



Teachers' Perceptions Regarding the Implementation of the National English Program (PRONI) in EFL Classes in Mexico

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Abstract

This paper examines the thoughts and beliefs of three English language teachers regarding the National English Program's implementation in their individual teaching settings. The study was achieved in public schools in the Mexican state of Guanajuato's region of Irapuato. A qualitative approach was utilized, and questionnaires served as the primary data collection tool. Results thus far indicate that all teachers generally have poor perceptions about the implementation of the National English Program. In order to improve the English language program, it was concluded that the government and school authorities need to act forthwith.

Keywords: National English Program (PRONI), EFL classes, teachers' perceptions.

1. Introduction

This study's objective was set to investigate the actualities of EFL instruction in Guanajuato state's public schools and to provide information on the National English Program in Mexico's current state. This research asks teachers their opinions about the National English program (Programa Nacional de inglés), designed by The Secretariat of Public Education in Mexico (Secretaría de Educación Pública en México, SEP in Spanish). This with the intent of acquiring the most accurate information possible about what the realities of English classes are nowadays.

Members of Mexico's public education system should learn more about EFL teaching programs thanks to the results of this study. Additionally, it is anticipated that this study could help strengthen its programs, with the intention of putting members in a position to create and put forth a policy in a setting that meets the requirements of all students and teachers. Therefore, the research question that led to the current study was What are the perceptions of 3 English teachers regarding the implementation of the National English Program (PRONI)?

It was decided to use a qualitative approach and emphasize on a case study to generate an in-depth understanding of the participants opinions. A questionnaire was designed as the primary data collection tool in order to address this research issue. The study will be linked appropriately with pertinent literature. Relevant details on the context and participants are provided. Additionally, key findings, results, and conclusions will be given.

2. Literature review

2.1 *History of English classes in Mexico*

During its relatively short history, the teaching of English classes in Mexico has had successes, undergone various changes, and experienced setbacks and several problems. English has been present in the curricula of Mexican schools since 1960 (British Council, 2015), and has not received adequate attention to obtain better academic results.

This quick examination starts with the 1982 English teaching curriculum, since there was not a clearly defined program with its own goals, strategy, and technique prior to the introduction of this curriculum. Written language was regarded as superior to spoken language since its main goal was to ensure that students had formal understanding of the language. It also stipulated that students should be able to read literature in the language being studied (the target language). Students should acquire and memorize grammar rules and vocabulary in the target language in order to translate literary texts in order to accomplish this goal.

Consequently, The National Agreement for Basic Education Modernization, or NABEM or ANMEB by its Spanish acronym, saw the emergence of one of the first English study programs in 1993. This program was based on the communicative approach (communicative language teaching), and its main goal was to develop communicative competence, which is defined as the capacity to know “what, who, and how to say it in an appropriate manner, in any given situation” (SEP, 2007).

Then, in 2006, a brand-new English-teaching program appeared; this comprehensive shift was known as “Reforma Integral a la Educación Secundaria” (RIES). This program’s methodology was founded on the communicative task-based approach, which is carried out through projects (or “Project-Work”). These projects were created from a challenging situation so that the students could solve it under the guidance of the teacher while taking into account the unique traits of each group. The main goal of these projects was for the students to engage in language social practices and improve their ability to communicate anywhere.

Furthermore, in Mexico the national English program was initially introduced in 2009. The new initiative replaced numerous state initiatives and sought to develop a unified curriculum that provided English teaching to all children in public schools nationwide.

2.2 *EFL classes in Mexico in the present*

The Mexican educational system has always been divided into public or private schools, and in terms of prestige, the middle and upper echelons of Mexican society have always valued English highly, and those with significant financial resources can send their kids to private schools.

Regarding public education, the Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP) created the “English in Primary School Program” with the clear awareness that knowing English helps the Mexican economy compete in a worldwide market. However, for many years the official teaching of English in public institutions in Mexico was limited to middle and high school levels (Ramírez-Romero & Sayer, 2016). This lack of attention can also be noticed by examining how proficient Mexican citizens are in English. According to Education First’s (2018) English Proficiency Index, Mexico currently ranks #57 out of 88 countries in English proficiency levels (Millán Librado & Basurto Santos, 2020). Although marginally superior to what it was in the previous century, the quality of the Mexican educational system today is far from ideal. The average educational level of the Mexican population is 9.1, which equates to the final year of secondary school, according to the Mexican Ministry of Education (SEP). Children between the ages of 3 and 14 had a net

enrolment rate of 94.8%, a completion rate of 98.2%, a coverage rate of 96.6%, and an illiteracy rate of 5.7% in 2014–2015 (SEP, 2015).

Reyes Cruz, Murrieta Loyo, and Hernández Méndez (2012) claim that the issue is that there is not a defined plan of action. Even though they are in line with global trends, it is difficult to make them completely functional in a dynamic environment like Mexico.

2.3 National English Program (PRONI)

The Programa Nacional de inglés (PRONI) is a federal program belonging to the Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP) and coordinated in the state by the Coordination of Educational Strengthening Programs, whose main objective is to help ensure the quality of learning in basic education through the strengthening of the teaching and learning processes of a foreign language (English) in the public schools (SEPEN, 2017). PRONI's curricular design is aligned with national and international standards: the National Language Level Certification (CENNI) and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). In this sense, the Program continues to promote English proficiency in students from basic education (preschool, primary and secondary). The PRONI aims to help public education schools strengthen their technical and pedagogical capacities for teaching and learning the English language, so that the population of Mexico has access to an excellent, pertinent and relevant education. The program took effect on 1 January 2016 and according to the agreement, it would be implemented in 33,093 public primary schools, and the expansion phase would continue from the third grade of preschool to the sixth grade.

The objectives of PRONI are as follows:

- (a) To support public elementary school's students' and teachers' development of competencies, through the production and distribution of educational materials for teaching and learning English.
- (b) To strengthen the academic knowledge as well as the teaching skills, and the international academic certification of teachers.
- (c) To promote international certification of students in English language proficiency, on the basis of equality between students.
- (d) To support the states in the implementation of second language (English) courses in public elementary schools from preschool to sixth grade.

The new program's goals closely resemble those outlined in the Program for Strengthening Quality in Basic Education (PFCEB). Because of this, it appears that the new program is a hybrid created by fusing the Programa Nacional de inglés en Educación Básica (PNIEB) and PFCEB, without explicitly stating the connection to either of them or the motivation behind the development of a new program.

Following the implementation of the national programs, greater coverage was achieved in terms of the percentage of students served in almost every state. However, this growth has been uneven across states. A study by Ramrez-Romero (2015) indicated that while some states had had significant increase, others had only experienced very modest or no growth at all, illustrating the unevenness of this expansion throughout the nation.

2.4 English teacher profiles

One of the main challenges of the widespread implementation of the English programs in Mexico has been the teachers: their qualifications, types, and working conditions. The Ministry of Education calculated that expanding the program to every school and classroom in the primary

grades across the nation would require hiring more than 99,000 teachers, taking into account that the majority of primary school teachers do not speak English and that there is a persistent shortage of qualified English teachers in the majority of states (Ramírez-Romero & Sayer, 2016). Consequently, the ministry established guidelines for the qualifications of new teachers, requiring that state coordinators fulfill the minimum profile and give preference to candidates with the ideal profile. A B2 or higher English proficiency is required for the ideal profile.

Given the shortage of qualified English teachers and the features of the sociocultural curriculum, state administrators have recognized that one of the solutions is to implement teacher training programs. There are three main areas on which they have concentrated, as with any L2 English program: (1) English proficiency, particularly in oral language skills; (2) language teaching methodology, particularly with the new sociocultural approach; and (3) general pedagogical skills, particularly for classroom management, working with children with special needs, and other concerns of public schools.

3. Methodology

3.1 *Research questions*

The focus of this research is to examine the perceptions and realities of the teaching and learning of EFL in public schools in the state of Guanajuato. The objective is to shed a light on what is the current state of the National English Program in Mexico by asking EFL teachers their perceptions. Therefore, the research question is:

- ◆ What are the perceptions of 3 English teachers regarding the National English Program?

3.2 *Qualitative approach*

Creswell (2003) defines qualitative research as a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures. Data typically collected in the participant’s setting, in order to have access to unmodified information. Hancock et al. (2001) mentions that qualitative research is a disciplined, systematic approach to finding things out, using the method most appropriate to the question being asked.

My research design is aimed to be qualitative research. This because it was deemed the most appropriate because it provides the adequate methods that enable me to discover and understand teachers’ perceptions. Qualitative research tends to focus on how people or groups of people can have different ways of looking at reality, in this case, focusing on what their perceptions are towards the National English program.

3.3 *Case study*

A case study is a detailed study of a specific subject, such as a person, group, place, event, organization, or phenomenon. These studies are commonly used in social, educational, clinical, and business research. Case studies attempt to answer specific questions about occurrences and their explanations (Tuckman, 1999: 401). The case study approach is particularly useful to employ when there is a need to obtain an in-depth appreciation of an issue, event or phenomenon of interest, in its natural real-life context (Crowe et al., 2011). A case study research design usually involves qualitative methods, but quantitative methods are sometimes also used.

In order to obtain qualitative data, I decided to use a case study research design. This because by using this research design, it will provide a depth and concise selection of information from a select group's viewpoint. In this case, a group of EFL teachers from the state of Guanajuato. According to Yin (2009), case studies can be used to explain, describe or explore events or phenomena in the everyday contexts in which they occur. By using a qualitative approach, the data is collected in the participants context.

By using a case study research design, it will allow the project to be focused and manageable since I do not have the time or resources to do large-scale research. However, I have taken into account that case studies have a dependence on a single case, and it is incapable of providing a generalizing conclusion on the topic.

3.4 Contexts and participants

Three active English teachers from Irapuato, Guanajuato, were questioned for this research. All these EFL teachers are currently employed in secondary public schools and are working with the National English program. They have between 7 and 25 years of EFL teaching experience and have taught classes at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. They are familiar with the National English program, have sufficient experience with it, and have a clear idea of how it works. Their ages differ from 26, 31, and 42. Pseudonyms were assigned to participants in order to conceal their identities. The contestants are Jennifer, Yael, and Marianne.

3.5 Inquiry tools

A method of inquiry is an organized and systematic approach used by researchers and scholars for controlled investigations and experiments to efficiently obtain information, solve theoretical problems, and generate discoveries (Coccia, 2018). Methods of inquiry generally aim to obtain further knowledge so that researchers can have more information about their field and explain its nature and context.

However, there are many forms of gathering data, such as, interviews, questionnaires, observations, focus groups, surveys, and recordings. For this research, the main source for inquiry was semi-structured interview. A combination of a questionnaire and interview was applied to the teachers.

4. Results and discussion (Data analysis)

Three main themes surfaced after a preliminary review of the participants' responses. The teacher's had negative opinions towards implementing the National English program. Teachers have to adapt activities constantly. Teachers' opinions are not taken into consideration in the design of the program.

As mentioned in the literature review, the PRONI aims to help public education schools strengthen their technical and pedagogical capacities for teaching and learning the English language. However, Marianne mentioned that some primary schools she has applied for did not have an English curriculum. She mentions "most of the public schools I know does not or is very difficult to have English classes".

Teachers mention that just by having a program does not equal success. Marlene mentions "I've always said that, having a program makes your teaching a little guided but sometimes limited (because you need to complete every topic and exercise on the books)". Jennifer

adds by saying “English level (in the program) for secondary is very advanced for students”. Which led to the theme of having to adapt activities on a constant level.

When asked to point out any benefits and challenges about using the National English Program teachers mentioned to dislike it or felt indifferent about it. Marlene reiterated by saying “I think is the major benefit! Well, since there is one program instead of not having anything”. She emphasized on having the program as a guide, even if it is not well structured. She also mentioned “I used the program in kindergarten so, kids loved the classes. But I had to implement different activities in order students can do them”.

Jennifer said to really dislike the program because “I have to adapt activities and topics all the time, to the level of the students”. She mentioned that her attitude towards implementing the program brought her “concern and stress”. Which led to disliking the program.

Yael added by saying “the writing activities are good.” However, when asked her opinion she mentioned “(the program) is very ambitious and difficult”.

Overall, with their opinions taken into consideration, the program needs an in-depth analysis, to have a functional solution. With the help of the teachers, the program could include activities that are to the real level of the students and eliminate what is not useful. Since EFL teachers are the ones implementing this program, having their insight and opinions will have a positive impact.

Participants, when asked if there was a teacher training program offered by the government, to know how to implement the National English Program, mentioned there was one. Marlene mentioned the following “There is a training program. No matter what, whatever you use to learn something you don’t know, it’s useful”. With her response, it is perceived that it is better to have something to guide you as a teacher, than having nothing at all.

Jennifer compliments by mentioning “There is (a teacher training program). But the government should have one that has the reality of the level of students”. She mentions that the teacher training program could also, in addition to the PRONI, need an update.

Every issue that the participants identified above is a result of the government’s lack of support towards the English curriculum. Whatever the situation, though, a solution is required. Despite the fact that it is outside the purview of this paper. To evaluate the strategies that could be used to alter students’ views, more research is required.

5. Conclusions

The main goal of this small-scale study was to inform, describe, and increase knowledge about teachers’ impressions of many parts of the National English programs’ implementation. The teachers’ voices highlighted a number of influencing elements, such as: the programs, their teaching environments, teachers’ attitudes, benefits and challenges of using the National English Program, opinions, and training programs. The majority of teachers’ perceptions were negative. Teachers complained that the curricula they are required to follow did not seem to correspond to the actual language proficiency of their students. In addition, their responses revealed that there was no adequate teacher training program. This paper also included the perceptions teachers have on the benefits and challenges of implementing the program, which were mostly filled with challenges. It is concluded that the schools and state governments must take immediate action, according to the information at hand. If these problems are not fixed, they will only get worse, disrupting the system and preventing healthy system development while having a negative impact on English language teaching and learning.

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Appendix 1. Participant Questionnaire

Part 1	Part 2
Age?	From your point of view, as a teacher, what are the differences between public and private schools?
School and city you are currently teaching English?	Have you taught or are currently teaching English in a public or private school?
How many schools do you teach English?	From your experience, are there differences between public and private schools in terms of teaching English classes? If so, what are they?
Current grade of school you are teaching English?	What is your opinion about English classes in Mexico?
What previous grades have you taught English?	Do you use the National English program? Or what program do you use to teach English?
Years of experience teaching English?	What is your opinion about the using either of these programs?
Have you taken the TOEFL?	Is there any formal teacher training program to use the National English Program provided by the government? a) If there are, are they useful? b) If there isn't, should the government implement a program?
What would you say is your English proficiency level from these 6 levels? 1 – No Proficiency. At this lowest level, there is basically no knowledge of the language. 2 – Elementary Proficiency. 3 – Limited Working Proficiency. 4 – Professional Working Proficiency. 5 – Full Professional Proficiency. 6 – Native / Bilingual Proficiency.	Are teachers' opinions taken into consideration in the design of the National English program?
	What is the school's attitude about using this program?
	Are there any benefits with using the National English program? If so, what are they?
	Are there any challenges with using the National English program? If so, what are they?
	Overall, do you like or dislike the National English Program?
	Based on your experience, are there aspects that could be improved or implemented about the program? If so, what are they?
	In general, how do you perceive student's attitudes towards your English classes, regarding using this program?
	What do you perceive about other teachers attitudes towards implementing the National English Program?
	When using this program, do you adapt any activities or lessons? If so, how often?

