

Transforming into a Multilingual Nation: A Qualitative Analysis of Mexico's Initiative to Develop Language Teachers¹

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Abstract

This research study reports the results of national data collected by one of three researchers on Mexico's *Programa Nacional de Inglés en Educación Básica* (PNIEB, or the National Program for English in Basic Education), and complements a larger quantitative study sponsored by the Mexican Ministry of Education. During the 2011-12 school year, data was collected from school site visits, classroom observations, and interviews with school principals, PNIEB EFL teachers, teacher supervisors, university faculty, and federal and state government officials. Data collection was conducted in four states geographically distributed across Mexico. This researcher documented the progress and impact of the PNIEB in Mexican schools based on participants personal and professional self-reflection accounts of their experience in the program. Qualitative data on the status of each state's context ascertained the impact of the PNIEB on the development of PNIEB EFL teachers' skills of teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Results of the data are reported in four themes that emerged: (1) genuine instructional practices, (2) level of English proficiency and confidence, (3) classroom and teacher character that supports teaching, (4) the training of EFL teachers-support and collaboration. The results provide an opportunity for discussion when considering implementing EFL training programs with practicing teachers or in teacher education programs.

Resumen

El presente estudio informa de los resultados de datos nacionales obtenidos por uno de tres investigadores en México patrocinado por el "Programa Nacional de Inglés en Educación Básica" (PNIEB), y complementa un estudio mayor cuantitativo patrocinado por la Secretaría de Educación Pública de México. Durante el año escolar 2011-12, los datos se recogieron por medio de visitas a escuelas, observaciones de aula y entrevistas con directores de escuelas, profesores de inglés como Lengua Extranjera (ILE), supervisores de docentes, profesores universitarios y funcionarios del gobierno federal y estatal. La recolección de datos se llevó a cabo en cuatro estados distribuidos geográficamente en todo México. Este investigador documentó el progreso y las repercusiones del PNIEB en las escuelas mexicanas en función de los participantes al nivel personal y profesional tomando en cuenta la reflexión de su experiencia en el programa. Los datos cualitativos reflejan el contexto de cada estado y determina el impacto del PNIEB sobre el desarrollo de las aptitudes de los maestros en la enseñanza de Inglés como Lengua Extranjera (ILE). Los resultados de los datos se dividen en cuatro temas que surgieron: (1) métodos auténticos en la aplicación de la enseñanza, (2) nivel de conocimientos de inglés y su seguridad en el idioma, (3) ambiente y actitud del profesor en apoyo a la enseñanza, (4) la formación de los profesores, el apoyo y la colaboración. Los resultados ofrecen una oportunidad para debatir sobre el Inglés como Lengua Extranjera (ILE) al considerar los programas de formación de profesores en servicio en los programas de formación docente.

Introduction

It becomes increasingly clear that colleges and schools of education, as well as local and national education systems, are not preparing P-16 students to meet the challenges of international economies, political systems, and the migration of world cultures (Asia Society, 2001). This deficit is due to the fact that most students lack the ability to speak more than one language. Therefore, the opportunity to provide children with a vehicle to become bi- or multilingual and to

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be taught by bi- or multilingual teachers is needed to prepare globally competent citizens (Cushner, 2007; Quezada, 2012).

A nation promoting multilingualism in P-9 schools is México. In México, English teaching has been required at the secondary level since 1926. In 1992, some states began to develop English language teaching programs on their own in primary schools (Reyes-Cruz, Murietta-Loyo, Hernandez-Mendez, 2011). Most recently, a national law was passed requiring all schools to teach English as a Foreign Language (EFL) from the third year pre-school (Kinder) through 6th and continuing up until 9th grade by the year 2018. This is based on *Acuerdo Secretarial No. 592* (Secretarial Accord, 2008) which established the articulation of Basic Education mandating English as a Second language (Secretaria de Educación Pública, 2011). The *Programa Nacional de Inglés en Educación Básica* was then established. According to Reyes-Cruz, Murietta-Loyo and Hernández-Mendez (2011) the purpose of PNIEB was to design plans and programs, develop educational materials, establish a scope and sequence and begin a staff development program to prepare the teaching of EFL by Mexican teachers in all of Mexico. The question to meet this mandate becomes, "How do we best train future EFL teachers?" particularly in México, since only 16% of the education research studies conducted in México on teaching English as a foreign language are on teacher education and only 9% are in learning methodology. The majority of those research studies (70%) focus on students and only 25% on teachers, and 76% of the studies are on institutions of higher education, while 6% are at the secondary level, 3% at the primary level, and 1% in kinder (Ramírez-Romero, 2009). Further, in Reyes-Cruz, Murietta-Loyo, & Hernandez-Mendez, (2011) and Martinez-Cantu (2009) they report that according to México's *Secretaria de Educación Pública* (Ministry of Public Education) most teachers have a minimal command of the English language which is insufficient to cover the teaching of EFL in all of México, from pre-school (kinder) up to the third year of secondary school. Therefore, there is a need to prepare effective EFL teachers in México, and it is up to colleges and schools of education or state and federal education agencies or governments in México and elsewhere, to provide continuing education and professional development to prepare teachers (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005).

Based on the above educational need and the information gathered and made available, this author participated in the evaluation of México's English language teaching program for the purpose of documenting the progress and impact of the *Programa Nacional de Inglés en Educación Básica* (PNIEB) initiative in Mexican schools in order to determine its advances and challenges; its effectiveness and weaknesses; and to propose recommendations on how to best prepare Mexican EFL teachers as well as recommend improvements to the PNIEB program.

Purpose of the Study

This study reports the results of national data collected by one of three researchers on Mexico's PNIEB and complemented a larger quantitative study sponsored by the Mexican Ministry of Education. During the 2011-12 school year, three researchers from the United States conducted school site visits, classroom observations, interviews with principals, EFL teachers, teacher supervisors, university faculty, and with federal and state government officials. Data collection was completed in four states geographically distributed across México.

A primary objective of the research was to document the progress and impact of the PNIEB initiative in Mexican schools. The data collected ascertains PNIEB teachers' development of their teaching skills in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL), as well as the overall effectiveness of the PNIEB program based on participant interviews and classroom observations. For the public elementary schools in the four states visited during the 2011-12 cycle, the teaching of English as a Foreign Language began 2.5 years prior with the pilot phase of PNIEB.

The overarching self-reflective research questions were:

- To what extent are PNIEB EFL teachers employing effective EFL strategies in their classrooms based on their self-reflective accounts?
- Did the staff development received by EFL teachers prepare them to effectively teach EFL at their respective school sites?
- Is the supervision and support of PNIEB EFL teachers' effective based on the reflective accounts of PNIEB supervisors, federal and state coordinators and school site principals?

Theoretical Framework

Two theoretical frameworks were considered. The first is based on the premise that effective staff development is key in the success of both EFL teachers and EFL students (Quezada, Lindsey & Lindsey, 2012; California Department of Education, 2010; Gay, 2000), therefore effective characteristics of professional development were determined. The second premise is based on the fact that implementing effective language-teaching approaches' are critical for learners' to successfully speak English, Brown's (2001) *Principled Language Teaching Approaches* were considered.

Professional development as a means of enhancing EFL instruction

We know that the last decades have seen an increase in research conducted in the field of language development and first and second language acquisition (Gonzalez, 2005; Menyuk & Brisk, 2005). From this breadth of research many professional development programs have emerged for preparing EFL teachers. We also know that professional development is a must if we are to diminish the learning gap between EFL students and the general student population due to difference in language acquisition and improve student learning throughout our international borders. Designing professional development instructional programs that are only scientific and research based is not sufficient if the sociocultural context of learning is not taken into account (Quezada, Lindsey & Lindsey, 2012). There are eight primary elements that should be considered in planning staff development for teachers when teaching EFL as described by Echevarria and Short (2010): (1) Theoretical knowledge—Focus on the underpinnings of instruction for English language learners; (2) Specific strategies—Focus on possible issues or difficulties English learners may face in learning specific content; (3) Lesson planning—Development of teaching units and lessons, including all aspects of effective instruction; (4) Modeling—Provide opportunities for teachers to observe effective practices for English learners and for mentors and coaches to demonstrate lessons; (5) Practice—Provide support and guidance through effective teaching processes; (6) Feedback and in-class coaching—Provide peers, coaches, and mentors immediate feedback on lesson demonstration; (7) Independent application—provide teachers opportunities to assess their instruction and analysis of lesson planning and teaching in collaborative groups with colleagues; teachers refine, adjust, relearn, and reteach lesson components, if needed; (8) Program coherence—Articulate beneficial policy and program features and best practices as a consistent message. Successful application of these professional development elements can result in having a cadre of EFL teachers who have the knowledge and disposition to be effective when teaching EFL. Gay (2000) and Nieto (2004) further support five effective educator practices to be considered when working with English Foreign Language learning students and their families: (1) Learn about and demonstrate knowledge about the English learning communities you serve in authentic ways; (2) View the community as an asset, utilizing its full complement of resources to access opportunities for success; (3) Know how other educators and the school as a whole react to the communities you serve; (4) Continuously learn how to be effective in serving your multiple diverse communities;

(5) Lead your school and its grade levels and departments by modeling and promoting culturally responsive ways to meet the educational needs of the communities you serve.

The eight elements espoused by Echevarria and Short (2010) coupled with the above five educator practices by Gay (2000) and Nieto (2004) can support both EFL teachers and general education teachers in meeting the needs of all students.

Language Teaching-Teaching by Principles

This researcher observed 15 classrooms where EFL was taught and validated field notes through interviews with PNIEB EFL teachers and with school site principals. Brown's (2001) "principled language teaching approaches" was used as a framework to scaffold the observations, as PNIEB EFL teachers received language training approaches and methods as part off their own EFL staff development. Brown provides twelve research-based principles to ground communicatively oriented EFL classroom practices. These include (1) *automaticity*: "Efficient second language learning involves a timely movement of the control of a few language forms into the automatic processing of a relatively unlimited number of language forms" (p. 56); (2) *meaningful learning*: "Meaningful leaning will lead toward better long-term retention than rote learning" (p. 57); By using activities in class that target and incorporate students' needs, personal interests, and goals; (3) *the anticipation of reward*: "Human beings are universally driven to act, or 'behave,' by the anticipation of some sort of reward" (p. 58); (4) *intrinsic motivation*: "The most powerful rewards are those that are intrinsically motivated within the learner" (p. 59); (5) *strategic investment*: "Successful mastery of the second language will be due to a large extent to a learner's own personal 'investment' of time, effort, and attention to the second language in the form of an individualized battery of strategies for comprehending and producing the language" (p. 60); (6) *language ego*: "As human beings learn to use a second language, they also develop a new mode of thinking, feeling, and acting—a second identity" (p. 61); (7) *self-confidence*: "Learners' belief that they indeed are fully capable of accomplishing a task is at least partially a factor in their eventual success in attaining the task" (p. 62); (8) *risk-taking*: "Successful language learners, in their realistic appraisal of themselves as vulnerable beings yet capable of accomplishing tasks, must be willing to become 'gamblers' in the game of language, to attempt to produce and to interpret language that is a bit beyond their absolute certainty" (p. 63); (9) *the language-culture connection*: "Whenever you teach a language, you also teach a complex system of cultural customs, values, and ways of thinking, feeling, and acting" (p. 64); (10) *the native language effect*: "The native language of learners exerts a strong influence on the acquisition of the target language system. While that native system will exercise both facilitating and interfering effects on the production and comprehension of the new language, the interfering effects are likely to be the most salient" (p. 66); (11) *interlanguage*: "Second language learners tend to go through a systematic or quasi-systematic developmental process as they progress to full competence in the target language. Successful inter-language development is partially a result of utilizing feedback from others" (p. 67); and (12) *communicative competence*: "Given that communicative competence is the goal of a language classroom, instruction needs to point toward all its components: organizational, pragmatic, strategic, and psychomotor. Communicative goals are best achieved by giving the attention to language use and not just usage, to fluency and not just accuracy, to authentic language and contexts, and to students' eventual need to apply classroom learning to previously unrehearsed contexts in the real world" (p. 69). These twelve principles were a key focus, particularly while PNIEB EFL teachers taught actual lessons with their students.

In the present study a description of the qualitative methodology utilized in the collection and analysis of the data, the main results of the study, as well as future recommendations on how to

best prepare EFL teachers in México and EFL teachers in general is reported, based on the analysis of the data.

Methodology

This research employed a pragmatic qualitative method research approach. This methodology was constructed to be qualitative, based on the definition that qualitative research aspires to achieve a deep understanding of knowledge of a social setting or phenomenon. "Pragmatic qualitative research focus is that of interpretation, which is a basic description of the issue under study. Interpretation is guided by the themes that emerge during data analysis. Interpretation happens when interconnections are noted" (Baden-Savin & Major- Howell, 2013 p. 458). Qualitative research is grounded in the idea that in order to achieve understanding, extensive time, engagement and observation is required in the field (Creswell, 2009). The "Qualitative researchers study things in their natural setting, attempt to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning the people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). The research focuses on an emic perspective or the views of the people and their perceptions, meanings and interpretations. The researcher is the primary instrument of data collection (Baden-Savin & Major- Howell, 2013). Therefore this author took triangulation into account as it was accomplished through the analysis of different data sources (classroom observations, interviews with PNIEB teachers, school site principals, supervisors, state coordinators, national administrators, university faculty, and PNIEB program documents and reports). An essential aspect of qualitative analysis is the search for patterns that unite previously isolated incidents. This search for patterns was undertaken to explore whether emotions, thoughts, behaviors or observations occur with some regularity in order to develop initial themes (Creswell, 2009; Strauss & Corbin 1998).

Sample and Data Collection

The current study is part of a larger three-year research project to monitor and evaluate the pilot PNIEB. The larger study encompassed site visits to 16 states with a total of 109 classroom observations and interviews with 178 EFL teachers, coordinators and directors. However, this study focuses on four states visited in 2011-12: México D.F., Querétaro, Aguascalientes, and Jalisco. These Mexican states were chosen to represent the diversity of contexts and situations in which the PNIEB program operates in English. This contextual diversity includes: geographical diversity; socioeconomic levels; states with and without a previous state English program; different levels of resources and organization.

The data collection was based on this researcher's written reflections of the PNIEB *Plan de Inglés Nacional en Educación Basica, Ciclo Tres* (National Education English Plan of Basic Education, Third Cycle) school site and classroom observations conducted between February 26-March 2, 2012. Schools visited were 16 PNIEB pilot preschool-10th grade schools from low, middle, and high income communities where English as a Foreign Language (EFL) was taught. Data is derived from 16 schools, 13 PNIEB itinerant EFL classroom teacher lesson observations, interviews with 20 PNIEB EFL teachers, 10 school site principals (*directores*), 9 teacher supervisors (*asesores pedagógicos*), 4 PNIEB State Coordinators (PNIEB *coordinadores estatales*), and from one meeting with the national director of PNIEB (*sub-secretario de educación pública*), a commentary from the superintendent of public instruction for Aguascalientes (*director de el Instituto de Educación de Aguascalientes*). In addition, interviews were conducted with 7 faculty members from the College of Education (*Departamento de Educación*) and from the Foreign Language Department (*Departamento de Lenguas*) from an institution of higher education located in Guadalajara, Jalisco, and PNIEB program documents.

Analysis of the data

To document the EFL teaching practices and locate them within the state and national macro-context, a methodology was devised that allowed the researcher to detect and analyze qualitatively the salient features of the program-level coordination and EFL classroom teaching strategies. Protocols were developed to guide the observations and interviews: one for analyzing the structure and operation of the PNIEB program, and one to observe in EFL classrooms. The focus during the classroom observations was to identify characteristics of effective EFL teaching strategies being implemented by PNIEB teachers. The American Council of Teachers of Foreign Languages (ACTFL, 2007) standards were used as a guide to see if teachers implemented effective EFL strategies, they included: a) Communication-stresses the use of language for communication in real life situation; b) Cultures-experiencing other cultures as an appreciation for both language and culture; c) Connections-language must be connected and integrated with other content subjects; d) Comparisons- students are encouraged to compare and contrast languages and cultures; e) Communities-extending learning experiences from the world language classroom to the home emphasizing a global community.

These EFL strategies included how instruction and curriculum was guided and preplanned, if PNIEB EFL teachers held high expectations of students, how students were oriented to EFL lessons, and if instruction was clear and focused. Characteristics include how the learning progress was monitored, re-teaching of the subject, how classroom time was used for learning, if classroom routines were efficient, if instructional groups were formed to support language development, high standards for classroom behaviors, positive interactions between teachers and students, and incentives and rewards for students to promote excellence (Blum, 1984; California Department of Education, 2010).

The qualitative data were analyzed using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) method of unitizing and categorizing components. The coded sections of the data were placed into their respective "provisional categories" using a constant comparative analysis where coding categories emerge from the data (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The process is intended to inductively discover the "latent content" of the reflections made by PNIEB participants. Latent content analysis is defined as the "...process of identifying, coding, and categorizing the primary patterns in the data" (Mayan, 2009, p.94).

Results of the Study

The qualitative analytic process of the interviews, classroom observations, and faculty discussions were based on the research questions. Four reoccurring themes emerged: (1) genuine instructional practices; (2) level of English proficiency and confidence; (3) classroom and teacher character that supports teaching; (4) the training of EFL teachers-support and collaboration.

Genuine instructional practices

Genuine instructional practices refers to EFL teaching methods and practices utilized by PNIEB EFL teachers who believed that they met their learning outcomes when teaching English. The genuine instructional practices implemented by the PNIEB EFL teachers' reinforced Brown's 12 language-teaching principles learned in the professional development training received in Mexico City, as well as ACTFL's five standards in foreign language education. EFL teachers in the *pre-escolar* and primary grades implemented more activity and hands-on type lessons that supported language development (Brown, 2001, principle #3). In one preschool classroom the PNIEB EFL teacher implemented effective EFL strategies. For example, she utilized gestures, pointed at pictures, provided intermittent Spanish language support, and taped charts on the

white board. In addition, the regular classroom teacher helped the EFL PNIEB teacher and she, too, taught in English (Brown principles #5 and #6). In another fourth grade classroom the PNIEB EFL teacher taught the months of the year/weather as an assessment. The PNIEB EFL teacher utilized a large picture book that had the different months of the year, pointed at different pictures representing the seasons and asked the students to repeat the vocabulary orally. The students also repeated the assignment orally in English while the PNIEB EFL teacher modeled from the book, monitored the students while working independently and provided positive verbal statements such as "very good."

Various media, such as CD's and Promethean boards were used and integrated into the curriculum by some PNIEB EFL teachers to focus on possible issues or difficulties EFL learners faced in learning specific content (Brown's principle #2). For example, the same fourth grade PNIEB EFL teacher utilized a CD player so the students could listen to English. The students sang the "days of the week" and "months of the year" song. This consistent and constant use of English in verbal and oral modalities reinforced the learners' language development and proved to be an authentic and genuine method of teaching EFL. In another classroom observation a Promethean board was used to stimulate students interest in learning EFL. The fifth grade PNIEB EFL teacher's lesson was to initiate actions. She began the lesson by asking pupils to imitate some animal physical action movements. While she modeled actions herself, students followed along. Then, the PNIEB EFL teacher showed students flash cards of actions that they needed to identify. The pupils raised their hands in order to be recognized. This group seemed to have a working understanding of the English language. At times the PNIEB EFL teacher clarified the actions when pupils did not know them or she provided verbal cues. The PNIEB EFL teacher transitioned into teaching about past tense by asking, "Do you remember we were studying verbs?" She continued by writing a two-column graphic organizer on the white board with simple and past forms of the verbs "very good" and "climbed." This PNIEB EFL teacher integrated technology as she utilized a video in English to support a lesson on dinosaurs. After viewing the video, she asked students to name a dinosaur. Students responded when recognizing the words they had written in past tense – very good & climbed. The teacher continued to show the video on dinosaurs and asked students if they could listen to specific dinosaur sounds. This teaching method helped students develop an "ear" for listening to various sounds, which can be useful in language learning. It also allowed students to understand how past tense words are used in context.

Level of English proficiency and confidence

Level of English proficiency and confidence refers to how the PNIEB EFL teacher reflects language proficiency confidence of oneself, sometimes without realizing. As might be expected, there is a clear, positive, direct relationship between the level of a teacher's English proficiency and his/her confidence in teaching EFL. Based on the researchers' observations, it is clear that language proficiency PNIEB EFL teachers with higher levels of proficiency in English seemed to have more confidence in themselves and in teaching their classes. For example, PNIEB EFL teachers who had shared that they had lived in English speaking countries or near international borders exhibited higher levels of English proficiency and therefore spent a greater amount of class time teaching in English. In one Mexican state where EFL had been taught in elementary schools for many years, through the support of the state government and the local university having an education TEFL degree program, it was evident that the teachers' EFL fluency levels were more advanced. These PNIEB EFL teachers seemed more motivated and paid less attention to their pronunciation or language proficiency and more attention to their learners' needs. In these classroom visits most of Brown's twelve language-teaching principles were observed in action. Also these PNIEB EFL teachers with higher levels of language proficiency seemed to

incorporate more social practices of language into their methodologies. For example, these PNIEB EFL teachers taught and maintained the lessons in English and responded in English when students asked questions. Some Spanish was used at times to clarify a word or concept, but PNIEB EFL teachers utilized short Spanish responses to maintain the flow of English.

The depth in the lessons taught varied based on PNIEB EFL teacher's English language proficiency. In a 3rd year preschool lesson, a PNIEB EFL teacher whose English Language proficiency was at the advanced level based her lesson on the enunciation and correct use of English grammar. There were 25 pupils in the class and the PNIEB EFL teacher spoke only in English while teaching the lesson. The topic of the EFL lesson was "days of the week". She had visuals and constantly pointed at the materials being utilized. Her grammar was well articulated and her voice had clear enunciation. She utilized a CD player to introduce the "good morning" song. Using music helped learners drop inhibitions and pronounce various English words. At times the pupils spoke or asked questions in Spanish, but the teacher responded in English demonstrating the confidence and competency to code switch. The materials utilized were in English and utilized *Total Physical Response* EFL method while teaching to the entire class. Throughout the lesson she provided verbal and physical praise "very good-well done." The teaching practices support Brown's language teaching principles # 3, #5, #6, #7, #10 #11 and #12.

The same PNIEB EFL teacher continued a lesson by introducing vocabulary on identifying parts of the body by having the students construct a puppet. This is a hands-on lesson that models language development ("paste eyes, mouth, ears, and hair") by using applied actions to support the vocabulary they were learning. She also utilized students as "teacher helpers." While the pupils were working independently she monitored and asked questions such as, "What is this?" (nose, ears, eyes, etc.,) (I too asked students questions in English to determine if they knew the parts of the body). All of her questions were asked in English as well as her responses to students. Being able to respond to student queries in English demonstrated the depth of the teacher's command of the English language. She was comfortable, confident, and self-assured using the English language and striving for her students to have this same level of proficiency.

In a secondary school classroom observed, the PNIEB EFL teacher taught a lesson on parts of body and their function by playing a game of jeopardy. She modeled many procedures during the lesson and utilized visuals. The PNIEB EFL teacher taught the lesson and spoke only in English and maintained the English language for the duration of the lesson. Many positive praise statements and gestures were provided to the pupils such as, "great job." The students would all "Clap!" to indicate support for each other. For being in their first year of ESL (according to the *directora* or school principal), the students spoke and understood the lesson very well. In closing the lesson student presenters were selected to show their final projects in teams of two. The oral presentation by students' supports the ACTFL standard-*Communication*.

PNIEB EFL Teachers with a lower level of English proficiency seemed to be more structured in their teaching methods and engaged student less in language development as well as classroom activities. An example of a lesson from a teacher with a lower level of English proficiency was in a secondary school classroom where the PNIEB EFL teacher taught a lesson on household items (living room, dinning room, the kitchen, appliances, furniture, etc.). She wrote a list of words on the whiteboard in both Spanish and English and the pupils were to copy the words. She introduced the lesson by reading the words from the whiteboard (sofa, bed, television, etc.,) and repeated the words three times and had the students repeat the words orally. She also called on different pupils to pronounce items from the board in order to assess the pupils (if student did not pronounce correctly the teacher repeated it). The classroom was bare and there were no

visuals or a rich print environment. Classroom textbooks and workbooks on students' desks were seen by the researchers, but not used in this lesson. This PNIEB EFL teacher's lesson was very didactic and traditional. She introduced the lesson, had the students' copy from the whiteboard, asked a few questions, students memorized and verbally responded when called upon. This rote approach to language learning is evident when teachers lack the confidence or depth of language knowledge to respond freely to student queries or go beyond the planned lessons' vocabulary. Being an EFL teacher is difficult at times, particularly for new PNIEB EFL teachers as they not only have to learn the job they are hired to do but also learn how to do the job as some aspects of teaching are learned while teaching (similar to "on the job training") (Ambrocio, 2011). Ramírez-Romero, Pamplón-Irigoyen, and Cota-Grijalva (2012) report similar findings in their national study of problems in the teaching of English in primary Mexican public schools where many teachers were observed teaching through rote memorization and translation, teaching isolated vocabulary, non-contextual, and limited socio-cultural practices were implemented. Davies (2009) and Dietrich (2007) also report that the conditions in schools contribute to the failures of Mexican English language teaching as the majority of students enrolled are of low-socio-economic status, the classroom numbers are high, the classroom facilities for the most part are in poor condition, and many teachers are poorly trained, low motivation by both students and teachers and when English was taught many teachers used Spanish for the majority of the time.

Classroom environment and teacher character that supports teaching

This refers to how EFL teacher's personal character can use the classroom to create a visual and engaging classroom environment for learning. As might be expected, PNIEB EFL teachers who were assigned their own classroom seemed to create a more attractive and aesthetic level of education as compared to PNIEB EFL itinerant teachers who traveled from classroom to classroom teaching the EFL lessons'. The physical classroom environment and positive classroom atmosphere can be used as a teaching tool to develop the student's language. Nieto (2004) and Gay (2000) practice #2, which promotes seeing the community as an asset, utilizing its full complement of resources to access learning opportunities of success, as was evident at one low government resource elementary school visited where the families and community were very much involved in school activities. At this elementary school there was a hospital adjacent to the school and therefore many of the parents were professional employees. This meant that more community monetary support was evident as the entire school had just been repainted and also refurbished. According to the school principal, some of the more affluent students in the area have left private bilingual schools to enroll at this school. The EFL students at this school also provided an end of year presentation of English learning outcomes to the families. In other schools, the environment itself supported language development as bulletin boards provided talking points and classroom props were used to stimulate conversational speaking. PNIEB EFL Teachers used posters, flip charts, bulletin boards, and technology as tools for teaching EFL. For example, technology was used in one classroom by teaching an EFL lesson through the use of a Promethean board. The PNIEB EFL teacher engaged the students in learning vocabulary through a cartoon-based character (dinosaur) by showing video clips of short stories.

Most PNIEB EFL teachers demonstrated a caring attitude towards their students. Many provided verbal and physical positive praise when teaching lessons and acknowledged the students while teaching (Brown's principle #6). Based on classrooms observed for the most part the PNIEB EFL teachers implemented good classroom management strategies therefore resulting in students being attentive and well behaved. Three schools provided an end of year assembly where students presented in English, based on the learning outcomes of the year.

Training of EFL teachers-support and collaboration

The Training of EFL teachers-Support and Collaboration-refers to the EFL training received by PNIEB EFL teachers as well as university supervisors (*asesores*) and the support that was reported by each entity (PNIEB EFL teachers, university supervisor, faculty staff and trainers). There is wide support for the PNIEB program. It was evident at all levels, from teachers and parents to the administrators and the community. The level of support varied according to the school principal, school, and state. Schools where the principal was very supportive and directly involved in the PNIEB program seemed to emulate a team approach as espoused by Nieto (2004) and Gay (2000), practice #3. In some states, consultants met twice a week to have their own training but this practice was not consistent. Evaluation forms for teachers of English in one state were comprehensive and focused on PNIEB requirements of that state. Some states allowed teachers to take online training workshops paid for by the *Secretaria de Educación Pública (SEP)* supporting Echevarria and Short's (2010) effective staff development practices- 5th element of *Providing Support*.

The level of support is evident as all entities strongly believe that the number of EFL hours for student learning needs to be increased from 3 to 5 hours per week. A strong recommendation by many family members as well as from school personnel is that a need exists to include EFL as a subject in the students report card and that a grade be assigned. Currently, there is no set indicator as to how the pupils are doing in EFL as a subject. Proponents believe that this will increase recognition of EFL teachers as professionals and provide students an incentive to attempt to do much better academically in EFL as a subject. Therefore supporting Brown's language teaching principles #2, #3, #4 #7, and #8 as well as ACTFL Standard-*Connections and Communities*.

Teacher competency in both English proficiency and type of training or academic degrees held varied, as many of the PNIEB EFL teachers held non-education degrees. Some PNIEB EFL teachers were recruited from *Escuelas Normales* (teacher training colleges) while others were university graduates. The differences in state coordination capacity seemed to have an impact on the efficacy of the program. Based on PNIEB trainers, most teachers attended the SEP training but some teachers, who traveled from far, were exhausted by the intensity of the first and second day sessions which were from early morning to late evening (8 a.m. to 9 p.m.).

Teachers followed SEP lesson plans as they were submitted to the principal, however, in many instances the principal did not speak, read, or write English, therefore accountability varied from school to school. The *asesores* did review lesson plans and some were e-mailed electronically. In some cases PNIEB EFL teachers meet with *asesores* monthly to receive staff development on topics such as classroom management and EFL teaching methods. In some states *asesores* also met bi-weekly for their own training, but the pattern was not consistent. PNIEB EFL teachers teaching in outskirt schools were given more work hours. The pay for this extra work was only 60.00-75.00 Mexican *pesos* per hour (USD \$5.00-7.00) yet the minimum paid by other private bilingual schools is 300.00 *pesos*/hour. This pay disparity places the PNIEB EFL teachers at an economic disadvantage

When interviewed, university education faculty commented that having different book publishing textbooks is a challenge and that there is no consistency in the curriculum from school to school, within a school itself or by grade level and in some cases from state to state. Therefore validating the same concerns that PNIEB state directors and coordinators as well as schools site principals had regarding curricular issues. Many new EFL teachers are trained every-year as there is a large turnover or new ones being hired because of the expansion of the PNIEB

program. Therefore education faculty trainers felt they could not go in depth in the training discussions, as there was a need to provide more skills based lessons.

EFL teachers participated in a 2-day training. There were a total of 5 states that participated for two days for a total of 10 days of training given. 17 groups had somewhere between 300-500 teachers from different states, 23 facilitators trained 30 teachers per group. The Facilitators were grouped by *ciclos* (cycles). Again education faculty trainers expressed concern for the long drive/ride in the bus for some PNIEB EFL teachers and the long day of training (day 1 from 8-7 p.m. and day 2 from 8-6 p.m.).

All *ciclo* trainings were in English and the PNIEB EFL teachers liked the trainings based on the EFL teacher evaluations. The text materials were both in English and Spanish. PNIEB EFL teachers liked meeting new teachers and working in different levels therefore there was much community building as a result of the training. A trainer of trainers model was followed as teachers who received the training in Mexico City then trained others. The challenge being new teachers cannot train other teachers, as they did not know about the PNIEB program as some only trained for 4 hours instead of 18 hrs. Other positive results as part of the training included the opportunity for PNIEB EFL teachers to share their experiences of learning and teaching and that all of the materials of the training can be accessed on a PNIEB website.

PNIEB EFL teacher evaluation forms reviewed in one state were comprehensive and addressed the state's PNIEB requirements. Other states provided staff development by allowing PNIEB EFL teachers to take on-line courses for professional development with the courses being paid for by the SEP. EFL teachers and school site principals, for the most part, felt that they were receiving supervision and support from their *asesores* with regards to teaching and classroom management strategies. In some cases the ratio is one supervisor to sixty PNIEB EFL teachers. In interviewing one *asesor* who accompanied the researchers, he indicated that he supervises 80 PNIEB EFL teachers and therefore concentrates his observations with those who need help the most. A second *asesor* in a separate state shared similar concerns; he supervises 30 PNIEB EFL teachers but has had an increase of 30 more as of this year. He spends less time observing and supporting all of the PNIEB EFL teachers and spends more time with those who have greater needs. Therefore supporting Echevarria and Short's (2010) effective staff development element #6-Feedback.

The above findings parallel and compliment the research study as it supports Ramírez-Romero, Pamplón-Irigoyen, and Cota-Grijalva (2012) findings of their national study of 96 schools with an approximate participation of 12 schools per state throughout México. They report similar findings in their national study of problems in the teaching of English in primary public schools in México, in both state schools using the *Programa Estatal de Inglés* (PEI) and in federal schools using PNIEB, through the use of school visits, classroom observations and interviews with teachers, students, families, school principals and both state and federal government officials. They reported that due to the lack of knowledge of EFL programs the public and educators are unaware of its purpose, the levels of acceptance and attitudes vary, teaching methodologies, financing, infrastructure, relationship with school principals and parents as well as the variation of teacher training from state to state. Although principals, teachers, and families reported the importance of studying English by students at the primary level, they felt uneasy as they thought it took time away from other core subjects, that there is inadequate planning, particularly in state schools, that the programs were only a government experiment and that the future of both the state and federal program was unsecure. The respondents of the study, particularly teachers, felt that there is not a formal curriculum for the teaching of EFL besides the use of textbooks provided by publishing companies. Many also felt that teaching EFL for 3-5

hours is inadequate, that EFL is not integrated within the other core subjects and that a scope and sequence from kinder to the primary grades and on into high school is not available. There is also a perception that since "English" as subject does not appear in the students' report card there is less emphasis in studying it by the students. The researchers also report that with regards to EFL teachers there are not enough teachers to meet the national demand. There are also problems in the retention and rotation of teachers in the morning or afternoon sessions, as well as a transfer from the public schools to private schools because of support, more pay and consistent pay. There is minimal training that is provided to teachers in the use of materials, many have minimal experience teaching or with degrees in EFL as a content area. Most of the training provided is by British and United States personnel or from the textbook companies, therefore a lack of social and cultural practices were minimally observed, as well as limited student engagement and mostly textbook based assessments were given. The books also lacked Mexican local and regional cultural traditions and customs. They also found that many schools lacked resources or in some cases were non-existent or the materials/textbooks were in bad conditions, the distribution of the materials and textbooks were also inconsistent. Besides the many problems and challenges found there were also significant advances in the infrastructure, the attitude towards English classes, in both English proficiency as well as the professionalism by teachers, teaching practices, and the motivation of all of the participants, including the teachers in this national study.

Discussion and Recommendations

The research findings from this study point to a series of concrete recommendations that could enhance the skills of PNIEB EFL teachers as well as improve the program effectiveness. The findings are further validated by recent research studies in language teaching and learning in México. We know that the teaching of English in México has increased throughout the decades as the demand for more language courses and teachers has increased. We can now find both undergraduate and graduate teacher preparation programs in EFL in both public and private Mexican institutions of higher education. One can also find various research studies in English language teaching and learning in México. One recent publication that further supports and validates the findings of this research study besides previous studies cited in this paper is found in the book entitled *Research in English Language Teaching-Mexican Perspectives* (2012) edited by Ruth Roux Alberto Mora Vásquez and Nelly Paulina Trejo Guzmán. In particular, a chapter written by José Luis Ramírez-Romero and Elva Nora Pamplón Irigoyen where they along with seventy researchers from twenty-one higher education institutions conducted an extensive state of knowledge review in English language teaching and learning in México from 2000 to 2007. They report on fifty studies and selected 548 products related to students, teachers, and teaching methods. Many of the findings in different research studies and reported by these researchers are similar to the findings of this PNIEB research study. Brief findings on Mexican students report that students who received more hours of language instruction, as well as consistent and continuity in all levels attained higher language proficiency (Espinoza, 2007). Further, factors that support language learning include the integration of students' cultural identities, how the target language is contextualized within the students' cultural framework (Gutierrez, 2005). Findings on language teachers reported that the working conditions as well as the level of preparation and educational background were the most important factors. Researchers reported the lack of institutional support, frequent rotation of foreign language personnel, unwritten academic hiring criteria were also lacking. Other problems include the lack and fluency of language and pedagogical knowledge held by language teachers as well as the type of training received was minimal as needed to be effective language teachers. With regard to activities, strategies and teaching methods, researchers reported that the use of cognitive learning strategies and teaching techniques enhances learning. Therefore rote memorization and

didactic teaching cannot be the only methods used as research supports that collaborative methods and cooperative groups tend to increase communicative performance (Martinez-Cantu, 2004). The findings in secondary schools were also similar to the findings of this research study as the studies reported that teachers for the most part use strict teaching methods, most of the time spent on disciplining the class, with a focus on grammar correction versus creative and dynamic teaching with the integration of multiple teaching methodologies (García, 2005). This research study reported the use of technology in the classroom as a medium for teaching language and that many students were engaged in the activities. Dominguez (2002) and García García (2002) had similar findings. The use of technology and multimedia (DVD's, video, music, computers, etc.) engages students and increases the four language domains (speaking, reading, writing and comprehension). Language is then seen as a system and not in isolation where just vocabulary and grammar is taught as a memorization approach. Unfortunately many times the lack of teacher training on how to use and integrate technology in language teaching was lacking. Last, just as this study reported the use of textbooks is the method most used and in many occasions the book distribution as well as their conditions did not fare well. Ramírez-Romero (2009) and Ramírez-Romero, Pamplón-Irigoyen (2012) sum up the above studies best by stating:

Future research should include a wider range of research methods and instruments that assure stronger designs and new epistemological perspectives. A fundamental aspect to take into account is that to be able to understand and address many issues in foreign language teaching, we need to reflect more deeply and extensively on the socio-cultural characteristics and needs of our Mexican students and contexts and their connection to language learning processes objectives, and results. (p. 57)

With the above research studies in mind, I provide the following recommendations that could enhance the language instruction of PNIEB EFL teachers as well as program effectiveness:

1. Classroom environment that supports teaching enhances EFL learning

There is a need to provide an instructional materials cart to facilitate the teacher's physical movement from one classroom to the next. For those teachers who do not have their own classrooms, a cart would allow the teacher to carry visuals, hands-on materials, and media with him/her to each lesson. The use of these teaching materials stimulates learner's application of the English language. In addition, textbooks need to be standardized in each classroom environment. With regard to EFL student textbooks, the PNIEB State Directors and Coordinators as well as school site principals felt that the pupil textbooks are managed at the Federal level. However, there are eleven different publishing companies (*Editoriales*) that provide different books, even in the same grade levels, therefore there is no continuity in the preparation, lesson planning, or implementation by PNIEB EFL teachers. Therefore consistency was not apparent, even within the same school and grade level different textbooks were used. Sometimes PNIEB EFL teachers used their own material, so their classroom did not follow state PNIEB curriculum requirements. Therefore, rotation by PNIEB EFL teachers from classroom to classroom limits the use of materials a PNIEB EFL teacher can carry and therefore does not provide students with a constant rich print environment that supports English language development. A cart to carry the materials might be useful as well as a space to store the EFL materials. The need for an assigned classroom space as well as a need to designate an "English corner" in classrooms for itinerant PNIEB EFL teachers would assist in lesson reinforcement and language development (vocabulary, word wall, pictures representing vocabulary).

2. Training of EFL, support and collaboration

The second recommendation is to lower the ratio of student teachers per *asesores*. The ratio of *asesores* is too high in some states therefore limiting the number of observations and amount of

support that can be provided to the PNIEB EFL teachers. In monitoring and observing classrooms, it was evident that some PNIEB EFL teachers and students did, not consistently use PNIEB teacher book manuals, workbooks, and materials. In reviewing classroom student workbooks many page assignments were left blank. If the *asesor* to PNIEB EFL teacher ratio were lowered, then closer supervision of PNIEB EFL teachers could facilitate more effective EFL teachers' practices in the use of materials and textbooks, and most importantly in the delivery of effective EFL language teaching strategies.

3. PNIEB Program improvements

The research findings recommended programmatic improvement in five areas.

A. Wages and benefits

The primary recommendation by the PNIEB state administration is to increase the pay of their PNIEB EFL teachers if high quality teachers are to be recruited. Low salaries, together with the lack of benefits and full-time, stable employment contribute to a high turnover rate amongst PNIEB teachers.

B. Academic Status of EFL

Currently, English does not appear on the student report cards, so the states have requested that English be added. This would give equal weight to EFL and legitimize it as a subject and would be taken seriously by principals, teachers, families, and students.

C. Peer Support

A peer observation model among PNIEB EFL teachers would assist to give them the opportunity to observe each other and those with less experience can learn from more experienced EFL teachers, particularly in the case of for secondary teachers.

D. Regional Support

The transition from the SEP training was not very evident in the classrooms we visited. The recommendations from education faculty, faculty evaluators, statistician and PNIEB program coordinators were consistent. They believe that regional meetings and trainings would be more effective than having everyone meet in Mexico City. It was also communicated that the SEP received parts of the training manuals but that university evaluators did not receive feedback in a timely manner to make the needed changes.

E. Building capacity

The integration of EFL instructional practices was evident but social practices and concepts that were taught in PNIEB EFL training for the most part was not evident in the teaching practice in the classrooms observed. New groups of teachers are employed and participate each year therefore less depth in teaching EFL concepts and methods by university trainers makes it difficult to be consistent. Many participants are not certified EFL teachers as the degrees attained vary. PNIEB EFL teachers who were trained in TEFL or who were graduates of an education program for the most part were much more effective. In order to build capacity at each site, a TEFL certificate should be required of teachers that are to be employed as a PNIEB EFL teacher.

Conclusion

According to Ramírez-Romero (2009) one can say that the research field in the teaching of EFL in México as well as other research in education is at the "initial" stage. Therefore as demonstrated in the findings section, including the recommendations given as a result of the data analysis, it is evident that México's bold initiative to become a multilingual nation by

integrating English throughout P-9 public schooling will have implications both in the implementation of the law as well as the recruitment, retention, and training needed by EFL teachers to effectively graduate multilingual students from México's public school system. The qualitative findings reported in this study centered around the analytic process of the interviews, classroom observations, and faculty discussions that were based on the research questions. The results reported four reoccurring themes that emerged: (1) genuine instructional practices; (2) level of English proficiency and confidence; (3) classroom and teacher character that supports teaching; (4) the training of EFL teachers-support and collaboration. Sub themes were also reported that emerged from the general themes that pointed to a series of concrete recommendations that enhances program effectiveness and language teaching: *classroom environment that supports teaching enhances EFL learning, training of EFL teachers and support and collaboration, PNIEB programmatic improvements, wages and benefits, academic status of EFL, providing peer support as well as regional support, and building capacity.*

With the above in mind it is this authors hope that children of Mexico will receive the best EFL teaching methodology that is grounded in the most effective principles of language learning and teaching. Ideally, EFL teachers should not bring prepackaged-and possibly ineffective methods in teaching EFL but be directly responsive to their students' needs (Brown, 2008), resulting in a corps of EFL teachers who are trained and will also have the skills to understand science-research, theory-philosophy, values-based and art-craft conceptions that will assist in transforming Mexico and its children into proficient bi- or multilingual and bicultural citizens (Richards, 2008). The ultimate goal is to produce educators who are culturally proficient practitioner-researchers in linguistically and culturally diverse environments and to nurture our students to become people of good character, capable of love and work, educated in good schools that are caring, civil, and challenging (Quezada, Lindsey & Lindsey, 2012; Quezada & De Roche, 2008). For we know that for the most part teachers are the key to educational change and school improvement (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992).

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