

## ENGLISH TEACHING IN MEXICO: AN OVERVIEW \*

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Kindergarten and Elementary Levels

English at kindergarten and elementary levels is offered only in private schools. There are 725,114 students enrolled at this level in private schools and more than half of them study English.

There is at present no official Secretaría de Educación Pública syllabus for English teaching at the elementary level. However, the Consejo Nacional Técnico de Educación of the Secretaría de Educación Pública is studying the possibility of drawing one up.

Some of the textbooks which are now in use at the elementary level are the English Around the World series, edited by Irene Anderson (1970 - 1973), Look, Listen and Learn by L.G. Alexander (1968- 1975) and Welcome To English by Thomas Lismore (1973).

Junior High School ( Enseñanza media, ciclo básico )

Approximately 80% of the students at the junior high school level are enrolled in English classes, that is, some 1,518,424 students, of a total enrolment of 1,898,053. The program provides for three hours a week of classroom instruction over three years, for a total of 180 hours. Classes often have 55 to 65 students. There are approximately 10,000 teachers of English at this level.

For 1976- 1977 there are 15 texts which are officially recognized for use in the first, second, and third years and which contain the materials and structure stipulated in the new syllabi. Five of the most widely used ones are: Inglés Objetivo Simplificado (1976) by Carmen Ochoa Fernández and María Luisa Garluino, Junior ACE, by Ethel Brinton et al (1975), English Alive, (1975), by Bertha Gómez Maqueo, My First English Book, I and II by Federico Hess et al (1975), and English Through Teamwork by Carlos Reyes Orozco.

\* This introductory overview is the first of a series of articles which will treat the different levels of English teaching in Mexico in detail.

The 1976-1977 syllabi were prepared by a group of educators: Sasana Astivia, Víctor Calderón, Rubén Campos, Elsi Ma. Castaldi, Bertha Gómez Maquco, Federico Hess, Barbara Hopkins, Librada Maciel de Garcia, Ma. de los Angeles Moreno Enríquez, Carlos Reyes Orozco, Esperanza Robles, Ma. Luisa Sigg, Martha L. Vargas, and Arturo Zentella.

The syllabi provide for 60 hours of classroom instruction during each of the three years, with a spiral approach, the same features turning up in different combinations or contexts at different stages and with different meanings. They are designed for use at both general and technical schools at this level. The handling of grammatical structure is emphasized rather than building vocabulary. Prof. Bertha Gómez Maquco's new book English Alive (1975), has some 340 words. Each of the other four texts mentioned above has approximately 800 words. The past tense is presented in these texts before the "simple present", since students find it easy to understand the past tense, and it is difficult for them to grasp the concept of the "simple present". "Do and does" are not presented until the end of the second year, although the use of "Who has...?" to ask questions is given at the end of the first year.

In Mexico City, Prof. Bertha Gomez Maquco is one of the best known coordinators for English classes in Mexico City at the junior high school level. (She is also the author of the three-volume textbook series entitled Inglés Cotidiano - Daily English (1969-1975) and, as mentioned above, of English Alive (1975).

Dr. Ma. de los Angeles Moreno Enríquez and her assistant, Mrs. Barbara Welles Hopkins, are the coordinators for the technical schools at junior high schools (ETIs: that is, Escuelas Tecnológicas Industriales).

Senior High School (Enseñanza media, ciclo superior: preparatorias, Colegios de Ciencias y Humanidades, Colegios de Bachilleres, Centros de Estudios Científicos y Tecnológicos.)

At this level less than half of the students take English: approximately 250,000 to 300,000 students of a total enrollment of 606,796. There are perhaps 3,000 teachers of English. The programs vary greatly as to the number of hours a week for one, two, or three years.

Some of the textbooks used are New Horizons in English by Lars Mellgren and Michael Walker; Active Context English by Ethel Brinton, et al; The Written Word and Inglés como Medio de Comunicación by Thomas E. Garst; New Concept English by L. C. Alexander and American English Course by Jack Morris, James P. Carter et al. Various published and unpublished materials are used at these technical schools (172 CECYT's).



The Instituto Politécnico Nacional has announced that it is studying the advisability of drawing up a syllabus in 1977 for English teaching at CECYT's.

It is expected that technical schools will continue to grow rapidly and prosper during the current six-year presidential regime, and that the emphasis will continue to be on English for Special Purposes focused on reading comprehension, rather than on a comprehensive English course aiming at inculcating the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Qualified teachers of English are urgently needed for technical schools. Newly established schools in the provinces have often been obliged to employ teachers who speak English, whether or not they have completed adequate teacher-training or had previous experience.

Once the resolutions approved at the plenary session of the Consejo Nacional Técnico de la Educación at Chetumal in August of 1974 have been implemented and the Reforma Educativa has worked its way through the secondary levels, it will be feasible and desirable to establish a unified program consisting of five or six years of English at the junior and senior high school levels (enseñanza media, ciclo básico y ciclo superior). At present students at the senior high school level begin anew to study English even though they have had three years in junior high school.

#### Higher Education

There are 72 institutions of higher learning in the Mexican Republic: of these, 45 are universities, 34 located in the provinces and 11 in México City. The total enrollment is 542,292.

At the level of higher education, English as a course of studies leading to a university degree now attracts a very small number of students. In recent years English for Special Purposes has become of paramount importance.

Because of the urgent need for English for Special Purposes, several universities have established language centers which function as service units but are not accredited within the university academic system; e.g. the Centro de Lenguas Extranjeras at UNAM and the Instituto Politécnico Nacional. Other universities depend on local language academies to do this work. Perhaps the most prestigious and long-established of these academies are the Institutos Mexicanos Norteamericanos de Relaciones Culturales and the Institutos Anglo-Mexicanos de Cultura, both nonprofit, cultural organizations. The former have 17 academies in Mexico, located as following: two in México City, two in Monterrey, and one in each of the following cities: Morelia, Guadalajara, Veracruz, Mérida, Hermosillo, Torreón, Saltillo, Chihuahua,

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Colima, Zacatecas, Mexicali, San Luis Potosí, Tampico. Of the *Institutos Anglo-Mexicanos*, two are located in Mexico City, one in Ciudad Satélite, one in Guadalajara, one in Puebla, and one may be established soon in Monterrey.

Ronald MacKay, a Scot researcher at the *Centro de Lenguas Extranjeras (CELE)* at UNAM until June of 1976, has perhaps contributed more than anyone else in Mexico to the field of English for Special Purposes, and has had a great deal of influence at UNAM and at the *Instituto Politécnico Nacional*. He has started a trend which will undoubtedly gather momentum. The current tendency is to provide English language materials specifically geared to a wide range of disciplines and the acquisition of skills: e. g., reading comprehension, listening comprehension, etc. Michael Long, a British researcher-teacher at the *Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana*, was also active in this field until he left Mexico in October of 1976. He edited the *English for Special Purposes* section of "EDUTECH," a publication of the *Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana*, which has proven to be a very useful journal to teachers in this field.

With regard to English textbooks in Science and Technology, British publishers have been active for many years, while American editors and publishers have entered this field more recently.

#### Teacher Preparation

It is estimated that not more than 10% of all of the teachers of English in Mexico at the junior and high school levels have taken methodology courses at one of the twenty *Escuelas Normales Superiores* which now exist. Not more than half of these twenty normal schools have methodology courses for English teaching, and perhaps not more than 100 teachers at *Normales Superiores* teach these courses in all of Mexico.

For the first time in 1975 the *Dirección General de Mejoramiento del Magisterio Mexicano* of the *Secretaría de Educación Pública* provided in-service training for English teachers at the junior high school level in the provinces. This program was not continued in 1976, but will be implemented in 1977, both in the provinces and in Mexico City.

During 1976 there was no official coordination among the twenty *Normales Superiores* (The *Escuelas Normales Superiores* are not members of the *Asociación Nacional de Universidades e Institutos de Enseñanza Superior, A.C., ANUIES*, the coordinating body for higher education.)

It is believed that an *Universidad Pedagógica* will be established in 1977. Such an institution, which might be a "decentralized" federal government agency, would serve as a coordinating body and would establish minimum

norms in English teacher preparation and act as an official accrediting organization.

### Conclusions

Many educators feel that the most urgent need in Mexico in the field of English teaching is adequate preparation of teachers, and that priority should be given to training teachers for the junior and senior high school levels.

In addition, many believe that it is essential that the English program for junior and senior high school secondary levels be integrated into a five or six year program, rather than continuing the present system of independent English courses at the junior and senior high school levels (*enseñanza media, ciclo básico y ciclo básico superior*).

Finally, it is also a widely held opinion that it would be highly desirable to continue preparing materials in the field of English for Special Purposes, for students at the university level or comparable advanced levels.



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