in the previous modules.*
- *AR as a useful process for teacher change and improvement*
 - *AR is not something that hinders my teaching but a tool that gives me the opportunity to change unwanted circumstances into productive feedback for the teacher and colleagues.*
 - *How AR can help to identify problems in the teaching process and what is happening with the learners and how to overcome such problems.*
 - *How to change my thinking... AR gave me tools to address the sense of powerlessness: to reflect, examine issues, solve problems and assess my process of decision making.*
 - *I learned to keep track of common problems in the classroom by observing students' attitude towards English and also what to do in order to face the problem identified. I learned that the important thing is to take actions to overcome problems.*
 - *A teacher can address the different problems in the classroom by conducting AR projects as a regular practice.*

4.2.8 Follow up to the Program

Continuing professional development after the Postgraduate Course was viewed by both trainers and teachers as a process involving different strategies such as *independent efforts through self-study, experiential knowledge through the teaching practice, collaboration with trainers, collaboration with peers, and the ongoing development of reflective skills.*

a) *Independent efforts through self-study,*

On the whole, both teachers and trainers shared the views that the follow up to the program required considerable personal efforts from the teachers themselves. Such efforts should involve both, their teaching skills in all target areas and their linguistic competence. Several ways of doing this were suggested. For instance, given the fact that there had not been enough time for them to go over the materials of the course thoroughly, it was highly recommended that they gave it a follow up independently through self-study. This was an effort that some of them had started to make to fulfill professional requirements. For example, one of the teachers admitted having read and revised the information provided as a preparation for a job interview at the English Department. Other efforts involved updating their knowledge through the search of relevant information on the web (e.g. technological tools for teaching EFL or activities for multiple intelligences) and the use of the library. This autonomous way of professional improvement was something familiar to the teachers. Nevertheless, they had gained knowledge on how to guide the efforts towards their specific professional needs. The following are the comments of both trainers and teachers in this regard.

- *Trainers' perception*

- *I would also recommend reading the bibliography provided carefully so that concepts as language learning strategies, learning styles, multiple intelligences or learner autonomy could be developed further and taken into consideration when planning language lessons.*
- *The teachers need to continue reading and getting more relevant information about theories on second language acquisition and effective (and ineffective) teaching methodologies.*
- *The teachers should devote time to study on their own. This will allow them to widen and consolidate their knowledge base which in turn will help them to develop their own teaching style and become more mature teachers.*
- *Use all the tools they can such as the Internet, the English laboratories, and the CRM if they want to become more effective teachers.*
- *It is important for them to explore the new sources of materials currently available TEFL sites on the web.*

- *Teachers' perceptions*

- *I feel I just need to review the material that was given to me and be critical about it. I don't think I have a lot of problems in this particular area. Maybe I have but they just have not showed up yet.*

- *I need more practice in applying strategies for teaching reading and writing skills because I feel I am not very proficient in this particular area. I want to be more informed and get more insights about these two macro-skills.*
- *I need to learn how to use other computer programs like Excel or Publisher to develop specific materials for my lessons.*
- *It is important for me to look for more references of different books to search for more information about the contents of the course.*
- *I need to continue to improve my writing skills in research reports. I'm still confused about how to organize the information in a report.*
- *I need to find out the real connection between achievement indicators in the lesson plan and the objectives in the evaluation.*
- *Go over the whole material to design good listening activities in real practice.*

b) Experiential knowledge through the teaching practice

Another way of giving a follow up was, naturally, through the teachers' experiential knowledge at the practice level. The classroom was, indeed, the framework *par excellence* in which the teachers could continue to enhance their knowledge in all target areas. Teacher development as a *situated experience* was another important central idea of the present study (see lit. review 4.4). Within this view in order to promote meaningful changes the teachers' contextualized practice should be emphasized. Consequently, the best way for teachers to improve was through integrating actions matching their teaching style, meaningful for their students and relevant to their contextual realities. Within this view, the teachers needed to continue to strengthen their development by implementing the actions learned in all target areas, (e.g. plan, implement and evaluate learner-centered lessons, use technology in the classroom, develop their own materials, and put into practice a wide range of activities for teaching the language skills). Thus, trial and error would test and determine the efficacy of the teaching actions for the sake of student learning outcomes. Both trainers and teachers shared this perception which is revealed in the following comments.

- *Trainers' perceptions*

- *There are a number of characteristics of a learner-centered curriculum teachers need to consider when facing new groups of learners or when trying to adapt this type of curriculum to groups they already run. My recommendation is to be practical and select only those points that can be clearly applied to each teacher's reality.*
- *Continue to integrate pre, while and post activities in order to widen their range of strategies and techniques for teaching the language skills.*

- *Continue to develop activities taking into account student age, levels, needs, interest, and background knowledge.*
- *The teachers should strengthen the good, old classroom techniques for sequencing and pacing different types of activities and integrate them into their lesson plan.*
- *Use technological tools in their lessons to continue to improve in this area (listening and speaking)*
- *Teachers' perceptions*
 - *To continue working for better activities that can make teaching a pleasurable moment for students; an opportunity to learn enjoying the lessons.*
 - *To continue practicing by myself and put into action all the methods one by one to have an idea on how they work in my class.*
 - *It is necessary to study the groups of students to identify their capabilities and the possible activities for them to work better.*
 - *I need to continue to work on ways to develop communicative activities and put them into practice in the classroom.*
 - *We need more practice to develop expertise in the selection of suitable materials for specific students' needs using technology.*
 - *I think we as teachers need to change out teaching methods to provide students with meaningful language learning.*
 - *To continue to promote some ideas to work with computers and let students learn using technological tools and keep track of that. Also it will be useful to continue to integrate other resources such as data show and multimedia.*
 - *I need to learn more about technology because every day more new pages appear on the Internet with different kinds of activities for English classes.*
 - *I need to incorporate the materials I created into my classes when I have the opportunity.*
 - *Don't limit ourselves and arrange activities to be applied in the classroom...revise the material given by the trainers and look for more models if necessary*

c) *Collaboration with trainers*

Another suggestion for the teachers' ongoing improvement was the follow up to the process of collaboration with trainers. *Collaboration* was, in fact, another central idea of this study to support teacher development (see literature review 4.1). Both trainers and teachers agreed that the efforts should go on in that direction. Regarding collaboration with trainers, there were suggestions about the continuation of courses on how to use technological resources (multimedia and computer programs) for teaching purposes, the follow up to the most important concepts of the courses, (those

who had not been fully understood or acquired, such as the ones related to lesson planning, learner-centered approaches, and methodology). Materials design was also an important area to continue to develop (the trainer admitted that the course had just been an introductory course). Thus, both teachers and trainers stated the importance of further teacher training opportunities in the form of workshops, courses, seminars and conferences. Another important suggestion related to collaboration with trainers involved personal or email contact, and classroom observations. The suggestions for the observations were that they should be both ways, from trainers to teachers (be monitored), and from teachers to trainers (observe effective approaches).

- *Trainers' perceptions*

- *I'd suggest more courses on the use of technology and enough time to develop them. Computers and language teaching is a field they showed interest in developing more, as well as developing materials with the aid of computers.*
- *Teachers could tend to forget what they covered in the class. It seems that routine might be more powerful than what they covered. More courses in the area should follow.*
- *Get in touch with teachers who have gotten experience and feel free to ask when they are not sure on how to develop a certain subject.*
- *The participant teachers could choose the concepts, topics or ideas they have found more useful and keep on developing these by means of seminars and observation of their work in the classrooms.*
- *I would recommend doing a number of...targeted classroom observations to see whether they can establish this necessary distance with the textbook...to see whether they can innovate and handle the materials with imagination and creativity. I would talk to them after the observations.*
- *I would also give them the opportunity to observe good classes taught by teachers who are really creative and don't follow a particular book.*

- *Teachers' perceptions*

- *One of the most significant limitations for me at this point is the need for more sequential congresses which I hardly hear of, or special training for teachers of English as a foreign language. I feel this is a huge limitation for me as a novel in the field.*
- *Ask for advice and opinions which help me look for better alternatives that give my work the light every teacher wishes, some instructions in order to understand what I didn't...and of course I need to put more effort and be determined to work.*
- *I would like to clear some gaps I still have concerning how to work or develop certain materials or activities for multiple intelligences.*

- *A practical workshop on different methodologies to apply in the classroom. I particularly need training on how to teach English for Specific Purposes*
- *One module explained the importance of not controlling the students' learning. More frequent help in this area is not a bad idea.*
- *It would be useful to provide activities to monitor teachers in the classroom and write reports about achievements and difficulties.*
- *I'm still pretty weak on some of the important elements of lesson planning such as sequencing and pace. I believe I need some kind of extra help in this area.*
- *I think that a follow-up on techniques and strategies on how to solve speaking at different levels would be great.*
- *This course was really important for us as teachers so if the trainer could monitor us in any way it would be good for our teaching process, because we could get feedback to improve if we need it or to know if we are doing it well.*
- *We need more reading workshops because I think many teachers have the same problem with the reading skill so that we can apply it at school and get student interest in this area.*

d) Collaboration with peers

Peer collaboration, on the other hand, was perceived as an alternative to continue to explore their teaching. From the part of the trainers the process was perceived as an important means of development through joint efforts (to plan lessons, to reflect on teaching, to make changes). From the part of the teachers this suggestion was, no doubt, the result of the peer work all along the process of the plan of action. On the whole, the teachers perceived the benefits of this contact and acknowledged their eagerness to move on in this direction. The teachers provided evidence of high levels of awareness in this regard, as they viewed the process as a way of knowledge acquisition and renovation. Peer observation, particularly, was mentioned as an important process that they considered a “rewarding and enriching experience”. Consequently, the suggestions were to keep the personal contact (or through emails) and share strategies and ideas on different areas. The following comments reveal all of these suggestions.

- *Trainers' perceptions*

- *I would propose them to design lesson plans together and/or discuss already prepared lesson plans. The lesson planning component presented is more practical than theoretical.*
- *Develop mechanisms to foster reflection that are approachable since they have so much work. More practical and realistic approaches should be fostered such as self-observation and peer teaching/observation.*

- *Collaboration and sharing with their peers should continue to be promoted. The teachers trust each other and are naturally motivated to work together. This eagerness can be the grounds to continue to make adequate transformations to their teaching in order to become better teachers.*
- *Teachers' perceptions*
 - *We as teachers can see our own teaching in the teaching of others. When we observe others we have the chance to construct or reconstruct our own knowledge just because we perform the same activity.*
 - *Observing and talking about teaching is certainly a beneficial practice that can offer chances to learn about and reflect on my own teaching and so improving my professional life.*
 - *As a new generation of teachers I should have more opportunities to both have exposure to innovative ideas and techniques in TEFL and share experiences in the classroom with other colleagues.*
 - *I am missing very relevant information about my teaching practice for not applying a communicative network with other teachers in a way of peer observation. I need to find someone with the time and a positive attitude towards peer observation to conduct such an enriching and professionally rewarding experience.*
 - *I would recommend to ask for teachers' mails and share comments about techniques applied in the classroom so we can have feedback about what to do and why*
 - *Knowledge knows no limits, so it would be great if I had the opportunity to find teachers with similar problems like the one I found.*
 - *I think it is important that we keep the interaction with other partners to share our educational experiences in TEFL. We should, for example, share lesson plans in order to get more ideas on how to improve it in practice.*
 - *Be better informed and put into practice the recommendations and advise of other teachers regarding the use of technology for teaching purposes.*
 - *Teacher needs continuing professional development so it is important to share with colleagues the results of particular strategies in one's classroom*

e) *The ongoing development of reflective skills.*

All of the above are important steps for professional development. Nevertheless, little improvement would be gained without reflective skills. Teacher development as a *reflective process* was another central concept of this study (see section 4.2 in the lit. review). Both teachers and trainers were aware of the importance of reflection and the follow up suggested also involved

efforts in this regard. On the whole, it was recommended that the teachers continued to make significant changes in their teaching practice through critical reflection (*reflection-in-action, reflection-on- action and reflection-for-action*). It was also suggested to give a follow up to a structured way of reflection such as Action Research or explore other options such as exploratory practice (because of its focus on combining research with pedagogy). Indeed, the approach that the teachers used to reflect was not really important as long as they continued to enhance their reflective skills. These skills would, in turn, help teachers to develop their own informed language teaching-learning theory; thus becoming theorizers and reaching full independence from external agents in their professional development. The following comments by both trainers and trainees reflect the views of reflection as an effective way of giving a follow up to the teacher professional development.

- *Trainers' perceptions*

- *Continue to internalize an awareness of how with the appropriate reflective tools they themselves can be empowered to make effective pedagogical decisions to improve their teaching practice.*
- *Develop a set of beliefs concerning the acquisition of the four major language skills upon which they can rely and upon which they can construct their own methodological principles.*
- *Continue to use their reflective skills to analyze the textbook in order to understand the underlying principle or approach of the textbook. They need to enhance their knowledge about the main characteristics of current textbooks. For example, what is a typical communicative approach textbook? What is a typical audio-lingual textbook? What does a textbook based on an integrated approach need to expose the students?*
- *Action research is a very important process. If they were having more practice on this particular area, it would help them a lot in their daily practice in their classes.*
- *Continue to strengthen their reflective skills and view reflection as a way of improving their practice. They need to see the practical side of reflection and how such improvement can take place. They need to explore other possibilities such as self-observation, self-evaluation.*
- *They teachers will probably benefit from an approach to reflection that is more connected to their teaching. In this sense exploratory practice seems to be an interesting alternative because of its focus on combining research with pedagogy.*

- *Teachers' perceptions*
 - *I believe I can improve my knowledge by doing some extra work myself...after all I learned to be critical and that is all it takes for someone who wants to grow as a person and professionally speaking.*
 - *I need to give a follow up to the diary writing as a teacher this activity helps me learn more every day.*
 - *Work on some mini-action research projects. That would be useful and motivating at the same time*
 - *I think it is important to continue to have personal reflections about our teaching and if necessary make changes.*
 - *Self-evaluation to find out how I understand my students' needs and if the plans are centered on them.*
 - *It would be highly beneficial if I could do some research on activities to apply for the variety of intelligences.*
 - *Put into practice reflective skills to face problems dynamically and find a solution.*
 - *To continue to develop an awareness of how to take into consideration the students' individual aspects in the learning process.*
 - *I could get so much meaningful feedback on my teaching. For instance I could have the chance to collect samples of my teaching. I could have the chance to talk to my partner and analyze classroom behavior and matters related to the class.*
 - *I consider I need to practice more and more these types of activities to consolidate what I learned from this course and I want to make sure that what I learned in this course I will be able to apply it in other research I do.*
 - *Now I know how to try to overcome the lack of institutional support... I need to become a researcher...a self-trained teacher using the Internet and other teachers' experience.*
 - *I feel that the careless attention of other teachers about undertaking Action Research could have a negative influence for me to continue with this rewarding practice.*
 - *Action Research is not something you will constantly hear teachers talking about on the corridors or college facility. Therefore I'm afraid that such a unique and useful tool, though complex, for improving my professional life can soon become an old story. I do not certainly want this because I know the value that AR can have in my growth as a professional.*

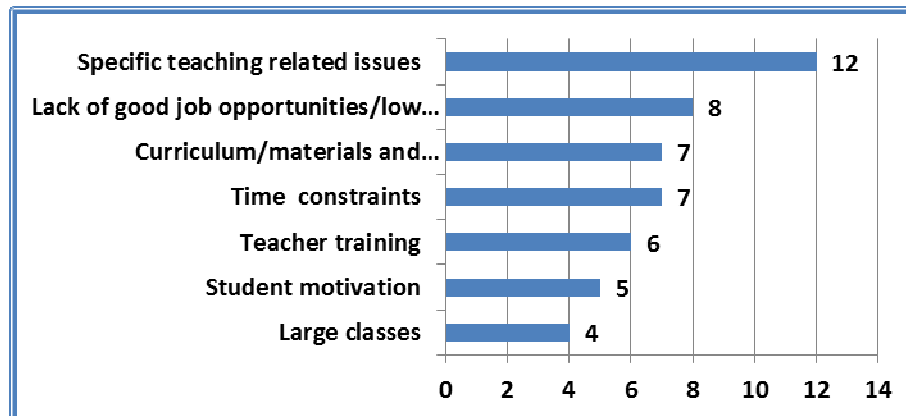
4.3 Final exploration of teacher development

The exploration of teacher development after the plan of action revealed interesting findings about the limitations perceived by teachers. These findings were contrasted with the original exploration. At that time, the teachers viewed their professional development as something directly connected with their contextual conditions, which determined the quality of their work. Thus, the teachers' concerns were concentrated in the first place on curriculum, materials and didactic resources. This was followed by students' personal characteristics (e.g. motivation, interest, and mixed-ability). The teachers' concern for student-related problems was an element that accompanied them all through their training process. Such concern had its more powerful effect on the selection of their action research topics. The next concern was teacher training, which the teachers acknowledged to be one of the limitations that affected them the most. The traditional methodology used in the classroom was another problem, which was followed by the phenomenon of large classes, the little time allocated for language instruction and, finally, teacher appraisal. Most teachers viewed change within these conditions as something external in which they had little or no participation for improvement. Thus, these initial findings served to identify the problems and determine those areas in which the teachers could be supported in a realistic way, through teacher training. There was room for improvement in the majority of areas, which led to the definition of the training program. Thus, an important task to undertake was to raise teacher awareness of the many aspects within their reach to make significant changes.

In stage three, the guided process to teacher reflection, the teachers reflected on their development stage as a preparation for the Action Research projects (see section 3.3). At that moment the teachers provided evidence that their original views had changed. The teachers' insights revealed that they were in the process of *increasing their professional competence, reflecting on experience for student learning outcomes and learning new knowledge for implementing changes*. Another important finding was that, at the classroom level, the teachers did not regard contextual problems as important as they used to. Moreover, their concerns were focused on other kinds of problems all of them related to students, namely student affective factors, student background knowledge, use of the target language, mixed-ability, and classroom management. The new teachers' views after the plan of action are reflected in figure 37 below.

Figure 38

Problems for professional development after the plan of action



As shown, the most important aspect in this exploration is a new element involving specific teaching related issues (n=12). The teachers also reported similar problems to the original ones but in a different order of priorities: issues related to curriculum, materials and resources (n=7) time constraints (n=7), teacher training (n= 6), student motivation (n=5), and large classes (n=4). On the other hand, the problems of lack of investment in education had evolved to focus on the issue of low salaries and/or lack of good job opportunities (n=8). Each of these problems will be discussed in detail below.

4.3.1 Specific teaching related issues

Most of the teachers' worries here emerged out of their teaching practice, which contrasted with their original concerns focused more on curriculum problems and resources. This change in teacher thinking revealed several important findings. First, the teachers had refined their perception to identify significant problems at the classroom level. Second, the teachers' attention had concentrated mostly on issues related to the classroom activity, which were within their scope to improve (in fact, along with the limitation most teachers provided the solution right away). Third, the problems mentioned had been recurrently present throughout the guided process to reflection (e.g. lesson planning, classroom instructions, controlled practice and teaching the language skills, among others), which reflects consistency in teacher thinking. Finally, an increase in teacher reflective skills is clearly perceived here, as there are dimensions of the three kinds of reflection discussed in the literature review *reflection in action*, *reflection on action* and *reflection for action*(see lit. review 4.2.2). This is revealed by the following teachers' comments.

- *Another significant limitation I have is to order my ideas when teaching. Every time I plan my class many ideas come to my mind, but my problem is to decide how to develop it.*

- *I don't need to write everything in my lesson plan, but it is a daily fight. I changed my approach just by writing the relevant things.*
- *I do too much controlled practice. I know I have to be a facilitator and it's a battle...I know what I have to do and I try to bear that in mind when I am in front of the students.*
- *Analyzing my professional development I can see some difficulties for introducing pronunciation exercises, timing and giving instructions when applying or using an activity for the first time, but this is where reflective teaching plays an important role.*
- *I need to improve my students' listening skills because I always speak slowly and my students understand...but in real life native speakers don't speak slowly...I want my students to develop their listening skills and, of course, that they understand when somebody speaks to them outside the class.*
- *I have to demand more from my students. So I need to push them in the different activities that we do in class...I know I can do that because my students feel comfortable with me.*
- *Supplying my students with a...range of activities is not easy...I have the idea of what to do in the classroom and how to develop activities; however I would love to have a resource bank of activities for me to choose from.*
- *Students insist in speaking their native language; they feel afraid of making mistakes or they have pronunciation problems. So, I'm going to work on that with activities about pronunciation, sounds and stress. Also, I will integrate more speaking activities where they can develop their oral skills.*

4.3.2 *Lack of better job opportunities and low salaries*

In the first exploration, the teachers referred to this problem as lack of investment in education. Here the teachers specifically referred to the lack of better job opportunities and low salaries as the second most urgent problem. It is significant that they did not place this problem in the first place, which shows both how focused the teachers were on their teaching practice, and their vocation for teaching. Nevertheless, teachers still regard the problem as a significant one. Moreover, along stage three the teachers provided evidence that their sense of professionalism had increased together with their knowledge and teaching skills. First it was present in 3.2.5, where they mention professional growth as an attribute of *the reflective teacher*, and then the teachers stated that their major source of job dissatisfaction was the lack of social recognition (3.2.5). Finally, the sense of professionalism emerged in 3.3.7 where the teachers demanded from students due respect to their efforts in helping them learn the language (3.5.2).

Here the teachers analyzed the problem from a very critical perspective stating how the low salaries and lack of better job opportunities affected them. The teachers' dismissal from UNAN was

mentioned as a specific example of this. Thus, not having good job possibilities was perceived as the main cause of a number of other problems: financial problems, underestimation of the education field and, the teachers' "desperate life style". The teachers' extreme workload was clearly perceived at the time they were undertaking their research projects (see 3.6.7). Most teachers were working several shifts in different institutions and attending numerous students, which affected both teacher performance and the quality of the research projects.

- *Most of the opportunities for professional development are at hand if you can afford it*
- *Low salaries have too many negative effects in society...the teachers demotivation is one of the effects...this has consequences in the new generation of students because they don't want to study in the majors of educational science. This field does not represent a good option for young people.*
- *On the other hand, teachers' salary is not good. In all Central America teachers in Nicaragua are the lowest paid....for this reason they don't have the facility to get good resources for their classes and even for living.*
- *I strongly think that there are other job opportunities in other fields inside education and it really helps teachers to go beyond in their professional development because the conditions could be different in the private language teaching.*
- *Due to the cost of life teachers have to work harder to make for a living...teachers have to work more and more hours for different institutions and even teach private classes, which in the end becomes time consuming.*
- *Teachers do not have a single job with which they can afford all they need....they fall into a desperate life style where they have to run against time and distance. Because of that life style many times teachers feel unsure of what they do when teaching a group or class having in mind and at hand different learners, policies and language levels.*
- *One example is how the hourly teachers from UNAN were dismissed and some of them without any hope to get hired again. Another example is that the teachers need to work in two or three places to get a better income.*

4.3.3 Curriculum materials and resources

Similarly to the original exploration, the teachers identified problems caused by inadequate curriculum guidelines and by the lack of materials and resources for teaching EFL in their institutions. Two courses intended to help teachers cope with these limitations, *Technological Resources in TEFL and Planning Materials and Units of Work in TEFL*. The courses reached their intended objective of enhancing teacher knowledge in this area, which is reflected in the achievements described in 4.2.7 above and in the solutions to the problems proposed below (4.3.8).

Nevertheless, the teachers' insights reflected that the problem with curriculum and materials still existed, and that it continued to affect the teaching processes. Moreover, it was clear that some institutions have more restrictive internal policies than others (particularly primary and secondary education in the public sector) which exerted negative influence on the teachers' motivation. Indeed, context decreased the teachers' willingness to make significant changes, which was perceived in some of the teachers' comments.

- *The Program of MINED is a problem that I'm facing as a teacher. We as teachers have to follow a program that is completely outdated. If a teacher does not follow the program the class is considered out of plan and not good.*
- *Working in elementary schools is neither challenging nor motivating. One of these problems is the lack of materials to prepare good and motivating classes, so students get bored easily...the teacher doesn't have good resources to get a dynamic class.*
- *The TEFL area needs a program that provides the framework for language instruction and the coherence of what is to be taught...I think this is an important factor to improve the quality of education in the whole country.*
- *In Nicaragua instead of increasing the budget for education it is decreasing ...they do not invest in infrastructure, technology and didactic materials.*
- *According to my experience using modern and updated materials I can help student with their language acquisition, but there is a problem with the lack of good books audios and videos.*
- *...the books do not have enough activities for all skills according to students' needs and requirements.*
- *This Program does not have enough activities for my students' needs...I need extra materials to support the topic studied and in this case use realia, students' real experiences.*
- *The lack of technological resources has been a problem because it is not possible to be a good professional without these resources to research, plan, design, print, etc.*

4.3.4 Time constraints

The problems connected with time constraints for language instruction were an issue in the first exploration and continued to be a problem at the end of the plan of action. Moreover, teachers related the little time for instruction with "the rejection of English" in some institutions. The courses *Lesson Planning in TEFL* and *Planning Materials and Units of Work in TEFL* intended to provide teachers with ideas to optimize class time. Thus, the influence of the training was clear here as the teachers acknowledged how important it is to "have the correct resources" "prepare creative activities" and "facilitate teaching and learning" to cope with time limitations.

- *The class is only forty-five minutes...If the teacher doesn't have the correct resources (book, photocopies, etc.), the class is more difficult and starts to be a typical class where the teacher is the center and the students are only listening and copying in the notebooks all the time.*
- *Teachers need to be well prepared with creative activities and materials that facilitate the teaching and the learning of the language to use the time as much as possible*
- *I only have classes with my group once a week. This affects the teaching process because the students do not have a continuous learning. Sometimes we have classes twice a month.*
- *Students have problems to assimilate the themes or put into practice relevant aspects in their class or reinforce any topic in so little time.*
- *The rejection of the English class in most faculties of this institution... This is perceived in the limitations of time to teach the language in the classroom*

4.3.5 Teacher training

Teacher training was one of the most significant problems identified in the original exploration. The teachers' insights at that time revealed their training needs in different areas in which they lacked strategies and techniques to improve their work as teachers. Those insights were useful to plan the content of the training course to fulfil the teachers' needs. The new teachers' insights revealed that for them teacher training was still an important concern. This reflected significant professional maturity since the teachers perceived their development as an on-going process.

There were two kinds of perceptions revolving around teacher training. On the one hand, those related to the same deep-rooted problems posed by institutions: either institutions did not provide training, or the training they provided was not adequate for the area. On the other hand, the teachers were concerned with a follow-up to the approaches in their training course. This concern revealed that the teachers found the practical side of such approaches for their improvement. Moreover, they were interested in finding the mechanisms to go on in that direction (the teachers' suggestions for these mechanisms were presented in section 4.2.8 above). The significance of this finding is that most teachers were aware of their needs for improvement which revealed a development attitude. As discussed in the literature review, teacher development is characterized by the teachers' own conscious decisions regarding their specific professional needs (see lit. review 2.3).

4.3.6 Student motivation

Student motivation towards learning English was also a recurrent problem. It was present in the original exploration combined with other student related issues, such as learning style and mixed ability. It was also a recurrent element throughout the guided process to reflection. In fact, the

greatest impact of this concern was perceived in the selection of the research topics, most of which emerged out of the teachers' interest in raising their students' motivation (see 3.5.2 in this section). After the plan of action, the teachers continued to be consistent with their concern for student lack of motivation in learning the language. It is clear that they maintained their attitude of assuming responsibility to solve the problem. Nevertheless, the teachers' perceptions also evolved to analyze the problem from a more general perspective. Thus, the problem was related to mainstream education in Nicaragua, which currently faces a generalized lack of student interest and motivation in pursuing professional careers.

- *If students are not motivated is impossible that they learn a second language for this reason teachers need to implement new methods, activities and tools and create a new environment and cooperative learning that help students to be self-confident.*
- *It is difficult for me to make students clear that they should not speak their first language in class...I believe that if a teacher uses the language as much as possible students will be forced to stick their minds to that rule.*
- *Some students take the English class as an obligation, but they don't give the real importance to English in the different careers for their professional life.*
- *They take the English class as a requirement to be evaluated in the curriculum of their studies...some of them don't like English at all so they don't feel interested in the class...they just do the assignments in class but they don't practice the language outside the class.*
- *This aspect is related to the real problems in our education system because the students only attend classes, but they are not studying at home, they don't do the homework so the lack of interest to get a good professional career is absent. In the English class the situations is a serious problem.*

4.3.7 Large classes

The issue of large classes was an urgent problem to address according to the teachers' perception in the initial exploration. Not surprisingly, it continued to be a problem at the end of the plan of action, as the contextual conditions were basically the same. The exploration of the teachers' contextual challenges during the guided process to teacher reflection (see section 3.6.7) revealed how serious the problem of large classes was for most teachers. Here, the teachers referred to the various dimensions in which this problem affected their teaching practice (e.g. lack of student motivation, inadequate classroom conditions, different kinds of students, etc.). The influence of their training is perceived in their insights as some of them mentioned the kinds of measures taken to ease the problem (e.g. working in small groups and pairs, or using monitors).

- *The situation (of large classes) affects both students and teachers because they are not satisfied with the development of the class.*
- *In this case the teacher needs to implement strategies like small groups and pair work ...the teacher also needs to identify the most advanced students and distribute them in the groups. It doesn't solve all the problems, but it's a start...the teacher should take advantage of the students' capabilities to help other students.*
- *I had to work with large classes of 40 to 50 students I had to deal with students with different levels of English, different needs and different personalities...that was a real challenge I had to face in that moment.*
- *The conditions in schools of Nicaragua are not good to develop and improve some of the skills that I have learnt. They (the skills) are good but when you put them into practice students are not motivated because of the number of students they are, because of the space... teachers cannot make noise because it can disturb the teachers in the other classrooms.*
- *The classroom environment doesn't help me to develop the class due to the conditions...the classroom is really small for the amount of students...the chairs cannot be moved and the whiteboard is far away from students.*

4.3.8 Solutions to the problems

Interestingly enough, the teachers' opinions about whose responsibility it was to make changes for improvement revealed important differences from the original exploration. This time the teachers viewed their own participation as important in most problems. The teachers also considered joint solutions that involved themselves and their peers. In addition, the participation of educational institutions and society was highlighted.

a. Teachers' participation in solving the problems

The teachers' awareness of the importance of their own participation went hand in hand with the issues at the classroom level. This is logical given the fact that a great deal of attention was devoted to the problems in their teaching practice. Nonetheless, the teachers also expressed an open and proactive attitude towards the resolution of some of the other problems, which was a significant sign of professionalism. As discussed in the literature review the teachers' awareness of their role as change agents makes them "reflective practitioners" able to go beyond the classroom by adopting a more active and participatory attitude in the problems of their situational contexts (see lit. review 1.3.3, 3.4.3, 4.2.1 and 4.2.4).

- *The final solution is in my hands and my students'. I take them into account when preparing a class project...I like to promote their growth by being a part of it. (too many controlled activities)*
- *I would like to improve my speaking. A speech class would help a lot. Another thing I need to practice on my own is phonetics in order to help students improve. (teaching pronunciation)*
- *I have the idea about what to do in the classroom and how to develop activities... I would love to have a resource bank of activities. (complementary classroom activities)*
- *Now I'm trained to design my own didactic materials...although this is not according to the MINED program.(lack of materials)*
- *We, English teachers, should be eager to update our knowledge incorporating new technologies in the language classroom...This requires change in our views of how language is taught and learned. (materials and technological resources)*
- *I need to create other materials that generate costs...when this occurs I ask my students old magazines, books, newspaper, and recycled paper to support my English teaching. (materials and didactic resources)*
- *Time is a necessary resource as a professional...because I am willing to continue learning I will spend days, nights and weekends to work and research and plan, so I can develop myself. (time constraints)*
- *Now I am learning to see obstacles as opportunities to do things differently and be focused on things done through my own effort. (time, economic problems)*
- *Even though these problems affect some of the plans and desires to continue learning and researching, I pay no attention and try to focus on what I want to reach, but it is quite difficult sometimes. (lack of good job opportunities/dismissal from UNAN)*

b. Joint teacher efforts

The teachers also showed awareness of the possible ways to solve the problems by means of working together with their peers, a process also suggested as a follow up to their training program in 4.2.8 above. The significance of this information is that considerable efforts were made throughout the plan of action to raise teacher awareness of the importance of collaboration with their peers. This collaboration reached its peak at the time of the Action Research projects with the peer observations. Here, the teachers mention collaboration with peers in joint efforts to prevent students from speaking their native language, overcome the problem of lack of materials, and provide alternatives to the lack of teacher training opportunities. Interestingly enough, there are

references to the need to spread the benefits of Action Research to the community of teachers through seminars and workshops.

- *All of the teachers working for a particular institution should get into an agreement where none of the professors is allowed to use the mother tongue when addressing students...it would create a sense of belonging to the language.*
- *It's good to say that teachers never give up and we are always adapting ideas to overcome these problems, working with peers, getting materials from other sources to provide good education/teaching.*
- *We could all share valuable information concerning our professional practices and get a positive outcome at the end. We should try to do this enriching activity for our professional development every month.*
- *We could at least try to bring about some kind of seminars which is more feasible and less demanding than a congress, or a discussion group among teachers to bring up meaningful issues that are taking place in the classroom and all together look for possible solutions...*
- *However we can change peoples' minds about AR if we could just present conferences, seminars or lectures with unquestionable reasons and convincing examples of how important research is for our professional development as teachers.*
- *I'm sure that if teachers are guided and become sensitive of the titanic impact that action research can have in their professional growth, they would all undertake a go on it no matter the circumstances and possible restrictions to teacher training.*

c. Participation of institutions/educational authorities and society to solve the problems

The teachers were willing to do everything in their hands to ease the problems and work the best they possibly could within the constraining conditions. Nevertheless, they knew that the ultimate solution to guarantee proper conditions for language instruction should come from higher entities in charge of decision making (national authorities, educational authorities and educational institutions). Moreover, they acknowledged the participation of members of the community like families, parents and the society as a whole in the resolution of the problems. The teachers' views resembled the issues discussed in the literature review about how socio-cultural and political factors shape language instruction. Such factors relate to how the language is viewed and valued by authorities and by the community (see lit. review 1).

- *The national authorities, educational authorities, parents, families and society play an important role in education which is developed through the teaching-learning process led by the teachers mostly, but at the same time this process has to be supported by the entities mentioned before.*

- *In my opinion I believe that university or any professional institution in the language teaching field has to get involved in the creation of a new updated program with good sources and provide some materials and training to the teachers or primary and secondary schools. In this way education could improve in a substantial way.*
- *Of course, more publicity for action research is needed so everybody can understand what AR actually is. To do this we would need support from the institution we are working for, so they can present the leading role.*

4.3.9 Teacher reflection at the end of the project

Teacher reflection was nurtured in each of the courses of the program. The plan also aimed at providing teachers with the necessary knowledge for professional improvement in target areas. Thus, the Action Research projects provided the teachers with the opportunity to both put that knowledge into practice and exercise their reflective skills. The teachers provided consistent and varied evidence of change: their awareness of troublesome aspects at the classroom level, the emergence of their problem solving skills, the refinement of their knowledge and the adjustment of their teaching beliefs. The observations provided valid evidence of the changes in their performance at the classroom level. Consequently, it was clear that the teachers had turned into more mature and professionally prepared teachers. They were willing to put into practice what they learned, reflect on their teaching, analyze internal issues, learn from their mistakes, overcome limitations, play effective roles, be accurate models, motivate students, and improve situations. All of these actions, characteristics of reflective teachers, are revealed in the teachers' insights below.

- *When I prepare the lesson, when I'm in front of my student, when we do the activities in the classroom, I realize that I'm putting into practice what I learned.*
- *All this can be done just by reflecting on my teaching practices. That means to systematically and actively think about what is happening in my classroom in terms of the teaching and in terms of the students' response, and then try to improve.*
- *I became aware that most things I saw difficult to undertake were things I had to come out with by myself and that they were things I could manage... I just didn't know how to do it.*
- *Besides external circumstances which might limit our work as teachers I think that internal issues are what we must fight the most.*
- *The only way to improve is by making mistakes; otherwise, what would we improve?*
- *I would like to say that I have changed my perspective about teaching...limitation is a word that should not exist in the vocabulary of a teacher. When we really want to do something there are no boundaries that can stop us.*

- *It seems to me that teachers must play the role of models, but real models; models who believe in themselves and have got the spirit of overcoming situations.*
- *I'm aware that most motivation and source of motivation for my students it's me. I can say that I'm totally aware that most motivation in a class comes from teachers and not from students by themselves.*
- *...they are weaknesses I must overcome and improve by reflecting on what I do and take actions on it. I'm aware of those difficulties and now I can take actions to improve the situations and my professional development as well.*

As revealed by these comments, the teachers had internalized the importance of reflection in their teaching practice. Such a view had important implications for their role, their students', the available resources, their teaching materials, and more importantly their teaching context. In spite of the problems faced all over the process of the present study, the ultimate aim had been achieved, as teachers had gained new understandings of their importance as EFL teachers, as social agents able to make significant changes in their classroom not only for the sake of student learning outcomes, but for the sake of their own professional growth. Certainly, they continued to face a number of significant challenges. The contextual reality was basically the same. But, the teachers had gone through an enriching professional development process that had empowered them to face such challenges in a more efficient way. The following comment illustrate accurately how most teachers' viewed their professional development at the end of the project.

I believe that professional development is our own responsibility...We, as humans and professionals are responsible for our own growth. We are the ones who have to feel satisfaction for what we are and do. Since professional development is a non-stop cyclical process, we should all view it as a part of what we are rather than an extra burden that we have to carry on our shoulders (teacher K)

4.4 Main findings from stage four: the final results

The research questions in stage four focused on the final results of this investigation from different perspectives. First of all, the teachers' beliefs were explored in light of their real practice at the classroom level. Secondly, the effectiveness of the program was assessed from the perspectives of both trainers and teachers. Finally, the problems for teacher development after the plan of action were analyzed.

4.4.1 *Main findings about the teachers' beliefs in practice*

The purpose of this exploration was to assess the evolution of teacher thinking and performance as a result of the plan of action. The areas analyzed were the same of the original exploration and

the issues tackled were *language learning, error correction, material and resources, the language areas, student-related factors* and the *main weaknesses identified*.

- *About language learning*

The most significant problem in the initial exploration was that the teachers' beliefs about the communicative purpose of the language were in discordance with their actions, as few of them provided evidence of real focus on communication in the classes observed. In addition, an unnatural use of the language was promoted. The final results showed three groups of teachers. The first group had improved significantly in both their techniques to convey meaning and in the use of the language as a medium of communication. The second group had made improvements, but whenever a miscommunication problem took place they switched to the mother tongue. The two teachers in the last group basically kept their same original approaches; using a mixture of the Grammar Translation Method and the Audiolingual Method.

Implications: The plan of action had succeeded in helping the teachers improve as a result of confronting their beliefs and action. This confirms the theory that ritual teaching behavior can be the result of lack of awareness. This was the case of the teachers in the first and second group. The findings in the case of the teachers in the third group suggest that when some behavior is deeply rooted in the teacher's teaching style, the teachers experience more difficulties to change. This finding has important implications for the Teacher Education Program at UNAN-León. In order to prevent these problems, special care should be taken to promote the acquisition of reflective skills and effective classroom techniques at the PRESET level.

- *About error correction in language teaching*

The original views and actions regarding error correction revealed high awareness of the importance of meaning over form in communication, which was consistent with their views that a language should be used for communication. Most teachers agreed that errors should be corrected since early stages but that they shouldn't be corrected during oral practice (fluency vs. accuracy). Although most teachers held modern views about correcting students' errors, there were significant problems at the classroom level as teachers tended to omit them. The new information revealed that most teachers had kept their same views about the importance of correcting students' errors at appropriate moments, so as not to interrupt their fluency in spoken practice. Although this was an accurate decision, most teachers did not provide evidence of error treatment at all. Only in a few cases the teachers provided evidence of addressing them; and even in these cases there was room for improvement. Contextual conditions exerted great influence on this problem.

Implication: In spite of the fact that teachers had raised their awareness regarding the disagreement between their beliefs and action, error correction continued to be an issue. The inappropriate contextual conditions continued to exert negative influence on the teaching-learning process. The number of students, noise in the classroom, and time limitations made it difficult for teachers to address this issue properly.

- *About materials and resources*

The teachers were aware of the importance of materials in the original exploration. The observations showed that the teachers were bound to the textbook, board and to student use of the notebook. Likewise, little use of recording materials, and few extra or complementary materials created or adapted by the teacher were observed. The final results showed an increase in the teachers' confidence in using other materials to complement the textbook, such as real objects (realia) worksheets, activity sheets, cards, flashcards, pictures and drawings. Likewise, the board was used as a resource rather than as the main means for instruction, and student note taking was significantly reduced, as well. There was also an increase in the use of tape recorders and DVD players for listening activities. Other resources and equipment such as TV or computers were not observed because in most cases the contextual conditions did not provide these resources.

Implication: The plan of action had been useful in increasing the teachers' confidence to use equipment for recorded materials, complementing their lessons with additional materials and being less dependent on the textbook. The teachers themselves acknowledged an improvement in this area in the evaluation of the plan of action. Nonetheless, there were no materials adapted from the textbook or created by the teachers himself/herself. This confirms the trainer's perception that the course Planning Materials and Units of Work had been an introductory course.

- *About teaching the language areas*

The original findings revealed teacher awareness of the importance of teaching the language skills and sub-skills. In spite of this, the lessons were focused on teaching grammar mostly. Very often the grammar point would take over the entire class period. Writing was relegated to be assigned as homework and there were few listening activities for comprehension purposes. Speaking would be practiced through mechanical dialogues from the textbooks often memorized and with significant pronunciation problems. Pronunciation was focused on repetition drills, and vocabulary teaching would concentrate on providing students with Spanish equivalent lists in some cases. There was little listening practice, and there were problems in addressing reading comprehension.

The new information revealed that the teachers' beliefs and preferences regarding the language areas had basically remained the same. They continued to show preference for teaching all language

skills. Listening and speaking had preference over reading and writing. Likewise, pronunciation was, again, over vocabulary and grammar. At the classroom level there were changes in the teachers' approaches in most areas. An increase in the integration of activities and in the practice of the different language skills was observed.

- *Vocabulary* In order to teach vocabulary, the teachers would use a variety of resources and elicitation techniques. The activities for vocabulary teaching were often connected with the other language areas
- *Grammar* It continued to be one of the practiced areas in most lessons. However, there were significant differences in the teachers' approaches to teaching grammar. Most teachers focused on grammar as a means to a broader functional and communicative purpose, which differed from the traditional approaches observed in the original exploration.
- *Pronunciation* practice revealed an increase in the use of different techniques for teaching troublesome sounds and intonation, and there were attempts to familiarize students with the English phonetic system.
- *Speaking* A variety of pair and group activities were integrated, most of them with purposes clearly communicative. This differed significantly from the practice provided in the original exploration, which consisted in mechanical dialogues.
- *Listening* There were two kinds of listening practice: first, listening for the purpose of understanding target ideas. This kind of practice clearly integrated pre, while and post stages. The other kind of practice provided was the exposure to the teachers' own speaking skills in using the target language to direct the classroom activity.
- *Reading* was one of the less practiced skills. Nonetheless, the teachers who provided this kind of practice integrated pre, while and post activities. This change of approach differed from the original exploration in which there was a lack of these activities, no treatment of new vocabulary, and a lack of activation of students' background knowledge.
- *Writing* practice basically remained the same, as the teachers continued to devote little attention to the development of the writing skill. Only in a few cases the teachers provided evidence of focusing on writing. In all cases the approach was invariably the same, writing assigned as homework.

Implications: The plan of action had been effective in enhancing the teachers' skills in teaching the language areas, as the teachers showed a wider range of classroom activities and techniques. Writing was the exception. The reason for this was a combination of factors, some of them posed by the contextual condition (little class time), some others seemed to be related to socio-cultural

aspects (lack of reading and writing habits) and some others the result of the teachers' background knowledge (the PRESET program had not given the teachers the necessary skills for teaching writing). These results also reflect the organizational problems of the training program, which did not allow the consolidation of this area.

- *About the integration of the language areas*

Originally, the teachers showed high awareness of the importance of teaching the language skills in an integrated way, and made significant efforts in the classroom. There were weaknesses in the lessons at the level of pace and sequence of activities, transitions, classroom instructions, and timing, which revealed the need for improvement.

The final results showed that the teachers continued to consider the integration of skills important for language learning. It was also revealed the improvement in their approaches to handle the integration of the language areas. The lesson plans provided evidence of the teachers' improvement as they reflected clear descriptions of the practice and content areas, carefully detailed activities in each stage, and the integration of learning objectives, materials used, time, kind of interaction and procedures.

Implication: Lesson planning was one of the areas in which greatest improvements were made. This was revealed by the actual lesson plan structure, by the development of the lessons observed and by the teachers' identification of the main achievements of their training. The teachers admitted having increased their awareness of the significance of lesson planning and having realized that lesson planning should be learner-centered in order to be effective. Likewise, they acknowledged having gained new perspectives about its structure and main components as well as about the creative nature of the process

- *About student-related factors*

The teachers' high awareness of student-related factors was the starting point for the improvement in this area, as they fully acknowledged students' differences. In the initial exploration they showed agreement with the views that it is important to provide different kinds of students (aural, visual, and kinesthetic) with different options for language learning (e.g. using visuals and auditory materials, or providing them with the opportunity to learn by doing). Likewise, the teachers' beliefs showed agreement with promoting student autonomy inside and outside the classroom, relating class content to student real life and promoting student participation through a variety of activities. Nonetheless, the teachers' actions didn't match their views as in the lessons observed the processes lacked activities to address students' learning needs effectively. What follows are the main results after the plan of action in in each of these areas.

a) *Student learning styles*

The new information revealed that the teachers had preserved their original views regarding learners' differences. Most of them acknowledged that some people have a special aptitude for language learning, and that not everybody can learn an FL following the same teaching techniques. Some other views, like the teachers' preference for vocabulary learning, revealed acknowledgement of learners' differences, as well. The teachers' performance at the classroom level showed more consistency with their beliefs through the integration of different resources and techniques, clearly aimed at addressing these differences in learning.

Implications: the plan of action had helped teachers align their views and actions at the classroom level. The integration of different kinds of materials in the lessons revealed that the teachers had preserved their natural perception of students' differences and had adopted a more proactive attitude to provide them with meaningful practice. These findings are consistent with the achievements identified by the teachers in the evaluation of the plan of action.

b) *Student independent learning in the classroom.*

The teachers had kept the same perception and preferences to promote student autonomy and independence for successful learning inside the classroom. They made attempts to promote more student-centered activities in their lessons, through the integration of a variety of activities. In order to handle class content, they made gradual moves from known materials to more elaborate contents for student independent practice. But, the teachers' kept their fondness for explaining everything, which had both positive and negative sides. The teachers had found a way to benefit students with a "traditional" practice, as the students were exposed to the target language in a meaningful way. In most cases the teachers' explanation provided students with exposure to clear spoken language, to which students showed high levels of understanding. However, the approach hindered students' progress towards independent learning. It was assumed that the teachers' reflective skills would be of valuable help for them to continue to improve in this area.

Implications: The ability to provide students with models, structure or frameworks to learn the language skills was identified by the teachers as an achievement in the evaluation of the plan of action. The kinds of activities integrated in the lessons revealed that the teachers had improved their teaching techniques to promote student independence in the classroom. However, the teachers' kept their tendency to continue to provide students with explanations. This was clearly an approach that they found effective to handle class instruction within their contextual conditions.

With so many students in one group, it is certainly easier to handle instruction that way. Context once again was not favorable for teacher change.

c) Student independent learning outside the classroom

The teachers' attempts to promote student autonomy outside the classroom were mainly revealed by the assigned homework. In this regard, some of the tasks assigned were traditional grammar exercises. Nevertheless, there were some other tasks that showed the teachers' attempts to provide students with more motivating opportunities for independent practice (writing a survey for their partners, listening to a song, following instructions for drawing something, using the web). The writing tasks assigned, though not effective, were also part of the teachers' attempts to provide students with meaningful opportunities for independent practice.

Implication: The plan of action had been helpful in raising teacher awareness of the importance of promoting student autonomy for successful learning. This was shown through the teachers' attempts to assign more meaningful tasks as homework. Nonetheless, there was still ample room for improvement in this area, particularly in the written assignments.

d) Connecting language learning to student reality

In the new exploration the teachers showed the same basic concern for raising students' awareness of the practical use of the language in real life. Thus, their attempts at the classroom level showed more agreement with their beliefs. In the lessons observed most of them made considerable efforts in linking class content with students' likes, personal aims, and interests through the activation of students' prior knowledge and the selection of motivating topic areas. All of these attempts to provide them with a meaningful learning process resulted in more student participation and motivation.

Implication: There was improvement in the area as a result of exposure to the different courses of the plan. As predicted, the teachers' major interest in fostering students' learning through the connection of the language to their reality, was the optimal basis for improvement.

e) Student participation

The teachers' agreed that different ways of interaction should be promoted in order to optimize student participation. The teachers' performance in the lessons observed showed agreement with their views. Different ways of classroom management were observed; as well as a variety of activities to promote student interaction and practice of the different language skills. The teachers continued to promote language instruction as a whole class, which was understandable because of the number of students in the classroom. However, this approach affected student attention in some

cases. On the other hand, most teachers also integrated pair work and group work activities and language games and there was also an increase in the teachers' ability to motivate students. All of the teachers' efforts in providing students with variety and with more meaningful opportunities for interaction resulted in increased student interest attention and participation in the process. The few cases in which students' participation was low were those cases in which the teachers used a traditional approach.

Implications: The plan of action had served the intended purpose as the results in both teachers' ability to motivate students and student participation showed a significant difference with the results in the first cycle of observations. It was assumed that the teachers' acquired reflective skills would be helpful for them to continue to improve in this area.

- *About the main weaknesses identified*

It was clear that the plan of action had served its intended purpose in both helping teachers align their beliefs and practice, and enhancing their teaching skills and knowledge. Nonetheless, there were weaknesses in the process, such as the teachers' tendency to provide thorough explanations and the organization of classroom instruction as a whole class. This approach was not the result of lack of teacher awareness or a sign of a traditional methodology (except for the two cases described). Rather, it was the teachers' response and solution to the limitations posed by the contextual conditions, because of the number of students and limited class time. Another problem posed by context was the difficulties to monitor students' work and check their understanding. As a result, the teachers did not address particular problems such as error correction or problems with particular troublesome students (passive, shy or undisciplined students). A further contextual problem was the time provided for instruction, which did not allow teachers to cover class contents in depth. On the other hand, it was perceived that most teachers were on their way towards better approaches in teaching the language skills, which they could possibly continue to improve towards their independent efforts. Nevertheless, the writing skills deserved special attention. Most probably, they needed external help to improve their teaching approaches in this regard. Similarly, the teachers' approaches in terms of instructional materials should expand to the actual improvement of textbook activities and materials designed by the teachers.

Implications: In spite of having improved their teaching approaches, the teachers continued to face problems posed by the situational context. The teachers struggled to provide adequate solutions and still keep approaches that fostered student learning. This was the best proof of their improvement since they were taking active roles as change agents and problem solvers. As far as writing is concerned, the plan of action did not achieve its intended aim. The teachers needed further help to

improve their teaching skills in this area. Planning and designing materials was another area in which the teachers needed further improvement.

4.4.2 Main findings in the evaluation of the training program

The evaluation of the program revealed significant information about its effectiveness from the perspective of both trainers and teachers, regarding the fulfillment of objectives, the main strengths of the teachers, and the main weaknesses and difficulties experienced during the development of the plan. Likewise, the information involved the perception of the trainers about the beliefs that the teachers needed to challenge, and their suggested area for Action Research. Finally, the evaluation provided valuable information about the main achievements of the program as perceived by the teachers, and the follow up suggested by both trainers and teachers.

- *The achievement of objectives*

The training program involved eight different courses aimed at equipping teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge for professional improvement as EFL teachers. On the whole both trainers' and trainees' perception about the fulfillment of these objectives was positive. Nevertheless, there were particular problems in some of the courses that prevented the teachers from fully benefiting from their training program. The courses in which the objectives were accomplished satisfactorily were: *Principles and Methods in TEFL, Techniques and Strategies in Listening and Speaking, Lesson Planning in TEFL* and *Teaching EFL with a Learner-centered Approach*. On the other hand, both teacher and trainers agreed that the objectives had been partially fulfilled in the other four courses: *Technological Resources in TEFL, Techniques and strategies in Reading and Writing, Planning Materials and Units of Work in TEFL* and *Action Research in the classroom*. The major constraints of the program will be described below.

- *The main difficulties in the development of the program*

The difficulties that affected the development of the program were experienced by both the trainers and the teachers and revolved around the teachers' background knowledge, the situational context, and the organization of the program.

- a) *The teachers' background knowledge*

Both the trainers and the teachers identified particular difficulties posed by the teachers' prior knowledge, which affected the pace and development of the courses. For instance, in the course *Lesson Planning* the trainer acknowledged lack of coherence at the time of lesson plan implementation. In the course *Technological Resources in TEFL* the trainer admitted that the computer literacy was not the expected one. In the course *Principles and Methods in TEFL* the lack of previous knowledge about language methods and certain key terminology affected the pace of the course. The novelty of contents was also a problem in the courses *Teaching EFL with a*

Learner-centered Approach, Techniques and Strategies in teaching Reading and Writing, and Planning Materials and Units of Work in TEFL. In the course *Action Research in the classroom* the problems with the teachers' background knowledge were focused on the lack of general research skills and the low writing skills for academic reports.

Implications: The gaps in the teachers' background knowledge at the beginning of the program were related to essential basic skills and knowledge such as technological skills, pedagogical skills, research skills, advanced writing skills, and analytical skills. These findings have significant implications indicating weaknesses in the PRESET program offered by the English Department at UNAN. Thus, an evaluation of the courses in which the teachers should acquire this knowledge would be highly beneficial.

b) The organization of the program

There were several difficulties in the organization of the program that affected its development and the achievement of objectives. The first problem was caused by not having accurately identified the exact nature and dimensions of the gaps in the teachers' background knowledge. This problem affected the pace and content of most courses as the trainers had higher expectations about the teachers' knowledge. Other organization problems were caused by time constraints as some courses were perceived by both teacher and trainers as too concentrated for the amount of contents to be covered. The courses affected by time organization were *Principles and Methods in TEFL, Teaching EFL with a Learner-centered Approach, and Action Research in the Classroom.* Another difficulty was the curriculum organization in terms of distribution of the courses along the development of the program. A specific example of this is the course *Techniques and Strategies in TEFL I*, which included *Reading and Writing* together. The trainer acknowledged not having been able to cover all of the contents of these two demanding areas. Other two courses that faced the same problem were *Lesson Planning and Teaching EFL with a Learner-centered Approach*, as they were concentrated in two weeks.

Implications: All of these findings have important implications for the planning of similar professional development courses offered by the English Department at UNAN. In order to prevent these problems from happening in future programs, some organizational provisions should be made. (1) The identification of the teachers' background knowledge requires a diagnostic test to find out the state of their knowledge. (2) Based on the results a propaedeutic course should be planned to help teachers catch up with the program contents. (3) Likewise, through the diagnostic test it can be possible to identify missing elements to integrate into the program (e.g. a course

focused on advanced Academic Writing focused on research reports). (4) On the other hand, the organization of the courses requires taking into account the nature and content of the courses as well as timing (e.g. more demanding courses should be taught separately).

c) Contextual problems

Problems posed by context were present all along the development of the teachers' training program affecting the process in different ways. Contextual problems were present at the beginning of the investigation limiting and determining teacher performance. These problems reached their peak during the development of the Action Research course affecting the teachers' research projects in a number of ways. On the whole, the problems posed by context were varied in kind and nature: economic problems, constraining institutional policies, time limitations, and the teachers' working conditions. Workload, particularly, was an ever-existing constraint that did not allow teachers to fulfill their academic tasks properly and be consistent with their attendance to the training program. What would seem to be a lack of teacher commitment was, in fact, the interfering influence of context on the teachers' performance. Other problems arising from context were socio-cultural factors, such as the lack of reading and writing habits.

Implications: All of these contextual factors combined with the organizational problems described above, affected the teachers' performance significantly. Indeed, their potentialities were not fully exploited. The major negative influence of the situational context on the training program was clearly perceived in the difficulties faced by the teachers to be able to benefit fully from their training program. These findings confirm the aspects discussed in the literature review that teacher development cannot be separated from their situational context where it takes place (lit. review 1). Thus, any attempt to provide the teachers with an effective training program should take into account these factors in the organization of the program.

- *The teachers' main strengths*

The trainers emphasized several teachers' strengths that contributed to the development of the training courses and to the achievements of the program objectives. Some of these aspects were particular teacher characteristics, such as open-mindedness, motivation, and the teachers' attitude towards collaborative work. Another positive aspect was the teachers' condition as in-service teachers. The teachers' professional practice was the reason why they had good contextual knowledge, which materialized in their awareness of students, the teaching context and the elements of lesson planning. The same strengths in the teachers' contextual knowledge had been perceived by the external evaluators during the assessment of the AR projects.

Implications: The strengths identified by the trainers as open-mindedness, motivation and the teachers' collaborative attitude had been recurrently present throughout the training process. On the other hand, the teachers' status as practicing teachers facilitated the training process significantly. Indeed, being teachers in practice was an advantage, as they were able to implement the skills, strategies and knowledge acquired in their classrooms. Moreover, their condition as practicing teachers provided them with the opportunity to design and implement their AR projects with their own students. The trainers' perception of the teachers' strengths have special significance for this study, since they confirm the suitability of this group of teachers as the target population for this study.

- *Teacher beliefs to challenge*

The trainers' perception about the beliefs that the teachers' needed to challenge shed significant light on the state of the teachers' beliefs prior to the guided process to teacher reflection. Moreover, it helped to focus the reflective process. In addition, the trainers' perception confirmed and validated the findings about the teachers' beliefs that emerged in stage two.

a) Understand clearly the processes of language teaching and learning

Such an understanding involved taking into account their situational context and the kinds of limitations and conditions it posed to language instruction. The teachers also needed to realize what effective language teaching involved, and how their own characteristics as language teachers contributed to such effectiveness. Likewise, it was important to raise the teachers' critical awareness of other important aspects such as their beliefs about language teaching and learning, their teaching approaches their roles, students' roles and participation, and the teaching materials among others.

Implications: An increase in teacher understanding of the complexity of language teaching and learning was identified during the guided process to reflection, which reveals that the guidance had been positive. The teachers' perception about their achievements as a result of the plan of action revealed significant awareness of this complexity as well. The classroom observations shed significant light on this issue as the teachers adopted a more holistic approach in their lessons.

b) Confront and change contextually conditioned beliefs and actions

The trainers identified weaknesses in the teachers' beliefs and actions as a direct result of the interaction with their situational context. Such interaction conditioned and limited the teachers' performance, compelling them to teach traditional lessons, even against their views. This was confirmed in the initial exploration (e.g. the teachers' perception that there was little room for

improvement because of contextual limitations). Thus, the trainers perceived as important that the teachers' confronted those views and actions.

Implication: The trainers' identification of this need contributed to the efforts to help teachers achieve consistency between their teaching beliefs and their performance at the classroom level. This effort fostered significant teacher reflection on a number of issues (e.g. using a traditional methodology in spite of holding modern views about language teaching). Evidence of change in this regard is found throughout the guided process to reflection, and the achievements perceived by the teachers as a result of exposure to the plan of action. The classroom observations were the ultimate evidence of the teachers' efforts to become change agents able to both adapt their approaches to their students' needs and deal with contextual challenges effectively.

c) Develop an effective beliefs system

According to the trainers' views, confronting and understanding their teaching-learning beliefs and actions should lead teachers to the development of an effective beliefs system of their own. Such a system should be well-informed experiential and based on reflection. The development of such a framework would allow teachers to develop their own language learning theories and practical knowledge taking into account their teaching style, their students and the teaching context.

Implication: For this purpose, their open-mindedness and natural inclination towards learning and collaboration were perceived as significant advantages. Evidence of a refinement in the teachers' beliefs system was given in the teachers' guided process to reflection, the second cycle of classroom observations, and the teachers' identified achievements.

d) Develop and internalize a positive attitude towards research

The trainers also suggested that the teachers should demystify the process of doing research and internalize it as a positive process for their improvement. This perception led to the organization of a scaffolding process involving *introspection* and *collaboration* to guide the teachers' along the design, implementation and evaluation of their research projects.

Implications: In spite of the efforts, it was a difficult process as the teachers had not had any prior experience in the area. This finding suggests a curriculum revision and an evaluation of the research components of the Teaching Education Program offered by English Department at UNAN-León. Scaffolding processes proved to be effective for supporting the teachers' process in doing Action Research. Evidence of openness to research was provided by the teachers' self-evaluation after the presentation of their research projects. Additionally, the teachers provided further evidence in the achievements identified and in the follow up suggested.

- *The trainers' suggestions for Action Research*

The trainers gave valuable insights about the potential areas in which the projects could be carried out within the scope of their particular training area. These suggestions enriched the reflective process, as they were discussed with the teachers to open up a wider perspective in light of their research projects. Nevertheless, no influence or pressure was exerted for the teachers to select their research topics. In most cases, the teachers addressed the research issue suggested by the trainers from the practical side, but not getting deep into the target area at the level of theory. For example, the trainer of the course *Planning materials and units of work* suggested comparative views of textbooks, but no research project was focused on this issue. The teachers used the knowledge in this area to integrate, adapt or create activities addressed to their research problem.

Implications: This cautious approach to address research was, no doubt, the impact of novelty. It was the first time that the teachers carried out research and they were clearly overwhelmed. The teachers did not feel confident enough as to pursue research from a deeper perspective. They preferred the practical side since their research skills were emerging. The teachers' low research skills suggest implications for future investigation in the area: the need for an evaluation of the research components within the Teacher Education Program at UNAN-León.

- *The main achievements*

The achievements according to the teachers' views, concentrated primarily on the target areas of the training program. These outcomes were clearly the result of the interaction between the teachers' strengths and the relevance of the training areas. Thus, the teachers perceived the following main achievements.

- a) *Enhancement of skills in using technology for teaching purposes*

This achievement was perceived by the teachers as a result of their interaction with the course *Technological Resources in TEFL*. The teachers valued the program as an optimal opportunity to enhance their knowledge on how to use technological resources, such as computers and the Internet for teaching purposes. The benefits of this course, which was the first of the training program, had an immediate effect on the teacher's approaches. Some of the teachers with access to equipment started to present lessons using visual and auditory information through power point presentations. Some others innovated by assigning tasks for students to complete and give a follow up on the Internet. Likewise, the acquired computer skills were useful for the tasks and assignments of the different courses and for the design and implementation of their Action Research projects.

Implications: It was accurate to start up the program with this course as it provided the teachers with the necessary knowledge to work on the assignments of the training program. For all of the teachers the course came to fulfill one of their most significant training needs as they had never taken a course of this kind. Some of the teachers already had computer skills, but for some others the course provided them with the necessary basic knowledge to start using technology as a regular professional instrument. Nonetheless, all teachers without exception benefited greatly from having updated their knowledge in the use of these resources for language instruction. The fact that most teachers had a low computer literacy and, in general, lacked basic knowledge in the use of technological resources has important implications for the Teacher Education Program at UNAN-León.

b) Development of strategies and techniques for teaching the language areas

The teachers acknowledged that the training program had been useful for them to concentrate, refine, enhance and improve the knowledge they acquired in their PRESET program for teaching the language skills. In addition, as an added value of the training program the teachers' also perceived improvement in the development of their own language skills. The development of this ability was achieved mainly through two particular courses *Techniques and Strategies in TEFL I: Reading and Writing and Techniques and Strategies in TEFL II: Speaking and Listening*. Nonetheless, given the interrelated nature of the program, the other courses also played an important role. On the other hand, the AR projects provided the teachers with the opportunity to put together all of this knowledge at a very practical level. The improvement in the teachers' teaching skills was perceived at the classroom level. The teaching of writing was the exception as the teachers' original approach kept basically the same.

Implication: There was evidence of improvement in real practice, which was revealed by the classroom observations. The teachers tried to teach the language skills in a gradual way using patterns, formats, structures, and models. Likewise, they made conscious efforts to provide students with different and meaningful opportunities to interact in light of the acquisition of the different language areas, which contrasted significantly with the first exploration. The exception was teaching the writing skills as the teachers' approach was basically the same observed in the original exploration. A combination of factors were perceived as influencing on this problem, being the most relevant ones, the lack of a solid basis at the PRESET level and the organizational problems at the INSET level. That is to say the training program did not achieve the consolidation of the teachers' knowledge in teaching the writing skill. This finding has important implications for future research in the area.

c) *Development of reflective skills*

The development of the teachers' reflective skills was focused on having gained new insights about teaching, the students and their own role as teachers.

- *A principled view of teaching*

As far as teaching is concerned, the teachers acknowledged having gained a more principled, well-informed and professional view about teaching approaches. The main courses focused on achieving this aim were *Principles and Methods in TEFL* and *Action Research in the Classroom*. But, the other courses contributed to achieving this aim each from its own particular focus. On the whole, the teachers acknowledged having gained awareness of how to improve the process of TEFL by using a principled approach. Interestingly enough, their insights focused on having developed a critical perspective of the different methods in context. Within this view, important contextual factors, such as the kind of students, the resources available, and the nature of instruction were all considered key elements to take into account when selecting the teaching method. Furthermore, the teachers' previous own traditional teaching views were brought into play.

Implications: Signs of this awareness were also identified at the time of the guided process to reflection. Thus, it seemed that the teachers had internalized the importance of not following particular teaching views in an unthinking way. Although the teachers learned theoretical aspects, they did so in practice as they had multiple opportunities to test the effectiveness of the ideas at the classroom level. This principled view of teaching, which was perceived as a sign of professional development, contrasted significantly with their original views before the plan of action. The teachers once more revealed their open and positive attitude towards making significant changes in the classroom. Thus it was confirmed that in order for change to take place the teachers have to be open-minded, motivated, and well informed. But, as Guskey (2002) suggests there should be a dynamic interaction between practice and theory; the teachers have to see the results in the student learning outcomes for change to take place.

- *Awareness of student-related factors*

The teachers also revealed having increased their awareness of student-related factors and learned new ways of understanding students. Two key courses for achieving this aim were *Teaching EFL with a Learner-centered Approach* and *Lesson Planning in TEFL*. The other courses of the plan supported this aim within their own particular focus. The teachers provided evidence of having internalized important insights regarding learner-centered approaches; for instance students' differences (ages, learning needs, and learning styles), affective factors (motivation, attitudes and personality traits), student previous experience and background knowledge and student

responsibility and involvement in their own learning process. Thus, the teachers stated their willingness to enhance students' capabilities so that they can build up their own knowledge. Moreover, they recognized the need to analyze students in order to identify their particular characteristics and plan the possible activities to improve their learning process.

Implications: The teachers' great concern for student learning, motivation and participation was certainly the starting point of this change. Evidence of teacher awareness was found in the guided process to reflection and in the final classroom observations where the teachers showed a teaching practice more consistent with their views (more learner-centered activities, as opposed to the traditional teacher-centered ones observed in the initial exploration). In this sense, there was still room for improvement in the teachers' approaches to provide explanations and group students as a whole class. This tendency, nevertheless, was not the result of lack of teacher awareness, but the response to contextual limitations (time, number of students and classroom conditions). Even within this traditional approach, the teachers tried to provide students with meaningful learning (e.g. clear exposure to the spoken language). Thus, it is confirmed that reflective teachers reshape their knowledge in light of their practice and as a response to their situational context.

- Awareness of their own teaching performance

The teachers' awareness of student-related factors was connected with the awareness of their own performance as language teachers. Issues regarding effective teacher roles and performance were approached in all the courses of the training program, each focused on its particular target area. The teachers recognized the importance of qualities, such as motivation, flexibility and creativity in the process. They also acknowledged having become more aware of their teaching style and preferences. They provided evidence of having gained fresher insights regarding their teaching actions as they openly admitted their limitations. What is more, the teachers recognized the influence that their beliefs and attitudes exerted on their teaching practice, and provided evidence of serious attempts to test their effectiveness for the sake of student learning.

Implications: Overall, the efforts served their intended purpose. The teachers had become more conscious that taking into account students' learning needs necessarily involved a more proactive participation from them. The starting point for this change was the teachers' stance and acceptance of their own responsibility for student learning. Nonetheless, this time they had a more professional, determined and informed way of approaching the issue. Once again, a sense of professionalism was perceived, as the teachers put forward their social role as change agents, and their initiative and commitment to improve their professional skills.

d) Improvement in the approaches to lesson planning

Lesson planning was the area in which more improvement was perceived. This positive outcome was the result of a combination of factors: the previous teachers' awareness of lesson planning structure, the relevance of the training course and the status of the teachers as practicing teachers (the teachers could see the immediate benefits at the classroom level). On the whole, the teachers reported that the process had helped them to: increase their awareness of the significance of lesson planning, view planning as a creative process, identify its elements and structure, and realize that planning should be learner-centered.

Implications: The best evidence of the improvement in the area of lesson planning was provided by the teachers' approaches in teaching the language areas. The influence of their training was clearly perceived, as most teachers admitted using a planning template created collectively during the course. The common features in the lesson plans were clear descriptions of the practice and content areas, carefully detailed activities in each stage, and the integration of learning objectives, materials used, time, kind of interaction and procedures.

e) Improvement in the skills for developing teaching materials

Another significant achievement was the development of materials for language instruction. The teachers' achievements in this area were focused on a critical view of textbooks, approaches for adapting and designing materials, and skills in developing adequate materials for student learning. The main course that addressed this issue was *Planning materials and Units of Work*. This course was closely supported by two other courses *Lesson Planning and Technological Resources*. The other courses also contributed to the improvement of teachers' knowledge on teaching materials, within their own specific focus. This was particularly true in the course *Action Research in the Classroom*, in which the teachers had to create, design, adapt and integrate materials to address their particular research problem.

Implication: Although there were problems of time and workload that affected the teachers' performance, there were improvements in the area. The teachers made it clear that they had gained enough knowledge and skills in the area as to continue to improve independently. The classroom observations revealed that all the teachers integrated different kinds of materials to complement their textbook which was a significant difference with the first observations. Nonetheless, no evidence was provided of the teachers' approaches to adapt materials from the textbook in the classroom observations.

f) *Development of a receptive attitude towards Action Research*

Developing a receptive attitude towards Action Research was the core objective of the course *Action Research in the Classroom*. It was also intended to help teachers demystify the process of doing research and make it approachable for them so they could become effective change agents in their classrooms. Thus, the teachers viewed Action Research as an important means of teacher professional improvement, a valuable tool for teacher reflection, and a useful process for teacher change and improvement.

Implications: (1) The receptive attitude towards research emerged out of the immediate and direct benefits in solving the target problems of their research project. This finding confirms the theory stated by Guskey (2002: 383) that changes in teacher beliefs only take place after they have corroborated the effectiveness of the particular innovation. (2) On the other hand, the process of doing research involved guidance and support to the teachers to help them overcome contextual limitations. Thus, two important scaffolding processes took place: introspection and collaboration. These two processes played a very important role to help teachers complete their research projects. These findings suggest that teachers doing research within restricting contextual conditions benefit significantly from such scaffolding processes.

- *Follow up to the Program*

Both teachers and trainers provided valuable insights as to how they viewed continuing professional development after the training program. They perceived such a process as involving independent efforts through self-study, experiential knowledge through the teaching practice, collaboration with trainers, collaboration with peers, and the ongoing development of reflective skills.

a) *Independent efforts through self-study,*

On the whole, both teachers and trainers shared the views that the follow up to the program required considerable personal efforts from the teachers themselves. Such efforts should involve both, their teaching skills in all target areas and their linguistic competence. Several ways of doing this were suggested: going over the materials of the course thoroughly, searching relevant information on the web, and using the library.

Implications: Independent study was a realistic and autonomous way of professional improvement with which the teachers were very familiar. Nevertheless, they had gained knowledge on how to guide the efforts towards their specific professional needs in a more effective way.

b) *Experiential knowledge through the teaching practice*

Another way of giving a follow up was, obviously, through the teachers' experiential knowledge at the classroom level. Thus, trial and error would test and determine the efficacy of the teaching actions for the sake of student learning outcomes. Within this view, the teachers needed to continue to strengthen their development by implementing the actions learned in all target areas, (e.g. plan, implement and evaluate learner-centered lessons, use technology in the classroom, develop their own materials, and put into practice a wide range of activities for teaching the language skills).

Implications: Teacher development as a situated experience was another important central idea of the present study. Within this view in order to promote meaningful changes the teachers' contextualized practice should be emphasized. Consequently, the best way for teachers to improve was through integrating actions matching their teaching style, meaningful for their students and relevant to their contextual realities.

c) *Collaboration with trainers*

Another suggestion for the teachers' ongoing improvement was the follow up to the process of collaboration with trainers. Thus, both teachers and trainers stated the importance of further teacher training opportunities in the form of workshops, courses, seminars and conferences. Another important suggestion related to collaboration with trainers involved personal or email contact, and classroom observations. The suggestions for the observations were that they should be both ways, from trainers to teachers (be monitored), and from teachers to trainers (observe effective approaches). Some of the target areas to continue to improve were a follow up of the courses of the training program. Some others were areas identified by the teachers as relevant to cope with existing challenges.

Implications: Collaboration was an important scaffolding process of this investigation. The positive results of this process show how beneficial collaboration is for teacher development. The findings in this study confirm the importance of establishing adequate collaboration structures and frameworks to support and accompany the teachers' efforts to their professional improvement, even after they graduate. This is particularly important when the contextual conditions, like in the present study, are not favorable for teacher improvement. Such results have important implication for future academic programs for teacher education at UNAN-León.

d) *Collaboration with peers*

Peer collaboration was suggested as an alternative to continue to explore their teaching. From the part of the trainers, the process was perceived as an important means of development through joint efforts (to plan lessons, to reflect on teaching, to make changes). From the part of the teachers,

this suggestion was, no doubt, the result of the peer work along the process of the plan of action. On the whole, the teachers acknowledged the benefits of this contact and expressed their eagerness to move on in this direction. Peer observation, particularly, was mentioned as an important process that they considered a “rewarding and enriching experience”. Consequently, the suggestions were to keep the contact (personally or through emails) and share strategies and ideas on different areas.

Implications: The teachers provided evidence of high levels of awareness as they viewed peer work as way of knowledge acquisition and renovation. The positive results of this process confirm the importance of peer collaboration for a sustainable teacher development process: an important implication for the teacher education program at UNAN-León

e) The ongoing development of reflective skills.

Both teachers and trainers were aware of the importance of reflection and the follow up suggested also involved efforts in this regard. The premise was that reflective skills would help teachers to develop their own informed language teaching-learning theory; thus becoming theorizers fully independent from external agents in their professional development.

Implications: The teachers should continue to make significant changes in their teaching practice through critical reflection. It was also suggested to give a follow up to a structured way of reflection such as Action Research or explore other options such as exploratory practice (because of its focus on combining research with pedagogy). Indeed, the approach that the teachers used to reflect was not really important as long as they continued to enhance their reflective skills. Reflective teaching and teachers as theorizers were central concepts of the present investigation. The identification of the need to continue this improvement has important implications for the Teacher Education Program in both INSET and PRESET at UNAN-León.

4.4.3 Main findings about the final stage of teacher development

In the original exploration the teachers viewed their professional development as something connected with their contextual conditions, which determined the quality of their work. Thus, their concerns were focused on curriculum issues, student-related factors, teacher training, methodological issues, time constraints and teacher appraisal. Most teachers viewed change as something in which they had little or no participation for improvement. These findings helped to re-define the areas of the training program. An important task to undertake was to raise teacher awareness of the many aspects within their reach to change and improve.

The final exploration revealed that the teachers had identified similar problems to the original ones, most of them related to context. Nonetheless, there were significant differences, since they

regarded their major problems as emerging from their classroom experience. Thus, teaching-related issues were the first problems identified. This was followed by the problems of low salaries and lack of good job opportunities, curriculum materials and resources, time constraints, teacher training, student motivation and large classes.

- *Specific teaching related issues*

Most of the teachers' worries emerged out of their teaching practice, which contrasted with their original concerns focused more on curriculum problems and resources. The problems identified had been recurrently present throughout the guided process to reflection (e.g. lesson planning, classroom instructions, controlled practice and teaching the language skills, among others). An increase in the teachers' reflective skills was clearly perceived as in the problems posed there were dimensions of the three kinds of reflection discussed in the literature review: *reflection in action*, *reflection on action* and *reflection for action*.

Implications: Most teachers' concerns had evolved from a strong focus on context-bound problems to the practical issues emerging in their teaching practice. This change in teacher thinking revealed that the teachers had focused their attention on significant problems within their scope to change and improve. Moreover, the fact that most problems were identified in the guided process to reflection, reflect consistency in teacher thinking.

- *Lack of better job opportunities and low salaries*

Lack of better job opportunities and low salaries were the second most urgent problems affecting teacher development. In the past they had defined this problem as resulting from low investment in education. Here, the teachers analyzed the problem from a very critical perspective stating how the low salaries and the lack of better job opportunities affected them. Their dismissal from UNAN was mentioned as a specific example of this. Thus, not having good job possibilities was perceived as the main cause of a number of other problems: financial problems, underestimation of the education field, and their extreme workload.

Implications: Along with their knowledge and teaching skills, the teachers had increased their sense of professionalism. In highlighting the problem of low salaries and the lack of better job opportunities, the teachers demanded a better social recognition to their work as teachers. The teachers' multiplicity of tasks was clearly perceived at the time they were undertaking their research projects. Most teachers were working several shifts in different institutions and attending numerous students, which affected both teacher performance and the quality of the research projects.

- *Curriculum materials and resources*

As in the initial exploration, the teachers identified problems caused by inadequate curriculum guidelines, and by the lack of materials and resources for teaching EFL in their institutions. As a result of these limitations, the training program integrated different courses aimed at helping teachers cope with these limitation. The teachers revealed that the problem with curriculum and materials still existed, and that it continued to affect the teaching processes.

Implications: The plan reached its intended objective of enhancing teacher knowledge in this area, which is reflected in the achievements described, and in the solutions to the problems proposed by the teachers. Evidence of the teachers' initiative to make changes and improvements in their teaching materials was provided in the guided process to reflection and in the second classroom observations.

- *Time constraints*

The problems connected with time constraints for language instruction were identified in the first exploration and continued to be an issue at the end of the plan of action. The major problems were focused on the little time devoted for English instruction, which was considered a sign of the underestimation of the language within the educational institutions.

Implications: Different courses intended to provide teachers with ideas to optimize class time. The influence of the training was perceived through the teachers' acknowledgement of the importance of classroom activities and teaching resources to cope with time limitations. Moreover, the classroom observations provided evidence of the teachers' efforts to optimize class time. Significant improvement was perceived in the teaching processes in this regard.

- *Teacher training*

Teacher training was one of the most significant problems identified in the original exploration. The teachers' insights at that time revealed the areas in which the teachers needed improvement, which was useful to plan the content of the training course. The new teachers' views revealed that teacher training was still an important concern. Two kinds of perceptions were identified: on the one hand, the teachers referred to the problems posed by the institutions: either institutions did not provide training, or the training provided was inadequate. On the other hand, the teachers were concerned with a follow-up to the approaches in their training course.

Implications: The teachers' willingness to continue their training reflected significant professional maturity, since they perceived their development as an on-going process. The teachers' found the practical side of their training program and valued it as a significant source of improvement. The

significance of this finding is that most teachers were aware of their needs for improvement, which revealed a development attitude. Teacher development, as discussed in the literature review, is characterized by the teachers' own conscious decisions to fulfil their particular professional needs.

- *Student motivation*

Student motivation towards learning English was also a recurrent problem. It was present in the original exploration combined with other student related issues, such as learning style and mixed ability. It was also a recurrent element throughout the guided process to reflection. After the plan of action, the teachers continued to be consistent with their concern for student lack of motivation in learning the language. It is clear that they maintained their attitude of assuming responsibility to solve the problem. Nevertheless, the teachers' perceptions also evolved to consider the problem from a more critical perspective. Thus, they related the problem to mainstream education in Nicaragua, which currently faces high levels of school desertion. The teachers' believed that part of the problem is due to a lack of students' motivation to pursue professional careers.

Implications: The greatest impact of the teachers' concern was perceived in the selection of the research topics, most of which emerged out of the teachers' genuine interest in raising their students' motivation. The classroom observations provided evidence of the improvement in the teachers' approaches to motivate students, reflected in an increase of student participation in the classroom activities. The teachers' reference to mainstream education reflects a more critical awareness of global educational problems in the country.

- *Large classes*

The problem of large classes was identified in the initial exploration as one of the most serious limitations. Several courses of the training program aimed at providing teachers with significant help to cope with this limitation. At the end of the plan of action the teachers' continued to reveal problems posed by the number of students in the classroom. The teachers referred to the various dimensions in which this problem affected their teaching practice (e.g. lack of student motivation, inadequate classroom conditions, different kinds of students, etc.). The exploration of the teachers' contextual challenges during the guided process to teacher reflection revealed the critical conditions in which the teacher provided instruction. The influence of the training program is perceived in their insights as they mentioned the kinds of measures taken to ease the problem at the classroom level.

Implication: The classroom observations revealed that the teachers made significant efforts in integrating pair work and group work activities. Nonetheless, the most used approach was whole class instruction, which was clearly the teachers' response to their contextual reality. The teachers'

tendency to address student as a group and provide them with explanations kept invariable. The difference in this approach was that it was combined with group work and pair work and that the teachers provided students with exposure to more natural and clear spoken language. Thus, the teachers were trying to adapt their approaches to cope with their contextual limitations.

- *Solutions to the problems*

In the original exploration the teachers viewed the solution of the problems as the responsibility of institutions and educational authorities. One of the tasks to undertake was to raise the teachers' awareness of the many ways in which they could contribute to ease the problems at the classroom level. The new teachers' insights revealed that they considered important their own participation in solving the problems. They also suggested joint efforts with their peers, as well as the participation of educational authorities and the society.

- *The teachers' participation to solve the problems*

The teachers' willingness to solve the problems was no doubt linked to the identification of teaching-related problems. Nevertheless, the teachers also showed an open and proactive attitude towards the resolution of some of the other problems,

Implications: The plan of action succeeded in raising the teachers' awareness of the importance of their own participation in making improvements. On the other hand, their willingness to contribute to the solution of some of the other problems was a significant sign of professionalism. As discussed in the literature review the teachers' awareness of their role as change agents makes them "reflective practitioners" able to go beyond the classroom by adopting a more active and participatory attitude in the problems posed by their situational contexts

- *Join efforts to solve the problems*

The teachers also showed awareness of the possible ways to solve the problems by means of working together with their peers, a process also suggested as a follow up to their training. The teachers suggested peer work to overcome the problems of lack of materials, as alternatives to the lack of teacher training opportunities, and to solve common problems in the classroom.

Implications: Considerable efforts were made throughout the plan of action to raise teacher awareness of the importance of collaboration with their peers. This collaboration reached its peak at the time of the Action Research projects with the peer observations.

- *Participation of institutions/educational authorities and society to solve the problems*

The teachers realistically acknowledged that the solutions to guarantee proper conditions for language instructions was the responsibility of authorities in charge of the educational system and

of decision-making. They also acknowledged the importance of the participation of community members such as parents, students and the society as a whole in solving the problems.

Implications: The teachers' views resembled the insights discussed in the literature review about how socio-cultural and political factors shape language instruction. Such factors relate to how the language is viewed and valued by authorities and by the community. The teachers' had raised their awareness of the importance of the different social actors in establishing adequate frameworks for an effective language teaching-learning process.

- *Teacher reflection at the end of the project*

Teacher reflection was the ultimate goal of the present investigation. As such, it was promoted in each of the courses of the program along with the relevant knowledge base for the teachers' professional improvement in target areas. The premise was that a reflective attitude would contribute to sustainable teacher development.

All through the development of this investigation, the teachers provided consistent and varied evidence of change fostered by their emerging reflective skills. This change focused on the teachers' awareness of troublesome aspects at the classroom level, the development of their problem solving skills, the refinement of their knowledge, and the adjustment of their teaching beliefs.

Implications: The final results of this investigation revealed that the teachers had internalized the importance of reflection in their teaching practice. Such a view had important implications for their role, their students', the available resources, their teaching materials, and more importantly their teaching context.. The teachers had gained new understandings of their own importance as EFL teachers; as social agents able to make significant changes in their classroom not only for the sake of student learning outcomes, but for the sake of their own professional development.

Chapter 6



Discussion of findings

In the previous sections I discussed in detail the results of this investigation in each of its stages. The present section will discuss the findings of the study based on the research questions. The findings reveal how the issues unfolded connect with each other and relate to the major theoretical issues discussed. Thus, references are made to the literature reviewed.

1. Research questions in stage 1: What problems do EFL teachers face for their professional development after graduating from their PRESET program? What are their training needs at the INSET level? What knowledge areas should be integrated into the plan of action?

The major aspects emerging as a result of these research questions were mostly related to the contextual conditions provided for language instruction in Nicaragua. The teachers revealed a number of problems that affected their teaching practice significantly, all of which were rooted in the situational context: inadequate curricula, scarce materials and didactic resources, student-related factors, teacher training, investment in the field (reflected in low salaries, difficult classroom conditions, and lack of resources), large classes, traditional methodology, time for instruction, and the teachers' appraisal system. The problems were interconnected and affected teachers significantly on an everyday basis.

1.1 The socio-cultural factors affecting teacher development

The interfering influence of context on teacher performance was perceived in several different ways all through the development of this investigation. For instance, all the teachers, without exception faced difficulties to focus on their training program due to their extreme workload. The peak pressure exerted by context took place in stage three, during the development of the teachers' Action Research projects. On the one hand, the teachers' workload made it very difficult for them to be able to focus on their projects. They worked in several institutions attending numerous students and working an excessive number of hours a week. On the other hand, their unexpected dismissal from UNAN-León affected both their motivational levels and the quality of the research projects. Six teachers could not endure the pressure and quit the program.

Interestingly enough, most teachers took full responsibility for student-related problems, an attitude that accompanied them all through the development of this investigation, fostering significant teacher motivation. Nonetheless, in all the other problems the teachers perceived that the responsibility was entirely in the hands of others, namely educational authorities, school principals and academic coordinators. This finding revealed that it was necessary to raise the teachers' awareness of their own importance in making contributions for improvement. It is worth mentioning here that it has not been my intention to undervalue the legitimate aspirations and rights of the teachers to have better working conditions, or take away responsibility from educational authorities and institutions to provide such conditions. Rather, one of the aims of this study was to identify what could be done to help teachers improve their teaching practice, within the existing contextual conditions. The premise was to empower them to assume a more proactive role and take steps towards becoming "change agents working for both better schools and a more just and truly democratic society" (Hudelson and Faltis, 1993:27). This view had a particularly significance in this study, as most of these teachers were in charge of university students who would be soon performing their professional roles in society.

All of these results relate to the insights discussed in the literature review that language instruction cannot be separated from the socio-cultural context in which it is embedded (see lit. review 1). Studies in the field have pointed out that the conditions provided for language instruction reflect how the particular community values such language. In Nicaragua, there appears to be low awareness of this. Although most educational authorities would agree that English is important, the conditions provided seem to reflect an underestimation of the language. This perception could possibly be extended to the community.

1.2 Teacher knowledge

The exploration of the teachers participating in this study revealed what kinds of knowledge was necessary for these teachers' professional improvement after graduating from their PRESET program at UNAN-León. Reference is made to the courses of the training program aimed at fulfilling these perceived needs.

- *Methodological aspects*

The problems posed by traditional methodology were the starting point. The majority of the teachers needed to improve in this area, particularly to expand their teaching techniques and be able to deal with large classes more effectively. Issues of methodology are enclosed in both *pedagogical content knowledge* and *personal practical knowledge*. Major efforts were carried out to fulfill these specific needs. Key components to achieve this aim were: *Principles and Methods in TEFL*,

Techniques and Strategies in Teaching Reading and Writing, and Techniques and Strategies in Teaching Listening and Speaking.

- *Materials design and implementation*

A second area identified was materials design and implementation. The need to improve in this area was corroborated by the classroom observations as very few teachers used materials that they had created on their own. Three kinds of knowledge involved here were: *contextual knowledge*, *pedagogical content knowledge*, and *personal practical knowledge*. The courses *Technological Resources in TEFL*, *Designing Materials and Planning Units of Work*, and *Lesson Planning in TEFL* helped teachers improve in this area.

- *Lesson planning and implementation*

The teachers expressed limitations in their ability to plan lessons. The findings in the classroom observations revealed how they struggled with lesson structuring and organization and with issues of pacing, sequencing, making transitions and timing. There was ample room for improvement in this area, as teachers had considerable freedom in their approaches to planning. The kinds of knowledge involved were, *pedagogical content knowledge*, *contextual knowledge* and *practical knowledge*. The courses *Lesson Planning in TEFL* and *Designing Materials and Planning Units of Work* helped teachers to enhance their skills in this area.

- *Target language use*

The teachers knew their limitations to be able to provide more effective instruction. Two specific concerns were how to encourage the students to use the target language in class, and how to help them use it for communication purposes. Furthermore, ways to optimize students' interaction and how to handle classroom instructions were areas in which the teachers needed improvement as well. The role, goal and nature of the language are aspects clearly enclosed in *content knowledge*. Other kinds of knowledge involved are *pedagogical knowledge*; *practical knowledge* and *contextual knowledge*. In all the courses of the training program the trainers used approaches intended to serve as models of effective language use in the classroom. Likewise pedagogical suggestions to optimize student practice in the oral skills were addressed in the course *Techniques and strategies in TEFL II* and in *Teaching English with a Learner-centered approach*.

- *Student-related factors*

There were constraints in the teachers' knowledge about how to deal with the particular characteristics of students. Specifically, they needed to know: how to deal with behavior problems, how to catch students' attention and interest, and how to deal with mixed-ability students. The teachers' awareness of student needs was high, but at the level of practice they needed to find the mechanisms to translate such awareness into effective procedures, tasks, and activities in the

classroom. *Practical, pedagogical, content, and contextual knowledge* were all involved in this area. A specific module that focused on student-related factors was the course: *Teaching EFL with a learner-centered approach*. Nevertheless, the teachers would find consistent help in *Lesson Planning in TEFL, Designing Materials and Planning Units of Work, Principles and Methods in TEFL, Techniques and strategies in TEFL I, and Techniques and Strategies in TEFL II*

2. Research questions in stage 2: What are the sources of teachers' beliefs? What is the current state of the teachers' beliefs and performance at the classroom level? How do teachers view themselves and their own development?

2.1 The sources of teachers' beliefs

The salient aspect of this exploration was how the teachers' beliefs were by and large the result of the interaction with their situational context, which shaped them significantly. Thus the teachers in this study acknowledged that the sources of their beliefs were teacher training, students, experiential knowledge and the teachers' experience as language learners.

- *Teacher training*

The teachers mostly regarded their teacher training as an important source; some of them acknowledging its positive aspects; some others criticizing the system. The information confirmed the shortcomings of the training provided to the teachers at the PRESET level, which were made evident in the initial cycle of classroom observations. The teachers struggled to achieve consistency between their beliefs and actions to provide effective language instruction. In trying to put together the knowledge they had learned in their initial training, such weaknesses were revealed.

- *Students*

Most teachers acknowledged the influence of students on their teaching views, which seemed to be connected with their concern for their learning. The teachers had developed great awareness of students' needs and made significant efforts to try to fulfill these needs. This awareness, in turn, motivated teachers to improve as they perceived their weaknesses. The teachers' concern for student learning was an important basis for the success of the training program.

- *Experiential knowledge*

Another major source was the teachers' experiential knowledge, materialized in the classroom and in their independent efforts to improve. This influence revealed the teachers' survival skills in dealing with the constraining influence of context, which did not provide them with proper support. As a result, they looked for ways to enhance their skills and knowledge through the process of

teaching itself or through independent search. Such an internal agenda, characteristic of teacher development, proved to be the basis for continuous improvement.

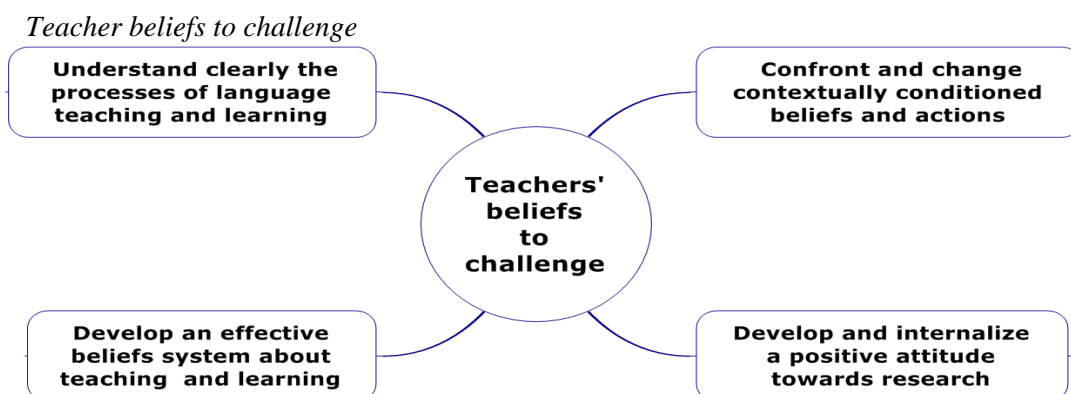
- *The teachers' experience as language learners*

Only two teachers regarded their experiences as language learners as having some kind of influence in the way they actually taught, and one of them with a very critical stance. Most teachers held non-traditional views regarding language learning and teaching. They acknowledged and criticized the constraints in the system, and the methodology used was one of the most significant ones. So, it seemed that most teachers did not recognize the influence of their learning, as a conscious rejection to the system. Nonetheless, teachers' experiences as language learners actually had an influence on the teachers' beliefs and actions, as confirmed in the classroom observations.

2.2 Teacher beliefs to challenge

The major issues to address in order to help teachers achieve consistency between their beliefs and teaching actions are shown in figure 38 and described below.

Figure 38



- *Understand clearly the processes of language teaching and learning*

Such an understanding involved taking into account their situational context and the kinds of limitations and conditions it posed to language instruction; and take relevant actions. Likewise, the teachers needed to realize what effective language teaching involved, and how their own characteristics as language teachers contributed to such effectiveness. It was also important to raise their critical awareness of other aspects such as their beliefs about language teaching and learning, their teaching approaches their roles, their students', and their approaches to deal with teaching materials, among others.

- *Confront and change contextually conditioned beliefs and actions*

There were weaknesses in the teachers' beliefs and actions as a direct result of the interaction with their situational context. Such interaction conditioned and limited their performance, compelling them to teach traditional lessons. Thus, it was important that the teachers had the opportunity to confront those beliefs and actions in light of effective practice.

- *Develop an effective beliefs system*

Understanding and confronting their beliefs and actions should lead teachers to the development of an effective beliefs system of their own. Such a system should be well-informed experiential and based on reflection. This would allow the teachers to develop their own language learning theory and practical knowledge taking into account their teaching style, their students and the teaching context.

- *Develop and internalize a positive attitude towards research*

The teachers had preconceived mistaken ideas about what research involved. These beliefs were also the influence of the situational context, this time at the level of their own educational background as they had not conducted proper research before this study. Thus, it was important for them to demystify the process and internalize it as an important tool for professional improvement.

2.3 The teachers' beliefs and practice

The initial exploration of the teachers' beliefs in practice was focused on language learning, error correction, the teaching materials, the teaching of the language skills, and students. On the whole, it was perceived that most teachers' held non-traditional views of teaching. But there were significant disagreements between such views and their practice. The major problems observed were, teacher-centered lessons often focused on the grammar point, with little student participation and connection of the language with real life. The use of the language in the classroom was not effective (unauthentic language, little communication, translations). There was also an inadequate treatment of the language skills (speaking approached through mechanical dialogues, lack of stages in listening and reading activities, writing assigned as homework).

Most teachers carried out tremendous efforts to provide practice in several language areas. Nevertheless, there were shortcomings in classroom instructions, timing, pacing, sequencing, and transitions between activities. Although they tried to promote variety through the formation of group work and pair work activities, there were weaknesses in monitoring group work, doing comprehension checks, and error correction. Most teachers were bound to the textbook, the notebook and the board, and few materials created by the teachers or adapted from other sources were observed.

The teachers were, for the most part, unaware of such discordances. Clearly, they had a struggle between what they believed and what was feasible for them to do within the restraining conditions posed by context. Thus, they would assume traditional roles (e.g. teacher-centered approaches) in spite of acknowledging that such roles were not effective. The problems were perceived as being caused by a number of factors such as the lack of consistency between their beliefs and actions, the lack of pedagogical ideas to teach in a more effective way and/or the direct influence of context (e.g. large classes, little time for instruction).

On the whole, this initial exploration confirmed that a teacher's teaching belief is indeed a complex system, resulting from an amalgam of largely derived contextual sources. The connection between the teachers' beliefs and their situational context was clearly revealed at the level of practice in the classroom. Thus, it was clear that the process of teacher development in the present study could not be separated from its context. Moreover, recognizing this connection represented an important step towards the improvement of the teacher education process. The next step was to guide teachers through a reflection process that addressed these and other important issues about their teaching beliefs and practice.

2.4 How teachers' viewed themselves

- *Teacher qualities and personality traits*

The study revealed that the teachers' qualities focused mostly on their rapport with students and their genuine interest and concern for their learning: good relationships, motivation, interest towards teaching, sense of humour, and a collaborative attitude. The teachers had great empathy for students and a high awareness of their needs. These qualities were clearly evidenced in the selection of the research topics, which were based on their concern to raise students' motivation and fulfil their learning needs. On the other hand, qualities such as open-mindedness, flexibility and willingness to learn were not consciously owned by the teachers. Because of their relevance for the development of a reflective attitude, one of the tasks of the program was to cultivate these qualities and make them evident.

- *Teacher motivation*

The teachers' initial motivational sources revolved around their personal and professional fulfilment, the achievement of language teaching-learning goals, the contribution to students' success and professionalization, and students' perception. These affective factors revealed that the teachers were highly motivated to their professional improvement, and that student learning outcomes exerted significant influence on that motivation. Moreover, the teachers perceived teaching as a process in which they shared knowledge with students. Such openness to collaboration with students had

resulted in a significant source of teaching beliefs and in a high awareness of student needs. The excellent rapport established between teachers and students was essential for the development of the research projects

The major sources of dissatisfaction, on the other hand, were the challenges imposed by their situational contexts. As expressed elsewhere, the teachers stated their frustration and disappointment with the conditions provided for language instruction. They also revealed their discouragement for not being able to deal with student-related factors effectively, which was confirmed through the classroom observations. The situation was optimal grounds to raise the teachers' awareness of the contradictions between their beliefs and practice.

- *Teacher development: the initial stage*

Most teachers' perceptions about their development focused on its ongoing, indefinite nature along their professional lives. They defined themselves as being in the early stages, and expressed their willingness to move on. Moreover, they acknowledged development as a personal process of discovery, growth and improvement. The most relevant finding in this exploration was the teachers' receptive attitude towards learning and change which was revealed through their identification with students. As discussed in the literature review (4.2.1) a receptive attitude towards new knowledge is an attribute of critical thinkers and, critical thinking is, in turn, an important condition for teacher reflection.

The teachers' position towards development indicated that the conditions for improvement were optimal. They fully acknowledged their need to move on professionally, as they considered their knowledge insufficient to cope with their numerous and varied professional challenges. On the other hand, their attitude towards learning and change revealed a high possibility for sustainable development. At this point of the investigation it was perceived that these positive views and attitudes were triggered by the reflective process in progress.

3. Research question in stage 3: What effect will a reflective process through Action Research have on teachers' thinking? What major problems will they experience? How can they be helped? Is Action Research, as a way of teacher reflection, adequate to the context?

In order to answer these research questions, I planned and implemented a guided process to help teachers develop their reflective skills through Action Research in the classroom. Given the restraining influence of context, the premise was that the teachers needed consistent support and assistance along the process. The teachers had gained relevant knowledge in the target areas as a result of their training. This background knowledge was the basis for the new task: doing Action

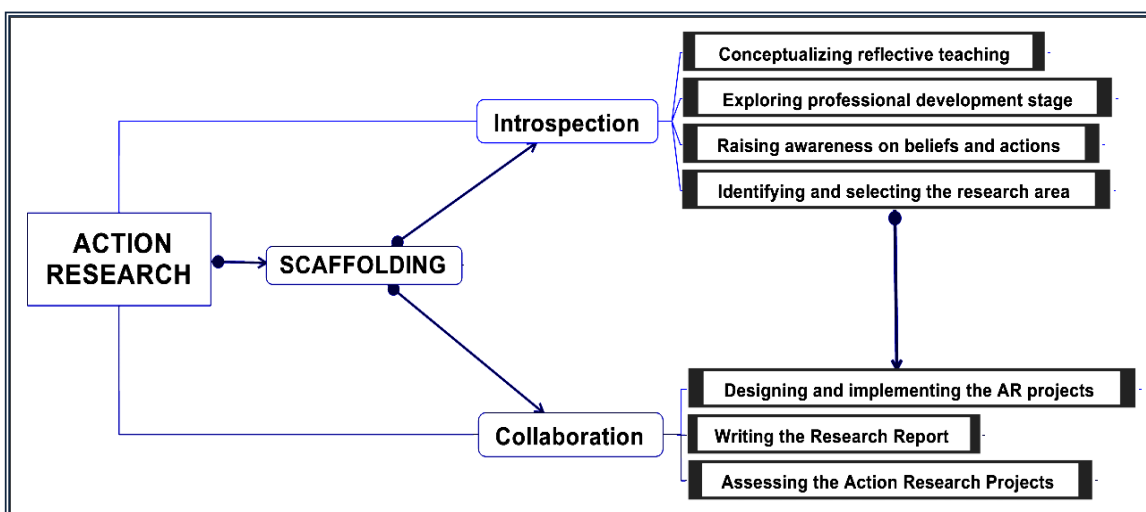
Research in their classrooms. The conditions were given and major efforts were made to provide an effective program to “lead the teacher to a better understanding of her own assets, beliefs, and values, and to help the teacher steadily improve her competencies” (Smith as cited in Bailey et. al., 1996:27). The following are the major issues emerging out of this guided process.

3.1 Action Research through Scaffolding

The process of teacher reflection through Action Research was a major challenge in this study as it required adequate supporting structures. *Scaffolding*, a term drawn from Vygotsky’s “Zone of Proximal Development” (Vygotsky, 1978: 86) is an example of such a structure. As defined in the literature review, *scaffolding* is a temporary supporting framework that makes it possible for an individual to continue to build on their existing knowledge with the help of peers or teachers (Holton and Thomas, 2001:99-100). This process is described in figure 39 below.

Figure 39

Action Research through Scaffolding



Scaffolding involved two major processes: *introspection* and *collaboration*. Introspection consisted of a series of tasks aimed at helping teachers reflect on a number of issues related to their teaching practice as a preparation for their research projects. The major reflective events within this guidance were: the teachers’ *conceptualization of reflective teaching*, *the exploration of their development stage*, *the awareness raising process on their beliefs and actions*, and *the identification and selection of the research areas*. As a logical progression, the introspection stages were followed by three collaboration stages. These stages consisted of assistance and support for the teachers’ efforts in conducting their research projects. This involved the participation of external collaborators who provided the teachers with support in different areas at key moments of their

projects: *the design and implementation of the research projects, the writing process of the research report, and the evaluation of the research projects.*

3.1.1 The introspective process

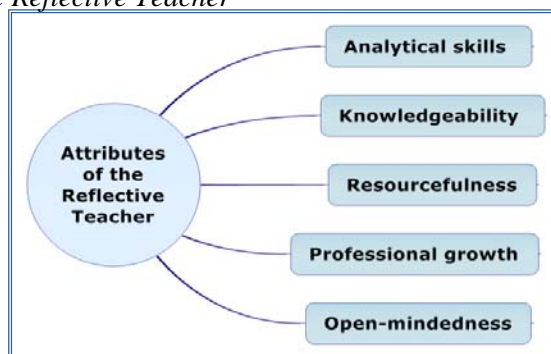
Through introspection the teachers reflected on their teaching in a variety of ways: journal writing, classroom discussions, conceptualizations of teaching, and explorations of their practice. The latter involved their existing knowledge, beliefs and actions. The process helped the teachers confront their beliefs and actions in light of effective practice. One of the major tasks of this introspective process was the exploration of the discordance between their teaching beliefs and performance, which fostered significant reflection. This process was very valuable for the investigation, and it confirmed that through adequate mechanisms it is possible to understand and give a follow up to the development of teacher thinking. This understanding can be the basis for relevant actions to foster teacher development. As Freeman and Richards point out “understanding teachers’ conceptualizations of teaching, their beliefs, thinking, and decision making can help us better understand the nature of language teacher education and hence better prepare us for our roles as teacher educators” (Freeman and Richards, 1996: 5).

- *Conceptualization of the Reflective Teacher*

The teachers’ conceptualization of reflective teaching shed significant light on their reflective process; it made the teachers’ *tacit knowledge* evident. This conceptualization seemed to resemble their reflective process and the knowledge and skills that they were developing. The attributes of the reflective teacher as portrayed by the teachers are shown in figure 40 below.

Figure 40

Conceptualization of the Reflective Teacher



As shown, the definition of *the reflective teacher* involved five specific attributes: *analytical skills, knowledgeability, resourcefulness, open-mindedness* and *professional growth*. For each of these attributes the teachers provided characteristic actions related to teaching, all of which potentially revealed their own process in both the acquisition of reflective skills and knowledge.

a) *Analytical skills*

The main attribute that the teachers perceived as characteristic of *the reflective teacher* was the ability to use analytical skills in his/her teaching practice. This seemed to indicate the emergence of their own *analytical skills* which they related to target areas of their teaching practice, such as their role as teachers, the students and the learning process. The thinking actions described related to both critical thinking and *reflective knowledge*.

b) *Knowledgeability*

The second attribute, *knowledgeability*, clearly revealed the process of knowledge acquisition, which had taken an important place in the teachers' priorities. The teaching actions described related to several kinds of knowledge: *Pedagogical Content Knowledge*, *Personal Practical Knowledge*, *Content Knowledge* and *Contextual Knowledge*.

c) *Resourcefulness*

The teachers connected *Resourcefulness* directly with the ability to provide students with the proper conditions for learning, which was their major concern. The teaching actions described portrayed all kinds of steps and measures that teachers should take in order to improve student learning. The salient aspects of this attribute resembled many of the principles involved in *learner-centeredness*, which revealed the influence of the training program on teacher thinking.

d) *Open-mindedness*

Throughout the development of the study the teachers had shown an open attitude towards learning and change. Nonetheless, they were not aware of these qualities. It is significant that they identified *open-mindedness* as an attribute of the reflective teacher, as it seemed to reveal an awareness of their own qualities. Within this attribute, learning involves both independent and collaborative efforts for self-improvement. Change, on the other hand, relates to attitudes, beliefs and actions in order to move away from a traditional framework.

e) *Professional growth*

According to the teachers' views, *the Reflective Teacher* should be concerned with her/his *professional growth*. The actions to foster such growth included both independent and collaborative activities. The underlying concepts were decision making, teacher autonomy, teacher development, professionalism, professional community, self-improvement, and teacher as a researcher, among others. Teachers' professionalism within the community was clearly a demand for respect and social recognition.

- *Teacher development in progress*

During the introspective process it was possible to assess and understand the evolution of the teachers' views: about themselves, their limitations, knowledge, qualities, and motivational sources.

The teachers' insights about their own development revealed a higher awareness of their professional status as they acknowledged an improvement in their teaching abilities. They also revealed changes in their perception about students and in their views about implementing changes. Their attitude was clearly more proactive. They revealed less dependence on contextual factors to make improvements in their classrooms, which was an optimal condition for their research task. Thus, they had started to focus on potentially researchable issues, most of which were related to students. The research topics that they eventually selected were directly connected with these original concerns, which reflected consistency in the teachers' beliefs and actions. In many ways, their perceptions resembled the attributes of reflective teaching as portrayed in their conceptualization, namely *analytical skills*, *resourcefulness*, *open-mindedness*, *knowledgeability* and *professional growth*. This indicated a logical flow in the evolution of their introspective process.

An increase in the teachers' self-confidence was perceived, as they acknowledged feeling better prepared to deal with classroom issues. Likewise, there was an increase in the teachers' sense of professionalism and awareness of their role as change agents. The teachers demanded respect from students, authorities and society to the teaching profession. There was also an increase in their awareness of the importance of collaboration for professional development.

In relation to their knowledge the teachers perceived important improvements as a result of their training, namely reinforcement of all kinds of teacher knowledge and expansion of teaching techniques and skills. Likewise, they had refined their perceptions of their own needs by establishing new priorities to continue to expand their knowledge in particular areas. In this regard, they acknowledged that their motivation to continue to improve was the result of the challenges posed by context, this time by their work as university teachers. The teachers valued the training course as an important means to face these challenges, which revealed the relevance of their AR projects.

- *The awareness raising process*

The results in the process of raising teacher awareness about the disagreement between their teaching beliefs and actions showed interesting results. Special attention was devoted to the findings emerging from the classroom observations, where the conflict was evidenced. Very important insights resulted from the teachers' interaction with the number of aspects involved in the exploration. This process shed significant light on the advances of the teachers' reflection, as it led to two important results.

On the one hand, the teachers focused on a number of troublesome aspects encountered at the classroom level (e.g. teacher roles, student motivation, classroom instructions and teaching the

language skills). The number and complexity of issues were clear indicators that the teachers' awareness of problematic areas had increased significantly. Each of the aspects that emerged out of the reflection was a potential research topic, which revealed that the scaffolding measure was serving its intended purpose.

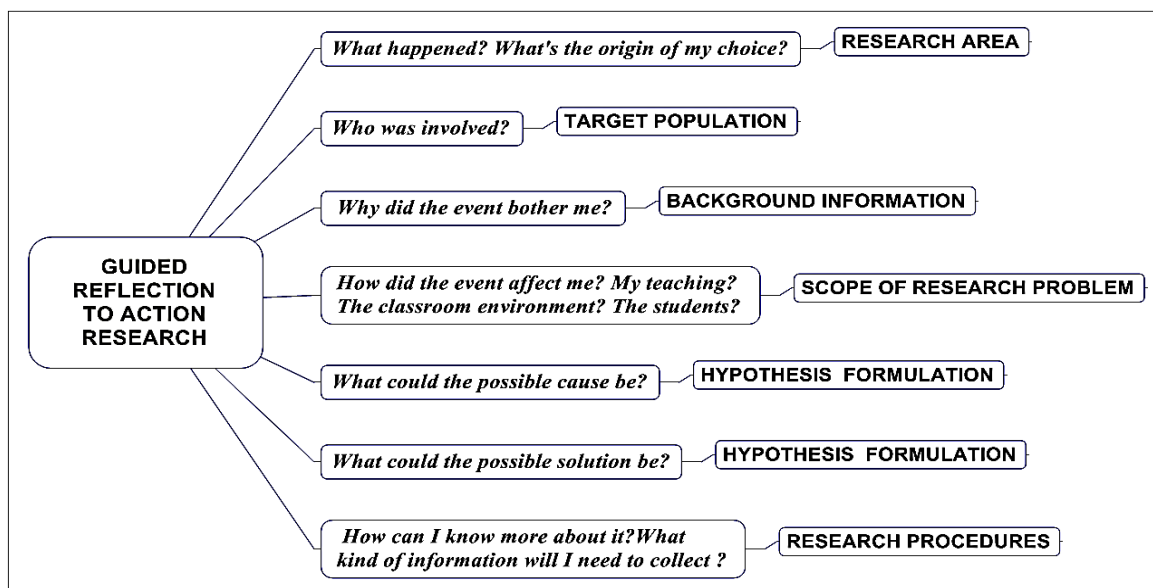
On the other hand, the introspection revealed important insights about the teachers' thinking as a result of confronting their teaching beliefs with their practice. This process resulted in a number of contributions that evidenced the complexity and depth of their perceptions, the evolution of their reflection as well as their intended future actions. Major emerging issues were: the gap between beliefs and practice, professional competence, the complexity of teaching, the influence of beliefs on the teaching practice, the difficulties in reconciling beliefs and practice, and the importance of collaboration to achieve consistency.

- *The identification of the research area*

The introspective process involved a guided set of reflective questions, each of which was connected to a particular research issue as shown in figure 41 below.

Figure 41

Guided Reflection to Action Research



a) *Research area and target population*

The research areas were consistent with the teachers' priorities to increase their knowledge base and with the troublesome aspects identified in the previous introspective stage. This indicated considerable consistency in teacher thinking. The heterogeneity of students, study fields, and university programs involved, showed the complexity of their professional task. The total

population of students participating were 470, (95% university and 5% secondary school). UNAN students were enrolled in ten different Programs belonging to seven different Faculties.

b) Background information

The teachers' concerns legitimately emerged out of classroom experience. They had refined their perception to identify relevant problems that were difficult for them to resolve. They had made the proper connections between their knowledge and beliefs taking reflection to the level of classroom performance. Moreover, a higher sense of professionalism was perceived. The teachers were more aware of student responsibility, and of their own role, involvement and value in the process.

c) Scope of the problem

The problems had different dimensions and levels of impact; the teacher, the students, the classroom environment and the teaching process. The teachers were affected both personally and professionally. There was an increase in teacher awareness of the complexity of the process, and of the numerous elements affecting their teaching practice and student learning. The teachers realized that, communication, the main objective of the language was not being fulfilled, and that there was ample room for improvement.

d) Possible causes

The problems identified were related to five different sources: contextual conditions, the teacher approaches, student particular characteristics, student background knowledge, and student affective factors. The introspective process showed that the basic original concerns for student learning had transformed into a much richer understanding of the causes of the problems. In most cases the teachers took responsibility for the problems, which reflected a much mature and professional attitude. One of the biggest challenges that they faced at the classroom level was to defy students' previous learning patterns and behavior.

e) Possible solutions

The teachers showed determination towards the resolution of the problems as they had found a situation with which they were not satisfied. They suggested solutions as a prelude of the features of their action plans (*studying the problem*, and *changing teaching approaches*), which were reflected in their research objectives. Interestingly enough, they also suggested actions for *empowering students*, which had similar characteristics to their own development process.

f) Research procedures

The introspective process was useful to help teachers decide the kinds of data they would need to find out more about the problem. The teachers put into practice their analytical skills in selecting the research instruments suitable for their particular problem. All the teachers found peer

observation useful for their research, which reflects teacher awareness of the importance of collaboration for their teaching practice.

3.1.2 The collaborative process

Collaboration, involved the provision of the necessary conditions for the teachers to develop and implement their research projects successfully. Different people participated in this effort: the teachers who were carrying out the investigation and working in peers for mutual help; the students who were participating in the research as the target population; the external collaborators who helped solve problems found along the way (e.g. the two remedial plans), the external evaluators who assessed the research projects, and my participation as the researcher and the teachers' mentor.

The premise was that collaboration could help teachers get higher levels of understanding of themselves, their peers, their students and their teaching contexts, necessary knowledge on the path to teacher development. This was particularly important since at the beginning of the program most teachers were recently graduated and looking for ways to expand their knowledge to operate competently inside and outside the classroom. Their integration into the INSET program helped them to achieve these aims. As England points out "an in-service training program is an opportunity for teachers...to draw on the strengths, training, and experience of teachers and to develop teachers' skills...for teachers to gain an identity as individual professionals, to work as part of a team of colleagues and to develop rapport..." (see literature review 4.1.6).

Collaboration was the scaffolding framework in which several major processes took place: the design and implementation of the research projects, the writing process of the research reports and the assessment of the research projects. After the identification of the research areas, this scaffolding measure allowed most teachers to move on from narrowing down their areas of concern into researchable topics, through structuring the research proposal and implementing it.

- *Narrowing down the research area and formulating objectives*

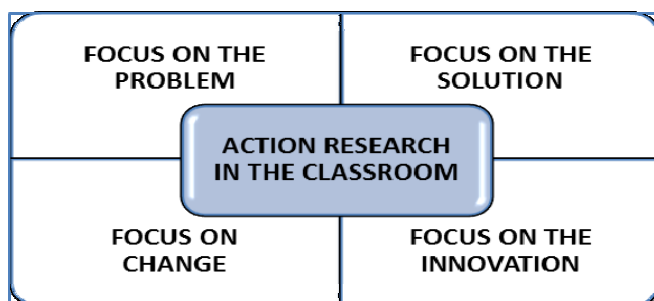
Turning their concerns into researchable topics and formulating research objectives were hard tasks for the teachers, resulting from their lack of familiarity with research. The process of fine-tuning involved support in the tutorial sessions and feedback from peers. Thus, the scaffolding process was being effective to provide the teachers with the necessary help to pinpoint problems and solve them along the way. The research areas evolved into more refined and focused topics, clearly researchable. The teachers showed considerable independence and decision-making skills along the process. Their original concerns and the refined objectives were similar in nature, which reflects consistency and a logical evolution of teacher thinking.

- *The research focus and objectives*

Interesting patterns emerged out of the refined research areas. These patterns revealed the teachers' decision making process and their analytical skills. The focus of the research projects is outlined in Figure 42 below

Figure 42

The focus of the Action Research projects

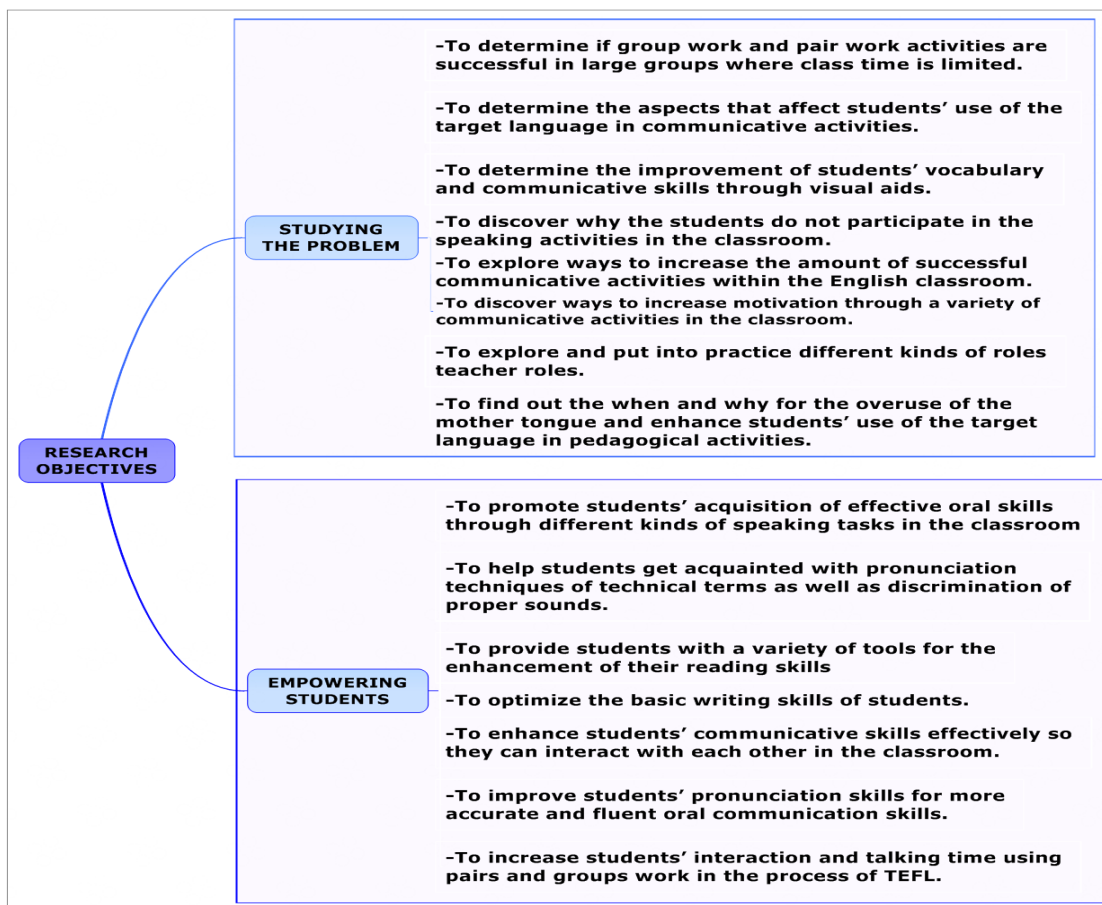


Four different patterns were identified in the research areas selected by the teachers. Some teachers worded their research topic focusing on the problem, which reflected their interest in finding out reasons and explanations about the particular situation. A second group of teachers, on the other hand, presented theirs from the point of view of the intended change. Interestingly enough, the research topics in this group were all related to the students' communicative skills. This evidences the teachers' greatest concern: students' use of the language for communication. A third group of teachers presented their topics as innovations. This is consistent with the nature of the research topics that proposed the integration of new elements into the process. The last group of teachers presented their research topics from the practical side using "how to", which reveals the teachers interest in finding solutions through the acquisition of new knowledge and skills.

The research objectives, on the other hand, shed some more light on the teachers' thinking process when refining their areas of concern. Previously, they had hypothesized possible solutions which involved *studying the problem* and *empowering students*. These two proposed solutions were present in the research objectives, which reflect a logical flow in the teachers' thinking process. This is shown in figure 43 below.

Figure 43

The research objectives



On the one hand, the objectives related to *studying the problem* denote the teachers' intention to find answers to questions, solutions to problems, facts, and explanations about the matter. The mental actions: discover, find out, explore, and determine, resemble the *analytical skills* and *open-mindedness* of the *reflective teacher* as portrayed by the teachers. The objectives related to *empowering students*, on the other hand, are focused on providing students with skills and knowledge to cope with the specific problem. These objectives resemble *resourcefulness* and *knowledgeability*, attributes of the *reflective teacher* as described by the teachers.

- *Planning and implementing the research project*

Scaffolding in the planning stage involved simplifying the research process through formats and templates. This allowed the teachers to plan the major events of the research in a fast and efficient way. Considerable time of the tutorial sessions was devoted to give a follow up to the teachers and help them solve the problems identified in this stage. Identified problems with the research

procedures led to the integration of the first remedial plan, which consisted of a tailor-made training workshop in this area.

- *The writing process of the research report*

The teachers experienced problems in the writing process of the research report caused by the lack of background knowledge. The problems related to both the structure of the research report and the teachers' writing skills. Through a second remedial plan they received assistance for the writing process. The plan helped to solve the problem, as most of the teachers were able to move on with the completion of their projects.

- *The evaluation of the Action Research Projects*

Evaluation involved the collaboration of external evaluators who assessed the research projects based on a series of predetermined criteria. The process involved both the written document and the teachers' oral skills in presenting their research project. The evaluators provided valuable insights regarding the major strengths and weaknesses of the projects. Likewise, they provided valuable suggestions for improvement.

- *Main strengths of the AR projects*

The evaluators considered as a major strength the teachers' awareness of contextual issues (e.g. the instructional context, the materials, and the kind of students), which was evidenced throughout the development of the study. On the other hand, the research projects evidenced the teachers' qualities and affective factors such as interest, motivation and concern towards student learning. The evaluators also acknowledged the teachers' reflective skills in the systematic and ongoing nature of the research projects, which revealed the effect of the guided process. Likewise, the evaluators emphasized the teacher's pedagogic abilities in dealing with the research problem, which was reflected in the conclusions. In some projects the writing constraints were overcome, as the research reports were considered adequate to academic standards.

- *Main weaknesses of the AR projects*

The teachers had adequate scaffolding processes and did their best within the given conditions. Nonetheless, there were still limitations identified in the research report. Some of the weaknesses identified focused on lack of coherence, clarity and relevance in certain areas of the report. These limitations emerged from the situational context. On the one hand, the educational context at the PRESET level had not given the teachers proper background knowledge in writing and research skills. On the other hand, the working conditions did not allow the teachers to focus on their research projects adequately. Both problems exerted influence on the quality of the research reports.

- *Recommendations for improvement*

The evaluators made specific suggestions for improvement. Some of the recommendations were focused on the content of certain areas of the reports (e.g. introduction should reflect the relevance of the project; methodology should clearly describe the data collection process). Some others related to the writing conventionalities of academic writing (e.g. referencing in the literature review). Some other suggestions related to missing information, aspects to clarify, integrate, and or eliminate (e.g. figures, graphic information). The recommendations provided the teachers with valuable feedback in order to improve their research reports.

3.2 Teacher change

The teachers revealed four different kinds of changes as a result of conducting Action Research in their classrooms, which are briefly described below.

a. Changes related to the research question

The changes related to the research question were specific changes. They involved having gained knowledge and skills in different areas and actions of their teaching practice, such as planning, providing practice, using variety of activities, addressing students' needs, integrating new teaching materials and increasing students' motivation.

b. Changes in general teaching approaches

These types of changes were of a general nature. The teachers revealed what they used to do and what, as a result of the research project, had improved. The reported changes were: moving away from a traditional approach, willingness to innovations at the classroom level, better lesson preparation, and openness to new ways of teaching.

c. Changes in the teachers' reflective skills

These kinds of changes reflected an increase in teacher awareness of the different aspects of the teaching practice: the teacher, the learner and the teaching-learning process. The aspects underlying this change of perception were awareness-raising, self-reflection, self-discovery, self-improvement and professional development.

d. Changes in the teachers' knowledge and perception of students

These kinds of changes involve a refined perception of student involvement in the learning process. The relevant aspects here were related to learner-centered processes, such as student learning styles, student needs, student motivation, student background knowledge, independent learning and student self-awareness.

Consistent evidence supporting the changes in teacher thinking was the link with the hypothesis and objectives of the research projects. The changes that they reported were the kinds of changes they wanted and expected.

3.3 Contextual interference: challenges for the teachers

Contextual interference answers the question about whether doing AR as a way of structured reflection is suitable for the particular context. In spite of the very good results of the present study, which I fully acknowledge, the answer to this question is not positive, at least not within the conditions surrounding the teachers in this study. The two scaffolding processes *introspection* and *collaboration* were valuable help to the teachers in order to carry out their action research projects. Nonetheless, the need of establishing such mechanisms for this professional task raises the question about its feasibility in an educational context like the Nicaraguan context, where the teachers face numerous professional challenges. The factors against the approach of reflection through Action Research revealed by this study are described below.

- *Educational background*

Two major problems emerged from the teachers' educational background. First, the lack of previous preparation and practice in the research field was a serious limitation. For all the teachers, it was the first time that they conducted research. The university courses they had taken beforehand (in the few cases that this happened) were too vague and general. This problem affected the teachers' ability to put their concerns together and structure them as an investigation. The other limitation was the teachers' writing skills. On the one hand, none of them had had experience in writing research reports. On the other hand, most of the teachers' writing skills were too basic as to reach the standards of an academic report, such as an investigation. The two remedial plans intended to solve the problem and they succeeded in the sense that teachers had a better idea of what they needed to do. Nevertheless, the original weaknesses were still perceived in the research evaluations.

- *Workload pressures*

The teachers' performance was affected in numerous ways as the workload was extreme for most of them, which did not allow them to focus on their projects properly. They had to work in different institutions, on two or three shifts and with different kinds of students of dissimilar academic levels (primary, secondary, university). Altogether the teachers were in charge of more than 4,500 students, which represented an average of 300 students per teacher. The average working hours were 27 hours a week (one teacher worked 59 hours!). The workload that they were facing far exceeded the standards for language teaching in many ways: amount of students, students

per group, different institutions, and working shifts. Because of workload pressures the teachers were overwhelmed, which affected the general research process, the application of the research instruments, the implementation of the plan of action, the attendance to tutorial sessions and the writing process of the research report.

- *Complexity of the professional task*

The teachers had a multiplicity of complex tasks. At UNAN-León they attended more than 2000 students enrolled in different academic programs. As university teachers they had important challenges, namely structure the syllabus, design materials, and teach English for specific areas. These tasks added to their also complex work in other institutions.

- *Job instability*

The conditions surrounding the teachers' professional lives affected their morale significantly. Context, as unpredictable as it was, posed unexpected problems such as the teachers' dismissal, which made it difficult for them to focus on their projects. It was, indeed, very difficult for the teachers to be motivated to go on professionally speaking under the conditions of uncertainty that risked their primary means of livelihood. The situation logically jeopardized the quality of the projects and the entire training process.

The experience of doing Action Research in this study was a unique experience revealing on the one hand, the potential benefits of the approach, and on the other hand its impracticality for the teachers within the given conditions. These results have important implication for the Teacher Education Program at UNAN-León, indicating that teachers doing AR in their classrooms need effective scaffolding processes in order to succeed.

4. Research questions in stage 4: What will the impact of the action plan be? What differences will there be in the teachers' beliefs and performance? How will the teachers view the problems for their professional development after the program?

4.1 The impact of the program

The program had a positive impact on the teachers revealed by the development of their reflective skills, the refinement of their beliefs, and the expansion of their knowledge base. As a result of the exposure to the program, they had the opportunity to put all skill, knowledge and beliefs into practice in their own classrooms and with their own students. This is an important result taken into account that more than 4500 students in 14 educational institutions were exposed to the teachers' newly acquired approaches during the development of the program. Likewise, over 2000 students, most of which were university students at UNAN-León, benefited from the teachers'

Action Research projects. The major factors that contributed to this success were the teachers' strengths, the contribution of trainers and external collaborators, and the relevance of the program.

- *The teachers' strengths*

The main reason why the program could succeed in the middle of the number of contextual problems that emerged was, no doubt, a direct result of the teachers' efforts. They were the ones interested in their own professional growth in the first place, which encouraged them to integrate into the program and complete it.

The teachers had particular strengths that contributed significantly to the achievement of the program objectives. Such strengths were evidenced throughout the development of the process and identified by both trainers and external collaborators. Some of these strengths were particular qualities and personality traits, such as their exceptional openness towards learning and change, as well as their motivation and attitude towards collaborative work. These attributes were the ones sustaining the teachers throughout the development of the program. Unfortunately, six teachers could not endure the pressure and quit the program. They are not to blame considering the major contextual constraints hindering their professional development. On the contrary, new scaffolding mechanisms should be established to help them fulfill this professional task.

Another positive aspect was the teachers' condition as in-service teachers. Their professional practice was the basis from which improvements could be made. Their condition as practicing teachers was the reason why they had good contextual knowledge, which materialized in their awareness of students, the teaching context and teaching-related aspects. The teachers' status as practicing teachers facilitated the training process significantly, as they were able to implement the skills, strategies and knowledge acquired in their classrooms. Moreover, they had the opportunity to design and implement the AR projects with their own students.

- *The contribution of the trainers and the external collaborators*

Within the collaborative approach of the program, the major contribution of the trainers and external collaborators is worth highlighting. The trainers, made it possible to plan, implement and evaluate the courses of the program. Their expertise, knowledge of the context and awareness of the teachers' needs facilitated the integration of relevant content areas, aimed at the fulfillment of the teachers' training needs. Likewise, the trainers' flexibility allowed important and necessary changes to the program, so as to adjust the content to the teachers' background knowledge or complement the program with remedial plans. Furthermore, as part of the methodology of the program they used modeling procedures that served as examples of effective approaches to teaching.

The external collaborators, on the other hand, participated in the project in different ways; some of them in providing feedback for the improvement of the teachers' written projects; some others in

assessing them. All of them, trainers and collaborators, provided their valuable insights on the aspects tackled by this investigation, such as the teachers' beliefs and knowledge, the effectiveness of the program, and the quality of the research projects. Their insights, made it possible to triangulate the information which increased the trustworthiness of the results.

- *The relevance of the program*

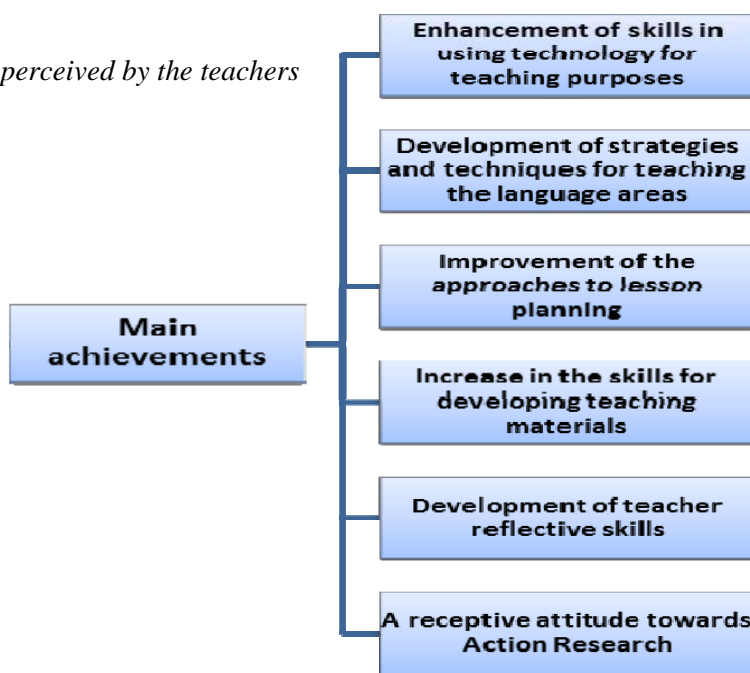
The training program as the framework of the study was the direct result of the perceived teacher training needs within the contextual conditions, which made it relevant for the teachers. Consequently, each of the courses of the program aimed at providing teachers with skills and knowledge to deal with their challenges at the classroom level, where they had considerable range of action. This connection made it possible for the teachers to experience the immediate benefits of the training program in their classrooms, which fostered teacher change. On the other hand, all of the courses aimed at increasing the teachers' reflective skills in the particular knowledge area. Another important feature of the program was its interconnected nature. This interaction allowed taking important actions along the process such as making changes and adjustments, giving feedback about the teachers' needs, reinforce particular weaknesses and share important information about the teachers' performance.

4.2 Main achievements

The achievements described by the teachers concentrated primarily on the target areas of the program. These outcomes were clearly the result of the interaction between the teachers' strengths and the relevance of the training areas. They are shown in figure 44 below

Figure 44

Main achievements as perceived by the teachers



- *Enhancement of skills in using technology for teaching purposes*

The program provided the teachers with the necessary basic knowledge to use technology as a regular professional instrument. All teachers acknowledged the benefits of having updated their knowledge in the use of these resources for language instruction.

- *Development of strategies and techniques for teaching the language areas*

The teachers perceived an improvement in teaching the language skills by providing students with different and meaningful opportunities. Such approaches included, among others, teaching the language skills in a gradual way using steps, patterns, formats, structures, or models.

- *Development of reflective skills*

The development of the teachers' reflective skills was focused on having internalized a more principled view of teaching, increased their awareness of student-related factors, and recognized the importance of their own performance in the teaching process.

- *Improvement of the approaches to lesson planning*

The teachers reported that the training program had helped them increase their awareness of the significance of lesson planning, view planning as a creative process, identify its elements and structure, and realize that it should be learner-centered.

- *Increase in the skills for developing teaching materials*

The teachers' achievements in this area were focused on a critical view of textbooks, approaches for adapting materials, and skills in designing adequate materials for student learning.

- *Development of a receptive attitude towards Action Research*

The teachers viewed Action Research as an important means of teacher professional improvement, a valuable tool for teacher reflection, and a useful process for teacher change and improvement.

4.3 Main difficulties in the development of the program

In spite of the very good results of the program, acknowledged by both trainer and teachers, there were problems along the way that affected both the teacher performance and the development of the program

- *The teachers' background knowledge*

The gaps in the teachers' background knowledge demanded changes and adjustments in the program and were related to essential basic skills such as technological skills, pedagogical skills, research skills, advanced writing skills, and analytical skills.

- *The organization of the program*

Several difficulties in the organization of the program affected its development and the achievement of objectives, namely lack of proper identification of the real state of the teachers' background knowledge, time constraints, and curriculum organization.

- *Contextual problems*

Problems posed by context had its peak at the time of the Action Research Projects, but they were also present all along the development of the training program. The constraints were varied in kind and nature: economic problems, constraining institutional policies, time limitations, and the teachers' working conditions. Other problems arising from context were socio-cultural factors, such as the lack of reading and writing habits.

4.4 The changes in teacher beliefs and practice

The results revealed that the teachers continued to hold modern views about language teaching and learning. There were differences in their approaches, formerly in disagreement with their views.

- *About the role goal and nature of the language*

Three groups of teachers were observed. The first group had improved significantly in both their techniques to convey meaning and in the use of the language as a medium of communication. The second group had made improvements, but whenever a miscommunication problem took place they switched to the mother tongue. The two teachers in the last group basically kept their same original approaches; using a mixture of the Grammar Translation Method and the Audiolingual Method.

- *About error correction*

In spite of the fact that teachers had raised their awareness regarding the disagreement between their beliefs and action, error correction continued to be an issue as most teachers continued to ignore them. The inappropriate contextual conditions continued to exert negative influence on the teaching-learning process. The number of students, noise in the classroom, and time limitations made it difficult for the teachers to address this issue properly.

- *About materials and resources*

There was an increase in the use of other materials to complement the textbook, such as real objects (realia) worksheets, activity sheets, cards, flashcards, pictures and drawings. Likewise, the board was used as a resource rather than as the main means for instruction, and student note taking was significantly reduced, as well. There was also an increase in the use of equipment for listening activities. There were no materials adapted from the textbook or created by the teacher himself/herself.

- *About teaching the language areas*

The teachers evidenced their conscious efforts to provide practice in the different language skills. They continued to prioritize vocabulary and grammar. Nonetheless, except for the two cases mentioned, grammar was taught in a more communicative way. Writing remained neglected. In the few cases observed, the teachers assign it as homework

- *About the integration of the language areas*

There were changes in the teachers' approaches in most areas, as the teachers showed a wider range of classroom activities and techniques to provide practice in the different language skills. The lesson plans provided evidence of the teachers' improvement as they reflected clear descriptions of the practice and content areas, carefully detailed activities in each stage, and the integration of important aspects such as learning objectives, materials used, time, kind of interaction and procedures.

- *About student-related factors*

The teachers' high awareness of student-related factors was the starting point for the improvement in this area, as they fully acknowledged students' differences such as interests, learning needs and learning styles.

a) Student learning styles

The teachers' performance at the classroom level showed more consistency with their beliefs through the integration of different resources, techniques and activities clearly aimed at addressing students' differences in learning. They had preserved their natural perception of students' differences and had adopted a more proactive attitude to provide them with meaningful practice.

b) Student independent learning in the classroom.

The teachers made significant efforts to promote more student-centered activities in their lessons. In order to handle class content, they made gradual moves from known materials to more elaborate contents for student independent practice. In the process, they provided students with models, structure or frameworks to learn the language, which revealed the improvement in their teaching techniques. However, the teachers' kept their tendency to continue to provide students with explanations, an approach that hindered students' progress towards independent learning.

c) Student independent learning outside the classroom

The teachers' attempts to promote student autonomy outside the classroom were mainly revealed by the assigned homework. Although some of the tasks assigned were traditional grammar exercises, some others showed the teachers' attempts to provide students with more motivating opportunities for independent practice. The writing tasks assigned, though not effective, were part

of the teachers' attempts to provide students with meaningful opportunities for independent practice. There was still ample room for improvement in this area.

d) Connecting language learning to student reality

The teachers' major interest in fostering student awareness of the practical use of the language was the basis for improvement in this area. Their performance at the classroom level showed more agreement with their beliefs. Most of them made considerable efforts in linking class content with students' likes, personal aims, and interests, through the activation of students' prior knowledge and the selection of motivating topics and content areas.

e) Student participation

Different ways of classroom management were observed; as well as a variety of activities to promote student interaction and practice of the different language skills. The teachers continued to promote language instruction as a whole class. But, most of them also integrated pair work and group work activities, and language games. The teachers' efforts in providing students with variety and with more meaningful opportunities for interaction resulted in an increase of student interest, attention and participation in the process. The few cases in which students' participation was low were those cases in which the teachers used a traditional approach.

- *Main weaknesses identified*

It was clear that the plan of action had served its intended purpose in helping teachers align their beliefs and practice and enhance their teaching skills and knowledge. Nonetheless, there were weaknesses in the process, such as the teachers' tendency to provide thorough explanations and the organization of classroom instruction as a whole class. Except for the two cases described, this approach was not the result of lack of teacher awareness or a sign of a traditional methodology. Rather, it was the teachers' response and solution to the limitations posed by the contextual conditions, because of the number of students and limited class time. Another problem posed by context was the difficulties to monitor students' work and check their understanding. As a result, the teachers did not address particular problems such as error correction or problems with particular troublesome students (passive, shy or undisciplined students). A further contextual problem was the little time provided for instruction, which did not allow teachers to cover class contents in depth.

On the other hand, it was perceived that most teachers were on their way towards better approaches for teaching the language skills, which they could continue to improve towards their independent efforts. Nevertheless, the approaches to teaching writing demanded external help, as weaknesses continued to be identified. The reason for this was a combination of factors, some of them posed by the contextual condition (little class time), some others seemed to be related to socio-cultural aspects (lack of reading and writing habits) and some others the result of the teachers'

background knowledge (the PRESET program had not given the teachers the necessary skills for teaching writing). These results also reflect the organizational problems of the training program, which did not allow the consolidation of this area.

The teachers continued to face problems posed by the situational context. They struggled to provide adequate solutions and still keep approaches that fostered student learning. This was the best proof of their improvement since they were taking active roles as change agents and problem solvers.

4.5 Teacher development: the final results

- *Problems for teacher development*

The most remarkable difference in the teachers' perception of problems was the emphasis placed on troublesome issues emerging from their classroom experience. Thus, teaching-related issues were the first problems identified. This was followed by context-bound problems such as lack of good job opportunities, curriculum materials and resources, time constraints, teacher training, student motivation and large classes. The teachers' attitude towards these problems was different from the initial results.

- *Specific teaching related issues*

Most teachers' concerns had evolved from a strong focus on context-bound problems to the practical issues emerging in their teaching practice. Moreover, the problems were not perceived as such, but as opportunities and challenges to develop their professional practice. An increase in the teachers' reflective skills was clearly perceived as in the issues described there were dimensions of the three kinds of reflection discussed in the literature review: *reflection in action*, *reflection on action* and *reflection for action* (see lit. review 4.2.2)

- *Lack of better job opportunities and low salaries*

Along with their knowledge and teaching skills, the teachers had increased their sense of professionalism. In highlighting the problem of low salaries and the lack of better job opportunities, the teachers demanded a better social recognition to their work as teachers. Not having good job possibilities was perceived as the main cause of a number of other problems: financial problems, underestimation of the education field, and their extreme workload. The teachers' multiplicity of tasks was an issue that affected teacher performance significantly all throughout the training program.

- *Curriculum materials and resources*

Problems related to curriculum and materials continued to affect the teachers. Nonetheless, the plan had reached its intended objective of enhancing teacher knowledge in this area. Evidence of

the teachers' initiative to make changes and improvements in their teaching materials was provided in the research projects and in the classroom observations.

- *Time constraints*

The teachers revealed the influence of their training process by acknowledging the importance of classroom activities and teaching resources to cope with time limitations. Moreover, the classroom observations provided evidence of the teachers' efforts to optimize class time, and significant improvement was perceived. Once again teachers' critical thinking skills were revealed as they identified the little time for English instruction, as a sign of the underestimation of the language within the educational institutions.

- *Teacher training*

The teachers' motivation to continue their improvement reflected significant professional maturity, since they perceived their development as an on-going process. Two kinds of perceptions were identified: on the one hand, the teachers referred to the problems posed by the educational institutions: either institutions did not provide training, or the training provided was inadequate. On the other hand, the teachers were concerned with a follow-up to the approaches in their training course. Most teachers were aware of their areas for improvement, which revealed a development attitude. Teacher development, as discussed in the literature review, is characterized by the teachers' own conscious decisions to fulfill their particular professional needs (see lit. review 2.1).

- *Student motivation*

Student motivation towards learning English continued to be an issue as it was at the time of the original exploration. The teachers maintained their attitude of assuming responsibility to solve the problem. This attitude was the basis for significant changes as revealed by the Action Research projects, most of which focused on raising student motivation. Once again teachers' critical thinking skills were revealed as the teachers' related the problem to mainstream education in Nicaragua, which currently faces high levels of school desertion. The teachers' believed that part of the problem is due to a lack of student motivation to pursue professional careers. The reference to this critical problem reveals that the teachers' perceptions had evolved to a higher awareness of global educational problems in the country.

- *Large classes*

The teachers' continued to reveal problems posed by the number of students in the classroom. They referred to the various dimensions in which this problem affects their teaching practice (e.g. lack of student motivation, inadequate classroom conditions, different kinds of students, etc.). The influence of the training program was perceived, as they mentioned the kinds of measures taken to ease the problem at the classroom level. On the other hand, the classroom observations revealed that

the teachers made significant efforts in integrating pair work and group work activities. The most used approach was whole class instruction, which was clearly the teachers' response to their contextual reality. The teachers' tendency to address student as a group and provide them with explanations kept invariable. Nonetheless, the teachers provided students with exposure to more natural and clear spoken language. Thus, the teachers were trying to adapt their approaches to cope with their contextual limitations.

- *Solutions to the problems*

The teachers revealed having gained awareness of their own participation in solving the problems. This was perceived as a direct result of the program, which had a strong focus on providing them with reflective skills to assume their role as change agents. They also suggested joint efforts with their peers, as well as the participation of educational authorities and society.

- *The teachers' participation*

The teachers' willingness to solve the problems was linked to the identification of teaching-related problems. Nevertheless, they also showed an open and proactive attitude towards the resolution of some of the other problems, which was a significant sign of professionalism. As discussed in the literature review the teachers' awareness of their role as change agents makes them "reflective practitioners" (Kohonen, 2002: 41) able to go beyond the classroom by adopting a more active and participatory attitude in the problems posed by their situational contexts (see lit. review 4.2.1).

- *Join efforts*

Considerable efforts were made throughout the development of this study to raise teacher awareness of the importance of collaboration with their peers. This collaboration had its peak at the time of the Action Research projects through the peer observations. The effects of this approach are revealed by the teachers proposed joint actions to solve the problems, a process also suggested as a follow up to their training. The teachers suggested peer work to overcome the problems of lack of materials, as alternatives to the lack of teacher training opportunities, and to solve common problems in the classroom.

- *Participation of institutions, educational authorities and society*

The teachers realistically acknowledged that the solutions to guarantee proper conditions for language instructions were the responsibility of decision-making authorities in charge of the educational system. They also recognized the importance of the participation of community members such as parents, students and the society as a whole in solving the problems. The teachers' had raised their awareness of the importance of collective efforts in establishing adequate frameworks for an effective language teaching-learning process. Their views resembled the insights

discussed in the literature review about how socio-cultural and political factors shape language instruction. Such factors relate to how the language is viewed and valued in the particular community (see literature review 1).

Chapter 7



Main conclusions

This investigation attempted to shed light on the area of language teacher education. The study was an Action Research project involving a group of 15 in-service EFL teachers integrated into the teacher education program at UNAN-León at the INSET level. The main aim was to explore the processes of teacher development within the Educational ELT context at UNAN-León. The research process involved an analysis of the major problems affecting teacher development and an exploration of the teachers' beliefs, knowledge and performance. The plan of action involved improving the teachers' knowledge and developing their reflective skills through Action Research. A number of issues emerged out of the project, which illuminated the processes of English teacher education at UNAN-León and the delivery of English instruction at the Faculties of UNAN-León. The main conclusions of the project will be presented in terms of their relevance for the Teacher Education Program at UNAN-León, for its educational authorities and for the teachers. In addition, I will make proper connections with existing theory in the area in light of the literature reviewed. On the other hand, I will also present the implications of the study, its limitations and the suggestions for further research in the area.

1. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Several implications can be drawn from this study related to the processes of language teacher education. The study has been focused on the ELT Nicaraguan context; specifically the Teacher Education Program at UNAN-León. Thus, the results can contribute significantly to the delivery of instruction in this program. Because of the particular contextualized features of the present study, I do not claim that these results can be generalized. Nonetheless, it is my hope that these suggestions can be relevant to teacher education programs in developing countries with similar contextual conditions to the ones in this study. Likewise, I hope that they can illuminate the processes of language teacher education in general.

1.1 Recommendations for improving the Teacher Education Program at UNAN-León

As revealed by this study, the English teachers graduating from the teacher education program at UNAN-León will surely face a number of limitations of the kind described, namely very difficult working conditions, extreme workloads, large classes, inadequate curricula, lack of materials, and

the like. Thus, the program must ensure that all the efforts are aimed at providing teachers with the professional tools required to operate effectively within these constraining conditions. The key questions arising are to what extent the program is fulfilling this aim and what can be done to optimize the academic processes.

1.1.1 Making articulated efforts

The results of this study highlight the importance of making articulated links between the PRESET and INSET programs to ensure that their graduates possess the knowledge and skills that are relevant for their context, and guarantee their professional competence. This study reveals the urgency to coordinate actions between the two levels. As England remarks, "...there is a need for coordinated and structured teacher preparation. Academic staff in pre-service preparation programs around the world need to join hands with their colleagues who are managing ELT programs to create a coordinated effort for pre-service and in-service professional development" (England, 1998: 19). In this regard, it seems relevant to make a curriculum revision of the academic programs offered at both levels to make sure that adequate provisions are taken to make this link. Such revision should be the basis to prioritize and establish their corresponding areas of intervention in a coordinated way.

1.1.2 Providing relevant professional tools at the PRESET level

The study explored and assessed the knowledge of the teachers participating, who graduated from both the Saturday Studies and the Regular English Studies of the Teacher Education Program at UNAN-León. The results show that most teachers regarded the sources of teaching beliefs as emerging from their teacher training. As discussed, both weaknesses and strengths were detected in the teachers' knowledge base, which has important implications for the program. Given teachers' economic constraints and the scarce offer of relevant professional development opportunities, chances are that the only professional tools that these teachers can rely on are the ones that they acquire at the PRESET level. Thus, faculty from the English Department should make significant efforts to provide the teachers with these tools during the development of this program. The following is a brief description of these basic tools.

1. Proficient users of the target language

Graduates should have communicative competence and be proficient and skillful in all language areas. Language proficiency is a must, as the teachers are to be effective models for the students to develop their own language skills.

2. The Practicum

The *Practicum* is the level in which the teachers learn and have exposure to real classroom practice by observing and by teaching. The knowledge that the teachers acquire through these experiences is part of their *contextual knowledge*. As highlighted by this study, *contextual knowledge* is vital for the teachers in the current constraining conditions. In order to optimize these experiences it is important to guarantee the following aspects.

- *Scaffolding*

Practicum experiences are essentially collaborative. Consequently, the process should be accompanied and supported by teacher trainers who are effective models and who provide pertinent assistance along the process. As Hudelson and Faltis remark, these field experiences should be carried out “with teachers who work from a worldview of critique and change and who utilize innovative instructional strategies” (Hudelson and Faltis, 1993:27-33). Another important way of providing teachers with support structures is through the development of their reflective skills. For this purpose, student-teachers should do introspective tasks such as journal writing, which they can share and discuss with their peers and trainers. The reflective teacher, as an effective model for teaching, should be emphasized during the *Practicum* experiences

- *Inter-institutional links*

The collaboration should involve effective inter-institutional synergies between the English Department and educational authorities and local schools. This liaison will allow a better organization of the *Practicum* activities.

- *Curriculum organization*

Consistent curriculum guidelines should be established around the organization of the *Practicum* in terms of timing, contents, organization, objectives, methodology and evaluation.

3. *Methodological principles and approaches*

The knowledge of methods and principles for language teaching should be reinforced. Consequently, special attention should be given to offer student-teachers a good theoretical basis about language teaching and learning, and a wide range of methodological options. It is important that non-traditional approaches are emphasized. Such approaches should be presented as options and not as unalterable recipes that the teachers are to follow blindly.

4. *Techniques and strategies for teaching the language skills*

The student-teachers also need techniques and strategies to teach the language areas in an integrated way. The approaches should emphasize the teaching of the skills in a gradual way using

steps, patterns, formats, structures, or models that provide students with multiple opportunities to interact with the language areas in a meaningful way. Special emphasis should be given to the teaching of the writing skill, which is an area that the teachers in this project were not able to improve. The gaps in their knowledge were perceived as emerging from the PRESET program, socio-cultural influence and contextual constraints.

5. Pedagogical options to deal with student-related factors

The teachers should have exposure to pedagogical options to deal with student-related factors such as student learning styles, needs, interests, motivation and autonomy. Thus, learner-centered approaches should be promoted. On the other hand, the teachers need practical and effective suggestions to deal with large classes effectively. Especial attention should be given to strategies and techniques for effective classroom management through a variety of activities, such as pair work, group work, and ludic activities.

6. Effective approaches to lesson planning

Lesson planning is the basic tool par excellence for teachers' practice. This was the area in which more improvements were identified in this project resulting from both the PRESET level and the teachers' condition as practicing teachers. The teachers reported that the training program had helped them to: increase their awareness of the significance of lesson planning, view planning as a creative process, identify its elements and structure, and realize that planning should be learner-centered. Special efforts should be made at the PRESET level to make sure that this basic knowledge is achieved.

7. Teaching materials

The teachers reported improvement in developing materials for language teaching. Better approaches were observed in the integration of teaching materials in the final classroom observations. Nonetheless, little evidence was given of actual textbook adaptation or materials design. The problems in this area were identified as resulting from lack of familiarity with materials design. This indicates that special efforts should be made at the PRESET level to provide the student-teachers with this basic tool. This is particularly important because the student teachers will surely face serious limitations with materials and resources as in-service teachers.

8. The use of technological tools for language teaching

Significant improvement was observed in this area. The teachers provided evidence of the use of technology to work on their research projects, search for information on the web and do their course assignments. However, adaptations were made to the course *Technology in TEFL*, as the teachers did not have the expected computer literacy. The PRESET level should ensure that the teachers acquire these basic professional skills.

9. Academic writing skills

The results in this study revealed that most teachers' academic writing skills were basic, which caused them problems with their research reports. The PRESET program should ensure that the writing skills of graduates are strong enough to be able to face professional challenges requiring academic writing skills, such as the writing of a research project.

10. Research skills

The program should make sure that the teachers have exposure to all the necessary knowledge for doing research, such as the research paradigms and the methods, principles and procedures of both qualitative and quantitative research.

1.1.3 Nurturing teacher professional development at the INSET level

The positive results obtained in this project have important implications for the teacher academic program at the INSET level, indicating that similar efforts should continue to be made in the organization of further academic programs. Based on these results, the following recommendations are made for the organization of future academic experiences at the INSET level of the Teacher Education Program at UNAN-León.

1. Establishing criteria for candidates

The criteria for candidates should be clearly established beforehand, depending on the objectives of the program. It is highly recommended that the candidates are teachers in practice and that they have good command of the language. INSET opportunities at a higher level than a postgraduate course, such as a Master's Program should prioritize teachers from previous courses offered by the English Department.

2. Selecting procedures

A personal interview and a proficiency exam will be needed to guarantee the participants' suitability. The selection of the participants in the program should be based on the established criteria.

3. Exploring the teachers' training needs

Through this exploration it will be possible to unveil both the contextual constraints affecting the teachers, and the knowledge areas in which they could be realistically helped to deal with such constraints.

4. Finding out information about the teachers' working conditions

Parallel to the exploration, it is necessary to find out relevant information about the teachers such as professional status, workload and time availability. All these elements will contribute to a better program organization.

5. Diagnosing the teachers' knowledge base

In addition to identifying the knowledge areas in which the teachers need academic help, it is important to find out the real state of their knowledge in the particular areas. This can be achieved through the administration of a diagnostic test.

6. *Revising the curriculum of the PRESET program*

There should be a revision of the study plan of the teachers at the PRESET level. This exploration will allow making the necessary link between the two levels.

7. *Revising the curriculum of previous INSET programs*

It is highly recommended to use the curricula of previous INSET programs, including the one used in this study, as the basis for the new program proposal.

8. *Designing the curriculum of the new INSET program*

The previous steps would allow for the planning of a training program that is relevant and adequate for the particular teachers. The new proposal should take into account the following organizational issues.

- *Focus*

Based on the results of this program, a combination of teacher training and teacher development is suggested as the focus of the new program. This approach will allow both equipping the teachers with the pertinent knowledge, and fostering their reflective skills.

- *Characteristics*

The proposal should make sure that the INSET program is contextualized and that it provides the teachers with the reflective skills to theorize about their practice. The process should rely on the academic help and collaboration of qualified teacher trainers.

- *Content areas*

Special care should be taken so as not to integrate together in the same course, or teach in a parallel way, content areas that are too demanding and that require individual treatment (e.g. components for teaching writing and reading).

- *Course timetable*

The program should be planned according to the realistic possibilities and time available to the teachers. In this regard, it is important to analyze their professional situation and to agree on the course timetable with them. The recommendation in step 4 above will be useful for this purpose.

- *Scaffolding*

The program should consider the possible ways of providing support to the teachers throughout the development of the program. The two scaffolding processes proposed here, *introspection* and *collaboration* might be helpful for this purpose.

- *Faculty*

A team of qualified teacher trainers should be in charge of the courses. Thus, it is highly important to count on the participation of staff from the English Department, as well as from local and foreign universities.

- *Research project*

Special care should be taken to make decisions about the kind of research project to do as the final requirement of the course. *Action Research* will surely require scaffolding mechanisms to simplify the process and help the teachers conduct their projects. Alternatively, *Exploratory Practice* could be used for the teachers' structured reflection.

- *Materials and resources*

The program should be planned using an updated bibliography to which both trainers and teachers have full access. Likewise, modern technological resources should be used throughout the program, and there should be permanent and free access to Internet.

9. *Propaedeutic course*

Chances are that the candidates require an initial propaedeutic course to address the weaknesses identified by the diagnostic test. Thus, the content areas to integrate into this program should be based on the perceived needs. The course will also help teachers to familiarize themselves with the new academic approach.

10. *Evaluation of the program*

There should be adequate evaluation procedures to assess the effectiveness and impact of the program. Such an evaluation should include the perceptions of all participants, teachers, trainers and collaborators. Any new program should be based on the results of such an evaluation.

1.2 Recommendation to UNAN-León authorities

This study was undertaken within the institutional framework of the Postgraduate Programs offered by UNAN-León. The effort was supported by the authorities of the Vice-rectory of Postgraduate Programs and Investigation, the Faculty of Educational Sciences and the English Department. In order to facilitate the official process for academic proposals at the INSET level, the following recommendations are made.

1. *About the academic proposals of programs at the INSET level*

- *Supporting Faculty members*

Faculty from the English Department should be encouraged and supported to plan, implement and evaluate these kinds of programs.

- *Forming an academic committee*

An academic committee or an internal division within the English Department should be conformed to revise, assess and approve the proposals before presenting them officially.

- *Establishing supportive internal policies*

Special care should be taken so that procedural policies surrounding these kinds of programs, namely, presentation of proposals, legal approval, paperwork, and logistics, are supportive and not restrictive.

2. *About the inter-institutional links with other universities*

The institutional links with other universities was a key element for the successful establishment and implementation of this Program as it allowed the participation of trainers from these universities. Similar liaisons should continue to be promoted for future programs. Moreover, these links should include synergies with other Nicaraguan universities offering teacher education programs for English teachers.

3. *About the hiring process of new teachers*

UNAN-León has devoted considerable time and efforts to strengthen the English Department, which, as described in chapter two, has involved the support and help of different institutions and universities. Most of the current staff from the English Department has graduated from its Teacher Education Program. These policies, which guarantee the suitability of the staff to offer high quality instruction, should continue to rule the hiring process of the new resources. Thus, it is highly recommended that a postgraduate course or a Masters' degree continues to be included in the criteria for hiring new resources. Among the proposed candidates, those who show the highest academic performance at the INSET level should be the ones prioritized for any given position.

4. *About the delivery of English in the Faculties*

Through the classroom observations I witnessed how the teachers tried to provide effective instruction in the different academic programs of UNAN-León, while facing a number of constraints. Special efforts should be made to optimize these processes. For this purpose, the following recommendations are made.

- *Time for instruction*

Little time for instruction was one of the major problems faced by the teachers. Two hours of English a week for just one semester or two during university studies does not do any good. Special care should be taken to re-structure and expand the time of instruction in

the different academic programs, in order to maximize students' exposure to the target language.

- *Didactic materials and resources*

The English Department should make sure that a bank of resources (materials, syllabi, exams,) is created so that teachers can be using such resources over a given period of time. This will help save valuable effort and time whenever a particular course is taught. On the other hand, the teachers and the students should be able to use all kinds of technological resources, including access to Internet, as regular tools inside and outside the classroom.

- *Teachers assigned*

The English Department should assign the same teachers to teach the same particular courses over a determined period of time. This organization will serve several purposes: create areas of expertise, increase the teachers' self-confidence and motivation, and save valuable time and effort.

- *Number of students*

It is not possible to teach English effectively with a large group of students. Special efforts should be made so that the amount of students in the English lessons is reduced to a more manageable number for the teachers.

- *Classroom conditions*

Modern language methodology involves a number of classroom dynamics that require a variety of grouping strategies to facilitate student interaction. English cannot be taught in a lecture-like fashion as other subjects in the curriculum. The teacher and the students need enough space to be able to interact by forming groups, pairs, and by moving around performing different kinds of tasks. Thus, the classroom should facilitate the proper conditions for this interaction.

- *Appraisal systems*

An effective appraisal system should be established so that the teachers can get consistent support and relevant feedback from qualified staff through classroom observations. It is highly important that this feedback is not done in a judgmental manner.

1.3 Recommendations to the teachers

All the teachers participating in this study need to continue to take consistent steps to ensure their ongoing professional growth, which can be achieved through the following recommendations.

a. *Continue to develop their reflective skills*

The teachers' definition of the reflective teacher should serve as a guide along this process. Thus, they should continue to have an open attitude towards learning and change, be resourceful when planning and implementing their lessons, make conscious efforts to increase their knowledge, use their analytical skills to assess experience, and be concerned with their professional growth.

b. Continue to make improvements and innovations in the classroom

The classroom is the one context where they have the freedom to make changes and innovations, which should continue to be promoted. In the long run, small gradual changes will make the difference in student learning outcomes.

c. Continue to view themselves as change agents.

Teachers can and are entitled to be change agents in and outside of the classroom. Such a proactive attitude will inspire students towards developing the same attitude.

d. Continue to promote collaboration with peers

The teachers should continue to make collaborative efforts with peers through sharing experiences and doing peer observations. This process will allow them to continue to support each other in a collegial atmosphere to make significant professional improvements.

2. CONTRIBUTION TO THE RESEARCH FIELD

This investigation has been an attempt to illuminate the process of language teacher education by contributing some understanding to the complex world of English teaching. Thus, this section will focus on the contributions of the study to the research field in language teacher education. The focus areas are the *social relevance of teacher education programs; teacher training and teacher development; teacher reflection and teacher beliefs.*

2.1 The social relevance of teacher education programs

This study has confirmed the importance of teacher education programs in sustaining teacher development within their particular situational contexts. As pointed out by a number of studies over the past few years (Bigelow and Walker 2003; Dubin and Wong, 1990; Freeman and Johnson, 1998; Graves, 2000; Grimmet, 1996; Kennedy, 1990; Kohonen, 2002; Kumaravadivelu 1994; Lin, 2001; Richards and Lockhart 1994; Richards 2001) teacher education programs should take into consideration the social, cultural and political context in which they are situated. The results of this study show that this consideration involves making significant efforts to guarantee the social pertinence of the program, and the suitability of the academic offer to the particular community of teachers. Moreover, having witnessed the difficulties that the teachers in this study experienced, I can positively claim that teacher development implies opportunities for professional growth that do not represent an extra burden for the teachers. On the contrary, teacher education providers should

assess the real possibilities of the teachers particularly in contexts, like the context in this study, which are unsupportive of teacher development. Thus, the programs offered should be realistic, pertinent and flexible enough as to adapt to such possibilities.

2.2 Teacher training and teacher development

Teacher training is described as input to teachers in the form of relevant pedagogic skills and knowledge, transmitted by the trainer's modeling behavior. Teacher development, on the other hand is a continuous life-long personal process characterized by the teachers' conscious desire for professional improvement. Implicit in this desire are the issues of teacher choice, decision making, self-awareness, and self-reflection. Thus, the purpose of teacher development programs is to nurture, further and fulfill this desire (see lit. review 2.1-2.5 for a complete review of both approaches).

Since the teachers participating in this study needed both kinds of help, the program combined the two processes. On the one hand, teacher training helped them to acquire the skills; techniques and knowledge that Prahbu (1987) called "equipping procedures" (see lit. review 2.5). Such procedures are justified when teachers face different kinds of contextual pressures from institutions of formal education, from government, and from other sources, which was the case of the teachers participating in the study. On the other hand, through the "development imperative" of the program (Mann, 2005:105) the teachers developed a critical perspective of teaching, which emerged from their willingness to improve in light of their sustainable professional development. The linking mechanism between the two approaches was Action Research, which allowed the teachers to reflect on their practice, while applying the relevant knowledge they learned in the program.

The results of this study showed that it is possible and desirable to combine the two approaches for the sake of teacher professional growth. Moreover, I believe that this twofold focus was one of the factors that allowed most teachers to be able to fulfill the program in the middle of the number of constraints posed by the situational context.

2.3 About teacher reflection

- *Teacher reflection at the PRESET level*

The results of this study highlight the importance of the reflective teacher as a necessary approach for teacher education programs. The teachers participating had low reflective skills when integrating into the INSET program. This was a significant weakness, which required the organization of a scaffolding strategy aimed at fostering teacher reflection throughout the development of the program.

The problem made it evident that such important skills should be addressed at the PRESET level. This is particularly true in unsupportive contexts, like the context of this study, where most teachers don't have the opportunity to undertake further studies. In this regard England (1998:23) states that "universities can no longer be held totally responsible ...since pre-service ELT preparation is only half the battle". She implies that institutions and schools should take responsibility to offer proper INSET opportunities to their teachers. Nonetheless, within constraining situational contexts, like the one in this study, the great majority of teachers can only have access to the knowledge they acquire at the PRESET level. As discussed above, social relevance requires that teacher education programs respond to the demands of the context. In unsupportive contexts such demands involve assuming full responsibility for the teachers' professional formation at the PRESET level. This is a valuable reason to redouble efforts at the PRESET level to provide the teachers with the necessary reflective skills that ensure their sustainable professional development.

- *Teacher reflection during the Practicum*

The results of this study also indicate that an optimal time to promote the acquisition of reflective skills at the PRESET level is when student-teachers take their *Practicum* courses. This is very important for several reasons. Firstly, the *Practicum* provides the teachers with relevant and practical knowledge that they will need to operate efficiently as English teachers. Secondly, the *Practicum* takes place in context, which gives student-teachers the opportunity to interact with teachers, students, and school authorities, and get familiar with core aspects of education system such as school policies and procedures, school organization and curriculum issues. Finally, the *Practicum* involves observing different teachers' approaches in planning, implementing and evaluating language lessons. As Wallace (1991:15) points out "in the reflective model such observation will be a matter of reflection rather than imitation and the reflection will probably have to be carefully structured so that the trainee can best benefit from the period of observation". All of these tasks during the *Practicum* require providing the teachers with the tools to reflect critically on the experiences. Given the importance of the *Practicum* experiences and their connection with teacher reflection, careful efforts should be made, like Wallace suggests, for structuring these courses. Such a structure most probably would involve analyzing curricula, materials and methodology, among other important aspects.

- *Teacher reflection at the INSET level*

On the other hand, teacher reflection at the INSET level should also be organized properly. In the present study Action Research was used as a structured way of reflection. The results indicate that the approach was *useful* for the teachers to reflect on their teaching practice. The reflective

process was an enriching experience that yielded a number of positive outcomes, which was evidenced through the teachers' perceptions and contributions along the process. Important indicators of this reflective process were the teachers' conceptualization of reflective teaching (*analytical skills, resourcefulness, open-mindedness, knowledgeability and professional growth*) which revealed their own reflective process. Other indicators were their insights about professional development, and the identification of the research area. Likewise, the documented comparison between the teachers' approaches before and after the process indicated their improvement.

In spite of these benefits, the results also indicated that Action Research is not a *practical* approach for the given contextual conditions. The multiplicity of professional tasks, the amount of work that the teachers faced, and their job instability evidenced that the context is not supportive enough to use Action Research as a structured approach for teachers' reflection. This, of course, does not mean that teacher reflection through Action Research should not be promoted. On the contrary, I imply that special efforts should be made in order to help teachers simplify the process. The two scaffolding processes used in this project, *introspection* and *collaboration*, are examples of this kind of help. On the other hand, it would be useful to explore other possibilities to reflection such as Dick Allwright's (1991) proposal of *Exploratory Practice*, an alternative to reflection that integrates research with pedagogy as a regular practice for teacher development. The basic objective of this approach is to provide teachers with reflection tools that do not represent an extra burden for them (see lit. review 4.3.3).

2.4 About teacher beliefs

Teacher beliefs about teaching have special significance in teacher education programs given their influence on the teachers' approaches to teaching, and on how the teachers perceive the multifaceted aspects involved in the process. As Richards and Lockhart point out, "what teachers do is a reflection of what they know and believe...teacher knowledge and 'teacher thinking' provide the underlying framework or schema which guides the teachers' classroom actions" (Richards and Lockhart 1994: 29).

- *Teacher beliefs: sources and influence*

As discussed in the literature review, the sources of teachers' beliefs can potentially be the teachers' educational experiences both as language learners in their school days, and as language teacher learners in their teacher education programs. The sources can also be the teachers' experiential knowledge, established practice, and particular methodologies, among others (see lit. review 3.2). The results of this study indicate that most teachers' beliefs emerged from their training

program at the PRESET level. The second source was students and the third source was their experiential knowledge.

Although most teachers held non-traditional views of teaching resulting from their training, there were significant discordances with their actual performance at the classroom level. The contextual conditions exerted significant influence on the teachers' decision making (e.g. assuming traditional roles because of the number of students, or avoiding correcting errors because of time constraints). Nonetheless, the teachers were also, (a) unclear about the particular complexities of language teaching and learning, (b) unaware of the disagreement between their beliefs and actions and, (c) unaware of the effects of this discordance on student learning.

The teachers revealed that students were their second source of beliefs, which explained their high awareness of student related factors, such as students' needs, interest and motivation. Because of this awareness it was possible for the teachers to perceive that something was not working well. Nonetheless, the low reflective skills did not allow them to perceive the causes of the problems.

Experiential knowledge, on the other hand, had been effective for the teachers to interact with their given conditions and carry out their practice. Nonetheless, once again, the lack of reflection did not help them go beyond the well-known traditional (and ineffective) classroom routines. Experiential knowledge alone was not enough for teacher professional growth. As Richards and Lockhart point out, "experience is the starting point for teacher development, but in order for experience to play an important role it is necessary to examine such experiences systematically" (Richards and Lockhart 1994:4). Examining experience was the reason why it was possible for most teachers to align their beliefs and practice, and change their approaches.

- *Teacher change*

Changes in teacher beliefs and performance are the fundamental goals of teacher education programs. According to Guskey (2002:383), change in teacher beliefs occurs only after the teachers are able to see positive results in student learning outcomes (see lit. review 3.7.1). In order for change to occur the teachers need to have an open-mind and be motivated. As Woodward highlights "There must be understanding and reasoning and the desire to change. There must also be an ability to relate what is going on outside with what is going on inside the person" (Woodward, 1991:129). Furthermore, the teachers need to be well-informed and have adequate preparation and skills in their particular professional area.

The results of this study support the theory of teacher change as a result of real improvement. In order for change to take place, certain conditions were met. The teachers had an innate inclination and openness towards learning and change, which was cultivated throughout the training process.

They were also naturally motivated towards their professional improvement, which fostered the acquisition of knowledge in the different focus areas of the training program.

The element that completed the conditions for change was teacher reflection, which was consistently stimulated throughout the training process and through Action Research. Special attention was given to help teachers resolve their conflicts, namely, lack of clarity about the complexities of teaching and learning, unawareness of the disagreement between beliefs and performance, and unawareness of the effect that such disagreement had on student learning. The conflict was resolved as a result of confronting their beliefs and performance.

The reflective process, through which the teachers confronted their beliefs and performance, put all the elements together to provoke the intended changes. Most teachers were able to make significant changes in their approaches to teaching as a result of confronting their teaching views with their actions. This outcome confirms Maingay's (1988) and Woods' (1996) insights discussed in the literature review (see section 3.7) that certain teaching behavior (*ritual teaching behavior* alternatively called *routine behavior*) can be the result of lack of awareness (see lit. review 3.7). The teachers' teaching practice allowed them to see the immediate results during the process. Thus, practical and effective innovations facilitated the acquisition of reflective skills in a parallel way with their knowledge, and as a result of their ever-present open attitude towards learning and change.

Consistent evidence supporting the changes in teacher thinking was the link with the hypothesis and objectives of the research projects. The changes that the teachers reported were the kinds of changes they wanted and expected. An increase in teacher confidence was perceived as parallel to an increase in teacher *personal practical knowledge* and *pedagogical knowledge* to deal with the particular aspect or area. The changes in the teachers' reflective skills involved their analytical and critical thinking skills, and their problem solving ability. The changes in the teachers' knowledge and perception of students revealed a connection between change and the teachers' motivational sources.

Change was not possible in all cases. Two teachers, although acknowledging the effectiveness of particular modern views, did not provide evidence of change, which seemed to be the result of routinized teaching. This suggests that when some behavior is rooted in the teacher's teaching style, teachers experience more difficulties in changing. This result has important implications for teacher education programs, indicating that special care should be taken in order to prevent deeply ingrained ineffective teaching practices. All evidence provided by this study indicates that these kinds of problems can be avoided by promoting the acquisition of reflective skills, and effective

classroom techniques at the PRESET level. The best time, as suggested above, is during the development of the *Practicum* experiences.

3. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study had as a major scope the exploration of the professional development of 15 English teachers at the INSET level. As it could be expected, the complexity of such an enterprise posed some limitations along the way, which should be considered together with the findings. The first limitation emerged out of the qualitative nature of the study. I was aware of the fact that these types of studies produce a large amount of data. Nonetheless, my interest in collecting enough valid information for the research questions did not allow me to anticipate the consequences of gathering so much data. Likewise, it was my understanding that by collecting abundant data from different sources and involving different actors, I would guarantee the trustworthiness of the research and therewith avoid biases. This was indeed the case. The data shed significant light on each of the research questions, and I believe that the trustworthiness of the study was guaranteed. Nonetheless, the efforts made in compiling, categorizing, coding, analyzing and interpreting such an amount of data was considerable and very time consuming. In retrospect now, it looks probable that the same results would have been obtained decreasing the amount of data.

The second limitation relates to the teachers participating in the study. Because of the scope of the investigation they were addressed as a group, and particular features were not analyzed in depth. For instance, it was clear throughout the study that there were differences in style, learning needs and potentialities (e.g. some teachers assimilated the course contents faster, while others took more time to digest the information). The levels of participation and involvement were different too, and so was their academic performance in the program. Although I believe these differences did not affect the results significantly (same contextual conditions, similar teaching beliefs, similar approaches in the classroom), the potential benefits of addressing individual differences were not exploited.

Finally, the constraints posed by the context also affected this investigation in several ways. For instance, the teachers' dismissal from UNAN affected their motivation in completing the program. Although this was a temporary situation for most teachers, six of them could not finish their research projects and quit the program. The teachers who completed their projects experienced problems in getting in touch with the students for the purposes of gathering pending information. All of this affected the quality of the research projects and the length of the program, which had to be extended. On the other hand, I intended to get deeper into the issue of the teachers' knowledge base, which was not possible to address as the teachers had dispersed. Some of them were rehired at

the UNAN, some others kept working at the secondary school level, and some others, disillusioned by the lack of teaching opportunities, integrated into other professional fields (training and interpretation, and Call Centers).

4. FURTHER RESEARCH

As a result of this investigation, several potential topics to guide research in language teacher education were identified. The suggestions are based on the most important aspects addressed by this study.

- The study focused on teacher development within the educational context at the INSET level and evidenced how important it is to make effective links with the PRESET level. Consequently, it would be interesting to do research on how to foster effective links between both kinds of programs.
- Given the importance of context in teacher education programs it is suggested to undertake studies on how other models of in-service development prepare English teachers to teach in response to contextual needs and circumstances
- This study highlighted how a restrictive context can prevent teachers from further professional development opportunities at the INSET level. Consequently, it is recommended to undertake studies that explore what needs to be done to provide student-teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills at the PRESET level for sustainable development.
- Teacher change is another important area to continue to explore through research. Given the fact that a few teachers showed resistance to change in spite of taking the same training program, it would be interesting to undertake a study that analyzes the nature of the factors involved in such resistance, and how it could be possible to overcome them.
- The issue of teacher structured reflection suggests interesting research areas as well. This study assessed two mechanisms to support teachers' efforts in doing Action Research. Thus, it would be interesting to conduct similar studies that explore the process of teachers doing Action Research in unsupportive contexts using alternative or similar scaffolding mechanisms.
- Given the importance of the *Practicum* for teacher preparation, research focused on this area is also needed. In this regard, it is suggested exploring effective scaffolding mechanisms to guarantee that student-teachers acquire solid pedagogical and reflective skills during the *Practicum* experience.

- The teachers in this study regarded their beliefs as emerging from their training, their students, and their experiential knowledge. In this regard it would be interesting to conduct a study that finds out the sources of teachers' beliefs and studies the nature of these experiences.

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APPENDIX 1

Plan Nacional de Educación - Nicaragua

Resumen Ejecutivo

- I. Introducción: Propósitos y proceso de elaboración del Plan Estratégico Nacional de Educación
 - Introducción
 - Propósitos del Plan Nacional de Educación
 - Proceso de Elaboración
 - Contexto de Nicaragua: Situación y Tendencias Socioeconómicas con Énfasis en el Desarrollo y la Superación de la Pobreza
- II. La Educación en Nicaragua
 - A. Diagnóstico a lo interno del sistema educativo
 - Cobertura
 - Formación Integral
 - Permanencia en el sistema
 - Apoyo de la Cooperación Internacional
 - Inversión-Egreso
 - B. Diagnóstico y Su Interacción con la Sociedad
 - Niveles de Educación, Abandono Escolar y Repitencia
- III. Propósitos Generales
 - . Visión y Misión de la Educación
 - A. Principios Generales de la Educación
 - B. Orientación Global Estratégica
 - Contexto Internacional
 - Contexto Nacional
- IV. Objetivos y Estrategias del Sistema Educativo
 - . Cobertura (Acceso y Promoción) y Equidad de la Educación

- Estrategias
 - A. Calidad y Relevancia de los Aprendizajes
 - 1. Definición de Conceptos
 - 2. Objetivos y Estrategias
 - B. Innovación, Ciencia y Tecnología
 - C. Condiciones Dignas y Formación Permanente del Educador
 - D. Gestión Educativa Descentralizada
- V. Requerimientos y financiamiento del Plan Nacional de Educación
 - . Requerimientos Humanos y Técnicos
 - A. Financiamiento
- VI. La Participación como Eje del Plan Nacional de Educación y de su Implementación y Seguimiento
 - . Compromisos
 - A. Difusión del Plan
 - B. Seguimiento y evaluación
 - C. Pasos a seguir

Source: MINED

APPENDIX 2 STUDY PLAN UNAN-MANAGUA

PLAN DE ESTUDIO 1999

Aprobado por el Consejo Universitario en Febrero 1999 y por el Rector Francisco Guzmán P. el 5 de septiembre del 2003.
 FACULTAD: CIENCIAS DE LA EDUCACIÓN Y HUMANIDADES
 CARRERA: INGLÉS
 GRADO: LICENCIADO (A)
 TÍTULO: LICENCIADO (A) EN CIENCIAS DE LA EDUCACIÓN
 CON MENCIÓN E INGLÉS.
 5 AÑOS

I.- PLAN DEL PROCESO DOCENTE

CODIGO	ASIGNATURAS	TOTAL DE HORAS	CREDITOS	REQUISITOS	CODIGO	ASIGNATURAS	TOTAL DE HORAS	CREDITOS	REQUISITOS
MAT-010 EDI-101	SEMESTRE I 1. Matemática General 2. Inglés Integral I	4 10	4 10		ESP-010 EDI-102	SEMESTRE II 3. Español General 4. Inglés Integral II	4 10	4 10	Inglés Integral I
PSI-101 EDI-202 EDI-201	SEMESTRE III 5. Psicología General 6. Pronunciación 7. Inglés Integral III	4 4 10	4 4 10	Inglés Integral II	PSI-102 PED-101 EDI-204	SEMESTRE IV 8. Psicología del Aprendizaje 9. Pedagogía General 10. Inglés Integral IV	4 4 18	4 4 18	Inglés Integral III
PED-203 SFI-210 EDI-204	SEMESTRE V 11. Didáctica General 12. Seminario de Formación Integral 13. Inglés Integral V	4 3 15	4 3 15	Inglés Integ. IV	MIN-320 EDI-302 HIS-102	SEMESTRE VI 14. Metodología de la Investigación 15. Inglés Integral VI 16. Historia de Nicaragua	3 10	3 10	Inglés Integral V
EDI-103 EDI-011 EDI-303 PED-204	SEMESTRE VII 17. Escritura 18. Gramática 19. Didáctica Especial I 20. Evaluación Educativa	6 6 6 5	6 6 6 5	Inglés Integral V Inglés Integral VI Inglés Integral III	EDI-010 EDI-406 EDI-304 EDU-300	SEMESTRE VIII 21. Didáctica Especial II 22. Evaluación de las Habilidades del Idioma 23. Lectura 24. Seminario de Educación	6 6 4 4	6 6 4 4	Didáctica Especial I Didáctica Especial I

SEMESTRE IX		SEMESTRE X		SEMESTRE XI				
IAP-520	25. Investigación Aplicada a la Enseñanza del Inglés	6	6	EDI-501 ING-503 SEM-601	29. Lingüística II 30. Traducción 31. Modalidad de Graduación.	4 6	4 6	Lingüística I
EDI-402	26. Lingüística I	6	6					
EDI-400	27. Conversación	4	4					
EDI-500	28. Literatura Inglesa	6	6					

IV. MODALIDAD DE GRADUACION

CODIGO	TIPO	SEMESTRE	CREDITOS
SEM-601	SEMINARIO DE GRADUACION	X	20
PRO-602	PROYECTO DE GRADUACION	X	20
EXG-603	EXAMEN DE GRADO	X	20
MING-604	MONOGRAFIA	X	20

EL /la estudiante seleccionará una de ellas.

Por el Consejo Universitario en Sesión N°. 12-99 del 5-03-99

NOTA IMPORTANTE: PLAN 99

POLITICA CURRICULAR CAPITULO 4, INCISO 12: "TODO GRADUADO DE LA UNAN-MANAGUA DOMINARA UNA SEGUNDA LENGUA INGLÉS O FRANCÉS A NIVEL DE COMPRENSION Y LECTURA TECNICA, IGUALMENTE EL DOMINIO DE HERRAMIENTAS BASICAS SOBRE LA INFORMATICA A NIVEL DE USUARIO"
EN SESION N°. 10-2003 DEL DIA VIERNES 9 DE MAYO DEL 2003
EL CONSEJO UNIVERSITARIO MODIFICA DISPOSICION ANTERIOR (INCISO 4.12) "EL ESTUDIANTE SELECCIONARA SOLO UNA OPCION".

APROBADO POR:

Msc. Francisco Guzmán Pasos
Rector UNAN-Managua

Ene-03

UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL AUTONOMA DE NICARAGUA
RECINTO UNIVERSITARIO "RUBEN DARIO"
FACULTAD DE EDUCACION E IDIOMAS
DEPARTAMENTO DE INGLES

PLAN DE ESTUDIO 1999

Aprobado por el Consejo Universitario en Febrero 1999 y por el Rector Francisco Guzmán P. el 5 de septiembre del 2003.
FACULTAD: CIENCIAS DE LA EDUCACIÓN Y HUMANIDADES
CARRERA: INGLÉS
GRADO: LICENCIADO (A)
TÍTULO: LICENCIADO (A) EN CIENCIAS DE LA EDUCACIÓN
 CON MENCIÓN E INGLÉS.

CURSO REGULAR
TOTAL DE HORAS 3,165
TOTAL DE CRÉDITO 23
TIEMPO DE ESTUDIOS:
5 AÑOS

I.- PLAN DEL PROCESO DOCENTE

CODIGO	ASIGNATURAS	TOTAL DE HORAS	CREDITOS	REQUISITOS	CODIGO	ASIGNATURAS	TOTAL DE HORAS	CREDITOS	REQUISITOS
ESP-010 MAT-010 GEO-101 EDI-101	SEMESTRE I 1. Español General 2. Matemática General 3. Geografía de Nicaragua 4. Inglés Integral I	4 4 4 10	4 4 4 10		HIS-102 FIL-010 PSI-101 EDI-102	SEMESTRE II 5. Historia de Nicaragua 6. Introducción a la Filosofía 7. Psicología General 8. Inglés Integral II	4 4 4 10	4 4 4 10	
PSI-102 EDI-202 EDI-201	SEMESTRE III 9. Psicología del aprendizaje 10. Pronunciación 11. Inglés Integral III	4 4 14	4 4 14	PSI-101 EDI-102	PED-101 EDI-204	SEMESTRE IV 12. Pedagogía General 13. Inglés Integral IV	4 18	4 18	EDI-201
PED-203 MIN-320 EDI-301	SEMESTRE V 14. Didáctica General 15. Metodología de la Investigación* 16. Inglés Integral V	4 3 15	4 3 15	PED-101 EDI-204	PED-204 SFI-210 EDI-302 EDI-304	SEMESTRE VI 17. Evaluación Educativa 18. Seminario de Formación Integral. 19. Inglés Integral VI* 20. Lectura	4 3 10 4	4 3 10 4	PED-203 EDI-301

SEMESTRE IX		SEMESTRE X		SEMESTRE XI		
IAP-520	25. Investigación Aplicada a la Enseñanza del Inglés	6	6	EDI-501 ING-503 SEM-601	4 6	Lingüística I
EDI-402	26. Lingüística I	6	6			
EDI-400	27. Conversación	4	4			
EDI-500	28. Literatura Inglesa	6	6			

IV. MODALIDAD DE GRADUACION

CODIGO	TIPO	SEMESTRE	CREDITOS
SEM-601	SEMINARIO DE GRADUACION	X	20
PRO-602	PROYECTO DE GRADUACION	X	20
EXG-603	EXAMEN DE GRADO	X	20
MING-604	MONOGRAFIA	X	20

EL /la estudiante seleccionará una de ellas.

Por el Consejo Universitario en Sesión N°. 12-99 del 5-03-99

NOTA IMPORTANTE: PLAN 99

POLITICA CURRICULAR CAPITULO 4, INCISO 12: "TODO GRADUADO DE LA UNAN-MANAGUA DOMINARA UNA SEGUNDA LENGUA INGLÉS O FRANCÉS A NIVEL DE COMPRENSION Y LECTURA TECNICA, IGUALMENTE EL DOMINIO DE HERRAMIENTAS BASICAS SOBRE LA INFORMATICA A NIVEL DE USUARIO"
EN SESION N°. 10-2003 DEL DIA VIERNES 9 DE MAYO DEL 2003
EL CONSEJO UNIVERSITARIO MODIFICA DISPOSICION ANTERIOR (INCISO 4,12) "EL ESTUDIANTE SELECCIONARA SOLO UNA OPCION".

APROBADO POR:

Msc. Francisco Guzmán Pasos
Rector UNAN-Managua **Ene-03**

APPENDIX 3 STUDY PLAN UCA

Plan de Estudios 2008 Carrera Enseñanza del Inglés

Código	Asignaturas
	1er Cuatrimestre
090304	Inglés Introductorio
090305	Introducción a la Conversación en inglés
090297	Español General
120005	Reflexión Teológica
	Total cuatrimestre
	2do Cuatrimestre
090206	Taller de Gramática del inglés I
090208	Taller de Lectura y redacción en inglés I
090207	Taller de Conversación en inglés I
090298	Taller de Redacción en Español
	Total cuatrimestre
	3er Cuatrimestre
090210	Taller de Gramática del inglés II
090214	Taller de Lectura y redacción en inglés II
090209	Taller de Conversación en inglés II
220138	Informática Básica
090257	Taller de Fonética
	Total cuatrimestre
	4to Cuatrimestre
090306	Taller de Gramática Avanzada del Inglés
090307	Taller de Lectura y Redacción Avanzada del Inglés
090308	Taller de Conversación Avanzada del Inglés
040259	Electiva de Género

	Total cuatrimestre
	5to Cuatrimestre
090309	Proeficiencia en Inglés
090224	Filosofía de la Educación
080230	Electiva de Cultura e Identidad
110111	Psicología del Desarrollo.
	Total cuatrimestre
	6to Cuatrimestre
090213	Pedagogía General
090218	Introducción a la lingüística
110166	Desarrollo de Habilidades Sociales
090289	Taller de Redacción Técnica en Inglés
	Total cuatrimestre
	7mo Cuatrimestre
090272	Adquisición y Aprendizaje de un Idioma
090271	Lingüística Aplicada
040266	Electiva de Historia
080110	Electiva de Ética
	Total cuatrimestre
	8vo. Cuatrimestre
090263	Cultura de los Pueblos de Habla Inglesa
090223	Metodología de la Enseñanza del Inglés I
080233	Electiva de Ambiente
090269	OP: 090269 Alemán I
090270	OP: Francés I
	Total cuatrimestre
	9no Cuatrimestre
090228	Metodología de la Enseñanza del Inglés II

090278	Introducción a la Traducción
090310	Literatura Inglesa
090273	OP: Alemán II
090274	Op: Francés II
	Total cuatrimestre
	10mo Cuatrimestre
090234	Práctica Docente I
090311	Enseñanza del Inglés como Segunda Lengua
090280	OP: Alemán III
090281	OP: Francés III
040309	Metodología de la Investigación
	Total cuatrimestre
	11vo Cuatrimestre

090241	Práctica Docente II
090242	Diseño Curricular
090277	Investigación de la Enseñanza del Inglés
090282	OP: 0902 Alemán IV
090283	OP: Francés IV
	Total cuatrimestre
	12vo Cuatrimestre
090312	Seminario de Culminación de Estudios
060361	Administración Escolar
090313	Seminario de Actualización
	Total cuatrimestre
	TOTALES PLAN 2008

APPENDIX 4: STUDY PLANS UNAN-LEÓN

PLAN DE ESTUDIOS 2011 - 2015 (IS)

Datos generales:					
Nombre de la carrera: Lengua Inglesa					
Grado a obtener: Licenciado					
Total de horas: 2,738					
Total de créditos académicos: 188					
Modalidad: Regular					
Régimen académico: Semestral					
Régimen	Código	Componente Curricular	T/H	No.CA	Requisitos
Ciclo I		Matemática Básica	64	4	
		Biología General	64	4	
		Historia de Nicaragua	48	3	
		Comunicación y Lenguaje	64	4	
		Inglés	64	3	
		Filosofía	64	3	
		Actividad Estudiantil I	16	1	
Subtotal			384	22	
Ciclo II		Lectura y Escritura en Inglés I	64	4	----
		Inglés Integral I	96	5	Inglés
		Laboratorio I	64	4	----
		Electiva de Formación General I: Literatura Básica en Inglés / Comunicación en Inglés I	64	4	----/ ----
		Actividad Estudiantil II	16	1	
		Optativa I: Comunicación y Lenguaje II/ Segundo Idioma Extranjero I (Francés o Alemán)	64	4	Comunicación y Lenguaje I
Subtotal			368	22	
Ciclo III		Lectura y Escritura en Inglés II	64	4	Lectura y Escritura en Inglés I
		Inglés Integral II	96	5	Inglés Integral I
		Laboratorio II	64	4	Laboratorio I
		Electiva de Formación General II: Historia de la Literatura en Inglés / Comunicación en Inglés II	64	4	----/ Comunicación en Inglés I
		Actividad Estudiantil III	16	1	
		Optativa II: Técnicas Básicas de Lectura/ Segundo Idioma Extranjero II (Francés o Alemán)	64	4	----/ Segundo Idioma Extranjero I
Subtotal			368	22	
Ciclo IV		Inglés Integral III	96	5	Inglés Integral II
		Laboratorio III	64	4	Laboratorio II

		Electiva de Formación General III: Estadística Introdutoria / Inglés Comercial y Gerencial I	64	4	----/ ----
		Electiva I: Fonética y Fonología del Inglés I/ Escritura Creativa en Inglés	64	4	----/ Lectura y Escritura En Inglés II
		Optativa III: Técnicas de Expresión Oral / Segundo Idioma Extranjero III (Francés o Alemán)	64	4	----/ Segundo Idioma Extranjero II
		Subtotal	352	21	
Ciclo V		Inglés Integral IV	96	5	Inglés Integral III
		Introducción a la Escritura Académica en Inglés	64	4	Lectura y Escritura en Inglés II
		Métodos y Enfoques en la Enseñanza del Inglés	64	4	----
		Electiva de Formación General IV: Análisis Literario en Inglés/ Eventos Contemporáneos	64	4	----/ ----
		Prácticas Profesionales I	32	3	----
		Subtotal	322	20	
Ciclo VI		Inglés Integral V	96	5	Inglés Integral IV
		Técnicas de la Enseñanza del Inglés I	64	4	Métodos y Enfoques en la Enseñanza del Inglés
		Prácticas Profesionales II	32	3	Prácticas Profesionales I
		Electiva II: Fonética y Fonología del Inglés II / Técnicas de Expresión Oral En Inglés I	64	4	Fonética y Fonología del Inglés I
		Electiva III: Investigación Cultural de los Países Anglófonos/ Historia de los Estados Unidos	64	4	----/ ----
		Subtotal	320	20	
Ciclo VII		Inglés Integral VI	96	5	Inglés Integral V
		Metodología de la Investigación I	64	4	---
		Prácticas Profesionales III	32	3	Prácticas Profesionales II
		Electiva IV: Laboratorio Avanzado/ Inglés Comercial y Gerencial II	64	4	Laboratorio III / Inglés Comercial y Gerencial I
		Electiva V: Técnicas de Expresión Oral En Inglés II / Traducción I	64	4	Técnicas de Expresión Oral En Inglés I / Inglés Integral V
		Subtotal	320	20	
Ciclo VIII		Inglés Integral VII	96	5	Inglés Integral VI
		Discurso Académico	64	4	Inglés Integral VI
		Metodología de la Investigación II	64	4	Metodología de la Investigación I
		Electiva VI: Traducción II / Escritura Académica En Inglés	48	4	Traducción I / Introducción a la Escritura Académica En Inglés
		Optativa IV: Formulación, Gestión y Evaluación de Proyectos/TOEFL	64	4	Metodología de la Investigación I/ Inglés Integral VI
		Subtotal	336	21	
Ciclo IX		Electiva de Investigación: Técnicas de la Enseñanza en Inglés II/ Proyecto Educativo	64	4	Técnicas de la Enseñanza en Inglés I/ Metodología de la Investigación II
		Electiva VII: Advanced Listening and Speaking/ Sociolingüística	48	4	Inglés Integral VII/ Inglés Integral VII

		Electiva VIII: <i>Lectura y Escritura Avanzada/ Gramática Avanzada</i>	64	3	Inglés Integral VII/ Inglés Integral VII
		Prácticas Profesionales IV	32	3	Prácticas Profesionales III
		Monografía o Examen de Grado	64	6	
		Subtotal	304	20	
		TOTAL	2,738	188	

PLAN DE ESTUDIOS 2011 - 2015 (IS)

Datos generales:					
Nombre de la carrera: Ciencias de la Educación, mención Inglés					
Grado a obtener. Licenciado					
Total de horas: 1,140					
Total de créditos académicos: 200					
Modalidad: Sabatina					
Régimen académico: Trimestral					
Régimen	Código	Componente Curricular	T/H	No.CA	Requisitos
Ciclo I		Comunicación y Lenguaje	20	4	
		Biología General	20	4	
		Historia de Nicaragua	20	3	
		Subtotal	60	11	
Ciclo II		Matemática Básica	20	4	
		Inglés	20	3	
		Filosofía	20	3	
		Actividad Estudiantil I	10	1	
	Subtotal	70	11		
Ciclo III		<i>Optativa I: Comunicación y Lenguaje II/ Gramática del Inglés I</i>	20	4	
		Inglés Integral I	30	5	Inglés
		Electiva de Formación General I: Literatura Básica en Inglés / Comunicación en Inglés I	20	4	
	Subtotal	70	13		
Ciclo IV		Laboratorio I	20	4	
		Actividad Estudiantil II	10	1	
		Lectura y Escritura en Inglés	20	4	
	Subtotal	50	9		
Ciclo V		Inglés Integral II	30	5	Inglés Integral I
		Electiva de Formación General II: Historia de la Literatura en Inglés / Comunicación en Inglés II	20	4	---- / Comunicación en Inglés I
		Filosofía Educativa	20	3	
	Subtotal	70	12		
Ciclo VI		Psicología General	20	3	

		Actividad Estudiantil III	10	1	
		Optativa II: Técnicas Básicas de Lectura/ Gramática del Inglés II	20	4	---- / Gramática del Inglés I
		Laboratorio II	20	4	Laboratorio I
		Subtotal	70	12	
Ciclo VII		Inglés Integral III	30	5	Inglés Integral II
		Electiva de Formación General III: Estadística Introductoria / Inglés Comercial y Gerencial I	20	4	
		Psicología Evolutiva y Pedagógica	20	3	
		Subtotal	70	12	
Ciclo VIII		Laboratorio III	20	4	Laboratorio II
		Optativa III: Técnicas de Expresión Oral / Gramática del Inglés III	20	4	---- / Gramática del Inglés II
		Electiva I: Fonética y Fonología del Inglés I / Escritura Creativa en Inglés	20	4	---- / Lectura y Escritura en Inglés
		Subtotal	60	12	
Ciclo IX		Inglés Integral IV	30	5	Inglés Integral III
		Introducción a la Escritura Académica en Inglés	20	4	Lectura y Escritura en Inglés
		Pedagogía General	20	3	
		Subtotal	70	12	
Ciclo X		Didáctica General	20	3	
		Métodos y Enfoques en la Enseñanza del Inglés	20	4	
		Electiva de Formación General IV: Análisis Literario en Inglés/ Eventos Contemporáneos	20	4	
		Subtotal	60	11	
Ciclo XI		Inglés Integral V	30	5	Inglés Integral IV
		Técnicas de la Enseñanza del Inglés I	20	4	Métodos y Enfoques en la Enseñanza del Inglés
		Prácticas Profesionales I	20	3	
		Subtotal	70	12	
Ciclo XII		Prácticas Profesionales II	20	3	
		Electiva II: Fonética y Fonología del Inglés II / Técnicas de Expresión Oral En Inglés I	20	3	Fonética y Fonología del Inglés I / ----
		Electiva III: Investigación Cultural de los Países Anglófonos/ Historia de los Estados Unidos	20	3	
		Subtotal	60	9	
Ciclo XIII		Inglés Integral VI	30	5	Inglés Integral V
		Administración y Gestión Educativa	20	3	
		Prácticas Profesionales III	20	3	Prácticas Profesionales II
		Subtotal	70	11	
Ciclo XIV		Metodología de la Investigación I	20	4	
		Electiva IV: Laboratorio Avanzado/ Inglés Comercial y Gerencial II	20	4	Laboratorio III / Inglés Comercial y Gerencial I

		Electiva V: <i>Técnicas de Expresión Oral En Inglés II / Traducción I</i>	20	4	Técnicas de Expresión Oral En Inglés I / Inglés Integral V
		Subtotal	60	12	
Ciclo XV		Inglés Integral VII	30	5	Inglés Integral VI
		Discurso Académico	20	4	Inglés Integral VI
		Subtotal	50	9	
Ciclo XVI		Metodología de la Investigación II	20	4	Metodología de la Investigación I
		Electiva VI: <i>Traducción II / Escritura Académica En Inglés</i>	20	4	Traducción I / Introducción a la Escritura Académica En Inglés
		Optativa IV: <i>Formulación, Gestión y Evaluación de Proyectos/TOEFL</i>	20	4	Metodología de la Investigación I / Inglés Integral VI
		Subtotal	60	12	
Ciclo XVII		Electiva de Investigación: <i>Técnicas de la Enseñanza en Inglés II/ Proyecto Educativo</i>	20	4	Técnicas de la Enseñanza en Inglés I / Metodología de la Investigación II
		Electiva VII: <i>Advanced Listening and Speaking/ Sociolingüística</i>	20	4	
		Electiva VIII: <i>Lectura y Escritura Avanzada/ Gramática Avanzada</i>	20	4	-
		Subtotal	60	12	
Ciclo XVIII		Prácticas Profesionales IV	20	3	
		Monografía o Examen de Grado	40	6	
		Subtotal	60	9	
TOTAL			1,140	200	

5. La enseñanza de inglés centrada en el estudiante

Se enfoca en procesos de enseñanza basados en el estudiante. Aborda aspectos como la motivación, los diferentes tipos de estudiantes, sus estilos y estrategias de aprendizaje y su conocimiento previo. Además, los diferentes roles, no tradicionales del profesor, y, del estudiante, como agente activo de su proceso de aprendizaje. Se proveen además una variedad de técnicas en el manejo de la interacción en el aula, particularmente con grupos grandes.

6. La planificación de clases

Aborda aspectos relacionados con las diferentes etapas del plan de clase y la transición de una etapa a otra prestando especial atención al tiempo disponible y a captar la atención de los estudiantes. Los profesores producirán modelos de planes de clase adecuados a sus necesidades y estilos de enseñanza. El curso tiene implicaciones importantes para las unidades didácticas diseñadas por los profesores.

7. Diseño de materiales didácticos en la enseñanza de inglés

Provee a los profesores del conocimiento para diseñar de manera creativa y efectiva sus propios materiales de instrucción. Los profesores recibirán ideas para realizar hojas de trabajo, y diseñar material complementario. Un aspecto práctico del curso es el proceso de diseño, implementación y evaluación de unidades didácticas.

8. Investigación- acción en el aula de inglés

Sienta las bases de la metodología de la investigación-acción en el aula: la identificación de problemas o aspectos a mejorar, la formulación de hipótesis de trabajo, los instrumentos de recolección de datos, el análisis de los mismos, el plan de acción y la evaluación del proceso. Se provee a los profesores el conocimiento necesario para el trabajo de investigación que realizarán como trabajo final de curso.

VI. METODOLOGÍA

La metodología del curso se basa en clases participativas, y en la lectura, reflexión y discusión de artículos esenciales por cada componente del curso. Se realizarán diferentes actividades de forma individual, en parejas y en grupo, dentro y fuera del aula de clase. El diseño, puesta en práctica y evaluación de materiales didácticos es una parte esencial de la metodología del postgrado.

VII. EVALUACIÓN

Para la evaluación se tomarán en cuenta criterios de asistencia, puntualidad y participación. Además se valorarán los trabajos y presentaciones individuales en parejas o en grupos por cada módulo. Como requisito final de egreso los profesores deberán desarrollar y presentar un proyecto de investigación en el aula

VIII PLAN CALENDARIO

El curso se realizará en sesiones sabatinas y sesiones intensivas intermedias. El horario se dará a conocer posteriormente.

IX. ADMISIÓN

1. Requisitos

- Ser licenciado en Inglés graduados de la UNAN-León (otros candidatos serán considerados dependiendo de la demanda de egresados de la UNAN-León)
- Ser profesores de inglés en ejercicio.
- Aprobar el examen TOEFL con una nota mínima de 450 puntos (Fecha del examen: 19 de Octubre de 2007 Sala de Maestría Facultad CCEEFF)
- Un ensayo escrito en el idioma inglés
- Entrevista oral con una comisión académica del Departamento de Inglés de la Facultad de Ciencias de la Educación y Humanidades.

2. Documentación.

- Original y copia del título universitario en su mención en inglés y certificado general de notas
- Carta de trabajo
- Certificado de nacimiento (original y copia)
- Dos fotos tamaño carnet

Para mayor información contactar a:

MSc. Edipcia Chávez Loredó
Directora Académica UNAN-León
Tel. 315-1199
Cel. 8423903
email: edipcha@yahoo.com

“ A la Libertad por la Universidad ”

APPENDIX 5: PUBLICITY BROCHURE

UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL AUTÓNOMA DE
NICARAGUA- LEÓN
FACULTAD DE CIENCIAS
DE LA EDUCACIÓN Y HUMANIDADES



UNIVERSIDAD DE ALCALA DE HENARES



Con la colaboración de:



Instituto Tecnológico
de Costa Rica

POSTGRADO EN:

**ENSEÑANZA DE INGLÉS
COMO LENGUA
EXTRANJERA
2008-2009**

I. INTRODUCCIÓN

La universidad como productora de ciencias no está al margen del proceso de globalización que se experimenta a nivel mundial, en tanto éste plantea nuevos retos que demandan mayor conocimiento científico-técnico. El aprendizaje del idioma inglés, en particular, se ha constituido de una manera importante en una necesidad que la universidad debe abordar con eficiencia, puesto que se ha convertido en una lengua universal y, como tal, en un requisito de primer orden para el profesional moderno.

Para llenar esta necesidad es imperativo contar con profesores de inglés con las habilidades y el conocimiento necesario para enseñar la lengua con efectividad y promover procesos de aprendizaje enfocados en lograr la competencia comunicativa de los estudiantes. El presente curso de postgrado en “Enseñanza de Inglés como Lengua Extranjera” para profesores de inglés que oferta el Departamento de Inglés de la Facultad de Ciencias de la Educación y Humanidades de la UNAN-León, en cooperación con la Universidad de Alcalá de Henares-España y la colaboración del Instituto Tecnológico de Costa Rica, está dirigido a proveer esta capacitación.

II ANTECEDENTES

La Facultad de Ciencias de la Educación y Humanidades de la UNAN León en conjunto con la Universidad de Alcalá de Henares han estado brindando programas de capacitación desde el año 1993 a través del Programa de Didáctica de Inglés. Es este período se han realizado cinco postgrados modulares y 2 programas de Maestrías Académicas en los cuales han tenido participación docentes de la UNAN-León y de otras universidades y profesores de inglés de secundaria. Además, se han realizado 3 encuentros de profesores de inglés a nivel regional y un congreso a nivel nacional con la participación de más de 200 profesores de inglés de Nicaragua y 42 presentadores de diferentes países. Estos esfuerzos han contribuido al desarrollo profesional de los docentes de Inglés en Nicaragua. No obstante, dado que hay un número considerable de egresados en inglés de la UNAN-León se necesita continuar ofertando estas opciones de capacitación, particularmente a la nueva generación de profesores que ya está ejerciendo la docencia en escuelas e instituciones educativas locales.

III JUSTIFICACIÓN

La enseñanza de inglés como lengua extranjera (TEFL) a nivel de educación media en Nicaragua merece atención urgente ya que es un área con grandes necesidades y problemas significativos. Algunas de las principales limitaciones son la falta de un programa

curricular estructurado, escasos recursos didácticos, falta de equipamiento y gran número de estudiantes por aula. Los procesos de instrucción se caracterizan por enfoques metodológicos tradicionales en los que los docentes asumen un papel centrado en el profesor y los estudiantes tienen muy poca participación en su proceso de aprendizaje del idioma. La combinación de todos estos factores da como resultado una baja calidad en los procesos de enseñanza del idioma y, en consecuencia, bajos niveles de dominio cuando los estudiantes culminan sus estudios de secundaria

Estas realidades contextuales representan grandes retos para los profesores ya que a ellos se atribuye gran parte de la responsabilidad del producto final en términos de los niveles de suficiencia de inglés de los estudiantes. La situación se agrava ya que existen en el país muy pocas oportunidades de capacitación para que los profesores de inglés amplíen sus conocimientos e impartan las clases con enfoques más participativos. Por tanto, el principal objetivo del presente Postgrado en “Enseñanza de Inglés como Lengua Extranjera” es el de proveer la capacitación que permita a los profesores enfrentar estos retos con efectividad y, a la vez, continuar su desarrollo profesional.

IV OBJETIVOS

Objetivo general

- Contribuir al desarrollo profesional de los docentes de inglés para que sean agentes de cambio y mejora en sus respectivas aulas de clase a través del diseño de materiales y de una metodología que promueva la interacción y participación de los estudiantes para una mejor adquisición del idioma

Objetivos específicos

- 1.- Promover enfoques de enseñanza centrados en el estudiante que involucren la participación activa de los estudiantes y una mayor y mejor interacción en el aula.
- 2.- Fortalecer el dominio y manejo de técnicas en la enseñanza de las diferentes habilidades y destrezas del idioma y estimular el debate sobre su aplicación didáctica en el aula.
- 3.- Proveer alternativas y sugerencias para crear materiales de instrucción, pertinentes y adecuados a la realidad nicaragüense.
- 4.- Ampliar el conocimiento en el uso de los medios tecnológicos y su aplicación efectiva y práctica en el diseño de materiales de instrucción para las clases de inglés.

5.- Proveer opciones para la planificación de clases y la producción de modelos apropiados a los estilos de enseñanza de los profesores, las características de los estudiantes y las particularidades de los contextos educativos.

6.- Fomentar una actitud reflexiva y analítica hacia los diferentes eventos del aula de clase, el papel del profesor, el papel de los estudiantes y la naturaleza de la interacción.

V. CONTENIDOS

1. Principios y métodos de enseñanza de inglés.

Se aborda una perspectiva crítica de los diferentes métodos en cuanto a las ventajas y desventajas de su aplicación en el contexto nicaragüense. Dicha perspectiva es un punto importante de apoyo para superar los métodos tradicionales de enseñanza de inglés y generar la toma de decisiones conscientes e informadas para el uso de enfoques más participativos en el aula dentro del contexto nicaragüense.

2. Recursos tecnológicos en la enseñanza de inglés

Provee exposición a una variedad de recursos didácticos disponibles en la web y capacitación en como utilizar estos recursos para apoyar la enseñanza de inglés. El curso es un importante medio para que los profesores obtengan materiales aplicables al diseño de unidades didácticas para sus clases.

3. Técnicas y estrategias en la Enseñanza de Inglés I

Está orientado a la enseñanza de dos de las macro-habilidades del idioma: *Reading Comprehension and Writing Expression* tanto de manera independiente como integral. A través de las diferentes actividades se pretende que los profesores mejoren su competencia lingüística en estas áreas y que adquieran una variedad de estrategias en la enseñanza de las mismas.

4 Técnicas y estrategias en la Enseñanza de Inglés II

Aborda la presentación y práctica efectiva de las otras dos macro habilidades *Listening Comprehension and Oral Expression*. Otros aspectos importantes son dinámicas de clase, la corrección de errores, la gramática comunicativa, la presentación efectiva de vocabulario y la integración de elementos de pronunciación.

APPENDIX 6: PLANNING TEMPLATE FOR AR PROJECTS

RESEARCHERS NAME: _____

PEER (S) NAME (S): _____

RESEARCH TITLE:

How to integrate Communicative activities in the English Language Process at the faculty of Educational Science and Humanities at UNAN-León - 7 year of social Science group 1-

TARGET POPULATION: 45 ss of twelve

GENERAL OBJECTIVE:

To discover ways to increase the amount of successful Communicative activities within the English classroom and act accordingly.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. To change the traditional way of teaching speaking in English classes through the integration of a variety of communicative activities.
2. ~~va promote~~ To develop an awareness of one's teaching practise activities in order to find ways to enhance ss communicative skills.
3. To promote student-centered processes where ss use the language meaningfully.
4. To share ideas on how to address ss' need in communication effectively.
5. need in communication effectively.

CALENDAR FOR ACTION RESEARCH PROJECTS

APRIL

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
27	28	29	30	
Meeting	Objective and title		Filling the format	

MAY

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
4	5	6	7	8
TEPCE	Checking bibliography	Checking bibliography	Checking bibliography	Meeting with the teachers
11	12	13	14	15
Carlos visit Pablo peer observation	Data Collect	Data Collect	Pablo visit Carlos peer observation	Analysis of data
18	19	20	21	22
Prepare instrument of survey	Data collection of survey	Teacher Edipcia observes my class 11 - 1	Data collection	Analysis of interview, survey, observation
25	26	27	28	29
Prepare instrument of survey	To colect interviews			Analysis

JUNE

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
4	5	6	7	8
Carlos visit Pablo peer observation			Pablo observes Carlos peer observation	Analysis of peer observation
11	12	13	14	15
	Writing Information		The teacher visit me 7 - 9	Writing
18	19			
	Last day of Semester			

MULTIPLE – TIME LINE FORMAT

RESEARCH PROJECT _____

BEGINNING OF PROJECT _____

COMPLETION DEADLINE _____

WEEK NO	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
PLANNING								
READING								
DATA COLLECTION								
ANALYSIS								
WRITING – UP								

Adapted from Wallace, M, J. 1988 Action 'Research for Language Teachers

DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT

INSTRUMENT	OBJECTIVE	DATE (S) TO BE APPLIED	DATE (S) TO BE ABALYZED
1: <u>Peer Observation</u> <u>Taking Notes</u>	To observe how the teacher develop communicative activities to obtain more specific information from ss	June 14 the teacher visit me	May 15 th June 8 Observation
2: <u>Survey</u> Interview	To discover the students participation in communicative activities to obtain more specific information from Ss	May 19, 21 26, 27, 28	May 22, 29 Analysis of survey May 29
3: <u>Tutor observation</u>		May 20 th	
PLAN OF ACTION			
1: <u>Peer observation</u>	Pablo Antonio Narváez observe twice my class in 1rst year PEN according to objective		
2: <u>Survey</u> Interview	To apply survey to ss of group I of PEN CCSS at Prepa to carry out and interview with ss of 1rst of CCSS at Prepa		
3: <u>Tutor observation</u>	The tutor visits me according to previous objective.		

APPENDIX 7 SAMPLE LESSON PLAN

Units 5, 6: Consolidation

Topic: Yes I can!

What are you doing? (Present continuous)

Objectives: - to describe physical actions and abilities.

- To ask about and describe what's happening at the moment.
- To relate language to one's own life.

Warm up: use flashcards to review with students' actions and ability vocabulary.

Activity 1: what Am I?

Bring picture cards or write some of the following words on index cards: birds, cat, cow, dog, duck, elephant, fish, frog, giraffe, hippo, horse, iguana, lion, monkeys, rabbits, rhino, seahorse, shark, starfish, tiger, turtle, and zebra.

Give students each a card with the name of an animal, taped or pinned onto their back. Then, they will ask other students questions to find out which animal they are, asking their classmates as they walk around the room.

Students can ask three kinds of questions: can I fly? What color am I? Am I big or small?

Activity 2: can you? Yes I can/ no I can't.

Hand in to students hand outs with the following information and some blank spaces.

EX: Can you ride a bike?

Name	Ride a bike	Walk on your hands	Sing and Dance	Play soccer

Have the whole class to stand up and circulate around the room, asking the question; can you (ride a bike)? The student interviewed answers the question saying, yes I can! Or No, I can't. Students' write the students' name and yes or no in the columns of the chart.

Then check answers with the whole class writing on the board how many students can do each activity.

Activity 3: Famous people.

Materials: Magazine pictures of famous people.

Prepare 3 pictures of well-known people for each group. They should be people with abilities students can talk or write about.

When groups have their pictures, invite them to write about their people.

UNIT 6: Dancing and Singing.

Activity 1: guess the action.

Materials: bag or box, paper strips with actions.

Write the following actions on small pieces of paper. Swing, walk, fly, hide, eat, drink, climb, crawl, sing, dance, jump, read, and juggle.

Put the paper strips in a box or bag. Play some music and pass the box around while playing some music. Model the activity if necessary using three students. When music stops one of the 3 students take a paper strip out of the box or bag and act out the action. Have the other two students ask and answer.

Activity 2: textbook scavenger hunt.

Write the following on the board: pag 13. Look at the mouse. What's it doing? Then write, it's washing a bowl. Next, write five more page numbers from different units and tell students what to look at on each page. Have them describe what is happening.

Activity 3: reading comprehension.

Pre: survey activity.

Parrots can talk. How many say yes? Count the votes. How many say No? Count the votes and record them on the board. Do the same with these sentences.

Dogs can dance. Lions can run. Elephants can paint. Monkeys can swing. Horses can count.

While: have students open their books to page 85. Ask, who is the reading about? Have students listen and read along as you play the audio.

Put students in pairs to answer the questions. When students have finished writing their answers, have some students read aloud what they said.

Post: divide the class in two groups and write four true or false sentences to give to another group to answer.

APPENDIX 8 SAMPLE OF QUALITATIVE EVALUATION BY TRAINERS

Dear teacher trainer: The present questionnaire is aimed at finding out relevant information about the participants of the Postgraduate Course in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). The information will be used as data for the research project: **EFL teachers' professional development in the Nicaraguan ELT context**. Please, feel free to expand your answers as you wish. Thank you very much for your kind collaboration:

Component you taught: Planning Materials and Units of Work in TEFL (choose from the list)

1. *Teaching Principles and Methods in Second Language Acquisition*
2. *Technological Resources in TEFL*
3. *Techniques and Strategies in TEFL 1*
4. *Techniques and Strategies in TEFL 2*
5. *Teaching EFL with a Learner-centered Approach*
6. *Lesson Planning in TEFL*
7. *Planning Materials and Units of Work in TEFL*
8. *Action Research in the English Classroom*

1. Generally speaking, what was the main objective for the component you taught?

To show the participants how they can adapt their teaching material; they were exposed to different types of classroom materials and they had to apply simple techniques to change – adapt - modify these materials, taking into account a number of factors: the group of students, their learning styles and preferences, his-her own teaching styles, the institution, the context in general, etc...

2. Was this objective accomplished? Why? Why not?

I would say that the objective was not totally fulfilled. The participants were not very motivated, they missed a lot of sessions, they did not hand in the assignments on time.. etc...

3. Regarding the teachers' background knowledge, what particular difficulty did you experience to the successful development of the program? (e.g. knowledge you assumed the teachers already had)

I think that for most of them, materials design is something new, as most of them are young teachers. They did not really have an opportunity before to design their own materials, or adapt the one they use regularly. To do this, they need to establish a kind of distance, and a very reflexive and analytical approach towards their textbook, and most of them do not have much experience comparing the different types of textbooks, as they did not have the chance to use many of them. So, let's say the course was rather just an introduction to textbook and materials analysis. The course gave them the opportunity to ask themselves a number of important relevant questions about the usefulness and relevance of textbooks.

4. Overall, what were the main strengths of the participants in relation to the component you taught, before the program? Explain

May be the fact that they are young, so they bridge the generation gap better than we (older teachers) can do. They understand better the needs, likes

and preferences of their students who are teenagers and young adults. The topics they would choose are closer to the favorite topics of their students. They bring, let's say, a kind of "fresh" insight about their target population, the students.

5. Overall, what were the main weaknesses of the participants in relation to the component you taught, before the program? Explain

The fact that for most of them, the contents of the course were completely new. Before getting to change or adapt or modify or add or amplify or eliminate anything in a textbook, you have to analyze the textbook, understand the underlying principle or approach of the textbook, you have to be aware of the kind of book it is, etc.. For example, what is a typical communicative approach textbook? What is a typical audiolingual textbook? What does a textbook based on an integrated approach need to expose the students with, etc.. What are the main characteristics of current textbooks? Etc.. They did not have very precise ideas about all this.

6. What particular recommendation would you give for a follow-up to the teachers in the area you taught?

Classroom observations would actually show if they really got something from the course: do they actually change and modify and adapt their materials for the best? Or do they just tend to follow the book and its menu without much analysis? I would recommend to do a number of very targeted classroom observations to see whether they can establish this necessary distance with the textbook..to see whether they can innovate and handle the materials with imagination and creativity. I would talk to them after the observations. I would also give them the opportunity to observe good classes taught by teachers who are really creative and don't follow a particular book (like Liz).

7. In relation to this area, what particular teaching/learning belief (s) do you think the teachers should change, adjust or improve for the purposes of teacher development?

They need to gain more experience in the analysis of textbooks. They need to understand that a good textbook does not make a good classroom, a good teacher with a nice group of students does. They need to be more creative, innovative and resourceful. They need to be more independent, and self-confident. Creating their own class with their own material- activities is sometimes much better than just following the order of activities in a given textbook.

(Did they manage to do this in their classes? I am not sure, you could tell me, because you observed them, I didn't. I still think they are very young, and most of them did not even know they would become English teachers a few years ago.)

8. Teachers will be conducting AR projects next year. In the area you taught, what specific aspect (s) would you recommend for such projects? Why?

For example, it is important for them to explore the new sources of materials currently available (TEFL sites on the web), as well as strengthen the good, old classroom techniques for sequencing and pacing different types of activities and integrate them into a lesson plan. They need more comparative views of textbooks.

QUALITATIVE EVALUATION BY TEACHERS

Dear teacher: the present interview is aimed at finding relevant information about your teacher development process since the time. You will be asked specific information about each of the courses you have taken so far. Please, feel free to expand your answers as desired

Name: _____

PART ONE: For each of the courses you have taken provide the information required

Course title: *Technological Resources in TEFL*

1. What is the most important thing you learned in this module? Explain
2. What particular difficulties, limitations or problems did you experience in the development of the course? Explain
3. What strengths and achievements did you get from taking this course? Explain
4. In what ways, if any, has the course helped you develop professionally?
5. Are you satisfied with your own performance in the course? why? Why not?
6. What kind of follow-up do you need in this specific area? Explain

Course title: *Principles and Methods in Second Language Acquisition*

1. What is the most important thing you learned in this module? Explain
2. What particular difficulties, limitations or problems did you experience in the development of the course? Explain
3. What strengths and achievements did you get from taking this course? Explain
4. In what ways, if any, has the course helped you develop professionally?
5. Are you satisfied with your own performance in the course why? Why not?
6. What kind of follow-up do you need in this specific area? Explain

Course title: *Techniques and Strategies in TEFL 1*

1. What is the most important thing you learned in this module? Explain
2. What particular difficulties, limitations or problems did you experience in the development of the course? Explain
3. What strengths and achievements did you get from taking this course? Explain
4. In what ways, if any, has the course helped you develop professionally?
5. Are you satisfied with your own performance in the course? why? Why not?
6. What kind of follow-up do you need in this specific area? Explain

Course title: *Lesson Planning in TEFL*

- 1) What is the most important thing you learned in this module? Explain
- 2) What particular difficulties, limitations or problems did you experience in the development of the course? Explain
- 3) What strengths and achievements did you get from taking this course? Explain
- 4) In what ways, if any, has the course helped you develop professionally?
- 5) Are you satisfied with your own performance in the course? Why? Why not?
- 6) What kind of follow-up do you need in this specific area? Explain

Course title: *Teaching EFL with a Learner-centered Approach*

1. What is the most important thing you learned in this module? Explain
2. What particular difficulties, limitations or problems did you experience in the development of the course? Explain
3. What strengths and achievements did you get from taking this course? Explain
4. In what ways, if any, has the course helped you develop professionally?
5. Are you satisfied with your own performance in the course? Why? Why not?
6. What kind of follow-up do you need in this specific area? Explain

Course title: *Techniques and Strategies in TEFL 2*

- 1) What is the most important thing you learned in this module? Explain
- 2) What particular difficulties, limitations or problems did you experience in the development of the course? Explain
- 3) What strengths and achievements did you get from taking this course? Explain
- 4) In what ways, if any, has the course helped you develop professionally?
- 5) Are you satisfied with your own performance in the course? Why? Why not?
- 6) What kind of follow-up do you need in this specific area? Explain

Course title: *Planning Materials and Units of Work in TEFL*

- 1) What is the most important thing you learned in this module? Explain
- 2) What particular difficulties, limitations or problems did you experience in the development of the course? Explain
- 3) What strengths and achievements did you get from taking this course? Explain
- 4) In what ways, if any, has the course helped you develop professionally?
- 5) Are you satisfied with your own performance in the course? Why? Why not?
- 6) What kind of follow-up do you need in this specific area? Explain

APPENDIX 9
LANGUAGE TEACHING LEARNING BELIEFS QUESTIONNAIRE

Language Teaching/Learning Beliefs Questionnaire

Name _____ Age _____ Gender (circle one): M F

Years of language teaching _____

Directions: Circle the number that corresponds to your degree of agreement with the statements listed on the left [strongly agree = 4; agree = 3; disagree = 2; strongly disagree = 1]:

	<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>	
1 Some people have a special aptitude for learning foreign languages.	4	3	2	1
2 Teachers should be facilitators rather than directors of L2 classes.	4	3	2	1
3 Student writers should get their ideas on paper and not worry about correctness.	4	3	2	1
4 In learning a foreign language, it is important to repeat and practice a lot.	4	3	2	1
5 Striving for native-like pronunciation is not a useful goal in language teaching.	4	3	2	1
6 It is important that sentences be grammatically correct when spoken.	4	3	2	1
7 Vocabulary words are the most important part of learning a new language.	4	3	2	1
8 Students should be speaking from the first day of learning a new language.	4	3	2	1
9 If learners are allowed to make errors, these will be hard to correct later.	4	3	2	1
10 The most important part of a new language is learning its grammar.	4	3	2	1
11 Language teaching should rely on a strong base of linguistics.	4	3	2	1
12 In communication, meaning is all-important; form is of little importance.	4	3	2	1
13 A foreign language will improve only if it is used often for communication.	4	3	2	1
14 Listening is more important than speaking in the early stages.	4	3	2	1
15 Everybody can learn a foreign language following the same teaching techniques.	4	3	2	1
16 Listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills should first be taught separately.	4	3	2	1
17 In writing, the final product is critical, not the process by which it occurs.	4	3	2	1
18 Grammatical rules should be 'discovered' by students rather than explicitly taught.	4	3	2	1
19 In oral practice, the teacher should not correct student errors during practice.	4	3	2	1
20 First and second language learning follow the same basic processes.	4	3	2	1

APPENDIX 10
LANGUAGE TEACHING LEARNING BELIEFS QUESTIONNAIRE

Language Teaching Activity Preference Survey (based on Willing 1988: 106–107)

1	In the language class I teach, I like students to learn by reading.	no	a little	good	best
2	In class, I like to use cassettes for listening practice.	no	a little	good	best
3	In class, I like to use games.	no	a little	good	best
4	In class, I like to have students practice conversation.	no	a little	good	best
5	In class, I like to use pictures, films, video.	no	a little	good	best
6	I think students should write everything in their notebook.	no	a little	good	best
7	Students should each have their own textbook.	no	a little	good	best
8	As a teacher, I like to explain everything to the students.	no	a little	good	best
9	I like to give the students problems to work on.	no	a little	good	best
10	I like to help students talk about their interests.	no	a little	good	best
11	I like to correct all the students' errors.	no	a little	good	best
12	I like to let the students find their own mistakes.	no	a little	good	best
13	I like students to study English by themselves (alone).	no	a little	good	best
14	I like students to learn by talking in pairs.	no	a little	good	best
15	I like students to learn in small groups.	no	a little	good	best
16	I like students to learn with the whole class.	no	a little	good	best
17	I like to take the students out as a class to practice English.	no	a little	good	best
18	I like to teach grammar.	no	a little	good	best
19	I like to teach many new words.	no	a little	good	best
20	I like to teach the sounds and pronunciation of English.	no	a little	good	best
21	I like to teach English words through students seeing them.	no	a little	good	best
22	I like to teach English words through students hearing them.	no	a little	good	best
23	I like to teach English words through students doing something.	no	a little	good	best
24	At home, students should learn by reading newspapers, etc.	no	a little	good	best
25	At home, students should learn by watching TV in English.	no	a little	good	best
26	At home, students should learn by using cassettes.	no	a little	good	best
27	At home, students should learn by studying English books.	no	a little	good	best
28	I like students to learn by talking to friends in English.	no	a little	good	best
29	I like students to learn by watching and listening to native speakers.	no	a little	good	best
30	I like students to learn by using English in shops and daily life.	no	a little	good	best

APPENDIX 11 TEACHERS' INTERVIEWS

INTERVIEW 1

Dear teacher: the present interview is aimed at finding out relevant information regarding your teaching practice. This information will be used to analyze and explore the actual contextual conditions under which you teach, for the purposes of providing you with pertinent academic and professional support. Please, feel free to expand your comments as desired. This information will be treated with absolute confidentiality. Thank you very much for your cooperation.

Name: _____ Age: _____

Graduation year: _____

Graduated from _____ Saturday Program _____ Regular English Studies

School name _____ Public: _____ Private _____

Morning _____ Afternoon: _____ Evenings: _____

Length of time working for this institution: _____

(If you work in more than one school, provide this information below)

School name _____ Public: _____ Private _____

Morning _____ Afternoon: _____ Evenings: _____

Length of time working for this institution: _____

(If you currently work for UNAN-León, mention the faculties/programs where you currently teach)

1. Faculty: _____ Program: _____

Morning: _____ Afternoon: _____ Saturday: _____

2 Faculty: _____ Program: _____

Morning: _____ Afternoon: _____ Saturday: _____

3. Faculty: _____ Program: _____

Morning: _____ Afternoon: _____ Saturday: _____

Length of time working at UNAN: _____

1. What grade (s) year (s) do you teach?
2. What is the minimum of students you have per class
3. What is the maximum of students that you have per class?
4. How many students do you have in total?

5. How many hours per group do you teach a week?
6. Do you have to follow an established Program for your classes?
7. If the answer above is affirmative which program do you follow? The one provided by the institution? Your own?
8. Are you given a specific format for your lesson plan? What information does it include?
9. If the answer above is negative, how do you plan your lessons?
10. Do you use a textbook for you classes? Which one (s)?
11. If the answer above is affirmative, do students have access to the textbook?
12. If you do not use a textbook, where do you/your students get the material form?
13. Mention other didactic resources (if any) that you use to teach as sources for you lessons
14. Do you have access to photocopies, tape recorders, videos or any other kind of resources to develop your teaching practice? Which ones (s)?
15. Do you have regular classroom observations or supervisions?
16. If your previous answer is affirmative, who carries out the observation, and how often?
17. What are the main problems you face in your teaching practice?
18. In an ideal situation, what would you consider optimal conditions for you professional development? Mention at least five elements that can help you become a better English Teacher
 1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____
 4. _____

5. _____

INTERVIEW 2

Dear teacher: the present interview is aimed at finding out relevant information regarding your teaching practice in this I Semester of 2009. This information will be used to analyze and explore the actual contextual conditions under which you teach, **for the purposes of providing you with academic and professional support with your AR Projects**. This information will be treated with absolute confidentiality. Thank you very much for your cooperation.

Name: _____ Age: _____

School name _____ Public: _____ Private _____

Morning _____ Afternoon: _____ Evenings: _____

Length of time working for this institution: _____

(If you work in more than one school, provide this information below)

School name _____ Public: _____ Private _____

Morning _____ Afternoon: _____ Evenings: _____

Length of time working for this institution: _____

(If you currently work for UNAN-León, mention the faculties/programs where you currently teach)

1. Faculty: _____ Program: _____

Morning: _____ Afternoon: _____ Saturday: _____

2 Faculty: _____ Program: _____

Morning: _____ Afternoon: _____ Saturday: _____

3 Faculty: _____ Program: _____

Morning: _____ Afternoon: _____ Saturday: _____

Length of time working at UNAN: _____

1. What grade (s) year (s) do you teach? **Please, provide detailed information**

2. What is the minimum of students you have per class

3. What is the maximum of students that you have per class?

4. How many students do you have in total?

5. How many hours per group do you teach a week? How many hours do you teach in total?

6. Do you have to follow an established Program for your classes?

7. If the answer above is affirmative which program do you follow? The one provided by the institution? Your own?

8. Are you given a specific format for your lesson plan? What information does it include?

9. If the answer above is negative, how do you plan your lessons?

10. Do you use a textbook for you classes? Which one (s)?

11. If the answer above is affirmative, do students have access to the textbook?

12. If you do not use a textbook, where do you/your students get the material form?

13. Mention other didactic resources (if any) that you use to teach as sources for you lessons

14. Do you have access to photocopies, tape recorders, videos or any other kind of resources to develop your teaching practice? Which ones (s)?

15. Do you have regular classroom observations or supervisions?

16. If your previous answer is affirmative, who carries out the observation, and how often?

17. What problems are you facing at the moment in your teaching practice? List the five most crucial limitations

18. Is there anything you are doing at the moment for your professional development? If so, mention three specific steps you are taking in this regard. Be as specific as possible.

INTERVIEW 3

Dear teacher: the present interview is aimed at finding out relevant information regarding your current working situation one year after you finished the Postgraduate Course in TEFL 2008-2010 as part of the sources of the investigation entitled: *EFL Teachers' Professional Development: Perspectives from an in-service Teacher Education Program at UNAN-León* in which you kindly accepted to participate as part of the target population of the study. The information you provide will be used with proper professional care. Thank you very much for your collaboration.

1. GENERAL INFORMATION

Last degree earned: _____
Graduated from _____ (University Program) Graduated in _____ (Year)
Teaching experience as a University Teacher _____
Years of Experience as Director of the English Department _____

2. SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Name: _____ Age: _____

School name _____ Public: ___ Private _____

Morning _____ Afternoon: _____ Evenings: _____

Length of time working for this institution: _____

(If you work in more than one school, provide this information below)

School name _____ Public: ___ Private _____

Morning _____ Afternoon: _____ Evenings: _____

Length of time working for this institution: _____

(If you currently work for UNAN-León, mention the faculties/programs where you currently teach)

1. Faculty: _____ **Program:** _____

Morning: _____ Afternoon: _____ Saturday: _____

2 Faculty: _____ **Program:** _____

Morning: _____ Afternoon: _____ Saturday: _____

3 Faculty: _____ **Program:** _____

Morning: _____ Afternoon: _____ Saturday: _____

Length of time working at UNAN: _____

1. What grade (s) year (s) do you teach? **Please, provide detailed information**

2. What is the minimum of students you have per class
3. What is the maximum of students that you have per class?
4. How many students do you have in total?
5. How many hours per group do you teach a week? How many hours do you teach in total?
6. Do you have to follow an established Program for your classes?
7. If the answer above is affirmative which program do you follow? The one provided by the institution? Your own?
8. Are you given a specific format for your lesson plan? What information does it include?
9. If the answer above is negative, how do you plan your lessons?
10. Do you use a textbook for you classes? Which one (s)?
11. If the answer above is affirmative, do students have access to the textbook?
12. If you do not use a textbook, where do you/your students get the material form?
13. Mention other didactic resources (if any) that you use to teach as sources for you lessons
14. Do you have access to photocopies, tape recorders, videos or any other kind of resources to develop your teaching practice? Which ones (s)?
15. Do you have regular classroom observations or supervisions?
16. If your previous answer is affirmative, who carries out the observation, and how often?
17. What problems are you facing at the moment in your teaching practice? List the five most crucial limitations

18. Is there anything you are doing at the moment for your professional development? If so, mention three specific steps you are taking in this regard. Be as specific as possible.

APPENDIX 12 A
FORMAT FOR CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS

Teachers' code: _____

Time: _____

Date: _____

Kinds of students: _____

No. of students: _____

Class content: _____

Lesson plan: (Y/N) _____

Brief description of the class:

Classroom management: (P/G/WC/OTHER):

Language used as a means of instruction (TL/MT/B/TRANLATIONS Yes? /No?)

Error correction (A/ST/N):

Materials used (B/NB/TB/D/TR/DVD/TV/OTHER):

Skills practiced: (L/S/R/W/GR/P/V):

Students' participation: (VG/G/AV/W/VW):

Teachers' ability to motivate students (VG/G/AV/W/VW/NO):

Teachers' ability to connect class content to students' real lives (VG/G/AV/W/VW/NO):

Homework and assignments (Y/N): _____

Kind of homework:

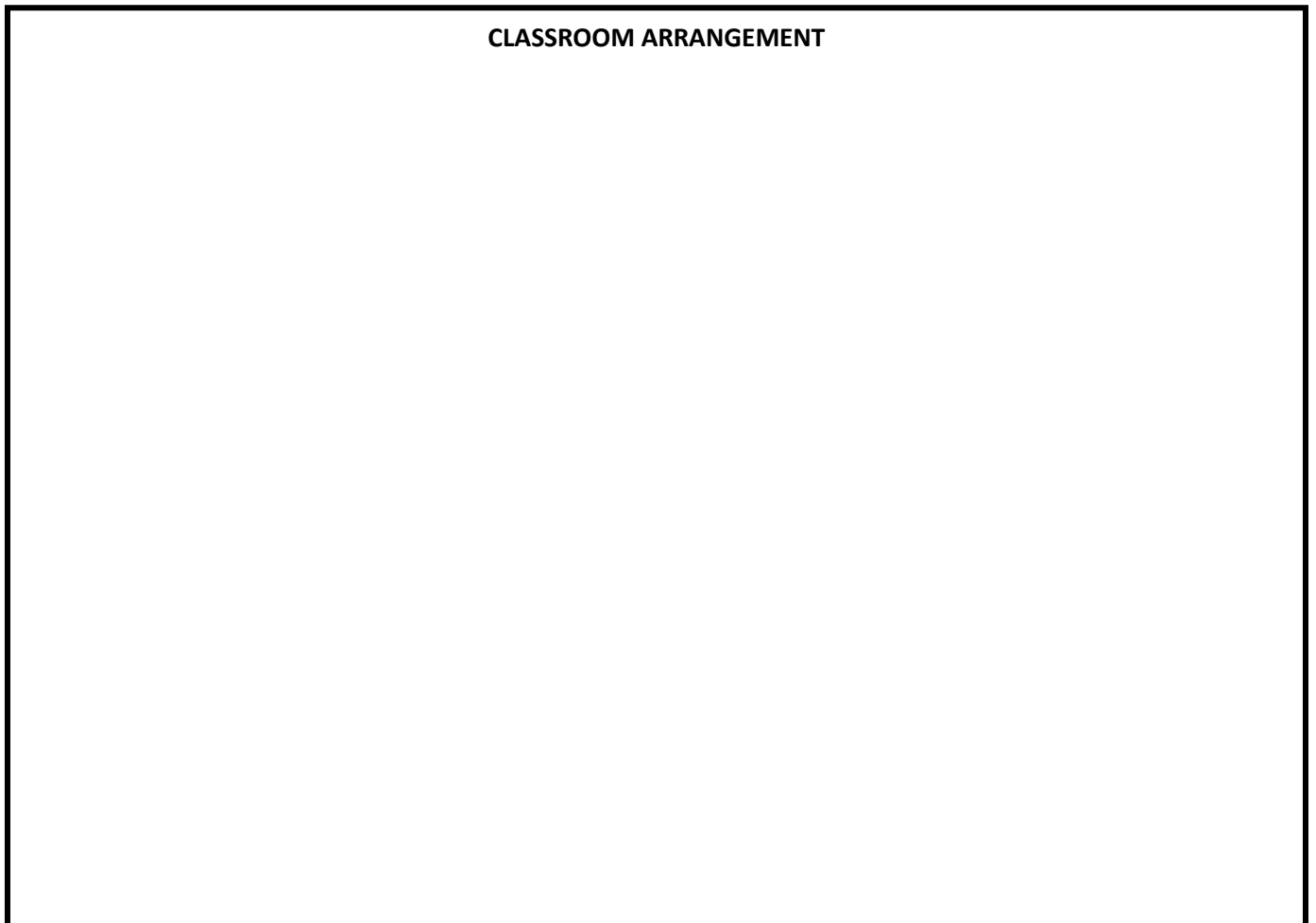
Games and competitions (Y/N):

Songs (Y/N):

Major problems observed:

Additional comments:

CLASSROOM ARRANGEMENT



- Integration of language skills
- Teacher approach to presentation and practice
- Teacher approach to classroom instructions
- General organization of the lesson opening, structure and closure stages
- Classroom interaction- student-student, teacher-student interaction patterns
- Student performance during pair work or group work activities
- Teacher talking time vs. student talking time
- Approaches to error correction
- Time management of the lesson
- Use of didactical materials
- Use of the target language vs. use of the mother tongue

Role of the teacher vs. role of the students

- ✓ Teacher Talking Time (TTT) vs. Student Talking Time (STT)
- ✓ Dealing with Group Management
- ✓ Monitoring students' work
- ✓ Asking questions in the classroom
- ✓ Promoting Communicative Skills
- ✓ Giving feedback to students' performance
- ✓ Providing variety of activities in the classroom
- ✓ Correcting students' errors
- ✓ Integrating games and competitions in the classroom
- ✓ Evaluating students' work
- ✓ Dealing with motivational problems
- ✓ Teaching integrated English
- ✓ Giving classroom instructions ...and so on...

APPENDIX 12 B
ANALYSIS OF BROAD NARRATIVE
TABLE 1

T	№ SS	CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT				LANGUAGE USED MOSTLY				ERROR CORRECTION	
		Pair work	Group work	Whole class	Other	English mostly	English/switches to Spanish at points		Immediate Translations	YES	NO
A	13	√		√					√		√
B	18		√	√	√		√				√
C	42		√	√		√					√
D	13		√			√					√
E	41		√	√					√		√
F	16	√	√			√					√
G	12	√	√	√		√					√
I	15		√	√		√					√
J	45		√	√		√					√
K	21		√	√	√	√				√	
L	10			√	√	√				√	
M	24		√	√	√		√			√	
N	5	√		√		√					
O	30		√	√			√			√	
		4	11	12	4	9	3		2	4	9

II CYCLE OF CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS

TC	DATE	TIME	NO. SS	GROUP
A	31/08/09	7:00 PM	13	II year Secondary
B	26/08/09	3:00 PM	18	II Year Business Adm.
C	19/08/09	12:00 MD	42	II year Secondary
D	29/08/09	9:00 AM	13	Children
E	18/08/09	7:00 AM	41	I year PEM SS
F	22/08/09	10:30 AM	16	Children
G	15/08/09	10:00 AM	12	Children
I	29/08/09	8:00 AM	15	Teens
J	20/08/09	10:00 AM	45	II year Pharmacy
K	08/08/09	8:30 AM	21	Teens III
L	22/08/09	9:00 AM	10	Teens VI
M	15/08/09	7:00 AM	24	Teens III
N	08/08/09	10:30 AM	5	III year Journalism
O	11/08/09	11:00 AM	30	PEM Lengua y Literatura

HOMEWORK ASSIGNED

	ASSIGNED HOMEWORK ?		KINDS OF HOMEWORK
	Y	N	
			Make questions and answers with borrow and lend using their home things
A	√		Wrote about your hero on a separate piece of paper
B	√		Grammar exercises on the book
C	√		Do grammar exercises on the book Listen to a song Write questions using (What's this/What are those?)
D	√		Writing questions and answers
E	√		No homework
F	√		Drawing foods they like and dislike (children)
G	√		Make Sentences/complete with appropriate prepositions
I	√		No homework
J	√		Prepare a short paragraph about their dreams without identification. Piece of writing would be used the next day for a classroom activity (find out the author)
K	√		Prepare an interview to find someone who (can/can't)
L		√	No homework
M		√	Write a movie review
N	√		Survey a partner about their favorite TV programs
O		√	No homework

CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS (TABLE 2)

T	№ SS	MATERIALS USED						SKILL PRACTICED							
		Board	Notebook	Textbook		Dictionary	Tape recorder/DVD	Others	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing	Grammar	Pron.	Vocab.
Orig	Copy														
A	16	√	√					SS objects/classroom objects					√		√
B	40	√						Strips of paper			√		√	√	
C	29	√	√					Realia/objects from the classroom	√				√	√	√
D	12	√		√				Visuals/drawings/activity sheets					√	√	√
E	40	√	√					Worksheets					√	√	√
F	12	√		√				Worksheets and Flashcards/ Realia	√	√					√
G	12	√		√				Visual aids/pictures/flashcards	√			√		√	√
I	34	√		√				own voice	√				√	√	√
J	40	√						Worksheets, transcript of listening exercise/Worksheet for ss interview	√	√	√		√	√	√
K	13	√		√	√			Strips of paper/ drawing and cards/worksheets	√	√			√		√
L	12	√			√		√	Drinks/(realia) worksheets for SS interview	√	√	√				√
M	14	√			√			Strips of paper/drawings and card	√		√			√	√
N	13	√			√			Worksheets and pictures		√	√	√	√		√
O	35	√		√			√	Flashcards, strips of paper a plastic bag	√			√	√	√	√
		14	3	6	7		2	14	9	5	5	3	10	9	14

Integration of skills and sub-skills

1 2 3 4
4 4 5 2

Table X shows the same information, but from the perspective of which areas were practiced the most recurrently. As observed vocabulary (14) and grammar (13) followed by listening (9) and pronunciation (9) Speaking is the next (5) followed by reading (5) and writing (3)

TC	Vocab.	Grammar	Listening	Pron.	Speaking	Reading	Writing	INTEGRATION OF SKILLS
A	√	√						2
B		√		√		√		3
C	√	√	√	√				4
D	√	√		√				3
E	√	√		√				3
F	√		√		√			3
G	√		√	√			√	4
I	√	√	√	√				4
J	√	√	√	√	√	√		6
K	√	√	√		√			4
L	√		√		√	√		4
M	√		√	√		√		4
N	√	√			√	√	√	5
O	√	√	√	√			√	5
	14	10	9	9	5	5	3	

**Integration of skills
and sub-skills**

1 2 3 4 5 6
0 1 4 6 2 1

TABLE 3 ELEMENTS OF A LEARNER-CENTERED LESSON

	STUDENTS' PARTICIPATION					TEACHERS' ABILITY TO MOTIVATE THE STUDENTS					CONNECTION TO STUDENTS' REALITY					
	VG	G	AV	P	VP	VG	G	AV	P	VP	VG	G	AV/RFI	P	VP	NO
A			√				√						√			
B			√				√					√				
C			√				√					√				
D	√						√					√				
E	√						√						√			
F	√						√					√				
G	√						√					√				
I	√						√									√
J	√						√					√				
K	√						√					√				
L	√					√					√					
M	√					√					√					
N	√					√					√					
O	√						√					√				
	11		3			3	11				3	8	2			1

TC	CLASS CONTENT	CLASS OBJECTIVE	Major strengths	Major weaknesses
A	Grammar: Borrow/Lend	Using the verbs borrow and lend	Teachers catches students attention, but he's the centre of the class	Too much TTT/students got distracted Teacher's constant use of translations Students use of Spanglish
B	Simple past: Regular verbs/Auxiliary Did	Ss will be able to ask for and give information in past and pronounce ed	The teacher shows a good range of skills to provide variety. The teacher uses the target language most of the time	The objective was not fulfilled (too broad to be achieve in one class. Too many aspects all together
C	Travelling/Prepositions of place	No objectives stated (Grammar and Vocabulary and pronunciation practice)	The teacher provides variety to student- The teacher uses students' background knowledge. Uses realia/The teacher has graded class content as to make it easier for students. The teachers tries to use the target language most of the time.	Number of students and seating arrangement did not allow teachers' free movement Students' insist on talking Spanish/There is too much TTT. Some activities are not challenging
D	Use singular and plural nouns	Talk about personal items	Teacher provides lots of exposure to the target language. There is a variety of activities for students to practice target language) Uses realia	Students are shy, there is little participation in the oral skills
E	Grammar	Tall about the weekend activities	The teacher is enthusiastic and tries to motivate students to participate	Translations are provided; class is focused on the teacher. Little room for ss

				participation
F	Food	Identify names of foods and drinks and talk about likes and dislikes	The teachers uses good visuals, enough class content for students to handle	Students grouping/optimizing visual aids/ checking students' understanding
G	What's this?/What's that?	Describe toys colors/shapes and locations		Seating arrangement prevented teacher from moving around
I	Present continuous/clothes	Talk about what people are wearing	The teacher has graded class content with time, pace and transitions- Class content is enough	Class is teacher-centered. Ss do what the teacher says
J	Plans for the future	5 different specific objectives stated	The teacher provides a variety of communicative activities taking into account students reality. There is integration of skills. Most .Ss are motivated	There is a lack of comprehension checks. Teacher does not move around. SS at the back are not taken care of
K	Can' can't	Be able to express possibility with Can't Different objectives stated	The teacher provides variety of comprehensible input. Ss are able to follow along without any problem. The have exposure to a lot of comprehensible input	Teacher talk. It caused SS distraction. Students participation in the speaking activities is low
L	Drinks	Talking about preferences regarding drinks	The teacher provides a variety of comprehensible input. Target language is the medium of communication. Ss follow along well	Students insist on talking in Spanish in spite of teachers'efforts/some discipline problems not addressed
M	Movies and television	Describe kinds of movies, categorize them and talk about preferences	There is a variety of activities. The teacher does a good job providing losts of comprehensible input	The use of the mother tongue in the classroom at several points during the

			taking into account students' background knowledge	development of the class. Students were shy.
N	TV and Broadcasting	Talk about TV Programs and movies Different objectives stated per ability		Students' passivity/One students isolated
O	Sports	Describe different sports	The teacher does a very good job in providing variety. Activities are graded, interesting, adequate to students' level. There is an element of competition all along the development of the class.	Students insisted on talking the mother tongue and using translations/ teachers' explanations in Spanish at the end Certain content was not known to students (names of sportsmen)

APPENDIX 13; ANALYSIS OF QUALITATIVE DATA

MATRIX TO ANALYZE THE EVALUATION BY TRAINERS/SUMMARY

Code	Course	Program focus	DIRECT OUTCOMES				RECCOMENDATIONS		
			Fulfillment of objectives	Main constraints	Participants' strengths	Participants' weaknesses	Follow up	Beliefs to challenge	Action Research
TTG	Teaching Principles and Methods in SLA	Basic knowledge of SLA and language teaching methods Critical reflection skills on teaching beliefs.	Positive in general as teacher knowledge increased and they showed deeper awareness of their beliefs.	Kind of information combined with lack of background knowledge, affected pace of the course. Not all contents were covered in depth	Being teachers in practice Attention, motivation and interest Openness to learn and change Willingness to collaborate and share with peers	Self-confidence Low participation by some teachers. Attendance Commitment with assignments Background knowledge	Re-read information and search current effective teaching methodologies. Develop "own" informed language teaching-learning theory Confront theories with real practice. to widen personal practical knowledge	No method should be used unreflectively Real awareness of how they are entitled and empowered to make effective changes in their teaching.	Focus on language learning/teaching beliefs in light of effective practice at any stage (planning, implementation and evaluation) of lessons and in any area.
TTA	Technological Resources in TEFL	Knowledge of technological resources for TEFL	Not so positive as the objective was not fully achieved	Little familiarity with technology, specially computers and the use of the internet. Course contents had to be adapted	Eagerness and motivation to learn	Lack of basic computer skills in some cases. Lack of familiarity with the use of computers for language teaching.	More courses on the use of technology and enough time to develop them.	That the use of technology for language teaching is too far to reach.	Know how to look for reliable sources in the internet for the research projects. Computers and language teaching Developing materials with the aid of computers.
TTB	Techniques and Strategies in TEFL 1 (Reading and Writing)	Strategies for teaching reading and writing Basic underlying theory	Only 50% of the course objectives were accomplished.	Limited number of hours for the two course components Barely any background knowledge Little time to read and do the assignments	Being teachers in practice Motivation Interest and a positive attitude Awareness of the importance of the course for professional development Openness to changes	Lack of background knowledge and beliefs Lack of reading habits Writing was given little or no attention Participation was low.	More courses in the area should follow to avoid that routine takes over.	A beliefs system in the area should be built through relevant literature.	How to improve students' abilities for writing through the process/product approach Develop writing and reading materials in the didactic units they will design.
TTC	Techniques and Strategies in TEFL 2 (Listening and Speaking)	Effective activities for teaching listening and speaking in the classroom	The teachers understood the main points of the activities suggested	Some of the teachers still face problems when using technology and equipment,	Good participation and motivation levels	Lack of clear purpose for developing listening activities Few teachers used to apply pre, while and post listening stages.	Develop activities taking into account student age, interest and background knowledge. Continue to develop pre, while and post activities in order to widen their range of strategies and techniques Use technological tools to continue to improve in this area	Increase self-confidence in the abilities to use equipment and resources for TEFL Get help form experienced teachers	Assess controlled activities to improve student listening and speaking skills. Integrate and assess pre, while and post listening and speaking activities taking into account students' needs, interests, and

									levels.
TTD	Teaching EFL with a Learner-centred Approach	Awareness of the learner importance in the EFL process Ideas and concepts regarding the learner-centered curriculum	Generally speaking the objective was accomplished, but there were constraints	Lack of time to read and do the assignments Lack of background knowledge Traditional methodology used in their language lessons. Mistaken idea of what the concept "communicative" really means	Being teachers in practice Eagerness to learn Knowledge of the problems learners have	Novelty of the concepts of the course Similar related concepts and ideas in previous courses had not been assimilated or fully understood.	Take into account the characteristics of a learner-centered curriculum in a practical way when planning language lessons Read the bibliography provided carefully Focus on the more useful concepts and keep on developing them (seminars and/or classroom observations)	Understand fully what learning a foreign language entails Develop personal beliefs about language acquisition upon which they can rely and construct their own principles. Internalize that it is the learner, not the teacher the central character of the learning process.	Analyze the different aspects to be changed in a particular situation in light of the principles of a learner-centered curriculum Apply some of the principles of a learner-centered curriculum with a specific group of students and analyze its effectiveness.
TTE	Lesson Planning in TEFL	Awareness of the role of lesson planning in the teaching process and of the importance of its different elements.	All the elements were analyzed and practical tasks designed	Certain lack of coherence when putting the lesson planning elements into practice	Being teachers in practice Awareness of most of the elements of lesson planning.	Lack of coherence when planning Lack of awareness of some important elements in planning (assessment vs. evaluation)	Design lesson plans together and/or discuss already prepared lesson plans.	Challenge the belief that the main point is the lesson itself and not the students. Their lessons should be more student-centered.	Compare the results obtained in a "traditional" class with the results obtained in a class in which the teacher uses a different approach (e.g. learner-centered planning) where the focus is not on the grammar point.
TTB	Planning Materials and Units of Work in TEFL	Material improvement by applying simple techniques to change, adapt, and modify these materials, taking into account a number of factors involved in language learning (the learner, the teaching context, the teacher, etc.)	Not totally fulfilled. Most participants were not very motivated, missed sessions, and did not hand in assignments on time.	Lack of background knowledge. Most teachers had not had the opportunity to design their own materials, or adapt the one they use regularly. What was accomplished in the end was an introduction to textbook and materials analysis.	Being young teachers Awareness of students' need, likes and preferences, which allowed them to select appealing topics and contents in the material they designed.	Lack of background knowledge about language methods and principles in materials design.	Classroom observations where teachers provide evidence that they are skillful in changing and adapting their materials for the better. Provide teachers with the opportunity to observe good classes taught by teachers who are creative in the use of teaching materials.	Understand that a good textbook does not make a good classroom, a good teacher with a nice group of students does Gain more insights and experience in the analysis of textbooks to be more creative, innovative, resourceful, independent and self-confident	Explore the new sources of materials currently available (TEFL sites on the web), Explore good classroom techniques for sequencing and pacing different types of activities and integrate them into a lesson plan. Undertake more comparative views of textbooks.
TTG	Action Research in	Principles behind the concept of Reflective	Not all of the objectives were	Teachers had significant gaps in	All teachers were teachers in	The lack of research skills	Develop mechanisms to foster reflection that do	Abandon the idea that doing research	Take into account the number of

	the English Classroom (The global process)	Teaching, Teachers as Investigators and Action Research. Action Research as a tool to improve and change particular contextual situations in the classroom,	fulfilled (teachers struggled with the different contents of the module which were a novelty) Only nine teachers completed their research projects successfully.	their background knowledge of how to conduct research (lack of solid background knowledge in basic general research) Lack of time to devote to the research project.	practice Teachers worked well with their peers Persistence in going on with their projects Interest in the different components of the course. Motivation to move to more advanced level of professionalism.	(most teachers had never carried out an investigation or before. The ones who had, did not have an enriching or rewarding experience For most teachers the whole process of planning and implementing their research projects was a difficult task.	not necessarily mean doing AR (since it proved to be too much of a burden). More practical and realistic approaches should be fostered such as self-observation and peer teaching/observation. For a more structured way of reflection they will most probably benefit from an approach to reflection that is more connected to their teaching. Exploratory practice is an interesting alternative because of its strong focus on combining research with pedagogy.	is not for them. The main purpose of research is to serve as a means of reflecting. They need to demystify the term research and give it a more personal, relevant and practical connotation.	issues raised in the initial exploration of their classroom performance to plan a change or an innovation in their teaching and give it a follow up.
TTF	Action Research in the English Classroom (Data collection instruments, Compilation, Analysis and Interpretation)	Strategies and techniques for analysing, compiling and interpreting qualitative data in AR projects.	Fulfilled, but more time was needed to cover some more examples and to listen to the students doubts about their final research project.	Little time to cover all of the contents and to be able to help participants develop their research topics.	Most of the students were very interested in the topics introduced.	Some of the participants needed to improve their language skills, particularly, their English command.	Action research should continue to be focused on with real examples rather than theoretical aspects. Teachers need to be practicing in their real environments.	Overcome the fear to do research. Abandon the idea that AR belong to experts. It is a matter that fits into educators who really want to obtain positive results in their classrooms. They need to experience the practical and beneficial side of AR in their daily teaching practice.	Have practice on how to select a topic to be studied. Plan their projects with a very open mind. Pay especial attention to triangulation procedures in their proposals Look for topics that are of interest Be clear of what they want to achieve.

APPENDIX 14



**UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL AUTONOMA DE NICARAGUA – LEON
FACULTAD DE CIENCIAS DE LA EDUCACIÓN Y HUMANIDADES
PROGRAMA DE DIDÁCTICA DE INGLÉS
DEPARTAMENTO DE INGLÉS**

En colaboración con:

Universidad de Alcalá de Henares UAH-España
Instituto Tecnológico de Costa Rica (TEC)

Curso: Uso de Recursos Tecnológicos para Enseñar Inglés como Lengua Extranjera

Horas Presenciales: 20

Horas Extraclase: 180

Créditos: 5

Profesora: M.TE. Ileana Mora Marín (TEC)

Descripción:

Este modulo plantea el uso de las nuevas tecnologías de la información y comunicación en la enseñanza del inglés. Los participantes tendrán oportunidad de analizar una variedad de recursos didácticos disponibles en la red y de material multimedia. Además recibirán formación sobre como utilizar estos recursos para apoyar el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje y su respectiva incorporación en el currículo. Finalmente los profesores podrán ampliar sus conocimientos en el uso y diseño de medios digito-tecnológicos que tengan a su alcance.

Objetivo general:

Analizar el uso de los distintos medios tecnológicos utilizados en la enseñanza de una lengua extranjera.

Objetivos específicos:

1. Conocer los diferentes buscadores en Internet
2. Realizar búsquedas en Internet profunda o invisible.
3. Desarrollar actividades de clase utilizando las tecnologías de la información y comunicación.

4. Diseñar un archivo de multimedia para la enseñanza del inglés.

Contenidos temáticos:

- ✚ Tecnología Educativa para la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera
- ✚ Software Educativo
- ✚ Internet (e-mail, chats, websites)
- ✚ Programas de Multimedia
- ✚ Videoconferencia

Metodología:

El curso se desarrollará de manera bimodal. En el desarrollo de la etapa presencial se analizarán y discutirán los temas planteados. Además se iniciará a los participantes en el diseño e implementación de un programa de multimedia. Para la etapa a distancia se facilitan un conjunto mínimo de fuentes bibliográficas que se han previsto con el fin de estimular la reflexión y la producción individual y que a su vez les sirva de base para desarrollar el proyecto de investigación.

Evaluación:

Criterio	Porcentaje
Asistencia	10%
Actividades en Internet	10%
Microenseñanza	10%
Proyecto de Multimedia	30%
Proyecto de Investigación	40%

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APPENDIX 15

**UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL AUTÓNOMA DE NICARAGUA
UNAN-LEÓN
FACULTY OF EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES
ENGLISH DEPARTMENT**



**POSTGRADUATE COURSE IN:
*“TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE”***

**PRINCIPLES AND
METHODS IN TEFL**

PROFESSOR:

EDIPCIA CHÁVEZ LOREDO

León, June, April-June 2008

Principles and Methods in the Teaching and Acquisition of English as a Foreign Language

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Course Outline

Course Title: Theories and Principles of Language Learning and Acquisition

Teacher: Edipcia Chávez Loredó UNAN/LEON

Contact Information: (mobile) 8423903 (home) (505) 315-1199

Students: Postgraduate Course in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) UNAN-León, Faculty of Educational Sciences and Humanities, English Department

Time and Place: _____

GENERAL COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course aims to build on your understanding of ELT methodology by introducing the relationship between theory and practice. In the course we will look briefly at different methodologies and then focus on what elements are essential to learning and teaching activities (learners- the teaching environment, motivation, the teachers's roles and performance, etc.) An important part of the class will be devoted to the concept of the teacher as a reflective and changing agent inside (and outside) the classroom

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

By the end of the course the teachers will be able to:

- Explain why theory and teaching principles are important to teaching,
- Develop their critical abilities regarding the use of methods adequate for the teaching of EFL taking into account their teaching styles and their contextual realities
- Briefly explain several theoretical principles involved in SLA and the teaching of EFL
- Be able to understand and use terminology related to the field of TEFL

MATERIALS:

1. Compilation of materials (dossier)
2. Book TEFL in Secondary School Education (MCLaren, Madrid, Bueno)
3. Other related books (bibliography will be provided)
4. Articles provided on line

ASSIGNMENTS AND EVALUATION:

You have several main tasks to complete during (and after) this course.

- 1) First, you must read the assigned readings **before** each class.
- 2) You will be responsible for presenting different contents to the class in groups (microteaching; sometimes)
- 3) You will be asked to write a journal aimed at helping you reflect on different aspects of the development of your professional life as a teacher. You can either type or handwrite your journal. If you handwrite your journal, please make sure that your handwriting is clear and that you use either black or blue pen.
- 4) There will be a written evaluation at the end.
- 5) You will be assigned to carry out an individual project after the module is over. The topic of this project will be decided at the end of the module and you will be given reasonable time to carry it out (deadline to be agreed on beforehand).
- 6) You will be asked to write a glossary of terminology covered in the module that is relevant for you (50 terms). The definition of the term is up to your creativity (pictures, definitions, contextualization, synonyms, etc.)

BIBLIOGRAFIA SEGUNDO ENCUENTRO MAESTRIA EN DIDACTICA

Gebhard, J. G. And R. Oprandy. (1999). *Language Teaching Awareness: A guide to Exploring Beliefs and Practices*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press..

Harmer, J. (1998). *How to teach English*. England : Pearson Education Limited

Harmer, J. (2001). *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. England : Pearson Education Limited

Larsen-Freeman, D. (1986). *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching*. Oxford : Oxford University Press.

Richards, J. C. and T. S. Rodgers. (2001). *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press.

Ur , P. (1991). *A course in Language Teaching: Practice and Theory*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press.

N. McLaren and D. Madrid , (eds.): *A Handbook for TEFL*. Spain: Marfil Alcoy,



Universidad nacional Autónoma de Nicaragua - León
Facultad de Ciencias de la Educación y Humanidades

Departamento de Ingles

**Postgraduate Course
in:**

Teaching English as a Foreign Language

Module:

Teaching Techniques and Strategies I

Part I: READING

Prof: Michèle Delaplace

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Universidad nacional Autónoma de Nicaragua - León
Facultad de Ciencias de la Educación y Humanidades

Departamento de Ingles

Postgraduate Course

in:

Teaching English as a Foreign Language

Module:

Teaching Techniques and Strategies I

Part II: WRITING

Prof: Michèle Delaplace

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I. The Why and What of Teaching Writing

What's Writing?

Producing a Piece of Writing (Raimes Chart)

II. How Should we Teach Writing?

Introduction to Different Writing Models

TOWER, The Process Writing Model

The Process / Product Writing Model

III. Writing Good Writing Assignments

Writing Assignment A

Writing Assignment B

IV. Pre-Writing Activities:

Discourse Analysis Activities and Generating Ideas Activities

Non-Writing Pre-Writing Activities

V. Comparison Paragraphs:

Example of Discourse Analysis Activities: Unscrambling Texts and Gap-fill

VI. Contrast Paragraphs

Example of Generating Ideas Activities: Brainstorming and Mapping

Demonstrating and Practicing Webbing

VII. Classification Paragraphs:

Example of Discourse Analysis Activities: Reading and Using a Graphic Organizer

Example of Generating Ideas Activities: Visualization

VIII. Listing Reasons Paragraphs:

Example of Discourse Analysis Activities: Ordering a Reading

Example of Generating Ideas Activities: Pyramid Brainstorming

**UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL AUTÓNOMA DE NICARAGUA
UNAN-LEÓN
FACULTY OF EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES
ENGLISH DEPARTMENT**



**POSTGRADUATE COURSE IN:
“TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE”**

**LESSON
PLANNING**

PROFESSOR:

ROSANGELA BAGGIO

León Nicaragua August 2008

POSTGRADO DE ENSEÑANZA DE INGLÉS COMO LENGUA EXTRANJERA

LESSON PLANNING

Rosangela Baggio

Liceo Italiano - Universidad de Alcalá

Session n. 1 (04.08.08)

1. **Brainstorming:** general definitions of lesson planning and different ways of doing it

2. **Participants' needs questionnaire.**

It is aimed at fostering individual reflection on the topic of lesson planning. The questionnaire undertook the following issues:

- a. Definition of lesson planning
- b. Elements taken into consideration when planning
- c. Difficult aspects to undertake and why
- d. Adapting course books to students' needs
- e. Revising lesson planning

In groups, participants discuss the individual answers and make agreements on the most common issues of concern, then a representative from each group report to the class.

Identification of common issues of concern:

- a. How to increase motivation (in spite of some environmental constraint)
- b. How to find out about pupils' needs
- c. How to make classes more attractive
- d. How to be more flexible
- e. How to improve sequencing and pacing

3. **Presentation:** Six common mistakes in writing lesson plans (adapted from www.adprima.com) and related examples.

Session n. 2 (05.08.08)

1. **Feedback from questionnaires** (mainly related to student's needs and motivation i.e. strategies for involving students in the planning process)

2. **Towards a common lesson plan template**

TASK n. 1

In groups, design a lesson plan (45 minutes) using a written text and picture as a prompt
Students' level: first year of secondary school.

To start with, in your group, agree on:

1. The lesson plan elements you have to take into account
2. The lesson plan template

Session n. 3 (06.08.08)

1. Presentation of the lesson planning task (4 groups)

All the participants performed as critical friends for the identification of some key issues.

Discussion took place with regards to.

- objective and grammar content
- communicative activities
- sequencing
- transition between activities.

Session n. 4 (07.08.08)

1. Towards a common understanding of

a. objectives

b. contents (vocabulary, language functions, language structures, pronunciation)

c. skills (and how to practice them)

In groups, teachers analyze the procedure of a lesson and then derive information about: topic, level, objectives, content (vocabulary, language functions, language structures, pronunciation), skills (specify how you practice them), pre-requisites.

TASK n. 2

Read the staged procedure for a 50-minutes lesson.

Fill in the first part of the lesson plan template we have elaborated.

Write the story you think the teacher has planned for undertaking the lesson plan.

Session n. 5 (08.08.08)

1. Presentation of key concepts and procedures related to evaluation, assessment and testing.

a. definitions

b. key questions to bear in mind when assessing

c. prejudice and problems

d. when should we assess

e. who should assess

2. Planning testing activities

TASK n. 3

In groups, teachers design a testing activity based on the Simpson family lesson we have planned.

Each group will work on one different skill.

For each activity, provide clear marking criteria.

Session n. 6 (11.08.08)

1. **Presentation of key concepts and procedures related to evaluation, assessment and testing:**
 - a. How should we assess. Elements of reliability, validity, practicality, accountability.
 - b. Self-assessment
 - c. Continuous assessment
 - d. Formal assessment and testing

2. Presentation of the testing activities

Discussion took place with regards to:

- clear description of the test
- coherence of the text with its typology
- adequate marking criteria

Session n. 7 (12.08.08)

1. The European Language Portfolio of Lombardy as a means for promoting students' awareness of the learning process and self-assessment skills:

- a. How can we facilitate the learners' awareness of their learning process
- b. How can learners be helped to learn
- c. How can learners become aware of their strengths and weaknesses

Discussion related to the reflective instruments provided as an example and their usefulness in the participants' teaching contexts.

Session n. 8 (13.08.08)

1. The flexibility issue: in spite of careful preparation, you may have to change your lesson plan. What would you do in some concrete situations?

Discussion related to some unexpected situations. Participants are asked to play a board game "Snakes and ladders" in order to fulfill the task.

2. Wrap-up session: vision of the training video "Ways of learning ways of teaching".

Identification and discussion of some important issues related to teaching-learning experiences: the exercise of power, the recognition of the teachers' role and experience, learning within a system of values, trusting the teacher, the students' involvement and motivation, the individual's needs and personalities.

List of articles and hand-outs

- "Lesson planning". Jane Jones. Revista Encuentro
- "Six common mistakes in writing lesson planning". Bob Kizlik (www.adprima.com)
- "How to write a lesson plan" (taken from Internet)
- "Classroom assessment". Tricia Hedge. *Teaching and learning in the Language classrooms*. OUP 2000
- "The teacher's guide" (summary). *The European Language Portfolio for Lombardy*. La Nuova Italia-OUP 2002
- "Evaluation and Assessment" (summary taken from Gattullo. *La valutazione degli apprendimenti linguistici*. La Nuova Italia 2001 and Harrys and MacCann. *Assessment*. Heinemann 1994.
- "Eleven principles of coping in large multilevel classes". Natalie Hess. *Teaching large multilevel classes*. CUP 2001
- "Defining a 'good teacher'. Simply!" Sandee Thompson. *Modern English Teacher*, Vol.17, n. 1
- "Planning lessons". J.Harmer. *The practice of English language teaching*. Longman 2001
- "Lesson planning". Penny Ur. *A course in language teaching: practice and theory*. CUP 1996

**UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL AUTÓNOMA DE NICARAGUA
UNAN-LEÓN
FACULTY OF EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES
ENGLISH DEPARTMENT**



**POSTGRADUATE COURSE IN:
“TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE”**

**TEACHING EFL WITH A
LEARNER CENTERED
APPROACH**

**PROFESSOR:
MANUEL MEGÍAS**

León, August 2008

POSTGRADO DE ENSEÑANZA DE INGLÉS COMO LENGUA EXTRANJERA

LEARNER-CENTRED TEACHING

Dr. Manuel Megías Rosa

Departamento de Filología Moderna

UNIVERSIDAD DE ALCALA

Session 1 (04/08/08)

1. Introductory task (practice)

In groups teachers select 5 words or phrases to define learner-centred education. Each group selects only one word or phrase to report to the class. Then the whole list is written on the blackboard and the words or phrases selected are underlined.

2. Comparing paradigms: Learner centred education/teacher-centred education (theory).

3. Listening: The Prince and the soldier (practice)

After telling this unfinished story, the teachers work in groups to find an ending of their choice. When the activity is finished, they check if the activity fulfil the characteristics (list) generated by the students themselves in the previous activity.

Session 2 (05/08/08)

1. Learner-centered conditions that ensure students' success in learning (theory)

1. Classrooms must be learner-centered, not content-centered
2. Teachers must believe that all students can learn
3. Learner-centered classrooms must be success-oriented
4. Learning must be active, not passive
5. Instruction must be developmentally appropriate
6. Instruction must address many different learning styles.

Discussion of conditions; for instance: What can an English teacher do for their students' physical, social and emotional growth or can you give examples of scaffolding activities?

2. Speaking activity: The fantastic binomial (practice)

The teacher asks each student in the class to write, on a piece of paper, an English word related to a person, an animal, an object, real or fantastic, to fold the paper and put it in a box (she/he can either ask them to say a word that she writes on a small piece of paper).

The teacher asks two pupils to pick up a paper each, they read the words and the first binomial is written on a board. They go on forming the binomials so that they can have a wide range of them. Then the teacher asks the pupils to choose among the list the most "strange" (each word having nothing in common with the other, whose meaning is unrelated or sounds bizarre). The teacher asks the pupils to start a story that includes a word of the binomial (i.e., moon-shell). The questions are a support for the students to find out the vocabulary they need to build up the story: A shell: i.e., big/small/ fat/thin; where is it?/what colour is it?/ how does it feel?, miming the possible answers.

The teacher writes down the sentences. The pupils are asked to go on with the story and the story ends when the words of the fantastic binomial meet in a meaningful construct

After finishing the activity teacher and students check if the activity fulfils the characteristics of learner-centred approach.

Session 3 (06/08/08)

1. Learner-centered conditions that ensure students' success in learning (theory)

6. Students must be allowed to work together
7. Teachers must be facilitators of learning
8. Teachers must provide students with choices
9. Learning must be contextually relevant
10. Many different forms of assessment must be employed
11. Teachers must be reflective practitioners

Discussion of conditions; for example: Is it possible to allow students to depict what they have learnt in a FLT context?

2. The Learner-centred curriculum: key elements (theory)

3. Grammar activity: Reducing a paragraph to one word (practice)

The teacher shows a slide on the screen which contains a long paragraph. Students are allowed to delete one, two or three consecutive words. The paragraph remaining has to be correct from a grammatical point of view. They are also allowed to change punctuation. At the end the paragraph has to be reduced to one word. The aim of this activity is to make teachers aware that working on grammar can also be motivating for students

Session 4 (07/08/08)

1. Learner-centredness in language learning: theoretical foundations (theory)

1. Communicative approach (characteristics of CA and Traditional approaches)
2. humanistic approaches
3. Learning strategies research
4. Learning styles
5. Multiple intelligences
6. Autonomous Learning

2. Applying humanistic principles to learning a foreign language (practice)

Students will be introduced to Italian language by applying a mixture of Silent Way and Communicative language Teaching techniques. The procedure is the following:

A picture is shown on the screen. Students start asking "how do you say" questions. The teacher takes notes. Students are not allowed to write. When they are ready they can say a sentence in a loud voice, i.e. *l'uomo è povero, l'uomo è triste*, etc. When all students have said their sentences, the teacher writes the vocabulary on the blackboard. Then, the students write sentences on their notebooks and say them aloud.

Two of the principles that guide this activity are students' needs and choice. Learning is constructed with the vocabulary demanded by the students.

3. Discovering strategies poem (practice)

Students discover the meaning of language learning strategy by translating a poem from Dutch into English. They write down the type of actions taken to be able to translate the poem. Finally, students provide a definition of language learning strategy that is compared with a pair of definitions provided by experts.

Session 5 (08/08/08)

1. Revision of key concepts (theory)

1. Interlanguage
2. Communicative activities
3. Communicative Competence

2. Presenting the Spanish lesson planning elements (theory)

The aim of this presentation is to familiarise students with the Spanish planning lesson format so that they could consider the possibility of incorporating new elements into their planning scheme of work, specially the learning to learn section.

3. Task: Reinforcing concepts (practice)

Students are provided with a number of activities so that they can identify language contents, functions and skills.

POSTGRADO DE ENSEÑANZA DE INGLÉS COMO LENGUA EXTRANJERA

LEARNER-CENTRED TEACHING

ASSESSMENT

1. Look at the characteristics of traditional and Communicative approaches. In which ways is your approach traditional? In which ways is it Communicative. Illustrate with examples.
2. Can you think of an activity which may help your learners develop metacognitive strategies?
3. Do you think the course (learner-centred teaching and lesson planning) has been learner-centered. If not, why not, if yes, in which ways? (to answer you can take into account the learner-centered principles provided).
4. Which is the difference between Language Learning Strategies, Learning Styles and Multiple intelligences? Give examples that make the difference clear.
5. We have briefly presented in the course the notion of Interlanguage. What influence can have this language system in the in the treatment of error in the FL classroom?

LESSON PLANNING

1. What do you see as being the objectives of lesson planning? (You may like to imagine that you want to persuade a colleague who never plans lessons at all.)
2. Do you think that you have improved your lesson planning skills during the course? If yes, in which way?
3. Which elements would you consider as the most important when organising the sequence of activities of a lesson? Describe the elements and explain their functions.
4. Which elements of the assessment procedures do you consider feasible for your reality? (apart from testing). Explain which ones you would like to incorporate in your practice, why and how you would use them.

Session 6 (11/08/0)

1. **Strategic poem:** Teachers enumerate the strategies they use when translating a poem from Dutch. The list is written on the blackboard and then compared to the list provided by the author of the activity (discovering practice).
2. **Teacher gives their own definition of language learning strategies** and then they are compared to definition given by experts (Oxford, Chamot, etc)
3. **A taxonomy of language learning strategies is presented:** cognitive, metacognitive, social-affective. Some definitions and examples are provided (theory).
4. **DISCUSSION TASK:** Teacher work individually. The task is aimed at developing teachers' awareness of the process involved in learning, and of ways in which teacher can influence the strategies the students employ (practice).

Session 7 (12/08/08)

1. **Applying language learning strategies to Zippo:** Teachers are presented a lesson sequence in which a number of learning strategies have been isolated and defined for every activity (theory). The activities analysed include cognitive, metacognitive and social-affective strategies.
2. **TASK** In groups, teachers analyse a unit and identify the language learning strategies behind a number of activities. Each group present the results to the rest of the class.

Session 8 (13/08/08)

1. **Learning style is defined and a classification learning styles is presented.**(theory)
2. **TASK:** In pairs or groups of three, teachers think of an activity suitable for each learning style (each group is provided with a dichotomy, for example, analytic/global). Then, the activities are presented and discussed with the rest of the class (practice).
3. **Brief introduction to Multiple Intelligences Theory** (theory)

List of articles provided:

- David Brown : *Learner-centred conditions that ensure students' success in learning*, *Education*, Fall 2003
- Kennet Henson *Foundations for Learner-centered education; A knowledge base*, *Education*, Fall 2003
- David Nunan; *The learner-centred curriculum: main concepts* (summary)
- Antonio Roldán Tapia : *El aprendizaje centrado en el alumno: de la teoría a la práctica*, *Revista Encuentro* 1999-2000
- Zhang Yuxian and Wang Jiling: *Learner-centredness*, *English Teaching Professional*, 48 January 2007
- Manuel Megias: *Language Learning Strategies*. Proyecto HOLA!
- Andrew Littejonh : *Motivation: Where does it come?, Where does it go?*. *English Teaching Professional*, 19, April 2001
- Richard Felder: *Learning and Teaching Styles in foreign and second language education*. *Foreign Language Annals*, 28, no 1, 1995
- Herbert Puchta: *Making the most of Multiple intelligences*. *English Teaching Professional*, 41 November 2005
- Peter Watkins *Language Awareness*: *English Teaching Professional*, 48, January 2007
- Elizabeth Harmer: *21st - Century Literacy*. *English Teaching Professional*, 36, January 2005.
- Jon Taylor: *The road to autonomy*. *English Teaching Professional*, 24, July 2002.
- Fernando Cerezal (ed): *De la Práctica a la Teoría: Reflexiones sobre la enseñanza y el aprendizaje de inglés*. Universidad de Alcalá.

**POSTGRADO DE ENSEÑANZA DE INGLÉS COMO LENGUA
EXTRANJERA**

LEARNER-CENTRED TEACHING AND LESSON PLANNING

**ASSIGNEMENT FOR THE MODULE LEARNER-CENTRED TEACHING TO BE
DELIVERED BY MID OCTOBER TO THE FOLLOWING E-MAIL:
manuel.megias@uah.es**

Design a batch of 3 activities to work on each of the eight intelligences mentioned by Gardner (1983) in a Secondary School grade of your choice. Specify the procedure for and rationale behind their implementation and how they could be combined to cater for all possible learning styles in the classroom.

**ASSIGNEMENT FOR THE MODULE PLANNING LESSONS TO BE DELIVERED
BY MID OCTOBER TO THE FOLLOWING E-MAIL: rosangela1@telefonica.net**

Prepare a lesson plan that you will teach to your class following the template elaborated during the course. Provide a detailed description of all the items proposed. Try it out with your students and write a commentary on the experience, underlying successful aspects as well as problems arisen. Be your own critical friend!

APPENDIX 19

UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL AUTÓNOMA DE NICARAGUA
UNAN-LEÓN
FACULTY OF EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES
ENGLISH DEPARTMENT



POSTGRADUATE COURSE IN:
*“TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN
LANGUAGE”*

Techniques and
Strategies in TEFL 2

PROFESSOR:

FRANCISCO JAVIER PARAJÓN

León, SEPTEMBER, 2009

Course Outline

Course Title: Techniques and Strategies in TEFL 2

Teacher: Francisco Javier Parajón UNAN/León

Contact Information: (cell) 83317285 (home) 2312-4409 email address (frankp372@yahoo.es)

Students: Postgraduate Course in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) UNAN-León, Faculty of Educational Sciences and Humanities, English Department

Time and Place: Fri 2:30-5:30 PM

Module calendar:

1. September 19th
2. September 26th
3. October 3rd
4. October 10th
5. October 17th
6. October 24nd
7. October 30th
8. November 7th
9. November 14th
10. November 13th

GENERAL COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course aims to build on your understanding of how to use the pre, while and post activities in Listening and speaking skills on EFL Teachers' Professional Development. Communication classes involve a great practice of listening for comprehension of main and specific ideas and a great practice of a particular speech communication skill as it is speaking. This course focuses on providing professors with tools for guiding their students to communicate effectively in the foreign language. However, it also provides activities to help them be independent learners

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

By the end of the course you will be able to:

- Understand, use and explain the main theoretical principles behind the concept of Reflective Teaching, Teachers as Investigators and Action Research
- Be able to use a wide range of language.

- Be capable of making lengthy contributions where appropriate and expand and develop ideas with minimal help from the interlocutor to communicate effectively
- Develop a critical and reflective attitude and the ability to question, assess, innovate, improve and change particular situations affecting your teaching
- **They will be able to know the importance of the listening and Speaking process**
- **Put into practice the different criteria** in the selection of the listening exercises.
- **Be able to design listening and Speaking activities.**

MATERIALS:

1. Compilation of materials (dossier)
2. Related books (bibliography is provided)

***ASSIGNMENTS AND EVALUATION:**

You have several main tasks to complete during (and after) this course.

- a) You must develop activities such as: Analyzing pictures or drawings, brainstorming on the topic, Class discussion based on questions, Information Gaps, Matching exercise, Prediction, Scrambled sequence
 - 1) Analyzing the assigned readings **before** each class. There will be discussions in the classroom about these readings. Also, you might be assigned to write summaries or opinion essays about them.
 - 2) You will be responsible for presenting different contents to the class (alone or with your peer).
 - 3) You must develop in pairs or group activities as follows. A listening walk, Drawing about the gist of the listening, Ending the story, Gathering specific information, Grid exercise, Listening for key words, Listening for opinions, Listening for the gist, Listening in sequence, Listening interruption, Listening teams, Matching exercise, Note-taking of key words, Split listening, True or false exercises, Vocabulary games.
 - 4) You will be assigned to develop informative and persuasive speeches.
 - 5) You will take individual and group test. 50% will be evaluated in class and 50% in a final assignment where you will show how much you learnt in this course.

Técnicas y Estrategias en la Enseñanza del Inglés como Segunda Lengua

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APPENDIX 20



UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL AUTONOMA DE NICARAGUA
UNAN-LEON
FACULTAD DE CIENCIAS DE LA EDUCACION Y HUMANIDADES

Postgrado: Enseñanza de Ingles como Lengua extranjera

Modulo: Diseño de materiales didácticos en la Enseñanza de Ingles
como Lengua Extranjera

Profesor: Michèle Delaplace

FINAL TASK:

Prepare a **teaching unit** with the course book you currently use in your classes. You will have to reorganize, change, supplement, eliminate, adapt and / or develop the activities and materials for this unit. The unit will have to include 6 to 8 classes of your current teaching program.

Step 1: Contextual factors.

Draw a table/chart with relevant information about your teaching context
The table will include significant information about: (= 10 pts)

- ✓ Your beliefs and understandings as a teacher, teaching philosophy, experience, personality and teaching style
- ✓ A group portrait of your students and their needs: No of students, background, levels, type of learners, learners' abilities, attitudes, preferences, etc...
- ✓ A brief description of the course organization: No of teaching hours, length of the sessions, evaluation processes, institutional givens.
- ✓ A brief account of the institutional environment.

Step 2: Identifying the textbook and other available materials.

Draw a table/chart with relevant information about your textbook and other materials. The table will include significant information about: (= 10 pts)

- ✓ **Your material:** investigate and describe how your textbook is put together (aims and approaches, design and organization, language

content, skills, topic, methodology). How is the material organized? What are the organizing principles of the book? On what basis and how are the units sequenced?

- ✓ **The support materials:** explore and describe all the support materials provided with the book. Mention what other materials are currently supplied and available. Describe and evaluate them. Do you use them on a regular basis?
- ✓ **Other institutional facilities:** what other facilities are currently offered by your institution? Do you have access to any other reference materials, a bank of other support materials, audio-visual and on line equipment, etc...?

Step 3: Selecting the teaching unit.

In your textbook, identify the parts/chapters that will integrate your teaching units. Remember you must cover 6 to 8 classes. Draw a grid that includes the following aspects: (= 10 pts)

- ✓ What are your objectives / goals for the unit?
- ✓ Determine and list the language learning components that will form the basis of the activities in the unit, so that the objectives for the unit are achieved (Functions? Culture? Lexis? Grammar? Phonology? Topics and associated vocabulary? Communicative functions? Speaking? Listening?)
- ✓ Describe the evaluation processes chosen for this teaching unit.
- ✓ List the different resources you will use.
- ✓ Give any other information relevant and important for the unit.

Step 4: Adapting the textbook and designing the final teaching unit.

(= 50 pts)

Once you have gotten inside of the textbook and understood how its content is organized, you can consider how you want to adapt it. You have a range of choices; you can make adaptations at three different levels:

- I. **activity level** :change, supplement, eliminate activities.
- II. **unit level:** change the order of activities and adapt existing activities.
- III. **book/syllabus level:** change, add to or eliminate parts of the syllabus.

Your teaching unit should include:

Balance of activities, sequencing, coherence and variety

List of activities you may want to include, among others:

Authentic materials, warmers and fillers, games, competitive activities, mingling activities, songs, jazz chants, information gaps, jigsaw reading, filling in grids, quizzes, surveys, and so on...

APPENDIX 21

UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL AUTÓNOMA DE NICARAGUA
UNAN-LEÓN
FACULTY OF EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES
ENGLISH DEPARTMENT



POSTGRADUATE COURSE IN:
*“TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN
LANGUAGE”*

Action Research in the Classroom

PROFESSOR:
EDIPCIA CHÁVEZ LOREDO

Course Outline

Course Title: Action Research in the English Classroom

Teacher: Edipcia Chávez Loredo UNAN/León in collaboration with Dr. Edwin Marín from the Instituto Tecnológico de Costa Rica (ITCR)

Contact Information: (cell) 8423903 (home) 315-1199 email address (edipcha1964@yahoo.es)

Students: Postgraduate Course in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) UNAN-León, Faculty of Educational Sciences and Humanities, English Department

Time and Place: Fri 2:30-5:30 PM

Module calendar:

1. March 6th
2. March 13th
3. March 20th
4. March 27th
5. April 3rd
6. ***April 24th**
7. May 8th
8. May 15th
9. May 22nd
10. May 29th

***Dr. Edwin Marín's course on qualitative data collection and interpretation**

GENERAL COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course aims to build on your understanding of reflection as a means of EFL Teachers' Professional Development. Exploratory Teaching, Reflective Teaching, and the Teacher as Investigator are all central concepts related to the issue of Action Research as a more structured way of teacher's reflection. A variety of instruments for collecting information about the multifaceted events that happen in the classroom are presented and discussed: questionnaires, interviews, diaries, classroom observations, etc. An important part of the course will be devoted to the concept of the EFL teacher as a change agent inside (and outside) the classroom. In addition, special consideration will be given to self-observation and peer observation (or peer coaching) processes as a means of sustainable teacher development. A variety of samples of actual Action Research projects will be provided, as well as articles about the main concepts of the course.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

By the end of the course you will be able to:

- Understand, use and explain the main theoretical principles behind the concept of Reflective Teaching, Teachers as Investigators and Action Research
- Explain what AR is and what it involves in terms of methodology, stages (the AR cycle), and data collection instruments.
- Plan, Implement and Evaluate Classroom Action Research projects within your own situational contexts
- Write research reports effectively
- Develop a critical and reflective attitude and the ability to question, assess, innovate, improve and change particular situations affecting your teaching

MATERIALS:

1. Compilation of materials (dossier)
2. Related books (bibliography is provided)
3. Articles and resources provided on line

*ASSIGNMENTS AND EVALUATION:

You have several main tasks to complete during (and after) this course.

- 1) You must read the assigned readings **before** each class. There will be discussions in the classroom about these readings. Also, you might be assigned to write summaries or opinion essays about them.
- 2) You will be responsible for presenting different contents to the class (alone or with your peer).
- 3) You will be asked to write a journal aimed at helping you reflect on different aspects of your teaching. You can either type or handwrite your journal. If you handwrite your journal, please make sure that your handwriting is clear and that you use either black or blue pen (your evaluation **WILL NOT** be based on the content of your diary or on your ability to write, but on the commitment to hand it in on the agreed dates).
- 4) You will be assigned to carry out an individual Action Research project along the development of the course. The topic of this project will be decided ASAP so that you can design your plan of activities during the semester. You will have to write a report of your AR project and present it (written and orally) on the 24th and 31st of July. **The AR project has 60% of the total grade of the course. The evaluation criteria will be negotiated.**
- 5) ****Classroom (peer) observations will take place during all April and May. A schedule will be appointed conveniently. There will be a post-conference after such observations. (evaluation on this **WILL NOT** be based on the classroom observations or post-conferences per se, but on the commitment and responsibility to carry out all of these activities).**
- 6) There will be tutoring session (either individually or with your peer) to discuss important aspects of your teaching (along April and May) as well as to provide you with counselling for the writing and presentation of your AR project (June).

*More detailed information about assessment will be given conveniently

**Each teacher is to select a partner to work with during the development of the course, and peer classroom observations will be appointed throughout the development of the course.

ACTION RESEARCH IN THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM

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APPENDIX 22

NORMAS PARA FORMATEAR Y EDITAR LOS ARTÍCULOS DE INVESTIGACIÓN

Estimados profesores:

Para la redacción y publicación de sus artículos de investigación vamos a retomar las normas de dos Revistas Internacionales que publican artículos de investigación e innovación en educación : la Revista Encuentro de la Universidad de Alcalá y la Revista Iberoamericana de Educación de la Organización de Estados Iberoamericanos para la Educación, la Ciencia y la Cultura OEI.

1. Guías generales

- La extensión del artículo (con la bibliografía) no debe ser superior a 15 páginas, con un espaciado de 1,3.
- El tipo de letra debe ser Times New Roman.
- El tamaño de letra debe ser 11 en el texto principal.
- Se debe utilizar sangría al inicio de cada nuevo párrafo.
- Los signos ortográficos (coma, punto, signo de interrogación o admiración, etc.) deben tener un espacio libre antes de comenzar la siguiente palabra.
- Las comillas siempre preceden al punto (si lo hubiese).
- Todas las páginas deberán estar numeradas, incluyendo bibliografía, gráficos, tablas, etc.
- Las notas deben ir a pie de página, TNR 10. Las referencias a autores en el texto del pie de página deben mencionar autor, año y página (Stern 1988: 17).
- Las notas a pie de página tendrán una secuencia numérica y se debe procurar que sean pocas y breves.

2. Acerca del título

El artículo llevará: título centrado (mayúsculas, Times New Roman 14, negrita); debajo, centrado, nombre del autor, TNR 12, negrita; en la línea siguiente aparecerá la institución del autor, TNR 12. Dos líneas más abajo deben ir los resúmenes en español e inglés, TNR 10.

3. Acerca del resumen (*abstract)

Todos los artículos incluirán un resumen en español y otro en inglés de un máximo de diez líneas cada uno, así como las palabras clave (cinco como máximo) en las mismas lenguas

El resumen (abstract) es una forma abreviada del proyecto que contiene todos los elementos del mismo pero en una forma muy breve y precisa(no más de 200 palabras) La página en números romanos en minúscula.

4. Acerca de las referencias bibliográficas*

- Asegurarse de mencionar siempre el apellido del autor, año y número de página en ese orden y todo ello en paréntesis como en el siguiente ejemplo (Nunan, 1998: 155).
- Las citas textuales o de títulos de artículos irán entre comillas españolas /«...»/ (ALT+174/175); si dentro de una cita hay otra, ésta irá en comillas inglesas /“...”/.
- Cuando haya más de tres líneas en la referencia se separa el párrafo del resto del texto y se utiliza un número menor de letra (Times New Roman 10) y menor espaciado como en el siguiente ejemplo:

The teachers' choice of method is the determining factor influencing the kind and nature of the classroom interaction and their own roles. Concerning this, Richards and Rodgers (2001) point out that:

The role of the teacher will ultimately reflect both the objectives of the method and the learning theory on which the method is predicated, since the success of a method may depend on the degree to which the teacher can provide the content or create the conditions for successful learning. (p. 29)

- La bibliografía al final se escribe en orden alfabético utilizando el siguiente formato:

- Allwright, D., 1993. Integrating 'research' and 'pedagogy': appropriate criteria and practical possibilities. In: Edge, J. and Richards, J., Editors, 1993. *Teachers Develop Teachers' Research*, Heinemann, Oxford, pp. 125–135.
- Allwright, D. & R. Lenzuen (1997). *Exploratory Practice: work at the Cultura Inglesa*, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. *Language Teaching Research*: 1.1, 73-79
- Allwright, D. (2003). 'Exploratory practice: rethinking practitioner research in language teaching' *Language Teaching Research* 7(2): 113–41.
- Allwright, D. & Bailey, K. (1991). *Focus on the language classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Breen, M. y Littlejohn, A. 2000. *Classroom decision-making: negotiation and process syllabuses in practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brown, J. D. (1995). *Elements of language curriculum: A systematic approach to program development*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle
- Carr, W. and S. Kemmis. 1986. *Becoming critical: Education, knowledge and action research*. London: Falmer Press.
- Carter, K. (1990). 'Teachers' knowledge and learning to teach', in Houston, W.R. (ed.), *Handbook of Research on Teacher Education*, pp. 291–310, New York: Macmillan.
- Cerezal, F. (1995). "Foreign Language Teaching Methods: some issues and new moves". En *Encuentro. Revista de Investigación e Innovación en la Clase de Idiomas*, No. 8. Pp 110-130. <http://www.encuentrojournal.org/textcit.php?textdisplay=269>
- En las referencias tomadas de la web se debe escribir la fecha en que fue descargada la información como en el siguiente ejemplo:
- Johnston, B., & Irujo, S. (2001). *Introduction: Voices from the field*. Minneapolis, MN: Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA) Retrieved October, 8, 2009, from <http://www.carla.umn.edu/resources/working-papers/samples/voices.html>

5. Las secciones del informe

En realidad no hay un formato específico para redactar un artículo de investigación. Hoy en día hay mucha flexibilidad en ese sentido. Lo que se pide en principio es que sea un artículo coherente y que refleje la esencia de la investigación. El contenido del informe está obviamente determinado por el tema seleccionado y puede incluir lo siguiente:

- Introducción (breve: integra la justificación y los objetivos)
- Revisión de la literatura (breve: los principales aspectos)
- Contexto y población meta
- Metodología (incluye la recolección y el análisis de datos y el plan de acción)
- Los principales resultados
- Las conclusiones (que se obtuvo del estudio, que implicaciones tiene para la propia práctica docente, para la institución y para el área de TEFL en general)
- Bibliografía

APPENDIX 23: SAMPLE EVALUATION ACTION RESEARCH PROJECTS

**NATIONAL AUTONOMOUS UNIVERSITY OF NICARAGUA-LEON
FACULTY OF EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES
ENGLISH DEPARTMENT
POSTGRADUATE COURSE IN TEFL 2008-2010
ASSESSMENT OF THE ACTION RESEARCH PROJECTS
THE WRITTEN REPORT**

Teachers's code: C Date: 22/04/10 Score: 73/100 (40%=29)

Evaluators' names: Martha Chavarría and Edipcia Chávez

TOTAL SCORE: 44/60

LEVEL OF PERFORMANCE

- 2 Proficient:** Met expectations
1 Developing: Below expectations
0 Not Observed: Not enough evidence provided

AREA	CRITERIA	2	1	0
RESEARCH INTRODUCTION	1. The problem is identified and set in an appropriate context.	X		
	2. Arguments for the research question are made.	X		
	3. The purpose of the research is clearly stated.	X		
	4. An overview of the organization of the report closes the section.	X		
RESEARCH SCOPE	5. The action research was relevant to the teachers' field of practice.	X		
	6. The research was relevant for the students participating (not enough evidence about this after the plan of action/no student survey applied)		X	
	7. The research contributed new understanding of the issues observed.(to the teacher, but nothing really "new" to the field).		X	
RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS	8. The participants were clearly described.	X		
	9. The project focused on the important actors involved.	X		
	10. It was stated who was selected and for which reasons.	X		
	11. It was clearly defined what the participants involvement was.		X	
RESEARCH CONTEXT	12. Consideration was given to the local context when implementing change.	X		
	13. It was clear why the context was selected for the development of the project.	X		
	14. The context was appropriate for the scope of the study.	X		
RESEARCH OBJECTIVES	15. The objectives were appropriate for the kind of project (objective 3 too ambitious/not possible to be fulfilled, better: <u>to provide options that help to overcome...</u>)		X	
	16. The objectives were clearly stated and defined.	X		
	17. The objectives were perceived in the different stages of the project.	X		
RESEARCH STAGES	18. The phases of the project were clearly outlined.	X		
	19. There was a logical process in evidence including: problem identification, planning, action and evaluation.		X	
	20. A timetable was given for the project and the different stages fit into the overall timetable.		X	

AREA	CRITERIA	2	1	0
RESEARCH LITERATURE REVIEW	21. There was enough revision of literature.		X	
	22. The connection with an existing body of knowledge was made clear.		X	
	23. There were theoretical insights offered throughout the project.		X	
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	24. An appropriate methodology was used to answer the research questions.		X	
	25. It is clear how data were collected and why for each phase of the project.	X		
	26. Data were collected in a way that addressed the research issue.		X	
RESEARCH VALIDITY	27. Data collection and record-keeping were systematic.		X	
	28. The researcher undertook method triangulation.		X	
DATA ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH	29. Data analyses were sufficiently accurate.		X	
	30. Procedures for analysis were described.			X
	31. Arguments, themes, concepts and categories were derived from the data.		X	
RESEARCH ACTION PLAN	32. The action plan was feasible and consistent with the skills, resources and time available.	X		
	33. The plan of action was based on the intended change.	X		
	34. The plan of action was adjusted in response to local events and participants	X		
	35. There is a clear discussion of the actions taken (the intervention and change).		X	
RESEARCH FINDINGS AND OUTCOMES	36. Findings were used to generate plans and ideas	X		
	37. There were clear statements of the findings and outcomes of each phase of the study.		X	
	38. There was a range of sources of ideas, categories and interpretations		X	
RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT	39. There are discussions of personal and practical development		X	
	40. The researcher offers a reflexive account		X	
	41. The researcher linked the data that are presented to own commentary and interpretation		X	
	42. The researcher has critically examined own and others' roles in the interpretation of data.		X	
RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS	43. Logical conclusions are reached based on the results of the study.		X	
	44. Logical instructional implications are drawn from the results of the study.	X		
	45. Recommendations are made that follow the logic of the study.	X		
OTHER CRITICAL CRITERIA	46. Grammar facilitates the flow of the report.	X		
	47. Sentence structure facilitates the flow of the report.	X		
	48. Connectors and transitional phrases are used to help the reader follow the arguments.	X		
	49. Reference list is included and written according to MLA style.		X	
	50. Figures, tables and graphics are used accordingly.		X	

NATIONAL AUTONOMOUS UNIVERSITY OF NICARAGUA-LEON
FACULTY OF EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES
ENGLISH DEPARTMENT
POSTGRADUATE COURSE IN TEFL 2008-2010

ASSESSMENT OF THE ACTION RESEARCH PROJECTS
THE ORAL PRESENTATION

Teachers' code: C Date: 22/04/10 Score: 14/20

Evaluators' names: Martha Chavarría and Edipcia Chávez Loredo

Oral Presentation Rubric

AREAS ↓	EXCEPTIONAL 4	GOOD 3	FAIR 2	POOR 1
Content	An abundance of material clearly related to thesis; points are clearly made and all evidence supports thesis; varied use of materials. <input type="checkbox"/>	Sufficient information that relates to thesis; many good points made but there is an uneven balance and little variation. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	There is a great deal of information that is not clearly connected to the thesis. <input type="checkbox"/>	Thesis not clear; information included that does not support thesis in any way. <input type="checkbox"/>
Coherence and Organization	Thesis is clearly stated and developed; specific examples are appropriate and clearly develop thesis; conclusion is clear; shows control; flows together well; good transitions; succinct but not choppy; well organized. <input type="checkbox"/>	Most information presented in logical sequence; generally very well organized but better transitions from idea to idea and medium to medium needed. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Concept and ideas are loosely connected; lacks clear transitions; flow and organization are choppy. <input type="checkbox"/>	Presentation is choppy and disjointed; does not flow; development of thesis is vague; no apparent logical order of presentation. <input type="checkbox"/>
Creativity	Very original presentation of material; uses the unexpected to full advantage; captures audience's attention. <input type="checkbox"/>	Some originality apparent; good variety and blending of materials/media. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Little or no variation; material presented with little originality or interpretation. <input type="checkbox"/>	Repetitive with little or no variety; insufficient use of multimedia. <input type="checkbox"/>
Material	Balanced use of multimedia materials; properly used to develop thesis; use of media is varied and appropriate. <input type="checkbox"/>	Use of multimedia not as varied but well connected to thesis. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Choppy use of multimedia materials; lacks smooth transition from one medium to another; multimedia not clearly connected to thesis. <input type="checkbox"/>	Little or no multimedia used or ineffective use of multimedia; imbalance in use of materials—too much of one, not enough of another. <input type="checkbox"/>
Speaking Skills	Poised, clear articulation; proper volume; steady rate; good posture and eye contact; enthusiasm; confidence. <input type="checkbox"/>	Clear articulation but not as polished. <input type="checkbox"/>	Some mumbling; little eye contact; uneven rate; little or no expression. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Inaudible or too loud; no eye contact; rate too slow/fast; speaker seemed uninterested and used monotone. <input type="checkbox"/>

INSIGHTS FROM THE EVALUATORS

1. What are the main strengths of the Action Research Project?

1/ The research question is well stated and justified; good arguments are made that provide reasons for the selected topic.

2/ Nice layout, it has a clear sequence; it's easy to follow; generally speaking the document is well written, concise, and coherent. There are logical transitions from one section to the other and it contains all the elements of a research report (some of them prone to improvement; see recommendations below).

3/ The Literature review presents important concepts related to the /problem/issue under study. It is logical and well organized (nevertheless, there are suggestions for improvement below).

4/ The contextual information shows good teacher knowledge and awareness of important issues such as the instructional context, the materials, the program, the kind of students.

5/ The problem studied is relevant, interesting, and closely related to the teachers' praxis, students and teaching context.

6/ A good number of relevant recommendations emerged from the study.

2. What are the main weaknesses?

1/ Few citations of experts; although there are important concepts tackled in the literature review, there is no in-depth analysis of what experts say in certain areas and some important concepts are not even mentioned. For instance, it would have been nice to have a review of well-detailed activities where pair work and group work, is the main organizational principle. In addition, some reference to the phenomenon of multi-level classes and to the issue of learning styles should have been made to some extent as well. Teacher Talking Time (TTT) vs. Student Talking Time (STT) fit into the research question as well. Actually group and pair work help to maximize student talk and to reduce teacher talk (thus optimizing class time, which was the main goal of the research).

2/ Triangulation is mentioned as a method used to validate the information. Nevertheless, the actual procedure carried out to analyze the information and put it together is not shown. This should be made clear.

3/ Some good classroom organization tips with actual models of how to group students (ideally presented visually) are missing.

4/ The writing style of the recommendations. They sound more like discussion of the findings rather than the suggestions that emerged from the research.

5/ The use of pair work and group work as the same term; these two concepts are used as one in the results section. Is there any reason to do so? Some distinction needs to be done as they are not the same.

6/ Some questions in the interview are not related to the topic of investigation (examples).

7/ Some recommendations do not match the topic

8/ Only one class for the implementation of the plan of action does not quite help to provide enough evidence of what kind of changes actually took place.

9/ A survey applied to the students after the implementation of the plan of action is missing (there wasn't a before and after a data collection?)

10/The conclusions are weak. The research question should be re-stated here, as well as a brief summary of the different aspects tackled and the implications for the professional practice (see recommendation below).

3. What specific suggestions for improvement are given?

- ✚ Include references in the lit. review where concepts suggested are integrated (TTT vs. STT, multilevel/mixed-ability classes, learning styles). State their importance and connection with the research question. Anybody interested in this topic would definitely search for these concepts.
- ✚ Suggestions of a wide range of pair work and group work activities should be included
- ✚ Integrate graphic information that presents visual organization of the classroom with different models of classroom arrangement for pair work and group work
- ✚ Objective 4 seems to be out of focus. It should be restated to match the research question or, otherwise, eliminated
- ✚ Check and revise number of pages to which the reader is referred to (sometimes they do not correspond)
- ✚ Sentences should not be started with numbers (the characters)
- ✚ Check the analysis of the diagram 3. Something is concluded that is not shown in the results (why "clearly showed....")
- ✚ Since there was no survey applied to the students this should be honestly admitted as one of the shortcomings of the study. Same thing with the plan of action.
- ✚ In the conclusions integrate and highlight the actual implications of the research for the teacher's professional practice. What were the teacher's perception/beliefs about the research question before? What new insights have been gained? What are the changes that the teacher has gone through professionally speaking? What would the teacher do differently next time?
- ✚ Use the spell and grammar checker of the computer to revise the grammar and spelling problems. Also check punctuation, margins, and typos.

The researcher has to integrate the suggestions in the report in a period no longer than 15 days after this feedback is given. Two hard copies are to be handed in, as well as a CD-Rom of the document integrating all the sections of the research report into one file in word and one file in PDF.

APPENDIX 24 TEACHERS'S SELF-EVALUATION

Dear teachers: Now that you have finished your AR projects I would like to know some of your insights about the issue through the present survey. So, please complete the following statements:

1. Action Research is:

2. Action Research is carried out in order to:

3. In carrying out my AR project I experienced the following problems:

4. As a result of doing Action Research my teaching has gone through the following changes:

5. The most important things I have learned in carrying out my AR project are:
