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**Teaching Practices and Professional Development in a Private Learning Context:
An autonomous Teaching Perspective**

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“Teaching Practices and Professional Development in a Private Learning Context: An autonomous Teaching Perspective”

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Dedication

First and foremost, I thank Almighty God, who has taught me that when the time comes, we will always knock it out of the park in any endeavor we embark on, showing me that not all pain is destructive—that sometimes we mourn more than we celebrate—yet through it all, God never allows us to fall.

Secondly, I dedicate this work to Matilde and Felipe, my beloved parents. Their unwavering love and support have been the constant driving force behind my success, believing in me even when I did not believe in myself.

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Abstract

In recent years, autonomy has been associated with greater self-governance capabilities in students, not only when learning a new language but also in all educational areas where individuals can take control of their own learning (Pavia & Braga, 2021). As autonomy is highly linked to reflection and innovation in terms of continuous teacher development, this study aimed to determine the close relation between professional development (PD) and autonomy in teachers who work in a private language institute in Mexico. However, in a Mexican context such as this one, formative processes in teachers tend to be limited and in other cases, institutional programs are repetitive and not focused on a real teaching setting in a classroom. This qualitative case study adopted a thematic analysis with elements of content analysis to examine teacher autonomy by using the six dimensions of autonomy proposed by Smith and Erdoğan (2003) and its relation to PD. The results indicated that autonomy is a dynamic, contextual and reflective process that is manifested when making decisions, adapting teaching practices, improvisation, reflection and the integration of PD. Such findings highlighted that autonomy is not only link to reflection but can be manifested in socioemotional matters. Besides the results obtained, this study presented limitations such as the reduced sample size, the duration of the study, and the virtual format of the class observations

Resumen

En los últimos años, la autonomía ha sido relacionada a mayores capacidades de autogestión en estudiantes (Pavia & Braga, 2021). Esto no solo es observable en el aprendizaje de un nuevo idioma, sino en varias áreas educativas, permitiendo que las personas tomen el control de su propio aprendizaje (Pavia & Braga, 2021).

La autonomía está estrechamente vinculada con la reflexión y la innovación en el desarrollo profesional continuo. Este estudio tiene como objetivo determinar la estrecha relación entre el desarrollo profesional y la autonomía en docentes que trabajan en un instituto privado de idiomas en México. Sin embargo, en un contexto mexicano como éste, los procesos formativos en maestros tienden a ser limitados y en algunos otros casos los programas institucionales son repetitivos y no son centrados en la práctica docente real en el aula.

Este estudio de caso cualitativo adoptó un análisis temático con elementos de análisis de contenido para examinar la autonomía en maestros utilizando las seis dimensiones propuestas por Smith (2003) y su relación con el desarrollo profesional. Los resultados indicaron que la autonomía es un proceso dinámico, contextual y reflexivo que es manifestado en la toma de decisiones, la adaptación de prácticas docentes, la improvisación, la reflexión y la constante integración del desarrollo profesional.

Estos hallazgos resaltan que la autonomía no sólo está vinculada a la reflexión, sino que también puede manifestarse en otros aspectos socioemocionales tanto en alumnos como maestros. Además, este estudio presento limitaciones tales como el tamaño reducido de participantes, la duración del estudio y el formato virtual en el cual se observaron las clases.

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Definitions and abbreviations

EFL- English as a Foreign language

CEFR - Common European Reference for languages

CPD - Continuous Professional development

AI - Artificial intelligence

PD - Professional development

PRONI - Programa Nacional de inglés

PNIEB - Programa Nacional de inglés en Educación Básica

SEP- Secretaría de Educación Publica

TEFL - Teaching English a foreign language

Definiciones y abreviaciones

EFL – Ingles como lengua extranjera

CEFR - Marco Común Europeo de Referencia para las Lenguas

CPD – Desarrollo profesional continuo

AI – Inteligencia artificial

PD – Desarrollo profesional

PRONI Programa Nacional de Ingles

PNIEB – Programa Nacional del inglés en educación Básica

SEP – Secretaría de Educación Publica

TEFL – Enseñanza del inglés como lengua extrajera

Chapter I Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This study is centered on teachers' professional development and examines how professional development (PD) is related to autonomy among English as a Foreign Language teachers working in a private language institute in central Mexico. In recent years, autonomy has gained prominence and has become more influential in terms of learning and teaching, alongside PD.

According to Jimenez Raya et al., (2024), autonomy is not just a plain concept; on the contrary, it goes significantly beyond, autonomy is the individual's freedom to make decisions and manage them responsively and continuously in such a way that autonomy can represent freedom, reflection, and a great sense of responsibility. In this respect, Farrell (2018) claims that there is an increase in promoting teacher autonomy, given that autonomy is recognized as a key factor in the influence of education quality and the building of more reflective practices that are not directed only and exclusively to teachers but implicitly impact students. Farrell (2018) also argues that reflective practices allow teachers to analyze what really happens in a classroom, what works, and what should not be applied and used in a classroom. Instead of repeating the same pattern every time, reflection promotes innovation and more critical thinking. This is especially relevant when considering the needs that meet and uncover the real meaning behind everyday teaching practices.

However, in a context such as this, PD tends to be limited by the lack of systematic training, relying on short and repetitive courses that are not focused on real and everyday needs and current challenges in a classroom. This situation has generated institutional PD opportunities that

are seen as a mandatory task rather than a meaningful and significant process that contributes to the better achievement of objectives.

Given this reality, some teachers search for more independent alternatives that help them improve their teaching practices while facing challenges. Some instances were spotted whilst observing classes. One clear example is the use of digital resources and artificial intelligence while collaborating with other colleagues. This strategy allows participants to face challenges in their everyday teaching which can be translated into individual initiatives that reflect a genuine desire to continue learning and adapting to new circumstances, illustrating that professional growth is not only about motivation or interest but also a process of self-regulation and an active role that mainly depends on teacher autonomy.

1.2 Background of study

When talking about Mexican contexts, several realities can be observed. For instance, many EFL teachers work in private language institutes, not possessing formal pedagogical training. This contributes to performing and delivering classes differently, primarily according to their resources; resources that range from pedagogical and formative to experiential. Rebolledo and Bullock (2019) claim that in Mexico, having a bachelor's degree not related to education or not having a bachelor's degree is a common and frequent practice when it comes to teaching EFL in Mexican contexts.

Then, their experience mainly comes from their daily teaching practices and the years of teachers' experience; this creates gaps between their PD and their teaching practices, resulting in less autonomous decision-making and a limitation of reflective practices. Authors, such as Farrell (2018), state that teaching reflectively means learning all over again. Then, reflective practices are an important matter that ought to be acknowledged in all classes, because they help build a

better understanding of teachers' autonomy while transforming educational practices. Thus, PD and autonomy are concepts that are closely connected, as both depend on reflective processes and self-directed professional actions. That is to say, continuous processes enhance improvement in teachers' practices, self-reflection, and conscious decision-making within their classrooms.

Some authors refer to PD as a process that is not only about participating in workshops but also about engaging in continuous learning processes that leads to changes practices. For instance, Díaz-Maggioli (2020) claims that Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is not the final extent but a permanent learning process that includes setbacks; these setbacks are part of the progress. In this regard, teacher autonomy is not limited only to individual dependence but also encompasses collaborative dimensions. To understand the relation between these two variables, this study relies on the six dimensions of autonomy proposed by Smith (2003) and the revised version of Bloom's taxonomy proposed by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001). These frameworks offer a useful manner to examine cognitive processes and reflection that participants develop in their classes. Such processes may range from low-level cognitive levels to higher cognitive levels and more complex stages in terms of cognition. When integrating these two models, the present study analyzed the correlation between PD and autonomy while finding formative, informal, and formal opportunities in teachers that strengthen teacher autonomy. This focus allows understanding not only observable results, but also internal changes and challenges teachers experiment within a private context.

1.3 Statement of the problem

Even though private language institutes in Mexico recognize the importance of linguistic competence, they tend to neglect the pedagogical aspect and the continuous professional development of their teachers. Therefore, due to the lack of workshops and training, participants

face challenges when it comes to teaching; this generates significant discrepancies in how teachers address their teaching practices. Such an absence of structured programs limits the opportunities for teachers to improve their reflective practices. To examine these issues, this present study conducted class observations based on adapted versions of the British Council's Continuing Professional Development Framework for Teachers (2015), Cambridge English teaching framework components (2019), and the checklists proposed by Brenes et al. (2010).

This study identified autonomy levels and the cognitive processes in which participants operate and process information. The findings show that while some participants enroll in workshops, webinars, and other related matters for PD, participants still lack guidance about how to identify or apply what they have learned, whereas other participants were more autonomous and consequently they successfully integrate what they have learned into their practices. These attitudes illustrate that there is a direct correlation between PD and teacher autonomy; the participants who take conscious decisions and strategies about their formation achieve a better advancement in their teaching practice. Additionally, these teaching practices were also linked to socioemotional aspects. This finding highlights that socioemotional well-being in participants is a key factor when it comes to improving teaching practices, as it influences willingness and confidence to engage in reflective practices.

1.4 Justification

This study is relevant because it addresses a gap in understanding the correlation between PD and teacher autonomy within private language institutes in Mexico. Although there is extensive information about teachers' training in the public sector, the challenges and realities faced by teachers in the private sector have not yet been explored in depth, especially in terms of how autonomy influences the capacity to continuously improve teaching practices.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the PD and autonomy field when integrating frameworks such as the British Council's Continuing Professional Development Framework for Teachers (2015), Cambridge English teaching framework components (2019), and Brenes et al. (2010) checklists. The use of these instruments allows to observe classes and spotting professional competences in participants whilst using the six dimensions of teacher autonomy framework proposed by Smith (2003). Such a framework illustrates how to differentiate and understand the levels of autonomy, especially in terms of teachers exercising their self-directed teaching practices. Moreover, when relating the dimensions of teacher autonomy with the cognitive levels of the revised version of Bloom's taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001), the study integrated a cognitive perspective that showed how participants took pedagogical decisions on different cognitive levels. From a practical point of view, this study offered evidence of how teachers in private institutions aim to search for their own PD in the absence of formal training.

Understanding how teachers develop their autonomy provides insight into how coordinators and principals can guide and create strategies that respond to the current needs of staff. Theoretically, this study showed how international approaches, such as the integration of the six dimensions of autonomy, can be integrated in other contexts, such as the Mexican context.

1.5 Research objectives and questions

As previously stated, there is a close relationship between PD and autonomy, and even if there is some research in public contexts, it is still not well-defined how autonomy and PD interact, develop, and progress in private contexts. As a result of this process, the specific objectives of this study are as follows

- To analyze the characteristics of teachers' practices in private contexts, considering as a reference the autonomy model proposed by Smith (2003), which is represented by a differentiation on six levels of teacher autonomy.
- To identify teachers' challenges and how they face these challenges when it comes to daily practices in relation to their autonomy.
- To examine how teacher autonomy contributes to their PD and how it is reflected.

Based on these objectives, the research questions that delimit the scope of this study are:

RQ1 How is the teacher instruction characterized in a private language school according to the teacher autonomy model proposed by Smith and (2003)?

RQ2 How do teachers cope with the challenges they face in their everyday instruction in relation to their teaching autonomy?

RQ3 To what extent does teachers' autonomy trigger their professional development?

1.6 Relevance of the study

The relevance of this study lies in the evidence it offers about how EFL teachers can develop autonomy and how autonomy directly impacts on more accurate PD. It also provides a more complete understanding of the nature of autonomy, supporting private contexts in the field of English-language teaching contexts and addressing an educational gap the existing literature.

Research on the dimensions of teacher autonomy is still limited; comprehending how participants exercise their autonomy while facing difficulties in their daily real settings provides valuable information for academic coordinators, teacher trainers, and principals in institutions. The results can orient and take challenges as considerations when creating policies and strategies that align with current practices, but above all, more realistic and adapted to teachers' needs and

daily challenges, fostering autonomous PD. Additionally, the study emphasizes the importance of socioemotional factors in PD, evidencing that if teachers feel more understood and heard, they may tend to be more involved in reflective and autonomous decisions. In brief, the findings are useful for teachers, private institutions, and the academic community, offering empirical evidence but also applicable practices that can guide teachers' training and practices.

Chapter 2 Literature review

2.1 From English as a Foreign Language to Teaching English as a Foreign Language.

Some of the first descriptions of the term “English as a foreign language” (EFL) were proposed by Broughton et al. (1980) who posit that EFL refers to how EFL was extensively taught in several countries and how it was included in various educational systems. Then, EFL was not only a linguistic matter but also a cultural, political, and educational matter that has worked as a social language tool (Broughton et al., 1980). Historically, this same term (EFL) was used by Kachru (1985), who developed the “Three Circles of English model.” In this model, Kachru (1985) establishes three different circles, namely “the inner circle,” the outer circle,” and “the expanding circle.” This last circle, “the expanding circle,” includes nations where English is mainly taught as a foreign language. For Kachru (1985), this last expanding circle involves acknowledging that English is a global language that has been increasing rapidly.

The increase in English teaching and learning around the world, either in public or private education sectors, has promoted the rise of professionals specializing in teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) (Broughton et al., 1980). That is to say, language can be a priority in education even if it is not officially recognized within an official framework (Crystal, 2003).

For him, this priority turns into an inclusion when governments incorporate English as a mandatory subject from early years in education. As a result, even if the language is not an official one, the instrumental value of it highly lies in international communication, science, technology, and economy in a country (Crystal, 2003). A clear instance of this English instruction seems to appear when it is integrated into school curricula as a foreign language, and even more when it is integrated in levels such as secondary and upper secondary education (Wolf & Butler, 2017). For this reason, in many countries where English is not the first language, governments

have decided to include it as a mandatory subject (Manrique & Izquierdo ,2024). Nevertheless, Crystal (2003) suggests that an important aspect that should be considered is that the term EFL should not be excessively simplified, because its role and interpretation should consider a diverse variety of contexts, the reasons why it is taught, and the direction of its objectives. Crystal (2003) exemplifies that in some cases, the role of English enacts as economic development while in others, it acts as a way of cultural integration, and in some settings, it is simply treated as an academic requirement.

However, currently EFL has more presence in academic matters and therefore there is more literature that evidences how EFL has been experimenting a deeper transformation (Manrique & Izquierdo, 2024). Such presence is becoming stronger in educational systems and becoming part of national curricula (Manrique & Izquierdo, 2024). Building on this perspective, Anastassiou and Andreou (2020) claim that this growing presence has generated an increasing amount of EFL literature, much of which is closely related to pedagogy, intercultural and multilingual studies, as well as teaching methods and general teaching. Such expansion also reflects the increasing complexity of the field, and from standpoint, Villacañas de Castro (2013) argues that TEFL presents a complex challenge for teachers due to the multiple contradictory demands. For him, this challenge exists not only in English but also in other languages.

Teaching a foreign language is not a mysterious matter, it is just the fact that TEFL is more difficult to teach than other subjects and consequently that is the main reason why it needs more sophisticated methods that extend to considering students' emotions instead of only correcting errors and repeating exercises (Villacañas de Castro, 2013). In this vein, experience in teaching is highly beneficial for those aspiring to be English as a Foreign Language Teachers because TEFL not only needs a mastery of the language but a solid foundation in theory and

practical techniques (Chan,2014). TEFL is widely recognized as a challenging task because its effectiveness not only depends on the teacher's knowledge but also on the ability to keep students engaged and motivated (Villacañas de Castro, 2013). Thus, it is imperative to develop professional competences in EFL teachers to improve their practices and teaching (Manrique & Izquierdo, 2024).

2.1.1 The expansion of English in México

As stated by Charles-Lejia and Torres Garcia (2022), the importance of English in Mexico has increased due to trade agreements with the United States and Canada; specifically, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the USMCA United States- Mexico-Canada agreement. In this same line, Despaigne (2010) argued that English became more common in Mexico in December 1994, when Mexico accepted being officially part of the NAFTA. While accepting being integrated into this global system, Mexico had to adopt some of its cultural and linguistic characteristics; one of these characteristics was the use of English as a dominant language in business, international trade, politics, and education (Despaigne, 2010).

Since 1994, English has become increasingly widespread in the country, contributing to the expansion of English in a Mexican society that was already multilingual (Despaigne, 2010).

Consequently, states with more industry and tourism, such as Quintana Roo, Baja California, and Aguascalientes, are those with the most English speakers due to the commercial and labor needs (Charles-Lejia & Torres Garcia, 2022). Around 23.9 million people in Mexico study English; this number includes students from private and public institutions and those who learn independently or through private courses (British Council, 2015). Despite this widespread use, Education First (EF, 2017) situated Mexico at a B1 low level based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

English in Mexico is, in the current context, a useful tool that contributes to improving economic opportunities, facilitating access to better job opportunities, and generating more social mobility, mainly because of the close connection with the United States (Borjia, 2015).

According to Borjia (2015), the influence that exists between these two countries is not only economic but also social, historical and cultural, and due to this connection, many people in Mexico are encouraged or forced to learn English to improve their quality of life and professional opportunities. As noted by Despaigne (2010), the relationship between Mexico and the United States is becoming closer in terms of economy, politics, and cultural matters; this means that both countries depend on one another. One clear example that truly highlights this relation is that now Mexico is part of a global economy; as a consequence, it needs to adapt to international market demands where English plays a huge role, having an impact not only in educational contexts but also in everyday life (Despaigne, 2010). In more contemporary global contexts, English is a tool that facilitates the global economy, but its economic advantages depend on regional context and other economic factors, which do not warrant a better commercial balance but can contribute to efficiency in international markets (Strango et al.,2025).

In line with this, Despaigne (2010) states that English is not only used in economy but also in songs, movies, technology, fashion, advertisements, and business. English is so present that it has become an essential tool for people who want to have access to better jobs, educational, and social opportunities (Despaigne, 2010). For this reason, in Mexico, learning English is almost a mandatory tool for those who want to improve their lifestyle (Despaigne, 2010). More recent reports in EF (2024) state that the proficiency trend from 2011 to 2024 has gradually improved. However, Mexico still remains in the low proficiency band, which indicates

an intermediate low-level proficiency. States such as Coahuila, Valladolid, and Morelia have the lowest proficiency levels, while Monterrey and its capital, Nuevo León, have the highest proficiency level (EF, 2024).

2.1.2 English Language Teaching in Mexico and its History

English has been taught in Mexico for many years; it was first introduced in Mexico's official secondary curriculum in 1941, since then, English has remained continuously present in Mexican education for over seven decades. By 1960, the federal government supervised education in the whole country; therefore, the decisions related to teachers, schools, curriculum design, and administrative employees were decided by the government (Calderón Martín del Campo, 2015). Nevertheless, this centralized system became obsolete and inefficient because every region in Mexico had different necessities (British Council, 2015). However, in the 1990s, as part of international policies, English was proposed to be integrated into the Mexican curriculum from an early stage (Ramírez-Romero & Sayer, 2016). According to the British Council (2015), by 1992, there was a decentralization process; this reform, implemented by the government, aimed to transfer the educational responsibility to the thirty-one states in the Mexican Republic. In such a manner, each state gained more control over its schools while aligned to the general regulations set by the government (British Council, 2015).

As noted by the British Council (2015), English teaching was affected by the previous centralization. However, this new reform allowed states in the Mexican Republic to have their own right to decide how to implement teaching programs according to their needs (British Council, 2015). In accordance with the British Council (2015), this remarkable decision resulted in variations in how English was taught, especially when it came to the resources and priorities in each state. According to Ramírez-Romero and Sayer (2016), at least five English language

teaching (ELT) programs have been developed; these include *Programas Estatales, English Enclicomedia, Programa Nacional de inglés en Educación Básica (PNIEB), Programa para el Fortalecimiento de la calidad de la Educación básica (PFCEB), and Programa Nacional de Inglés (PRONI)*.

This last program emerged based on the necessity of having public schools that can teach English, mainly based on the importance of knowing English as a competitive skill that allows students to access more information and improve their job opportunities (SEP, 2017). However, it is important to note that PRONI neither evaluates students' English learning nor analyzes whether it is distributed equitably or it is satisfactory for students (SEP, 2017). As part of this last reform and its main objective, the Mexican government needed to recruit and prepare more than 80,000 English teachers to meet this goal (British Council, 2015). Similarly, Christiansen et al. (2018) agreed on this significant recruitment of English language teachers, highlighting a preference for those who were already English language users. Hence, the number programs to teach English in Mexico has increased, primarily due to the educational policies, policies that promoted the inclusion of English in education systems (Christiansen et al., 2018). As Davies (2020) has pointed out in Mexico, as in other countries, there is a huge variety in the quality of ELT. These varieties can range from excellent instruction to decent instruction or even ineffective teaching, which leads to very poor results (Davies, 2020).

Analyzing ELT in a country is all about identifying whether, in general terms, it is good, average, or poor, and if so, the reasons behind that and this sense Davies (2020) observed that ELT in Mexico shows huge differences in terms of quality in education. These disparities in public schools have contributed to challenges in teaching, such as limited time for teaching, large groups, students' diversity, and the lack of classroom resources (Basurto Santos & Weathers,

2016). Additionally, across Latin America, several countries allocate a few hours to English instruction; in Mexico, this can be attributed to a great diversity of factors, such as insufficient resources, ineffective teaching practices, and reduced instructional time (Eccius-Wellman & Santana, 2020). In this regard, Manrique and Izquierdo (2024) added that several times teaching English simply reduces to memorizing and applying the language out of real contexts, limiting students to using the language in a practical manner.

Manrique and Izquierdo (2024) pointed out that this is the result of the lack of a solid framework, albeit it does not foster students to use the language in meaningful situations. This echoes in Davies and Domínguez's (2021) findings, who claimed that even after six years of English education, three in upper secondary school and three in lower secondary school, most students frequently enroll in university with a basic level of proficiency. As noted by Davies (2020), English language teaching, especially in public schools, is not achieving significant results, and there is still little reliable information about its successes and failures. Learning English in Mexico is not only limited to a linguistic process, but it also involves multiple cultural and social factors. One of these is television and the media, which contribute to students associating the language with the American ideal, influencing not only their motivations but also their identity (Mora Pablo, 2014). Nevertheless, another and even more significant factor is the socioeconomic context; learning English in Mexico depends not only on the educational system but also on the socioeconomic level (López-Gopar & Sughrua, 2014). This became in the late 90s, when most of the elementary public schools in Mexico did not have English as part of their curricula, resulting in limited access to the language (López-Gopar & Sughrua, 2014).

To address this lack, private institutions started to integrate English as part of their programs; additionally bilingual schools (Spanish - English) offered a more modern and global

education (López-Gopar & Sughrua, 2014). Due to this ongoing globalization and social interaction, English has become essential in Mexico, and the country has responded to this increasing demand by implementing educational programs aimed to develop stronger linguistic competencies (Eccius-Wellman & Santana, 2020). However, significant structural inequality persists in terms of English education; this inequality relies mainly on the fact that students in private schools advance faster and are more successful than learners in public schools, who face limitations that hinder their development in terms of linguistic abilities (Eccius-Wellman & Santana, 2020). In Latin America, learning English and mastering it is closely related to private education and access to better job opportunities, which reflects broader educational and social inequality (Sayer, 2018). This inequality is also represented in digital environments of private schools, where technological resources facilitate better and more complete and continuous learning (Sayer, 2018). From this perspective reducing the gap between public and private schools becomes essential to promote a more inclusive and equitable access to English learning for all students (Sayer, 2018).

2.1.3 Profiles of English Teachers in Mexico

According to Richards (2010), most English teachers around the world are non-native speaker teachers; this means that a native-like proficiency in teaching is not necessary for being a successful and effective teacher. In fact, some of the best classes are not always performed by native speaker teachers; on the contrary, they are being taught by teachers whose English is either their second or foreign language. In today's contexts, English language teaching is understood as a global dynamic phenomenon in which the focus is not exclusively based on linguistic authenticity but rather on teachers' professional competence and preparation to teach (Richards, 2010).

In other words, teaching English in a globalized world does not rely solely on whether the teacher is a native or non-native speaker. Instead, continuous training, research, and PD are the key elements that define an effective English teacher in an interconnected world (Mora Pablo, 2014). From this perspective, teachers who have foundations such as psycholinguistics and language learning have a better understanding in terms of teaching (Surkamp & Viebrock, 2018). Strengthening these forms of knowledge becomes particularly important, especially when considering the need to develop higher professional competence in EFL teachers, as this contributes to improving their practices, facilitating curriculum integration as well as promoting the social utility of English (Manrique & Izquierdo, 2024). This need is especially relevant in Mexican context, where English is taught as a mandatory subject at various educational levels, such as preschool, elementary school, junior high, and university (Rebolledo & Bullock, 2019).

However, despite all these strategies and education systems, reports in 2023 displayed the unsuccessful results in EFL among students, indicating that students in Mexico are not achieving these proficiency standards that once were set by the Ministry of Education (Manrique & Izquierdo, 2024).

According to Charles-Lejia and Torres (2022), these reports provide evidence that indicates that English proficiency in Mexico is still far from attaining significant levels. Such reports have shown that there is an evident deficit not only in terms of communicative skill but also in proficiency evaluations (Jaime et al., 2021). Taking these findings into consideration, a set of actions has been implemented; one of which is directly targeting teacher preparation (SEP,2017). One example of this focus on teacher preparation in Mexico can be spotted in *Escuelas Normales*. *Escuelas Normales in Mexico* are the ones serving as teachers' "training

colleges.” *Escuelas Normales* are responsible for preparing educators to deliver different subjects in levels such as kindergarten, elementary schools, and junior high schools (Rebolledo, 2021).

Nevertheless, these training programs and curricula do not sufficiently meet the real-world contexts in which teachers work, and what is more, the conditions that students face as learners (Manrique & Izquierdo, 2024). Yet, when it comes to examining results on how teacher training impacts students, it is not possible to reach a single conclusion; some findings show that there is a positive impact, while others rely on little or no evidence at all (Kubanyiova, 2012).

This is not surprising because an array of programs includes a wide variety of teacher training contents, and these programs have been applied in different contexts, in addition to the fact that researchers understand and measure the concept of impact differently (Kubanyiova, 2012). Considering the above, the need for PD is indisputable to improve teachers’ methods as well as language skills, instead of providing short training sessions designed by school authorities, which, in teachers’ words, do not always focus on English language teaching (Rebolledo & Bullock, 2019). In this regard, many teachers rely on taking short training courses in order to impart classes; this is mainly because, in Mexico, there is no need to hold an English teaching degree to impart classes (Rebolledo & Bullock, 2019). In Rebolledo and Bullock’s (2019) study, the absence of holding a degree seems more common than it may appear. That is why preparing teachers for everyday practices and future challenges they face in this teaching profession is highly important (Surkamp & Viebrock, 2018). Teaching is a long-endavored fundamental profession in which all teachers who demonstrated have a solid preparation, commitment, and support for others play a key role in the development of a more democratic society (Borjian, 2014).

2.2 The Art of Being a teacher: Teaching Practices

According to Harmer (2007), so many metaphors can be used to illustrate teachers' roles, because teaching is not a static activity but one that implies being responsible for distinct roles according to the students' necessities in every moment; in this sense, teachers' roles may be even compared to orchestral conductors who guide conversations and the tone of a class. Thus, being a teacher transcends considerably beyond the idea of only performing a job or a profession as it involves vocation, identity, and a continuous personal commitment to both learning and human relationships (Surkamp & Viebrock, 2018). In other words, teaching is more than transmitting information and applying methodologies; it is about recognizing human and personal qualities alongside the innate ability to connect with learners, inspire them, and motivate them (Harmer, 2007). Therefore, teaching is not only about practice but also about the impact that teachers have on their students. Cassany (2021) claims that the term "good" teacher depends not only on the knowledge teachers possess but also on the personal qualities and abilities that transcend academic content, which inspire students and leave a long-lasting impact. Moreover, teachers are not only individuals who teach in classrooms but also work alongside other teachers, institutions and communities to help improve learning and education (Borjian, 2014). Truly, excellent teachers inspire, not necessarily by instructing but by encouraging students on what to do and what to reflect on (Harmer, 2007). In this regard, teachers are described according to how they are perceived within different cultural context; in some cases, they are mainly considered as authorities in a classroom who focus on guiding students (Richards, 2010). However, research suggest that teachers can also be dynamic and flexible individuals who adapt strategies, roles, and behaviors to focus on students' needs that promote more effective learning which highlights that learning how to teach essentially means an engaging and ongoing reflection that at the same time, it is also a highly demanding and complex process (Harmer, 2007). In these contexts, such

considerations form the core of teaching practices, which, according to Hernandez and Izquierdo (2023), are associated with lesson planning and based on a foundational knowledge of curriculum, discipline, and pedagogical background.

Moreover, according to Freeman (2006), teaching is not only about giving instructions or explaining the content of a subject, but it also involves as a set of actions, words, thoughts, and decisions that teachers do when in specific contexts. The objective of teaching practices is to find the opportunity to improve and polish practices which are continuously redefined by experiences and reflections about teachers' own practices; these experiences are crucial because they take place in real scenarios (Richards & Farrell, 2011). In this regard, when language teachers obtain information about "teaching," they do not usually analyze it thoroughly and in a detailed objective way. Instead, they tend to interpret it quickly through their ideas, beliefs, and knowledge, which they already have in mind (Kubanyiova, 2012). That implies that teaching practices not only apply to the foundations of a teacher but also evaluate teachers' theories and beliefs in a way that they themselves can evaluate them (Richards & Farrell, 2011). In other words, every teacher's process is a unique way in which teachers see it from their own background, experiences, and circumstances. Such characteristics are not chosen randomly; they are shaped by several influences, such as teachers' own personality, past experiences as students, professional career paths, and the context in which they are immersed at their work (Kubanyiova, 2012). Hence, teaching is not only about giving information about a topic but also about creating an environment that promotes learning (Harmer, 2007); it follows that the evolution of teaching languages does not only depend on theory and research but also on the experience lived by the teachers, and at times, the teachers' practices, which reflect what teachers have lived as students (Lennon, 2021).

2.2.1 Reflective practices

Reflective practices are fundamental to train foreign language teachers serving as a cornerstone that integrates theoretical fundamentals, academic training and reflective thinking (Surkamp & Viebrock, 2018). In a similar vein, Moon (2004) defines reflective practices as a process in which educators scrutinize their teaching methods with the aim of enhancing or modifying them for better results, leading to the growth of competent professionals. However, despite their recognized importance, the integration of reflective practices goes far beyond; many teachers just rush out of class, having in mind and still focused on what just happened, rarely having the time to fully reflect on what just happened in their classrooms. This lack of reflection limits the opportunity to analyze their lessons, teaching decisions and consequently, improving their professional practices (Harmer, 2007). But this is not the only obstacle, according to Menegale (2024), teachers often face obstacles that may arise from their social environment or from the conditions within their schools; these obstacles can be related to students' expectations, the availability of resources, or even the physical spaces where teaching takes place. Such situations can trigger reflective thinking and encourage teachers to think deeply about their practice and make informed decisions to improve their teaching practice (Menegale, 2024).

Reflective practices, as argued by Farrell (2024) are more than just a simple, thoughtful process, because they must be systematic and purposeful, involving not only remembering what happened in a class but also critically analyzing it and learning from it. Such practices should be a central concern for teachers because teachers must ensure that students learn effectively, which involves constant evaluation, and the ability to readjust the way in which they teach to enhance effectiveness (Borjian, 2014). Therefore, this focus should not be only about teachers but students and the way students receive feedback, particularly because students are the ones who

receive teachers' methods, techniques, and teaching practices (Farrell, 2024). Thus, adopting a mindset of continuous learning allows teachers to reflect and improve their methodologies and strategies to better address students' learning needs, emphasizing the importance of consistently remaining open to learning (Borjian, 2014). In this regard, adopting a continuous learning becomes essential because reflection not only helps teachers to identify problems while teaching but also encourages self-reflection about their own role (Farrell, 2024). Hence, teachers who self-reflect are more conscious of the decisions they make and the reasons behind them, such reflective activities are fundamental because they are equally important for both students and teachers (Farrell, 2024). To facilitate this process, teachers must reflect on their own teaching practices to improve them; that is the main reason teachers should have access to countless opportunities throughout their careers, not only before they begin teaching but also during the process (Lengeling, 2014).

2.3 Professional Development a Dual Process: Informal and formal PD

In essence, PD is a continuous cycle in which a teacher can learn, reflect, adapt, and apply learning in their teaching practices to better results and students' growth (Avalos, 2011).

This cyclical process highlights how teachers voluntarily participate in learning new methods, adapt teaching practices, and modify their own teaching according to students' needs, emphasizing that PD is an ongoing process that extends through all the teacher's career in such a manner that it improves and refines abilities that meet students' necessities (Diaz-Maggioli, 2004). In other words, PD is a continuous and permanent activity, and it may occur in a teacher's workplace and outside of it; it not only influences teachers' professional life but also their personal life (Hayes, 2015). This understanding of PD as a fundamental and long-lasting process, includes how PD can modify and influence quality in teaching strengthening leadership in

members of a school. Moreover, the fact that PD is related to teachers' professional and personal lives reassures that teaching is a profession that demands constant training, and teachers must engage in continuous learning throughout their careers (Day, 1999). Building on this idea, it is found that PD plays an imperative role because it allows teachers to readjust and reshape their teaching techniques to guide and support their students' learning. This means that PD influences how teachers choose to give classes and promote learning in classrooms, reflecting their own individual teaching style (Díaz-Maggioli, 2004).

Thus, PD, when viewed comprehensively, goes beyond professional growth, because it encompasses areas such as teaching practices in a classroom, reflexivity in teachers, and collaboration and adaptation among individuals. In this regard PD includes both natural learning experiences and planned activities that are aimed at supporting teachers, colleagues, and the school itself, improving the quality of education. Such support also encourages teachers, either individually or collaboratively, to reflect on their teaching practices and strengthen their commitment as agents of change (Day, 1999). Therefore, PD is not an individual task but a collective one, that is created in communities, mainly because teachers need to rely on other teachers as they require support from others, in this case their colleagues and their institutions (Lengeling et al., 2014). This leads to the conclusion that PD should not be assumed as just attending workshops or acquiring new techniques, instead, it should be understood as a way of living the teaching profession, bearing in mind that professional growth never stops (Wong, 2011).

The notion of PD as a continues and formative process is further argued by Richards (2017) who claims that PD should not solely be associated with attending workshops or participating in courses because it is a process that allows teachers to transform the way they

think and the manner in which they teach; this can often relate to the change that emerges from reflecting and analyzing their classroom experiences. In other words, teachers should be able to demonstrate their ability to change and willingness to contribute to reshape practices not only in their classrooms but in their school and their working communities (Lengeling et al.,2014).

Research has shown that teachers ought to be actively involved in PD practice especially because their participation constitutes an imperative element that improves their teaching practices and students' learning (Swan Dagen & Bean, 2014). Within this understanding, PD involves a variety of processes that contribute to this improvement, some of these elements include teachers dedicating enough time to learn the content of a subject and becoming more aware of pedagogical strategies. This means that teachers must actively participate in activities that involve everyone in a school environment, in such a manner that every individual receives support, feedback, and follow-up to apply what has been learned in the classroom. According to Swan Dagen and Bean (2014) PD tends to be more successful in collaborative scholar cultures where teachers share experiences and work together; additionally, this acquisition of knowledge is also fundamental in areas such as literacy because it incorporates the same principles of active learning and continuity. Hence, applying such principles and PD policies in a school district depends largely on the people who are in charge and put them into practice, and also the way in which these policies are implemented and how they have evolved through time. Highlighting that the implementation of these policies is not exactly a mechanical process but a learning process in which everyone participates (Jaquit, 2014). In doing so, to be truly effective, PD cannot be limited to the transmission of information; rather, it involves clear and purposeful teaching processes (instructive), opportunities to analyze and critically examine teaching practices (reflective), the active and constant engagement of teachers in their own learning (active),

collaboration and shared work with colleagues (collaborative), and a focused and meaningful attempt that promotes real impact on teaching practices which can also contribute to improving the educational outcomes (substantive) (Quatroche et al.,2014).

From this standpoint, PD has passed through many processes, one clear instance of these processes is measuring teachers' efficiency while performing in classes, then the focus was not only on acknowledging teacher's efficiency or teachers' thoughts and beliefs but on how these decisions influence their practices, which resulted in focusing is on students' learning (Diaz-Maggioli, 2020). Thus, PD is not only related to teachers but to students, understanding that PD is a set of experiences that take place within a collaborative culture with shared leadership, which strengthens educators' knowledge and provides them with tools that can be apply more effectively in classrooms, such learning and experiences in teaching practices that directly impact students' performance (Swan Dagen & Bean, 2014). In other words, PD is as valuable for teachers as students. However, the main concern lies in professional learning as a collective process and how this enhances teachers' collaborative capacity to face challenges or generate solutions, That is to say, concern is not only individual development , but how to work all together to solve problems and make the school more effective in fulfilling its essential purpose: improving individual student learning outcomes (Swan Dagen & Bean, 2014).

2.3.1 Continuous professional development

Continuous professional development (CPD) is a variable process that runs throughout teachers in all their careers and encompasses activities that range from formal to informal, adapting to different stages and necessities of every teacher and ensuring that professional growth remains in alignment with current necessities (Hayes, 2014). As argued by Quatroche et al., (2014), there are different ways to conceptualize CPD and identify it through multiple

perspectives. This is mainly because there is a big external plethora that encompasses a wide variety of options, such as websites created by state departments of education, materials, and virtual seminars provided by consultants. These CPD resources are continuous planned processes designed to target objectives and a continuous and permanent process that allows teachers to improve their knowledge and practices, not only in their own personal development but also in their PD, thus teachers not only empower themselves but also improve their abilities to take actions (Bolitho, 2011). In this regard, PD responds to objectives at a school or teacher's personal interests that generate continuous formative processes which tend to be never-ending training, this implies that teachers ought to be in constant training along their professional life (Hayes, 2014).

Therefore, CPD is imperative for teachers to continue polishing their teaching practices, given that education mainly relies on teachers who need support and motivation to help students reach their full potential. To meet these objectives, teachers must continue updating, adapting, and training in their professional lives (Prince & Barrett, 2014). CPD should be understood as a continuous, evolving process and not a linear one; this continuous process includes advances, setbacks, and moments to reflect (Díaz- Maggioli, 2020). Thus, CPD is not a target to be achieved but rather a well-oriented constant practice directed towards a quality in teaching (Díaz-Maggioli, 2020). In light of the above, CPD is essential to prepare teachers with the essential skills to face the increasing educational demands, new technologies, and changes in society keeping their own autonomy and having the availability to manage their own learning (Hayes, 2014). For this reason, as stated by Prince and Barrett (2014) CPD is an activity in which teachers perform autonomously in their own right. However, this process is more effective when teachers collaborate and share their experiences and learning with others since such interactions

foster collective reflection. In this vein, reflection and critical self-reflection makes teachers think about their own practices and look for areas of improvement, allowing them to maximize their own responsibility and self-awareness. Such sense of professional responsibility and auto reflection are integrated and work as complementary components that foster PD (Prince & Barrett, 2014). Nevertheless, PD not only relies on teachers' willingness but also on the collaboration of educational institutions and government agencies, and organizations that have the responsibility of creating the right conditions in which CPD can be sustainable and constant.

Thus, this responsibility that is vested in organizations, the very organizations do not receive any direct credit for their work, but teachers do, and this creates an impact that is reflected on teachers when they become more autonomous and conscious of the importance of CPD. In short, CPD is a distributed responsibility among teachers, institutions, and governments since each of these play a fundamental role in the creation of conditions that facilitate teachers' development (Prince & Barrett, 2014). This continuous learning is highly important for them because teachers not only need to teach effectively while in training, but they also need support when they see themselves become immersed in the teaching reality (Borjian, 2014). The application of PD initiatives is not always easy to perform, to become part of this environment means to face complex realities in classroom, unknow pedagogical demands, therefore proposals are perceived as complicated or hard to implement and therefore teachers may find themselves not participating in them. As stated, before these participations may not be the only thing overwhelming teachers but the integration of them into their daily tasks for teachers that may represent additional workload (Prince & Barret, 2014). Having said this, educators are not only lifelong learners who are constantly looking for new ways to improve their knowledge and skills but learners who need to apply what they have learned. For this reason, it is teachers who should

have access to various professional development opportunities throughout their careers (Borjian, 2014). Henceforth, PD should not solely focus on teachers and trainers but also consider academic staff, providing guidance and support; this way, not only teachers but also authorities are responsible for monitoring and coordinating the implementation of these activities (Prince & Barret, 2014).

Lengeling et al. (2014) state that teacher PD is not simple or linear. On the contrary, it is a complex process that changes and evolves over time, on the contrary, it constitutes a complex process that makes it difficult to determine what qualities a teacher should possess to grow professionally. This highlights the fact that each teacher may approach PD differently and not exactly have a single correct path. That is to say, CPD is fundamental for all teachers, although its impact may differ among individuals, it enhances their professional abilities and contributes to greater satisfaction and success in their jobs (Lengeling et al., 2014). Sch variation reflects several contexts in which individuals work, as well as the variety of teacher's competencies that every individual uses when teaching. Despite these differences, CPD is a process that consolidates pedagogical knowledge and continuous teachers' development. In this sense PD opportunities provide tools for teachers to conduct research and better understand students' needs, allowing them to teach effectively. In other words, CPD is a process of refinement that is clearly focused on enhancing teachers' knowledge and ability, which is a key target that improves students' learning (Díaz-Maggioli, 2020).

2.4 Learner Autonomy

The term "autonomy in language" first appeared in 1971 within the framework of the European Council of Modern Languages Project developed at Nancy University, and shortly after, it became an important concept in research. Consequently, the term "autonomy" quickly

became an important point of investigation and practice regarding learner autonomy. At this point Yves Châlon figured as the first scholar who first introduced the term “autonomy”, he was also regarded as the “father” of autonomy, shortly after the leadership was delegated to Henri Holec, who continues to be widely recognized as one of the most influential figures in the study of autonomy in language learning (Benson, 2011). Starting from these conceptual foundations, it turns out to be necessary to explore in depth how the term autonomy has been understood when it comes to explaining what autonomy means, numerous misconceptions emerge, particularly regarding what it truly means and how it should be implemented. For instance, some believe that “autonomy” means to learn entirely independently, alone and without the guidance of a teacher or that learning occurs exclusively outside of a classroom. Such assumptions make the relationship between autonomy and teaching unclear. These misconceptions are, at least in part, the result of confusion and conceptual ambiguities within the field of language teaching (Benson, 2011).

According to Little (1991), autonomy is not something that develops rapidly; rather, it depends on the continuous development and practice of some specific abilities. According to him, among these abilities is the capacity for detachment, which enables students to distance themselves from external guidance, such as teachers or learning materials and instead, seek solutions independently. This highlights the importance of critical reflection, which allows learners to identify weaknesses and strengths. Having such a reflection emphasizes that decision-making is a fundamental skill that guides learners to determine what to study and how to manage time effectively, as well as which strategies to implement to meet learning goals (Little, 1991).

This implies the need for critical reflection, not only because it benefits individual learning but also prepares students to face changing educational environments, in a context

where information and educational demands develop constantly, it is not enough for education to be limited to instructional or curriculum materials, especially in a world that is constantly changing, education should not only focus on transmitting content but also on teaching students how to learn independently and to use autonomous methods that help them to acquire new knowledge (Châlon, 1975). In this vein, autonomy is generally understood as the ability that students must direct their own learning; this widespread idea of autonomy may stem from the notion that learners naturally search for a certain control over what they learn and how they learn it, which lies in the setting of realistic objectives that help focus language teaching and learning in languages on what really matters: learning effectively. When students learn to be autonomous, they not only become better language learners, but they also develop responsibility and critical thinking, becoming active and engaged members of their community (Benson, 2011).

According to Jimenez Raya and Viera (2024), autonomy can be interpreted in two different ways: one as the capacity of every individual to manage their own learning, and second, as a collective principle that promotes a more democratic education. Then, autonomy seeks to generate transformation at both the individual and collective levels. From an individual level, autonomy allows students to assume responsibility of their own learning developing more self-assessment skills, but from a collective perspective, it fosters collaboration between students and the sharing of knowledge and experiences (Lamb & Vodicka, 2018). Understanding how autonomy operates in groups and communities is necessary to draw on other disciplines that offer interpretations applicable to these specific contexts. In this way, it becomes possible to create local and collaborative conditions for learning and using specific languages (Lamb & Vodicka, 2018). Comprehending how autonomy is manifested in groups or communities allows it to expand its own study, far beyond individual learning, considering more contextual factors that

influence its progress. This perspective reflects that autonomy is not only limited to a few individuals, but it can be developed by anyone. This is a clear example that autonomy is not manifested in the same way for everyone since it depends on the individual characteristics of each learner and the conditions in which they find themselves. Therefore, autonomy can appear at different levels and be expressed in diverse situations depending on the context (Benson, 2011). Therefore, learning should also include a critical perspective where students not only learn to ask questions but also to analyze and evaluate the information they receive. This represents the first step toward true learning autonomy and freedom in which students are not entirely dependent on the teacher (Châlon, 1975). In this regard, understating that teacher autonomy requires not only examining the learners' perspectives but also considering the role of educators. According to Jimenez Raya and Viera (2024), autonomy depends on the teachers' education perspective and how teachers promote freedom to make decisions while teaching. This suggests that autonomy not only depends on an educational perspective but also on how it is promoted freely. In more recent years, Blidy (2017) claims that autonomy and independent learning techniques seem to have emerged as a response to the challenges posed by education in the 21st century skill, these changes are closely related to the emerging need of rethink teaching and learning theories, as well as to acknowledge the diverse styles and strategies through which students process knowledge. These innovations in learning and teaching are not only focused on learners but on teachers, so the role of a teacher becomes clearer and exemplifying that it consists of discovering how students can develop the ability to learn in an independent way, taking advantage of spaces in which they have the freedom to explore. Such innovations in learning and teaching highlight the imminent transformation, redefining the roles in a classroom

where a teacher acts as a guide, supporting students in using learning resources and recognizing value, thereby promoting autonomy and responsibility for their own learning (Blidy, 2017).

Here, the importance of “learning communities” that according to Liberman and Miller (2014), learning communities are spaces that connect teachers and allow them to share experiences and knowledge. Although some communities can involve a large number of participants, the most effective groups tend to be small groups facilitating the creation of strong links among members. Such spaces allow teachers to speak honestly about their teaching practices, critically analyzing their work, and developing a better and deeper understanding of how students learn. Additionally, they promote collaboration and share responsibility in such a way that teachers not only focus on their own development but also assume responsibility for their students’ learning (Liberman & Miller, 2014). This responsibility is a key factor in fostering autonomy, because it implies that teachers ought to create learning environments in which students can make decisions by themselves, exercising a certain degree of control over their own learning process which can be translated into a beneficial learning (Benson, 2011). By providing meaningful tasks and opportunities for reflections, educators can help students gradually develop autonomy even if they struggle to demonstrate in independent learning. That is to say, students who initially do not demonstrate autonomy can develop it when they have the right conditions and guidance; and such conditions together with teaching and learning practices play a fundamental role in this development. In simple terms, encouraging autonomy not only strengthens students’ ability to work independently but also leads to deeper and more meaningful learning (Benson, 2011).

2.4.1 Defining Teacher Autonomy and Autonomous teachers

Teacher autonomy has become prominent topic in educational research; its extended effects have been spotted in teachers and extended beyond institutional practices that directly affect teachers. Teacher autonomy reflects broader educational trends that are both national and global levels. Moreover, teacher autonomy is not merely a theoretical concept, rather it is a factor that has many implications for teachers' well-being and institutional stability (Wermke et al.,2018). In this vein, Wermke and Höstfält (2014) claim that teacher autonomy is not static but evolves over time and can be manifested in different ways depending on the context. Hence, teacher autonomy can be examined through a sociohistorical perspective, by analyzing social contexts that allow to observe the way autonomy is understood and exercised by teachers. In this sense, the relationship between educational phenomena and curricular evaluation imply that the ways in which, content, curricula, programs and student learning are evaluated have a direct impact on the level of autonomy exercised by teachers (Wermke & Höstfält, 2014).

Another definition about teacher autonomy states that teacher autonomy goes beyond the simplistic idea of a teacher doing whatever they prefer, therefore teacher autonomy integrates different dimensions, such as cognitive, contextual and critical practices within professional development (Dikilitaş & Griffiths, 2017). For these authors, freedom in teaching does not refer to ignoring institutional policies, rather it involves the teacher's capacity to critically analyze curricula, materials, and educational policies to decide how these can be adapted in their own context. In other words, teachers do not act automatically or mechanically, instead, teachers interpret and negotiate external demands based on one their pedagogical knowledge and the real needs of their students. According to Dikilitaş and Griffiths (2017) considering actions and teachers' capacities represents a metacognitive dimension of teacher autonomy, as teachers are

aware of what they can do, their current limitations, and the actions required from improvement.

This includes recognizing gaps in their knowledge and seeking opportunities to critically evaluate the impact of their pedagogical decisions. Therefore, teacher autonomy should be understood as a continuous process of professional empowerment based on critical reflection, informed decision-making and the capacity to act within and sometimes despite existing institutional conditions. From this perspective, teacher autonomy is closely linked to the ability engage in problem-solving, as problem-solving is not merely an isolated academic activity; on the contrary, it is a formative cognitive process in which individuals are required to think critically. Such process involves analyzing problems, evaluating different options, and anticipating consequences (Cirocki & Hallet, 2024). This entails reflecting processes, as individuals ought to acknowledge mistakes, recognize what they know and learn from experience. Moreover, problem solving promotes innovation, since there are so many times in which there is no single correct solution and individuals are encouraged to come up with solutions that can be adapted to specific contexts (Cirocki & Hallet, 2024). These processes are closely related to the exercise of teacher autonomy in educational contexts, according to Girocki and Anam (2021) teacher autonomy is a complex and multidimensional capacity that encompasses classroom practices, professional development and participation in institutional processes.

Ergo, teacher autonomy, implies voluntary participation and freedom to self-direct teaching, emphasizing the teacher's role as active agent in pedagogical practices rather than as a passive executor of externally imposed decisions. The capacity to plan, implement and evaluate pedagogical practice indicates that autonomy is manifested throughout the teaching process. Teachers design lessons, select appropriate strategies, implement activities, and evaluate

outcomes with the purpose of continuously improving their teaching practice. The target of such practice is to be engaging, effective, sustainable, and self-directed, reflecting concern not only for immediate learning impact outcomes but also for long-term continuity, coherence and improvement (Cirocki & Anam, 2021).

For Cirocki and Hallet (2024), these autonomous teaching practices are reflected in a set of professional attributes that characterize autonomous teachers. It is imperative to highlight that autonomous teachers tend to demonstrate flexibility and strategic thinking, which allows them to adapt to diverse educational contexts. Similarly, they also show sensitivity to diversity and clear pedagogical orientation, supported by a critical stance and a logical approach to decision-making. In addition, autonomous teachers display professional ambition, determination, and willingness elements that strengthen confidence and foster reflexivity. Responsibility and a disposition to take risks are also evident, together with selectivity and initiative in their professional commitment. Finally, attributes such as professional restraint, ingenuity, exploration and curiosity reveal a strong disposition toward innovation, continuous learning and long-term professional development (Cirocki & Hallet, 2024).

2.4.2 Teacher Autonomy and its relationship with PD

Teacher autonomy is conceptualized in the educational literature as an important and key factor within educational systems. It is described as an element that enables teachers to make informed pedagogical decisions. Moreover, many studies and educational discourses show that teacher autonomy is a powerful means when addressing several school-related challenges. As a result, a link between teacher autonomy and teachers' professional development is established (Wermke et al., 2018). However, for a long-time autonomy was understood primarily as a concept which led to a lack of empirical research in the field of English Language Teaching.

Nevertheless, when teacher autonomy started to be understood as part of teacher professional identity and it was integrated into this perspective, autonomy stopped being an abstract idea and started to be considered as an observable one. As a result, it increased the number of research studies in diverse educational context, where practical use was implemented in order to improve initial formative programs for English teachers, as well as initiatives for professional development (PD) which connected research directly on educational practice (Cirocki & Hallet, 2024). Within this empirical turn, research began to identify the factors that shape and sustain teacher autonomy in practice. In this regard, Wermke and Höstfält (2014) argue that curricular evaluation is not the only imperative factor when it comes to talk about autonomy. Additionally, teacher education and the integration of continuous professional development (CPD) are key aspects in the development of teacher autonomy. Through these processes, a shared professional knowledge base and a common professional culture are constructed, this influences how teachers make decisions in an autonomous manner. For Wermke and Höstfält (2014) four central axes explain how teacher autonomy emerges. These are curricular evaluation, teacher education, CPD and educational leadership in schools. Such as axes highlight that teacher education is initially considered as the starting point of professional autonomy, as it is through this process that pedagogical, didactical, and ethical knowledge are constructed.

According to Girocki and Hallet (2024), autonomy and professional development (PD) constitute a central dimension of professional identity. This implies that the way in which teachers participate, learn, develop professionally directly influences how they see themselves as professionals. PD activities should include not only preservice teachers, but also in-service and such activities ought to be contextualized and realistic, that is, closely related to real contexts in

which teachers work. This approach promotes collaborative work, allowing teachers to learn from one another, and to develop both their teaching practices and their professional learning in a collective manner. During PD processes, it is fundamental that the teachers are granted a considerable degree of freedom. This freedom includes the possibility of taking pedagogical risks, implementing their own initiatives, making rational decisions, and designing both short- and long-term plans. In synthesis PD is also an autonomous, reflective and contextualized process in which teachers play a central role in decision-making and in the improvement of educational practice (Cirocki & Hallet, 2024). Nevertheless, the extent to which PD promotes autonomy largely depends on how it is designed and implemented. In this regard, Wermke and Höstfält (2014) continuous professional development (CPD) is often imposed in a vertical and standardized manner, which can limit teacher autonomy. By contrast, when CPD is flexible and contextualized, it can amplify teacher autonomy, positioning CPD as a fundamental axis in the evolution of teacher autonomy. Within such autonomous and supporting environments, teachers are more likely to get involved in problem solving processes, which contributes directly to PD, by fostering critical thinking, personal responsibility and leadership which are key elements for autonomous learning (Wermke & Höstfält,2014)

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Chapter three details the methodology adopted in this study, which aims to examine how teachers' autonomy in a private English School from a socio-constructivist perspective is reflected in teaching practices, and how it is linked to their PD, noting that autonomy plays an important role in learning and it is essential and imperative for both students and teachers when taking control of their own learning. However, it is still not known how teachers implement and comprehend autonomy in their practices and its role in their PD. The following chapter describes the methodological directions for a qualitative investigation, outlining the overall research design, participants, data collection, and procedures that were followed to implement this study.

The chapter is organized under the following headings: research questions, methodological approach, research method, data collection instruments, participants and setting, data collection and procedure, data analysis, and ethical considerations.

3.2 Research questions

As argued by Creswell (2012), research questions in both quantitative and qualitative studies serve the purpose of guiding their research by specifically defining the objective of the analysis. Similarly, Sunderland (2010) claims that research questions should be formulated in a way that allows us to discover new trends that only research could show. Therefore, the research questions that guide this study are:

RQ1 How is the teacher instruction characterized in a private language school according to the teacher autonomy model proposed by Smith (2003)?

This research question aims to explore whether any of the six dimensions of autonomy are reflected in teachers' instructional practices. Hence, by examining how teachers engage in

self-directed teaching and at some certain points, self- directed learning, together with the degree of how they experience freedom and control over their own teaching practices and even pedagogical decisions. Overall, this question intends to pinpoint evidence of the use of any of the six dimensions.

RQ2 How do teachers cope with the challenges they face in their everyday instruction in relation to their teaching autonomy?

The objective of this research question is straightforward to explore and describe how teachers' autonomous decisions face challenges that emerge in their daily practices. By identifying challenges and how these challenges intervene in their capacity to take pedagogical decisions and decisions about their learning as teachers, as well as the capacity to perform in a self-directed manner. This question exposes strategies and actions used to deal with different situations and the level of autonomy they may show.

RQ3 To what extent does teachers' autonomy trigger their professional development?

The aim of this research question is to explore if there is any relationship between teacher autonomy based on reflective practices and PD in such manner that this relation promotes pathways to continue developing as professionals.

3.3 Ontological perspective

As described by Creswell and Poth (2018), the ontological dimension in research examines the essence of reality and its own characteristics. Seen from a qualitative approach, it is believed that there is not a single reality but many; this means that people may perceive reality differently (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In the same direction, Mckinley (2020) claims that

researcher's ontology consists of concepts that help the researcher define the existence of a phenomenon and its nature.

Therefore, from a socio constructivist perspective, reality is not seen and found as a static reality but as something socially constructed. In this vein, autonomy is not only an individual ability but a collaborative one that is shaped by exchanged and collective reflections among teachers and their leaning communities. Thus, autonomy is an ongoing and dynamic process that is influenced by social interactions and cooperative learning.

3.4 Epistemological perspective

From an epistemological perspective, knowledge is obtained through the subjective experiences of individuals based on constant and close interaction (Cresswell & Poth,2018).

Supporting this idea, McKinley (2020) describes epistemology as a set of beliefs about knowledge, including what is considered right, what is believed and how it is justified. Then, knowledge is co-created in a self-regulated manner that leads us to think that autonomy is not about teachers working alone but teachers' beliefs taking decisions about their teaching practices. In such manner that it allows teachers to shape and adapt continuously, based on their own necessities, experiences and feedback received from others. In other words, knowledge is negotiable, collaborative and it is constantly built.

3.5 Qualitative approach

The approach that guides this research is qualitative, which as stated by Strauss and Corbin (1990) refers to the studies that do not use any statistical or quantitative methods to obtain results. Instead of focusing on numbers, qualitative research aims for a deep understanding of human experiences, such as emotions, behaviors, lifestyles, and social and cultural phenomena (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In the same line, Silverman (2017) argues that

qualitative research does not only follow one path but many, depending on the target of the study.

Qualitative research is especially useful when exploring complex situations that aim to understand what happens and how it happens (Silverman, 2017). Based on these ideas, this method is remarkably suitable for the context of this study, exploring the perceptions and experiences English teachers face while contextualizing their teaching practices.

Nevertheless, despite these strengths, qualitative research also has its own limitations. For instance, Silverman (2010) points out that qualitative research focuses extensively on meanings and experiences from people that at times, researchers neglect that the social historical or cultural environment may influence what people feel or reveal. This can limit the depth or accuracy of the findings since experiences do not occur in isolation (Silverman,2010). Given both the assets and drawbacks of qualitative research, it still remains as the most appropriate method since this research aims to explore how autonomy may influence their decisions within a specific institutional context.

This approach not only makes it possible to observe what teachers do but to comprehend their practices and how this interpretation could be linked to their own professional development. Such rich and in-depth contextualized insights could not be obtained through quantitative methods in their own but can be thoroughly captured through qualitative ones.

3.5.1 Case study in qualitative research

This study is framed into a case study as a qualitative approach that analyzes specific cases or multiple cases in real life. Case studies are not valued because of the number of people involved but because of how deeply the phenomenon is understood in its real environment (Silverman, 2017). This process involves collecting data overtime by using different sources such as interviews, observations and audio-visual materials that conclude with a case description

about the key themes in the case (Cresswell & Poth, 2018). Nevertheless, Yin (2018) establishes the relationship between case studies and researchers as worrisome, especially when addressing many traditional concerns about them. It is believed that case studies have often been considered a less desirable research method because they are perceived as lacking rigor and the fact that they do not follow rigorous processes raises questions about their validity and the results obtained (Yin, 2018).

However, Yin (2018) also pointed out this as a common misconception about case studies, and this is mainly because the results of case studies had not been addressed adequately and systematically and even if cases studies are less structured than other methods, this does not mean they lack validity , they only require to be addressed carefully and methodologically, to ensure quality and reliability in their findings. Considering these aspects, the proximity and relation to this study, the research starts by choosing a specific case that is analyzed in detail, establishing it as the main reason why a case study is at hand to analyze teachers' autonomy within the context of a private institution in Mexico. The selected case is formed by a group of English teachers who work in an English private institution. These teachers' experiences and reflections were analyzed to comprehend how teachers conceptualize and apply autonomy in their classes. Since this research is seen from a social constructivist approach, the use of a case study is suitable allowing to explore how autonomy is socially created among teachers.

3.5.2 Interpretative perspective

The perspective underpinning this study is interpretive in nature. Alvermann and Mallozzi (2010) claim that interpretative turn marked a significant change in research, long ago positivism was commonly used to study about human behavior. However, with the emerge of interpretivism, researchers started to reflect differently and instead of predicting human

behaviors from an objective perspective, researchers started focusing on understanding the inner meaning behind people's actions, this is what is called interpretivism (Alvermann & Mallozzi, 2010). Quinlan (2017) explains that the interpretative perspective is flexible, inductive, and focused on qualitative methods in order to explore meanings and perceptions, it aims to understand how people perceive and experience a phenomenon (Quinlan, 2017). In the same line, Schwandt (2001) argues that interpretative researchers' beliefs lie in observing that the meaning given to what people do is not the result of external factors, but of actions themselves.

Photongsunan (2010) states that researchers not only observe what people do but comprehend what it means. However, Photongsunan (2010) also mentions some concerns about interpretative approaches, these concerns range from critiques related to individuals not being completely aware of their own reality, to more radical positions such as relativism, augmenting that there is not only one objective truth when it comes to individuals' points of view and their cultural context. Nevertheless, Photongsunan (2010) also claimed that the aim is not to generalize results, but to explore and understand peoples' meanings based on their experiences.

This leads to the creation of new meanings and the linking of new ideas that were not previously connected, implying a deep personal comprehension (Photongsunan, 2010). As human beings, we have the capacity to communicate, and this ability becomes the crucial point of interpretive research, giving priority to how people communicate their experiences (Photongsunan, 2010). Based on this perspective, this study adopts an interpretative approach, as it does not only seek to comprehend how teachers construct and develop their autonomy but to explore diverse ways in which and when they experiment it. Additionally, this approach aligns with the use of qualitative instruments such as interviews, reflective journals, observations

during classes, aiming to capture participants' voices and the meanings and reasons they give to their actions.

3.6 Participants and research context

Creswell and Poth (2018) labelled the role of participants as a significant role in research validation, especially in case studies. Ergo, participants are not only passive individuals, but active ones that should be included actively in the research process (Stake, 1995). In this context, this study involved a group of six English as a Foreign Language Teachers from a private institution in México.

The criterion for selecting these participants was based on their teaching profile, all the teachers perform as English teachers, but they have different education backgrounds, and in some cases, they do not hold a degree related to language education. Some participants hold a bachelor's degree related to teaching, while others have backgrounds related to music, law, and translation. Regarding their English proficiency, all participants demonstrated their level through the Test of English as a Foreign Language Institutional Testing Program (TOEFL ITP). This certification is aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Their proficiency ranged from mid B2 to low C1 with scores between 537 to 610 based on TOEFL ITP scores.

3.6.1 Participant demographics

A total of six teachers participated in this study, three males and three females, aged between 20 and 25 years old. They have diverse levels of teaching experience, ranging from two to five years. The participants also come from different educational backgrounds: three of them hold a bachelor in English Language Teaching, with two of these teachers having specialized in

translation. Meanwhile, two other participants have a bachelor's degree unrelated to English language teaching, one in Law and the other, in Music.

The last participant does not have a bachelor's degree, instead, after concluding high school, she took English classes at the same school where she works now. Regarding the course delivery and class descriptions, the levels of all the courses are aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). It is important to mention that the names shown in the following table are pseudonyms, used solely for the purpose of organizational matters and protection of participants' identities. Table 1 below summarizes key details about the participants' background, emphasizing their differences in colors.

Table 1

Participants' Characteristics and Background

Participant	Gender	Years of experience	Educational background	Certification	Courses taken
Phillip	Male	3	Musician	TOEFL ITP 573 points	TKT offered at the institute
Katherina	Female	2	Highschool	TOEFL placement test 537 points	Training courses offered at the institute
John	Male	2	Law (BA in process)	TOEFL ITP 550 points	TKT offered at the institute
Gonzalo	Male	3	BA in Language Teaching	TOEFL ITP 553 points	Training courses offered at the institute
Julia	Female	3	BA Language Teaching (specialized in translation)	TOEFL ITP 603 points	Online webinars
Matt	Female	3	BA Language Teaching (specialized in translation)	TOEFL ITP 610 points	Training course offered at the institute

Own source (2025)

3.6.2 Setting

In qualitative research, researchers focus on collecting data directly from the participants natural setting where the phenomenon takes place in such a manner that participants experiment the situation that is being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this line, this study centers in one private English language institute located in Mexico, this institute belongs to a wide branch of schools of a well-established educational network.

This educational network offers language courses in at least 30 states of Mexico, all the institutes share the same mission: the institution seeks to be the leader of English language teaching by offering a high-quality academic program that supports continuous teacher training, ensuring the best performance and outcomes as well as their complete satisfaction (my translation). As for the vision, its major commitment is to bring out the best in their students so they can achieve their dreams in a globalized world (my translation). Along with this, all the branches follow the same educational model that relies on the following combination of models, pedagogical, constructivist, natural, integral, and audiovisual models.

However, each aforementioned model is presented with no detailed or extra information that explicitly entails what each model aims to target or include. In a general definition by the institute, its model aims to target interaction, adaptation to several learning styles and autonomy in learning. In the description given by the institute, the model is used to help students develop communicative competences such as grammatical, sociolinguistic competence and discourse competence, reinforcing and strengthening the four core language skills: writing, reading, speaking, and listening. According to the institution's learning ideology, students will be capable of learning the most frequently used words in English through a method that focuses on

promoting interaction, fosters active and intuitive learning, encourages autonomy, and reinforces previous content by integrating technological and audio-visual tools.

As for the classes and courses in this institute and institutes in other states, courses range from course level 1 to course level 24 for adults, from course level 1 to level 15 for kids and from 1 to 15 for teenagers. These levels are aligned to the CEFR, and they have a length of one month per course. These courses may go from general English classes to TOEFL ITP Certification Courses, International Conversational Courses and Teaching Knowledge Test (TKT) courses. These courses are given by any of the teachers on the staff, except for the TKT courses, TKT courses are only taught by teachers who have already taken this course at the same institute. Classes last one hour forty-five minutes from Mondays through Thursdays and in other cases, Saturdays or Sundays, classes may be given face to face or online, depending on the availability of the courses. All courses use British books which are also aligned to the CEFR framework. However, classes are taught using US English as teachers speak American English.

3.7 Data collection instruments

When talking about data collection, it is common to think that it is only focused on different kinds of data such as interviews, observations, or documents and the procedures that are followed to obtain them, but the process is much more complex and it is essential to consider other key aspects such as ethics, sampling strategy, data recording and permissions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this regard, the following instruments were used to gain a better understanding of this phenomenon and to see the phenomenon from different angles, then the data for this study was obtained by using the following five instruments as described below:

3.7.1 Classroom observations

As pointed out by Curdt- Christiansen (2020), observation is an essential method in qualitative research, in this manner observation and notes are used to keep track of specific and detailed perceptions that were observed. In this context, online classroom observations and notes were used to gather direct information in real time about the strategies that the teachers use in their classes, observing interactions between teachers and students and if there was any sparkle of autonomy in their teaching decisions.

These online observations were conducted from Monday to Saturday by the researcher, aligning to the teachers' schedules that may vary from 9:00 am to 9:00 pm, considering that every hour forty-five minutes teachers change groups, this means that teachers have four or five different groups a day. The observations were recorded and have a foundation on adapted versions of the British Council's Continuing Professional Development Framework for Teachers (2015), Cambridge English teaching framework components (2019), and Brenes et al. (2010) checklists. Since these Cambridge Frameworks meet international standards on what characteristics a class and a teacher should have while performing classes.

It is imperative to highlight that besides the researcher's observations, there were observations performed by the academic coordinator of the institute and these observations were conducted using the official observation format at the institute. The aforementioned official institute observation files are designed to monitor and provide feedback on teachers' performance right after being observed. Even though the original observation file cannot be reproduced because of confidentiality, there is an adapted version that includes the same core aspects such as class planning, classroom management, language use, students' engagement, and teachers' use of resources (see Appendix A).

3.7.2 Checklists

Checklists and annotations were also implemented in classroom observations as the second instrument, (see Appendix B) covering several aspects to observe in class. According to Hosie et al. (2005), checklists can be one of the first steps before a deeper and contextualized evaluation, they also help to identify areas of improvement. The checklists used as a second instrument were adapted from a compilation from Cambridge English teaching framework components (2019), the British Council's continuous professional development framework for teachers (2015) and Brenes et al. (2010).

Six checklists were used to explore six different aspects in English language teaching and professional development; every checklist covers specific areas that allowed an exhaustive and detailed analysis that may show the autonomous decision-making process in a classroom. Below are the six checklists and their description.

Checklist 1 "Planning": This checklist focuses on planning and preparing classes, evaluating how teachers structured their teaching and at some point, reflect on their decisions while planning.

Checklist 2 "Managing the lesson": The second checklist evaluates the ability that teachers should have to manage the lesson effectively and strategically.

Checklist 3 "Knowing the subject": This checklist evaluates the teachers' knowledge of the topic he or she is delivering. This includes the ability to teach different methodological and linguistic areas such as grammar, pronunciation and other sub skills.

Checklist 4 “Integrating ICT”: This checklist analyzes the use and integration of digital technologies in teaching, evaluating how a teacher uses platforms and digital resources to improve and promote technology and autonomy in their students.

Checklist 5 “Promoting 21st century skills”: Checklist number 5 is based on the encouragement of certain abilities such as critical thinking, problem solving, creativity and communication. It also evaluates how teachers promote digital literacy and how they help the students develop the aforementioned essential skills for the 21st century.

Checklist 6 “Rapport and communication with learners: This last checklist establishes interaction among teachers and students; by having this connection, students share feelings and opinions about their class.

In a nutshell, the previous checklists were used to identify key aspects of different areas. Additionally, notes were added to offer and keep track of additional observations, reflections or relevant details that emerge during the observations. This information provided consistent and organized data that will serve as one of the bases for further analysis.

3.7.3 CVs

The third instrument used in this study was the collection of Curriculum Vitae (CV) (see Appendix C) considering that CVs show not only demographics, but prior professional development such as courses taken and other studies teachers may have taken. The curriculum vitae serves as a fundamental tool that extends to contrasting functions such as professional and academic achievements and professional history (Cañibano & Bozeman, 2009). Analyzing teachers’ curriculums provided imperative information about their teaching, professional background, teaching experience, and how they continue growing as professionals in the ELT area, this was useful when it came to analyzing patterns in information, certifications, or

credentials. By analyzing all the patterns, it was possible to triangulate interviews, observations, and researcher's reflective journal. This analysis served as a resource to confirm and verify findings with other sources, ensuring accuracy, consistency, and reliability.

3.7.4 Semi-structured interviews

The fourth instrument was a semi-structured interview with the teachers. This interview (see appendix D) is divided into sections pointing at different insights. Interviews are an essential and useful tool in studies where the aim is focused on how individuals, experiment, believe or interpret a specific phenomenon (Braun and Clarke, 2013). As highlighted by Alasaawi (2014), semi-structured interviews are the combination of a structured and unstructured interviews, these kinds of interviews are commonly used in social sciences, and they allow the interviewer and interviewee deeply elaborate on their responses.

In this regard, six interviews were conducted for this study, every interview lasts from one hour to one hour thirty minutes, depending on how much the participants elaborated on every question. The interviews were based on a questionnaire that was divided into six sections. The first section was about participants' demographics with a total of three questions, the second section was named "challenges" with a total of five questions, these questions were related to challenges the teachers may face while giving classes. The third section named "understanding teachers' way of teaching" focused on how and why they perform the way they do it, how and based on what they take their own decisions about giving classes in such a manner. The fourth section named "Reflecting on their professional path and professional development" addressed how and why they continue developing professionally.

Then, the fifth section named "Perspectives about having teaching background" explored teaching background and their experience. Lastly, the sixth section named "identity" examined

how they perceive themselves as teachers. These interviews were recorded by using an online platform, without mentioning any of the previous sections in order to have a fluent interview.

3.7.5 Reflective journal

As for the fifth instrument, a reflective journal (see Appendix L) was used by the researcher, keeping track of the process to avoid any potential bias. According to Creswell (2009), using several sources of information in research is recommendable to strengthen reliability, validity, and overall study quality. According to Janesick (1998), reflective journals are considered valuable tools for qualitative researchers because they not only help collect data but strengthen reflection and analysis. There are four key points: reflection on the researchers' role, relationship between researchers and participants' answers and understanding of the researchers' own knowledge Janesick (1998).

In line with this perspective, the use of a reflective journal served as a key point to keep track of thoughts, reflections, perceptions, and evolving insights in the process. This enriches results and interpretation, promoting self-reflection in the researcher's role. By engaging in continuous self-reflection, it is possible to offer space to critically analyze potential biases and track methodological choices.

3.7.6 Piloting and validation of the instruments

Before collecting data, a piloting stage was performed in order to ensure that the instruments were clear and aligned with the objectives of this research. The first piloted instrument was the semi-structured written interview that contained fifteen questions, these questions were related to PD and the influence of teaching backgrounds.

This interview was performed by four teachers from a different institute but still part of the same educational network (see Appendix E). This allowed not only to confirm the clarity of

the interview prompts but also to identify that some questions were too obvious, leading participants to respond in an equal and simplistic manner. Based on the piloted results and feedback received from an expert in language teaching, modifications were made to create a new set of questions for the interview, it is imperative to note that these questions were once again verified by an expert in ELT (see Appendix D).

As for the following instruments such as CVs (see Appendix F) and certifications (see Appendix E), while not piloted, these tools were adapted considering specific aspects such as academic and non-academic experience, academic background, and participation in professional development courses. This information served as a backup for interviews and a source of data comparison between the piloted Group 1 and the participants in Group 2, if not standardized, formats were adapted because of confidentiality matters. In relation to the teachers' observations, observations were performed by the academic coordinator using the original observation format.

However, this original format could not be added as an appendix because of confidentiality, a adapted version was designed maintaining clarity and closeness to the real descriptions (see appendix A), the results of these teachers' observations were simplistically represented in a table that covers number of observations, areas of improvement, academic coordinator's comments and action plan for teachers, based on the academic coordinator interpretation (see Appendix H). Based on the previous institutional checklists and their results, additional observation checklists were developed, adapted, and applied, covering aspects that previous intuitional checklists at this private institute did not cover. Therefore, checklists were developed and aligned using international standards based on Cambridge English teaching Framework (2019), the British Council's Continuing Professional Development Framework for Teachers (2015), and Brenes et al. (2010), ensuring consistency and usability,

Although no formal pilot was performed, this instrument was reviewed by a researcher in ELT (see Appendix B). This led to the identification that not only one variable was spotted but two: professional development and autonomy, having these two aspects as the center of the analysis.

3.8 Data collection procedure

The data collection for this procedure involved a qualitative approach that uses multiple sources of data collection to reassure triangulation and have a wide comprehension of the process. The instruments as previously mentioned, and the sequence of the procedure are described below:

Firstly, to inform the participants of this research, a meeting was arranged with teachers and the academic coordinator. This meeting explained the purpose of the study, its scope and the procedures that were followed. It also provided a space for teachers to raise questions during or after this research. Additionally, teachers were informed of the letter of consent they will receive. Secondly, the letter of consent (see Appendix I) was written and sent to every teacher. After signing it, teachers were observed and the classes were recorded. Teachers were observed from two to four observations in a month, these observations included a checklist and field notes depending on their availability, all observations were recorded. Thereafter, teachers were asked for their updated CVs. Following that, interviews took place, it is important to note that interviews were recorded to keep as much information as possible to gather details in every comment.

The process of interviews lasted three weeks, always considering and making teachers aware of their own rights, highlighting they had the freedom to decide to turn their cameras on or off while having the interview or even quitting the interview, this to make them feel more

comfortable. Along with the previous aforementioned instruments, a reflective journal was written during all process of data collection. Consequently, these interviews were transcribed in order to codify them for thematic analysis.

3.8.1 Agenda

This agenda has the objective of organizing and planning the activities during the data collection of this research. This agenda is presented in two phases: Phase 1 called “data collection agenda”, this agenda focuses on the piloting stage, divided into five columns as stated below, the first column refers to the strategies and techniques that were used, the second column presents the participants from the piloting, the third column points out the instruments that were used, as for the fourth column, the calendar that was followed and the dates when the data was collected. Finally, the fifth column addresses extra comments that serve as clarification when meeting misunderstandings. As for Phase 2, which corresponds to the implementation of the instruments, it follows the same structure, allowing to have organized and clearer data collection and overview.

Table 2

Phase 1 Agenda: The Piloting

Strategies or techniques	Participants	Instruments	Dates	Description of the process
Group 1 CVs	4 teachers	Teachers' CVs	September 2023	Collecting CVs
Group 1 Observations	4 teachers and the coordinator	Observation and rubrics designed by the school	October – November 2023	Observations performed by the coordinator
Group 1 Written questionnaire	4 teachers	Set of 15 questions	October – November 2023	Teachers answered a written questionnaire

Own source (2025).

Table 3*Phase 2 Agenda: The Implementation*

Strategies or techniques	Participants	Instruments	Dates (application)	Description of the process
Group 2 Observations	6 teachers	2 to 4 observations per month	November 2024- January 2025	Number of observations depended on teachers' days off
Group 2 CVs	6 teachers	Teachers' Curriculums Vitae	January 2025	Asking for
Group 2 Oral interview questionnaire	6 teachers	1 interview per teacher with a total of six interviews	January 2025 – February 2025	Interviews last from 1 hour to 1 hour 30 minutes
Reflective journal	Researcher	Researcher's journal	December 2024- March 2025	Reflective diary written by the researcher while observing participants' classes

Own source (2025).

3.9 Data analysis

Data analysis is an active process where the researcher not only works directly with the data collected but interacts and reflects on its meaning and context, connecting to the aim of the research (Campbell, McNamara & Gilroy,2004). Then the data in this study was analyzed by using thematic analysis with elements of content analysis and the six dimensions of autonomy.

3.9.1 Thematic analysis and the six dimensions of autonomy

According to Braun & Clarke (2012) Thematic analysis is an approach used to identify patterns, this allows not only focusing or analyzing unique or individual aspects within the data but obtaining an overall understanding of shared and collective meaning in the dataset. The data is organized into themes according to the six dimensions proposed by Smith (2003) and analyzed by using the revised version of Bloom's taxonomy proposed by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001)

(see Table 4 and Table 5). The use of this allowed to make a deeper analysis of how autonomy is represented in teachers' practices and how teachers go through different cognitive levels in their professional growth and professional development.

Köksal et al (2023) believe that Bloom's Taxonomy is and has been an imperative basis on teacher professional development and teacher education. In her words, the revised version of Blooms' Taxonomy enriches and expands the original model when including greater accuracy in different cognitive levels. Both cognitive levels and autonomy levels were identified in individual teachers' extracts that are categorized in themes, highlight the level of their autonomy and its connection to professional development. In a nutshell, by combing the six dimensions of autonomy and the different levels of cognitive process proposed in the revised Blooms' Taxonomy, it is possible to spot different processes within each dimension and observe how various cognitive process are perceived and applied in decision-making, showing how teachers integrate critical thinking, reflection and creativity into their professional practices.

To provide a framework and understanding of the six dimensions of autonomy. See the following table and a brief description of each dimension.

Table 4

The Six Dimensions of Autonomy

In relation to professional action:	In relation to professional development
A) Self-directed professional action i.e., Self-directed teaching'	D) Self-directed professional development i.e., Self-directed teacher -learning
B) Capacity for self-directed professional action i.e., Teacher autonomy (capacity to self-direct one's teaching	E) Capacity for self-directed professional development i.e., Teacher-learner autonomy (capacity to self-direct one's learning as a teacher

C) Freedom from control over professional action i.e., Teacher autonomy (freedom to self-direct one's teaching)	F) Freedom from control over professional development i.e., Teacher-learner autonomy (freedom to self-direct one's learning as a teacher)
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Note. From Smith (2003)

These six dimensions are divided into two principal areas; the first one is in relation to their professional action, and the second one, is related to professional development. Regarding the relation to professional action, there are three categories. The first is self-directed professional action that refers to the teachers' ability to take independent decisions about their teaching strategies, classroom management and lesson planning based on their own experiences. The second is the capacity for self-directed professional action, this dimension highlights the abilities and knowledge that teachers need to take autonomous decisions in their teaching practices, it reflects whether they are capable of acting in an autonomous manner. The third dimension, labeled as freedom from control over professional action, means the level at which these external authorities such as coordinators, supervisors or institutions impose constraints on the teacher's actions. In other words, greater freedom indicates higher autonomy.

As mentioned before, there is a second area in which these dimensions are divided, and this is the relation to professional development. The fourth dimension, self-directed professional development, describes how teachers take the initiative to get involved in learning activities in such a manner that demonstrates these decisions were made voluntarily and independently, such as attending courses, reading literature, or collaborating with peers. Building on this, the fifth dimension is reflected on the capacity for self-directed professional development, focusing on not only in the teachers' skills and attitudes but on their own awareness to engage in a meaningful and willing manner for their professional development. This dimension reflects that

it is not just about the will to learn but the ability to do it effectively. Finally, the sixth dimension, which is represented as freedom from control over professional development, refers to the extent to how much freedom teachers have to choose their own content and the directions they take into their professional development without being restricted by institutional policies. To support the analysis of the study, the revised taxonomy proposed by Anderson and Krathwohl's (2001) was incorporated. The table organizes cognitive levels and presents the operational verbs associated with each category.

Table 5

Revised Bloom's Taxonomy by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001)

Anderson and Krathwohl revised version	
Remembering:	choose, defined, find, how, label, list, match, name, omit, recall, relate, select, show, spell, what, when, where, which, who, why
Understanding:	classified, compare, contrast, demonstrate, explain, extent, illustrate, inferior, interpret, outlined, relate, rephrased, so, summarize, translate
Applying:	apply, build, choose, construct, develop, experiment with, identify, interview, make use of, model, organize, plan, select, solve, utilize
Analyzing:	analyze, assume, categorize, classify, compare, conclude, contrast, discover, distinguish, divide, examine, function, infer, inspect, list,
Evaluating:	agree, price, assess, awards, choose, compare, conclude, criticize, decide, the dog, defend, determine, disapprove, estimate, explain, importance, influence, interpret, judge for my justified, mark, measure, prioritize, rate, recommend, rule on, select, support, and value
Creating:	adapt, build, change, choose, combine, compile, composed, construct, create, delete, design, develop, elaborate, estimate, improve, invent, makeup, maximize, modified, originate, plan, predict, propose, solve, suppose, test,

Note. Information retrieved from Anderson and Krathwohl's taxonomy (2001)

To guide the procedure of this study, the sequence described below outlines the steps that were followed and how the data was processed and interpreted. This procedure ensured that findings and data were not treated as isolated fragments.

1. Transcription and coding; semi-structured interviews were transcribed (see Appendix J) and coded based on the six dimensions of autonomy themes, observational notes (see Appendix K) were reviewed and used to identify patterns.
2. Categorization and thematic analysis: codes were grouped accordingly.
3. Recurring themes were identified through constant comparison across the data sources.
4. Triangulation data from observations, CVs, interviews, and reflective journal (see Appendix L) were compared to justify results and reassure consistency.

3.10 Ethical considerations

Flick affirms (2014) ethics in qualitative research means ensuring that both the extent of the activities and the use of the data are rigorous and ethical. Before collecting data researchers must ensure confidentiality is respected. In this vein, a consent letter (see appendix I) for the participants was designed adhering to ethical guidelines and bearing in mind to maintain the integrity and credibility of this research while protecting the well-being of each participant. Ergo, the participants were anonymized and were given random names, in such a manner that participants' identities were kept confidential. All the records in this research were steadily stored, and the results were reported transparently and honestly reassuring no data was manipulated or misinterpreted.

Chapter 4 Results

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings derived from the analysis the presented results are based on the data from adapted observations and checklists of the British Council's Continuing Professional Development Framework for Teachers (2015), the Cambridge English Teaching Framework component (2019), and an adapted checklist developed by Brenes et al. (2010), as well as from interviews conducted by the researcher, participants' CVs, and the researcher's reflective journals. All this information considers the six dimensions of autonomy proposed by Smith (2003), which are self-directed professional action (Dimension A), capacity for self-directed professional action (Dimension B), freedom from over professional action (Dimension C), self-directed professional development (Dimension D), capacity for self-directed development (Dimension E) and freedom from over professional development (Dimension F).

As for the revised version of Bloom's Taxonomy proposed by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) that represents six cognitive levels, this taxonomy is divided into low-order cognitive levels and high-order levels. Representing the first three low-order cognitive levels are "remember," "understand," "apply," and representing the high cognitive levels are "analyze," "evaluate," and "create." Using these two frameworks and illustrating them in a visual manner, hexagon was created. The hexagon begins with "dimension A" and continues until "dimension F," showing continuous progression and indicating the cycle of autonomy levels. This movement is also surrounded by arrows around the hexagon that indicate the dynamic nature of autonomy, suggesting that individuals can move forward through the dimensions as part of an ongoing teaching process. Such movement aligns with Blidi's (2017) viewpoint that lies on the fact that autonomy is not only a theoretical concept but a practical one. For him, autonomy is represented

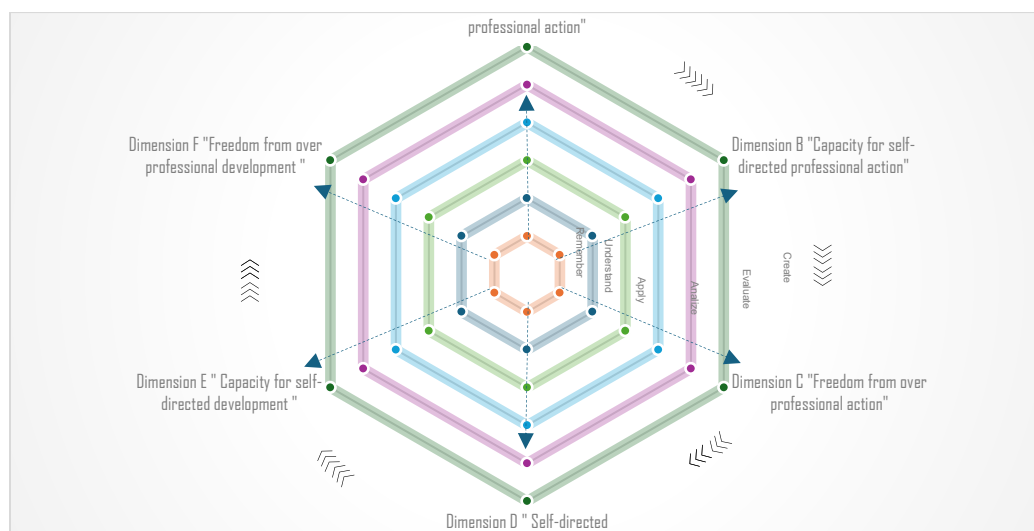
as an evolving phenomenon that develops gradually, depending on teachers' active engagement, awareness, and reflection in their own learning processes. Asserting this viewpoint, the aforementioned hexagon illustrates the six cognitive levels of Bloom's taxonomy (2001) which are "remember," "understand," "apply," "analyze," "evaluate," and "create," such levels are arranged in six layers that go from a center outward, resembling the layers of an onion.

The objective of this figure is to visually illustrate that cognitive development occurs in overlapping layers, where higher levels represent more complex thinking skills based on Bloom's taxonomy. Such organization means that any of the six dimensions of autonomy can operate at different cognitive levels ranging from low cognitive levels to high cognitive levels.

This depends on teachers' decisions and on how teachers engage in reflection and decision-making when giving classes. Accordingly, the following figure emphasizes that autonomy and cognition are interrelated and can evolve progressively rather than linearly (see figure 1).

Figure 1

Integration of Smith's (2003) Six Dimensions of Autonomy and Anderson and Krathwohl's (2001) Revised Bloom's Taxonomy



Then, to identify evidence from the data, a coding procedure for each instrument was carried out using thematic analysis with elements of content analysis, addressing the six participants of this study. And as result of the data analyzed, evidence of different levels of autonomy in relation to their professional actions in their classes was spotted. These data are completely detailed in the following paragraphs, including several excerpts from interviews, class observations, class checklists, participants' CVs and the researcher's reflective journal.

4.2 Analysis of the three dimensions of autonomy (dimensions A, B, C) in relation to professional action and Bloom's taxonomy.

The aim of this analysis is to identify different levels of teacher autonomy engagement based on Smith (2003) proposal and the revised version of Bloom's taxonomy proposed by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001). By understanding these dimensions and cognitive levels, the integration of both frameworks gives insights into how participants take initiative, make decisions, and implement strategies autonomously, showing significant variations in cognitive domains. This study is also closely connected to the ways in which participants plan classes, execute activities, and reflect on their teaching practices.

Analyzing the data through the revised version of Bloom's taxonomy proposed by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) allowed a dual perspective on how participants' decisions are manifested through different cognitive processes. For instance, participants who tend to operate mainly on prescribed methodologies and have some minor adaptations often operate in low order thinking cognitive domains. In contrast, those participants who engage in more reflective practices and make use of higher cognitive levels such as "analyzing," "evaluating," or "creating" exercise higher levels of autonomy. Hence, this analysis offers a deeper understanding of how autonomy develops through many processes such as experience, reflection, and even contextual negotiation. It also illustrates how professional actions evolve to be more intentional,

critical, and self-regulated within teaching practice. Ergo, considering this background information, the following section offers a detailed examination and analysis of the first dimension of autonomy, which is categorized as “self-directed professional action.”

4.2.1 Self-directed professional action

Self-directed professional action constitutes an essential characteristic of the teacher autonomy, as it reflects the way on which individuals plan classes, carry out decisions and actions in a classroom. Such decisions are based on knowledge, skills, responsibility, and management in a classroom. Hence, “self-directed professional action” involves activities and practices that teachers perform within their own professional role, guided by the teachers themselves. These actions are performed autonomously considering not only initiative but concern, without relying completely on external instructions.

Benson (2011) claims that learner autonomy refers to the ability to take control of one’s own learning. For Benson (2011) autonomy is traditionally and conceptually mistaken, he notes that the term “autonomy” is believed to emerge naturally, particularly in the context of self-directed learning where learners themselves determine what to learn, how to progress, and how to assess their own learning. This perspective supports the idea that “self-directed professional action” in teachers is an expression of autonomy because it reflects their ability and in some cases expertise to manage their own professional practices independently.

In the following excerpts retrieved from interviews, class checklists, the researcher’s journal and class observations in classrooms, analysis is presented to illustrate how each teacher exercises autonomy within these aforementioned cognitive domains. According to Bloom’s revised taxonomy (2001), low cognitive levels mainly include the capacity to remember and comprehend new information. These basic skills are essential because they provide the

foundation on which more complex abilities are developed, such as analyzing, evaluating and creating (Molas & Winkler, 2023).

Reference 1. Excerpt on Phillip’s class observation.

“Making effective use of resources and equipment: Teacher followed the textbook closely without structuring any free drills or phases in classes [...] teacher did use power point presentations based on the lesson [...] to reinforce vocabulary in the book.” (Cognitive domain: remember)

This excerpt shows that Phillip relied mainly on the textbook, demonstrating that there is limited exercise on self-directed professional action in his teaching practices in the classroom.

Nonetheless, he incorporated extra Power Point slides to reinforce vocabulary, this vocabulary was related to the lesson Phillip was teaching that day. Note that these power point presentations were not part of the assigned controlled drills in the book; such slides included more than one image to exemplify vocabulary and made it meaningful, this activity allowed him to expand explanations slightly further. Yet, these extra activities showed he still remained adhered to the prescribed grammar and vocabulary, making evident that the cognitive level responds to the “remember level” as he focused on repetition and controlled drills rather than creating other free drills, which could have fostered deeper understanding and more freedom to have students express spontaneously. So, self-directed learning is understood as a process in which every person can identify their own needs and take decisions on how to address them, progressing at a pace that better suits them (Benson, 2011). As exemplified before in Phillip’s earlier progression, he adapted his own materials according to the students’ pace and the pace he required in his classes.

Such patterns align with the idea that autonomy is not sudden achievement, but a gradual process shaped by learners’ need, motivation, and prior knowledge (Blidi, 2017). In Phillips’

case, his practice showed the tension between the reliance on prescribed and more controlled materials that at some point restricted more autonomous and communicative opportunities. This instance presents a similar pattern observed in the following participant that equally relies on certain reliance on structure materials.

Reference 2 Excerpt on John's class observation

"Managing the lesson: Making effective use of resources and equipment" (**Cognitive domain: remember**)

When observing John's classes using checklists, it was noticeable that Power Point presentations served as extra resources to provide additional guidance and facilitate explanations when it comes to provide further examples.

This evidence constitutes more autonomous decision-making in terms of deciding what material facilitates the delivery of his classes, such decisions can be observed in the use of PPT presentations in order to support his teaching. According to Jiménez Raya and Vieira (2021), autonomy can be oriented in two ways because autonomy not only depends on educators' views and their underlying conceptions of teaching and learning, but it also requires teachers to have the freedom to decide the modalities of learning and teaching in which they engage.

In this vein Jiménez Raya and Vieira (2021), claim that freedom relies on adapting activities, methods, and individuals' own resources; such adaptation is grounded on their specific classroom needs. Accordingly, John demonstrated this principle and found a way in which he could adapt images into his teaching by making them more innovative, this helped the participant personalize students' learning according to recent trends and even memes he clearly referred to in his interview. However, despite this autonomy, the participant still adhered to the textbook and continues to rely on the controlled drills without creating more less-controlled drills or more free drills. Based on these actions, there is no evidence of expanding this learning beyond what is

already stated in the book, as he does not enable students to engage in communication tasks due to his reliance on pictures and repetition. This scope of autonomy is extended and illustrated in the following participant, where the participant finds himself in a challenging classroom situation.

Reference 3. Excerpt on Phillip's interview.

"I just had this student that was like ... mmm... really mean and I really tried to make him like being part of the class [...] Soo, this is the time that I felt like I didn't have the control, so I had to take him out of the class" (Cognitive domain: remember)

The excerpt showed how repetitive patterns are still present these days, spotting some solutions that may be old-fashioned and without deeper or concrete pedagogical objectives.

Phillip revealed he could not have good established classroom management; he relied on simplistic solutions such as setting up a student apart, which may reflect limited pedagogical depth and a certain adherence to conventional practices. This situation can also be interpreted through the lens of autonomy. For instance, Benson (2011) explains that in order to develop the capacity to take control of one's own decision in teaching, the individual needs to have freedom from the control of others; otherwise, true autonomy cannot find a place if others dictate how to react and when to learn.

At the same time, this practice aligned with Bloom's first cognitive level, "remember," as Phillip was able to recall what to do in the very moment. However, the participant did not consider the extent or the depth of his decisions. Nevertheless, decisions such as taking the student out of the classroom reflected a certain amount of autonomy since he decided what to do. Nonetheless, it is unclear whether these decisions were based on experience and own judgment or influenced by outdated practices. Yet, it is important to highlight that Phillip relied on a typical solution, choosing to solve the situation right away rather than pausing muse and pondering it.

This type of situation, where teachers rely on immediate solutions, emphasizes how autonomy is exercised at various levels. Ergo, fostering autonomy does not imply an immediate transformation of learners or teachers' perception of themselves. Instead, it is a gradual process in which existing practices are respected or progressively adapted (Blidi, 2017).

In this vein, Phillip's reliance on outdated solutions illustrates an early stage of autonomy, where decision-making is present but still shaped by repetitive and traditional practices rather than reflective practices and strategies. Such situations, in which teachers rely on immediate solutions, reflect that autonomy is exercised at diverse levels. This pattern can also be seen in the following excerpt, which shows how professional experiences reveal several ways in which autonomy is manifested.

Reference 4. Excerpt on Gonzalo's CV.

"5 months in a Technical course in Odessa, Texas, 2019" (**Cognitive domain: Understand**)

The previous reference points out a technical course, placing the participant in "understand," this is primarily because Phillip explained that he completed a course in a native speaking country, specifying its location and duration. Nevertheless, he showed an understanding of promoting PD as part of his career. However, in the participant's class observations and checklists, there is no evidence that he applied the strategies he may have learned in his course.

This indicates that he recognized the value of continued professional growth, but he does not reflect in his teaching practices by applying them which in other words means he has not reached the "apply" level. This action illustrates the willingness to take courses, yet not to the extent of implementing it in such ways that he presents a change in his teaching. Gonzalo's willingness to take courses and engage independently relates to what professional growth is.

According to Blidi (2017), professional growth is linked to a natural impulse to improve and encompasses collaboration, competence, and autonomy with others. Blidi (2017) also argues that this willingness to learn independently and explore because of mere curiosity, gradually fosters self-direction and self-determination, and in doing so, individuals gradually develop awareness of their own learning process. This instance gives an insight into how autonomous decisions can improve PD in teachers if applied assertively. Building on Gonzalo's example, which illustrates awareness and understanding of PD without yet applying strategies in practice. The following excerpt in Matt's class observation provides a clear example of not only understanding but applying what has been learned.

Reference 5. Excerpt on Matt's class observation

"Managing the lesson checklist: Making proper decisions about which languages are used by the teachers and the learners" (Cognitive domain: apply)

The excerpt illustrated Matt's self-directed professional action in her classroom, by making decisions about the teacher's choices to conduct her lessons. For instance, she chose to use English consistently when addressing class-related matters, on the contrary, using Spanish only for non-related topics, which demonstrated concrete autonomous decisions in her professional teaching practices. This kind of professional initiative aligns with Benson (2011) emphasizing the importance of creating conditions that foster initiative and strengthen autonomy in educational context. In this way, Matt took the initiative when she found the appropriate conditions to apply her professional judgment and exercise her autonomy in her classroom.

However, although such decisions demonstrated her autonomy, it is also important to consider and note that practices like these have not yet been carefully evaluated to determine

their effectiveness in her classes. A reason behind these practices may be reflected on quietness and minimal oral participation of her students, who remain passive unless speaking in Spanish, such situations limit opportunities for language production in the target language. Hence, as Blidi (2017) explains, autonomy involves taking decisions, committing to results, taking risks, and going through the process of experimenting with new strategies while accepting possible mistakes (Blidi, 2017). Ergo, In Matt's case, her choices demonstrated autonomy in action based on their own experience and judgment, yet the lack of evaluation of her actions showed that her self-directed professional action is not fully developed in terms of reflective responsibility and identifying advantages and disadvantages in her teaching.

Summary of 4.2.1

Briefly, while a larger number of data were analyzed, only five were included due to their relevance and clarity in relation to the analysis of self-directed professional action. These five references illustrated that the participants take autonomous decisions, such as the selection of their own materials as a means of reinforcement, such determination relies on specific challenges participants face while performing classes. Now, the analysis revealed three prevalent cognitive domains where most teachers operate, which are “remember, understand and apply.” Illustrating that even if the teachers have the freedom to adapt their practices, they tend to use what they have learned or what they have been taught, not making significant adaptations and if so, these adaptations still adhere to the textbook. Thus, their autonomy is still limited but not because of external factors, but their own decisions.

This can be spotted within the “remember framework” where some opportunities for autonomy emerged; they were not fully developed or taken advantage of. According to Palfreyman (2018), autonomy is not only to know “what it is” but also to understand its purpose

and how to apply it in practice. He argues that an individual's perception of autonomy is crucial, as it influences how gradually individuals develop the capacity to learn independently and meaningfully. In line with this view, moving toward the "apply level" which demonstrated a higher sense of self-professional action, it was found that participants not only recalled methodologies and understood them, but they actively implemented them. This is clearly exemplified in Matt's excerpt (reference 5) where she deliberately made decisions about classroom language use, thereby demonstrating the application of her autonomy in practice.

In conclusion, the findings at this level suggest that self-directed professional action is present to different extents and while some teachers remain in repetitive sequences or memory-based practices and drills, others show evidence of applying their own autonomy in practice. Ergo, autonomy can exist at different levels, not only in its full form but even in small acts of independence or deliberate challenges to traditional (Blidi, 2017).

4.2.2 Capacity for self-directed professional action

This level refers to the ability or capacity of a teacher to take decisions and identify opportunities. A teacher's capacity goes far beyond what a teacher currently does in the classroom; it refers to the latent potential to act autonomously based on knowledge, experience, and willingness. In contrast to self-directed professional action, where a teacher reflects what he or she does in the classroom, capacity for self-directed professional action centers in a combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and dispositions that allow teachers to act effectively and adapt to new contexts. Little (1991) defines autonomy as the ability to act independently, make one's own decision and reflect critically. For Little (2017), this capacity is fundamental because autonomy is not a fixed trait but a skill that can be developed through practice, and it

can also weaken if not exercised. In line with this perspective, the following excerpts exemplify how the second level of autonomy is exercised within teachers.

Reference 1. Excerpt on Phillip's interview.

“But I also think that a teacher should be self-assured, like OK, I’m.... I’m the teacher; right now I need to be. I need as I mentioned, I need to have like... this authority. (Cognitive domain: understand)

Phillip has the capacity to recognize the importance of having self-assurance and authority in his role as a teacher. He placed strong emphasis on understanding that the role of being a teacher, for him, is not only about understanding a language, but also of being a teacher and fulfilling this role. In other words, he understands that to be a teacher is not solely about following rules and instructions in the classroom. This resonates in the fact that “understanding” is a huge step in professional autonomy because it shows how to act based on responsibility and decision-making. Namely, an autonomous person is someone who can regulate their own thoughts, emotions, and behaviors and, at the same time, someone who can make ethical decisions or act according to values within society (Jiménez Raya et al., 2024). In line with this, Jiménez Raya et al., (2024), also claim that autonomy is not just about doing “whatever one wants” but about the ability to responsibly manage the freedom of choice and being able to self-regulate our decisions. Then, Phillip not only talks about having authority and understanding it in a classroom, but also about his professional role and the responsibility and self-confidence he needs to possess.

This self-confidence is precisely a manifestation of teacher empowerment, which aligns with Jiménez Raya et al., (2024) who claim that the central idea of autonomy is how teachers exercise their own professional autonomy when taking conscious, reflective, and critical decisions about their teaching. For these authors, by taking such decisions and ethical

responsibilities, teachers promote a more participative and reflective teaching that in turn fosters student autonomy. Ergo, Phillip's understanding of authority and self-assurance illustrates an internalized form of autonomy, where empowerment emerges from responsibility and reflection.

This sense of reflective understanding continues to be present in the subsequent excerpt that further illustrates Phillip's comprehension of the teaching process.

Reference 2. Excerpt on Phillip's interview.

"I will recommend him to relax; cause teaching is not like ... mmm only a job [...] it is like a kind of art [...] just relax, give your classes." (**Cognitive domain: understand**)

As seen in Phillip's excerpt, he was asked about how he feels when teaching and what he would recommend others to do when teaching. That is when he does not only remember the teaching process, but understands it, having the capacity to advise other teachers to improve their teaching practices. This reflects understanding, as the participant showed the actions he would like to take in order to guide others, pointing at a level of competence not only by being concerned and helpful to others but in his professional actions. Together, both excerpts show that Phillip's professional understanding enables him to make informed decisions, act responsibly, and contribute to his own PD while reinforcing others.

This is consistent with the broader concept of teacher autonomy in the classroom, which is closely linked to professional autonomy, where teachers can choose and control their own PD, this in turn, leads teachers to choose and take more pedagogical decisions (Jiménez Raya et al., 2024). According to Jiménez Raya et al., (2024), to be autonomous implies resilience and perseverance without neglecting that challenges should not act as obstacles that hinder their development. On the other hand, teachers who assume their own PD can face and surpass their limitations to deal with them strategically (Jiménez Raya et al., 2024). Overall, Phillip's instance

illustrates how professional understanding and autonomy allow teachers not only to face challenges but also to act responsibly, promoting his own professional development and that of their colleagues. Following the analysis of autonomy in Phillip's practice, the next excerpt from Julia's class observation illustrates how these concepts are enacted in the classroom.

Reference 3. Excerpt on Julia's class observation

“Using the board effectively: Julia tends to use different colors when writing on the board, there is a clear organization, spotting aspects such as the objectives of the class, and the new structures she is explaining. (Cognitive domain: apply)”

In this excerpt, Julia utilized some pedagogical resources, such as using different colors when writing on the board, highlighting the importance of organization when explaining. She is applying what she has learned about how to organize the board and the importance of it; this is highly important because it creates a visual organization that helps students identify and spot specific key moments in her classes. That is to say, Julia has the capacity to consciously implement resources when it comes to using the board in real classroom settings, exposing that she does not only actively and autonomously take decisions, but she is skilled enough to recognize strategies that not only involve reflection but pedagogical knowledge. Since she translates theoretical principles of classroom management and visual support into practice, such practices can also be translated into her own capacity to implement techniques that go beyond basic board use making content comprehensible and understandable. However, this also connects with Menegale (2024), who claims that there is a distinction between knowing and effectively applying what it is known, since considering that what is applicable in theory does not necessarily ensure it is successful and usefully applied in classroom contexts. Therefore, reflection on teacher's practices becomes essential to link this gap and ensure the application

In this same line, reflecting implies stopping thinking about what is being done and how it is being done, so that consistent and meaningful changes can emerge (Quartarolo Vargas et al., 2024). Having considered these variations and the application of strategies and methods, it is concluded that Julia's case exemplifies how the cognitive processes are directly related to autonomy, through conscious reflection and the capacity to transfer theoretical knowledge into classroom practice. In line with this, the observed excerpt from Matt's class illustrates how Matt applies strategies to foster students' learning and autonomy at the same time.

Reference 4. Excerpt on Matt's class observation

"Planning activities that help learners to develop learning strategies" (Cognitive level: apply)

Based on the checklist, the observed excerpt exemplifies Matt's ability to plan and execute speaking activities and writing activities. Initially, when Matt wrote questions on the board to practice, she divided the activity into two sequences, first, students responded to some questions on their notebooks, and second, they discussed these same questions without referring to their notebooks. When she asked them to write, she had students use tablets and cellphones and advised them to use some online dictionaries.

This activity demonstrated how she designs activities that foster speaking and writing skills, reflecting on her pedagogical capacity to generate interaction among students. Although her approach lacked constant feedback, particularly because she did not monitor if students' written responses were right, these activities still reflect her capacity to decide and integrate two different skill areas, as well as to create communicative opportunities aligned with the objectives of the class. At this point, the cognitive level Matt aligns to is "apply." Since she is applying the techniques, she has learned all through her career. However, the fact that Matt omitted feedback

is still limiting the observation of students' progress to determine whether these techniques were used effectively. This observed practice aligns with Blidi's (2017) argument that exposes that teachers should plan and guide learning according to students' real needs and context promoting student autonomy. For Blidi (2017), autonomy is not automatically developed; it requires students to take responsibility for their own learning, while the teacher provides situations and develops in students the need to find strategies and use them (Blidi, 2017). This instance makes way for the following excerpt which illustrates a teacher's awareness of learning through different roles in the classroom.

Reference 5. Excerpt on Phillip's interview

"I learn more as a teacher than as a student" (Cognitive level: analyze)

The excerpt demonstrated how Philip has surpassed the simple recalling of information and understanding of it. Instead, he compared two different roles, teacher and student, and reflected critically on how each role has contributed to his learning, dividing them into a differentiation where he spotted the importance of both roles in his own learning. This reflection shows his awareness of his own professional growth in different roles in a classroom setting. Such self-awareness aligns with Martínez Agudo (2024) and the notion of teachers' self-perception and how teachers see themselves. This mainly relies on how teachers understand their professional role and what kind of teachers they aspire to be, directly influencing on their decisions and teaching practices. (Martínez Agudo, 2024). Albeit Phillip's instance showed that reflective thinking about one's role can promote autonomy, allowing teachers to make more informed decisions and guide their PD. In doing so, Phillip not only depends on his roles as both a teacher and as a student but comprehends that he learns differently depending on the role he is performing.

Summary 4.2.2

In conclusion, the excerpts showed that the participants cognitively operate at three main levels, “understand,” “apply,” “analyze,” slightly moving forward to high order thinking cognitive levels. This depends on their own roles and actions taken in class. It is important to highlight that these cognitive levels directly reflect the capacity for self-professional action, as they demonstrate how knowledge, attitudes and even reflective thinking enable teachers to act autonomously, making more informed decisions and adapting their practices to several teaching contexts.

This combination integrates cognitive processes that illustrate the ability to reflect and apply what has been learned, including practice, experience, comprehension, and critical analysis of themselves and their decisions. Namely, the way participants analyze situations is by adjusting strategies, planning classes and strategies, and taking fundamental decisions based on their pedagogical knowledge. This exhibits their autonomous disposition to plan and implement their practices in a more thoughtful and reflective way. According to Menegazzo and Xavier (2004), reflective thinking is understood as a vital element in developing autonomy, as it implies teachers to actively rethink their educational practices, in ways such as in the functioning of the school and in addressing students’ needs.

This view is reflected on the data as these cognitive processes and the disposition to act autonomously are further exemplified. Some instances are shown in excerpts such as Philip’s interviews and Julia’s observations that clearly showed how these participants operate across different levels while exercising their professional autonomy. These excerpts also demonstrated a clear understanding of the teachers’ role, highlighting aspects such as self-confidence, authority, and a deep vision of teaching as an “art.”

Another example can be found in Julia and the use of the board. These practices demonstrated not only pedagogical knowledge but capacity to analyze her own teaching and even learning as a teacher. Taking together these instances, autonomy is not only about decision-making but also involving cognitive engagement and reflective teaching practices that illustrate a dynamic interplay between cognitive processes and practical action.

4.2.3 Freedom from over professional action

In a context where autonomy plays an important teaching role, freedom can be understood as the teacher's capacity to make decisions independently, without the influence or direct control from external sources, such as principals, coordinators, or rigid institutional policies. Consequently, autonomous teachers should maintain an open-minded attitude instead of a narrowed one; this may include the readiness to apply new strategies and innovative pedagogies in a classroom. In such a way that they can adapt and even improvise based on their needs (Martínez Agudo, 2024). In other words, a teacher can adapt strategies and select resources according to his or her professional judgment, previous experiences, or events the students need.

This freedom does not only mean the absence of rules. On the contrary, the possibility to exercise more responsible and effective autonomy. So, when freedom and professional action are linked, it mainly refers to the capacity of a teacher to perform professional actions autonomously and responsibly. This is essential because a teacher not only knows what to do or has the capacity to identify it, but a teacher has the right and the freedom to decide how and when to do it or even adapt it. This is a key feature in teachers' autonomy because it allows teachers to apply their knowledge, skills, and attitudes creatively while adapting to different circumstances or contexts.

Hence, teacher autonomy can be understood as the ability to exercise freedom when taking pedagogical decisions, combined with the responsibility for managing their own

professional practice, this includes critically reflecting on their actions and decisions, evaluating what works and identifying ways to enhance practices (Akbanan & Dikilitaş, 2024). Akbanan and Dikilitaş (2024) also claim that this is particularly important for future teachers, as it allows them to project their identity and how they aspire to perform in their role as teachers. Selected excerpts from interviews, journals, checklists, and observations are presented to shed light on this dimension.

Reference 1. Excerpt on Gonzalo's class observation and checklist

“Making appropriate decisions about which languages are used by teachers and the learner” (Cognitive level: analyze)

In this excerpt, Gonzalo demonstrated evidence of his freedom and autonomy, he chose to use Spanish strategically during his lessons, relaying a bit into code switching. It is evident that he does this switch intentionally. Namely, this deliberate decision reflected his autonomy and simultaneously the fact that these decisions are not always constrained by external regulations. However, there is a key point to highlight, the participant still keeps in mind to stick to the use of English in class reflecting he is aware of this very fine line that should not directly cross in terms of the institutional policies. Additionally, observing these practices from a cognitive perspective, Gonzalo operates at the “analyze” level, carefully considering both his own teaching decisions and students' needs.

This observation echoes Blidi's (2017) claim that highlights the fact that freedom alone does not guarantee autonomy, even when a teacher or a student has the freedom to act, that freedom is never absolute itself, and therefore it will always be limited by factors such as institutional policies or teaching objectives. Ergo, Gonzalo's decision-making goes beyond

simply applying preexisting methods or procedures; it involves critical examination and reflective decision-making when taking into consideration students' language needs and class objectives. Notably, using code-switching mostly when delivering grammar rather than other parts of the class suggests a deliberate pedagogical choice. This selective and focused use of code-switching illustrates how Gonzalo applies his freedom to enhance both learning and teaching in his students. Admittedly, freedom is only a step toward autonomy, as it is necessary to allow experimentation and decision-making, but by itself, it does not ensure an individual develops true autonomy (Blidi, 2017).

Reference 2. Excerpt on John's class observation and checklist

“Was there good communication between teachers and students (individually and in groups)? Comments: Teacher adapts questions into real context settings; he's got good rapport. (Cognitive level: apply)”

This excerpt shows the teacher's ability to make independent decisions in his classes, and an optimal use on how to adapt and reapply pre-established content in specific classroom settings, demonstrating a form of teacher's freedom. Although the participant is using material from the textbook, he tries hard to make it fit and contextualize it when creating questions based on the topic he has reviewed.

This is further highlighted by the fact that this activity took place during the Christmas period, when students were participating in a classroom gathering while eating pizza. These kinds of activities make a class more engaging, especially when it comes to having such potlucks. This celebration was organized by the teacher, it was also organized in advance to celebrate the beginning of Christmas, illustrating that within the constraints of prescribed

curriculum and institutional policies, John still exercises his autonomy and freedom to implement meaningful learning experiences in his classes. This leads directly to the following except where John demonstrated a similar process.

This instance showed the point made by Quartarolo Vargas et al. (2024) who posits that autonomy in teaching involves not only teachers but learners. Hence, teachers must take active roles and create more opportunities for students to develop their autonomy. Thus, students' participation not only involves students understanding the objectives of their classes but also applying what they have learned in their classes, fostering the promotion of more learning communities where everyone can contribute to, learn from and benefit from shared and acquired language (Quartarolo Vargas et al., 2024). Concluding that John's observation exemplifies how teacher autonomy can be exercised even within institutional constraints, by adapting content to real life contexts.

Reference 3. Excerpt on John's interview

"They were all writing it down, and I told them, 'No, no, no!' you need to speak [...] I had to make a few adjustments here; in the end I got it work" (Cognitive level: apply)

In the excerpt above, John observed that his students were not achieving the intended communicative objectives, so he made immediate decisions to change the activity he planned for this class, in such a manner he could transform it into a more communicative one. That is to say, John did not create something entirely new, rather he used established instructions and activities in a more creative way. This shows that his cognitive process focuses on evaluating situations and adjusting them in real time. By intervening and changing the dynamic of the classroom right away, he demonstrated he still retains his freedom to implement strategies that best meet the communicative needs of his students. This excerpt further confirms that John consistently and consciously adapts activities in real time according to several changes he deals with in class.

According to Blidi (2017), building an environment where students can learn autonomously is not something that is achieved easily; it requires time and demands that teachers think carefully and deeply, from the very beginning of their classes and even at the end. Teachers need to remain focused and committed throughout the process to respond to students' rhythms, needs, and learning pace. John's ability to make decisions during his classes reflects Blidi's principle in practice, as his actions show an ongoing process of reflection but above all, adaptation to support learning in his students.

Observations showed that he maintained a strong rapport with his students in such a way that it allowed him to guide the lesson more effectively. Thus, this made Phillip feel more confident in exercising his freedom to modify activities whenever he perceived that the learning objectives were not met. Similarly, the following excerpt about Phillip's classroom practices illustrates how teachers exercise autonomy when selecting resources to address challenges.

Reference 4. Excerpt on Phillip's interview

“Right now, I'm teaching a TOEFL course [...] right now they are advanced in English... sometimes there are topics that I don't understand, so, I use Chat GPT a lot, he he he [...] and I ask; I have this situation, what can I do? Or... [...] I don't know how to explain this...” (Cognitive process: apply)

The excerpt showed how Phillip decided how to sort out a challenge that he was facing; the problem lay in not fully understanding a topic Phillip was going to teach next month. These kinds of situations make him feel unsure, which encouraged him ways to look for solutions.

One of the solutions is using Chat GPT as a tool to generate ideas and support his teaching. This decision illustrates the deliberate freedom he possesses when choosing resources and strategies within his teaching practice. In today's context, mainly characterized by rapid technological changes, the use of digital tools becomes more necessary and essential for both

teachers and students (Quartarolo Vargas et al., 2025). Such necessity creates more independence, more informed decisions, and more use of technology strategically to enhance teaching and learning processes.

Then, Phillip is not limited to using only the material provided at the school; he is also free to make more autonomous decisions about how to teach and how to explain concepts within his margin of action. Thus, alongside autonomy, Phillip leverages these tools to maximize his effectiveness as a teacher, showing how digital competence can strengthen professional autonomy and the extent of his classes. Following the previous reflection on Phillip's use of digital tools to face instructional challenges, the next excerpt further illustrates how Phillip applies autonomy and problem-solving when it comes to planning his classes.

Reference 5 Excerpt on Phillip's interview

"I need to make it look easy, [...] some topics are not easy to explain, it's complicated sometimes to try to find the easiest way [...] sometimes it's hard" (**Cognitive level: apply**)

As previously noted, Phillip frequently used Chat GTP to support his teaching when he faced challenges. Similarly, in this excerpt, Phillip used the same approach when looking for ideas to improve his lessons. These practices reflected strategies to adapt to what is needed in class. This proves that the teacher not only uses materials or activities that are proposed by the school or in the book, on the contrary he complemented his classes by using external applications such as apps, videos, and digital resources. In line with Chik (2018), autonomous practices do not depend solely on formal classroom activities but rather on the reflective use of technology and how to use it accurately. As previously shown, such practices can transform digital experiences that can create meaningful learning opportunities that connect with students' previous knowledge and generate real understanding.

Therefore, Phillip's actions showed how autonomy can be clearly present in reflective and adaptative practices within the classroom context. This multifaceted ability to adapt, select, and apply strategies according to classroom and students' needs reinforces his role as an autonomous individual that transforms challenges into opportunities which results in meaningful learning. This professional independence is further evidenced in classroom practice, as illustrated in the following excerpt based on the researcher's reflective journal.

Reference 6. Excerpt on researcher's reflective journal

"The highlight of the class was when the teacher decided to stop using the book and had an unplanned competition among students" (Cognitive level: evaluate)

This last excerpt, taken from the researcher's reflective journal, illustrated another instance of freedom in Phillip's decision-making; when he stopped his planned activity from the book and replaced it with an unplanned and more dynamic activity. He demonstrated that he is not strictly following the pre-established sequence of the class and, as a result, Phillip made adjustments based on the development and evaluation of the class. This conscious decision showed his freedom to modify both content and methodology according to the necessities at that very moment. Such behavior reinforces and aligns with what is observed in previous excerpts, where Phillip used Chat GPT to find solutions and adapt to his classes. Then, these implemented decisions reflected his autonomy and showed that in real teaching practices not everything relies only on theoretical perspectives but more on active practices that can be translated into concrete actions that are aimed at enhancing students' knowledge and prioritizing real learning instead of covering the stated plan of class.

The instance of real-time adaptation aligns closely with the claims of Cirocki and Anam (2021), who argue that teachers need to have professional freedom to decide what to teach and

how to structure as well as develop their classes, as well as to evaluate the learning outcomes. This autonomy allows them to design meaningful and innovative educational experiences that adapt to the needs and interests of their students. Especially when it comes to talking about meaningful, it is not only about relevance in a topic but connected to real necessities and creating learning that sticks to students' minds. In summary, Phillip's reflective and adaptive decision-making highlights that teacher autonomy is not merely a theoretical concept but a practical one that can be applied to create meaningful learning. Highlighting that autonomy is arbitrary, because it is not about doing whatever an individual wants, on the contrary, autonomy is based on what is needed, and it is responsive, responding to actual classroom situations.

Summary 4.2.3

The excerpts analyzed under the dimension of freedom from control over professional action showed how teachers exercised their autonomy when taking autonomous pedagogical decisions. Summarizing that teachers have the freedom to take decisions by themselves and not by being commanded. In many cases, these decisions go beyond the limitations of the existing materials or a rigid curriculum. This dimension also illustrates how teachers adapt their resources, material, strategies, and classroom dynamics based on professional judgment, but most of the time in students' necessities instead of limiting themselves to following a prescribed curriculum. Then, in essence, autonomy is both independence and commitment, as it involves the facility to manage decisions in a more ethical and reflective way, permitting individuals to rethink, react and remake choices based on their own way of thinking aligning with their values (Jiménez Raya et al., 2024).

Now, in terms of cognitive level, the actions that teachers mainly performed are applying, analyzing, and evaluating. For instance, the fact that Gonzalo switches between languages,

excerpt 1, reflected an analysis level because he examines the linguistic demands as well as the students' comprehension to decide when and where to change. Other excerpts, such as excerpt 2 and 3, show the level of application, where the teacher used preexisting activities but adjusted them in real time to ensure communication, leveraging a well-established rapport among students. Another example of this freedom is when Phillip uses ChatGPT to address questions that he faces when explaining. These explanations helped him generate and integrate more teaching ideas.

Lastly, the reflective journal in Excerpt 6 illustrated a step forward that corresponds to the "evaluate" level. Ergo, when Phillip perceived that his students did not grasp at all the vocabulary and therefore not using it, it revealed a higher cognitive process in Phillip because this implies evidence of judgment and decision-making as a fine response to the context. Concisely, evidence suggested that freedom from control over professional action is not expressed as an absolute dependency on policymakers, regulations, or institutional policies, instead, it reflects the capacity to consciously and responsibly adapt, modify, and enrich teaching practices in a classroom setting.

Teachers act within a framework of pre-established actions but show autonomy when making context-sensitive decisions. Ranging from code switching, adjusting, and using technology to redesign tasks in real time. These actions exemplify how autonomy becomes tangible in teaching practices. When teachers rely on the use of their own knowledge, experience, and available resources, they are operating at different cognitive levels that foster students' learning.

4.3 Analysis on the three dimensions of autonomy (dimensions D, E, F) in relation to professional development and Bloom's taxonomy

The main target of PD is to enhance teachers' professional growth to improve their pedagogical skills and generate positive impact on teaching practices. In line with this, Manzano Vázquez (2024) posits that academic preparation, recurrent, and practical training in teachers play a vital and imperative role in professional growth. Such processes are essential for helping teachers face their everyday challenges and in turn, improving educational systems. Such growth is also reflected on the quality of learning and teaching in students. These processes may range from activities to experiences that can be formal and informal, enabling teachers to expand and improve their knowledge, abilities, attitudes, experience, and professional competences. When it comes to addressing how to incorporate self-directed PD, individuals should have the initiative to manage their own decisions, identifying specific needs rather than waiting for institutional directions to follow (Manzano Vázquez, 2024).

In this vein, teachers select resources, techniques, strategies, and tools they consider more effective for improvement, implying an ongoing reflection on their progress (Manzano Vázquez, 2024). So, when assuming this responsibility without relying exclusively on institutional workshops or training, teachers see themselves finding solutions for a long or near future, where they do not only solve the problem but learn how to overcome it and therefore, teachers can strengthen practices and prevent future difficulties. Although PD focuses on the teacher, it is inevitable that it replicates into students, covering a fine line where the teacher indirectly empowers students in becoming autonomous. The following excerpts illustrate the extent of this dimension.

4.3.1 Self-directed professional development

Reference 1. Excerpt on Phillip's interview

“We checked that in a workshop [...] sometimes the topics aren’t gonna be understood by students, so they told us like to look for something [...] like we can change the topic a little bit [...] for example, I can try to look what is like [...] trendy? (Cognitive level: understand)”

This excerpt described how Phillip adapted to his teaching practices and recognizes that his students do not always grasp topics or explanations at first. As a result, he decided to look for more appropriate content that better fits his current classroom challenges and necessities. This situation does not always occur at the very moment of delivering a class. However, Phillip decides to plan as a proactive effort to prevent problems. Such behavior reflects the important considerations he takes in advance to meet his objectives, which also helps improve his pedagogical competencies and teaching strategies.

Highlighting that Philip took the initiative to enhance his teaching practices and exercise his freedom to change the topic he considers students may not catch at first. These decisions are based on his own observation and judgment, without relying on external guidance about what to do or how to do it. Now, considering this analysis, the participant can be categorized in the “understand” level according to Bloom’s taxonomy. Building on Phillip’s proactive approach to adapting things to his own content, he further reflects on how he consolidates his teaching style and strategies through experience and guidance from the coordinator and others, such as colleagues whom he refers to in some other instances. In this vein, the following excerpt continues elaborating Phillip’s teaching practices.

Reference 2. Excerpt on Phillip’s interview

“I learned it with my experience, but also learned it in class [...] Can I say a workshop? [...] It was the principal who told me: ‘one strategy you can use is’ [...] and then is when I learned, okay... now I have to use this (strategy) and yes, it has worked!” (Cognitive level: evaluate)”

As previously stated, freedom from control over professional action allows the teacher to make independent decisions about how to act without relying on external instructions. In this case, Phillip decided how to apply some strategies that were suggested by the coordinator and the training he has taken in the school where he works. However, he did not only remember but also applied and critically evaluated their effectiveness while integrating them into his own teaching practices. These processes reflected the fourth dimension of autonomy, as Phillip not only follows instructions, but also judiciously selects and adapts his strategies according to real contexts, what he calls “trendy,” in such a way that he can verify whether they work in his context or not.

From a cognitive perspective, Phillip’s actions operate at the “evaluate” level, since he assesses the utility of the strategies and considers their applicability to adapt them to his context; this not only requires observation but reflective thinking about the use of strategies that are adapted to his context. Additionally, this can also resonate with Phillip’s autonomous decision-making as these decisions directly impact his students, enhancing content comprehension and teaching quality, promoting an active and meaningful learning environment. This aligns with the fact that students can relate the content to their own reality and interest, which reinforces motivation and participation, consistent enough with the socio constructivist view that states that learning occurs when the teacher facilitates understanding and interaction, not merely by transmitting information. Expanding Phillip’s ability to evaluate and adapt strategies in his practice, evidence of this can be found in his CV.

Reference 3. Excerpt on Phillip’s CV

“Asistencia al congreso: Inteligencia artificial: La puerta a las oportunidades, 2018”
(Cognitive level: create)

In this excerpt, Phillip showed how he looked for new spaces that offer him support to continue growing in his PD, for instance, the conference he attended which was related to the use of artificial intelligence. This decision does not rely on external policies; on the contrary, it evidences Phillip's freedom to act in his professional life. Ergo, the fact of attending the congress reflected he is aware of his necessities and understands the relevance of the topic to enrich his teaching role and practices, demonstrating his autonomy to integrate new perspectives that help him to transform his teaching.

This helped him create new ways of teaching, integrate previous knowledge, and adjust new elements to design something original that allows him to design new strategies based on what he has learned. Nowadays, autonomy is crucial to lifelong learning; individuals should think and act as autonomous, responsible, and self-directed agents, considering that autonomy is essential for their professional growth (Jiménez Raya & Viera, 2015).

Even though it may seem like a personal achievement, its pedagogical implications are evident, amplifying both Phillip and his students by exposing them to more updated context and innovative methodologies. Building a conclusion, Phillip developed autonomy and a process of maturity, demonstrating that he transits from reproducing strategies to evaluating them, and finally to creating or adjusting them. Such decisions consolidate his autonomy and place him at higher cognitive levels. Significantly, this last action of attending a congress about AI can be interpreted as culmination and inner autonomy. This decision to evaluate and adapt strategies prepared him to take full responsibility for his own PD. Altogether the last three excerpts about Phillip support the idea that autonomy is a dynamic and evolutive collaborative process.

According to Chik (2018), integrating technological practices in learning environments can be

useful and can be also a key to fostering independent learning, thus, understanding how these tools allow teachers to adjust their teaching and promote students' autonomy effectively.

Reference 4. Excerpt on Julia's class observation and checklist

“Planning activities that help learners to develop learning strategies; Julia planned a writing, she tends to plan lots of writings, she tends to assign them and then correct them, without giving feedback, she lets students write freely and use their gadgets to look for information (Cognitive level: apply)”

The excerpt illustrated Julia's class observation. This observation was based on a checklist that revealed how she plans her classes and the patterns she tends to follow, mainly based on writing assignments, these assignments always have some peculiar targets during the class. In doing so, she goes beyond memorization or remembering methodologies aiming to improve writing skills in students while using different approaches. Furthermore, by allowing students to use their gadgets, Julia reflects autonomy not only on her own practice but also in the way she encourages autonomy among her students.

However, a key point to highlight is the limitation students may have when using writing. While she fosters independence and asks students to write freely, the technique does not necessarily ensure effectiveness and serves as a reinforcing exercise, particularly because Julia does not offer feedback. Elaborating more on feedback, it is clear that Julia does not take time out of her classes to offer explanations about the students' performance in terms of writing and feedback. This creates gaps that could be addressed as an improvement area, since feedback can also promote autonomy in students and serve as an additional tool to foster students' willingness and a greater sense of responsibility for learning.

As Blidi (2017) emphasizes, it is fundamental that students develop independence and responsibility in their learning, both inside and beyond their classroom, because learning a language is a lifelong process and autonomy is vital and enduring in terms of learning.

Summary 4.3.1

Taken together, these excerpts inform the conclusion of the analysis of this dimension, where excerpts such as Phillip's and Julia's illustrated different manifestations of self-directed professional development and evidence of the nature of autonomy. For instance, Phillip's CV reflected a stage of PD centered on the challenges he was facing in class, leading him to talk about decisions about his personal growth that can also have an impact on his practices. These decisions not only allowed him to identify his needs but make adaptations in his teaching practices (Reference 3).

It is important to highlight that in Phillips's case, a broader, more complex and evolving panorama is presented. In his interviews, he describes how he proactively adapts the content of his teaching based on classroom observations and checklists (Reference 2 and 3), evaluating the effectiveness of his strategies. In these instances, he does not only demonstrate self-directed PD but also an advance in his high-order level cognitive process.

This progression ranges from understanding to evaluating and finally to creating. This continuous progression shows how autonomy evolves, from reproducing strategies to critically evaluating and creating new practices to implement them in real classrooms settings. That is to say, the main idea is that teachers develop the capacity to act independently, fostering in teachers as a strong sense of adapting to their needs by offering personalized examples and creating conditions that promote independence in learners and a more creativity that at the same time promotes more critical thinking, making their PD more autonomy-oriented (Jiménez Raya &

Vieria, 2015). These excerpts collectively show that self-professional development is a multifaceted and progressive process where teachers start by acquiring knowledge, skills and techniques that later on allow them actively to adapt and reevaluate strategies, ultimately leading to innovation in their practices. This evolution highlights the importance of autonomy as a mechanism for professional growth and its powerful impact on teachers' practices. However, this impact is not only demonstrated in teachers on their own but in learners, fostering autonomous learning in them. In the following section, no evidence was found. Nevertheless, a description of each dimension is provided.

4.3.2 Capacity for self- directed development

The capacity for self-directed development refers to the ability, disposition, and inner potential of a teacher to be aware and take control of their own professional learning autonomously. This includes the teacher's ability to identify strengths and weaknesses in areas of improvement, which implies a high-level and constant self-observation. Hence, true PD implies control, self-reflection, and autonomy, especially because when teachers exercise self-direction, their development stops being an external obligation and becomes an internal motivation process (Jiménez Raya et al., 2024).

In this dimension, teachers know how to plan their PD establishing clear targets and priorities that guide them toward achieving and fulfilling objectives, even before taking concrete and decisive actions. This includes the ability to select resources, strategies, workshops, or experiences that are most useful and appropriate for their learning, according to their needs and context. Ergo, sustainable PD and innovation are not only achieved by applying theory in a classroom. In other words, it is not only a matter of being familiarized with a method or a strategy and applying it, but of making decisions shaped and informed by their previous

experiences and evidently, how teachers have learned as students and how their formal academic training was (Jiménez Raya & Vieira, 2015).

It is imperative to note that this capacity is not about what the teacher does but about how the teacher can do it and how the teacher is prepared to lead learning and guide students at the same time. To fully realize this capacity, the teacher must consider looking for resources and strategic approaches. Such resources allow the teacher to acquire new knowledge and implement it in practice, adjusting content and teaching methods that evaluate not only the teacher but the impact on students. Ergo, this process not only involves analyzing the effectiveness of strategies but reflecting on results in order to adjust instructional practices for future decisions.

4.3.3 Freedom from over professional development

Freedom responds to how PD refers to the teacher's ability to make autonomous decisions about their own professional growth without being constrained by external directives, mandatory programs, and imposed procedures. In this dimension, autonomy is expressed as the freedom to choose what, when, and how to develop professionally, according to teacher's objectives, context and needs, in other words, when teachers determine which courses, congresses, workshops and resources to attend according to their own judgment. This implies how they manage their pace, focus, and depth in PD, to make more effective practices. As noted by Kenny (1993), true autonomy does not consist solely in allowing individuals to make decisions or choices, rather, it is a process through which they can express who they really are, what they think and how they wish to act, within a well-structured framework.

This freedom implies that teachers take full responsibility for their professional growth, including planning classes, planning their own strategies, implementing and evaluating their own efforts. When teachers exercise their freedom to their fullest, they maximize their PD and find

ways to promote autonomy in their students, creating a learning environment where both teachers and students actively participate in knowledge construction and educational decision-making. As Benson (2011) highlights, autonomy involves engaging with political challenges, since learning occurs within structural educational contexts where a lot of rules and constraints exist. For him, autonomy is not a limited matter based on taking decisions about methods but also entails having control over the content and the direction of learning.

4.4 Overall findings

The analysis of the dimensions of autonomy evidence that most concentration is manifested in dimension C (Freedom from control over professional action) and D (Self-directed professional development). In these dimensions, teachers reached higher cognitive levels within Bloom's taxonomy, reaching mainly "apply," "analyze" and in some specific cases, the "create" level. This reflects that some teachers not only apply previously learned strategies and adapt their resources, but they take and make conscious pedagogical decisions grounded in experience, learning styles, their own processes when learning and the learning they have acquired while taking extra courses. Nevertheless, even though some participants reached higher levels, these are not the highest levels in the six dimensions of autonomy proposed by Smith (2003). This indicates that while self-directed professional action and PD are evident across other dimensions, more advanced forms of autonomy are not sufficiently evidenced in higher level such as dimensions "E and F."

Synthesizing these findings, the data reflected a gradual selective development in teachers' autonomy where the capacity to apply, analyze and in some cases, create strategies, reflect growing self-directed practices and PD. Nonetheless, this autonomy is still limited and unevenly distributed, highlighting that higher levels of autonomy remain aspirational within the

Chapter 5 Conclusions

5.1 Introduction

The following chapter presents the conclusions of this study, based on the data collected and provides answers to the research questions in Chapter 4. Its purpose is to integrate the findings retrieved and explain the relevance of them both in terms of theoretical framework and their practical implications. Additionally, the contributions of the study are discussed, along with its own limitations, further directions for future research, and a personal reflection on the research process highlighting the impact of it on the researcher's PD.

The chapter is organized in a way that the research questions are first addressed in detail, providing evidence from classroom observations, teachers' interviews, CVs, and researchers' reflective journal. Subsequently, the general conclusions of this study are presented to show and spot repetitive patterns in teacher autonomy and PD. This not only allows summarizing the findings but also illustrates how teachers' autonomy progressively advances and influences teaching practices, enabling teachers to innovate and redirect their practices to make professional decisions independently. Furthermore, it emphasizes the importance of PD so that it considers both the teachers' prior experiences and the contextual and structural conditions in which they perform their roles. To facilitate the reader's understanding the six levels of autonomy proposed by Smith (2003) will be reintroduced in this section and subsequently, the response to each research question will be presented.

Table 6

The Six Dimensions of Autonomy

In relation to professional action:	In relation to professional development
A) Self-directed professional action i.e., Self-directed teaching'	D) Self-directed professional development i.e., Self-directed teacher -learning

<p>B) Capacity for self-directed professional action i.e., Teacher autonomy (capacity to self-direct one's teaching)</p>	<p>E) Capacity for self-directed professional development i.e., Teacher-learner autonomy (capacity to self-direct one's learning as a teacher)</p>
<p>C) Freedom from control over professional action i.e., Teacher autonomy (freedom to self-direct one's teaching)</p>	<p>F) Freedom from control over professional development i.e., Teacher-learner autonomy (freedom to self-direct one's learning as a teacher)</p>

5.2 Answering the research questions.

In this section, the answers to the three research questions that guided this study are further explained and elaborated. Each research question is addressed individually, considering the data and findings described and analyzed in Chapter 4.

The purpose is to offer an integrated interpretation of the results based on theoretical categories and the objectives of the study, highlighting how autonomy and PD are manifested in this specific context. For such a purpose, the data obtained through applied instruments such as class observations, teachers' interviews, CVs, and the researcher's reflective journal were used to triangulate the information and strengthen the validity of the conclusions. Through this process, patterns of cognitive thinking and classroom decision-making were identified and subsequently related to the dimensions of autonomy proposed by Smith (2003) and the revised version of Bloom's Taxonomy proposed by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001).

In the following subsections, responses to each research question are presented.

5.2.1 Research Question 1

RQ1 How is the teacher instruction characterized in a private language school according to the teacher autonomy model proposed by Smith (2003)?

This first research question sought to explore in detail whether any of the six dimensions of autonomy was reflected on participants' teaching practices by examining how teachers were involved in self-directed action and experimented their own freedom and control over their pedagogical practices. The obtained findings from applied instruments, such as participants' interviews, class observations, CVs, and the researcher's reflective journal allowed to identify patterns of actions taken when delivering classes, this along with the different cognitive levels that were spotted in such practices, always considering and aligning to the six dimension of autonomy Smith (2003) and the revised version of Bloom's Taxonomy proposed by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001).

In relation to the first-dimension, self-directed professional action, it was observed that the participants took autonomous decisions within a structured framework, such as the selection of their own material, this helped them to reinforce their practices and cover their needs. For instance, Phillip included Power Point presentations to strengthen vocabulary, showing an effort to adapt to the content, and slightly expanding explanations beyond what was prescribed. As found in Phillip's instances, there are some other examples of these adjusted practices and decision-making, for example in Katherina's teaching practices. Katherina adapted some activities according to her classroom needs and challenges, relying not only on professional experience but on her own life experiences, as she elaborated when talking about classroom management and the strong link between being a mother and a teacher.

Nevertheless, the cognitive analysis revealed that most of the participants mainly operated at levels such as 'remember, understand, and apply' using what had been previously taught during their training with only minor but meaningful adaptations at least to find solutions

right away in their teaching practices. Ergo, this indicates that autonomy is still limited, not due to external factors, but rather because of participants' own decisions.

Regarding the second dimension, capacity for self-directed professional action. Interaction between cognitive processes and reflection was observed. Such evidence illustrated that the participants mainly operated in levels "understand, apply and analyze" relying on the use of the acquired knowledge and reflection process they go through during the class or after the class. These decisions also had to do with the fact that participants decided how to plan classes, adjust strategies and make pedagogical decisions. For instance, Julia's excerpt illustrates (Excerpt 3) illustrates consciousness and the consistent application of pedagogical knowledge, as she uses strategies to visually organize information for students. These progressions reflected advancement toward higher levels of cognitive levels according to Bloom's revised taxonomy. Namely, cognitive levels in participants demonstrated the capacity for self-directed professional action when integrating reflection and practical application. Collectively, these instances illustrated the dynamic interactions among practice, reflection, and cognitive processes in participants when carrying out their classes, underlining that autonomy is manifested progressively in real classroom contexts.

As for the third dimension, freedom from over professional development, it was observed that participants exercised their autonomy by adapting resources and strategies according to their students' needs, making decisions that go far beyond what is prescribed. Findings suggest that autonomy expresses the capacity to make conscious, constant, and adaptive decisions in response to students' needs. Freedom is not exactly absolute because it allows participants to modify materials, strategies, and classroom dynamics, integrating reflection, professional judgment, and creativity, to generate meaningful learning experiences. This confirms that autonomy is

manifested gradually in real classroom contexts, combining independence in both teachers and students, responsibility, and continuous adaptation within the educational environment.

Consequently, the fourth dimension, self-directed professional development, illustrates that autonomy is also expressed in the progression of teachers' professional growth. For instance, this can be clearly observed in Phillip's participation in formative spaces, such as attending seminars on artificial intelligence. Such attendance revealed advanced levels of autonomy, reflecting a real willingness in his decisions and proactive professional development. The analysis of this case showed different manifestations of self-directed professional development and how it is reflected on teachers' autonomy, not only in one participant but others. Therefore, these excerpts confirmed that autonomy and PD imply interdependence between them, reflective capacity to adapt in different circumstances, and responsibility, contributing to the continuous improvement of teaching practices. Such evidence illustrated that there was no participant that reached the highest levels of autonomy corresponding to the fifth dimension that is "capacity for self-directed professional development" and the sixth dimension, "freedom from control over professional development."

In a nutshell, the analysis indicates that teachers' instruction in this context, a private language school, reflected several but progressive manifestations of autonomy across the first and the fourth dimensions proposed by Smith (2003). The participants demonstrated self-directed professional action, integrating cognitive process that involved reflection, freedom to adapt materials and strategies, and proactive engagement in PD. These dimensions are revealed through participants' conscious decision making, contextual adaptation, reflective practices and participation in formative spaces which are identified as opportunities to continue their professional growth. Concluding that, these findings suggested that although autonomy is

actively expressed in practice, it is still in process of development, with vast opportunities for participants to move forward fully self-directed and independent professional growth and more freedom from dependence on institutional policies.

5.2.2 Research Question 2

How do teachers cope with the challenges they face in their everyday instruction in relation to their teaching autonomy?

The purpose of this second research question was to explore and describe how teachers exercise their autonomy when facing challenges that emerge in their daily teaching practices. By triangulating data from teachers' interviews, classroom observations, CVs, and the researcher's reflective journal, several challenges were identified, as well as strategies that participants employed to face them. This analysis also revealed different levels of autonomy reflected on their actions. In general terms, the main challenges faced by participants were related to classroom management, adaptation of outdated materials which they clearly stated as lacking relevance and connection to real-life context in such a way that they tend not use them at all, and finally the absence of formal pedagogical training (highlighting that trainings are given not exactly based on their real classroom needs). In these situations, participants demonstrated varying degrees of autonomy when making real time decisions in their classrooms, adapting strategies according to their needs or challenges faced when delivering classes, and finally selecting resources that suited the specific context of their groups.

These findings also revealed recurrent challenges among participants, illustrating the limited pedagogical background, which in some cases generated insecurity when planning or explaining complex contents. Such incidences were also exemplified when participants expressed difficulties explaining grammatical structures or while selecting activities for true

beginners. To overcome such obstacles, participants frequently relied on the use of technological apps, such as GPT and other online resources that help them plan their activities, create new materials or activities, and finally find examples on how to use, apply, or generate them. Although this reflects initiative and a proactive attitude in participants, it also revealed a dependent form of autonomy, as their pedagogical decisions often relied on external resources rather than on self-generated knowledge. This kind of mediated autonomy aligns with the dimensions proposed by Smith (2003), since participants demonstrated self-directed professional action within their own structural limits.

In this vein, another important challenge to remarkably consider was the use of outdated instructional materials available at school, including flashcards, toys, and some other physical resources. According to participants, this material is neither current nor relatable to these years, some instances elaborated by the participants claimed that when talking about music, some artists or singers are not even recent due to the fact that students do not even know who they are, another example exemplified by another participant was the use of flashcards with contexts such as VCRs , landline telephones that in some cases, are not used these days.

Given these limitations, participants showed professional autonomy by adapting, creating, and complementing with more recent didactic materials. These decisions demonstrated the participants' ability to respond in a contextualized and reflexive manner according to both their needs and students' needs, accentuating adaptations to deal with their class current challenges in such a manner participants could exercise their professional judgment within the institutional boundaries. In a few words words, it is observable that adapting materials becomes not only a coping and repetitive strategy but also an indicator of self-professional action.

Similarly, regarding self-professional action, the evidence illustrating the use of Chat GPT emerged as a compensatory strategy in response to the lack of institutional updating. Its use allowed participants to compensate strategies in terms of trendy materials and free drills, such reliance let participants expand their pedagogical repertoire, showing willingness to find more independent solutions when institutional training or resources were insufficient or not covering their everyday challenges. In this sense, autonomy does not merely lie in accessing technology but in knowing how and when to integrate it with a clear pedagogical purpose.

Finally, the analysis of CVs revealed another challenge; almost none of the institutional training has been applied in participants classrooms settings, in some cases, some recommendations were considered showing a minimal disposition to use them and directly asking coordinators for some pieces of advice. While in some other cases external training was carried out by participants, it was not used and applied in classrooms. One instance of this is represented in Gonzalo's case, who took a technical course in Odessa, Texas. Although he demonstrated a disposition toward PD, there was no evidence of transferring what he learned into his teaching practices, as he never used different techniques, activities or approaches to deliver his classes. This phenomenon can be interpreted as a dissociation between the autonomous capacity and the autonomous action. The participant showed interest in improving but remained at the "understand" level according to the revised version of Bloom's taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001) without reaching the "apply" level. This may result from various factors including a lack of institutional follow-up or support.

Overall, these findings show that participants faced everyday challenges through strategies that reflect autonomy at different levels. Some demonstrate adaptative autonomy when modifying materials and adjusting strategies while others showed reflective autonomy in making

context-based decisions and finally, a few of them displayed mediated autonomy when relying on external resources to improve their classes. In this vein, it is observable that in some participants, this potential autonomy has not yet been consolidated due to the lack of practical application or the lack of appropriate guidance determining that autonomy in private educational context is a dynamic and contextual process in which participants continuously negotiate among available resources, institutional policies, and the students' needs.

5.2.3 Research Question 3

To what extent does teachers' autonomy trigger their professional development?

The objective of this research question was to explore if there was a relationship between teacher autonomy and PD, and how this relationship can generate opportunities for participants to continue growing up as professionals. Since there was a triangulation, as previously stated in other questions, diverse manifestations of autonomy were identified in teachers' interviews, class observations, CVs, and the researcher's reflective journal. Such manifestations contribute to the participants' PD in terms of reflection, decision-making, and usage of strategies.

These manifestations can be seen in instances such as Matt, who demonstrated autonomy reflected on her capacity to improvise and adapt to her classes when unexpected situations occurred relying on experience or her own way of learning. This finding shows constant learning, as she stated: "improvising has been part of my life so, as a teacher you have to pretend that you have everything under control but at the same time, you just have to make it happen".

This fine line contributed to highlighting her ability to manage classroom situations and students' attitudes, finding a balance between authority and closeness, which results in strengthened pedagogical competencies and classroom management.

Similarly, Katherina illustrated the use of her autonomy through external resources, such as apps and reels that she uses to overcome difficulties when explaining content and reinforcing vocabulary in class. She also quoted “sometimes I look for examples or ideas online when I don't know how to explain something.” Indicating that her autonomy is not only exercised by improvisation but also through the active and committed search for resources when integrating reflection and the use of technological apps and tools in the search of pedagogical purposes.

Another example was seen in John's way of delivering classes, who manifested his autonomy in managing diversity among students, identifying individual needs, and making decisions about classroom dynamics. He stated, “Sometimes the students do not want to participate but I had to learn how to manage it and have control of the class.” This quotation reflected how autonomy contributed to PD by allowing him contextualized decisions and build effective strategies to face everyday challenges. Along with this decision, there is a link between his decision making and the good rapport he showed in all his classes among different groups.

This facilitated the inclusion of different teaching practices that helped him have a more fluent set of drills in his classes.

Finally, another finding was observed in Gonzalo, who demonstrated he has the potential to continue his PD, although it is not yet fully consolidated. Gonzalo applies his previous and new knowledge in his classes, such as acquisition is already reflected on his teaching practices. These findings show that he can adapt, apply, and reflect on his teaching practices. However, he is still in a stage where he is not yet transferring ways to promote autonomy in students. This serves to prove that autonomy can foster PD and consequently can be potentially useful when it is combined with effective and insightful action.

In a nutshell, these findings indicate that autonomy acts as a catalyst for PD because it allows teachers to reflect on their practices, improvise effective strategies, exercise more classroom management, adapt resources, and even more, collaborate with others. Admittedly, the relationship between autonomy and PD is manifested in a dynamic and contextual way, in which participants exercise adaptative autonomy which is reflected on immediate decisions in classrooms, reflexive autonomy when observing what has worked in classes and mediated autonomy that is represented when continuously learning to perform better in classes, demonstrating continuous improvement in their pedagogical competences and a higher disposition to deal and face professional challenges. Likewise, participants whose autonomy is not yet consolidated showed that autonomy itself does not guarantee PD, and it must be accompanied by constant action, transfer of knowledge, and critical reflection. In this context, autonomy does not automatically resolve everyday classroom problems, but autonomy creates opportunities for participants to continue growing up professionally, consolidating abilities and techniques that strengthen their knowledge and professionalism within an educational institution.

5.3 General conclusions of the study

The results of this study showed that autonomy in this private language school is a dynamic, contextual, and reflective process. Throughout the three research questions, it was observed that autonomy was reflected on multiple dimensions that included decision-making practices, adaptation, reflective practices, challenges faced, classroom management situations, improvisation in classes, the use of technological resources to better perform in their practices, and finally opportunities to participate in PD processes.

From this first research question (RQ1), it was found that participants exercised autonomy in “self-directed professional action,” “capacity for self-directed professional action,”

“freedom from control over professional action,” “self-directed professional development” which are represented in dimensions “A”, “B”, “C”, “D”. In this vein, it was found that participants made consistent and reflective decisions by adapting materials when planning or performing classes. These classes integrated technology into their objectives and drills, showing participants progressive autonomy. However, dimensions of a higher level such as capacity “for self-directed professional development” and “freedom from control over professional development” which stand for dimensions “E” and “F” were not manifested. This indicates that autonomy is still in progress, and it remains partially limited by either personal or institutional factors.

The second research question illustrated participants’ challenges in everyday teaching. It was observed that participants demonstrated adaptive autonomy, reflective autonomy and mediated autonomy, showing how they adjusted and used external support to effectively face difficulties such as classroom management, limited pedagogical formation and the use of outdated materials in order to create more innovative and up to date resources.

It was found that participants implemented strategies such as improvisation, asking colleagues and coordinators, and the use of external resources such as videos on social networking sites or videos on YouTube. In addition, they reported artificial intelligence such as ChatGPT or other online AI applications. This resulted in some participants showing potential autonomy that in some cases, has not yet been translated into concrete and applicable actions in classes. It states that autonomy is still at beginner or developing levels in participants.

Finally, the last research question explored the relationship between autonomy and PD. The findings indicated that autonomy acted as a booster for PD by allowing participants to reflect not only on specific circumstances on their practices but on modifying strategies, expanding, and improving classroom management, adjusting resources, and cooperating actively

with others. Shortly, participants demonstrated that autonomy, even when exercised through improvisation, involves an active search for resources and the ability to make contextualized decisions which strengthen their professional abilities.

Nevertheless, it was observed that in some cases, autonomy by itself does not guarantee PD because autonomy must be accompanied by consistent actions in students and teachers, transfer of knowledge, and critical reflection in both cases, teachers, and students. To sum up, the study concluded that autonomy in this specific private context fosters PD, but in a progressive, dynamic, and contextual manner. Illustrating that in this setting, autonomy enables reflective practices, strategic adaptations, proactive problem-solving, and the consolidation of pedagogical abilities, thereby promoting professional growth. At the same time autonomy does not directly solve classroom challenges, but it does create opportunities to enhance practices and promote more conscious CPD while strengthening the teachers' practices.

5.3.1 Study contributions

This study contributes evidence on how teacher autonomy and reflective practices influence PD. One of the most relevant contributions is the identification of the importance of socioemotional wellness, considering the increase amount on topics related to 21st century skills. One instance of this contribution was expressed by one of the participants, Katherina, in her interview, she emphasized the imperative significance of being listened to and considered not only as teachers in a classroom but in their emotional dimension in their jobs. Claiming processes such as feelings, worries and issues before and after classes, recognizing that teachers are human beings and their emotional well-being directly impacts their capacity. Katherina even linked these socioemotional matters to the quality of interaction with students, and even the pedagogical decisions they make in a classroom.

These findings present that there must be an implicit way that correlates with the participants' social emotional wellness and their teaching practices. This correlation may create good rapport and a genuine connection and engagement with their students, taking into consideration how their students feel during classes. Shortly, participants are concerned about how students feel in class because they indirectly would like to be considered and asked how they feel. Once identified, this first repetitive pattern and other repetitive patterns among participants draw attention to how autonomy and reflection are manifested in practice. Some of these repetitive patterns were exemplified as follows.

5.3.1.1 The constant use of writing activities.

As found, it was evidenced that most of the activities performed by the participants reflected a reliance on writing skills as a learning and reinforcing tool. This is illustrated in participants consistently incorporating writing activities in every class, either controlled or semi-controlled activities. In such a way that students are already familiar with these activities. Thus, findings may show a certain commitment to fostering student production through written expression even if participants do not identify it conscientiously. It is quite notable that while some participants used writing in different approaches, such as guided prompts, others used specific requirements, usage of connectors, and written questions that they further elaborate on a more complete composition.

5.3.1.2 Concern about students' socioemotional state.

The concern about the students' socioemotional state was evident among all the participants, as participants consistently asked their students how they felt at the beginning of each class. In some cases, participants even took additional time to listen to students. This repetitive pattern can be related to the teachers' implicit understanding of the importance of their

own socio-emotional dimension, which in instances such Katherina, contributed to creating a confident and more emotional environment in favor of learning.

Another example such as John, who at the end of the year, during Christmas season, the participant literally proposed wearing ugly sweaters to take classes while he was giving classes in Christmas pajamas, such activity was complemented with all his students wearing ugly sweaters and having food while completing activities. He never stopped teaching while making jokes about Christmas. This helped him create a more comfortable and relaxed environment for students to learn. Similarly, other participants consistently organized potlucks at the end of every course. One of these instances is Philip, who arranged a potluck for students to present their final projects. These findings indicate that participants consistently take students' socio-emotional needs into account, integrating them into intentional activities in their classes that mean having an objective, such as presenting projects and sharing stories.

The analysis confirmed that teacher autonomy is not only related to making pedagogical decisions and adopting strategies, but also to creating inclusive and effective learning environments where students are considered human beings, playing a role that allows them to be free at some point. The integration of reflection on socio-emotional well-being as suggested by Katherina, strengthens teachers' disposition to focus on emotional needs of students, promoting socio-emotional competencies that are key within 21st century skills. Namely, promoting reflective practices and considering the social-emotional wellbeing of both teachers and students an important part of a class.

5.4 Limitations of the study

Despite the findings obtained, the study presented certain limitations that should be acknowledged and considered for further research. Firstly, the study was conducted in only one school that belongs to a wide range of schools. This limited the possibility of generalizing results, as it does not necessarily represent the experiences of all the teachers in other schools, nor does it reflect the realities of private institutions. Additionally, this school is a private language school, which influences the teaching practices and the availability and variation in resources, further restricting the transferability of the findings to another educational context.

Secondly, the sample size of this study was small, composed of six participants and while there are some disadvantages as the fact of having an in-depth qualitative analysis of autonomy and PD, it also implies that the results cannot be generalized statistically. Nonetheless, the qualitative data obtained provided detailed insights and an interpretative understanding of teaching practices.

Finally, the duration of this study was relatively short, lasting approximately 5 months. PD and the consolidation of autonomy are long-term processes that as stated before, develop progressively. Additionally, it should be considered and noted that classroom observations were conducted online, even if every class was recorded to have the possibility to watch the classes, this can also represent a limitation because an online environment does not always replicate the natural conditions of face-to-face observations, especially when it comes to teaching. Such circumstances could influence the behavior of teachers and students, and at some point, some details could not be fully captured through the cameras. But while spotting some downsides, there are also some upsides that allowed to find some minor details that guided a more detailed analysis. One of these advantages was the great possibility to observe students' and participants'

response times, decisions, and teaching practices in real time, these online observations also facilitated the identification of authentic patterns because, as the participants and students did not know exactly when they were being observed, they could act naturally and forget about being observed, revealing their true behaviors.

5.5 Directions for further research

Based on the results obtained in this study, several avenues for future research can be identified. One of them is that it contributed to gaining deeper understanding of PD and teacher autonomy in specific contexts, such as teaching English as a foreign language.

Firstly, one recommendation is to expand the participants' sample for future research by including more participants that have different levels of experience and especially academic background. This would allow for a more detailed comparison of how autonomy and reflective practices are manifested across different stages of a teacher's career in various institutional contexts. Another key and important recommendation can result in including a larger sample, this would provide a broader perspective on the landscape of PD within Mexican private educational institutions. Secondly, it would be valuable to conduct observations in face-to-face classes to differentiate various changes in behaviors and decisions compared with online observations. This is mainly because face-to-face observations could provide another perspective on teacher-student interaction, classroom management, and the social and affective dynamics that emerge in a natural environment.

By comparing both modalities, online and face-to-face, future research could provide relevant insights into how the context influences teacher autonomy. Finally, it is also suggested to further explore the relationship between teachers' autonomy and socio-emotional wellbeing, which these days plays an important role. This focus could support the design of more

comprehensive teacher training programs that recognize the socio-emotional dimension as an essential component of continuous professional development and teaching practices.

5.6 Reflection

Considering the above, this study has represented a significant opportunity to reflect on the complexity of PD and autonomy, especially when it comes to integrating them into teaching practices. The process of gathering and analyzing data was a tough matter to perform because the fine line between being a teacher and a researcher is quite difficult not to cross. As a researcher, you must remain neutral to the point that you must adjust, recalculate your own thoughts to avoid being biased or even being guided by your own perception. Such circumstances help you bear in mind that there are limits that should never be crossed to maintain ethical. Now, in terms of content and how the perception of a researcher changes when grasping meanings, it plays an important role in rethinking social problems, in this case in terms of teaching. This relates to the main variables found, autonomy, and its relationship with PD, unraveling the huge misconceptions about the role of autonomy in teaching. It was highly evident that autonomy is often misunderstood and therefore labelled as working independently.

Thankfully, from these findings, it was possible to spot the relationship between socio-emotional well-being and teachers' autonomy that, as expressed by a participant, is never considered. This underestimation may be the influence of challenges in teaching. In a nutshell, his process did not only allowed me to recognize limitations but also identified opportunities in educational research, concluding that such experience strengthened my conviction of the importance of teaching and my great commitment to being even more ethical and reflective.

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Appendices

Appendix A

The institutional observation form

Teacher:		Observation date:	
Course:		No. of students:	
Time:		Observer:	

Score	School's policies:			Score: 0-69 unacceptable 70-79 fair 80-89 good 90- 100 excellent
	Academic performance:			
	Final mark:			

Comments about students' performance	
Comments about teacher's performance	

Student's performance in class

Yes:1	No:0	N/A: 1	Total marks:	
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Student's level matches with the assigned level	Yes/No
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Classroom management (6)	1. Students were punctual	
	Comments:	
	2. Students used only authorized material (no photocopies)	
	Comments:	
	3. Students refrained from using any gadget (mobile phones) for personal purposes	
	Comments:	
	4. Students used vocabulary taught in previous classes	
	Comments:	

Class room	5.- Students used only and exclusively the target language (English)	
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	Comments:	
	6.- Students remained focused in class and showed interest in class	
Performance	1. Spoken language (fluency)	Comments:
	2. Accuracy	Comments:
	3. Speech intelligibility	Comments:
	4. Language variety	Comments:

Teacher's performance in class					
Yes: 1	No: 0	N/A:1	Total marks:		
Standards	1. The teacher started and finished the class on time.				
	Comment:				
	2. The teacher dressed according to the school's guidelines.				
	Comment:				
	3. The teacher refrained from using his/her mobile phone for personal purposes (in class).				
	Comment:				
	4. The teacher did not eat anything during class (unless it was part of the lesson).				
	Comment:				
	5. The teacher did not have a seat during the lesson.				
Comment:					
Standards	6. The teacher promoted a respectful and positive classroom atmosphere.				
	Comments:				
	7. The teacher used the lesson plan proposed by the school(institute).				
Comments:					

	8. All the necessary teaching material and digital resources were prepared beforehand	
	Comments:	
	9. The teacher wrote the lesson objectives (before class started).	
	Comments:	
	10. Ongoing monitoring was carried out throughout the class	
	Comments:	
	11. The teacher was in the classroom and refrained from leaving it for unrelated matters to the class	
	Comments:	
	12. The teacher always guided the students during class	
	Comments:	
	13. The teacher promoted the use of the target language and refrained from using Spanish	
	Comments:	
	14. The teacher provided timely corrections and feedback on students' performance	
	Comments:	
	15. As for the first class of the course, the teacher provided clear assessment and orientation on the course.	
Comments:		

0-3 points		Total Marks:	
Performance	1. Was the class clearly structured and adequately planned?	Score:	
	Comment:		
	2. Did the students have enough opportunities to use the target language during the class?	Score:	
	Comment:		
	3. Were students' inquiries addressed appropriately?	Score:	
	Comment:		
	4. Was there a clear sequence in the class (introduction, drills, and consolidation) of new language structures?	Score:	
	Comment:		
	5. Were topics and vocabulary contextualized to apply in real-life contexts?	Score:	
	Comment:		
6. Did the teacher use different ways to correct errors during class (variety of error correction techniques)?	Score:		
Comment:			

	7. Did the teacher use several teaching aids (such as flashcards or extra material)?	Score:	
	Comment:		
	8. Was the class engaging and relevant to the students?	Score:	
	Comment:		
	9. Was the teacher proficient in using the target language and did the teacher show traits that serve as a model for students?	Score:	
	Comment:		
	10. Were students involved and appropriately seated around the classroom?	Score:	
	Comment:		
	11. Were activities aligned to the objectives of the class?	Score:	
	Comment:		
	12. Were the intended objectives of the class successfully achieved?	Score:	
	Comment:		

Additional comments:

Suggested action plan:

This is an adapted version of the original observation format that is used at the mentioned institute. It is presented solely to provide a general idea of the observation categories used for internal observations. This sample serves merely for illustrative purposes and does not replicate the original one.

Appendix B

Checklists

Checklist 1 Planning

According to Cambridge English teaching Framework components (2019) planning classes is an important component for effective teaching. So, then planning an affective class considers the following concepts and objectives.

- To identify students' needs to ensure appropriate classes for students.
- To establish clear objectives that align with the syllabi.
- To foresee possible problems that students may deal with when taking classes.
- To prepare strategies in advance to tackle problems in class.
- To structure classes, considering flow, sequence, and time to maintain students' attention
- To choose the appropriate roles and interaction in classes. I.e., having students work in pairs, groups or individually.
- To differentiate and apply strategies according to students' level, learning styles and students' pace.

The following checklist presents aspects to consider in planning lessons and courses.

Table 1

Planning

Name: Course:					
Planning lessons and courses	Clearly evident	Evident	Some evidence	Little or no evidence (needs work)	And this is why
1.- Defining aims/learning outcomes that meet learner's needs and the course objectives					
2.- Selecting and developing activities, resources and materials which engage learners and correspond to the aims of the lesson					
3.-Dividing lessons into coherent stages with realistic estimates of timing					
4.- Planning a broad outline for a sequence of lessons including the recycling of learning content					

5.- Selecting and describing interaction patterns for different activities during the lesson					
6.-Planning activities that help learners to develop learning strategies					
7.- Describing how a lesson is linked to those before and after it					
9.-Anticipating problems that may arise during the lesson and planning how to respond to approach them					

Comments:

Adapted from the British Council's Continuing Professional Development Framework for Teachers 2015.

Checklist 2 Managing the lesson.

According to Cambridge English Teaching Framework Components (2019) managing and setting up a lesson implies the use of planning strategies that optimize students' learning. This includes the use of several key aspects such as starting and wrapping up lessons. The application of these various teaching techniques must align to the context in order to achieve students' successful learning. Some of these essential principles include:

- Organizing activities
- Giving clear instructions
- Assigning time to perform activities
- Monitoring students' learning
- Students' interaction

The following checklist shows key points to consider while managing a lesson.

Table 2

Managing the lesson

Name:					
Course:					
Managing the lesson	Clearly evident	Evident	Some evidence	Little or no evidence (needs work)	And this is why

1.-Controlling the pace and timing activities					
2.- Signalling transitions between stages of the lesson					
3.- Adjusting the classroom layout to support learning					
4.- Responding to unexpected classroom events					
5.- Making effective use of resources and equipment					
5.- Giving instructions effectively					
6.- Using the board effectively					
7.- Explaining learning aims and content appropriately					
8.- Checking understanding					
9.- Using error correction techniques adequately					
10.- Using elicitation and questioning techniques					
11.- Making proper decisions about which languages are used by the teachers and the learners					
12.- Encouraging learners to use English as much as possible					
10.-Monitoring and providing support when necessary					
11- Stablishing and maintaining a positive learning environment					
12.- Monitoring learner engagement in order to maintain motivation					
13.-Adjusting plans to take advantage of learning opportunities that may emerge during lessons					
14.- Checking on learning and offering constructive feedback					

Comments:

Adapted from the British Council's Continuing Professional Development Framework for Teachers 2015 and Brenes et al.,2010.

Checklist 3 Knowing the subject.

According to continuing professional development for teachers (CPD) Framework for teachers (2015) teaching effectively requires a mastery of the target language. This means developing knowledge about several linguistic areas and methodologies, this includes aspects such as grammar, phonology, and other communicative and sociolinguistic abilities. Hence, the use of these materials and theories helps teachers to reflect on their own strengths and weaknesses while teaching.

The checklist below presents the key aspects of knowing a subject.

Table 3

Knowing the subject

Name:					
Course:					
Knowing the subject	Clearly evident	Evident	Some evidence	Little or no evidence (needs work)	And this is why
1.- Developing and demonstrating proficiency in the target language in order to provide a good model for learners					
2.- Selecting appropriate methodologies and resources for introducing and practicing specific areas of the target language, this includes: Grammar Speaking Listening Writing Reading Communication strategies					
3.- Having an awareness of a range of materials relevant to the subject and using them to support teaching and learning					

Comments:

Adapted from the British Council's Continuing Professional Development Framework for Teachers 2015.

Checklist 4 Integrating ICT

According to Cambridge English teaching framework (2019) the importance of integrating digital tools in teaching English not only requires certain knowledge about its use but also having the ability to apply them strategically and accurately. The development of these abilities is essential because it improves learning processes, and it allows the use of other resources. Ergo, improvising and having different alternatives in case these digital resources are not available is imperative.

The following checklist details the elements that are considered to integrate Information and communication technology (ICT) in classes.

Table 4

Integrating ICT

Name:					
Course:					
Integrating ICT	Clearly evident	Evident	Some evidence	Little or no evidence (needs work)	And this is why
1.-Developing effective strategies for locating the appropriate digital content					
2.- Using digital content, tools, and platforms for achieving desired learning outcomes					
3.- Using technology in the production of teaching and learning materials					
4.-Creating activities (reinforcement) that support learning by exploiting appropriate digital content, tools, and platforms					
5.- Developing effective strategies for resolving potential technical issues					
6.- Promoting autonomous learning by exploiting digital content and technologies inside and outside of learning environments					

7.- Promoting collaborative and participatory learning by exploiting online communities, tools, and platforms					
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Comments:

Adapted from the British Council's Continuing Professional Development Framework for Teachers 2015.

Checklist 5 Promoting 21st century skills.

Promoting 21st century skills implies developing consciousness and critical thinking in students. These century skills are not only used for solving challenges but also communication, collaboration, creativity, and digital alphabetization. Then, selecting methodologies and appropriate resources allows students to develop and evaluate abilities, making them understand the value of reflecting in their own strengths and weaknesses (Cambridge teaching Framework, 2019). The following checklist details the aspects to consider in promoting 21st century skills.

Table 5

Promoting 21st century skills

Name:					
Course:					
Promoting 21 st century skills	Clearly evident	Evident	Some evidence	Little or no evidence (needs work)	And this is why
1.- Developing awareness and proficiency in critical thinking and problem solving					
2.- Developing awareness and proficiency in collaboration and communication					
3- Developing awareness and proficiency in creativity and imagination					
3.- Developing awareness and proficiency in citizenship					

4.-Developing awareness and proficiency in digital literacy					
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Comments:

Adapted from the British Council's Continuing Professional Development Framework for Teachers 2015.

Checklist 6 Rapport and Communication with learners

Creating a good relation in classrooms is based on confidence and respect among students and teachers. This allows learners to feel confident, competent, and creative. Having this connection includes strategies such as showing interest in each student, giving feedback on their progress, asking about their feelings and emotions, eliciting ideas, and valuing their opinions. It is necessary to find the right balance between compliment and criticism without crossing the fine line that lies between laughing with them and laughing at them. (Brown & Lee, 2015).

The following checklists offer several elements considered in rapport and communication with learners.

Table 6

Rapport and communication with learners

Name:					
Course:					
The student -teacher showed	Clearly evident	Evident	Some evidence	Little or no evidence (needs work)	And this is why
1.-Is there a positive and engaging attitude during class?					
2.- Is there evidence of respectful and helpful attitude towards students?					
3.- Was there good communication between teacher and students (individually and in groups)?					
4.- Does the teacher praise and encourage learners most of the time?					
5.- Does the teacher promote interaction among students?					

6.- Is flexibility and tolerance promoted in class?					
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Comments:

Adapted from Brenes et al., 2010.

Appendix C

The CVs

This appendix presents the participants' CVs in this study. It is important to note that the documents were originally written in Spanish and have been formatted into tables. These tables represent the extracted and organized information, maintaining its original language and content in order to maintain authenticity. For confidentiality matters, original versions of the participants' CVs have not been attached in full.

Phillp's CV

Section	Description
Name	Provided
Contact information	Phone: provided. Email address: provided. Address: provided.
Profile summary	Me considero una persona amante de aprender. Me gustan las nuevas experiencias, así como pulir mis habilidades hasta poder perfeccionarlas.
Educational background	Secundaria (egresado) Bachillerato (egresado) Escuela de inglés (egresado) 2018 Estudio 5 años música y aprendió: piano, bajo y teoría musical Actualmente estudia ingeniería mecatrónica (8vo semestre)
Professional experience	English teacher Julio 2023- actualmente
Skills	Not provided
Languages	English
Certifications	TOEFL ITP 570 puntos
Additional information	Certificado de acreditación en Música Certificación de Cambridge 143 puntos TOEFL ITP 570 puntos Diploma de asistencia al congreso "Inteligencia Artificial: La puerta de las oportunidades en 2018 Diploma por capacitación en informática

Katherina's CV

Section	Description	
Name	Provided.	
Contact information	Phone: provided. Email address: provided. Address: Provided.	
Profile summary	Al egresar de la preparatoria me dedique a estudiar y desarrollar el idioma inglés dejando este como segundo lenguaje operativo en mi vida laboral como personal.	
Educational background	Bachillerato (egresado) 2012-2015 Escuela de Inglés (egresado) 2015-2017 Como alumno destacado	
Professional experience	Servicio al cliente en juegos mecánicos:	
	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Descripción del cargo</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Operación de juegos mecánicos Explicación de reglamento en inglés y español Guía asistida en español e inglés</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Descripción del cargo
Descripción del cargo		
Operación de juegos mecánicos Explicación de reglamento en inglés y español Guía asistida en español e inglés		
Skills	Trabajo en equipo Visión de negocio Trabajo bajo presión Proactividad Comunicación efectiva Capacidad de aprender	
Languages	Not provided in CV but in interview	
Certifications	Not provided in CV but in interview and Test TOEFL ITP score report	
Additional information:	Softwares utilizados: Programas de computadora Manejo de app móvil	

John's CV

Section	Description
Name	Provided
Contact information	Phone: provided E-mail: provided address: provided

Profile summary	Estudiante de licenciatura en derecho, me considero una persona responsable, puntual, dedicada y ordenada buscando mi primera experiencia laboral
Educational background	Bachillerato con orientación en humanidades Licenciatura en derecho 2020- presente
Professional experience	Escuela de inglés como maestro 2023- Actualidad
Skills	Competente usando programas informáticos para la elaboración de presentaciones didácticas (power point, prezi)
Languages	Inglés Español Nativo
Certification	Not provided in CV but holds a TOEFL ITP score report
Additional information	Not provided

Gonzalo's CV

Section	Description
Name	Provided.
Contact information	Phone: provided. Email address: provided. Address: provided
Profile summary	Not provided
Educational background	Preparatoria (egresado) Universidad Actualmente es estudiante de Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras
Professional experience	Escuela de Inglés como maestro 2023- actualmente
Skills	Not provided
Languages	Inglés 80% escritura y lectura
Certification	Not provided in Cv but he holds a TOEFL ITP score report
Additional information	5 meses technical Course in Odessa, Texas, 2019 Paquetería básica: word, excel, power point.

Julia's CV

Section	Description
Name	Provided
Contact information	Phone: provided Email address: provided. Address: provided.

Profile summary	Not provided
Educational background	Egresada en Lenguas extranjeras
Professional experience	Agosto 2023 - actualmente
Skills	Creatividad Manejo de idiomas Ética laboral Iniciativa
Languages	Ingles nivel C2 Frances nivel B1
Certification	Not provided in CV but she holds a TOEFL ITP score report
Additional information	Capacitación de trabajo en peluquería y belleza

Maty's CV

Section Name	Description
Contact information	Phone: provided. Email address: provided. Address: provided
Profile summary	Licenciada en lenguas con pasión por los idiomas y la educación
Educational background	Licenciada en lenguas extrajeras Promedio aritmético 9.9 Bachillerato (egresada)
Professional experience	Not provided.
Skills	Not provided.
Language	Inglés C2 Frances B2
Certification	Oxford placement test C2 Certification provisional ILA Frances B2
Additional information	Capacitación para e trabajo en paramédicos

Appendix D

Interview questionnaire

The purpose of this interview is to get insights into how teachers' decisions are taken in their practices.

Section 1 Demographics
1. How old are you
2. What are you majoring in? Elaborate
3. How long have you been teaching English? Can you please elaborate?
Section 2 Challenges
1. What do you find most surprising about teaching English? Follow up questions: what is something you enjoy doing in your classes? What is something you find hard to perform or explain in classes?
2. Can you tell me a moment or time when your class did not go as planned? Follow up question: How did you handle this situation and what is something you learned from it?
3. What is one of your most effective strategies when something does not work the way you are expecting? Follow up question: how did you learn this strategy?
4. Do you ever think there are not enough teaching resources to apply in real classroom settings? How do you tackle them? Elaborate
5. Whenever you face unexpected situations in a class, what kind of support do you rely on to overcome these situations? Follow up question: do you rely on mentorship or pieces of advice from experienced teachers? Do you ask colleagues or your coordinator?
Section 3 understanding their teaching
1. How did you learn English? Why did you Start learning English?
2. In your own words what is it for you to be a good teacher? Follow up question: What characteristics should a good teacher have according to your own perspective?
3. What strategies do you tend to use to keep your lessons engaging for students?
4. If you were a mentor/ teacher trainer or coordinator what piece of advice or support would you offer to your teachers to succeed?
Section 4 reflecting on their professional development
1. Can you mention three essential skills/ abilities or background teachers need to teach English effectively, what is effectively for you?
2. Are there any resources, courses or training you wish you had access to before you started teaching? Follow-up question: How do you think these training courses could have helped you with your teaching style?
3. If you were to design a preparation program for English teachers, what would you include in this program?
4. If you were to pursue further studies or certifications related to teaching, what kind of courses would you like to enroll in? Why?
5. How do you describe your personal growth as a teacher (last five months)? Follow up question: Did you take any courses or webinars these last months?

Section 5 perspectives about having a bachelor's degree

1. What kind of preparation or background do you think it is helpful for someone to start teaching English? Follow up question: What would you find more necessary when it comes to teaching? Do you have formal education or experience? Please, elaborate
2. Do you think the academic or professional background you have had influenced your teaching practices?
3. Are there any specific skills or abilities in English teaching that you think require specialized training? Follow up question: Do you think these skills/abilities can be learned through formal studies, experience, or a combination of both?
4. In your opinion what makes an English teacher stand out from others? Follow up question: Do you think qualifications contribute to it or not?
5. What inspired you to pursue or take up teaching as a profession? Do you think this (teaching) is a long-term career for you? If so, why?
6. How do you find balance between being a teacher and living your non-school life? Is teaching something that aligns with you in a long term aspiration?

Section 6 identity

1. If a colleague asks you what kind of teacher you are, how would you define yourself? Follow up question: What makes you unique?
2. How do you stay motivated in your teaching role?
3. How do you define success in your classes? Please, elaborate
4. Do your teaching practices align with your current view of teaching? Please, elaborate

Appendix E

Written questionnaire

This questionnaire was used and applied to Group 1. The participants answered it, and it served as the pilot instrument.

The questionnaire

Please read each question carefully before answering there are no right or wrong answers.

1.	What is your educational background (state your BA degree)?	
	How old are you?	
2.	Do you have any formal training in pedagogy or teaching practices?	
3.	How did you become an English teacher (explain)	
4.	How long have you been teaching English?	
5.	What levels and ages have you thought?	
6.	Have you participated in any professional development activities such as webinars, in service programs or courses for teachers? If so, please describe them.	
7.	To what extent do you consider professional development programs to have helped you in your teaching? Please provide specific examples if possible. (e.g., I have improved my timing, the way I plan my classes, the strategies I use and so forth)	
8.	What topics or skills would you like future professional development (PD) programs to cover?	
9.	Do you enjoy teaching? Why or why not?	
10.	What are the most rewarding aspects of being a teacher?	
11.	What are the most challenging aspects of being a teacher?	
12.	Do you plan on continuing teaching in the long term? Why or why not?	
13.	What are your strengths as a teacher? Mention your reasons.	
14.	Are there any areas in your teaching that you consider need improvement? (specify the reason)	
15.	Do you find necessary to have a BA in teaching to be an English teacher? Why or why not?	

Appendix F

Group 1: CVs template

This appendix presents the collected CVs during the piloting phase of this research. The CVs were used to obtain general information about the participants, highlighting their academic background, work experience, certifications, and professional interests. They were reformatted into tables for confidentiality purposes. However, the original content and language in which they were collected is still represented in each table.

Table 1

Teacher 1J CV

Section	Description
Name	Provided
Contact information	Phone: provided. Email address: provided. Address: provided
Profile summary	Not provided
Educational background	Bachelor's degree in psychology
Professional experience	Five years of experience
Skills	Friendly and patient
Languages	English and Spanish
Certification	TOELF ITP
Additional information	33 years old Gives classes in a kinder garden and in the piloted institute. Has his own patients and gives them therapy

Table 2

Teacher 2B CV

Section	Description
Name	Provided
Contact information	Phone: provided. Email address: provided. Address: provided
Profile summary	To be able to perform in the best way in the assigned area and demonstrate my qualities and abilities to meet and exceed the organization's goals
Educational background	I learned the language when I live in the United States for 10 years. 2004-2005 IPFW university Fort Wayne, Indiana The achievement of the fundamental basis of the English language in the area of teaching.

Professional experience	More than five years
Skills	Computing
Languages	English and Spanish
Certification	TOELF ITP January 2020
Additional information	38 years old Took a teaching preparation course for the TKT certification

Table 3*Teacher 3E CV*

Section	Description
Name	provided
Contact information	Phone: provided Email address: provided. Address: provided
Profile summary	Profesional comprometida con impartir clases de calidad que no solo fomenten el aprendizaje efectivo de los alumnos, sino que también apoyen su desarrollo académico y personal. Mi prioridad es asegurarme de que cada estudiante realmente aprenda, al mismo tiempo que me preparo continuamente para mejorar mis métodos de enseñanza y ofrecer la mejor experiencia educativa posible.
Educational background	Licenciada en Relaciones Internacionales
Professional experience	5 años de experiencia
Skills	Comunicación efectiva Uso adecuado de lenguaje oral y escrito Relaciones interpersonales que conlleven a trabajar en equipos multidisciplinarios Capacidad de análisis e investigación en el ámbito nacional e internacional Habilidad en la negociación Gusto por aprender diferentes idiomas
Languages	Inglés Avanzado Francés básico
Certification	TOELF ITP
Additional information	Cursos tomados: How to write an essay (online) Berkeley University of California Teaching language systems (2023) Teaching receptive skills (2022)

	Teaching productive skills (2022) Manejo de software: Correo electrónico, Microsoft office, Google suite, manejo de redes sociales.
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Table 4*Teacher 4E CV*

Section	Description
Name	provided
Contact information	Phone: provided
Profile summary	Not provided
Educational background	Carrera trunca en Gastronomía
Professional experience	3 años de experiencia
Skills	Not provided
Languages	English and Spanish
Certification	TOELF ITP
Additional information	Tomo curso TKT proporcionado por la institución donde trabaja

Appendix G

Group 1: Participants' characteristics

This table represents the characteristics of Group 1, where participants shared data, such as the certificates or credentials they possess and the courses they have taken. This table served as a clearer and more organized overview of their profiles. It is important to highlight that this table represents the pilot group (Group 1)

Table 1

Piloted group 1 "participants' characteristics and background"

Participant	Gender	Years of experience	Educational background	Certification	Courses taken
Teacher 1 J	Male	5	Psychology	TOEFL ITP 590	TKT and training courses offered at the institute.
Teacher 2B	Male	Up to 5	No BA	TOEFL ITP 620	TKT
Teacher 3E	Female	5	International trade	TOEFL ITP 600	Training courses offered at the institute. How to write an essay (online) Teaching language systems (2023) Teaching receptive skills (2022) Teaching productive skills (2022)
Teacher 4E	Male	3	Gastronomy	TOEFL ITP 540	TKT and training course taken at the institute

Appendix H

Observation' results performed by the academic coordinator.

This appendix shows the results of the Group 1 teachers' observations; each teacher was observed three times. These results were obtained from the observations performed by the academic coordinator of the institution, the aforementioned observations were conducted individually evaluating areas of improvement, comments targeting the improvement areas, the score teachers obtained ranging from 0 to 100 by using the observation form see (Appendix A). This is an adapted and summarized version of the general results of each observation.

Table 1

Teacher 1J				
Number of observations	Area of improvement	Comments by the coordinator	Score	Action plan
1	Communicative competence	Cueing - Grammatical visual Talk to students about punctuality.	Excellent 90.2%	Workshop in communicative competence
2	Classroom management	Work on your classroom management.	Good 80%	Try to push your students a little by telling what the benefits of projects are
3	No needed	Try to use more material to trigger your ss ideas. Be careful with your grammar (relax)	Excellent 94.1	No needed

Teacher 1J Observation

Table 2

Teacher 2B Observations

Teacher 2B				
Observation	Area of improvement	Comments by the coordinator	Score	Action plan
1	Inductive teaching	Organize your board	Excellent 90.3%	No needed
2	No needed	Good fluency	91.7 %	No needed
3	Materials	Teacher could have used other materials to help his students	94.1%	Workshops in the use of materials

Table 3
Teacher 3E Observation

Teacher 3E				
Number of observations	Area of improvement	Comments by the coordinator	Score	Action plan
1	No needed	Remember to write today's objective	Excellent 97%	No needed
2	Overall planning Materiales de aprendizaje	Before your class starts, make sure you have all your material ready. Plan your examples in advance in order to help students understand clearly.	Excellent 91%	Communication and meaningful interaction
3	No needed	More variety when error correcting	Excellent 95.1%	No needed

Table 4
Teacher 4E

Teacher 4E				
Observation	Area of improvement	Comments by the coordinator	Score	Action plan
1	Error correction Grammar delivery	Mainly, don't get stressed, we AC's are to help you improve your teaching	Good 86,3%	Workshops in communicative competence
2	Vocabulary and practice	Make transition smooth. Keep studying! Watch your teaching talking time	Excellent 93.1 %	How to teach vocabulary and practice
3	Classroom management	The teacher is getting more	Excellent 90.3 %	Classroom management

		experience in classroom management. His teaching is also improving		
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Appendix I

Letter of consent

Title of the research project:

Principal investigator: Barrientos Cadena Angélica

Thesis director: Dr. Marisol Guzmán Cova

Institution: Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla

Maestría en la enseñanza del inglés

Contact information: 223462011@viep.com.mx

Purpose of study

You are invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the following information carefully and feel free to ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information.

The purpose of this study is to explore and address gaps in autonomy and professional development for English as a foreign language teachers. Your participation will help identify challenges and opportunities for improving teaching practices. This study is being conducted as part of my master's degree at Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla.

Study procedures

All data collected (e.g., interviews, classes observations, recordings, CVs) will be anonymous and used exclusively for the purpose of this study. If you feel uncomfortable being observed or responding to any interview questions you are free to decline. Please note that the interviews will focus only on your experiences and professional development needs.

Confidentiality

Your responses and comments will remain anonymous. I understand the importance of transparency in research, and I am willing to respond to any further questions or clarification in the use of your information. Every effort will be made by the researcher to preserve your confidentiality, including the following:

- Assigning code names/ net numbers for participants that will be used on all research notes and documents.
- Keeping notes, interview transcriptions, and any other identifying participant information in a locked file in the personal possession of the researcher.

If you have questions about this study at any time or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study, you may contact the researcher whose contact information is provided on the first page.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part in this study. If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign a consent form. After you sign this consent form you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason. Withdrawing from this study will not affect the relation you have if any with the researcher. If you withdraw from study before data collected is completed your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

I have read and understand the information provided and I have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without cost. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.

Participant signature _____ date _____
Investigator signature _____ date _____
Thesis director _____ date _____

Appendix J

Interviews transcripts

Angélica: What do you find most surprising about teaching English?

Gonzalo: It can may be the different challenges that you can find when you are giving a class, because depending on many many different factors like ages or even the level of English, you learn how to take out, take down those barriers.

Angélica: Okay, and what is something you enjoy doing in your classes?

Gonzalo: Something that I enjoy about, hmm oh, it must be like, seeing the the connection between students, once they learn or they understand what I, what they have to do or the grammar that we checked, seeing that students are using what I show them or what I told them is something that I find really, that really, that I really appreciate that. I really like.

Exact excerpt from Gonzalo's interview transcription

Phillip: I do. Well, two things. First of all, I ask my coordinator cause well, she's my coordinator, but she's also my friend. So, I can like... ask her for advice like...okay. I have this situation, what could I do? Also, in my school there are workshops, and they are quite useful, so I try to focus on them. Like okay, I don't know what to do in this case and they explain it... And finally, I look on Internet. I use GPT a lot hehehe and I ask, I ask it like, okay, I have this situation. What can I do? Or I have aa... mmm... I don't know how to explain this topic, can you help me, and it has helped me, and it has helped me a lot.

Angélica: Okay, now talking about the use of artificial intelligence.

Exact excerpt from Phillip's interview transcription

Appendix K

Observational notes in checklists

6.-Planning activities that help learners to develop learning strategies			✓		There was too much TTT
7.- Describing how a lesson is linked to those before and after it			✓		T asked about prev class
9.-Anticipating problems that may arise during the lesson and planning how to respond to these			✓		There were no other visual aids

Comments: Teacher did not have warm up where reflected scaffolding or recycling from previous activities, he had good timing but too much TTT and when it comes to vocabulary he didn't promote critical thinking, T asked and he immediately responded himself, T. was very patient while explaining but T could have taken advantage of having only one st.

Notes while observing teachers' classes.

13.-Adjusting plans to take advantage of opportunities for learning that emerge during lessons			✓		
14.- Checking on learning and offering ongoing feedback			✓		

Comments: Teacher was friendly and supportive, but when he was explaining grammar, T decided to do it in Spanish, in situations like error corrections T immediately used Spanish.

Notes while observing a teacher's classes.

Appendix L

Reflective Journal

December 17th, 2024

Today while observing a teacher, it felt kind of weird because I used to be the one observed. It was quite interesting to see how other people perform classes and that is when I understood those lines from a book: “there are some things that we can learn from a teacher and there are some others that we also learn not to do”. You can learn a lot by observing a teacher, quite a lot I would say. After observing this teacher, I realized that having a checklist for different stages during a class was quite useful. At the beginning I thought there were too many checklists, and having at least six checklists was kind of challenging, but as the class went on, I realized the significance of having each one and how they fit in each stage of the class

The class that I observed today had the following objective: “write a fact about nature” this objective made me reflect on the times I wrote my own objectives in class. This made me think about those old times when my teachers at college used to highlight the importance of knowing what verbs to use in our objectives, depending on the target of the class, “the famous Bloom’s taxonomy”.

Excerpt of the first page of the reflective researcher’s journal