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The impact of cultural immersion on English Language

Teachers and their teaching in the classroom

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to analyze the impact of cultural immersion on English language teachers to understand how this experience shaped their teaching practices in the classroom.

The research was carried out at a public university located in one of the biggest cities in central Mexico. This university has an undergraduate program in English Language Teaching where students are trained to become English teachers. The data of this research were collected by means of an in-depth interview. It was a one-on-one interview that is the most common qualitative research method to have a detailed conversation with participants. The research findings have shown that, most of the time, accent variation is one of the typical problems that the participants faced when they were in a foreign country, and, in some cases, this could be a problem for communication. The participants pointed out that cultural immersion in a foreign country was the opportunity to improve their foreign language since all the skills are put into practice at the same time. This experience helped them to increase the level of confidence and at the same time it helped them to not feel afraid to communicate with others. Cultural immersion was also the chance to have cultural exchange. Therefore, according to the participants of this study, it is important for ELT students to learn more about their language and culture. In addition, they explained that this kind of experience could help them in their professional development. In the case of teachers, this experience helped them to improve confidence in the classroom, and at the same time it could broaden their life perspective. More results and implications are described within this thesis

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

It is common to hear in many countries that students need to learn a second language. For them, it is important to have more tools to develop their professional life. English is known as a global language which can give an opportunity to communicate with people around the world and learn about diverse cultures. In Mexico, there are a variety of programs to practice the language which include student exchanges. Some programs offer the opportunity to have a foreign experience in English-speaking countries while the student works.

Brooks 1960 (cited in Lange and Paige, 2003) stated that cultural immersion in foreign language education has been developing for decades. In the 21st century, standards for foreign languages listed cultural immersion as one of the five goals of learning a second language. In 2007, the Modern Language Association of America (MLA) reported the importance of teaching both language and culture, which proves that culture continues to be a crucial element in foreign language education.

Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to explain the role of cultural immersion in the teaching and acquiring of English as a second or foreign language. It is relevant to understand the impact that culture can provide to teachers in English Language Teaching (ELT) programs and how the experience of living in a country where the language is spoken helps in the classroom.

1.1 Rationale

My interest in the topic of cultural immersion started from an experience that my parents had when they were living in The United States of America. In the case of my mother, she is a non-native person who started to learn the language while she was working as a babysitter, and she started to experiment the cultural immersion like my father. In his case, he experimented with two languages, the first one was English and the second Korean.

When my mother started to work, her level of English was poor and therefore she could not understand her environment, so she started to listen to people and used repetition to try to interact and some people started to teach her vocabulary. In six months, her level was better; she was able to have small conversations and understand the language better; thus, she became more confident to share her knowledge.

In the case of my father, it was almost the same, but the language was Korean. This experience occurred when he started to work in a Korean restaurant. Korean and Mexican people do not have a language in common because the owners of the restaurant do not speak English or Spanish. It was necessary to adapt himself to the Korean language. At the beginning it was difficult for him to understand what was happening in his new environment, but his boss helped him. She tried to communicate with him with signs. Then, he paid special attention to the actions, started to relate the sounds with actions, and little by little he started to understand the language. In the first four weeks, he tried to understand the language, but when someone asked him to translate some words, it was difficult for him to do it. In two months, he started to create some sentences like a child. He explained that he could start to think and speak in the language because he was in contact with it all the time.

For that reason, I personally found it important to investigate the impact of this cultural immersion on English language teachers. This started when I identified the differences in attitudes between teachers who lived abroad and the ones who did not. Most of the time the difference depends on the experience of living abroad. Whether it is good or bad, it has an impact on the language and also on the classroom.

1.2 Location of research

The research was conducted in a public university located in one of the biggest cities in central Mexico. This university has an undergraduate program in English Language Teaching where students are trained to become English teachers. Students enroll in the program with an A2 level of English, and they must achieve the B2 level. The English Language Teaching program has five courses of English where students improve their level of the language. The program also includes subjects like Phonetics and

Phonology, Semantics and Pragmatics, and Language Acquisition among others to achieve a good level of the language and at the same time to have the tools necessary to become an English language teacher.

The participants of this study work in this public institution and all of them live abroad. This means that they were in constant contact with the language and their experience was different depending on the place where they were working and living.

1.3 Purpose

The priority of this research was to investigate the impact of cultural immersion on English language teachers and how this experience impacts their teaching in the classroom.

1.4 Aims

The aims of this investigation are the following:

To explore the effects of cultural immersion in English language teachers.

To analyze the advantages and disadvantages of cultural immersion in English language teachers.

1.5 Research questions

The research questions that lead this study are the following:

1. How has cultural immersion impacted English language teachers who work at an undergraduate program in English Language Teaching?
2. How has cultural immersion helped those teachers in their teaching practice?
3. What are the benefits and challenges of cultural immersion?

1.6 Significance of the study

Through this study, English language teachers and ELT students could become aware of the importance of cultural immersion. Cultural immersion can help improve

language skills and increase students' confidence in the classroom. As some researchers mention, cultural immersion can make teachers more empathic and have a better connection with their students.

At the same time, when students value different cultures, they become more interested in the language, which in the classroom to interact motivates them with native people in a real context. It occurs when the teacher who experimented with cultural immersion in the target language shares the experiences during the process and the new knowledge acquired. Learn in the classroom, but nothing compares with the real context, where it is necessary to put into practice all the knowledge acquired in the classroom. Consequently, it is important to understand the different kinds of learning processes and the theories that explain cultural immersion in second language acquisition.

1.7 Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter, the issue of this study was stated. The purpose and aims of the study were described. The reasons behind the study, the participants, and the context where this project took place were also explained. The next chapter will discuss the literature review of this research. Chapter III will describe the methodology used in this research including the method, the participants, the instruments, and the procedure that guided this project. In chapter IV, the research questions will be answered, and the results will be shown. Finally, in Chapter V, the implications of the research project, the limitations and recommendations for further research will be provided.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

The purpose of this research was to find out how cultural immersion can affect the teachers' experience in the classroom, not only the knowledge but also the motivation that helped in their teaching practice. This chapter includes a literature review that will help to understand the topic deeply. Therefore, first, the theories of language acquisition will be explained based on Lightwood and Spada (2013) research. Second, how the first and second languages are acquired accordingly to learning theories will be explained. At the same time, this chapter includes some of the most recent studies that are related to cultural immersion. These sections will help to understand how cultural immersion has impacted some participants and how this could be applied in the classroom for English teachers.

2.1 Language learning theories

To explain second language acquisition, it is necessary to take into account the theories that help to explain the process. Those theories will be explained by Lightbown and Spada (2013).

According to *Lightbown and Spada* (2013), the **Behaviourist Perspective** explains that learning could be guided by repetition. They also mention that the behaviorist theory explains that learning occurs through imitation, practice, reinforcement or feedback, and habit formation. In addition, they explain that the biggest influence of this was from the 1940s to the 1970s. At the same time, this theory was compared with the contrastive analysis hypothesis. This one mentioned that most of the errors produced in a second language result from the transfer to their first language. Larry Selinker (1972) mentioned that students need to receive feedback to recognize the difference between first and second language, this is to avoid the fossilization that occurs when the learners do not correct their mistakes and still commit the same error (Lightbown & Spada, 2013).

2.1.1 The innatist perspective Chomsky (1959), states that the innate knowledge of Universal Grammar (UG) permits the acquisition of the language of their environment, and this occurs during their development during the critical period. “Children are born with an innate ability that helps them to discover by themselves the language rules of a language they are exposed to” (Humaniora, 2019, cited in Lightbown & Spada 2013 p.15).

Jacquelyn Schachter and Robert Bley-Vroman in 1990 mentioned that UG could be an appropriate framework to understand the acquisition of a first language, but it does not explain the acquisition of a second language, specifically with learners who have passed the critical period.

Lightbown and Spada (2013) mentioned that some applications of second language acquisition influenced by Chomsky’s theory of first language acquisition were the Monitor Model. In the early 1970s, Krashen described his model in five hypotheses: the acquisition learning hypothesis, the monitor hypothesis, the natural order hypothesis, the comprehensible input hypothesis and the affective filter hypothesis. This model has been challenged by McLaughlin (1987 cited in Lightbown & Spada 2013) who mentioned that it is not possible to test Krashen’s hypothesis in empirical research. Nevertheless, his hypothesis, especially the comprehensive input hypothesis, has been successfully disseminated. Classroom research has confirmed that students make good progress through comprehensible input.

2.1.2 The cognitive perspective emphasizes the importance of memory, perception and attention (Lightbown & Spada 2013). The language is principally focused on decision making and problem-solving. This theory also compares the human mind with a computer for its capacities of storing. Paying attention is an essential part of the language that they are trying to learn or produce. And gradually through practice and new experiences, learners can process the new information easier and they become able to access it quickly (Lightbown & Spada 2013).

Language learning and most learning starts with declarative knowledge. This theory explains that through practice, declarative knowledge might become an ability to use knowledge. According to this, while learners practice a skill more, this becomes

automatized, (Anderson, 1995; DeKeyser, 1998, 2001, 2007 cited in Lightbown & Spada 2013).

2.1.3 The sociocultural perspective (Vygotsky, 1979) assumes that cognitive and language development emerged as a result of social interaction. This theory has also been compared to Krashen's interaction hypothesis because of the role of interlocutors. However, sociocultural theory is focused on the ways of learning as an effect of culture.

Vygotsky, argued "*The social dimension of consciousness is primary in time and in fact. The individual dimension of consciousness is derivative and secondary*" (Vygotsky, 1979, p. 30, cited in Scott & Palincsar, 2013). This perspective refers to the mental functions not only depending on social interaction, but also the structures and specific processes that could be a result of this interaction with society.

2.2 Cultural immersion

Immersion refers to the act of dipping something in a substance, completely covering; cultural refers to all the facts that conform to a group of people, sharing thoughts, beliefs, religion, language, traditions, music, etc. Therefore, cultural immersion means being immersed in the culture of a group or country, in this case in a country where the main idea is practicing the second language.

Immersion programs are programs in which a second language is taught via content-based instruction. People are involved in the culture of the second language and have contact with native people of the language that they want to learn. In this process, the learner understands contexts, beliefs, traditions, religion and many other aspects of the host place. Cultural immersion involves an experience in which the second language is a powerful tool to understand the new culture.

2.2.1 What is cultural immersion (CI)?

Cultural immersion has been defined by several authors. Lyster (2007) provided a very comprehensive definition of immersion:

Immersion is a form of bilingual education that aims for additive bilingualism by providing students with a sheltered classroom environment in which they received at least half or their subject-matter instruction through the medium of language that they are learning as a second, foreign, heritage, or indigenous language. In addition, they receive some instruction through the medium of the [majority language] in the community (Lyster 2007 cited in Cammarata and Tedick 2012 p. 252).

As Lyster (2007) mentioned before, immersion is a form of bilingual education.

Other authors differentiate cultural immersion from tourist curriculum:

“Cultural immersion focuses broadly on activities that engage students in meaningful direct interactions with a host culture” (Díaz-Lázaro & Cohen 2001; Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke, 2010) differentiated from what might be termed a ‘tourist curriculum’ that focuses on such cultural artifacts as food, clothing, or other objects that could lend themselves to stereotyping” (Derman-Sparks, 1989, cited in Hubbard & Rexeisen 2020, p.2).

In addition, Pope-Davis et al. (1997) mentioned that experiences in cultural immersion require the participants to interact with a community different from their own that promotes counselor growth (cited in Delgado, Cook, Avrus & Bonha, 2013). “It is believed that the interpersonal contact that occurs during the immersion experience promotes affective and behavioral growth in counseling students and simultaneously provides students with insight into the lives of diverse communities” (Canfield et al., 2009; Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke, 2010 cited in Delgado, Cook, Avrus & Bonha, 2013 p.192).

At the same time “Immersion is not as much a method of second language teaching as it is a pedagogical approach that promotes second language learning” (Genesee, 1985, p.541). Most of the programs of immersion are designed to create conditions similar to first language acquisition. “Second language learning through immersion also differs from other methods of second language instruction insofar as teaching and learning are not as much grammar driven as they are proficiency-driven, that is, they proceed according to the learners' real communication needs in the classroom” (Genesee, 1985, p.542).

In addition, Lear and About (2008, cited in Hubbard & Rexeisen, 2020) mentioned that cultural immersion can be found in programs where the purpose is to help the student to become successful using the language to communicate for real purposes. According to Forum on education Abroad Glossary (2017, cited in Hubbard & Rexeisen, 2020) most of

those programs have a duration of 8 weeks or less. They produce a significant impact in the intellectual and personal life of students (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004; Medina-Lopez-Portillo 2004, cited in Hubbard & Reixeis, 2020). Furthermore, Dwyer (2004, cited in Hubbard & Reixeis, 2020) found out that students who are involved in long term programs have a stronger impact and at the same time explains that this impact depends on the quality of the program.

It is known that in each country there are people who are non-native speakers; they can move to other countries for work or personal reasons. So, that is why many countries around the world have implemented language immersion programs. These programs have many variations, and are described with the terms One-way, Two-way, and indigenous immersion, partial/total, early/late, and 50:50/ 90:10 (Fortune & Tedick, 2008, cited in Cammarata & Tedick, 2012 p.251). They are geared toward responding to a wide variety of societal challenges that may range from repairing injustices committed in the past as a result of colonization, as in the case of indigenous language immersion, to responding to needs stemming from the metamorphosis of societies into multiethnic, multicultural, and multilingual entities that must find ways to cohabitate and collaborate with each other.

One-way foreign language immersion (OWI) programs began in Canada with the St. Lambert experiment in 1965. “They are designed for a language majority (e.g., English-speaking) . . . , but one-way immersion classrooms are populated by learners who may not share the same home language though they often know the majority language of the community” (Dagenais, 2008; Swain & Lapkin, 2005 cited in Cammarata & Tedick, 2012, p.252). Genesee, (2008) states that originating in the United States, the Two-way bilingual immersion (TWI) programs “are an amalgam of one-way immersion programs for majority language students and developmental bilingual programs for minority language students. The principal aims of both one-way and two-ways programs are to promote additive bilingualism and biliteracy, academic achievement, and intercultural understanding” (cited in Cammarata & Tedick, 2012, p.252).

2.2.2 Reasons for cultural immersion

Smolcic and Katunich (2017) mentioned that, as education in schools becomes more culturally and linguistically diverse, the necessity of teachers who possess the skill and understanding to work across cultures increases. For those reasons, teachers and educators face the challenge to inspire other teachers with the confidence and the abilities to teach in today's classrooms (Castro, 2010, cited in Smolcic & Katunich 2017).

King, Borders and Jones (2020) in their investigation called *Developmental Pathways of cultural immersion: Motivations, Processes and Outcomes* invited all master's degree students (N=32) completing a first semester *Counseling Diverse Population* course to participate. Students were enrolled in an accredited counselor education program which offered a doctoral degree in counselor education and master's degrees in clinical mental health, couple and family, and school counseling. Participants of this study responded to qualitative instruments and demographic questions and granted access to three journal entries completed for the MAP (Multicultural Action Project) assignment. Students mentioned some reasons for cultural immersion:

Lack of knowledge/ experience of other cultural groups: Students wanted to have the experience of cultural immersion because they described that they had lack of knowledge of other cultures. For example, a student explained "I have had the blessing of experiencing many different populations and being pushed out of my comfort zone quite frequently." Other participants mentioned how ignorant they were of the traditions and values of Asian people.

Stereotypes/ biases: Some students wanted to have a cultural immersion because they wanted to break the stereotypes that they had about certain groups of people. For example, a student said "I heard the stereotype about black men was that they were either sexualized or villainized.... It was something I wanted to check for my own thinking." In addition, some students mentioned the following: "It's hard to acknowledge my bias, because I know it doesn't come from a rational place at all. Nonetheless, it's still there and I really need to confront it" (referring to discomfort and shame around avoiding people with disabilities).

Personal reasons for choosing population: Students had personal interest or curiosity and previous experiences also motivated students to select a CI population. The terms varied in terms of depth. For example, a student wanted to learn more about LGBTQ+ identities related with an experience in her own family's struggle to accept her cousin's transition from female to male in light of their conservative Christian worldwide. Another student who also immersed herself in this population explained how her frustration as a black woman hearing messages that "gay is the new Black" or comments that racism and homophobia are equivalent oppressions "clouded my ability to empathize". "In both cases, students described their own positionality, how CI shaped their previous interactions with this cultural group and how it motivated their desire to change" (cited in King, Borders & Jones 2020, p.136).

Professional reason for choosing population: Some students explained how growth in multicultural and social justice counseling competence motivates the decision of an immersion. For example, one school counseling student noted the importance of effectively working with immigrants. Some students identified systemic issues facing their identified population (e.g., rise in discrimination toward Muslims).

The results of this study show how important CI is in any field of study. In foreign language acquisition, cultural immersion is key to practice not only the language where it is spoken, but also to understand other cultures. The 21st century standards for foreign languages listed culture as one of the five goals of learning a second language. Those goals are communication, culture, connections and communities. Lear and Abbott (2008) mentioned that "to comply with these standards, the successful student needs to use the language to communicate for real purposes, understand multicultural and global issues, connect with other disciplines and acquire new knowledge, make comparisons with their own language and culture and participate in multilingual communities" (Lear & Abbott 2008, p.77).

Cultural immersion is relevant for ELT students since they will become English teachers. For them, CI could be a process of "awakening" that can guide them toward reshaping their own professional identity (Cammarata & Tedick 2012). "Teachers encourage the learners to think about how to use the language according to the context

when comparing norms across languages and cultures and consider alternative interpretations concerning L2 and L1" (Liddicot & Scarino, 2013, cited in Solodka, Filatova, Hinkevych & Spanatiy 2021 p.85).

2.2.3 Benefits and Outcomes

Some of the benefits of immersion programs have been long empirically documented. "A large-scale studies and meta-analyses of program effectiveness research have revealed two-way immersion (TWI) to be the most effective program model for language minority learners" (Collier & Thomas, 2004; Lindholm- Leary & Borsato, 2006; Rolstad, Mahoney, & Glass, 2005; Slavin & Cheung, 2005; Thomas & Collier, 1997, 2002, cited in Cammarata & Tedick, 2012, p.253). In general, research has shown that "language minority learners in TWI (typically Spanish speakers but speakers of other languages, as well) outperform *over the long term* their peers who are educated only through the medium of English" (e.g., Lindholm- Leary, 2001; Thomas & Collier, 1997,2002, cited in Cammarata & Tedick, 2012, p.253).

Different studies have shown that both language minority and majority learners achieve academically on a par with peers schooled in English and demonstrate high levels of academic achievement in the respective L2s (cited in Cammarata & Tedick, 2012). Students who experience an immersion program, perform better in the immersion language. English-speaking immersion students of various academic abilities, regardless of ethnic or socioeconomic backgrounds are capable of achieving high levels of functional proficiency in the immersion language while at the same time achieving academically as well as or better than non-immersion peers on standardized tests administered in English (Caldas & Boudreaux, 1999; Genesee, 1987, 2004; Holobow, Genesee & Lambert, 1991, Krueger, 2001; Lambert & Tuckers, 1972, Slaughter, 1997; Swain & Lapkin, 1982; Turnbull, Lapkin, & Hart, 2001, cited in Cammarata & Tedick, 2012, p.253).

In this section, the benefits of cultural immersion that have been analyzed in three different studies are explained below:

Firstly, Wiest in 1998 gave to her students an assignment called *Cultural immersion project*. The students who carried out the project were from the University of Nevada, Reno. Students participated in an unfamiliar culture for a minimum of 1 hour and then speculated how what they had learned could apply to classroom teaching. In this project, three classes of students (86 total) participated, the students chose an experience in a distinctive culture different from their own. Some of the benefits are the following:

New Information About Specific Cultures: Students acquired new information about the culture where they participated, new knowledge about artifacts, customs, and attitudes that are and are not representative for a group. For example, “a female at an African American Church became aware of different styles of worshipping. Because the African Americans in the church she attended were more vocal and more bodily involved than worshippers she had previously attended, *she came to realize that everyone does not have to be silent to worship God*” (p. 360).

Challenged Beliefs and Understandings The newly acquired cultural knowledge helped dispel stereotypes, misconceptions, and fears they had about the group they visited. This experience of cultural immersion impacted some students. For example, a man who referred to seeing gay people dancing and kissing at a gay bar said, “this was the first time I have engaged in this culture and I had no schema to place in it” (p. 361). Another case was about two women who attended a Jewish church. They noted that even a sense of humor seemed to be culturally based. A joke the rabbi made set the entire congregation laughing, but neither of them got the joke.

Enhanced Personal and Professional Skills: The outcomes of this experience include enhanced ability to look at a situation from another’s perspective and acquired or increased the empathy for feelings of people when they are not in their familiar or dominant culture. For example, a female who attended a Black church mentioned “I feel this experience truly opened my eyes to what it must feel like for the minority cultures”. “A male student said he gained understanding of the desire to be with others like oneself” (p. 361). The students gained heightened awareness of common humanity. For instance, “a man who spent an evening with the entire family of a Mexican American acquaintance concluded that he was more like them in terms of values, work ethic, and other personal

characteristics than many White people he knows” (p. 361). “Several students described how their hearts thumped and anxiety rose as their experience drew near and they finally entered into it” (p. 362).

Secondly, Zhao, Meyers and Meyers (2009) in their study *Cross-cultural immersion in China to preparing pre-service elementary teachers to work with diverse student populations in the United States*, investigated cross-cultural immersion in China to prepare pre-service teachers to work with a diverse population of students in the United States. The main purpose of this study was to “investigate the pre-service teachers’ perceptions of their overseas student teaching and how this experience might affect their future teaching in culturally diverse school settings in the United States, specifically in regard to their continuing development of a culturally responsive pedagogy” (p. 298). The participants of this study were ten undergraduate pre-service elementary education student teachers, an Asia American, an African American and eight Caucasians between 21 to 55 years old. When they returned to the United States, they started to share stories of cross-cultural immersion programs in China with their American elementary pupils and mentor teachers.

The findings showed that student teaching experience in China had a notable impact on the participants, for example, the aspect of their understanding of a different culture and ways of working with non-English speaking students. “Five themes emerged from the data analysis: understanding and respecting different cultures; developing empathy with and for second-language learners, exchanging teaching strategies and resources; reflecting on professional and personal growth; and initiating a proactive stance as culturally responsive change agents” (p. 302). In the same way, the findings from this study indicate that student teachers perceived this cross-cultural immersion experience in China as extremely beneficial to their future teaching career, noting that they gained knowledge, skills and insights as a result of their participation (). The benefits the participants mentioned in Zhao, Meyers and Meyers’ investigation are explained below:

Understanding and respecting different cultures: The predominant theme that emerged from the data analysis was participants’ new understanding and respect for a culture with which they were unfamiliar. “The findings affirm the central tenet of culturally relevant practice, which underscores the need for educators to not only recognize but also

infuse students' cultural connections within the classroom environment" (Ladson-Billings, 1994; 1995, cited in Zhao et al. 2009, p.303). Nevertheless, researchers learned that transformation was slow to develop, even though, prior to the exchange experience, all participants stated on their applications and pre-trip interviews that they expected to grow by becoming more open and socially aware. Furthermore, participants considered their cultural immersion experience as a life-turning point, believing that the experience changed their way of thinking about their own culture, a dominant culture, and other cultures. To them, the dominant culture, literally the predominantly white Western culture, no longer meant the right way, not the only way.

Although participants encountered language barriers and were exposed to a new environment, participants were grateful that they were treated well, and their American culture was highly respected. It is likely that respect helped them become more appreciative of the host country culture. "Additionally, many participants felt that cultural immersion in another country gave them the opportunity to rethink racial issues existing in the United States, and it freed them from some of the challenges they had faced at home in the United States" (Zhao et al. 2009, p. 305). The participants compared and contrasted their personal and professional cultural experiences in China with those experiences at home. For a brief four-week time period, participants examined first-hand the various meanings of being "the other". They reflected that often, being "the other" involves being invisible.

Developing empathy with and for second-language learners: This first-hand experience in China enabled participants to develop an empathetic disposition toward no-English speaking students. They could now picture, at least a snapshot, what it was like to walk in their shoes. Thus, each of the students' teachers acknowledge that they were determined to make extra efforts to establish a supportive classroom community that would embrace students of different cultures. Several pre-service teachers report a deeper understanding and stronger connection to second-language learners because of their experiences in China. Many of the participants went back to their school placements in the United States upon their return from China, and they approached students, teaching, interactions and life in general differently because of their overseas teaching experience. They seemed to see things through a new, wider cultural lens.

Exchanging teaching strategies and resources: “Large class sizes and lack of teaching resources in China were huge challenges for the participants. Nevertheless, this situation forced them not only to be creative and flexible in teaching, but also to learn how to collaborate and share teaching ideas and materials. This collaboration was ongoing whenever the researcher visited the pre-service teachers’ school offices” (p.307). The participants developed partnerships with their Chinese counterparts. They reported their excitement of collaborating not only with their American peers but also with the Chinese teachers, whether inside the classroom, during roundtable discussions or by observing teaching demonstrations. Learning was reciprocated; American teachers and Chinese teachers shared and gained valuable teaching ideas from one another. Nearly all of the participants in this study believed that they developed a deeper understanding of and new ways of teaching English language learners while working with Chinese teachers and students, which perhaps is one of the most important outcomes of their four-week immersion experience in China.

Reflecting on professional and personal growth: As the groups of ten student teachers recognized, these activities broadened participants’ minds and gave them opportunities to grow both personally and professionally. Participants unanimously reported that they became better people and better teachers because of this overseas experience. This experience gave the participants the opportunity and the confidence to collaborate with professionals in the host country.

Initiating a proactive stance as culturally responsive change agents: Almost all of the participants expressed that they learned profoundly from their host families about Chinese families, traditional and modern Chinese culture, perceptions of American people, and about the world. All participants acknowledge their own personal growth and development. However, close examination of the data sets suggested that those participants who shared their thoughts, questions and time with their host families, collaborated with teaching colleagues, and explored the many different components of Chinese culture gained more than those who were less willing to do so. They were proactive in sharing and obtaining information and were eager to immerse themselves more fully into Chinese culture (p.312).

“The findings from this study indicated that student teachers perceived this cross-cultural immersion experience in China as extremely beneficial to their future teaching career, noting that they gained knowledge, skills and insights as a result of their participation” (p. 312).

Thirdly, King, Borders and Jones (2020) explained other benefits and outcomes in their study.

New knowledge/ information: During the immersion experience, the students gain more knowledge and new information about the population. This knowledge was stated as “takeaways” or more firm understanding from across the experience and following exposure to new lifestyles and information. They learn concepts related to the language and costumes related to traditions of each population. Students can also be exposed to common issues: beauty standards, language barriers or for example, they develop understanding of practices associated with each population. For example, the Day of the Dead involves merging of indigenous Mexican and Catholic Traditions.

Personal growth: This category captured students arriving at a new understanding of themselves, their worldwide, or their privileges relative to other people. Some students identified how their previous gaps, discomfort, or bias were related to fears that they could not communicate or establish communication with group members. In other cases, they reflected on their strategies for managing discomfort towards the unknown.

Many students described self-examination and developing understanding of their personal privilege, noting how their culture being represented or catered to was something they “take for granted.” These different expressions show how students’ primary identity was privileged or marginalized:

As a white person, who has the luxury of experiencing this discomfort [of standing out] less frequently than those minority races, I tried to hold onto what I felt and allow that experience to do its work on my cultural-conscious[ness] and empathy for others” (King, Borders & Jones, 2020 p.140).

In contrast, a black student stated the following:

I was feeling nervous and uncomfortable because I was as a member of the majority, coming into a space that a minority group created for themselves. As a cisgender heterosexual woman, I am the one

in a privileged position coming into a space that was not created for me... rightfully so” (King, Borders & Jones, 2020 p.140).

This student mentioned, “empathy toward LGBTQ+ people stemmed from understanding that it is important to have spaces where marginalized group members can filter out expectations from dominant groups members” (p.140). In addition, this student experienced “dissonance” seeing herself as holding a privileged identity status in this context, since in many other contexts her Black identity is primarily marginalized by others (e.g., she is studying in a predominantly White institution).

New perspectives on others: In this part, students challenged the ideas they initially carried about others, including fears, discomfort, and biases. Occasionally, this category overlapped with the personal growth category, given insight about oneself had implications for how one interacted with or perceived others and vice versa. A student had “a growing understanding of how intimidating it must be for families to come to a completely different country with a vastly different language and culture from their home country”. Students also explained how developing new perspectives about others created connections. For instance, the overlap between Latinx Dia de los Muertos and Jewish Shiva. A student mentioned: “It is so wonderful how different cultures can be so similar in their traditions” (p.140).

Most of the time when students challenged themselves around biases, they made way for new, perhaps unexpected, experiences with group members. This new set of stories of cultural group members allowed for an expanded sense of within-group diversity, as well as an appreciation for contextual factors impacting daily life. “These takeaways enable students to see differences between themselves and others as important yet less threatening and to feel gratitude for how they were welcomed” (p.142).

Intentions for the future / personal goals: “Students also explored how they could continue to pursue connections with people beyond their social location and build capacity for allyship” (p. 142). A student mentioned: “I feel like I’ve come to a place of awareness where I can make more intentional and conscious decisions about challenging my biases and acknowledging gaps in my understanding” (p. 143). It seems that the intention for the future was to become more aware of taking decisions.

Finally, another study about cultural immersion benefits was carried by Smolcic and Katunich (2017) called *A review of the research into cultural immersion field experience for teachers*. They analyzed 22 studies reporting empirical data about their experiences during cultural immersion, both international and domestic. Those studies were categorized in four brand program types for the development of teachers interculturality: 1) *Stand-alone course or professional development program*, 2) *International study tour*, 3) *Overseas student teaching* and 4) *Cultural immersion programs and field experience*. The researchers documented how these activities help teachers to work effectively with the culturally and linguistically diverse student population.

Stand-alone course or professional development programs were a component part of a teacher preparation program or targeted professional development for in-service teachers with focus on intercultural learning. The course, sometimes, integrated a guided interaction with culturally different population, like tutoring adult immigrants or interacting with international university students or immigrant families (Dunn, Kirova, Cooley, & Ogilvie, 2009; He & Cooper, 2009; He, 2013; Keengwe, 2010, cited in Smolcic and Katunich p.50, 2017). Some teachers looked reflectively at their beliefs, practices with culturally and linguistically diverse population through readings, discussion, or problem-solving with actual classroom scenario (DeJaeghere & Cao, 2009; Reidel & Draper, 2013, cited in Smolcic and Katunich p.50, 2017).

International study tours were programs focused on developing intercultural awareness (Burton, 2011; Gleeson & Tait, 2012; Wernicke, 2010, cited in Smolcic and Katunich p.50, 2017). Those programs involve travel to different sites, focused learning about the country's society, history, culture, and sometimes, it offers discipline-specific, for example: methods of teaching the English language in the schools of that country (Smolcic and Katunich p.51, 2017). *Overseas student teaching* were programs students completed as part of their student teaching requirement, typically in an international school which often includes students from different countries. The students may not be teaching in their certification areas; in some cases, student-teachers taught English in an additional area. Finally, *Cultural immersion programs and field experience* tried to immerse program participants in a different cultural context. Participants often lived in a homestay situation

and had some type of teaching or assisting teacher role in schools and classrooms (Smolcic and Katunich p.51, 2017).

In these programs, Smolcic and Katunich (2017) synthesized the primary intercultural learning objectives for teachers: *Building knowledge of culture, Build awareness of the role of culture in teaching school structures, and educational systems, Developing cultural and societal self-awareness, Create a Sociopolitical awareness and a critical consciousness, Understand the process of second language learning and Personal growth*. Those outcomes of intercultural learning are explained below:

Building knowledge of culture: One of the clear outcomes of cultural immersion experience is the development of culture-general knowledge, awareness of specific ways of being and similarities between cultural groups. “As a component of cultural competence, some fundamental knowledge about culture and how culture operates is crucial for teachers to demonstrate a cultural competency necessary for culturally responsive teaching” (Smolcic and Katunich p.51, 2017). An outcome concerning building fundamental knowledge of culture is that conceptualizations about culture can be developed through connecting personal experiences of immersion with theory and concepts (Addleman, Nava, Cevallos, Brazo, & Dixon, 2014; Dantas, 2007; Malewski et al., 2012; Phillion et al., 2009; Zhao et al., 2009, cited in Smolcic and Katunich p.52, 2017). A good example is Addleman et al. (2014) used ‘debriefing circles’ “with a group of students during the time abroad to create a dialogue structure that encouraged students to process incidents of cultural disequilibrium without judgment and allowed the group to analyze their cultural and intellectual bias (cited in Smolcic and Katunich p.52, 2017).

Build awareness of the role of culture in teaching school structures and educational systems: This section can be described as a deeper awareness of how knowledge of culture to educational systems, schools, classrooms and teaching practices have to be applied. “ An awareness of culture in schooling can also be built by an exploration of cross-cultural differences in teaching styles, schooling norms, and learning expectations between the host and home countries (Causey, Thomas, & Armento, 2000;Dantas, 2007; Hamel, Chikamori, Ono, & Williams, 2010; Lee,2009; Malewski & Phillion, 2009; Malewski et al., 2012; Nero,2009; Pence & Macgillivray, 2008; Tang &

Choi, 2004; Willard Holt, 2001; Zhao et al., 2009 cited in Smolcic and Katunich p.52, 2017). Lee (2009 cited in Smolcic and Katunich p.52, 2017) concludes that seeing and interacting in a foreign classroom environment gave teachers a window where they could look more deeply at their own educational context and question the ways that education unfolds in schools and classrooms at home.

Developing cultural and societal self-awareness: A crucial outcome for immersion programs is to enable the participants to place themselves in a cultural environment where they can begin to understand cultural differences vis-a-vis their own. “In a number of programs this self-awareness arises through self-reflection that leads to a critique or re-examination of one’s own beliefs, in particular cultural stereotypes that may have been unexamined (Addleman et al., 2014; Causey et al.,2000; Domangue & Lee, 2008; Lee, 2009; Malewski et al., 2012; Tang & Choi, 2004, cited in Smolcic and Katunich p. 52, 2017).

Create a sociopolitical awareness and critical consciousness The studies demonstrate that with the participation in cultural immersion experiences, the participant develops new socio-political awareness and consciousness. “For example, participants gain a better and more concrete understanding of how recognize privilege related to class, race, ethnicity, or gender (Domangue & Lee, 2008; Malewski & Phillion,2009; Phillion et al., 2009 cited in Smolcic and Katunich p. 53, 2017). “This understanding may prompt examination on one’s own stereotypes and prejudices” (Phillion et al., 2009, cited in Smolcic and Katunich p.53, 2017). Or “it may reinforce stereotypes based on a limited experience in the host culture” (Marx & Pray, 2011; Santamaria et al., 2009, cited in Smolcic and Katunich p.53, 2017).

Understand the process of Second Language Learning: One crucial and important outcome for immersion experiences is the understanding of second language acquisition and learning. To better understand this process, prospective and practicing teachers are able to both better scaffold content for linguistically diverse learners and support emerging bilingual learners in their language learning. “A more concrete outcome however, may be the opportunity for participants to develop their own L2 proficiency and confidence in L2 communication in an immerse context” (Marx & Pray, 2011; Nero, 2009; Olmedo &

Harbon, 2010, cited in Smolcic and Katunich p.53, 2017). “Several studies show that empathy arises when participants find themselves in the position of a “linguistic other” in the immersion setting ((Palmer & Menard-Warwick, 2012; Phillion et al., 2009; Trilokekar & Kukar, 2011, cited in Smolcic and Katunich p.53, 2017). “Indeed, this empathy can help move the teacher participants towards more linguistically and culturally responsive modes of language support and pedagogy, such encouraging learners to draw on L1 resources and recognizing beneficial use of the L1 in learning a new language (Pray & Marx, 2010, cited in Smolcic and Katunich p.53, 2017).

Personal growth: Another important key that was pointed was personal growth. This can be related to intercultural and global competence, in that these experiences lead to deepened interest in international teaching and/ or travel (Johnson & Battalio, 2008; Nero, 2009; Pence & Macgillivray, 2008; Willard-Holt, 2001, cited in Smolcic and Katunich, 2017). “In other cases, this personal growth may manifest as a reported increase in qualities such as self-confidence, independence, risk-taking, and maturity” (Lee, 2009; Miller & Gonzalez, 2010; Pence & Macgillivray, 2008; Tang & Choi, 2004; Trilokekar & Kukar, 2011; Willard-Holt, 2001, cited in Smolcic and Katunich p.53, 2017).

2.2.3.1 Benefits for pre-service English teachers

Nieto (2006) mentioned that several authors have urged the utilization of experiential learning in teachers’ education, often as a means of increasing cultural sensitivity. Baker (1989) believed that experiential learning is beneficial because students learn better when thinking, feeling and doing are all combined (cited in Nieto, 2006). Bergen (1989) stated that “no student teacher should be considered fully qualified for teaching until she or he has spent the equivalent of one semester involved in a foreign culture” (cited in Nieto 2006, p.76). Wilson (1982) believed that “Cross-cultural experiential learning should be a component of every teacher education program” (p. 184, cited in Nieto 2006, p.76).

Nieto (2006) mentions that for some years several professors at San Diego State University have been using a cultural immersion activity called Cultural Plunge. He continues explaining that they have used this activity in a sociology immersion program

(Gillete, 1990), in counselor education (Cook, 1990; Malcolm, 1990) and most recently, in teacher education.

A cultural plunge is individual exposure to persons or groups markedly different in culture, ethnicity, language, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and physical exceptionality. This cultural plunge has four major objectives which are stated in the course syllabus: (a) to have direct contact with people who are culturally different from oneself in real-life setting which represents the target group's "turf"; (b) to gain insights into circumstances and characteristics of the focal community; (c) to experience what it is to be very different from most of the people one is around, and (d) to gain insight into one's values, biases and effective responses.

Therefore, it seems that for several decades, immersion has been a relevant topic in different areas of knowledge. In the area of English Language Teaching, having the experience of immersion programs is relevant. Bergen (1989) pointed out "no student teacher should be considered fully qualified for teaching until she or he has spent the equivalent of one semester involved in a foreign culture" (cited in Nieto 2006, p.76). In this case a direct interaction with a foreign culture and language could improve the teacher's experience and knowledge.

Ference (2006) mentioned that the cross-cultural experiences in teacher education are an essential part of multicultural education because they allow preservice teachers to examine their world view and also develop culturally sensitive dispositions critical for teaching in our diverse society. The article described how a college has successfully maintained a cross-cultural program for all education students since 1999. "Now with the diversity of school populations increasing at a rate faster than ever before, it is important that preservice teachers develop culturally sensitive dispositions if they are to be effective teachers" (Ference, p. 12, 2006).

The research has shown that effective cross-cultural experiences can lead to personal development, cultural understanding and sensitivity, and openness to cultural diversity (Wilson, 2001, cited in Ference, p. 12, 2006). The cross-cultural program at Berry College began when the teacher education curriculum was restructured in 1999. The

restructure added the English for Speakers of Other Language (ESOL) endorsement program. In this program 54 students participated, 27 (23 female, 4 male) went to Dalton and 27 (22 female, 5 male) went to Italy. Some experiences of the activities such as Pre-trip seminars were required to attend at least six 90-minute pre-trip orientation seminars. These pre seminars are essential for successful experience because instructors can help students to confront their biases and stereotypes with case studies and simulations.

In the case of Dalton, students were placed in groups of four with Latin host families, the families shared their culture with the students and told stories about their lives and coming to America. On the contrary in Italy, students did not live with host families but used a hotel as their home base in Florence, traveling to Rome, Tuscany, and Assisi. The results from the students' journal entries, final papers and interviews showed that this cultural immersion had affected them in a substantial way. Some results are explained below.

Being the outsider: "Students in both immersions experienced feeling like an outsider and were often out of their comfort zone" (p. 16). Many of the students described feeling uncomfortable and this feeling helped them relate to the immigrants. This experience increased feelings of empathy for those students who will be in their future classroom. Some students had feelings of empathy for those who will be in their future classroom. Some students' opinions of both experiences are shown below:

Dalton: An experience that caused me to feel like an outsider occurred at 7-years-old Raphita's soccer game. When we showed up, we noticed that we were only white people there, everyone was Latino. I felt like everyone was looking at us and wondering why we were there. This experience definitely was an eye opener in understanding how minorities feel among us (p.16).

Italy: Being where was the minority and the different one was so refreshing to me and it forced me to do things that may not have been specially easy or comfortable, but that is what made this trip for me (p.16).

Dalton: I felt completely out of my element. After a few days, I did in fact become homesick for not only my family and friends but also simply a familiar environment. I actually got physically sick one night. The dramatic change of environment proved to be too much in just two weeks. I got only a glimpse of the overwhelming experience of Latino immigrants' transition into American culture (p. 16).

Education experiences: Students in both situations were able to observe different education experiences. In the case of Italy, students were exposed to Montessori, Roots and

Shoots and Italian education. In Dalton, students experienced different kinds of schooling for new immigrants. These experiences opened students' minds to the variety of education programs available for students of other cultures and languages. By observing some situations where ESOL students sat in the back, some students became determined to change those types of situations in their own classroom. Some students said the following:

Italy: By observing both the Montessori school and regular public schools while in Italy, I have developed new ideas about my own future teaching methods. I feel that more hands-on activities for American students will benefit their learning process. I plan to emphasize the importance of art and creativity in all the subjects I teach.

Italy: Italian education emphasized the importance of allowing children freedom to explore the world and learn at their own pace. Students are not compared to one another.

Dalton: Observing different types of educational experiences allowed us to see beyond our own limited experiences. Since most people in our group were only familiar with the typical American school, we were able to consider other viable options. The changing demographic of America requires that we study ways to best educate all children including those whose first language is not English.

Culture: In both Italy and Dalton experiences, the students learned about a culture different from their own. Students were able to learn about family, relationships, traditions, and students' roles. At the same time, they learned to accept without judgment different ways of life. "In both Italy and Dalton, our preservice teachers came to understand individuals with a culture, as well as to understand the culture of a group of people. Our students' cross-cultural competence was enhanced by comparing and contrasting ways in which cultures are similar and different" (p.18).

Language immersion and communication problems: "Immersion in a culture different in a culture different from one's own is made even more difficult when the language is different as well. Students find out how hard it is to communicate when they don't speak the language" (p.18). In both cases, Dalton and Italy developed strategies that would help them to communicate and became aware of the stress induced by not understanding the language. A student mentioned the following:

Italy: It amazed me how much body language, facial expressions and tones helped me communicate. I will definitely be able to use these methods in my classroom.

personal development: “Students in both immersions believed they grew as people and the experience will influence their future teaching” (p. 19). After the experience they believe this experience as an essential part of their teacher training as well as their personal growth. Students pointed out the following:

Dalton: I believe that I have grown so much personally and feel better equipped to serve my future ESOL students as well as their communities. Because I had created stereotypes about my family that were proven wrong, I’ve realized that stereotypes should be avoided. I realized that each child has different background experiences, whether it’s cultural or economic (p.19).

Italy: I think that the culmination of all these experiences will benefit my future teaching, especially when it comes to recognizing cultural differences. I feel as if I am now better qualified to take on the world in general, and especially the classroom. In Italy, I felt that the world did not seem so big. Hopefully, I will be able to communicate that to my students.

During the immersion students must build trust and mutual respect. The experience of immersion should include planning and reflecting as well as physical, cognitive and emotional engagement of the student with the host culture (FERENCE, 2006).

2.2.4 Learning Processes

King, Borders and Jones (2020) mentioned that during the process, students develop cultural self-awareness, knowledge, and empathy for the experience of being “other” (Barden & Cashwell, 2013; DeRico & Sciarra, 2005; Shanoonhouse et al., 2015, cited in King, Borders & Jones, 2020). During cultural immersion experiences, “students explored an event, whether internal or external, and its impact on their thoughts, feelings and behaviors” (King, Borders & Jones, 2020 p.129). They had some learning processes:

Preconceptions/expectations about population: Part of students’ preparation to enter the immersion activity or environment seemed to involve reflection about what they might encounter in their chosen population. A mixture of nervousness and excitement often accompanied students imagining what it would be like to enter a new environment or interact with new people unknown to them. As a student mentioned:

As I went into the experience... I was nervous because I wasn’t sure what to expect... I was excited because I want to learn and grow as a counselor and person... My religious background always told me that it was wrong to be transgender, and I believed that (p.136).

At the same time, students' feelings of nervousness and worry differed in how pointed or vague they were, nervous for new experiences vs nervous to use incorrect pronouns or gendered language (King, Borders & Jones, 2020).

Exposure to new information/ ideas / lifestyles: This part represents students' reaction to new content, or they represent their efforts to consolidate new knowledge about the population that they selected for immersion. Sometimes, the new ideas marked similarities that students shared with the groups. In other cases, the new information contrasted with the students' lifestyle or perspective.

A student made a comment about her time at a pride festival:

Being around people where gender norms and objectification are not accepted or expected evoked positive emotions in me due to my upbringing placing a large emphasis on modesty and shame around sexuality. Beyond what I could concretely see with my eyes, there was freedom that existed at this event that I rarely see. It was contagious (p.137)

In the opportunity of gaining exposure to new ideas/ lifestyles/ information, students often made comparisons to their preconceptions on their own worldviews in order to begin synthesizing the experience (King, Borders & Jones, 2020).

Interaction with others: Students' engagement with people at the event or setting constituted the largest key learning process category. The interaction included direct conversation, the student's expectations about how others perceived them, or evaluation of an interaction. These kinds of statements differed in their valence, with some being quite positive, others negative, and some in between. As soon as students immersed themselves in the new environment, they began to interpret the behaviors (verbal and nonverbal) of people around them. A Latin grocer and lunch counter explained:

I walked into the building and immediately identified my discomfort at being in the ethnic minority... did my best to hide this truth from those around me... I reminded myself that I had no reason to be uncomfortable" (p.138).

Some students expressed new empathy for members of minority groups and responded to thoughts they would reject. "The process of acclimating to the environment by letting discomfort pass and seeking interactions to feel included was repeated in many students' journals" (p.138).

At the same time, interactions with others promote appreciation for within-group diversity. For example, a student immersing with Asian people noted the significance of home country to variations in language. Another student who immersed himself in Muslim culture was exposed to variation in how different the Muslim interpretation was and wore (or did not wear) the *hijab* (covering), “what resulted in an appreciation for diversity and choice within a cultural group, as opposed to her initial view of Muslim women as a static, monolithic group” (p.138).

Reflections/internal dialogues: Students shared thoughts about what they observed and felt in a stream of consciousness fashion; an aspect of the journals that appeared to help students assign meaning to their experiences. In other words, the students described how they came to understand what they were seeing and doing. One student described:

I felt vulnerable with this group of strangers, these unfamiliar practices, and the silence in the room that felt so loud. And because of these feelings within myself, I started making assumptions about other people as a way to distract from my own uncomfortability.

In addition, students’ internal monologues during CI also served as probes to deepen self-awareness. As one student approached an event for transgender-identified people, she noticed feelings of embarrassment and worry surface.

2.2.5 Challenges of Cultural immersion

Cultural immersion is an experience that can be difficult for some students because they could face customs, traditions, among other events that are not familiar. “Cultural immersion (CI) challenges students to enter unfamiliar contexts and take seriously the worldviews and lifestyles of other populations” (Pope-Davis et al., 1997; Prosek & Michel, 2016, cited in King, Borders & Jones, 2020). In their study, King, Borders and Jones (2020) found out that their participants faced some challenges with CI:

Anticipatory feelings: Students mentioned feelings of discomfort, uncertainty, and anxiety to interact with the population as motivators. Students’ learning goal was broadly “stretch themselves beyond their “comfort zone,” which often meant pushing past fears that they would be excluded, judged, or not accepted by the group” (cited in King, Borders & Jones, 2020 p.135).

Preconceptions/ expectations about population: Part of students' preparation to enter the immersion environment involves reflection about what they might encounter. A mixture of nervousness and excitement often accompanies students, imagining what it would be like to interact with people unknown to them. For example, a student mentioned: "As I went into the experience . . . I was nervous because I wasn't sure what to expect. . . I was excited because I want to learn and grow as a counselor and person. . . My religious background always told me that it was wrong to be transgender, and I believed that". In the same way, students' feelings of nervousness and worry can differ in how pointed or vague they were, for example, the nervousness of new experiences vs the nervousness of the use of incorrect pronouns or gendered language. Otherwise, some students wondered about how their presence would be felt. Sometimes some students took steps to make themselves conform to customs they imagined the population might expect of members. For example, a student mentioned how having more knowledge about Jewish customs helped her feel "not very anxious".

In addition, Cammarata and Tedick (2012) mentioned that cultural immersion programs do experience a number of challenges. Since the 1970s, studies have shown that while immersion students acquire native-like receptive skills, their productive skills remain lacking. The language they acquire typically lacks grammatical accuracy, lexical specificity and variety, and is less complex and sociolinguistically less appropriate (Harley, 1984, 1992; Mougeon, Nadasdi, & Rehner, 2010; Pawley, 1985; Salomone, 1992; Spilka, 1976 cited in Cammarata & Tedick 2012, p.253). Students' immersion language also becomes increasingly anglicized over time and is limited to a more formal academic discourse style (Lyster, 1987; Fortune, 2001; Potowski, 2007; Tarone & Swain, 1995, cited in Cammarata & Tedick 2012, p.253). Indeed, in Two Way Immersion (TWI), research finds that learners who are dominant in Immersion Language (IL) at the start of the program may become dominant in English by the upper elementary and middle school grades and at times produce grammatically inaccurate utterances (Fortune, 2001; Potowski, 2007 cited in Cammarata & Tedick 2012, p.253). "Some immersion teachers of upper elementary grades report concern about teaching advanced-level subject matter because students' language proficiency is not strong enough to engage more complex academic content (Fortune,

Tedick , & Walker, 2008; Walker & Tedick, 2000; cited in Cammarata & Tedick 2012, p.253).

2.3 Difficulties that Immersion teachers face

It is important to mention the challenges that teachers who teach immersion students face. Cammarata and Tedick (2012) pointed out that immersion teachers' attempt at balancing content and language in instructions is an experience lived as a process of awakening, a pedagogical journey whose success is intricately linked to the quest and challenge of figuring out what language to focus on in the context of content instruction. This journey comprises many challenges that, if well negotiated, can guide teachers toward reshaping their own professional identity. The following findings describe five key constituents, that, considered altogether, define immersion teachers' experience as a whole:

Identity transformation: At the core of immersion teachers' experience of balancing content language in instruction lies the need for them to revisit and reshape their teaching identity. Immersion teachers in the United States and around the world must be licensed as content teachers or have demonstrated expertise in content- for elementary teaching, they typically hold license in elementary education and, at secondary levels, they hold a license to teach subject matter. In a similar way, some states in the United States required that immersion teachers complete bilingual certification. Research has shown that immersion teachers see themselves as content teachers due to their licensure and the fact that they and their students are held accountable above all for content (subject matter) achievement (e.g., Fortune et al., 2008; Walker & Tedick, 2000 cited in Cammarata & Tedick 2012).

External challenges: Over the top of external challenges is lack of time, because it is linked to all other external challenges. Having to attend to language in the context of content instruction and taking the time to do so is perceived as an extra demand that takes a huge toll on teachers. For immersion teachers, the issue resides in the difficulty of finding room within an existing curriculum, which requires the coverage of specific subject matter content and associated concepts, to incorporate any other instructional concerns such as

more intent to focus on language (Cammarata & Tedick 2012, p. 258). A participant described this approach.

My whole goal in math is getting my students to understand math concepts... [to incorporate language] I would have to take the time to figure out what are my [language objectives] ... It just doesn't come like that... I'm multiplying fractions... but when the school day starts, it's so quick, and the time that I have with each class is so short..." (Teacher B, int #2, p.4, cited in Cammarata & Tedick 2012, p. 258).

The teacher mentioned some of the principal problems in education. Both lack of planning time and lack of instructional time can result in an incomplete class and in some cases, a missed subject.

Some external challenges imposed on immersion teachers take the shape of clear expectations in terms of content coverage. In the context of immersion education, the pressures expectations imposed on teachers can be so high that they may act as a barrier that prevents them from attending to language instruction even if they desire to do so (Cammarata & Tedick 2012, p. 258). One of the participants explained:

[U.S. history] content is so demanding and so full of specifications that I felt a lot of pressure to not take off my content hat long enough to pay any attention to language in a meaningful way that I was always kind of out of breath just trying to keep up with the content expectations". (Teacher C, int #1, p 63, cited in Cammarata & Tedick 2012, p. 258).

Having to attend to language in the context of content instructional and taking the planning and instructional time to do so is perceived as an extra demand that impacts the little time available. The expectation from the district, school administrators, and parents is that immersion learners will keep pace with their non-immersion peers when it comes to content learning (Cammarata & Tedick 2012, p. 258).

The other part of it is there's a lot of pressure from the district to make sure students... are getting good instructions in math... and so you just gotta keep going forward, forward, and you don't have any extra time. (Teacher B, Int #2, p.4 cited in Cammarata & Tedick 2012, p. 259).

Balancing content and language in instruction is also more work because of limited resources. The attempt to balance content and language ends up being lived as a difficult challenge because of the absence of available support in the forms of material and resources teachers can tap into, such as material specifically designed to integrate language and

content, clear language standards, curricular roadmaps, and PD programs designed to meet the unique needs that immersion teachers have (Cammarata & Tedick 2012, p. 259). A participant explained:

It's that extra, extra step, sometimes being an immersion teacher figuring all that you have to translate or that there are materials you can use with this [because there are not materials designed for us]. (Teacher A, Int #1, p.6)

Another external challenge relates to the lack of attention given to immersion language (IL) development at the program and district level. In contrast to teacher and student accountability when it comes to content achievement, immersion teachers and students are seldom held accountable for acquisition of the IL. In other words, students' L2 proficiency is rarely assessed at the classroom or program level, particularly in one-way programs, but their content learning and English-language development are evaluated with both standardized and classroom-based measures (Cammarata & Tedick 2012, p. 259).

On my own: Linked to external pressures and challenges from the community (district, schools/ programs, parents) to focus on content is an increased feeling of isolation experienced by immersion teachers. This feeling is primarily influenced by the absence of collegial support and makes the experience of trying to balance content and language a frustrating one. Lack of respect and understanding, or both, as well as lack of support from others (colleagues, the program, the district) lead teachers to describe themselves as isolated within their instructional contexts (Cammarata & Tedick 2012, p. 259).

One study participant, a math teacher, explains her feeling of isolation, emphasizing that it stems in part from the fact that the other math teachers in her school do not have to consider how to attend to language instruction while teaching math:

I find lots of times that if I want to get rid of that feeling like, I'm an island, I'm the one who needs to go to my English-speaking math teachers. They're not gonna come to talk to me about it or anything. And they don't need to; they just keep turning the page [of their provided curriculum]. They don't think... Honestly, they are not thinking at all about how I can incorporate language into my lesson. Not at all. (Teacher B, Int #2, p. 32, cited in Cammarata & Tedick 2012, p. 259)

Awakening: In the midst of undergoing an identity transformation, feeling the pressures of external challenges, and experiencing feelings of isolation, immersion teachers

experience a growing sense of “awakening,” an increase of awareness of the interdependence and content. Through their actual experience of attempting to balance content and language in their instruction, teachers become more “language aware” (Hoare, 2001, cited in Cammarata & Teadick 2012, p.260). They begin to see that as the cognitive demands of academic content grow at the same time as the linguistic demands, and if students do not have strong language proficiency, they will not be able to access or engage the content as they move up through the grade levels (Cammarata & Teadick 2012).

A stab in the dark: Cammarat and Tedick (2012) cited, “despite the levels of awareness that immersion teachers develop when it comes to understanding the critical connection between language and content, they struggle to find the exact language they need to bring the students’ attention to as they teach content” (p.261). In simple words, they have difficulty identifying what language to focus on, figuring out how and when to integrate that language in the context of content instruction, and deciding how to follow up on the language in their assessment strategies.

2.4 Chapter conclusion

In this chapter, the learning theories, the benefits and challenges of cultural immersion were explained. At the same time, this chapter helps us to understand some of the skills that participants developed during the process and how those helped them to understand the connection of the language with the environment. In the following chapter, the methodology of this research will be provided.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.0 Chapter Introduction

This research was about the experiences of teachers that lived abroad. The main purpose was to understand how the different kinds of experiences lived during cultural immersion can help to improve the level of confidence in the classroom, acquisition of the second language and the impact in English language teaching. Therefore, to collect the data it was necessary to carry out an interview, where the participants were teachers who experienced a cultural immersion in a foreign country having the English language as an only resource to communicate with the others.

In this chapter, I will explain the setting, subjects, research methodology, instruments, data collection procedure, data analysis and chapter conclusion. I will also provide a description of how I went about collecting the necessary data for answering my research questions.

3.1 Setting and Subjects

This investigation was carried out at a language department of a public university located in central Mexico. This department has an undergraduate program in English Language Teaching (ELT) where five English courses are taken to obtain a B2 level. The participants of this research were English teachers who were working in this program. The age ranged from 24 to 68, 4 females and 1 male, with a good level of English. 4 had a cultural immersion experience for some time in an English-speaking country: a participant engaged in a Spanish teaching assistant program for a year, another participant studied a master's degree, a participant who moved from the United States to Mexico in her childhood and the last one who moved to Mexico after his career and engaged in an English teaching program in Mexico.

3.2 Research methodology

Research is a process of steps used to collect and analyze information that helps to increase our understanding of a topic (Cresswell, 2012). This investigation was qualitative because of the nature of the aims.

Creswell (2012) cited, that “Qualitative research is best suited to address a research problem in which you do not know the variables and need to explore. The literature might yield little information about the phenomenon of study, and you need to learn more from participants through exploration” (Creswell 2012, p. 16). In qualitative research, data is collected to learn from the participants in the study and develop forms (protocols). These forms pose general questions so that the participants can provide answers to the questions. Often questions of these kinds of forms will change and emerge during data collection. Examples of these forms include an interview protocol, which consists of four or five questions, or an observational protocol, in which the researcher records notes about the behavior of participants (Creswell, 2012, p.17).

3.3 Instruments

The data of this research was collected by means of an interview. I chose to use an interview as my instrument because the goal of my research was to know about experiences, feelings, opinions and impacts. The interview was the most appropriate instrument to gather that kind of information. It was a one-on-one interview which is the most common qualitative research method.

3.3.1 Interview

Creswell (2012) explains that a qualitative interview occurs when researchers ask one or more participants general, open-ended questions and record their answers. When you ask open-ended questions “the participants can best voice their experiences unconstrained by any perspectives of the researcher or past research findings. An open-ended response to a question allows the participants to create the option for responding” (Creswell 2012, p.218). In this research, a semi-structured interview was used, and some open-ended questions were designed to gather the information (See Appendix A).

Creswell (2012) states that in qualitative research, interviews have both advantages and disadvantages. Some advantages are that they provide useful information when you cannot directly observe participants, and they permit participants to describe detailed personal information. Compared to the observer, the interviewer also has better control over types of information received. On the contrary, some disadvantages are that interviews provide only information “filtered” through the views of the interviewers and the researcher summarizes the participants’ views in the research report. Another disadvantage is that the presence of the researcher may affect how the interviewee responds.

3.4 Data collection procedure

Once my instrument was designed and piloted, the final version of the interview was applied. First, it was necessary to send emails with a formal invitation to participate in an interview related to cultural immersion experiences. The email was sent to 10 teachers but only five teachers accepted the invitation. I interviewed them for thirty-five or forty minutes. I recorded the interview to get every detail, and I also paid attention to their expressions and took notes to facilitate the transcription of the information. I also added more questions about whether it was necessary to get more information. At the same time, I included some of my opinions or experiences to make the conversation more comfortable, trying to look friendly to get a better atmosphere to obtain more useful information.

3.5 Data analysis

The information gathered from the interview was collected and analyzed in detail. Firstly, I started to transcribe the complete interview, writing the questions related to the answer to get better control of the information. I also analyzed the different contexts of every situation. Some of the interviews had a duration of 45 minutes or 1 hour, therefore in some cases, it took longer to transcribe.

Secondly, I followed the classic method for analyzing qualitative data (Holliday, 2015, p. 54):

- 1) Coding: convert the comments on each piece of data to key words or phrases.

- 2) Determining themes: The codes which occur with significant frequency are grouped within themes.
- 3) Constructing argument: The themes are then used as the headings and subheadings for constructing an argument about what can be learnt from the data.
- 4) Going back to the data: Collecting extracts to support the argument will involve going back to the data, reading the codes and referring or possibly changing the themes. The process of drafting and redrafting the argument will also add to this process of refinement.

3.6 Chapter conclusion

In chapter III, I presented some information about the setting and subjects, the research design that I used to carry out my research methodology, and some specific information about my instrument. Also, I described the procedure that was followed, and I included how the analysis was made to obtain the results and the answers to my research questions. In the following chapter, I will provide the data obtained to answer my research questions.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS

4.0 Chapter introduction

In this chapter the findings of this research project are presented and explained. The information obtained from the instrument was transcribed in a Word document named Results of interviews Doc. The transcripts used in this chapter refer to this document. Additionally, to relate the data analysis to the purpose of this study, the aims and research questions are also included.

4.1 Aims and Research question

In order to remind what the purpose of this study was, the aims are provided:

To recognize the effects of cultural immersion in English language teachers.

To analyze the advantages and disadvantages of cultural immersion in English language teachers.

Research questions:

1. How has cultural immersion impacted English language teachers who work at an undergraduate program in English Language Teaching?
2. How has cultural immersion helped those teachers in their teaching practice?
3. What are the benefits and challenges of cultural immersion?

4.2 Cultural immersion as an impact for English language teachers

An important aim of this research project was to find out whether experimenting cultural immersion has an impact in the language and professional development of the participants, as teachers. Valuable information was obtained from the interviews; the most interesting responses are presented.

4.2.1 Learning English before the cultural immersion and how it helped to interact with native speakers

Participant 2 mentioned that before experimenting cultural immersion she used to practice English in a Self-Access Center.

Me ayudó, por ejemplo, el centro de lenguas que en esos entonces tenía una sala audiovisual y funcionaba como si fuera un cine pequeñito. Se proyectaban películas y tú podías entrar y estar ahí no el tiempo que quisieras porque pues ya sabes cómo funciona. Esa era la única práctica que tenía para conocer los diferentes acentos.

For me, it was very helpful in the audiovisual room to watch movies in English and learn about the accent variation (Results of Interviews doc, p.5).

Participant 4, who lived in the United States when she was a child, returned to Mexico some years later and the only way to keep practicing English was to watch movies.

Después de vivir un tiempo en Estados Unidos, regresé primero con mi mamá y mis hermanos. No practiqué inglés hablando con alguien. Logré conservarlo porque observaba películas en inglés con subtítulos en los dispositivos como televisión, o computadoras totalmente en inglés para no perderlo, porque no tenía con nadie con quien practicarlo.

“I was able to keep my knowledge of English because I was always watching movies in English. In this way I won't lose my knowledge” (Results of Interviews doc., p.14).

As participants mentioned, movies can be very helpful in second language learning. With movies people can listen to the different accent variations without leaving their country and at the same time they acquire vocabulary and pronunciation and develop the listening skill.

4.2.2 Impact of English and accents variation

2 participants (n=4) considered that experimenting with cultural immersion had an impact on their development as English language teachers. They explained that being exposed to an environment in which English is spoken was a shock because of the accent and language variation; for instance, participant 1 mentioned the following:

Yo creo que como maestro que va a estados unidos y que se sumerge en la cultura sufre mucho culturalmente, ¿por qué? Tuve un amigo normalista que se fue a Estados Unidos y decidí visitarlo. Él enseñaba en una comunidad negra y ellos tienen una pronunciación muy diferente. Es como si te fueras a Veracruz y los veracruzanos tienen otro acento o el acento tabasqueño. La velocidad es diferente y si no estás acostumbrado a ello te va a costar trabajo. Estoy hablando de español a español; entonces esta persona me llevó a su aula, me presentó y los alumnos me hicieron algunas preguntas. Les contesté y bueno la cosa estuvo bien. Después mi amigo me dijo “yo pensé que no les ibas a entender”. Pregunté ¿por qué? y dijo “porque they talk very different, they talk more like a

rapper ok and sometimes is not easy for you to understand, you know what I mean” [Afro-American accent rapper imitation]. Entonces mi amigo entendía este tipo de palabras que son más obvias pero cuando ellos le hablaban de manera más coloquial, mi amigo no entendía.

I believe that as a teacher who traveled to the United States and is immersed in the culture... suffers a lot culturally. Why? For example, I had a friend who was living in the United States, and I decided to visit him. He was teaching in an Afro-American community and as you know, their pronunciation is different and when I visited one of his classes, he told me that for him it was difficult to understand them when they talked colloquially (Results of Interviews doc, p. 1-2).

During cultural immersion people would be in contact with different accents and people from different parts of the world; therefore, it seems that this participant’s friend had some problems with the Afro-American accent, and it is common to face some problems but at the same time it could be helpful in the acquisition of a second language. Participant 2 mentioned an experience about different accents:

Éramos un grupo no sé cómo de 30 personas de diferentes países y entonces el único idioma con el que nos podíamos comunicar verdaderamente era en inglés. Yo medio sabía francés, pero no alemán, cero y las chicas que iban a lo mismo que yo no sabían español. Pero, las demás estudiantes que eran más jovencitas que estaban estudiando su carrera ahí eran de China, Japón, de Singapur, de Irlanda. Bueno ellas sí hablaban inglés, pero recuerdo perfectamente, hablando de la lengua, yo no les entendía nada, cero y entonces te llega la cuestión de: “¿no se supone que dominaba la lengua?” Pero, fíjate que en esos entonces yo aprendí. Por eso, yo sí creo que estas experiencias culturales de la lengua son importantes, ya que, por ejemplo, no me habían enseñado tanto la diferencia de acentos... Entonces, fue, por un lado, el shock de entender inglés de una china, de una compañera de India, de una compañera de Singapur.

We were a group of students from different countries and there were students from France, India, Singapore and China. So, for me the first shock was when I realized that we were more than 30 students from different countries and the common language was only English. I remember perfectly that when we started to talk, I did not understand anything! Zero. So, I questioned myself: “I am not supposed to have a good command of the language, aren’t I?” But let me tell you that at that time I learned, that is why I believe that those cultural experiences are important because, in my case, I wasn’t taught about the difference of accents... So, it was a shock to understand English from a Chinese girl, a partner from India and a partner from Singapore (Results of Interviews doc, p. 4-5)

In this case, it seems that the participants had a hard time with accents at the beginning of the cultural immersion because there were people from different countries speaking English with their accent variations. In addition, the participant explained the following about English accents:

Cuando me tocó con una chica irlandesa que yo casi decía: “pero es que ella, ¿habla inglés? porque yo no le entiendo nada”.

Then, with a girl that was from Ireland, I was like: “I do not understand anything “Is she speaking in English? because I do not understand anything”.

Learning about accent variation can be helpful. Most of the time accent variation is one of the typical problems that learners face when they are in a foreign country, and, in some cases, this can be a problem for communication.

4.2.3 Practicing English during the cultural immersion

When being in a cultural immersion and the only language to communicate is English, it had to be used by the participants:

For example, I was in a place without Hispanic people and that is why I thought that I had the opportunity to improve my English. The only language in common was English so it helped me a lot... For example, I was like “ok, tomorrow I will go to the church because there is more interaction there”. It was all in the second language... Or when you must interact with a group of students and there is not another option you must use your second language (Results of interviews doc.,p 4-6).

It could be very difficult to teach or show in the classroom the impact of cultural immersion and in the same way the impact is not as strong as the experience in real life. Participant 1 said:

Es difícil producir ese shock dentro del aula, porque en Estados Unidos estás corriendo, caminando, bebiendo, fumando, subiéndose al camión, usando el inglés con expresiones que no has escuchado y eso también depende de las regiones. Por ejemplo, para subirte al camión te dicen “grab now” y significa “trepate”, pero nadie te dice “up, up” como lo ves en los libros de texto. Quizás lo que quieren hacer es provocar un shock cultural al alumno pero, el alumno en una hora se deshace del conocimiento. Lo único que va a hacer ese shock cultural es que va a mostrar la importancia de las reglas en la lingüística. Porque no quitamos el dedo del renglón, no vas a enseñar inglés coloquial, vas a enseñar inglés que te marca el libro de texto, no lo que hablan en la calle y lo que se habla de verdad en la calle rompe las reglas.

“It is difficult to retort that shock in the classroom because when you are in the United States, you are running, walking, drinking, smoking, taking the bus using the English language, with unknown expressions and that also depends on the region. For example, to take the bus they say “grab up” instead of “up up” like in the books and maybe what it tries to do is to have a cultural shock in the student, but the student in one hour forgets the knowledge. The only thing that this cultural shock could do is to show the importance of rules in linguistics. You are not going to teach colloquial English, you are going to teach the English that is in the book and is not used in streets because the English of the streets breaks the rules (Results of Interviews doc, p.2).

There is a controversy about what book should be included. It is very useful, but it just guides you grammatically and formally to speak. In real life the language that is commonly used, breaks the rules as participant 4 mentions:

Bueno en este caso la inmersión cultural, te da cambios en cuestión del idioma. Están bien los libros que usamos en Lengua Meta y en cualquier escuela, pero, algo que yo veo que no tienen y que se nos hace difícil es cuando hablas con un nativo frente a frente. Es decir, el nativo usa muchas palabras informales, oraciones, todo eso, los “phrasal verbs”. El libro sí nos enseña sobre la cultura, pero lo

que yo creo que realmente necesitamos es aprender el inglés informal (Results of Interviews doc, p.16).

In this case cultural immersion makes you change the language. The books that we use in Target Language and in any school are fine, but I observed that one thing they do not have and make it difficult is when you talk with a native face to face. I mean, the native speaker uses a lot of words and informal sentences, “phrasal verbs”. The book has topics about culture, but I think that what we really need is to learn informal English (Results of Interviews doc, p.16).

The participant who had a cultural immersion in Mexico, explained that informal English can be used in an academic context, and, from his perspective, in Mexico it is not the same.

Aquí en México la cultura es muy diferente. En Estados Unidos no importa que seas académico y que estés frente a un grupo de intelectuales y digas un “nadien” o digas un “pos”. Entonces, no hay problema si se trata del inglés, pero en español sí hay problema. A veces creo que para pulir un idioma necesitas mucho tiempo; se necesita más que un año. Este tipo de experiencias son muy buenas, lo he visto con los alumnos a los que les he recomendado que se vayan un año a Estados Unidos a tener esa experiencia y practicar todo eso. Claro, ellos se han ido a enseñar español, que igualmente eso también interfiere mucho en el shock cultural ya que haces lo mismo que los americanos vienen a hacer acá de que no te hablan español y siguen usando su lengua materna y no se adaptan al idioma del país en el que se encuentran (Results of interviews doc, p.3).

Here in Mexico the culture is so different. In the United States, it does not matter if you are an academic person who is in front of intellectual people, and you say “nadien” or “pos”. So, there is no problem talking about English, but in Spanish it is an issue. Sometimes I think that you need a long time to improve a language; you need more than a year. It is good, I have seen it with the students that I have advised to live abroad for a year in the United States to have the experience. Of course, they went to teach Spanish, but in the same way, it interferes with the cultural shock because you do the same as Americans when they come to Mexico; they continue using their mother tongue instead of adapting themselves to the language of the country where they are.

One of the benefits of cultural immersion is to have interaction with the language and with the culture. At the same time this interaction produces a shock that is difficult to understand or feel just by seeing or reading it in a book in the classroom.

4.2.4 Cultural awareness about the native language

Curiously, just 1 participant of 4 experimented with cultural awareness of her own culture. This participant mentioned her experience when she needed to share information about her own culture.

Cuando interactuaba con la gente, quieren conocer de tu cultura, de tu país y a veces me daba cuenta que estaba un poco perdida. Había cosas que ellos sabían, que yo no sabía de mi país. Entonces, yo decía: “creo que cuando tú sales de tu país y estas en otro, lo que la gente quiere es que tú les hables del tuyo a través de ti y si no estás preparada y no estás inmerso en tu cultura, pues... ¿qué pasó?” Entonces, creo que antes de viajar deberíamos tener esa conciencia de tener esa inmersión cultural de nuestra propia lengua para que luego estés lista para la inmersión en el extranjero. En este caso, ese shock lo fui compensando un poco. Como yo daba clases de español, entonces los libros que usábamos en las clases tenían cierta cultura que obviamente yo sabía.

When I used to interact with people; they wanted to know more about the culture of my country. I noticed that I was not aware of my own culture, because most of the time they knew things that you didn't know, and I think that when you are in a different country, what people want is to know about the culture of your country from your own perspective.

The same participant pointed out that it is absolutely necessary to know about all the celebrations that are more interesting for foreign people. Participant 2 mentioned:

Por ejemplo, recuerdo una de las clases era hablar cerca de la quinceañera y yo decía: “¿cómo?”. Pues sí. Venía en el libro una lectura acerca de la “quinceañera”. Entonces, me hacían preguntas muy interesantes cuando tuvimos esa clase. Me preguntaban: ¿y qué sucede?, ¿es verdad que va mucha gente?, ¿es verdad que baila frente a mucha gente? Y yo decía: “parece que, en esta experiencia de vivir en el extranjero, el hecho de ir a una fiesta de quince años me ayuda, porque si yo nunca hubiera ido a una fiesta de quince años ¿qué les diría? Sí, sí es cierto así se hace, o no se hace”. Y a partir de ahí, yo aprendí a valorar y a tener confianza en la lengua extranjera, a fortalecer mi nivel de la cultura y la lengua para poder compartirla en el salón de clases. No solo era de mi segunda lengua, sino de la primera, mi lengua materna.

I remember that when I was teaching a Spanish class and the topic was “la quinceañera”, students were asking me very interesting questions like: “what happens” “is it true that many people attend?” and “does she really have to dance in front of people?” I realized that going to a simple party is really helpful when you have to share your culture. I learned to appreciate my own culture and have the confidence to teach my classes and at the same time I started to value not only the second but the first language, I mean my mother tongue”. (Results of Interviews doc, p. 7-8).

Cultural immersion in a foreign country is not only the opportunity to practice the foreign language, but also the chance to have cultural exchange. Therefore, according to the participants of this study, ELT students need to learn more about their own culture.

4.2.5 Developing empathy with and for second-language learners

Most of the time, as native speakers, we do not observe how difficult it could be to acquire our language (Spanish) as a second language. Participant 2 noticed the following during her cultural immersion:

Me di cuenta de que las estudiantes se ponían a hacer las tarjetas para las conjugaciones de pasado, presente y futuro de los verbos con terminación “ar, er, ir” y de los verbos irregulares. Yo pensaba “nosotros no estamos conscientes porque nosotros no aprendimos español como lengua extranjera, pero estoy viendo todo lo que la gente padece para aprender español; es muchísimo trabajo”.

I noticed that the students used to write the conjugations of the past, present and future of regular verbs [in Spanish] “ar, er, ir” and irregular verbs. I thought: “we are not conscious about it because we did not learn Spanish as a foreign language, but I am noticing how people suffer to learn Spanish; it is a lot of work”.

It seems that sometimes people do not appreciate their language and how difficult it can be for others to learn it. As native speakers, it is difficult to understand it, but it takes us more than 8 years to learn the first language.

4.2.6 Confidence in the classroom and in language level after the cultural immersion

Another important aspect in which all the participants thought similarly is that their confidence increased after the cultural immersion:

No puedes [entrar al salón de clases] y hacer preguntas como se hace en Facebook; por ejemplo, “what 's up in your mind” [imitando pronunciación incorrecta] y esperar que el alumno te conteste. Si sigues hablando de esa manera pues el alumno va a decir: “para que le pregunto al maestro si no sabe ni pronunciar las palabras”. En este caso pierde la confianza. Entonces debes encontrar la manera de inspirar confianza a los alumnos de que “you are the man or woman to ask”

You cannot [inside the classroom] ask questions as they are asked on facebook; for example, “What’s up in your mind” [imitating incorrect pronunciation] and wait for the student to answer. If you continue talking in that way the student will probably say: “Why should I ask the teacher if he does not even know how to pronounce the words correctly”, In this case they don’t trust you. So, you must find the best way to show this confidence, so they understand that you are the man or woman to ask (Results of interviews doc., p.1).

Another participant mentioned that cultural immersion helped to improve her English level:

Tiene impacto en la lengua, tu nivel de inglés mejora mucho, te da mucha confianza. Por lo menos a mí sí me dio mucha confianza; por ejemplo, me ayudó al regresar a México y ya no sentirme tan inexperta en el salón de clases... al regresar me dio también mucha más seguridad el pensar “aunque venga un estudiante con buen nivel, no me va intimidar, no me voy a sentir mal”. Es también muy importante platicarles a tus alumnos por lo menos a dónde viajaste... Por supuesto te da mucha amplitud de todo, no solo de la enseñanza... Cuando comienzan a viajar su perspectiva se va ampliando, sin embargo, tiene mucho que ver la disponibilidad que tengas de socializar con la gente (Results of interviews doc, p.9).

Your language level improves a lot. I mean, it gives you confidence. In my case, this helps me a lot to get more confidence. For example, when I returned to Mexico, it helped me to have more confidence in the classroom. When I returned, I felt more confident and I thought: “If a student with a high level comes, I won’t feel intimidated or bad”. It is also important to talk to your students about places that you know or have visited [from English-speaking countries] (Results of interviews doc, from p.1-6) ... Of course, it broadens your perspective about everything, not only about teaching... When they start to travel their perspective changes; however, the disposition to socialize with people is very important (Results of interviews doc, p.9).

According to the participant, cultural immersion promotes language practice; all the skills are put into practice at the same time. This experience helps to increase the level of confidence in learners and at the same time it helps them to not feel afraid to communicate with others.

4.2.7 Stereotypes, Preconceptions, Biases and Expectations about Population

3 teachers (n=4) considered that the impact of cultural immersion could be positive or negative depending on the participants' attitudes. Participant 1, whose native language was English, and his immersion was in Mexico, mentioned the preconceptions some people have about American and British English:

Realmente depende de la persona porque hay cosas malas que producen efectos buenos y hay cosas buenas que producen efectos malos. Creo que depende de la actitud de la persona. Existe aquí en México la creencia cultural de que; ¿tú qué lengua hablas? ¿inglés británico o americano? Para mí no hay diferencia, es solo un acento. Por ejemplo, he vivido en varios estados interactuando con esos acentos y sí los entiendo, al igual que palabras coloquiales. Entonces, un amigo que tuve que [comienza a hablar en inglés] “was learning English in a British style”. En este caso, cuando mi amigo fue un tiempo a Estados Unidos pues me enteré que no le gustaba porque él quería ir a Inglaterra, él no quería ir a Estados Unidos. Entonces en este caso fue a Estados Unidos con una actitud negativa así que no le agrado. También él interpretó muchas cosas mal, con referencia a lo que él veía en museos, cultura en general. Adquirió mal algunos conceptos y traté de ayudarlo a corregirlo, pero él no lo entendía.

It really depends on the person and the attitude because there are bad things that can produce good results or effects and good things that can produce bad results. I think that it depends on the person's attitude. My friend didn't want to travel to the United States, so he did not like it. He wanted to travel to England, he did not want the United States so, when he was living in the USA, he did it with a negative attitude and as I saw, he understood the culture, the language, and many concepts wrongly. I tried to help him to correct it but he did not want it (Results of Interviews doc, p. 3).

Participant 3 mentioned that when having a cultural immersion, racism from native people could be faced:

Viviendo en New York pero sobre todo trabajando en Manhattan, viví racismo por parte de los americanos pero sobre todo de los afroamericanos. Esto debido a que los mexicanos llegamos de manera ilegal a los Estados Unidos. Entonces, en mi caso, llegué con papeles, con una maestría, viajaba hablando inglés, español, francés, con una actitud que no era de mexicanos. Entonces, las afroamericanas me trataban mal y me decían que a qué hora me había bajado del barco y yo les decía: “no pues no me he bajado del barco, viajé en avión, tengo visa y tengo papeles”, pero me molestaban constantemente con eso. Por otra parte, pienso que ellos tienen que saber que en México hay personas preparadas, que pueden llegar a Estados Unidos de manera legal y con preparación.

Living in New York but specifically working in Manhattan, I lived with racism from American people, but even more from Afro-American people. It is because most of the time Mexican people arrive in the United States as illegals. So, in my case, I was legal, I had a master's degree, I used to travel speaking English, Spanish and French, with an attitude different from that of a Mexican. So, the Afro-American people treated me badly and bothered me constantly by asking me at what time I got off of the ship and I told them: “No, I didn't get off the boat, I traveled by plane, I have a Visa and documents”. I think that they have to know that in Mexico there are professional people who are capable of going to the United States legally (Results of Interviews doc, p.11).

Sometimes when people find themselves in a different country, some feelings of isolation could affect them. Participant 4 quoted the following:

Para mí fue difícil la interacción con los nativos en USA, ya que, en muchas ocasiones sentía que no encajaba, o solo era aceptada un momento y después me ignoraban.

For me, interacting with natives in the USA was difficult, because most of the time I felt like I was not included, or I was accepted for a moment and then they ignored me.

During cultural immersion, different situations and feelings can be faced. Most of them depend on the kind of interaction that a learner could have with people living in that country.

4.3 Benefits and Outcomes for professional and personal growth

When a person decides to travel and get cultural immersion, many aspects could change life. Most of the time confidence increases and an awakening occurs as participant 2 mentioned.

Para mí fue como un despertar de mi valoración de mi propia lengua y también de afianzar el nivel de mi lengua, adquirir más seguridad como te decía, confianza no solo de tener un buen nivel de la lengua. También, el tener esa experiencia de vivir en un país extranjero, por supuesto te da mucha amplitud de todo, no solo de la enseñanza. Te abre los ojos a nuevas cosas.

In my case, it was an awakening in the appreciation of my own language and also to consolidate the level of my language, to acquire security and confidence not only of having a good level of the language but also of having the experience of living abroad which of course gives you a different perspective in everything not only of teaching. It open your eyes to new things.(Results of Interviews doc, p.8).

Similarly, participant 3 mentioned that:

Cuando viajas en una situación en donde necesitas obtener un certificado o que te califiquen, claro que esta experiencia te va a ayudar. A lo mejor no aprendes mucho inglés porque puede ser que estés en una comunidad donde no hablan tanto inglés, pero si te va a abrir la perspectiva no solo lingüística sino la perspectiva de vida, que de hecho va de la mano con la lingüística. Pero ten por seguro que te abrirá la perspectiva de vida. Eso sí, puede haber casos que regresen y en vez de abrirles la perspectiva de vida se la cierre, pero ya son casos aislados y de gente más cerrada. Difícilmente una inmersión te va a cerrar la perspectiva; generalmente te dará un paradigma que estando solamente en México no te lo va a dar, o sea, es importantísimo que salgas (Results of Interviews doc, p.14).

If you are traveling because you need to obtain a certification or a note, this experience will surely help you. Maybe you do not learn much English because you might be in a community where people do not speak much English, but the cultural immersion will open the perspective not only of linguists but also of life perspective that goes along with the linguistic. It will open your perspective of life for sure. There can be some cases that instead of opening your perspective, it will close it but those are some special cases. It is so difficult that cultural immersion closes your perspective, generally it will

give you a paradigm that being only in Mexico will not give you. That is why it is very important that you travel (Results of Interviews doc, p.14).

This kind of experience could help in professional development. In the case of teachers, this experience helps to improve the confidence in the classroom and at the same time it could change the life perspective of participants.

4.3.1 Exposure to new information, ideas, lifestyles

Participant 2 explained that it is important to socialize when having a cultural immersion:

El que tú estés dispuesta a socializar con los demás ayuda y finalmente cuando viajas de eso se trata. No se trata de que te quedes en tu hotel, en este caso para mí, en el departamento que nos daban para vivir. Salir, perderte. Por ejemplo, recuerdo que en una ocasión me perdí terriblemente en el metro buscando librerías. Afortunadamente eran la 1 de la tarde, entonces pude regresar bien. Para eso el diálogo fue muy necesario. Entonces yo creo que sí debes aprovechar esas experiencias

Willing to socialize with others helps you and finally when you travel it is supposed that it is what you are supposed to do. You do not stay in a hotel, or in my case, in the apartment that they gave us to live in. Go out and lose yourself. For example, I remember that I lost myself in the metro when I was trying to find some bookstores. Fortunately, it was 1 p.m, so I was able to get back. For that, communication was very necessary. So, I believe that you should take advantage of those kinds of experiences (Results of Interviews doc, p.6).

Similarly, participant 4 who was born in the USA noticed the contrast between American and Mexican culture. She mentioned the following:

Es muy diferente. A pesar de que era muy chiquita cuando estaba en Estados Unidos, sí noté muy diferente la forma de estudio. Por una parte en la cultura no hay mucha convivencia entre latinos; ellos tienen otra ideología de lo que son las amistades, el verse. No son como en México que inmediatamente echamos relajo con alguien que no conocemos... Me di cuenta que en México es muy diferente ya que aquí no es tan de "la escuela a la casa", podías ir a la casa del que fuera, hacer trabajo o lo que sea. Eso fue una cosa que se me quedó muy marcada (Results of Interviews doc, p.15)

It is so different. Even though I was so young when I was in the United States, I noticed that the way of study was so different. On the one hand, in the USA there is not much interaction among Latinos; they have a different idea of what friendship is, of seeing each other. They are not like in Mexico that they immediately start to talk with people that they do not know... I noticed that in Mexico it is so different because here is not like "from school to home", you are able to go to anyone's house, to do homework or anything. That was one of the things that shocked me (Results of Interviews doc, p.15).

As it was observed, there is a long process of cultural immersion. People face different experiences before, during and after this process. Taking advantage of them depends on the person and the disposition to interact with natives for better language acquisition.

4.4 Chapter conclusion

In this chapter, the results of cultural immersion were provided. First, cultural immersion as an impact on English language teachers was explained. In this section, the impact of learning English before cultural immersion was analyzed as well as the importance of accent variation and the impact of it in communication. At the same time, it was pointed out the importance of practicing English during the cultural immersion experience, the awareness about the language, and how learners develop empathy with and for second language learners during cultural immersion. This chapter examined how confidence and language level are affected after the experience, and also analyzed the stereotypes, biases, and expectations about the population that learners had before, during, and after the experience. Finally, the section explained some of the benefits and outcomes for professional and personal growth, as well as how being exposed to new information, ideas and lifestyles changed their life perspective.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

5.0 Introduction

The main purpose of this study was to analyze the effects, advantages and disadvantages of cultural immersion in language teachers. In this chapter, I will summarize all the findings from the analyzed information collected from the instrument presented in chapter four to answer my research question. I will explain some of the limitations faced during the process of this research and some suggestions for further research will be provided.

5.1 Summary of the results

An important aim of this research project was to find out whether experimenting cultural immersion has an impact on the language and professional development of the participants, as teachers. Valuable information was obtained from the interviews; the most interesting responses were presented.

First, participants mentioned that movies can be very helpful in second language learning before having a cultural immersion. With movies people can listen to the different accent variations without leaving their country and at the same time they acquire vocabulary, pronunciation and develop listening skills. At the same time, learning about accent variation can be helpful before cultural immersion programs. Most of the time accent variation is one of the typical problems that the participants faced when they were in a foreign country, and, in some cases, this could be a problem for communication.

Second, one of the benefits of cultural immersion was to interact with the language and with the culture. At the same time, this interaction produced a shock that is difficult to understand or feel just by seeing or reading it in a book in the classroom. Cultural immersion is the opportunity to have cultural exchange. Therefore, according to the participants of this study, it is important for ELT students to learn more about their language and culture. Sometimes, people do not appreciate their language and how difficult it can be for others to learn it.

Third, cultural immersion promoted language improvement since all the skills are put into practice at the same time. This experience helped to increase the participants' level of confidence and at the same time it helped them to not feel afraid to communicate with others. In addition, during cultural immersion, different situations and feelings could be faced. Most of them depended on the kind of interaction that the participant could have with people living in that country. This kind of experience could help in professional development. In the case of teachers, this experience helped them to improve confidence in the classroom, and at the same time it could broaden their life perspective.

There is a long process of cultural immersion where people can face different experiences before, during, and after this process. Taking advantage of them depends on the person and the disposition to interact with natives for better language acquisition.

5.2 Limitations of the study

To obtain the information for the research, interviews were carried out. One of the main purposes of this investigation was to analyze the advantages and disadvantages of cultural immersion. But there were some limitations during the investigation.

First, I thought that many of the teachers of the faculty lived abroad and had a direct interaction with native people, but the reality was that most of the teachers had not lived abroad. It was difficult to get participants because most of the teachers had only spent a few days in a foreign country. Then the experience of the two of them was in Mexico with the Spanish language and not in the United States as I expected but, it was useful.

Second, the data collection was during the covid-19 pandemic; therefore, it was difficult to get in contact with the teachers to interview them and at the same time it was hard to get more participants because the only way to get in contact was through email. Most of the time they did not answer or did not want to participate.

5.3 Further research

The research was mainly focused on English language teachers' opinions about their experience with cultural immersion. Nevertheless, I realized that there can be some topics for future research.

First, it could be interesting to investigate how the preconception/ expectation about population affects the learners' decision before traveling. It could be interesting to understand how these preconceptions affect the idea of traveling to different countries.

Secondly, future research could be carried out focused on teachers and how the experience of teaching abroad changes their perspective of education. It could also be interesting to analyze the differences in education between the two countries because it is mentioned that in Mexico the education is not that good compared with other countries.

5.4 Personal Reflection and Experience

In this section I will explain a reflection about writing this thesis. First, I am going to talk about the beginning of this research. Secondly, I am going to share some personal experiences and finally, I am going to mention how this research has impacted me.

First of all, it was a little difficult for me to select a topic. It was during the language department that something caught my attention: the theories of cognitive perspective and sociocultural perspective. My parents always told me about how they acquired their second language when they were working in the United States. The case of my mother was the one that came to my mind immediately, because she learnt it working as a babysitter. She did not know the language so, during the process she started to learn it just with the environment, probably not grammatically correct at all but useful for communication.

After I took the five English courses, I decided to participate in the summer camps programs, because even though I passed the levels, it was very difficult for me to communicate. There were some teachers who made me lose confidence in summer camps programs, since most of the time they said to all of us that those programs are not useful, they are just for fun or that we are not able to practice the language if we do not have the

correct level. Also, some of them mentioned that native people do not have patience with people who are learning. Those kinds of comments gave me bad expectations about the people and the language.

After talking about the programs and the comments of the teachers with my family, my mother told me that it was a good opportunity to force myself to talk and prove my English level and see it for myself, so I did it. Once I arrived in the United States, I was shocked because the accent was so difficult for me to understand and also the speed. Then, during the camp, the lack of vocabulary started to be a problem. So, I started to observe my environment in the kitchen where I worked. Sometimes they explained to me in English the function of the instrument that they were asking for and after they told me the name. In that way I started to expand my vocabulary and at the same time solve my communication problems.

Then in 2023, I decided to try another language, French. Therefore, I decided to travel to Quebec, Canada. The experience there was a little more difficult because my level was between A2 to B1. The shock with the accent was bigger than with the English level, because I just learned the accent from France and nobody told me how different the Quebecois accent could be. I experienced isolation during this experience and at the same time frustration for how difficult it was for me to communicate in some situations. After some days, I started to interact more with the kids. Sometimes they got frustrated with me because there were some words that I did not understand at all, but after some time, I started to interact more and get more vocabulary to the point of getting familiarized with the accent. At the same time, there were people who were so kind and explained to me in English, but there were some native people who preferred not to interact with the foreign people. Some of my partners interpreted this situation as racism and this influenced their decision to not visit the country again. So, for them this impacted negatively.

During this process I noticed that I was living most of the aspects mentioned in this research, positive and negative. The experiences helped me to acquire more knowledge about the language and culture of the region. At the same time those experiences changed the way I see life.

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APPENDIX A

La siguiente entrevista tiene como objetivo entender cómo la inmersión cultural impacta la vida laboral de los profesores de inglés y cómo esto los ayuda a mejorar su confianza frente al salón de clases. La información adquirida es confidencial y será usada para los propósitos de esta investigación.

A continuación se muestran las preguntas relacionadas a la entrevista:

- 1. ¿Ha viajado a algún país de habla inglesa y cuánto tiempo vivió ahí?**
2. ¿Cuál fue su primera impresión de ese país?
3. ¿Fue difícil la comunicación con las personas nativas? Si/no ¿por qué?
4. Es bien sabido que lo que más se experimenta cuando se viaja a un país extranjero se le conoce como inmersión cultural, la cual se refiere al contacto directo con el idioma que usualmente se aprende en el salón de clases. También se experimenta una inmersión total de las creencias, pensamientos, costumbres, religión, gastronomía entre otros del lugar que se visita. ¿Qué opina acerca de la inmersión cultural?
5. ¿Cómo puede esta experiencia de inmersión cultural ayudar en la adquisición de una segunda lengua?
6. ¿Cómo se modificó su perspectiva de enseñar una segunda lengua con la inmersión cultural que vivió?
7. ¿Cree que esta experiencia puede ayudar a mejorar los niveles de confianza en la práctica docente? Si/No ¿por qué?