



# BENEMÉRITA UNIVERSIDAD AUTÓNOMA DE PUEBLA

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Maestría en Enseñanza del Inglés

Thesis:

English teachers' challenges in their transition from pre-service to in-service in secondary schools in Mexico: A multiple case study

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“ENGLISH TEACHERS’ CHALLENGES IN THEIR TRANSITION FROM PRE-SERVICE TO IN-SERVICE IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN MEXICO: A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY”

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## **ABSTRACT**

The present qualitative case study pursues to investigate three purposes. First, to explore the challenges that English novice teachers encountered at the beginning of their profession. Most novice teachers are part of the union in education, in Mexico the secretaria de educación pública (from now on SEP), and have a tenure in public secondary schools. Second, to find how challenges were solved. Finally, to know what are the factors that influenced novice teachers' decision-making about their teaching practices. Therefore, to obtain the data two instruments were applied: an online questionnaire and one online focus group interview. Furthermore, the data analysis followed two views, the sociocultural (Johnson & Golombek, 2011) and the language teaching awareness (Gebhard & Oprandy, 1999). Overall, the results have shown that participants' initial challenge was being in charge of a group of people. Furthermore, novice teachers found students not motivated to learn the language, facilities which were not appropriate to the number of students, a mismatch with the book, teaching other subjects, and work location. Novice teachers solved the challenges with the refinement of their skills, most importantly, they had to trust, believed, and have confidence in themselves. Undoubtedly, the teacher education program, mainly the practicum, was the factor that helped participants in their decision in their everyday teaching. The influence of social relations helped novice teachers' personal and professional development.

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## Chapter I: Introduction

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Significance of the study

1.2 The context of the study

1.3 The aim of the research

1.4 Research questions

1.5 Conclusion



## 1.0 Introduction

Being a teacher is one of the most challenging professions among all. Teachers are the foremost actors in the formation of the professionals that might exist in a society. Through the years teachers and teaching are changing constantly. On one hand, the new teacher is younger and less experienced, but better qualified (Fuller & Bown, 1975). Very importantly education is changing in terms of methodologies, material, content; classroom settings, management, and one of the most important is the focus on the learner. These are just some general features that novice teachers experience and encounter when entering the field of English Language Teaching (ELT). Novice teachers are prepared in the educational program to meet the challenges in the classroom. Having the full support of a teaching education program novice teachers are expected to be prepared for meeting the challenges and standards for English Foreign Language (EFL) teaching (Wertheimer & Honigsfeld, 2000 as cited in Hudson, Hoa Nguyen, & Hudson, 2008).

Up today, perceived problems of novice teachers in their first year of teaching have been under research in different countries such as The United States (Bingham Rees, 2015; Burns & Richards, 2009), Canada (Farrell, 2008, 2012, 2016), United Kingdom (Edge & Mann, 2013), Australia (Miles & Knipe, 2018), Turkey (Hamurabi Sözen, 2018; Sali & Kecik, 2018), and others. Some of them have created programs to support novice teachers. Regarding public education in Mexico, there is little research about novice ELT in their first years after entering the profession. In the light of this context, this MA thesis intends to hear the voices of recent undergraduates from a Teaching English Foreign Language university entering the

teaching profession to gain understanding of this process so that these insights become relevant for future teachers.

### **1.1 Significance of the study**

Novice teachers enter the teaching profession with some beliefs about teaching and learning. They are very positive and excited before entering the profession. Unfortunately, when they start their first teaching job, they see the other side of the coin, the profession is totally different to what they were expecting to encounter. Consequently, this reality turns into difficult, challenging situations that novices have to overcome whether by themselves or with the support of senior teachers. This reality is the result of the transition from teacher training to the first teaching job, something that Veenman (1984, cited in Farrell, 2008) recognized as the “reality shock”, when faced with the demands of teaching. This may be attributed to the limitation of practicum in different contexts, different levels, and students’ age.

Recent review of the literature on this topic, elementary and secondary beginning teachers’ most perceived problems were: classroom discipline; motivating students; dealing with individual differences; assessing students’ work; relationship with parents; organization of class work; insufficient and/or inadequate teaching material and supplies; dealing with problems of individual students; and insufficient preparation for the job of teaching (Veenman, 1984, cited in Dayan, Perveen, & Khan, 2018; challenges related to foreign language pedagogy (establishing rapport with learners); and challenges relate to forms of professional support to novice EFL teachers (school administration-related) (Sali & Kecik, 2018).

Generally speaking, the challenges novice teachers experience are recurrent, gaps cannot be avoided in the teacher education programs, there are some areas that cannot be covered in depth. For this reason, studies have been conducted to know the ELT situations encountered around the globe, especially in Latin America, and Mexico. Considering this, this study will contribute to the existing research because it is an area that has not been researched compared to ELT in primary school level (Davies, 2007, 2009, 2020; García-García, Romero-Contreras, & Silva-Maceda, 2018; Ramírez-Romero, 2012, 2016). It will provide a meaningful insight about the everyday situations that novice teachers live in as soon as they get in the profession.

## **1.2 The context of the study**

The transition from pre-service to in-service teaching is notorious in ELT. In many countries, the central part of pre-service EFL teachers' development is the experience or practicum. This allows pre-service teachers to make the connection between current theoretical knowledge and school practices; yet understanding the standard of teaching and learning effectively (Liu, 2005 as cited in Hudson, Hoa Nguyen, & Hudson, 2008).

The participants taking part in this investigation are recent graduates from a Public university in central Mexico. This university has developed a 4-year college education program which provides pre-service teachers with teaching experience and relevant knowledge before they go on to their actual teaching profession. In this context, the teacher education program has always dealt with the recognition of

qualified teachers in all subject areas, but something not considered yet is to investigate or to explore the transitioning of its undergraduates into the teaching field. Thus, this investigation aims to explore the challenges faced by EFL novice teachers during their first years in the field. Importantly, for this investigation there will be nine participants, whose ages are from 23 to 32 and have a B1-C1 level of English, novice teachers that have little experience working in public secondary schools.

It was decided that the best option would be a qualitative method as a multiple case study in order to draw conclusions about teachers and their early experiences in the ELT profession.

### **1.3 The aim of the research**

Novice teachers entering their profession realize that the school reality is different to those training ideals they had. They must learn at once or review what they were taught in their education programs. Besides that, novice teachers are also in the initiation of the adult world with responsibilities, perhaps for some living away from home, looking for accommodation, with no options to skip or to miss classes, to follow a schedule, to make new friends, to engage in adult conversations, or to raise a family. In other words, from the freedom of student life to the restrictions and responsibilities of professional life. All these features create a phase of constant learning.

Importantly, this research reviews literature to get an impression of the problems that beginning teachers have encountered (Davies, 2007; Lengeling M. M., 2018; Millan Librado & Basurto Santos, 2020). Consequently, the literature will consider only experiences of beginning teachers and will be limited to senior

teachers. Henceforth, this research aims to hear the voice of novice teachers to analyze how they overcame the situations, and to identify the factors or the circumstances that helped them during a certain time and context. Notably, the experiences might serve as a picture of what is likely to be an English teacher in secondary public school and that might be considered for student-teachers.

#### **1.4 Research questions**

The current investigation aims to explore the following research questions:

RQ 1: What challenges do novice English Foreign Language teachers face as they transition into the classroom?

RQ 2: How do novice English Foreign Language teachers overcome those challenges?

RQ 3: What are the factors that influence the participants' decision-making about teaching practices?

In answering these research questions, an analysis using two views (Sociocultural theory and language teaching awareness) will help to identify the professional development of the participants at the beginning of the profession, hence, pedagogical implications are suggested for the improvement of English language teacher education programs in public universities.

## **1.5 Conclusion**

Nobody said that being a teacher would be easy, this profession as many others has respectable and undesirable features. Becoming a teacher is a complex and stressful duty. Consequently, in accomplishing this demanding task teachers do not always feel supported by the institution where they are working. It is recommended that all people, taking part in the education of the learners, become aware of the support that novice teachers require when entering this profession. This is the beginning of this long and lasting profession; thus, mentoring is required in order to soften the challenges that are about to come.

It is hard to emphasize the problems that arise from the teaching profession. Thus, the best source to know what awaits in this profession is to listen to novice teachers, their experiences in a form of learning while they are doing it, being this the most important source of the acquisition of knowledge and skills. Participants taking part in this investigation are the key element, and through their experiences the new teachers might benefit from it.

## Chapter II: Literature Review

### 2.0 Introduction

### 2.1 Vygotsky's sociocultural theory

2.1.1 Language teaching awareness following Gebhard and Oprandy (1999) assumptions

### 2.2 Historical perspectives of ELT in secondary schools in Mexico

2.2.1 Second language teacher education

2.2.2 Teacher education for secondary schools in Mexico

2.2.3 Second language teacher education program offered by the public university in central Mexico

### 2.3 Novice teachers

2.3.1 Novice teachers' perceptions and beliefs

2.3.2 Novice teachers' practices

2.3.3 The role of mentoring and supervision in the Mexican novice teachers

### 2.4 teacher identity and agency

## **Chapter II: Literature review**

### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter two is divided into four parts. First, an overview of sociocultural theory and language teaching awareness in professional development. Second, background information on English Language Teaching (ELT) in secondary public education schools in Mexico is mentioned. Third, studies on novice teachers' practice, their perceptions, and beliefs about teaching, as well as the role of mentoring and supervision within this context are discussed. Finally, salient interpretations about teacher identity and agency are presented.

### **2.1 Vygotsky's Sociocultural theory**

The next paragraphs introduce the sociocultural theoretical perspective and aims to explain the mechanisms, nature, and consequences of novice teacher professional development of this investigation. This investigation embraces Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (SCT) (Mahn & John-Steiner, 2012) which emphasizes the relationship between teacher professional development and the cultural, institutional, and historical situations in which that development occurs. Some scenarios of teacher professional development are as follows. For example, when a novice teacher has his/her first job and gets involved with everything related to teaching. A pre-service teacher observing a class and seeing how it is carried out. A senior teacher taking a course that the ministry of education is offering and/or the



school personnel participating in a workshop is also part of professional development. Cultural and institutional situations refer to the setting and circumstances in which the teachers are living, learning, and working (Johnson & Golombek, 2011). The rules that have been stated and must be followed. The historical situations are taken from previous experiences teachers had in their early educational levels. Perhaps, they might follow the same enthusiasm of a teacher or do not want learners to go through the same learning experiences as they did.

This theory of human cognition is referred to as fundamentally social, that is, the result of participating in different external forms of social interaction that become internalized psychological tools for thinking (the internalization) (Johnson & Golombek, 2016). This transformation is done from external to internal, it is indirect, that is mediated. These external, social interactions and activities become internalized in teachers' thinking, enabling them to construct a better understanding about the language, how it is learned and how it should be taught in that specific context and group of learners.

Mediation is a key element in the professional development of novice teachers, so, according to Vygotsky' SCT this transformation goes from external to internal. Vygotsky argued that individuals transform what is appropriate for their own benefits in/for specific situations of use. This theory recognizes individuals as actors in and on social situations in which they are taking part, both being shaped by and shaping the social situations for their further development. In the case of novice teachers, they are shaped in and during their experiences as student-teachers, the cultural practices of teacher education, and the particulars of their teaching context,

all embedded with large sociocultural theories yet appropriated in individual ways (Johnson & Golombek, 2016).

According to Lantolf (2001 as cited in Guerrero Nieto, 2007) one of the main concepts of sociocultural theory is that the mind is mediated. This means the subject does not establish a direct relationship with the world, then, this relationship is mediated through the use of tools. That is to say, the mediation is done with the use of tools, artifacts or activities that help novice teachers to expand their knowledge and abilities to enable them to change the way in which they are delivering their lessons. Psychological tools are oriented to shape cognitive development, they are represented in the form of artifacts, activities, concepts, social interactions (relations), or mediational means (Johnson & Golombek, 2011). Novice teachers involved in these social interactions learn how to use the psychological tools to develop their higher mental process. The transformation from being an undergraduate to becoming a teacher; novice teachers interacting in a friendly way with students (social interaction, external) and later on reflecting on the students' behavior inside the classroom (internal) is explained through the role of mediation.

This process of transformation from external to internal resulting in new forms of cognition is what Vygotsky referred to as internalization. These elements are presented in the following triadic model of mediation in L2 teacher development. Humans do not act directly with their environment, rather they use various tools to mediate their activities. Teacher educators teach these tools to student-teachers through tasks (set of procedures to be done, lesson planning, material design, the use of teaching theories, and more) in the teacher educational program, and these tools serve simultaneously to regulate student-teachers behavior and to make

available various means of self-regulation (i.e., reflective teaching) (Johnson & Golombek, 2011). These material objects that exist in the courses, are part of sociality and how they are used to organize their activities that are part of their development. In the words of Guerrero Nieto, (2007) the role of psychological tools is to mediate the psychological process of humans.

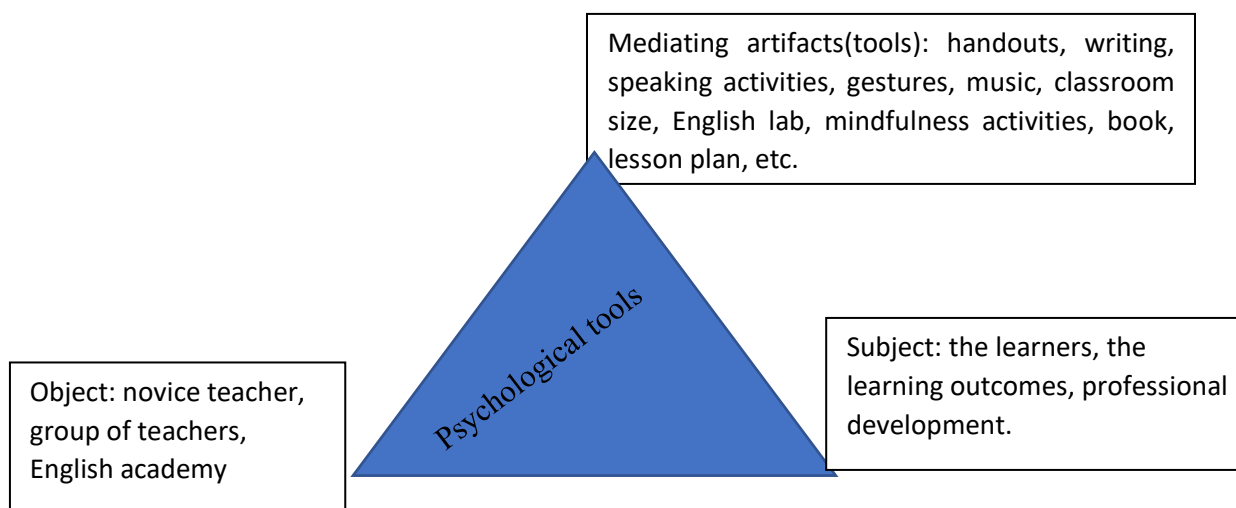


Figure 1: Internalization model. Adapted from Johnson and Golombek (2011).

### 2.1.1 Language teaching awareness following Gebhard & Oprandy (1999) assumptions

Events in the classroom present a major challenge in its management especially for novice teachers. The knowledge that a teacher has for processing this complexity depends on his/her level of language teaching awareness. Language teaching awareness is to see or to go beyond the usual way of teaching. It is classroom life from a different perspective, so that teachers might have opportunities to become

aware of new things in a very familiar place. Teaching awareness is to discover and rediscover things hidden in the teaching beliefs and practices inside the classroom. Taking in consideration Fanselow (1988 cited in Gebhard & Oprandy, 1999) recommendation to see teaching differently. In order to gain or to develop language teaching awareness Gebhard and Oprandy (1999) describe nine beliefs and assumptions that experienced, and novice teachers could explore in their teaching context where they live and work. These are as follows:

1. Teacher taking responsibility of his/her own teaching
2. The need for others
3. Description over prescription
4. A nonjudgmental stance
5. Attention to language and behavior
6. Avenues to awareness through exploration
7. Personal connections to teaching
8. Attention to process
9. A beginner's mind

The first one, teacher taking responsibility for his/her own teaching refers to the teacher's desire of exploring his/her teaching beliefs and practices coming from themselves and not from other teachers. Nevertheless, teachers must create bridges to reach out to others in the process (Forsdale, 1981 cited in Gebhard *ibid*, 1999).

The second one is the need for others, Gebhard and Oprandy (1999) state that if a teacher wants to investigate his/her own teaching, it could be a little complicated to do it without any support or help from other people. Consequently, she/he will need a colleague or a student at least. Thus, teachers interacting with others help them to understand their teaching experiences, and provide them choices.

The third one, description over prescription refers to the events when carrying on a lesson. That is to say, to be open to try out different viewpoints to get to the aim of the class, rather than insisting on following every step of the lesson plan. Prescription's disadvantage is that it might create confusion within the teacher because it is believed to be the correct way or best way to teach. Therefore, this reduces the chances of teachers to become experts and allow others to make decisions for them. Subsequently, teachers lose the opportunity to discover awareness of their teaching beliefs and practices. It is through description that teachers' awareness improves their teaching and empowers them in their decisions making.

The fourth, nonjudgmental stances are some ideas used for teachers to judge themselves, whether positive or negative, having the following examples. "That was a very good lesson", "I had some pronunciation mistakes", "that was very good, I managed the time like planned", "students did not like the sheets". Same ideas in certain circumstances do not allow teachers to see their teaching clearly, which might bring emotions that interfere with their language teaching awareness. It is recommendable to let them go and start exploring it.

Paying attention to the use of language and behavior is another aspect that teachers should consider. It is recommendable to avoid the use of vague words when talking about teaching. Some words have different meanings for different people. The use of common language will make communication easier, in other words, to be on the same page. Another important feature is the role that listening plays in communication. Listening to others opens conversational space, with the

teacher and the other people (college, student, parent, and more), or raises awareness about one another's contribution to their co-construction of knowledge.

The next assumption, avenues to awareness through exploration, suggests four ways to explore teaching by:

1. Problem-solving happens when the teachers identify a problem, the causes, and try to solve it. Therefore, teachers change some aspects of the class, the behavior and see what happens.
2. a) To be silent, stop giving directions and write them on the board, start teaching from the back are some unusual or opposite techniques recommended to be used in the classroom. b) The other recommendation is adapting random teaching behavior like playing some background music, taking some candles to the classroom, students asking questions to teachers, talking about students' life.
3. Seen what is by is the assumption of a) contrasting what the teacher does with what he/she thinks is doing. To be aware of this, the teacher has to keep a record, write a journal and collect descriptions of their teaching under study. The other option is to b) consider what the teacher believes in the light of what he/she does, some situations are when giving directions, correcting students pronunciation, translating words, the use of L1).
4. Clarifying feelings has to do with the need to explore the teachers' emotional side, how the feelings affect teacher behavior, the students, teaching and more.

The next, personal connection to teaching is about the connection with teaching as professionals. Teachers have been involved in diverse contexts where they live (out of school), work (professional teacher person, school setting), and what they can bring to the classroom from the outside community that will engage students.

Attention process is when teachers explore their teaching beliefs and practices. They develop this awareness by doing follow up activities, observations, analysis and interpretations of their teaching, when using a teaching journal to process their teaching, collaboration with others, etc.

The last assumption is teachers giving up their ideas, and it is recommended just to listen to and observe. Possible scenarios for a beginner's mind is when teachers take part in a conversation, activity, observation, conference without preconceived ideas about what should be going on in that situation.

Within these views, this current investigation identifies teacher professional development in the social, political, historical, cultural, and institutional context in which teachers live, work, and learn (Johnson & Golombek, 2016). It connects two views being one the sociocultural levels that are part of professional development of novice teachers. And the other one is the level of language teaching awareness they have explored, and or to see their internalization level as part of their teaching expertise.

## 2.2 Historical perspectives of ELT in secondary schools in Mexico

By 1990 in Mexico the *educación básica* (basic education) was: six years of *primaria* (primary school with grades 1-6, ages from 6 to 11 and at least one teacher per grade), later in 1993 three years of *secundaria* (secondary school grades from 7- 9), and became mandatory for any Mexican teenager (SEP, 2017). The 1993 curriculum introduced some significant changes, a foreign language was added (English) devoting three hours per week during the three years of it (Quiroz, 1998; Basurto Santos, 2010). Thus, secondary schools are the middle grades and there are three kinds of them: *secundarias generales* (general) that enrolls non-rural students, including those that are college-bound. *Técnicas* (technical) are the ones that provide vocational training for those that are not into attending university and are interested in the labour market. The last one is the *telesecundaria* (tele-secondary), the rural school which offers a televised curriculum, which enrolls mostly rural students. Although EFL is part of the curriculum, in a few schools it is taught by teachers who are not EFL teachers and therefore, the results are minimal (OEI-Mexico as cited in Basurto Santos N. M., 2010).

A great number of teachers have been involved in this academic activity for over 50 years. Too much effort and funding have been invested with outcomes that are recognized mostly by teachers involved in it and experts doing research (Davies, 2007; Basurto Santos, 2010).

In Mexico the literature on this topic is mainly about the implementation of teaching English in public primary schools and the English national program (Davies, 2007; Dzul Escamilla, Funderburk Razo, & Hidalgo Avilés, 2010; Ramírez-Romero,



2012; Lengeling, Mora Pablo, & Barrios Gasca, 2017; García-García, Romero-Contreras, & Silva-Maceda, 2018; Millan Librado & Basurto Santos, 2020). There are a few studies on teaching English in public secondary system (Davies, 2007; Sandoval Flores, 2009; Lengeling M. M., 2018; Basurto Santos N. M., 2010; Basurto Santos & Gregory Weathers, 2016; Millan Librado & Basurto Santos , 2020), and others on critical incidents during career entry teaching in primary schools (Lengeling & Mora Pablo, 2016), emotions during initial teaching practice in primary level (Arizmendi Tejeda, Gillings de González, & López Martínez, 2016; Méndez López , 2020), mentoring in university and normales program (Ponce Ceballos, García-Cabrero, Islas Cervantes, Martínez Soto, & Serna Rodríguez, 2018) and mentoring primary teachers (Reséndiz Melgar, 2019).

In Millan Librado and Basurto Santos' (2020) investigation on teachers' perceptions about teaching English to primary and secondary learners in Mexico the six English language teacher participants emphasize the lack of opportunities for teacher training /development. Most of them reported they did not receive regular training, it was scarce and absent. Additionally, these EFL teachers expressed that they also experience a lack of teaching materials (books, computers, recorders, and others), and deficient infrastructure in their classrooms.

In another study, Sandoval Flores (2009) explores the different options secondary school teachers (whether from normales or universities) chose to become inserted into the public school system and how these options affected their teaching practice. The findings indicate that both profiles encountered the same challenges being group control, discipline, and respect. The university students (universitarios)

faced mostly subject matter problems, as in some cases they taught subjects that were not related to their B.A. degree.

The findings are consistent with several related studies (Sandoval Flores, 2009; Funderburk Razo, & Hidalgo Avilés, 2010; Morales Cortés, 2016; Farrell, 2016; Dzul Escamilla, Lengeling & Mora Pablo, 2016; Lengeling, Mora Pablo, & Barrios Gasca, 2017; Lucero & Roncancio-Castellanos, 2019; Millan Librado & Basurto Santos, 2020) spotlighting that becoming teachers might need more practicum hours. Preparedness comes along with practicum and training in the educational program, something that is recurrently mentioned. Teaching activity is so complex, this is the reason why becoming teachers need more exposure to activities where they can have a big picture of the profession, more precisely to know what teaching English is about.

The studies above on Mexican secondary schools have focused the attention on the need to carry out more research and expand it to different contexts (from capital cities to rural places). Also, to inform the stakeholders and people interested in improving the quality of EFL teaching and learning in the Mexican classrooms. Therefore, the findings of this study of novice teachers' challenges in their transition into the secondary school public classroom will contribute to the EFL teaching area and the EFL teacher education program. Teacher educators could have a new perspective of how their alumni live this process and student-teachers could understand better what EFL teaching implies in public secondary school contexts. So, they might have a reference or areas that require more attention while being in the teacher education program.

### **2.2.1 Second language teacher education**

With the growth of EFL instruction worldwide, there has been the need for universities to offer a second language teacher education program (SLTE). Furthermore, some parts of the world face a teacher shortage that opens up the possibility of teachers moving to a different country making teaching a market. Becoming teachers want to find a SLTE program that offers quality and recognition in how teachers are trained. In this situation, SLTE role is to train teachers to deal with multiculturalism, whether liked or not, most teachers face (Townsend & Bates, 2007).

Becoming teachers go through an initial phase of learning that is the preservice program where they acquire subject matter knowledge, study the teaching and learning process, know about the different learning approaches, lesson planning, instructions, and assessment. But there might be a misinterpretation of the process, considering teachers as finished products, assuming that they mostly need to refine their skills, or to treat their bad early teaching experiences as a deficiency in their preparation (Feiman-Nemser, 2003). Becoming teachers have individual learning needs that the SLTE program cannot tailored, there will always be gaps that will be fulfilled with practice.

SLTE goal is to address becoming teacher needs, to give an introduction into the profession, and to provide the tools. Something that Ely (1994) remarks teacher education aims at teachers to be prepared for the contingencies of unforeseen future teaching situations (p.336 cited in Barahona, 2014). Nevertheless, Norton (2005) suggest that a teacher education program should go beyond content and teaching

methods, thus, work on pre-service teachers' backgrounds, their future goals, and the communities and learners they want to teach. That is to say, becoming teachers have to learn how to make the best of all of it. Becoming teachers need to size up situations and be able to make a decision as to what to do, learn to create safe classroom environments, engage all students, study the effects of their teaching, in this sense, use what they learned.

SLTE helps becoming teachers develop a principle of teaching practice and fit into the existing system. Norton (2005) suggests that student-teachers need to negotiate different identities and that the range of identities is constructed through language immersed in different communities of practice. Consequently, the program should provide future teachers with identity options that would enable teachers to be part of these communities and enhance the teaching and learning of a language. Something that not even the best teacher education program can compensate for is the unhealthy school environment that might exist in the profession.

### **2.2.2 Teacher education for secondary schools in Mexico**

In Mexico, teacher education within the public system has relied on two primary institutions: Normales and Public Universities. In the beginning, most English teachers were undergraduates from the Escuelas Normales, but due to the need for English teachers in the country, public universities opened English teaching programs as a result a significant number of teachers come from these programs (Cordero-Arroyo & Salmerón-Castro, 2017; Medrano Camacho & Ramos Ibarra, 2019).

According to the National Association of Universities and Institutions of Higher Education (its initials in Spanish ANUIES) there are 36 out of 256 Public Universities in Mexico that offer a bachelor's degree in English Language Teaching (ANUIES, 2020-2021). For this research one autonomous university from central Mexico is involved.

### **2.2.3 Second Language Teacher Education program offered by a public university in central Mexico**

This university is located in central Mexico and offers two degrees in language teaching that are English and French. This paper only considers the English curriculum. Hence, this university has developed a 4-year college educational program that enables pre-service teachers to receive teaching experience and gain relevant knowledge before they go on to their actual teaching profession.

From the very beginning, student-learners are taught the basic elements of the ELT profession as the target language; they learn about the linguistic policy, and education in Mexico; understand the theories of the learning process; an introduction to language study; academic writing; and develop skills of complex thinking. By the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> semester, student-teachers are able to design both paper-based and digital teaching material. They can reflect on the various teaching methods in ELT and approaches available. They can design different kinds of assessments and the learning outcome in a teaching context they are familiar with. Regarding the sixth semester, the student-teachers are expected to have a good level of target language proficiency, a fluency that allows them to communicate with a non-native or a native

speaker. They know different written sources both formal (academic writing) and informal. They design classes to teach grammar, vocabulary, phonology, reading and listening skills to different learners' levels (A1-B2).

Finally, by the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> semester, student-teachers will produce clear, well-structured written text, be able to make decisions regardless of their context needs, and choose the most appropriate teaching methodology according to their students' age, learning styles and needs. They will be able to conduct a class under supervision and without supervision.

To sum up, they are expected to be bilingual teachers of English with an understanding of the English-speaking culture, have the preparation, knowledge, and skills to face the challenges in the classroom. Something that Freeman (1993, as cited in Johnson, 2009) referred to teacher learning as “front-loading”, where preservice programs equip teachers in advance for all they will need to know and be able to do throughout their teaching lives.

In this context, the teacher education program has always dealt with the recognition of qualified teachers in all subject areas, but something not considered yet is to investigate or explore the transitioning of its undergraduates' students into the field. This investigation aims to do it, to explore the challenges faced by EFL novice teachers during their first years of experience.

### **2.3 Novice teachers**

Many novice teachers assume that once they have graduated from their teacher education program all they will do is to apply all theories learned in the program.

They arrive at their first teaching job very excited, enthusiastic, and full of energy with the idea of being one member of the teaching profession. Unfortunately, the first months in the teaching profession can be intimidating, a mix of feelings is present, especially for them, whose awareness of the school environment is poor. Novice teachers who are required to act as full-formed teachers (Hamurabi Sözen, 2018; Farrell, 2016), to assume teaching responsibilities, to become familiar with the school policies and curricula, to establish relationships with students, colleagues, administrative staff, and parents. So, after their teacher education program, they must be prepared for what awaits. Farrell (2012) novice teacher's characteristic is somebody who teaches for the first time. Most novice teachers are young adults embarking on this long teaching career. There is no sharp time limit about the duration of that stage. Therefore, for Kim and Roth (2011) this stage is less than five years in the profession (as cited in Hamurabi Sözen, 2018).

To set up this journey there is a transition from pre-service to professional practice; from being subject-centered in their learning to being problem-solving oriented. This is the stage that student-teachers experience between the last year of the teacher education program and their first experience in the classroom with learners. Most of the time this stage is disconnected because there is not a gradual induction into the profession. This period has been characterized by Veenman (1984) as "reality shock" (same author cited in Chasleston-Cormier, 2006; Farrell, 2012; Heather, 2013; Sali & Kecik, 2018; Dayan, Perveen, & Khan, 2018). In his study, he states "In general, this concept is used to indicate the collapse of the missionary ideals formed during training by the harsh and rude reality of everyday classroom life" (1984 p. 143). The transition from teacher preparation to teaching is

generally unexpected and isolated, no support is offered (Feiman-Nemser, Schwille, Carver, & Yusko, 1999; Romero, 2021). While they have a fundamental understanding of the demands of teaching, their learning process needs to continue to refine their skills, competencies, and abilities.

When novice teachers start their teaching practice, they typically bring an understanding of what it means to be a teacher based on experiences they have had during their early education, teacher education, and/or pre-service to the classroom. The novice teachers do not have a clear idea of what awaits. As Arizmendi Tejeda, Gillings de González, and López Martínez (2016) study describes that novice teachers beginning teaching for the first time, arrive at their schools with certain expectations. They have been thinking about what teaching would be like. They have assumptions concerning what their students will be like and how they will act. For students it may be just another teacher in the English class but for novice teachers is the beginning of the journey in the world of teaching.

Novice teacher development involves mainly stakeholders, novice teachers and second language educators (Farrell, 2012) all working in collaboration to ensure a smooth transition from the education program to the first years of teaching. Glanz (2007, as cited in Charleston-Cormier, 2006) emphasized the purpose is to provide instruction in classroom and teacher effectiveness, to reduce the intensity of transition into teaching, and to increase the retention of a great number of qualified teachers.

Unfortunately, in the teaching profession, institutions or schools, there is no difference between being a senior or novice teacher with little or no experience. Despite the fact that novices lack in many aspects, they must meet all the



requirements as soon as entering the field like their colleagues (Wong, 2002; Romero, 2021; Farrell, 2016). They are expected to develop effective lesson plans, cope with standards, collaborate with colleagues, manage time wisely, they commonly receive the most challenging classes, timetables among others and are expected to perform them with expertise as senior teachers (Singer and Murphy, 2003). So, from the very first day on the job novices experience whether in a swim or sink type situation (Sandoval Flores, 2009; Farrell, 2016, termed by Varah, Theune, & Parker, 1986). Novice teachers inevitable face challenges in everyday lessons and they come in a variety of forms that can be categorized as:

**Social:** student's behavior in the classroom, relations with parents and colleagues, dealing with problems of individual students, social recognition.

**Contextual:** adaptation to school culture and environment, teaching with unfamiliar materials or following school methodology.

**Administrative:** pressures on new teachers; workload; fear of inspection or observation; lack of space, classroom, office, or cubby for their material; materials and supplies may be limited or non/existent; low pay, short term contract; lack of job security; access to internet or computer labs.

**Pedagogical and curricular:** teaching, evaluation, grading, time management, inexperience, conflicts between pre-service training and in-service applications; content knowledge, classroom discipline, assessing students' work, organization of class work, lesson planning, having diverse level classes.

**Collegial:** relationships with stakeholders; opinion is not considered within the school personnel, colleges, or academy; little support from colleges, headteacher or school members, dealing with individual differences.

**Affective, self, emotional:** fatigue, effort to be able to finish more tasks, isolation, stress, do not know how to motivate students, lack of professional recognition.

**Physical:** small classroom, crowded classroom, even in some cases schools do not have the services of electricity and/or internet.

Not being able to cope with any of these can lead to teacher burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and feeling of low personal accomplishment) (Bingham Rees, 2015), attrition (Sasser, 2018; Farrell, 2012) or teachers often suffer from lack of social and professional recognition and their teaching performance is affected (Cornejo, 2009 as cited in Romero,2020).

Research has shown that many EFL teachers working in the public sector do not feel comfortable with the environment in the school setting. In the Mexican context, novice teachers, besides previous challenges, work in a non-union temporary contract that does not guarantee them permanence or employment stability, they do not have the same benefits as regular teachers (health insurance, bonus, paid vacations, housing). Moreover, teachers are not paid in a timeline manner, despite signing a contract, often do not have other option rather than to wait more than six months to receive their paid-check (Basuto Santos, 2010; Ramírez-Romero, 2012; Lengeling & Mora Pablo, 2016; Lengeling, Mora Pablo, & Barrios Gasca, 2017; Rebolledo & Bullock, 2019). For instance, it is not certain if the EFL coverage in public institutions goes from state capitals to rural communities

(Ramirez-Romero & Sayer, 2016). Rural areas have been covered less therefore they might lack access to internet, computer labs, and although all students are entitled to textbooks, not all receive them, or the webpage is unavailable to access them.

An important fact that seems to be disregarded or taken for granted is the support that novice teachers need and their development as professionals. It has been noted that teachers not only need to be supported with academic matters like continuing training or updated courses, but they also need to understand the theories behind the methodologies they are asked to implement in their classroom (Basurto Santos, 2010), or perhaps the opposite, the lack of them (Dzul Escamilla, Funderburk Razo, & Hidalgo Avilés, 2010). Breaux (2003) agrees that support can come from individuals such as the principal, department chair, team leader, group of teachers, programs, staff, and collegial activities (as cited in Charleston-Cormier, 2006).

### **2.3.1 Novice teachers' perceptions and beliefs**

Another characteristic in this investigation of novice teachers is their perceptions and beliefs. Although defining beliefs is still elusive, the term has been labelled in many ways. They have been discussed in terms of opinions, attitudes, perceptions, personal reasons, perspectives, conceptions, principles of practice and orientations (Pajares, 1992 as cited in Fajardo Castañeda, 2014). Beliefs are too central to a personal worldview to be able to identify them at first sight. Pajares (1992) recalls the confusion around beliefs from other forms of knowledge. A common belief is in

God or ghosts, for example, teachers might tag students as lazy, immature or intelligent. Teachers' beliefs might be that their students will learn better if they treat them as friends. Beliefs come from previous events that have an effect on subsequent events, that is the case of the teachers' experiences that happened when they were learners in their education or later when they became teachers. This experience creates a belief structure that later will be reflected in their teaching practices and instruction in their classroom (cited in Heather, 2013).

The teachers' perceptions and beliefs will vary depending on the different sectors of education they will work on, those beliefs are about who are the learners (children or young people); beliefs about teaching (methodologies, evaluations, lesson planning) (Sali & Kecik, 2018); beliefs about collaboration with in-service teachers; perhaps having a good salary, timetable; the belief about the role of being a teacher.

Some realities that teachers find uncertain are reported working long or a few hours, and both include work taken home that must be done out of school-working hours. Some teachers might add the lack of time. When working as a teacher, time is one of the most important factors. After teachers finish the lesson, the next thing is planning, material design, checking learners' homework, helping some learners with personal needs and issues, and the list goes on (Sali & Kecik, 2018). One evidence of a teacher in his/her practice is as follow:

The classroom is not what I expected! (Teacher entry in Lucero & Roncancio-Castellanos, 2019).

### **2.3.2 Novice teachers' practices**

To maximize pre-service teacher potential readiness, effective cooperation and collaboration need to be established between schools and teacher education programs, to support them in the practicum as part of their formation. Learning to teach is a complex process that involves mainly social interaction within a school context (Farrell, 2003). Thus, this job has both rewards and challenges, but it is especially demanding for a novice EFL teacher that everything is new and must deal with different situations at the same time. Possibly, the practicum or training did not address the intensity of daily challenges and often leaves novice teachers feeling inadequate and frustrated. Pedagogical practicum involves mentor teachers, pre-service teachers, and the context. These practices help to acquire a sense of autonomy and commitment that novice teachers get as means of professionalism and being a member of a community as they interact with in-service teachers and gain experience in everyday unplanned situations.

This is the period of accompanying practices, and guidance about what to teach and how to teach from observation and analysis that might inform what aspects to concentrate on when arriving in the actual profession. It seems that teacher educators have remarkable effects on pre-service teachers that later will become novice teachers. Richards (2002) claims that the teaching practicum enables and enriches student teachers' knowledge, skills, and experiences, and more importantly, represents an opportunity to continue academic and professional growth.

Training, academic, and professional growth come through a series of workshops, networks, demonstration classrooms, visitations sessions where teachers are taught and shown effective classroom strategies. Moreover, carrying out research while being in the teacher education program, doing classroom research in their actual job, courses, seminars, advisory sessions, and projects (Vergara Luján, Hernández Gaviria, & Cárdenas Ramos, 2009) is another way to achieve academic growth. These activities could help to know, understand, evaluate, and improve foreign language learning and teaching.

Novice teachers need help in dealing with challenges, already mentioned, these efforts drain even the most energetic new teachers (Feiman-Nemser, 2003). Novice teachers develop strategies that help them survive in the classroom and the same strategies may be the ones that impede effective teaching. Novice teachers are dealing with two different things, as Farrell (2012) refers to two complex jobs during these years: “teaching effectively and learning to teach” (p. 438). By looking at such challenges from the perspective of experience or by drawing from a larger repertoire of instructional strategies and materials, induction programs can help beginner teachers identify a larger range of possible solutions. It is recommendable that to prepare teachers, teacher educators should find ways to connect theory with practice (Bingham Rees, 2015) as it is observed in other studies (Cadavid Múnera, Díaz Mosquera, & Quinchía Ortiz, 2011; Sinem GENECa, 2016; Morales Cortés, 2016; Lucero and Roncancio-Castellanos, 2018) that recall a mismatch between what happens in the real context, real language classroom and what is taught about how to teach a foreign language.

### **2.3.3 The role of mentoring and supervision in the Mexican novice teachers**

One possible way to reduce the problems when entering the teaching profession could be the practicum components of teacher education program, also to increase the teaching practicum hours; work with different learners ages and levels, public and private institutions, capital cities and rural contexts. Additionally, having a mentor to guide the practice in the last semester to soften the transition to profession. When becoming a teacher, there is always this thought of what if...What to do if this or that happens, who is the person who offers support, guidance, or advice? This person is often named mentor. Although the concept of mentor has a range of definitions, Welty and Puck (2001, as cited in Ponce Ceballos et al, 2018) define a mentor as “a person who has knowledge or expertise in a specific area”. Richards and Farrell (2005, as cited in Lengeling, Crawford, & Mora-Pablo, 2019) describe mentoring as the “process whereby an experienced teacher works with a novice teacher, giving guidance and feedback”. Hobson, Ashby, Malderez, & Tomlinson (2009) define mentoring as the one-to-one support of a novice or less experienced practitioner (mentee) by a more experienced practitioner (mentor), designed primarily to assist the development of the mentee’s expertise and to facilitate their induction into the culture of the profession (in this case, teaching) and into the specific local context (here, the school or college).

Mentoring has been defined as a “nurturing process in which a skilled or more experienced person teaches, sponsors, encourages, and counsels a less skilled or less experienced person to promote the latest professional and/or personal development” (Anderson and Shannon, 1988, p. 40, as cited in Iancu-Haddad and

Oplatka, 2009). Although, this term is also a concept among the institutions that are interested in retaining their students and supporting them in their studies (Jane, 2007; Ponce Ceballos et al. 2018).

Research has suggested that novice teachers, particularly during their first year of teaching, benefit from a mentor (Feiman-Nemser, Schwille, Carver, & Yusko, 1999; Iancu-Haddad, & Oplatka, 2009; Gilles, Trigos Carrillo, Wang, Stegall, & Bumgarner, 2013; Encinas Prudencio & Sánchez Hernández, 2015), it helps to novice teachers' teaching orientation, academic matters, professional and personal development. Fortunately, the research on mentoring in the ELT teaching context in Latin America is increasing (Reséndiz Melgar, 2019).

Most frameworks recognize that an ongoing program cannot succeed without adequate personnel and financial resources. They recommend collaboration among government, higher education institution and state education departments (Feiman-Nemser, Schwille, Carver, & Yusko, 1999). While the program goes on, all will be benefited from it, not only novice teachers, but also senior teachers and mainly the learners. With the trials in ELT, the recent years of mentoring programs could be a bridge from theory learned in the teaching program to in actual practice for novice teachers (Feiman-Nemser, et al,1999; Encinas Prudencio & Sánchez Hernández, 2015; Ponce Ceballos et al, 2018).

The terms used in the practicum course in the Mexican context are presented in table 1 below:

Titles	Setting
Supervisor	In universities: those working with student-teachers in their licenciatura programs.



Mentor	In schools: teachers working with student-learners, practitioners from the universities.
Department coordinator	In basic and middle education there are monthly meetings.
Peer observation	When a more experienced teacher observes the class of a novice teacher and feedback is provided.

Table 1: Taken from, Encinas Prudencio & Sánchez Hernández, 2015. Constructing an Interdisciplinary Mentoring Framework for ELT. Teacher Education and Teacher Development.

From above, it is notorious the intent to approach mentoring and supervision separately, some details that make them different from one another. In this case, supervision and mentoring play a very important role in the last semester of the student-teachers when having their practicum, therefore the impact they have on the experience and their professional development. In the Mexican context, supervision is the most frequent term used rather than mentoring. Some of the responsibilities that supervisors carry out are orienting the student-teacher in the preparation of the class that will be observed; offer guidance in and revision of the lesson planning and providing feedback; organizing visits to observe and guide the student-teacher work.

One important element to consider in pre-service teachers' education is the fact of facing different environments with its implications; this act brings novice teachers' progress. When they are exposed to these implications, they may see the profession as difficult. This is the case when becoming teachers lack reflection. Pre-service teachers with their supervisor's guidance must evaluate their work in real teaching spaces in order to reflect on and understand what teaching implies. This is the reason why it is important to pay attention to the opportunities of practicum that

are provided to becoming teachers in their education program (Morales Cortés, 2016).

Supervising student-teacher often involves administrative paperwork or evidence of the supervisor and student-teacher work. Wallace (1991 as cited in Vivar Coyotl, 2020) defines a supervisor as “any person who has the duty of mentoring and improving the quality of teaching done by other colleagues in a given educational situation” (p.107). In mentoring the activities are soft and not merely inside the school, it can be any place where the mentor and mentee feel more comfortable working. Besides academic matters related friendship is created. Sometimes there is the option to choose or find someone for guidance; in this sense, the experience is more positive rather than strict. In some cases, mentoring other teachers in the schools, are those in-service teachers who offer help, support and guide novice with comments and feedback and has no relation with administrative issues or filing papers, the feedback is seen as friendly. Sinem GENECA (2016) mentions that if an in-service teacher is successful and has enough teaching experiences s/he can make an effective mentor for pre-service teachers.

## **2.4 Teacher identity and agency**

The description of the difficulties novice teachers encounter were mentioned previously. Nevertheless, something that novice teachers experience during this reality shock has also to do with the school and/ or work environment. In this sense, novice teachers want to be accepted, feel integrated perhaps know the simple rules in the context around them (Gavish & Friedman, 2010; Romero, 2021). Something

that is very commonly mentioned not only by novice teachers, but also in-service teachers is to know the relationship among the teachers. Moreover, how is the organization of the school activities and the teachers in charge of them. The teacher educational program prepares novices what and how to teach, but something that the curriculum does not include is what “being a teacher” really means (Feiman-Nemser, Schwille, Carver, & Yusko, 1999). This process of socialization comes together with the job activity in the setting as well as the community where novice teachers are part of, and how this influences and shapes identity.

Norton (2000) associates identity with the need for group membership. “Identity references desire, the desire of recognition, the desire of affiliation and the desire for security and safety” (p.8). (p.8). This is the most basic representation that every human seeks. Perhaps Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop (2004) state that none was born with an identity, but something that develops during one’s whole life.

Identity refers to the way a person understands and views himself, and is often viewed by others, at least in certain situations a perception of “self” that can be fairly consistently achieved (Horn, Nolen, Ward, & Campbell, 2008). The perceptions vary depending on the context (Beijaard et al. 2004), perhaps the role of a person varies in the place it is encountered, teacher in school, mother-father at home, friend in the party and so on. Role identity is a psychological term, which means one tends to be the same with other individuals or groups to imitate and internalize the behavior, manner, attitudinal notion and value criteria (Dong, 2008). The important part of the self concept is what Beijaard et al. (2004) state “who the individual thinks he or she is and who is announced to the world in word and action. It arises in interaction, it is reaffirmed in interaction, and it is changed in interaction. It is important to what we

do” (p. 89). The self is the hardest part of all because it is deeply personal but very important in the construction of social platforms in schools (Fry, 2017).

Burns and Richards (2009) define teacher identity as “how” individuals see themselves and how they enact their roles within different settings”. According to Farrell (2011), teacher role identity includes teacher beliefs, values, and emotions about many aspects of teaching and being a teacher (p.54). To have a solid definition of identity would be a lie, this term is too open, something that the following quote by Johnston, Pawan and Mahan-Taylor (2002, cited in Lengeling M. M., 2018) describes:

First, identity is complex and contradictory, comprising multiple, often conflicting allegiances and belongings. Second, identity is crucially dependent on social, cultural, and political context. Third, identity is to a significant extent established, negotiated, and developed through discourse. These qualities just mentioned meant that identity is not permanent or fixed but is rather in constant change over time (p. 58-59).

In other words, identity is something not stable or fixed and implies both person and context. Knowles (1992 as cited in Beijaard et al. 2004) characterized identity as an unclear concept in the sense of what, and to what extent, things are integrated in such an identity. In a study carried out in Iran about the teacher role identity, Reza Atai, Babaii, and Lotfi Gaskaree (2018) found eight emerging professional role identities for English Language Teachers : Teachers as creators and users of learning opportunities; teachers as selectors and users of teaching/learning materials; teachers as assessors and evaluators; teachers as researchers; teachers as realizers of and facilitators of the development of learners’ (full) potentials; teachers as observers of ethicality; teachers as learners; and, teachers as teacher educators.

Identity is linked to self and social realizations that in some cases require approval from the ones being around. Novice teachers are the ones who more often experience different facets to establish an identity on a career that in most cases is influenced by school culture, school environment, power relations, relationships among stakeholders, the support or guidance from in-service teachers, mentors, and the context as well. Unfortunately, this phase is more commonly experienced at the beginning of any profession, teachers that must learn the basic rules to survive in daily schooling life. Luckily if they won't encounter in-service teachers that give nothing but perhaps, give trouble and view them as competitors. It is necessary to explore a number of activities and conditions that are considered as essentials for fulfilling a role in identity and how they are negotiated into this community.

Agency is an important element of professional identity, meaning that teachers have to be active in the process of professional development. Some recent studies mention "teachers as agents of change" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Jing & Benson, 2012; Biesta, Priestley, & Robinson, 2015). One can view a teacher's professional development as a learning process, which covers becoming a member of an expertise culture. A culture where the principal and teachers are learning partners in promoting school improvement and student achievement (Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014 in Sasser, 2018). Agency is a much-debated concept with diverse theoretical framings informing it, that has become a source of confusion in social thought. To illustrate how agency is defined, some definitions and interpretations of the concept are presented below taken from Jing & Benson (2012):

- Agency is interactive and cannot reside only in the individual because it is a socially constructed experience (Lipponen & Kumpulainen, 2011).

- Agency is the sociocultural mediated capacity to act (Ahearn, 2001).
- Agency as the self-conscious reflexive actions of human beings (Sealey and Carter, 2004).
- Agency has to do with the ability to exert control over and give direction to the course of one's life. This can be linked to these situations in which people take control of their life as a result of a perceived calling or sense of duty. Agency is concerned with the individual's influence over his/her particular situation (Rowland, 2011)

In sociology the term is a synonym for action (Biesta and Tedder,2006).

Calhoun (2002) defines it as the capacity for autonomous social action, and more specifically as the ability of actors to operate independently of determining constraints of social structure (ibid).

For this discussion about agency, Emirbayer and Mische paper “what is agency?” to which they refer as “relational pragmatics”, will be used in order to reach a definition of the term. In their approach to agency, they define it as a temporarily embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past (in its habitual aspect), but oriented toward the future (as a capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and toward the present (as the capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment). Priestley, Biesta and Robinson (2013 & 2015) also use this dynamic interplay variation with present, past, and future and they refer to these three dimensions as the interactional, the projective and the practical-evaluative. In every action the three of them play a role, but its degree of contribution might vary in the context of action. Thus, Emirbayer and Mische (1998) define agency as:

The temporary constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments the temporal-relational context of action which, through the interplay of habit, imagination, and judgement, both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations (p. 970).

Thus, agency is understood as a temporary process of social engagement, taken from past experiences, oriented to the future, and acting in the present, having in mind past habits and future projects. This implies that agency will be achieved from the results that exist in the interplay from particular and unique situations. Agency, in other words, is not something that people have; it is something that people do, or more precisely, something they achieve (Biesta & Tedder, 2006). In such terms help us understand how humans are creative and able to act when they encounter societal limits. Based on Emirbayer and Mische research, Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson (2013) created a model with the interplay of iterational, practical evaluative and projective dimension that shows how this contribution explains the achievement of agency. (see figure 2 below).

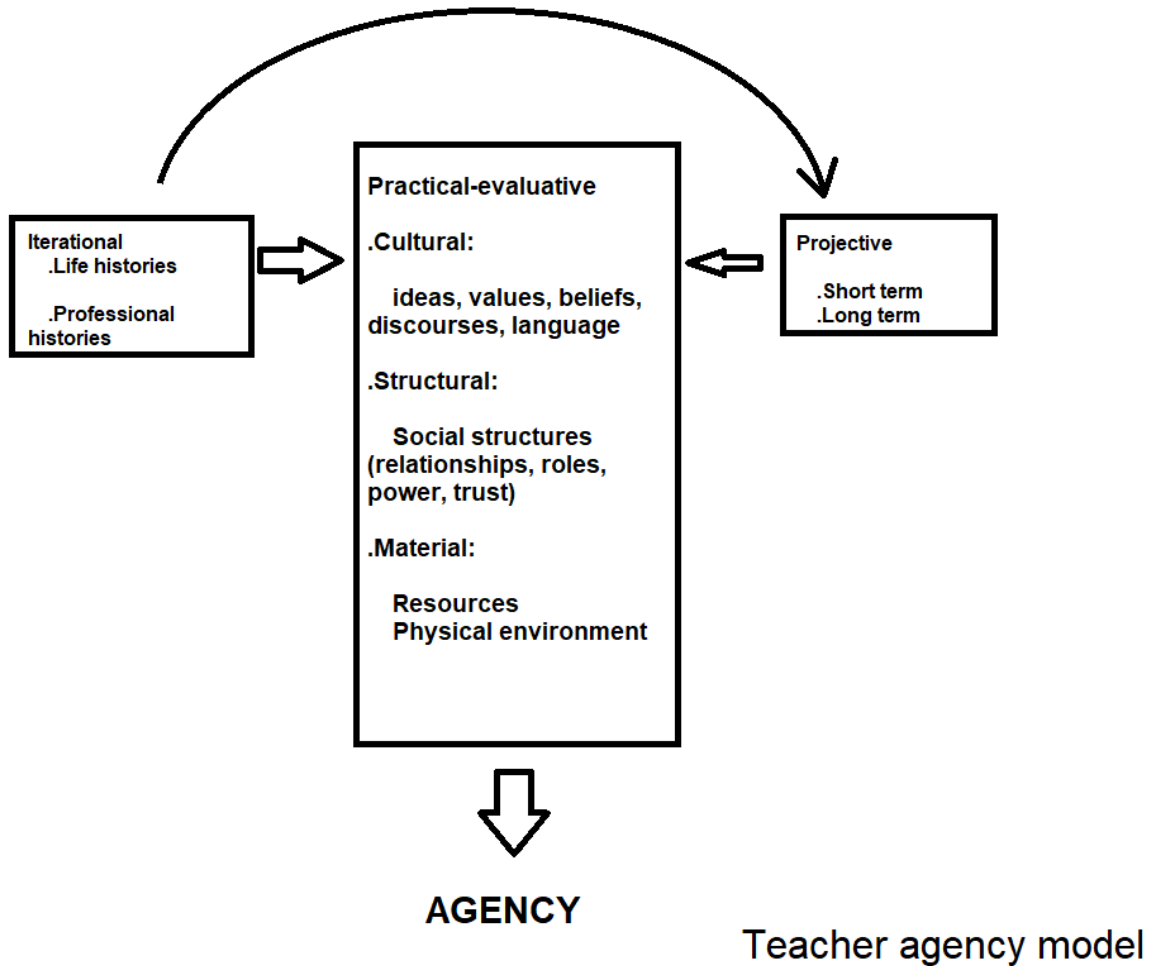


Figure 2: Taken from Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson, 2013. Teachers as "agents of change": teacher agency and emerging models of curriculum.

The model highlights the combination that exists between personal and professional experiences and those that lead to a future that in some situations are short or long term objectives. To make a possible fit, they are always accompanied with cultural, structural and material resources available to the actors, in this case teachers. The model once again backs up what has been mentioned before, the life course of every individual, the present, past and future for the achievement of agency. Regarding teachers, who would point to a number of interactions which contribute to teacher agency, some of them include personal capacities like skills



and knowledge; personal and professional beliefs; and values. These contributions have a common feature, that is past experiences. Besides, for the teachers of tomorrow, it is important to attend actions now, in present contexts, that will serve as past experiences. This is where teacher education plays its role, in preparing teachers with the resources, skills, competences they will need in their context, with this they can become resources for judgement and action (Biesta, Priestley, & Robinson, 2015). Unfortunately, the preparation that teacher education program offers is a small part of the experiences that teachers need, therefore teachers will enrich their experience when they begin their teaching profession, this day to day dialogues with the school personnel and students, this exposure to school culture and professional engagement will be the other part to be meaningful in teachers life and profession.

Restrictive context, less teachers' exposure to it, less innovative schools, are some examples that will not encourage the achievement of teacher agency. The less challenges teachers encounter, the less likely to experience and be able to overcome problematic situations. This shows that if past experiences help in the achievement of agency, then today's context will impact the future agency of teachers.

## Chapter III: Methodology

3.0 Introduction

3.1 Research methodology

3.2 Location of the research

3.3 Participants

3.4 Data collection and analysis procedures

3.5 Conclusion

## **Chapter III: Methodology**

### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter three discusses the methodology used to gather and analyze the data for the present investigation. Furthermore, the context of the study is described all together with the participants to have a picture of their characteristics. Then, the instruments for data collection as well as the analysis procedures are mentioned. Finally, in the last section a conclusion of this chapter will be provided.

### **3.1 Research methodology**

The methodology adopted for this investigation was framed by the qualitative paradigm. Quinn Patton and Cochran (2002) mention that the characteristic of a qualitative method is its aims, which relate to understanding some aspects of social life, and its methods which generate words, rather than numbers, as data for analysis. That is, qualitative methods generally aim to understand the experiences, the attitudes, the perspectives, to explore the meaning of individuals or groups ascribed to a social or human problem. In this study the participants' characteristics were being a novice teacher, having little experience working in public secondary school, and being alumni of the same university language teacher education program. This means the participants were selected because they are likely to generate useful data for the investigation.

The use of this method is because it aims to answer questions about the 'what', 'how' or 'why' of a phenomenon rather than 'how many' or 'how much', which

are answered by quantitative methods. Creswell (2007) recommends in qualitative research the use of open-ended questions. The more open ended the questions, the better as the researcher listens carefully to what people say or do in their life setting. For this reason, this investigation was qualitative research as a multiple case study (Žukauskas, Veinhardt and Andriukaitiene, 2018, Creswell, 2007; Richards, 2003) in order to draw conclusions about novice teachers and their early experiences in the ELT profession.

It was decided that the best method for this investigation was case study which is found in a number of different social science disciplines as well as the practicing professions including psychology, sociology, political science, anthropology, social work, business, education, nursing, community (Yin, 2018), law, medicine, sociology, and, indeed, linguistics (Dean Brown & Rodgers, 2003). It is a design of inquiry found specifically in the evaluation field, in which the researcher develops an in-depth analysis of a case, often a program, event, activity, process, of an individual, a group (Creswell, 2007), a situation (van Lier, 2005) or institutions (Richards K., 2003), within its natural context of situation, and tries to probe into its characteristics, dynamics and purposes over a sustained period of time. This choice is based on the research questions which seek to explain some contemporary circumstances of a social phenomenon.

Case study is bounded by time and activity, boundedness examples are a classroom, a foreign language department, a program, a school, or an administrative office. All these examples are bounded in some way, the relationship among them, from individual to group to institution. The reason for this investigation is to understand how a specific unit (person or group) functions in the real world over a

significant time. The findings of case studies are not generalizable, it is not possible to generalize from a small group of participants to an entire population. Then, it is possible to particularize, something that van Lier (2005) points out “insights from a case study can inform, be adapted to, and provide comparative information to a wide variety of other cases” (p. 198). If there is a contradiction between some cases in certain issues, this contrast can provide more thought and further research.

Researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection techniques involving observations, interviews, recording, audio-visual materials, documents and reports. Thus, the present investigation adopts this method because it seems appropriate for a researcher that wants to understand the experiences, and the perspectives of a group of participants.

Nevertheless, some limitations when using the qualitative paradigm is the association with the range of different methods, perspectives, and approaches; it does not set a unified set of techniques or philosophies, on the contrary, it has grown a wide range of intellectual and disciplinary traditions. Furthermore, it limits the researcher to set out to test specific hypotheses (Mackey & M. Gass, 2016). Likewise, some limitations when using case study is not having exclusivity there might be overlaps with other methods; there is a limitation of items when designing a questionnaire; the number of participants does not warranty the quality of the data to be analyzed, case study is not generalizable (van Lier, 2005); it can be considered as a data collection tactic (Yin, 2018) and it has multiple source of evidence that might confuse a novice researcher.

### **3.2 Location of the research**

The collection of the data was from alumni of a public university located in central Mexico. This is an autonomous state university of higher education which offers a great number of majors in both science and humanities. The university provides high quality education and aims to provide it to all citizens by making it available to everyone. This is the case, the student population is diverse having learners with diverse sociocultural backgrounds including economic status, rural or urban, educational, indigenous heritages, and disabilities.

Within the university departments there is the language faculty which offers a Bachelor's program in teaching English as a foreign language. This faculty has developed a 4-year college education program which enables teachers to receive teaching experience and gain relevant knowledge before they go on to their actual teaching profession. In this context, alumni will share their experiences while being students and become professionals.

### **3.3 Participants**

For this research, the participants were identified as novice teachers. The participants were nine alumni graduated in 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2020 from a Public university in central Mexico, whose ages were from 23 to 32 and had a B1-C1 level of English, novices that had the chance to work in secondary level in public institutions, whose teaching experience was no longer than four years (Hamurabi Sözen, 2018). Four participants reported having four years of experience, three of

them two years, one participant reported 18 months, and the last one reported having one semester of experience. Seven teachers have the permanent tenure in secondary school, another teacher works in a private institution and shared her experience when she had the practicum in a tele-secondary school, the last teacher is hired temporarily in a tele-secondary school. The context where the teachers work does not vary at all, three of them work in semi-urban context, and six of them work in rural context. So far, the search for novices was limited. The next table presents a description of the participants.

<b>Background information</b>								
<b>Participant's ID</b>								
Oscar	Andrea	Manrique	Daniela	Ethel	Angela	Erika	Ariel	Coni
<b>Age</b>								
27	23	31	24	32	29	31	29	21
<b>Gender</b>								
Male	Female	Male	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female
<b>Marital status</b>								
In a relationship	In a relationship	Single	In a relationship	In a relationship	In a relationship	In a relationship	Married	In a relationship
<b>Children</b>								
No	No	No	No	No	Yes, 2	Yes, 1	No	No
<b>Place of birth</b>								
Tlaxcala	Puebla	Puebla	Tepexi de Rodríguez	Puebla	Puebla	Puebla	Mexico	Puebla
<b>Work location</b>								
San Lorenzo Chiautzi	Puebla capital	San Lucas el	Los Reyes de	Tetela de Ocamp	San Martin Texmelu	Zacapoaxtla, Puebla	San Pedro Zacachim alpa, Puebla	Los Reyes de Juárez

ngo, Puebla		Grand e	Juárez, Puebla	o, Puebla	can, Puebla			
<b>Educational background</b>								
<b>Is Spanish your first language?</b>								
Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	yes	Yes	Yes
<b>What other languages do you speak?</b>								
English and French	English, French and other	Englis h and other	English and other	English	English and French	English and French	English	English
<b>Do you hold an International Language certificate?</b>								
Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
<b>What certification do you have?</b>								
TOEFL and DELTA	CENNI	TOEFL ITP	CILS	FCE Cambri dge	FCE, IELTS, CENNI	CENNI	CENNI	CENNI
<b>What is your English Proficiency level (CEFR)?</b>								
C1	B2	C1	B2	B2	B2	C1	B1	B2
<b>Graduation year</b>								
2018	2020	2017	2019	2017	2018	2017	2014	2017

Table 2: Participants background information

### 3.4 Data collection and analysis procedures

The instruments for the data collection were one online questionnaire (above table) and a focus group interview (see appendix 1). The questionnaire aimed to obtain the background information of the participants, in other words, to know about their personal and professional life. This data served as an informant of what kind of information was recommended to ask and avoid humiliation, pain, or increased



anxiety to participants. It might not only be created during the instrument application but may also emerge after it (Quinn Patton & Cochran, 2002).

In the focus group, the participants answered a combination of close and open-ended questions regarding their teaching experience, Brinkmann and Kvale (2018) claims that this instrument provides the researcher with descriptions and narratives to be interpreted according to the research interest. Focus group is one of the qualitative instruments to be utilized by a researcher who wants to know how people consider an experience, idea, or event (Steward & Shamdasani, 1990 in Ritchie and Lewis, 2003; Freitas, Olivera, Jenkins, & Popjoy, 1998).

The participants had the option to have the interview in their first language (L1) Spanish therefore they used the foreign language (L2) being English. This new knowledge supported the understanding of how novice teachers developed as professionals, about their language teaching awareness and/or felt identified as a real teacher regarding the everyday classroom lived experiences.

The main data to be analyzed was from the focus group. The first model used was sociocultural, where the data was identified and classified at different levels (self, classroom, school, work, society), in other words, to identify how the personal and professional development of participants evolved in a certain time and context (see appendix 2). Therefore, the second model used in the analysis was the assumptions of the language teaching awareness in which there was a second round in identifying the data according to the description in the assumptions. Identify the lines where participants' answers led to awareness in their teaching (see appendix 3).

### **3.5 Conclusion**

This section has provided a description of the methodological framework that served as a guide to gather the data for the current investigation. It has presented the techniques, the context, and the description of the participants. Having provided the methodological procedures, the following chapter will present the analysis of data obtained.

## Chapter IV: Analysis

### 4.0 Introduction

### 4.1 The sociocultural levels for professional development of novice teachers

#### 4.1.1 The self

#### 4.1.2 The classroom

#### 4.1.3 The school

#### 4.1.4 Work location

#### 4.1.5 Society

### 4.2 Language teaching awareness following Gebhard & Oprandy (1999)

#### assumptions

#### 4.2.1 Teacher taking responsibility of his/her own teaching

#### 4.2.2 The need for others

#### 4.2.3 Attention to process

#### 4.2.4 Avenues to language through exploration

##### 4.2.4.1 Problem solving

##### 4.2.4.2 Seeing what happens by: trying the opposite

##### 4.2.4.3 Adapting random teaching behavior

##### 4.2.4.4 Seeing what is by: contrasting what he/she actually does with what he/she thinks is doing

##### 4.2.4.5 Considering what he/she believe as teachers in relation of what he/she does

##### 4.2.4.6 clarifying feelings

#### 4.2.5 A nonjudgmental stance

#### 4.2.6 Personal connections to teaching

4.2.7 A beginner's mind

4.2.8 Attention to language and behavior

4.2.9 Description over prescription

4.3 Conclusion

## **Chapter IV: Result analysis**

### **4.0 Introduction**

This chapter provides the results and the analysis of the experiences and challenges reported by novice teachers, as well as their experiences they went through at the beginning of their profession in public secondary schools. The analysis was guided by two views, the sociocultural perspective (Johnson & Golombek, 2016) and the language teaching awareness proposed by Gebhard and Oprandy (1999).

The first section presents the levels of the self, the classroom, the school, work location and society that are part of the sociocultural perspective. The second section presents the next assumptions; teacher taking responsibility for his/her own teaching, the need for others, description over prescription, a nonjudgmental stance, attention to language and behavior, avenues to language through exploration, personal connection to teaching, attention to process, and a beginner's mind. These views present a small picture of what goes on in the profession in public classrooms in the Mexican context.

### **4.1 The sociocultural levels for professional development of novice teachers**

The following table contains the sociocultural levels that are part of teacher professional development. It shows what participants experienced from the time they got in the teaching profession. That is to say, the relationship between their professional development and how the context influenced it (see Appendix 1). The participants who have been working for more than two years (Manrique, Ethel and

Erika) shared more detailed experiences, therefore the experiences were limited in the case of the ones (Daniela, Ariel, and Coni) who had less than six months in the field.

Levels/ Participants	Oscar	Andrea	Manrique	Daniela	Ethel	Angela	Erika	Ariel	Coni
<b>The self</b>									
<b>The classroom</b>									
<b>The school</b>									
<b>Work location</b>									
<b>Society</b>									

Table 3: Sociocultural levels that are part of professional development

Evidence found	
No evidence found	

#### 4.1.1 The self

The self, the first level of professional development, evidence is when the participants had their first job and got involved with all related to teaching. Participants stated having a maximum two years and a minimum of a semester of prior experience before they got into SEP.

Participants	Experience
Oscar	Primary, secondary school; taught academic and medical English.
Andrea	Practicums from the ELT
Manrique	Freelance teacher of mathematics and later added English and other subjects. Secondary and practicum in the language faculty.
Daniela	Kindergarten to high school learners.

Ethel	Worked and studied at the same time.
Angela	Worked and studied at the same time.
Erika	Doing research was her thing, she was not into teaching, first job was in a primary school and liked it.
Ariel	After the ELT program moved to The United States to improve her English proficiency. Worked one semester in a secondary school.
Coni	English academies.

Table 4. Participants professional development.

#### 4.1.2 The classroom

In this level participants gave details about the students, the teacher role, first language, the school facilities, and the material. Manrique, Ethel, Ariel and Coni described having some outstanding and good students. They also mentioned the age of the students and found them not motivated not only to learn the foreign language but also to attend school. This demotivation led them to not paying attention to the class, do not follow the rules inside the classroom, misbehave and the use of vocabulary not recommended in the school context. Oscar commented in his respect:

*There are students who are in the school just because their parents send them, they do not want to pay attention, don't even want to try. It is a little difficult to try to make those learners like motivate them, to teach what they need in order to have something more of knowledge.*

The previous response is one scenario when working with secondary students as one of the biggest challenges that participants faced. Certainly, the students' age is a determining factor in teaching in public schools. The learners'

characteristics were similar to what Basurto Santos (2010) describes “Being adolescent implies people difficult to handle and uninterested in learning among other negative connotations” (p.209). Teachers must have a great commitment in the profession to be able to cope with unknown situations at the beginning of the profession when they do not have the experience.

There were single cases such as Angela’s, who stated that she had a role of confidence. That is, the students called her and talked about issues that were making them worried. This social relation or interaction helped in her professional development, the role she was playing as a teacher and confidence. Opposite to Angela, Manrique said that his students preferred to talk about him, asking questions related to his experience when learning the foreign language, rather than to talk about them.

Another case was related to the role that a language plays in a context, Erika said that her students’ first language was Nahuatl and Spanish was the second language, consequently they were not into learning a foreign language. Her learners’ interest was learning Spanish, indeed some classroom situations were related to students asking the meaning of words in Spanish. She cited:

*Most of the students are not really interested in learning English, because they don’t see it as useful, they see useful Spanish and Nahuatl.*

The following category was the facilities, which are described as inadequate in size and limited to the number of teachers. Most of the participants reported moving from classroom to classroom. Manrique, Daniela, Ethel, Angela, and Erika reported having from 45 to 50 students in their attendance. They described how the



school authorities had to adapt the premises and the timetables to cover the needs of teachers and students. Similar to Nora's (2003-2005) and Jolene's (2015) studies in (Basurto Santos & Gregory Weathers, 2016) , English foreign language teachers find themselves with the same situation regarding the number of students they have in each group . Even though participants of this investigation context were in urban, semi-urban and rural context they shared commonness in their experiences. Angela expressed:

*The space, the classrooms are too small, and I have in a classroom more than 50 students... when I want to do certain activities it is impossible or it is difficult and we have to adapt the activity, that is one problem.*

Andrea, Manrique, Daniela, Ethel, Angela, Erika and Ariel talked about the disadvantages and challenges when trying to work with the book, the implementation of the different strategies they used, the material's redesign and activities to complete successfully what was stated in the curriculum. Participants found the English book's level higher compared to the actual students' level. It was told that the students' contexts did not match with the content prescribed in the book, having this as another disadvantage when using it. Previous experiences have some similarity to what Ramirez-Romero and Sayer's (2016) found in their investigation, the inadequacy of the book that students and teachers encountered while working in the public educational system. In this investigation, participants reported the application of different methods and strategies to connect the students' context with the book content thus to make the best of the learning process. Something that Erika stated:

*The book is kind of complicated and the English level is very high; mostly they don't understand it. The book brings a lot of aspects that you might do in a city and a more organized context, and we are focused on small*

*towns of indigenous families that they don't really get to live the life as many other people in other places.*

The lines described in this level raises questions associated with the reasons behind the similarities among studies being carried out. That is, the number of students does not fit the size of the classroom (Millan Librado & Basurto Santos, 2020). For instance, school authorities might not take the risk to reduce the number of students, that could create a shortage of English teachers in the school. This is something that the ministry of education and government should consider in the statistics.

#### **4.1.3 The school**

The school protocols, social activities and the personnel, were the salient features that participants stated in the school level. Teaching other subjects like physics, chemistry, mathematics, Spanish, physical education, arts, and other activities was part of some school protocol that participants of this investigation were required to follow for some time or months. Angela expressed:

*So, three months more less I don't remember I didn't teach English I had to teach physics, chemistry, math, Spanish. I had to do, well the coffees you know, the copies, all that stuff I had to do for three or four months.*

The students' parents were part of the social activities inside the school, Oscar, Manrique, Angela and Coni agreed that most of their experiences were related to parents discussing mainly academic things related to their children's grades. Thus, participants asked parents to teach the values at home, and explained how values are reflected in the students' behavior. Hence, participants described it as a bad experience because some parents were not committed to the education of

their children, parents were more into the grades being aware that their children did not do the activities. Something that Manrique said:

*You can see plenty of parents coming to you complaining about you not making your job and you not giving their kids good grades without doing anything and I have to talk to those parents well your kid doesn't do anything, he doesn't have his notebook with any kind of information about the subject, he doesn't pay attention inside the class, he is disrespectful, he sometimes even trying to start arguments with me.*

In this sense, it is not very common seeing parents coming to secondary schools and making consultations about their children's development, this is something to be thanked. Therefore, it is recommendable that novice teachers take advantage of situations like this and do collaborative work to help the learners in their learning process.

However, there was an exception, Angela received positive comments from parents about her doing a good job, being the only one who does a follow up and pays attention to the students' progress.

Interestingly, Andrea, Ethel, Ariel, and Coni recalled the collaborative work they had with the other teachers mainly to discuss the academic situations the students had or giving support related to the management of the classes. *Ethel said:*

*Well, it was very sad because it was not only with me, but it was also with all my colleagues, all my colleagues were like what can we do with these students ...What we did is, we had a meeting and we decided that we were going to do like an exam for those students who wanted to pass, so a very few of them did it.*

Manrique was the exception, the school where he was working had a classroom just for English, he mentioned:

*In my school we actually have a classroom specifically for English. It's been adapted. I have a projector, I have a computer, I have a CD player with all the audio-visual materials. We have discussed adding more visual material on the wall and we couldn't do it because the pandemic started".*

Manrique's school had an English academy; thus, they had a classroom, well known as English lab where students had timetables to come (once or twice a week), meet the teacher there and do a variety of activities like listening; online exercises; watch videos; teachers and students doing PowerPoint presentations; examinations and more. Teachers worked in collaboration to make the best of the English lab for the benefit of the students and themselves as well.

#### **4.1.4 Work location**

The students' background and the distance from home is part of the work location level. Participants highlighted the decision they had to make regarding work location, whether to take or leave it, something that is part of personal and professional development. Ariel and Coni were pleased with their work location as it was not far from their home. Nevertheless, Angela's challenge was her timetable because she had to wake up at 4.30 am to get to school and teach the first class at 7.00 am. After that she had free hours between the classes, then waited to finish her shift and go back home and be ready for the next day. A similar situation was Erika's rather than to drive five hour she decided to move to the place where her tenure was and take advantage of the time to prepare and design material for her lessons. Participants taking part in this investigation, especially Angela and Erika showed commitment to the profession, work location is one of the elements teachers consider before signing

a tenure in SEP, not considering this element will result in teachers leaving the job.

Something to what Erika expressed:

In my case moving away from my home because from the place where I live to get to my work is about five hours in a car. So, five hours in my car takes seven hours by bus, So I would say the distance.... I had to consider the tenure or try somewhere else.

Andrea, Manrique and Daniela considered students' background, they were conscious of the situations that students were facing, for example talking about monetary situations enabling students to afford the material or not. Adding to that, the occupation and the ideologies of the learners' family and the influence they had over the student achievement or lack of motivation. Being aware of these situations helped participants to consider their role they were playing as teachers and how they could help students to develop their skills and make a change. As Daniela expressed in the following statement.

*It is our responsibility to make changes, I think, particularly here in my town. It can be the ideology from almost all the students. Their ideologies are not good, they don't have expectations to become professional in their future. They want to become workers, employees, but it is a little bit difficult but also it is a motivation for me to change their minds in order to become better not only in my case but in their cases to teach individual students I know they have skills or abilities that they can develop.*

Nonetheless, Ethel and Erika had different experiences related to the work location, it was Tetela and Zacapoaxtla. In Tetela the students were very positive to learn the foreign language, even there were some occasions that learners thanked the teacher for giving them the opportunity to learn it. Ethel recalled having heard some colleges talking about families migrating to The United States, thus children are raised by their grandparents. This might be a possible reason behind this motivation and the interest to follow the same path, living and working abroad.

All students in Zacapoaxtla's first language was Nahuatl, so Erika suggested that they were more into learning Spanish as a second language and their interest to learn a foreign language was not in their priorities. The reason for this rejection was how the language could help them in their daily activities that most were related to making business as they were traders. She told her experience with a student:

I remember one of the students I used to fight with him like all the time and he used to be like “I don’t want to study”, “my dad is a tortillero and he makes that about money and I bet you he makes more money than you do”.

Ethel and Erika experiences are examples of the different contexts and the factors that trigger learners whether to learn or not a foreign language. This is something that teacher education programs might foster in the practicum, to raise awareness among both becoming teachers and teacher educators. Awareness about working in different backgrounds, something that Norton (2005) recommends going beyond the content and the teaching methods.

#### **4.1.5 Society**

Society is the last level in SC view, thus, the features that were most mentioned were the Mexican ministry of education benefits. As well as the teacher educational program (in which participants attended), especially the opportunities it provided in the practicum course.

Participants mentioned some advantages after being hired in SEP. As it is one of the main teaching job providers in Mexico, participants communicated the benefits it offers when getting a tenure. The benefits listed were permanence in the

job, the health services, social security, vacations, payment, retirement, and opportunities to develop professionally with the courses it offers. Some participants expressed:

*Erika: I got the plaza and I went to SEP... I'm going to be a SEP, everybody wants to be there, right?*

*Coni: I know this job has a lot of benefits.*

Participants taking part in this investigation listed the advantages they had after signing their tenure in SEP (in temporary contracts benefits are not included). Especially the courses it offers to teachers to continue with their professional development and refinement of their skills. Some scholars highlight that tutoring has proven to be an effective educational strategy to follow up and accompany not only student-teachers but also novice teachers, to strengthen their knowledge, clarify topics, ask for suggestions, do collaborative work, foster professional development and continuous learning (Dzul Escamilla, Funderburk Razo, & Hidalgo Avilés, 2010; Reséndiz Melgar, 2019; Velandia, 2020). An evidence of this strategy is in Ariel words:

*They give you a mentor for two years to work with, in these mentoring classes you meet with colleagues and work together. We do readings, we meet every week via skype and we share our experiences, we have evaluations, we share our evaluation instruments, lesson plans, we also share different knowledge about teaching, different strategies, methodologies. I like that though, that SEP gives it at the beginning of our profession.*

In the same manner, Manrique, Ethel and Angela recommended the implementation of collaborative work between the ministry of education and the teachers. They insisted not only SEP being a provider but also working together in different projects or giving different options to work with. Projects that go together

with the schools' context, also SEP might focus attention to and cover the needs of the schools, for example make sure that the material (the books) has arrived to all students (Ramirez-Romero & Sayer, 2016).

Oscar, Andrea, Manrique, Daniela, Angela and Ariel discussed the benefits that teacher education program had offered to them, denoting the theory inside the classroom and mostly in their practicum class. To support this, Oscar and Angela talked about having the opportunity to be exposed to different educational levels (primary and secondary) where they faced misbehaved students, crowded classrooms, and book shortage. They learned from those teaching practices, but what they recalled being the best of all, was the guidance and feedback that teacher educators offered after their lesson plan revision and class observations. These experiences helped them to develop awareness of the possible situations to be encountered in their future lessons and be able to adapt and redesign through the teaching process. In this respect Angela stated:

*My both courses of practicum help me in the way that my teachers they gave me advice, so their advices were like really helpful for me when I was in front of the groups because they told me, "well you know and I observed that you didn't do this", or " I observe that you are repeating it so you have to do that or you have to avoid this" so their advices.*

The participants' experience in their practicum course makes reference to the literature, especially in the second view, Gebhard and Oprandy (1999) assumptions. Participants' experience showed the importance and benefits when working in collaboration, emphasizing the need of others. Teachers working by themselves are not able to see their teaching from a different perspective, interacting with others provides choices.



## **4.2 Language teaching awareness following Gebhard and Oprandy (1999) view**

Most novice teachers' challenges are encountered in the classroom, and its complexity will depend on teachers' knowledge for processing the situations through their language teaching awareness.

Language teaching awareness is when teachers are aware of situations in the class but also situations that go beyond teaching that might have some effect in it. To give an example would be to know the reasons why a student fell asleep in the class. There are multiple reasons behind it, probably the student works the night shift; she was doing homework at the last minute and went late to bed; he might have an illness that makes him feel sleepy; she might take care of her grandparents; or he/she just had a baby. It is recommended to teachers paying attention to small details in the classroom, examining the environment, the context, the expectations that students have (Pineda, 2002), their interests, likes and dislikes, talking to students to avoid attention calls or scolding in front of the class. By doing this they will have a better picture of what to do or how to act when having situations with learners.

In order to explore the participants' language teaching awareness, this investigation followed the nine assumptions recommended by Gebhard and Oprandy (1999) (example in Appendix 4).

The following table illustrates the levels of language teaching awareness that each participant suggested in this study and which are expressed through their experiences encountered in the profession.

Level	Oscar	Andrea	Manrique	Daniela	Ethel	Angela	Erika	Ariel	Coni
1. Teacher taking responsibility of his/her own teaching	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue
2. The need for others	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue
3. Description over prescription	Blue	White	Blue	White	White	White	White	White	White
4. A nonjudgmental stance	White	Blue	Blue	Blue	White	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue
5. Attention to language and behavior	Blue	White	Blue	White	White	Blue	Blue	White	White
6. Avenues to awareness through exploration	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue
Problem solving	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue
Seeing what happens by: a) trying the opposite. b) adapting rando teaching behavior	Blue	Blue	White	White	Blue	White	White	White	White
Seen what is by: a) contrasting what he/she actually does with what he/she thinks is doing. b) considering what he/she believe as teachers in relation of what he/she does.	White	White	Blue	White	White	Blue	Blue	White	White
Clarifying feelings	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue
7. Personal connections to teaching	White	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	White	Blue
8. Attention to process	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue
9. A beginner's mind	Blue	White	White	White	White	White	White	Blue	White

Table 5: Language teacher awareness assumptions

Evidence found



No evidence found



As can be seen, all participants expressed different situations of their teaching awareness that fulfil with the assumptions number 1,2,6 and 8. However, participants' experiences were limited to the rest of the assumptions. As the following examples, two participants shared experiences related to assumption 3; or seven participants judged their class delivery and this goes with assumption 4, and so on. Novice teachers teaching awareness are presented in the next paragraphs.

#### **4.2.1 Teacher taking responsibility of his/her own teaching**

In this level all participants' experiences were related to their teaching responsibility that was mostly about the improvement in their teaching skills regarding techniques, methodologies, strategies, and material design, to help themselves and students in the teaching and learning process. They expressed being able to manage unexpected situations and learn more on their way. Learning to teach is an endless process that requires continuous preparation. Daniela mentioned:

*I was looking for different techniques, strategies, methods in order to attract their attention because it has to do with their learning styles, like kinesthetics, visuals, etc.*

Arie added: we know everybody is different is just like a teacher we need to find the way to teach them or to reach them with different kind of activities, strategies, methodologies I don't know it's every single class is like an investigation in your field, because you need to design your lesson in a creative way to catch the students' attention.

Participants' responsibility and commitment were some of the key elements in the beginning of their profession. They did not let the problems demotivate them, rather they invested time to refine their skills to help themselves to deliver the classes and the students' learning process. Undoubtedly, there were some occasions that

participants were in a swim or sink type situation (Farrell, 2016), which were handled with effort leading to participants' success.

#### **4.2.2 The need for others**

When novice teachers are hired for the first time, they often look up to someone for advice, and recommendation. Thus, this level emphasized the importance of interacting with other people in the context where the participants were working. In fact, participants' first social relations were with the students, some colleges, school authorities, including some students' parents. Also, there were other kinds of social relations, it was related to the teachers they had in the ELT program, teacher educators in the practicum course, and even the family was considered.

These social relations helped participants the most in developing their language teaching awareness, that is to say, the other person was able to offer advice or suggest something that the participants were not able to see by themselves regarding their teaching. In this sense participants recommend working in collaboration to develop professionally. Something that Andrea stated:

*Even my family, they don't speak English.....they also help me because I was oh my Goodness how can I teach this?, Do you remember some of your English classes? And they were, yes my teacher did this in this way...I think somehow the students too, because they are the ones, they are the center of the class, so if you see that your students are learning, are interested in the class that is going to help you to be motivated and that is going to motivate them to get interested In the class so it's a teamwork it's not an easy task ,but I think that if you are really committed with the class and with what you are doing, you are going to do it great."*

Oscar added:

In my case the teacher in the practicum class, she was like you have to adapt here because if they are not getting, you can try to go back a little and then help them to understand the topic.

From these extracts it can be observed that participants wanted to receive any type of feedback not only for the participants and learners benefit but also for the college benefit. Participants instead of taking the comments as a criticism, they considered it as an opportunity for change and development. The result of this is to create an environment that supports cooperative learning by building an atmosphere of openness and trust (Farrell, 2016).

#### **4.2.3 Attention to process**

All participants described that being in front of a group was not easy, fortunately, they were able to manage most of the classroom situations. Participants overcome the difficulties by following a pattern, same described in the attention to process assumption. First, they identified a situation or problem regarding the students, teaching, material, and/or premises. Second, they did a follow up by using different resources (diary, keep a record, made some observations, or took notes), considering the origins, possible causes, and frequency of the problem. Third, participants found a possible solution to solve the situation. Some evidence of this are the next excerpts, Oscar expressed:

I can say that I have tried to talk to parents whose children are a little bit behind what is expected from them talking about learning outcomes, I have tried to contact them, when I have successfully contact them and have tried to talk to them in a way that is understandable for them that there is a problem with their children so they can help me to provide with sufficient materials or their children's attitudes to help me to help their children.

Ethel added:

Talking about discipline it was very challenging for me I think that my principal helped me a lot they used to monitor my students, I did some mindfulness activities, where they breath, I tried to do some exercises inside the classroom just to focus my students' attention on my class and I tried to make the class as dynamic as possible, I made my students participate as much as possible. So, I think in the future I will do it better.

Taking the above into account, participants' difficulties are related to the lack of experience, lack of techniques and lack of strategies for disciplining students. However, participants emphasized that these situations of undeveloped skills are achieved through time and with practice.

#### **4.2.4 Avenues to language through exploration**

In this level of exploration inside the classroom there are six sublevels or avenues of teaching awareness which some were very evident in the responses, and others had exceptions. The levels expressed by participants are presented as follows. The majority reported problem solving, three reported trying opposite teaching behavior, three contrasted what they actually did with what they thought they were doing, and all reported experiencing different feelings.

##### **4.2.4.1 Problem solving**

Many of the participants described situations related to the management of the classroom, students' interest in the English subject, learners' behavior, working with the book, and the school facilities. Situations like these called the participants'

attention to solve them. Participants reported looking for different methodologies, strategies, and material to change the students' perception toward the subject. Interestingly, it was also noticed that some of the participants talked to students' parents and helped each other for the learners' benefit. Others tried to match the book with the students' level by lowering the activities. Something that Ethel said:

Well, talking about the program I just tried to match the program with the level that students had, I don't know if the program says students need to read a poem, I looked for a very very easy poem that my student can read and rewrite probably.

#### **4.2.4.2 Seeing what happens by: trying the opposite**

Very few participants testified trying opposite teaching behaviors to have improvement in their classes and raise the students' interest toward the subject. That is the case of Oscar, Andrea, and Ethel who reported implementing different strategies to what students were not very used to. For example, Oscar chose students who had higher English level and asked them to work with a student who had a lower English level. By doing this the participant was able to see the reaction of the students, to see what activities worked and did not work with certain students and was able to find more options to help students in their learning process. He stated the following:

*When students help the teacher to assess how their classmates are going...we can do a lot of collaborative work; they can help each other...So, we can use them to help us to help the other students to comprehend the topic."*

Similarly, in this level Andrea decided to give the whole class in English, to see if the students were following and understanding her. Surprisingly most of her

students understood what she was saying. This action was worth it for her in the case of the time she has spent preparing her classes and the students' learning outcomes. To what she reported:

One day I decided to give the whole class in English so I could see if they were understanding or if they were following me. The thing here is that most of the students understood what I was saying so it is positive because they were learning.

Also, in the case of Ethel, to calm down the students she tried different resources to help students to concentrate, to get focus in the lesson. Significantly, she mentioned it was worth it because based on the result, she considered what to do in the following situations. She stated the following:

I don't know to do some mindfulness activities, where they breath, I tried to do some exercises inside the classroom just to focus my students' attention on my class and I tried to make the class as dynamic as possible, I made my students participate as much as possible so I think in the future I will do it better.

#### **4.2.4.3 Adapting random teaching behavior**

In this assumption, it was expected that participants shared experiences about trying random behaviors in the classroom. Unfortunately, being a novice with little experience limited participants trying to play some background music, perhaps to take some candles to the classroom or letting the student ask personal questions to the teacher. Unusual behaviors like these could create a misunderstanding to students. Participants were afraid of losing the floor. To what Andrea shared:

I am 23, I look too young, so people always say like oh my gosh you are 16, but I am not. I am 23 and I think that is one disadvantage because students are used to see the teacher as a role, as a figure of



power... but in my case it goes with the second grade and they were like “no I don’t want to do anything”, “no, I am not paying attention” and they were even like kind of harassing me. They were like “no teacher, can I get your Facebook”, “can I get your number” and I was like oh my goodness what’s going on here. even I wanted to be a kind of friend for them, I was like OK no I cannot do that because if not, the line between the teacher and student is going to get lost.

In this sense participants were aware of what techniques or implementations were not recommended to apply when being a new teacher. In other words, they limited themselves in using random techniques to gain recognition and be accepted in the college group. Something that Norton (2000) associates with the need of group membership.

#### **4.2.4.4 Seeing what is by: contrasting what he/she actually does with what he/she thinks is doing**

For example, Manrique, Angela and Erika recalled experiences when they were in their last course of their education program that was the practicum, and they were guided by a teacher educator who provided feedback observed them in the classroom, made them to reflect in their teaching so they could change their teaching to some extent and avoid certain things in their following classes. The previous experiences were relevant for the participants in their actual job, because they reconsidered what they did and what is not recommendable to do in the classroom. Angela shared this experience.

*My both courses of practicum... my teachers they gave me advice, so their advices were like really helpful for me when I was in front of the groups because they told me “well you know and I observed that you didn’t do this”, or “I observe that you are repeating it so you have to do that or you have to avoid this.”*

#### **4.2.4.5 Considering what he/she believe as teachers in relation of what he/she does**

In relation to this level, participants were limited to share experiences that had to do with the following situations. For example, when giving directions, the number of times they corrected students' pronunciation, they translated a word from English to Spanish, or considered the use of L1 to clarify an idea. They were by themselves in the classroom and there was not a school authority to provide feedback related to their class delivery. In this sense, the need of another person was essential to tell the participants what they were doing. This is the reason why evidence was not found.

#### **4.2.4.6 Clarifying feelings**

In this last sub-level, undoubtedly, all participants recalled experiencing different feelings when they were in front of their group. That is, emotions and attitudes shown by participants to students and vice versa. Curiously, participants' attitudes had some influence on the learners' learning process. A good example that illustrates this was that of Angela who felt motivated to see the reaction of some students had over their learning outcomes, as follows:

*The students were like “what? she knows English”, “she speaks English” so it was very different. I felt motivated. I like helping people and I think when we teach, we are helping and sharing with others. The students feel happy when they learn because they understand things, “they say oh teacher I am speaking in English”.*

Similarly, Erika wanted to do research, but her parents persuaded her to go into teaching. Consequently, she was not prepared for the following events that were

awaiting. At the beginning she was not happy at all, the reason was because she fell into the job, and her tenure was assigned in a municipality far from her family. However, she moved to the place where the school was. Hence, her thoughts and emotions were reflected in her lessons, and had some effect on her students' interest towards the subject. After realizing about this wrong misconception, she gave a chance to teaching and started liking it, so students' perceptions changed as well. To what she expressed:

The very first month I was like they don't really pay attention, they don't like the class, I was so negative about it based on my experiences in the class...I was really rejecting the context, the school, the student everything and I was just like no we don't we don't really get along... I realized that I was just too negative.

Generally speaking, participants experienced a mix of feelings in their first job, they felt confident, some reported a relief of being hired, a bit of excitement, others nervousness and insecurity. Feelings and emotions cannot be avoided, it is just a matter of time and practice to handle them. Something that Daniela told:

*I think to be confident with myself is the best support, because if I am not sure about myself, I cannot teach with my example, with my own example.*

This paragraph describes something similar in Sandoval Flores (2009) investigation which is related to group control, relationship with students, teacher's respect and the teacher attitude towards the context.

#### 4.2.5 A nonjudgmental stance

In this level there was a noticeable agreement among the participants, Andrea, Manrique, Daniela, Angel, Erika, Ariel and Coni discussed their experiences of how they judged their classes' delivery. Even though their teaching skills were in a process of development, participants were able to judge their job. To what Daniela said:

*I felt my voice was not enough, the tone was not enough. Also, about the time and my activities, I felt that the time was consuming very fast, and I didn't have enough time to do all the activities that I planned.*

Disappointingly, some participants recalled not only learners complaining about learning the foreign language, but also students' parents judging the learners' skills. That is, parents were assuming that their children won't make it to learn the foreign language, that learners lacked in their learning skills. Thoughts like these might create insecurity and decrease the students learning outcomes as expressed by Manrique:

*I have parents coming to me and they already assume that their kid is not going to be good at learning English and if they think that, they are giving insecurity to the students and that's a problem.*

Surprisingly, participants told they were judged by their colleagues, the reason was because of the teacher educational program they belonged to. Colleges assumed that universitarios teachers were not prepared for the job, and their teaching skills were limited, making emphasis in the lesson planning. This is expressed by Angela and Erika:

*I remembered other thing that happened to me when arrived, this was like you know the difference that I studied at BUAP, as I am a universitaria, you're not a teacher, you don't know how to teach , no*

*tienes control de grupo, no la vas armar, all those things, it was like the common idea and comments that I received every day, “ah la de inglés”, “ah la nueva”, “la universitaria” (participant laughs).*

As it can be seen from the reference above, participants faced challenges in their work environment, in this sense talking about the school community, relationship with colleges, recognition and affiliation. Fortunately, they were able to take this in a positive way and did not let the comments affect their feelings and teaching. Thus, Beijaard, Meijer and Verloop (2004) recommend in-service teachers to offer support or guidance to novice teachers to learn the basic rules in the school context. Actions like these will soften the transition of novice teachers into the profession.

#### **4.2.6 Personal connection to teaching**

In this level, participants recalled their early experiences as a learner during their education which they described as admirable and committed teachers. Nevertheless, some participants disliked their classes due to lack of planning. In this sense Andrea, Manrique, Daniela, Ethel, Angela, Erika and Coni early experiences served as a reference of what activities, teaching methods, materials, and strategies are recommended or not to be taken in their classroom. For example, Angela stated:

*So, one of the things that I try to remember when I’m teaching is, to remember when I was a secondary student, I didn’t like classes in the classroom, I didn’t like boring classes, I didn’t like just memorizing things, I didn’t like translating songs, I didn’t like all those things... so I tried to do things differently...*

Previous paragraph is in agreement with some scholars that declare “teachers as agents of change” (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Jing & Benson, 2012 ;

Biesta, Priestley, & Robinson, 2015). Thus, participants were in the process of achieving their agency, something that Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson (2013) describe as a temporary process of social engagement, taken from past experiences, that act in the present and are oriented to the future.

They also mentioned the benefits of teaching the values at home and how that is reflected in the classroom, as expressed by Manrique:

*The most important thing, if people don't give values to their children, they just learn to disrespect everyone else around them".*

Daniela and Ethel's personal connection was love to the profession. Daniela was achieving her goal that was set since she was a child and Ethel fell into the job but through time, she started liking it and recommended becoming teachers having commitment to the profession or better find other options.

#### **4.2.7 A beginner's mind**

Sometimes people find it difficult to limit their thoughts, opinions, and knowledge in situations like conferences, seminars, meetings, talks and any other situations. It might look like people lower themselves, but it is not, actions like this of giving up ideas are opportunities of constant learning. A beginner's mind as described by Gebhard and Oprandy (1999) was evident in some participants' responses. For example, Oscar, Andrea, Daniela, Angela, Erika, Ariel and Coni were open to learn from everything they were facing in the profession. That is, even though the ELT program prepared them for the profession, they carried out some personal research

to overcome the situations they were encountering because learning is an endless process. Oscar stated as follows:

*of course, the career provided me with sufficient knowledge to give classes, but I consider as teachers we have to keep learning and involving regarding to our techniques, methodologies or strategies that we know, so we can adapt them and, in that way, we can help the students to achieve the expected learning that is set in the curriculum.*

Oscar and Angela recalled previous experiences from the practicum course where they listened to the experts' feedback after lesson planning or delivering a class.

My both courses of practicum... my teachers they gave me advice, so their advices were like really helpful for me when I was in front of the groups because they told me well you know, and I observed that you didn't do this or observe that you are repeating it so you have to do that or you have to avoid this so their advices.

It is worth mentioning that no matter the degree of knowledge a teacher has, it is important to listen constantly to others and learn from them. There is always something to learn.

#### **4.2.8 Attention to language and behavior**

Very few participants shared experiences related to students using appropriate or inappropriate language inside the classroom, not only among students but also talking to the teacher. For example, Oscar, Manrique, Angela and Erika were astonished by the rude vocabulary students used inside the classroom. Fortunately, participants' awareness helped them to know what vocabulary to use when talking to different people. For example, they used academic vocabulary with school authorities, and colleges. As Oscar statement:

*“I have tried to talk to students’ parents in a way that is understandable for them...”*

In this case Oscar avoided the use of academic vocabulary and tried to use general words to deliver the message so parents could follow him. Disappointingly, the same participant and also Erika disagreed with the rude vocabulary students were using inside the classroom. Oscar made a comparison to himself, when he was a learner, in his time students were very cautious to the vocabulary they used inside the classroom. he shared the following:

The attitude or perception students have towards the role of the teacher is negative. They do not respect sometimes what is said by the teacher, they even say bad words in the class that was one thing that I got really astonished when I first listened that kind of vocabulary that it was said by a student in the classroom, I understand that, of course is part of the language you can use it, but we have to know when to use it. So, when I first heard this kind of vocabulary from students in the classroom I was really surprised, astonished, because they were like nothing, it was normal to talk like that in the classroom. Even though I studied in this sector my whole life I don’t remember students talking to teachers with that kind of vocabulary. So, I think by the time has changed the perception towards the teacher in the public school mainly, is a little bit negative but from time and students.

The excerpt from above leaves the next question, where are the students’ values? The learners’ education starts from home, thus, the school complements it. Therefore, it is recommended that teachers, students, students’ parents, and school authorities work in collaboration for the best of all.



#### **4.2.9 Description over prescription**

Hardly any of the participants described how they used to deliver their lessons. One possible reason might be that the investigation's questions were related to experiences faced in the beginning of their profession rather than teaching the subject matter. Despite this, Oscar and Manrique discussed previous teaching experiences when they were in their practicum course and became aware that class will not follow step by step as planned, there will always be changes on the way, and teachers must be ready to adapt. Manrique added:

When I was doing my practicum, I worked with one very strict teacher, so you have to work a lot, you have to check your lesson plans, you have to be very careful with the words you are writing during the instructions, and how you made your warm-up, your closure and what kind of activities you were supposed to do. What I consider helpful for me was how I designed my classes and how I would have adapted them through the teaching process. You have to change all the time because sometimes you make your lesson plans thinking that the students are going to be making everything you have predicted, but as you go you realize that you have to go back or go slow.

There are a number of things to consider inside the classroom when delivering the lesson, there are not right or wrong steps, the thing is to reflect and find other options.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

The current chapter provided an analysis of the data that was collected to address the questions posited for the present investigation. It explored and presented the issues (challenges) that novice teachers encountered at the beginning of their

profession. The data was analyzed by the levels which emphasize the relationship between teacher professional development and the cultural and institutional situations in which that development occurred (SCT); and by the guidance of Gebhard and Oprandy (1999) assumptions of language teaching awareness to hear the voice of novice teachers.

All participants mentioned working in private institutions and English academies to get experience before they got into SEP. It was a challenge and at the same time part of their professional development. That previous experience helped them to overcome the situations related to the management of the class, the students interests and behavior, school facilities, the material, and work location. They also mentioned the teacher education program, especially the practicum, the exposure to different context was worth in their everyday classes, and in their professional development.

Having illustrated the data analysis, the following chapter will serve to answer the research questions stated at the beginning of this investigation.

## Chapter V: Conclusions

5.0 Introduction

5.1 Discussion of research questions

5.2 Limitation of the study

5.3 Directions for further research

5.4 Personal and general conclusion

## **Chapter V: Conclusion**

### **5.0 Introduction**

This chapter aims to provide the conclusion of the investigation by responding to each research question. As previously stated, this investigation was meant to understand the challenges that novice teachers came across at the beginning of the profession in public secondary schools in central Mexico. Consequently, a discussion of the categories emerged by levels will be mentioned. The levels that were considered in this investigation are from the sociocultural perspective (Johnson & Golombek, 2016) and the assumption of language teaching awareness by Gebhard and Oprandy (1999). The conclusion is drawn from the analysis emerged from the interviews. Finally, the limitation of the study, direction to further research and a personal reflection will be presented.

### **5.1 Discussion of research questions**

As mentioned in chapter II, this investigation pursued the sociocultural theory (Johnson & Golombek, 2011) and the language teaching awareness (Gebhard and Oprandy, 1999) for the analysis of the data. Meaningful insight about the teacher's professional development, and the degree of awareness in teaching were found. Generally, the findings suggest that participants' professional development went over the different levels, already mentioned, within the situations they were facing. Most situations turned into challenges that participants had to overcome with the use

of tools, artifacts or mediated activities that enabled them to change the way of their lessons' delivery.

This investigation's first question was: **What challenges do novice English foreign language teachers face as they transition into the classroom?** In this sense, participants' professional development was analyzed by levels and the challenges they mentioned were as follows. Following the sociocultural perspective (Johnson & Golombek, 2011) first level, the self, participants' initial challenges at the beginning of their profession were: being the person in charge of a group of people, being in front of a class, the person who all responsibilities relied on, and to be able to make decisions. That is, participants' principal challenge was not only to become responsible teachers, but also to show obligation outside school, to the people around them.

Significantly, at the classroom level, it was found that the most challenging situations were having students not motivated to learn the language; students struggling with their age that made them misbehave and use vocabulary not recommended inside the classroom. Similarly, there was a case where Erika said her students were not into learning the English language and the context was the main influence. Being Nahuatl speakers and traders, the learners were more into learning Spanish rather than a foreign language.

Even though participants were working in a different context; Oscar, Manrique, Ethel, Angela and Erika reported the facilities were not recommended to the number of students. Having from 40 to 50 students limited participants when trying to carry out different activities. The findings are in parallel with the result of another investigation carried out by Veenman (1984, also cited in Dayan, Perveen,

& Khan, 2018) that highlighted perceived problems with classroom discipline, motivating students, inadequate teaching materials and supplies.

Likewise, the book was another challenge that Oscar, Andrea, Manrique, Ethel, Angela, and Erika discussed. They reported a mismatch between the book and the students' level. Furthermore, the content was not recommendable for the context. These results echoed previous findings to Ramirez-Romero and Sayer (2016) that reported schools and learners are entitled to textbooks that some situations arrive late or are limited to the school community.

The following level was the school, where Angela and Manrique stated it was a bit challenging to teach other subjects different to English. Some of them were physics, chemistry, mathematics, physical education, arts, and Spanish. Moreover, their experiences were more related to the protocols and activities carried out inside the school.

Following the analysis, the next view was the assumptions of Gebhard and Oprandy (1999). Regarding the level of teachers taking responsibility for their own teaching, participants' most challenges were related to the lack of teaching skills, using techniques, methodologies, and strategies to help themselves and the students in their teaching and learning process. Also, to be able to manage unexpected situations in the classroom.

The next level mentioned by all participants was the need for others, where they acknowledged how challenging is when a teacher works alone. The perspective, view, opinion from another person helps not only in the professional development of a teacher but also in the improvement to deliver the classes and raise awareness.

In the assumption of avenues to awareness through exploration level, the findings are similar to the sociocultural level. They are classroom management related; students' interest in the subject, and behavior; working with the book and school facilities. In the same manner, in the nonjudgmental stance sub-level, Andrea, Manrique, Daniela recalled judging their work about unsatisfying teaching experiences. Thus, participants recalled their tone; time management; and surprisingly dealing with students' parents.

Last but not least, in attention to language and behavior level, Oscar, Manrique, and Erika not only got disappointed but also challenged the fact that students were using rude vocabulary not recommended in the classroom setting. Description over prescription was the last level where Oscar and Manrique stated being ready for adaptation as a challenge when delivering the classes and something unexpected happens. Based on their experiences, participants declared that not all lessons follow the same procedures, or the steps will not go as planned. Something to become teachers should be prepared for a "what if" situation.

The second investigation question was: **How do novice English foreign language teachers overcome those challenges?** The data analysis correlates with the sociocultural perspective (Johnson and Golombek, 2016), that is, participants involved in these social interactions learned how to use the psychological tools to develop their higher mental process, mainly the transformation from being an undergraduate to becoming a teacher. Undoubtedly, the use of psychological tools helped novice teachers to internalize and be able to overcome the situations presented in the everyday classroom situation. In other words, being the person in charge of a group of people was overcome with time and practice. But

most importantly, participants had to trust, believe, and have confidence in themselves. Their confidence was evident when talking to students and delivering the lessons. Participants implemented new teaching techniques and strategies; designed attractive material; tried unusual activities inside the classroom to catch the students' attention and motivate them. But before doing it, they had to do some research about teaching English.

Related to the facilities and number of students, participants mentioned they did enough collaborative work and tried different activities inside and outside the classroom. Lowering the activities to the students' level and adapting the book content to the students' context help the participants to have learning outcomes. Talking about teaching other subjects, participants mentioned they had to study and learn about them to deliver an appropriate class.

Making reference to the vocabulary not recommendable to be used in the classroom, participants responded it was a matter of time to stop using it. Significantly, the implementation of varied activities in the classroom had an effect on students' interest in the subject. In the same manner, the negative ideas that few participants had at the beginning of the profession turned positively affecting the students' behavior and their learning outcomes. In other words, the participants' attitude was visible to the students' eyes. For example, if the participant was angry some students went angry too, or if the participant was very active and smiley, this joy was spread among students.

The last question was: **What are the factors that influence the participants' decision-making about teaching practices?** Importantly, all



participants achieved their perception of self, and they recognized that their professional development was mostly in their hands. Their attachment, love and commitment to the profession pushed them not only to continue growing personally and professionally but also prepared and helped them to be able to make decisions related to their teaching practices.

Importantly, participants mentioned the knowledge that the career provided was an influencing factor to their actual classes. Findings have a similar divergence reported by some scholars (Bingham Rees, 2015; Morales Cortés, 2016; Lucero & Roncancio-Castellanos, 2019) that highlighted teacher educators finding ways to connect theory with practice. That is to say, participants were encountering situations in the real language classroom, therefore they reconsidered a match between the theory given in the teacher education program with their actual practice.

## **5.2 Limitation of the study**

Some limitations came up when carrying out this investigation. The intention was to find participants for two focus groups, each of 8. Therefore, a few issues affected having access to participants beginning with the lockdown of COVID19. Following that, the invitation to participate in this investigation was posted on social media and asked some researchers to spread the word, which resulted in having access to two participants. The investigator tried to find the participants individually. Unfortunately, when reaching them, most teachers reported not having worked in public secondary

level, whose first experiences were in private institutions, primary, or high school level; thus, some were senior teachers willing to collaborate.

In the end, there were 9 participants whose experiences were in secondary and tele-secondary public schools. Once the participants agreed to participate, unluckily, another limitation was to set the time for the focus group. Even though they were doing home teaching their availability was not open at all. They reported having a considerable workload that did not allow them time for extra activities. The focus group turned into individual, pair, thirds group interviews. Another problem was the internet speed; few sessions were cut or frozen in action, which somehow affected the atmosphere, feelings, and emotions that participants were experiencing at that moment.

### **5.3 Directions for further research**

This investigation presented the situations encountered by novice teachers, novices who represent a small part of the ELT in the Mexican context. Interestingly, the results of this investigation are a bit similar to some scholars' investigation (Basurto Santos & Gregory Weathers 2016). Even though it has happened more than a decade, teachers' testimonies are recurrent. It is frequent to hear situations about the limitations of the school infrastructure; the number of students from 40 to 50; the mismatch between the students' level and what is stated in the syllabus; and the lack of material.

Further research could be carried out by replicating this study with a different group of participants, who have similar characteristics such as, being in the same

academic year, same educational program and same university. Furthermore, the researcher suggests the following areas to do research:

1. The experiences and advice of senior teachers to becoming and novice teachers.
2. The experience of student-teachers from the practicum course.
3. The progress of alumni's professional development for a certain period (10 or more years).
4. To Explore the SL teaching awareness in in-service teachers.
5. To explore networks to get entry to schools.

#### **5.4 Personal and general conclusions**

The following paragraphs will wrap up the personal experience of writing a master thesis and a general conclusion about the topic under research.

First of all, writing this thesis project has been both a very challenging task and promoted my personal and professional growth. It all started by choosing the topic and area to be researched. I knew it was about ELT in Mexico, so following some recommendations, I decided to go with secondary school because it seemed to be the area that is limited in research.

I would like to mention that my limited experience in carrying out research and the restrictions to having access to journals and books made me lose focus on the topic. I thought that reading about ELT in Mexico and the ministry of education were the key elements for my paper, but I was wrong, the main concept was novice teachers. What helped me the most to get focused was when I found Farrell (2003,

2008, 2012, 2016) and Veenman (1984) studies. Their studies served as a guide to see where I wanted to go with my investigation and importantly led me to different scholars.

Once again, I lost track of my research, I was not sure about possible frameworks for the data analysis. Nevertheless, the frequent consultations with the scholars guided me to choose it. I found that the most recommendable frameworks for the data analysis and results were sociocultural theory (Johnson & Golombek, 2011) and language teaching awareness by Gebhard and Oprandy (1999). Not using the frameworks, the analysis would have been general and difficult to identify the professional development level of each participant. Therefore, Gebhard and Oprandy's (1999) assumptions facilitated the study of the level of teaching awareness participants had in their profession.

I would like to mention that before and while carrying out this investigation, I had the wrong idea of making the teacher education program responsible for the unpreparedness of its undergraduates. I was wrong. Importantly, the two frameworks made me realize that the teachers' readiness is mainly in their hands. The teacher education program's main role is to be a tool provider. That is, becoming teachers must make the best of it while studying for their BA. Referring to the ministry of education, I realized that instead of criticizing the system and going against it, I should prepare myself and make the change through my actions in the classroom, to help learners to develop their skills.

To wrap up this personal conclusion, I would like to add that after writing this investigation I see things from another perspective. Before the master program, I was not aware of my professional development and the factors that triggered that

development. I was not aware that learning is an endless process that requires a lot of commitment to what we do. I did carry small projects in my profession that might be taken to further study.

Last but not least, my general conclusion for this investigation starts with making a connection between the elements mentioned in the literature review and the participants' responses.

Importantly, it was found that participants achieved their perception of self, being this the hardest part of all because it is deeply personal but very important in the construction of social platforms in schools (Fry, 2017). Interestingly, it was found that participants were not familiar at all to the terms mentor and supervisor. When talking about the practicum course, they referred to them as the teacher educators. Even though two participants were familiar with the mentoring term, the reason was they were in a mentoring course provided by SEP, a course that guides new teachers in the profession.

When talking about identity, it was found that participants got identified in different social platforms, it started with this big group that is part of SEP, especially having a tenure. Then, their identity went to be part of a sub-group that was a secondary school and wanted to be accepted. In the end, they got identified as English teachers who were immersed in the English language and English culture. They got identified with this specific group that is “the English teacher”, they were normally called “the teacher”.

Importantly, talking about agency, all participants developed it at different levels. Some participants' agency was developed when they turned into agents of

change, that is, they wanted to make a change in the context where they were working, serving them as a model to students to make the best of them. In the same manner, most of the participants achieved their agency through the process of social engagements, they emerged in this interplay between their past experiences that had an effect in the present, the same that served as a possibility to their future classes.

Generally speaking, results from this investigation indicate that becoming teachers need further personal development; and professional development in teaching experiences and skills related to the classroom and school settings. It seems to be that the practicum course is the phase where becoming teachers should make the best and identify some gaps between the theory already learned and the actual practice.

Moreover, becoming teachers having options in public, private, urban, semi-urban and rural schools; with learners of different ages will give them a better picture of what to expect in the profession. Those experiences might soften the transition from being an undergraduate to becoming a teacher. The teaching world is gigantic that cannot be covered in a four-year program but giving different scenarios will be worth it.

I would invite becoming and in-service teachers not get in the routine of their work. Fortunately, the teaching profession constantly provides options to carry out small projects and try to refine those skills, competencies and abilities that will result in developing personally and professionally. Do not get in the comfort zone, make a change for the better.

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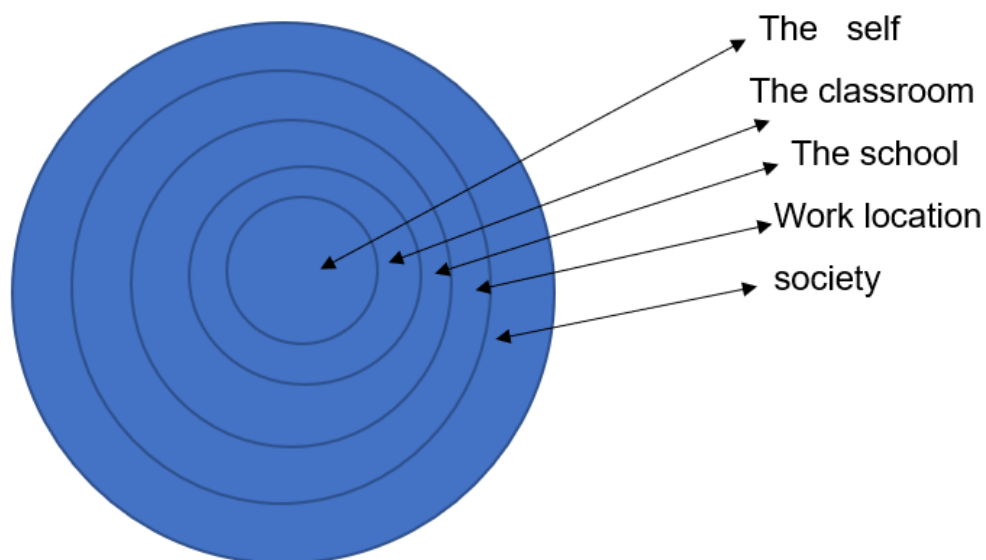
## Appendix 1

The focus group interview:

1. How did you feel about teaching after finishing the ELT program?
2. What are the reasons you felt that way?
3. Can you mention some positive experiences you have had in your first months/ courses/years of teaching in secondary school??
4. Can you name any particular problems during your first months/ courses/years of teaching? If appropriate, how did you respond to them?
5. You mentioned these situations.... What is your opinion about the cause of that problem?
6. What has been your biggest challenge during your first months of teaching?
7. How has practicum (from the ELT program) helped in your daily teaching?
8. What or who has been your biggest support in your teaching practices?
9. Do you have any suggestions for improving the quality of the ELT program? Please be specific.
10. What advice would you give to teacher candidates who will soon graduate and start teaching?

## Appendix 2:

The sociocultural perspective levels that are part of the professional development of novice teachers are:



### **The self:**

The subject matter / the foreign language  
Experience, little or none  
Feelings  
Support

### **The classroom:**

The infrastructure  
The learners  
The lesson planning  
The book /The material (handouts, activities, role plays, games, songs, the use of technological resources)  
The language

### **The school:**

School policy/ protocols  
Social activities (Mother's Day, flag's day, revolution's day, graduation ceremony, etc.)  
Personnel (The principal, colleagues, the English academy, senior teachers)

**Work location/ school setting/context:**

Urban, semi-urban

Economic status

**Society:**

The ministry of education

Students' parents

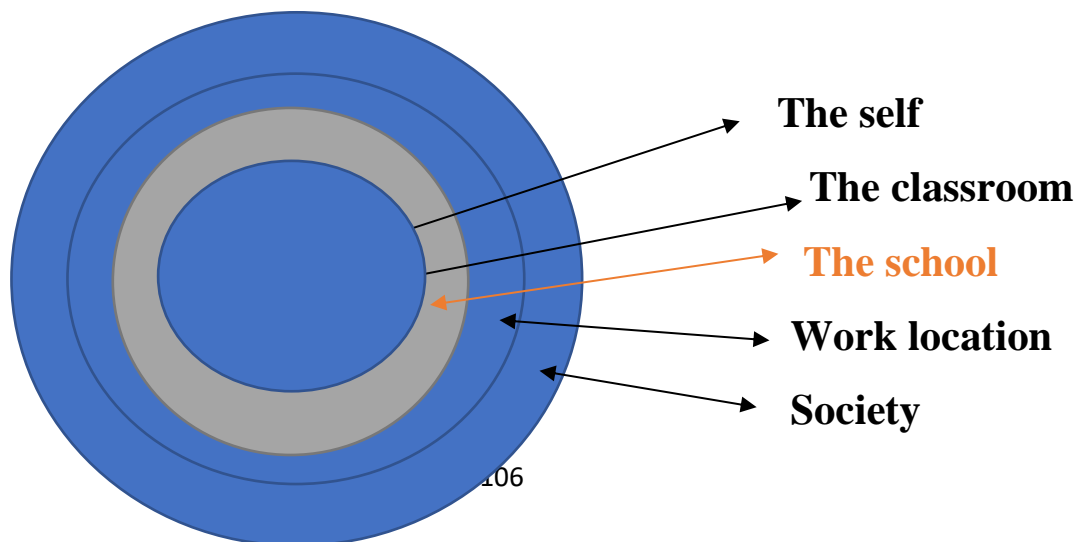
The teaching educational program

**Example of the sociocultural perspective levels of novice teachers**

<b>LEVEL</b>	<b>P4</b>
<b>The self</b>	
The foreign language	B2
Experience, little or no experience	I have experience in tele-secondary, but also, I have experience in other levels, for example kindergarten, elementary school, high school and nowadays I have some students at university level from different careers.
Feelings	Since I was a child, I wanted to be a teacher so when I was in junior high school, I decided to be a teacher, to be more specific an English teacher. When I started the career, I was very excited because I was achieving the goal of my life and I enjoyed all the teaching and learning processes. So, I love teaching... At the beginning of the profession, I remember I was a little bit nervous and also, I was afraid about the first experiences that I was acquiring at that moment. Well, I was afraid but also amazed with this kind of experience.
Support Herself	I think that I was sure about my capabilities...I think to be confident with myself is the best support, because if I am not sure about myself, I cannot teach with my example, with my own example.
<b>The classroom</b>	
The infrastructure/ facilities  Class size	I remember this group there were around 35 or 40



<p>The learners</p> <p>The material</p>	<p>The students were very amazed because they did not have an English teacher before. They were enthusiastic in order to learn the language with the activities, with the play roles etc. I think that they liked the material I used in the classes, they really loved some of the material I used, and they could interact with their classmates and the material.</p> <p>I remember that some of the students, not all, had complicated behavior, they did not want to learn. It was a little bit difficult for me to get outcomes without their help. The students did not help me to helped them.</p>
<p><b>The school</b></p>	
<p><b>Work location/ context</b></p>	
<p>Urban, semi-urban</p>	<p>Semi-urban</p>
<p>Economic status</p>	<p>It is our responsibility to make changes, I think, particularly here in my town. It can be the ideology from almost all the students. Their ideologies are not good, they don't have expectations to become professional in their future. They want to become workers, employees but it is a little bit difficult but also it is a motivation for me to change their minds in order to become better not only in my case but in their cases to teach individual students I know they have skills or abilities that they can develop.</p>
<p><b>Society</b></p>	
<p>The teaching education program (language faculty)</p>	<p>I think all the knowledge that I acquired in the faculty was useful for me at the beginning, during and also nowadays in my teaching process.</p>



**APPENDIX 3**  
**The language teaching awareness model**

<b>Assumptions</b>	<b>P4</b>
Teacher taking responsibility of his/her own teaching	I was looking for different techniques, strategies, methods in order to attract their attention...
The need for others	They want to become workers, employees but it is a little bit difficult but also it is a motivation for me to change their minds in order to become better not only in my case but in their cases to teach individual students I know they have skills or abilities that they can develop further.
A nonjudgmental stance	I felt my voice was not enough, the tone was not enough. Also, about the time and my activities, I felt that the time was consuming very fast, and I didn't have enough time to do all the activities that I planned.
Avenues to awareness through exploration	
Problem solving  Identify the problem Identify the cause Solve it	I remember that some of the students, not all, had complicated behavior, they did not want to learn. It was a little bit difficult for me to get outcomes without their help. The students did not help me.  I was looking for different techniques, strategies, methods in order to attract their attention because it has to do with their learning styles, like kinesthetics, visuals, etc. So, I could attract their attention with some of the material that I used and the use of technology, etc. I think it was hard work, hard responsibility but I could succeed, they were really interested in this.
Clarifying feelings	I think to be confident with myself is the best support, because if I am not sure about myself, I cannot teach with my example, with my own example
Personal connections to teaching	Since I was a child, I wanted to be a teacher so when I was in junior high school I decided to be a teacher, to be more specific an English teacher.
Attention to process	...teach individual students I know they have skills or abilities that they can develop.

	I think that the main thing to teach is to take a rest in order to solve some of the difficulties in the educational system we have in our country...
A beginner's mind	In the real context I think it is very different from the theory from the practice and I think all the knowledge that I acquired in the faculty was useful for me at the beginning, during and also nowadays in my teaching process.