

# **The Teaching of English at Basic Education in the State of Hidalgo: A Case Study**

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The Secretary of Public Education in Mexico has made several attempts to implement the teaching of English in public primary schools. However, the programs that have been carried out have not reached the desired results. One possible reason for this could be the lack of educational and organized planning to guarantee the appropriateness and feasibility of a project (DíazBarriga F, 2003). The present study led by the University of Sonora is part of a longitudinal study initiated at the end of 2011. The main objective of this study was to understand the state of the art of English teaching in public schools at basic education level in Mexico. Researchers from the Universities of Baja California, Durango, Guanajuato, Jalisco, Tlaxcala, Guadalajara and Hidalgo participated in this project. In this chapter, information gathered from the program PNIEB in the state of Hidalgo in 2012 and recently updated data is reported. Classroom observations and interviews were carried out for collecting data; the state was divided into three main regions: Sierra Baja and Alta, Valle del Mezquital and Comarca Minera in order to obtain a representative sample of what occurs within the state. Amongst the most relevant findings, it should be mentioned that there is not a specific profile for hiring teachers, a lack of qualified teachers of English, a lack of in-service

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training, poor working conditions; and, last but not least, no appropriate methodology for teaching English to children.

## **Introduction**

### **Infancy and the Right to Education**

When we hear the word infancy, generally we tend to associate it with the best years of a human being's life, although for many this utopia is a long way from the reality that they face, because at this stage, many children suffer all types of child abuse, not to mention the external social factors that affect them, for example; extreme poverty, lack of educational opportunities, discrimination, unsettlement- including civil wars in their countries- amongst many others. Due to these factors in 1946 the United Nations General Assembly created UNICEF: the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund. Its main objective was to help and protect European children's rights after the Second World War, without distinction of race, nationality or religion above all other interests. In 1953, UNICEF became a permanent organization within the United Nations system, still with the same objective of helping children and protecting their rights. Over the years this program has undergone various changes and adjustments according to the problems that have emerged throughout the world. The name of the program has also changed and at present is known as the United Nations Children's Fund. It has however, kept the original initials in English: UNICEF.

UNICEF, governed by the established principles of the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, was approved by the United Nations Organization (UN) in 1959. The program's mission is to focus on five priority work areas: Child Survival and Development, Education and Gender Equality, Infancy and HIV/AIDS, Child Protection and the promotion of Policy and Partnerships. UNICEF is present in 193 countries and territories to help guarantee for children the right to survive and to develop from the early stages of infancy up to teenage years, by providing nourishment, clothes and medical attention to the children of the world. UN recognizes the right to education as one of the fundamental pillars to child development, and from which a better way of life can be achieved and

delinquency prevented. In the 28<sup>th</sup> article of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child<sup>2</sup>, it was established that “*States Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunities*”. As a consequence of the above and in response to the accelerated changes that have generated scientific and technological development worldwide, aside from the new ways of life that have been created since the emergence of globalisation, in Mexico the Secretary of Public Education known in Spanish as the SEP, has introduced fundamental changes to its educational policies. Under the framework of these demands, the SEP includes English teaching into the national program of basic education; the determining factor for the inclusion of English into the national curriculum is due to the status of the language and the recognition of English as an international language of communication in the global village, consequently, worldwide access to science and technology.

## **Antecedents**

### **Linguistic policies on English teaching in basic education**

The National Development Plan 2007-2012 (*Plan de Desarrollo Nacional*) and the objectives outlined within the Education Sectorial Plan 2007-2012 (*Plan Sectorial de Educación*), represent the basis for the educational public policy reform in Mexico. The main strategy proposes to carry out an integrated change to basic education by adopting an educational model based on the development of competences, paying special attention to addressing the entire basic education (pre-school, primary and secondary programmes). The objective of this new model is to ensure that the students are competent to face situations when they come in contact with different cultures and languages.

The introduction of the English language in public primary schools in Mexico began in some states in 1993, especially in the Northern part of the country; from 2009 the development of competences of an additional language was included into official SEP documents. This document describes the communicative competence

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<sup>2</sup>Adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 44/25, of 20 November 1989. Entry into force 2 September 1990, in accordance with Article 49.

that a student should achieve verbally as well as written; '*...should possess the basic tools to be able to communicate in an additional language*' (SEP, 2009). In 2011, the Study Plan was modified to incorporate the competence of permanent learning; to be able to develop this competence, the ability to read, along with the ability *to communicate in more than one language was required...* (SEP, 2011). The aforementioned responds to the approach given by the SEP in its 2011 document, page 48: '*the communicative ability in the contemporary world is incomplete without two contemporary components: English as a second language, spoken equally to their mother tongue*'. As a result, for the first time in the curriculum and the SEP's basic education program, English teaching was included within the field of training referred to as language and communication. The objective of this is "*the development of communicative competence from the formal study of the language*" (SEP, 2011) English teaching starts in the third grade of pre-school, followed by six years of primary school and three years of secondary; in total students will study English for 10 years, by which it will be considered a second language (SEP,2011).

### **Brief summary of the English programs in public primary schools in the State of Hidalgo**

English teaching at a basic education in the state of Hidalgo has a very peculiar history due to the efforts made not only by the state but at a national level to establish English language teaching and to put a stop to it being made available only to private primary schools.

In the state of Hidalgo, four programs were introduced at basic education level of English teaching in addition to a form of English teaching where families paid for the lessons:

1. IPC (Computer-assisted English program)
2. ETC (English taught in full time schools)
3. English 'Encyclomedia'
4. PNIEB (*Programa Nacional de Inglés en Educación Básica*)- National English Program in Basic Education

In 2012 a study for a longitudinal investigation<sup>3</sup>, was carried out by researchers from various public universities including the University of Hidalgo, the objective of which was to understand the state of the art of English teaching at a basic education level held in Mexico. Interviews were carried out with those responsible for the four current existing programs.

### **IPC“Computer-assisted English” state program**

This program began in 2004 in primary and secondary schools as a proposal to incorporate English into public state schools at basic education level. Those responsible for introducing this project were the ones in charge of the computing labs and were not teachers of English. This means that the teachers in charge of the computing classes were also in charge of the English classes. The teachers responsibility was to give the material to the students, who worked by themselves without receiving any language guidance. The department in charge of this program was SEPA Inglés, which designed the software for developing the four skills of the language.

In the interview carried out on the authority responsible for the IPC program, the following information was provided:

It began in 2004, and yes, it is a well- established program, although there isn't any funding. The technology department designed the software ("2008" – the third version is currently being worked on)- the authority who works in the educational technology department of the SEP in Hidalgo designed the first two versions. The software consists of songs and games, as well as other interactive activities in which the student completes phrases, selects answers, relates words to objects, etc. One of the advantages of the software is that it registers the teachers work as well as that of the students because it is able to register the teachers as teachers and register the students as users of the software(Extract taken from the interview).

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<sup>3</sup>The universities that participated in the study were: Baja California, Colima, Durango, Guanajuato, Jalisco, Quintana Roo, Sonora, Tlaxcala and Guadalajara; this project was led by the University of Sonora.

The subject authority was asked to show program records of the number of schools and students who have benefited from the program and the type of follow-up that was carried out, as well as the results and impact of the feedback received. Unfortunately such type of records does not exist. That is to say, the real impact of the program is unknown. Currently, this program no longer operates and has been replaced by the National English Program in Basic Education (PNIEB).

### **"English Encyclomedia" National Program**

The "Encyclomedia" program was a federal program introduced in 2004, with the objective of installing interactive boards in the fifth and sixth-grade classrooms in primary school education. The software and hardware contained digital primary school books, as well as audio, visual and teachers workbooks. At the beginning the interactive board contained only certain subjects such as; Spanish, mathematics, history, geography and social sciences; in 2008 the teaching of English was introduced. The program was in fact designed to be used by teachers of all subjects and it was not a requirement for teachers to speak English themselves. In 2012, the authority in charge was interviewed:

In 2004 the first version of the program without any English was installed; in 2008, the 2.0 version of the interactive 'Encyclomedia' board was installed; now containing the English program. This office carries out only technical work. The program has a basic level of English and it takes teachers and students by the hand in order to learn English. The UPN (Universidad Politécnica Nacional) has also helped as an external assessor.

Despite the fact that interactive boards still remain in public primary schools within the state, from 2013 the government no longer provides resources to be able to carry on the program. At present the program has been replaced by PNIEB.

### ***"English in schools offering full time education"* National Program**

Public Primary schools, known as full-time schools, underwent an important

change. The first significant difference was in their timetables<sup>4</sup>as well as other services offered, such as: dining room facilities and English classes. The program started during the academic year 2007/2008 in the state of Hidalgo as a pilot course in three schools; two of them are situated in the countryside and the other one in an urban zone in the capital of the state. Approximately 481 students benefited from this program. Through government funding the teachers were given full time contracts to teach English. The subject authority interviewed, commented on the main objective of the program:

The program started in the academic year 2007-2008. It was a presidential initiative of Felipe Calderon during his campaign, to support working mothers, providing an integral education for their children, with access to more courses, a more comprehensive education, within a full time schedule... the complementary areas are: English, media, art, dance, physical education, sports..." "The English teachers are hired as freelance teachers. Part of the funding of the program is used to pay the services of these teachers, because they are not hired on a full-time basis(Extract taken from the interview).

One of the main problems that this program faced was in relation to the English teachers' fees:

There is a fund that comes from the national planning program mainly to provide food to children, as part of the benefits of the program, children have breakfast and lunch there, and do their homework in an area called assisted homework. A percentage of this fund is precisely to pay English teachers, although the truth is that it takes around five to six months for teachers to get paid(Extract taken from an interview).

The subject authority interviewed in January 2014, was unaware of the terms in which the English program operates; currently the students that attend full-time schools are not receiving English classes.

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<sup>4</sup>Primary schools in the state have two shifts, the morning and evening shift. The morning shift runs from 8am to 1pm and the evening shift starts at 2pm until 6pm. Full-time schools cover 8 hours beginning at 8am in the morning having a break between 1pm and 2pm when the students are given a meal and from 2pm to 4pm complementary activities are programmed.

## **“National English Program in Basic Education” (PNIEB)**

This program is a national program and it is in fact the results of this program that are being reported in this chapter as part of the research study carried out along with researchers from other public universities. This program was implemented in 22 public primary schools in the state as a pilot course during the academic year 2009-2010. For the academic year 2010-2011, the program was implemented at basic education level (pre-school, general primary school and bilingual<sup>5</sup> schools). The program has a well-organized structure and is constantly growing within the state of Hidalgo. The program operates under federal funding. The authority in charge of the program commented the following:

It began formally according to an agreement of collaboration that the governor signed with the Federation, from the beginning of December 2009. ...Secretaría de Educación Pública through the Secretaría de Educación Básica designed a proposal for an English Program that responds to the curriculum in accordance to the educative reform... (Extract taken from the interview)

In the academic year 2013-2014 the PNIEB attended 141 schools out of the 2481 schools of primary school education<sup>6</sup> within the state, which represents 5.6% of the total of primary schools; catering to 33,000 students of the 327,334 (10.08%) of the state. The program covers 19 towns of which 84 exist within the state. See figure 1.

1. Acaxochitlán
2. Actopan
3. Atotonilco el grande
4. Francisco I. Madero
5. Huejutla
6. Huichapan
7. Ixmiquilpan
8. Mineral de la Reforma
9. Mineral del Monte

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<sup>5</sup>Bilingual schools refer to the ones in which an indigenous language is spoken

<sup>6</sup>General and indigenous primary



10. Pachuca
11. San Bartolo
12. San Salvador
13. Tepeapulco
14. Tizayuca
15. Tula
16. Tulancingo
17. Zacualtipán
18. Zempoala
19. Zimapán

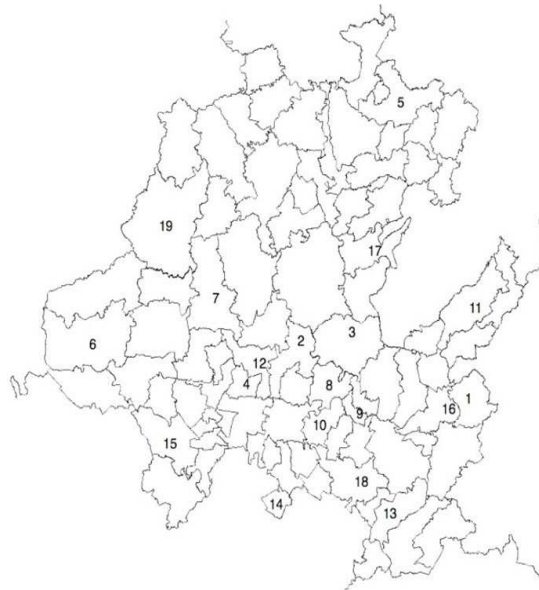


Fig.1. Image retrieved from: <http://www.pnieb.net/inicio.html>  
[March 22<sup>nd</sup> , 2014]

The coverage of the PNIEB in the state of Hidalgo is not yet significant; nevertheless, according to the person in charge of the program the target for a 100% enrolment in the state of Hidalgo will be reached by 2020.

With regard to the program where the parents covered the English teachers, no records exist. From the interviews that were conducted it was understood that two schools in the state, one of them in Pachuca and the other in Mineral de la

Reforma used this method, but once the PNIEB was implemented in these municipalities the use of this method ceased.

As it can be observed, various attempts have been put forward at state and federal levels in order to satisfactorily introduce English teaching in public primary schools; hopefully the introduction of PNIEB at a national level will finally meet the expectations of all children in Mexico by giving them a better quality of education.

### **Methodology of the study research**

The present study is part of a longitudinal study initiated at the end of 2011, the main objective of which was to understand the state of the art that holds English teaching in public schools at basic education level in Mexico, in which researchers of the University of Baja California, Durango, Guanajuato, Jalisco, Tlaxcala, Guadalajara and Hidalgo participated. This study was led by the University of Sonora; the aforementioned universities are part of the Network of Academic Groups of Foreign Languages (*Red de Cuerpos Académicos de Lenguas Extranjeras*); RECALE (in Spanish).

Information gathered from the program PNIEB in the state of Hidalgo in 2012 and recent data that has been updated is reported in this chapter. The approach of this investigation is via a case study. Case study is a method of qualitative research used to understand in-depth the social and educational reality. The most important feature of this method is the exhaustive and profound study of a case or situation with a certain degree of intensity. Muñoz and Muñoz (2001) perceive the case study as a “delimited system” due to the limits defined by the object of the study within the global context where it is produced. The typology of the study is descriptive and interpretative. Likewise, this approach is appropriate for investigations at a low scale, in a short period of time, space and resources. The results of a case study tend to be qualitative and illuminative but not conclusive due to its characteristics which are not representative of a true reality (Bell, 2004) The criteria taken into account to carry out the research were agreed on during the RECALE meetings:

- To focus on the PNIEB (National English Program in Basic Education), because it is a federal program and consequently it has been implemented in the majority of the states of the Mexican Republic.
- To divide the states in representative zones in order to have a wider view and not be limited only to urban zones.
- To collect data, it was agreed on classroom observations and interviews in primary schools where PNIEB had been implemented. Interviews would be conducted with the principals of the schools to be visited, the English teachers of 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades, parents or tutors and students. It is important to note that the questionnaires for the interviews were provided by the researchers of the University of Sonora in order to standardize them and to guarantee the validity and reliability of the instrument.

The purpose of the interview with the primary school principals was mainly to find out the number of students that are benefited by the English program, their opinion with respect to the program and the English teachers; and if they had faced any problems as a consequence of the implementation of the program. Regarding the English teachers, it was very important to understand their qualifications, if they had received any formal training to implement the program, the impact of these two factors while teaching in the classrooms; the existence of a study program, the materials to be used, amongst others aspects. It was also relevant to gather the parents and students' opinions; students were asked if they liked the English classes; in addition they were asked to provide some information in English.

Four researchers and three students from the BA in English Language Teaching of the Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Hidalgo participated in the project. The State of Hidalgo was divided in three large regions: Sierra Baja and Alta, Valle de Mezquital and Comarca Minera. A primary school in the urban area and another in the rural area, one representing the morning shift and another the evening shift were intended to be selected to represent each region. However, not all schools offer the evening shift; in total five schools were visited.

The first school visited was 'General Felipe Angeles' Primary School in the municipality of Zacualtipán. Zacualtipán de Angeles is located in the Sierra Baja on the Northeast part of the state. It is situated at 1980 meters above sea level and a population of 24,933 inhabitants. Its main activity is agriculture. The municipality has basic public services; electricity, running water, public lighting, drainage, sewage system and pavements. However, remote communities lack basic infrastructure. In general Zacualtipán is considered a municipality with a medium to high level of marginalization<sup>7</sup>.



Fig. 2 'Felipe Ángeles' Primary school in Zacualtipán.  
Photo taken by María Guadalupe Flores Herrera, LELI student



Fig. 3 Patio of the 'Felipe Ángeles' Primary school in Zacualtipán.  
Photo taken by María Guadalupe Flores Herrera, LELI student

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<sup>7</sup> Information retrieved from  
<http://www.elocal.gob.mx/work/templates/enciclo/EMM13hidalgo/municipios/13012a.html>

The principal provided the following information: 705 students attend the school in morning and evening shifts, from 1<sup>st</sup> up to 6<sup>th</sup> grade; 50-minute English classes run three times per week. His opinion about the implementation of the teaching of English was the following:

Researcher: What do you think about the teaching of English in basic education?

Principal: I am very grateful to the Dirección de Educación for the support of the welfare of the children by providing an additional language, so that the children can practice it, well. (Extract taken from the interview)

About the problems encountered:

Researcher: What do you think about the English teachers?

Principal: Very well, the only problem is in the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grades: there are too many students in teacher Lizbeth's class; therefore it is not possible to cover the schedule properly, that was my complaint... The problem is that the teacher comes rushing from another school, trying to get in on time at 11, yeah, I'm referring to teacher Liz, and then there is another problem with her health...

Researcher: and is the teacher still teaching classes?

Principal: No, but they are going to send a substitute teacher, but it is the same problem that they have to travel and attend to other classes...

Researcher: and the teacher's classes, does anyone cover them?

Researcher: No. (Extracts taken from the interview)

Due to the class schedule, the class was observed first and after the class the teacher was interviewed. The 5<sup>th</sup> grade consists of fourteen boys and thirteen girls, ranging from around 9-11 years old. The classrooms are big enough with the necessary furniture, well lighted and ventilated;

The class begins:

**Teacher: *Good Morning***<sup>8</sup>.

**Students: *Good Morning***

**Teacher: *Open your books page 49, contesten el ejercicio***

**Students: *Los dos o solo el primero***

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<sup>8</sup>The dialogue in bold has been written exactly how it was said during the interview; instructions were given in Spanish and English combined.

**Teacher: *Los dos***

Actually the class was delivered this way, where the students only answered the book with the teacher giving instructions in Spanish and questions were asked and answered in Spanish; there was no interaction in English. Another observation was the lack of classroom management.

During the interview with the English teacher, it was noted that he was uncomfortable when responding to certain questions:

Researcher: What are your qualifications?

Teacher: A few years ago I was working in the United States and I became interested in learning the English language, as a matter of fact I learned to speak English and when I came back to Mexico I decided to learn to write and learn the grammar as they call it, to be able to teach both skills. I hold a high school degree and I have studied English courses in Harmon-Hall...with a diploma in proficiency

Researcher: Regarding the materials, do you use a specific book or what kind of materials do you use whilst teaching English?

Teacher: A book according to their level, 'Yes, we can!'<sup>9</sup>, 'Do it' and 'Readers 4' for fourth level...

Researcher: Do you know the program?

Teacher: No, I don't (Extracts taken from the interview)

With reference to the interviews given to the students' parents, a mother was interviewed at the end of the class:

Researcher: *What do you suggest to improve your children's English classes?*

Mother: *That there should always be English classes because at the moment there are no English classes; the teachers come from other schools so sometimes they come and others they don't...* (Extract taken from the interview).

With respect to the children's interviews, they were carried out in an informal way to make the students feel more confident; however, when they were asked specific questions in English they didn't respond and whilst giggling they said to each other:

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<sup>9</sup>Books provided by the SEP

“you, you answer” and they answered with difficulty questions such as “where are you from?”

From this first visit it was possible to say that despite the good intentions to teach the language, the problems encountered impact negatively on the teaching objectives. This is to say the lack of teachers and specially the lack of qualified teachers are reflected on the methodology used by the teacher including their poor classroom management skills. In consequence, it is very difficult for the students to learn English if the class is delivered in Spanish because for many students, this is their only opportunity to be exposed to the language.

The second school visited was ‘Escuela Primaria Lic. Javier Rojo Gómez’ located in the Municipality of Atotonilco el Grande. Atotonilco el Grande is situated in the Sierra Baja. It has an approximate population of more than 7,000 habitants and it is situated at 2,080 metres above sea level. Its main activity is agriculture. It should be noted that in this municipality, amongst the male population, there is a high percentage of migration to the United States.



Fig. 4 Patio of the ‘Lic. Javier Rojo Gómez’ Primary school in Atotonilco el Grande.  
Photo taken by Karina Guadalupe Ramos Noguera, LELI student.



Fig. 5 'Lic.Javier Rojo Gómez' Primary school in Atotonilco el Grande.  
Photo taken by Karina Guadalupe Ramos Noguera, LELI student.

Due to the class schedule, the class was observed before the interview:

The school facilities as well as the classroom facilities were very similar to the first school visited. The class from sixth grade consists of 27 students; 13 boys and 14 girls. In contrast to the first school visited, it was possible to observe the notices in English on the walls.

**Teacher: *Please take out your note-books***<sup>10</sup>

**Teacher: *Do you like parties?***

**Students: *Yes***

**Teacher: *Now give me an example of a formal party***

**Students: *A wedding***

**Teacher: *Now Benito give me an example of an informal party***

**Benito: *Dinner with friends***

The class took place this way: the teacher delivered the class completely in English despite not all the students participating. Everybody paid attention and the ones that did participate responded in English.

**Teacher: *Now in groups of four write a formal invitation for a wedding***

The students obeyed and worked in groups although they spoke amongst each other in Spanish. One group called the teacher over: "**Teacher, please come...**"(Extract taken from the classroom observation)

During the teacher's interview and out of the script, she was asked:

Researcher: *Why did you ask the students to design a wedding invitation? Don't you think that according to the students' age, it would be better to ask the students to design a birthday card, for example?*

Teacher: *ohh, it is an activity taken from the book....* (Extract taken from the interview)

It was observed that the teacher followed closely the course-book and the activities proposed by the book, without taking into consideration the students' needs or ages.

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<sup>10</sup>The dialogue in bold has been transcribed exactly as it was said.



With respect to the problems faced, he commented:

Principal:erm the problem is that some students' parents are migrants and mmmh they speak English but not all of them...and the other ones feel they are at a disadvantage...and it is possible to observe this in the classroom...

Researcher: What other problems have you seen or you have been told related to the English classes?

Principal:Erm the schedules, yes the schedules;English takes place three times a week and some teachers of the others subjects have to leave later and they get upset because the classes they teach are later than usual...

With regards to the teacher's interview:

Researcher: What are your qualifications?

Teacher: I am an undergraduate student from 'Normal Superior' majored in English

Researcher: Are you familiarized with the official study plan?

Teacher: .... Yes. In Pachuca we were given a course where the program was given to us, they gave us booklets and materials... (Extract taken from the interviews)

Compared to the previous school, more students wanted to participate and those that did participate answered the following questions:

Researcher: *Do you like your English classes?*

Student: *Yes*

Researcher: *What have you learnt in your English classes?*

Student: *New words*(Extract taken from the interviews)

The pronunciation of some of the students was quite good, and so we asked some of the students some questions away from the interview script:

Researcher: Does any member of your family speak English?

Student:Yes, my dad, and he speaks with me and my brothers and sisters in English(Extract taken from the interviews).

A representative of the parents was interviewed:

Researcher: What do the other parents think about the English class?

Parent: They are really happy with the new English teachers; now they are really learning English because before we were paying the teachers but, it wasn't that... erm... the new teacher especially from 5<sup>th</sup> grade and 6<sup>th</sup> grade is really good(Extract taken from the interview).

From this visit, it was observed that a qualified teacher and, as in this case, the possibility to communicate in the target language with a family member, are important factors to learn the language.

In the municipality of Ixmiquilpan, the Benito Juárez School was visited. The school is located in the 'Valle de Mezquital' region. According to the INEGI<sup>11</sup> it has a population of 86,363 inhabitants. The main activities are agriculture and farming. There are many places with high marginalization in this town. An interesting fact that calls attention is that the international migrants from the state of Hidalgo that have moved to North America in the United States are mainly from the Mezquital Valley area<sup>12</sup>.



Fig. 6. Patio of the Primary school 'Benito Juárez' in Ixmiquilpan, Hgo.  
Photo taken by Stephanie Pacheco Mora, LELI student.

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<sup>11</sup>National Institute of Statistics and Geography (*Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía*; INEGI for its acronym in Spanish)

<sup>12</sup> Information retrieved from (2014)

<http://cuentame.inegi.org.mx/monografias/informacion/hgo/poblacion/educacion.aspx?tema=me&e=13>



Fig. 7. Patio of the Primary school 'Benito Juárez' in Ixmiquilpan, Hgo.  
Photo taken by Stefhanie Pacheco Mora, LELI student

In the interview with the principal, he commented that there were two morning shifts with 535 students, and in the afternoon there were 306 students; and just like in the other school there were three 50-minute sessions of English. In his opinion about the teaching of English classes:

Principal: ...the knowledge of English nowadays is a need

Researcher: What is your opinion of the teachers that give the classes?

Principal: Good, good performance of the teachers; I have suggested a few things so that their classes become more dynamic... They are well prepared and besides they like their job

Researcher: Any problems that you would like to comment on?

Principal: erm... materials, yes, the materials and the books arrive late ohh and the English teachers wages, there have also been problems with their wages; most of the time, there is a delay...mmmh they are under contracts; they are not hired on a full time basis like the Spanish teachers. They have an agreement with the SEP and their working situation isn't stable; they don't have benefits, that is, yeah, that is the problem... (Extract taken from the interviews)

Due to the school schedule the English teacher was interviewed before the class began:

Researcher: What are your qualifications?

Teacher: I am an undergraduate from the 'Normal Superior'

Researcher: Are you familiar with the study plan?

Teacher: No

Researcher: Did you receive any training?

Teacher: No, I only received a list with all the topics that I had to cover; they didn't give us a methodology, nothing... we are free to decide what to do and how to do it according to our context and... just a list of topics, topics that I have to develop

Teacher: Can I make a comment?

Researcher: Yes, please go ahead

Teacher: As a suggestion I would like there to be an equipped English classroom with projectors for example...in order to be a better teacher...I would like to attend training courses...

The teacher started her class on time at 12:00, greeting the students in English and the students replied in English. The class consisted of 15 girls and 14 boys. The facilities in the classroom were different because they didn't have any type of equipment such as: electronic board, etc, although the room was spacious and well ventilated with the basic furniture.

**Teacher<sup>13</sup>: Ok open your books page 39, what do you remember about this reading?**

**Student: It's about invitations**

**Teacher: Look at the first activity**

The teacher provided the instructions in English and the students started to work; they were given a reasonable amount of time to do the activity and then the teacher gave the next instruction.

**Teacher: Ok, let's check your answers** – The students answered correspondingly at the same time (Extract taken from the classes observed).

The class took place as described; the teacher delivered the class in English and the students responded in the same way; nevertheless only 4 students participated: two girls and two boys. There was a girl who was a dominant speaker; she spoke English perfectly well. The rest of the students started to get distracted but the teacher called their attention and they reacted positively:

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<sup>13</sup>The dialogue in bold has been transcribed exactly as it was said.

**“Teacher: *What’s wrong with you Daniel?*”**(Extract taken from the classroom observations)

A mother was interviewed and just as the in other cases the parents were happy for their children because they were learning English. The majority of the students did not want to be interviewed, but the ones that did, commented that they liked their English classes. However, when they were asked in English they replied in monosyllables:

**Researcher: Where are you from?**

**Student 1: Errrr,** (laughs)

**Student 2: que¿de dóndeeres?**

**Student 1: Aaahlxmiquilpan**(Extract taken from the interviews)

The last municipality was Pachuca de Soto, the capital of the State of Hidalgo. Pachuca de Soto is located in the Comarca Minera. It is situated at 2,400 meters above sea level. Despite the decline of the mining activity, this is still an important activity. Nowadays, Pachuca contributes with more than 60% of the total production of gold from the state and 50% of the production of silver; although this activity is in constant decline.

Two schools were visited; the criteria used to select the schools were related to location. One is in an urban zone and the other one in a suburban zone. The schools visited were ‘Pedro María Anaya’ and ‘Presidente Miguel Alemán’. The first school has a population of 449 students and the second one 826, both operate morning and evening shifts. In the principals’ opinions about the teaching of English in their schools they both agreed on the benefits students will obtain when learning a foreign language.

With regard to the problems faced, they were quite similar to the ones encountered in the other schools visited:

Principal: at the beginning we resisted a little bit, because three hours a week are reduced from Spanish classes, but after organizing schedules we have moved forward. The students like it, the groups start at eight so that they don't change the schedules and we haven't had any problems (Extract taken from the interviews).

At the 'Presidente Miguel Alemán' primary school we learned about a more complex problem:

Principal: ...we need a program, we need a schedule. Imagine in the afternoon... the morning shifts last five hours, from eight to one, and in the afternoon we work from two to six. So it's an hour less and we have to cover all our programs, I mean our Spanish programs. I am referring to Spanish, Maths, Science, History, Geography and Social studies; on top of this, we have to include three hours of English per week for all the groups...so it is necessary to have a plan, it is not just about teaching, it is about time availability as well... (Extract taken from the interviews).

The two teachers of English interviewed hold a BA in English Language Teaching. They are not familiarized with the official study plan.



Fig. 8 'Pedro María Anaya' Primary school.

Photo taken by Stefhanie Pacheco Mora, LELI student



Fig. 9 'Presidente Miguel Alemán' Primary school.

Photo taken by Karina Guadalupe Ramos Noguera, LELI student

None of the teachers received any type of training, they were only given the course materials- the text books: Reader 6 from the series *Do it!* In response to providing a suggestion of how to improve the English program, both teachers suggested: "Teachers: *Training, yes training for teaching children*" (Extract taken from the interviews)

For the effects of this report, the teacher from the 'Presidente Miguel Alemán' school will be referred to as teacher 1 and the teacher from the 'Pedro María Anaya' school will be referred to as teacher 2. The teachers greeted the students in English and the students replied in the same way; the number of students in each group was very similar: in the 'Pedro María Anaya' school the group was made up of 30 students: 16 girls and 14 boys, and in the 'Presidente Miguel Alemán' school there were 12 girls and 17 boys, a total of 29 students with around the same age of the students in 6th grade at primary school. The teachers based their classes mainly on the books.

Teacher 1: vamos a dar un repaso del vocabulario que vimos ayer: pencil.

The class continued with a reading about Pecos Bill. The teacher gave instructions in Spanish and the students answered the questions from the book:

Teacher 1: Ok voy a poner el listening

The students listened to the listening activity from the book in English and in certain parts the teacher stopped the tape and asked questions in Spanish about the listening activity. The students replied in Spanish, the same thing occurred at the end of the tape they went through the activity in Spanish.

Teacher 1: Now voy a leer page eighty eight (the teacher read in English and at the same time translated into Spanish what she was reading)

Note from the observer: 40 minutes had passed and there was no interaction in English. At the end of the class and steering away from the script the teacher was asked the following:

Researcher: Why was the whole class delivered in Spanish?

Teacher 1: Because the students can't speak English

(Extract taken from the class observation)

With regard to the class observation with Teacher 2, the dynamics of the class was very similar; although the instructions were given in English, the whole class was about a Tom Sawyer reading. "Teacher 2: Ok David read page 99"

Some students read aloud and even if they made mistakes in their pronunciation, they were not corrected. Although there was little interaction in English, it wasn't non-existent like in the previous school.

On the parents perceptions about the English classes, the response was positive as they believe that English classes will provide their children with a better learning and preparation for when they move up to Secondary school.

## **Conclusions**

It is considered that a successful curriculum implementation can only be achieved by means of a systematic/educative planning that guarantees its relevance and feasibility (DíazBarriga F, 2003).LLarena, MCGinn et al (1981) cited in Díaz-Barriga F. (2003): define educational planning as:

The process that foresees diverse futures in relation to educational processes; specifies aims, objectives and goals; allows the definition of course of action and from here on, it determines the most appropriate resources and strategies in order to accomplish their development.

Based on the aforementioned definition and from the information obtained from this study, it is proposed that the following recommendations be taken into consideration in order to improve the effectiveness and structure of the study plan for teaching English in an elementary level:

- Hiring requirements. Training varies among the English teachers, from those who have only taken English courses or have lived abroad to those who are qualified English teachers.
- Training and updating courses. It was noted that many teachers interviewed don't know the PNIEB program; therefore it impedes the achievement of the desired results. In the same way it is necessary to train the teachers to be able to teach English to children, even though they hold a university degree.



- One of the biggest challenges in teaching a foreign language is that although it is a subject it must be taught in the target language; therefore it is recommended that English be used whilst teaching it.
- A better planning will allow a better organization of the schedules and the materials provided.
- Working conditions; the security of having a permanent job and a good working environment will result in a better performance from the teachers.

Finally, an important aspect that cannot be left out is the methodology used in English teaching. The teachers based their teaching on a series of ESL Readers books *Yes we can* and *Do it!* English as a Second Language (ESL) is an approach to language instruction designed for those who have a primary language other than English, for example when English is the official language as in some African Countries or for immigrants living in an English speaking country; which is not the case in Mexico. The methodology used to teach ESL, is literature based instruction. Literature-based instruction is the type of instruction in which authors' original narrative and expository works are used as the core for teaching a class. Wells (1990) points out that literature-based instruction is much more than giving students quality literature; it is doing the authentic things with the literature that all writers and readers would naturally do and giving learners support with these activities as they need it. According to Ur (2008) some of the main advantages of literature teaching are:

- Literature can be very enjoyable to read
- It provides examples of different styles of writing and representations of various authentic uses of the language
- It fosters reading skills
- It can supply an excellent jump-off point for discussion or writing
- It encourages empathetic, critical and creative thinking

Literature-based instruction can be conceived as a process containing three main stages (Ur: 2008):

1. Encounter and impact
2. Understanding and familiarization

### 3. Analysis and interpretation

This means that teachers must be trained for teaching literature-based instruction. However, according to various authors among them Harmer: (2007), Scrivener: (2005), Ur: (2008) and based on our experience, we believe that for our Mexican context (EFL) teachers should follow a more communicate approach.

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