



C A P Í T U L O 2

PRIVATE AND PUBLIC ENGLISH TEACHER S PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR DEVELOPMENT IN HIGH SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT: Teaching English as a foreign language has taken an important place in the education programs of public and private institutions in Mexico. The main objective of this paper is to explore the perceptions that English teachers have of teaching English in the private and public sector. The importance of this research is to be aware of the opinions and perceptions that teachers have regarding their teaching experience in either public and private sectors, and how EFL teachers appreciate their own teaching development. Then, knowing this, it could help to identify the strengths and weaknesses they notice in their students. The inquiry took place in four different high schools, two from the private sector and two from the public. The participants were four English teachers, two from private schools and two from public schools. There were some considerations that were considered to choose the participants, for example their teaching experience and their qualifications to get more objective and standardized information regarding their personal perceptions. The length of this study lasted 7 months. The method used in this study has the characteristic of a qualitative research. Some observations were carried out before interviewing teachers as well as open-ended research questions. Four categories emerged from the data: 1) teachers' perception; negative and positive, 2) teachers' development including the motivation they have, 3) teachers working conditions and 4) the positive and negative challenges teachers face in the classroom.

KEYWORDS: high school teachers, students' behavior, perceptions, private and public sector, teachers' role.

RESUMEN: La enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera ha ocupado un lugar importante en los programas educativos de instituciones públicas y privadas en México. El objetivo principal de este trabajo es explorar las percepciones de los profesores de inglés sobre la enseñanza del inglés en los sectores público y privado. La importancia de esta investigación radica en conocer las opiniones y percepciones de los profesores sobre su experiencia docente en ambos sectores, y cómo los profesores de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) valoran su propio desarrollo docente. Conociendo esto, se podría ayudar a identificar las fortalezas y debilidades que observan en sus estudiantes. La investigación se llevó a cabo en cuatro escuelas preparatorias diferentes, dos del sector privado y dos del público. Los participantes fueron cuatro profesores de inglés, dos de escuelas privadas y dos de escuelas públicas. Se tomaron en cuenta algunos factores para la selección de los participantes, como su experiencia docente y sus cualificaciones para obtener información más objetiva y estandarizada sobre sus percepciones personales. El estudio tuvo una duración de siete meses. El método utilizado se caracteriza por ser una investigación cualitativa. Se realizaron observaciones antes de entrevistar a los profesores, así como preguntas de investigación abiertas. De los datos surgieron cuatro categorías: 1) percepción de los docentes; negativa y positiva, 2) desarrollo de los docentes incluyendo su motivación, 3) condiciones de trabajo de los docentes y 4) desafíos positivos y negativos que enfrentan los docentes en el aula.

PALABRAS CLAVE: profesores de secundaria, comportamiento de los estudiantes, percepciones, sector privado y público, papel de los docentes.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching English as a foreign language has taken an important place in the education programs of public and private institution in Mexico. Nowadays, some educational institutions include English as a part of the comprehensive education of advanced (college) students. However, in some states, their governments have implemented the teaching of English from the early grades of elementary education. This confirms the importance and relevance of English as a foreign language in the curriculum.

The role of the English teacher is highly significant during this time. According to Harmer (2007), an English teacher must perform multi-tasked responsibilities among the students because his or her role is important in the molding of the present generation. The primary aim of an English teacher is to develop language proficiency among the students. Teachers should be aware that there are different methods and strategies to make a good process in teaching and learning English (Fauziah et al 2005). As it is known that students pursue the learning of English

because they are intrinsically motivated and have cultural connections with native English speakers (Borjian A, 2015). For this reason, the function that a teacher performs with students' development acquires great importance in the teaching process (Wright, 1991).

The Mexican education system has four different levels. These are preschools, which provides early education for children aged three to five; primary education consists of six grades; lower secondary education consists of three grades; upper secondary is for three grades and the higher education consist from three to four years and it is mostly provided at large public universities. The government holds the responsibility to provide free of charge basic education and assumes responsibility for teacher education. The principles of the Mexican education system were established in the Third Article of the Mexican Constitution on February 5th, 1917. This article states that compulsory basic education shall be free of charge, non-religious, and publicly provided (Mexican constitution, 1917).

This paper centers on teachers' perceptions of their English teaching development in private and public high schools. More specifically, this research deals with the differences, pros and cons, in each sector. The importance of this research is to show the opinions and perceptions of two teachers who have over five years of teaching experience in private schools and two different teachers whose experience is in public schools.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research

The method that was chosen for this study has the characteristics of qualitative research. According to Creswell (2007), qualitative research uses an emerging approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting, sensitive to the people and places under study. A qualitative approach is used because a problem or issue needs to be explored to identify variables that can then be measured. Qualitative research is conducted because a complex detailed understanding of the issue is necessary, and these details can only be established by talking directly with people and making them share their stories.

Types of qualitative research

There are five approaches to qualitative research. They are narrative, phenomenology, Grounded Theory, Ethnography and Case study.

The first one is the narrative approach, which according to Creswell (2007) retells someone's story across time. The phenomenology approach describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept of a phenomenon. The third approach is the Grounded Theory; this kind of approach investigates a process, action, or interaction with the goal of developing a theory. The Ethnography approach is an in-depth description of a people group done through immersed participant observation. The Case study approach looks at episodic events in a definable framework bounded by time and setting and the general purpose is to explain "how".

The qualitative method that was chosen for this study was narrative research because its procedure consists of focusing on studying one or more individuals, gathering data through the collection of their stories, reporting individual experiences and ordering the meaning of those experiences. The researcher needs to collect extensive information about the participant and needs to have a clear understanding of the context of the individual's life.

DATA COLLECTION METHOD

Instruments

The instruments used to collect more detailed information for this study were interviews to teachers as well as open-ended research questions. Details can only be established by talking directly with people. The interview pretended to focus on the concentration on how participants perceived their own teaching development. The interview was used to provide first-hand information because the interviewer works directly with the respondent. In order to make this data more reliable, it was necessary to use open ended questions in case any unexpected topic emerged while the interview was taking place.

Interviews

Interviews are defined as a qualitative research technique, which involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea or situations. For Neale & Boyce (2006), the main task in an interview is to understand the meanings of what the interviewees say. The purpose of interviewing is not so much to get answers to questions, but rather the lived experience of other people.

Dolbeare and Schuman (as cited in Seidman, 1998) designed a model of an interview that consists of three sections which characterize and allows the interviewer and participant to explore the experience and to place it in context.

Seidman (1998) asserts that the first interview provides the background for participant's experiences. The second interview allows participants to reconstruct the details of their experience. Finally, the last interview is intended to serve as a reflective purpose, to encourage participants to consider the meaning of their experience.

Jamshed (2014) states that semi-structured interviews are those in-depth interviews where the respondents answer preset open-ended questions and thus are widely employed by different healthcare professionals in their research. Semi-structured interviews are based on semi-structured interview guide, which is a schematic presentation of questions or topics and needs to be explored by the interviewed.

As a researcher and interviewer, for preparing an interview it is necessary to choose a setting with the least distraction and a place in which the participant can feel comfortable. It is important to explain the purpose and the format of the interview to the participants in order to have accurate information from them. Moreover, the interviewer needs to be able to clarify any doubt that the participant could have in the process of the interview.

Context

This study was carried out with teachers who work or have worked in private and public institutions. This is so because the researcher needs to have different perspectives of what teaching English is like at these institutions.

This study focused on only one educational level, high school. Of all the teachers that were interviewed, two of them teach English in public institutions and the other two teach English in private schools.

Each participant in this research paper, work in different institutions. Participant one, Amelia works in a private high school, close to one of the main important avenues in the city. This makes it one of the favorite schools for parents and students, as it is easy to reach. Participant two, Orquidea works in one of the biggest private high schools in town, it is a popular school, and students want to belong there. Participant three, Nelly works in a public high school which is located near downtown, as it is a public school and is the most preferred school due to its accessibility. The fourth participant, Gonzalo works in a public high school, which is also located in one of the main avenues; however not as popular as the other schools.

Participants

The participants were four English teachers. Two teachers from private schools and two from public schools. For the data to be more reliable, there were some considerations that were taken into choosing the participants. For example, their teaching experience, public and private sectors, and their studies. Also, it was preferably to hold the BA in English; their teaching experience for over three years or more. It was an important fact that the participants were chosen considering their professional development; they should have also studied an English BA and should have a language certification in order to get more objective and standardized information regarding their personal perceptions.

The participants had to be able to describe their own development of teaching English in the field where they are working. The researcher had to go to each school to ask teachers to participate in this project. Both private school teachers and public-school teachers were chosen randomly from different institutions.

This research paper interviewed four teachers from the public and private sector. The participants from public schools were given a pseudonym to keep their identity safe. Participant one was known as Nelly. She is 31 years old. She studied the BA in English Language at the Universidad Veracruzana; she has not completed her master's in education. She has been teaching English in a public high school for 8 years. Participant two was known as Gonzalo. He is 58 years old. He has a BA in English Language and he is studying a master's in education. He has been teaching English for 10 years.

The participants from private schools were also given a pseudonym in order to keep their identity safe. Participant one was known as Amelia Gonzalez. She is 34 years old. She is Mexican. She lived in the US for 4 years. She studied the BA in English Language at the Universidad Veracruzana. She has been teaching English in a high school for 9 years. The second participant was Orquídea Ramirez. She is 33 years old. She studied the BA in English Language at the Universidad Veracruzana and a master's in teaching English as a foreign language. She has been teaching English for 11 years.

Data collection Procedures

First, the questions of the interview were piloted in order to know if the questions were understandable; then it was necessary to change the first questions because they did not show reliable information. The pilot interview was done to a teacher of the BA. The interviews took place in the participant's area of work while they were in a break. It was not easy to access the teachers, as they were afraid of being in the spotlight. However, they finally acceded to be interviewed so the researcher had to interview them in their workplace.

Data analysis

The data collected was analyzed and interpreted soon after the interviews were done, the researcher transcribed them and started organizing the data. While the researcher was transcribing the information, some questions emerged, and it was necessary to go back to the information to clarify those questions. After that, the categories emerged and they were classified; and the research started to discuss the findings

FINDINGS

After analyzing the data, 4 categories emerged and they are discussed here to show illustrate how teachers perceive their own teaching development as English teachers, the challenges they face in their everyday life and what they do to solve them according to their experiences in the high school level.

Teachers' perceptions: positive and negative

According to Amelia's perceptions of working in the private sectors for more than 11 years, she has felt that English is given more support than in the public sector. At the beginning, Amelia felt comfortable working there because she learnt to be more organized in all aspects. For example, classroom management as well as office work. She remembers that one day, when she was teaching in the school, she noticed that there was always somebody monitoring her and all the teachers. For Amelia being monitored was good because she was used to having all her teaching material, activities and lesson plans ready. Then, this monitoring gave her no negative feelings or anxiety, and the following rules were good for her to get the right teaching development. On the contrary, Amelia added that a negative perception is that working in that sector is difficult to develop professionally, because teachers get stagnate in only one level and they are not able to grow professionally.

Likewise, Amelia's experience, Orquidea commented that the way in which the private institutions develop the classes are more organized than in public institutions. Now, she is on time with all her duties at the institution. That way, the institution made her more responsible. On the other hand, when Orquidea is developing classes, she noticed that discipline in the private sector is very different from public schools. For example, she said that telling off students in private schools is not allowed as parents tend to interfere a lot. This is because most of the students are overprotected and pampered by the parents. Also, she mentioned that as private teachers they need to be careful how they interact with students during the classes. Teachers must be aware of the consequences that could result if they do not behave with the students as the parents want.

Nelly has been working as an English teacher in the public sector, and she perceived that teaching English tends to be more comfortable because teachers can be themselves in the classes; they have more freedom, and work with material and activities they believe to be good for the students. Nelly says that working without feeling under pressure by the institution and the parents make them feel more productive and develop good classes. Nelly remembered when she started teaching English in the institution, her boss asked her to have prepared the classes on time, carry all the material needed in the activities and never be late, but as time has passed, the school's priorities have changed. However, Nelly added that she had noticed that the headmaster wanted teachers treated students as if they were in a private school, justifying the bad behavior during classes in order to decrease problems with the parents.

Similarly, Nelly's experience, Gonzalo mentioned that the biggest advantage of teaching English in the public sector is that it is free of charge, and English is available for most students. Despite this positive perception, Gonzalo commented that some teachers want students with a good English level; however, this is not possible. In addition, he said teachers excluded the weakest students and the different ones. He remembered that some years ago, he had a stammered student. He prepared different activities to help the student to be familiarized with the topics as well as get close to their classmates. Gonzalo also said that it was a good challenge for teachers to have the opportunity to teach all types of students. He argued that it was important to have patience when teachers are working with them. Moreover, Gonzalo had noticed that the syllabus of the English subject in the public sector is very ambitious, and it is not adapted to the students' necessities. He commented that to learn a new language it was necessary to go through it little by little, because for some students this is their first encounter with English.

Teachers' development

Amelia's opinion was that working in the private sector makes her follow rules to be successful in the classes as students are familiarized with the activities. Amelia said that in some cases it was not easy to have a good professional career in that sector, because most of the time teachers usually remain at the same level and are unable to be prominent. Amelia commented that when she started working in the private sector, she noticed that for that institution it was not important whether the teacher was well-qualified and certified, with a BA or an MA degree. They all earned the same salary as someone who spoke the language well but with no qualifications. She said that it was disappointing. Another point she mentioned was about the time given to English; she thought it was enough for the students, to practice vocabulary and grammar more.

According to Orquidea, teaching in the private sector could be easier for the teacher because most students have better English level than students from the public schools. As a result, the English subject is developed productively. Orquidea added that she had more freedom in her speaking activities as many students seemed to understand her. Also, she said that these students could travel; so, they practiced what they saw in classes. Despite Orquidea's education was in the public sector; she has always practiced, worked and developed her career as an English teacher for the private sector. She commented that the private sector was well-organized, classes were smaller than in the public schools, which let them have more control over the development of the teachers. For Orquidea, being controlled by the institution had some advantages such as being always on time with her lessons plan, her material for the classes and some administrative duties as well.

Furthermore, Orquidea mentioned that in the school in which she was working, the way they developed the classes was old-fashioned. She stated that the institution focused on one kind of strategy for teaching and wanted the students to learn in the same way using the same strategy. She believed that the institution could be updated to current activities and methods for classes to be more successful and eye-catching for the students. In addition, she added that there were many activities that could be developed in the classes and being monitored in order to have better results. As reported by Orquidea, the way in which teachers developed their classes was affected by the time given by the institution. She stated that in the private sector, students take more classes than in the public schools, it might be an advantage as students are more exposed to the language.

For example, Orquidea explained that in the school where she worked, English classes lasted two hours, from Monday to Friday. Then, she agreed with Amelia about time being an advantage. She mentioned that the time was favorable because she could explain better, and the students were able to practice more, she could solve students' doubts and most importantly, she was able to finish the syllabus and review the topics.

In contrast to what Amelia and Orquidea said about the time given for the English classes, Gonzalo mentioned that, in the public sector, time is not enough neither for teachers nor students. He commented that in the school in which he was working, the English classes lasted 50 minutes, two or three days a week. Thus, he stated that the lack of time was a disadvantage for the teachers because they did not have the opportunity to give students enough material for the topics, to explain carefully the grammar and practice the language. As a result, Gonzalo needed to finish the syllabus in less time; and his teaching quality was not what he expected. However, Gonzalo said that he felt fulfilled when he noticed the progress of his students. He also said that despite the lack of time, he got along well with his students.

According to Nelly, the time allowed for the English classes had pros and cons. For example, the length of her classes was 50 minutes, on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. She complained about time as it was not enough to call attendance, check homework, and teach. Nonetheless, Nelly stated it also depended on the students' disposition of having an excellent class, it might result in good learning from the students' side.

Teacher's working conditions

According to Amelia, the private sector influenced her to be more organized because she got used to having all her duties on time. In addition, Amelia commented that there was someone in her institution who monitored the development of teachers. For Amelia, it was important to have someone watching her because she noticed some teaching mistakes she had been making in the classes. Therefore, being observed helped her correct those mistakes and improve classes. For Amelia, the length of the class was good because she had time even to review grammar and explain more vocabulary.

On the other hand, Amelia stated that working in the private sector made her unable to grow professionally because teachers usually stay at the same level of the language and they were not challenged to improve. Also, she noticed that the institution's authorities were very old-fashioned to the point of settling in the same ideas for years. Amelia explained that private institutions tend to see education as a business and not as a real education; and that bothered her. She complained that the institution did not appreciate the certifications she had, or the other teachers did not have because they all earned the same.

Orquidea agreed with Amelia about the qualities in private institutions, such as the organization, length of classes, and students' progress. Orquidea stated that private institutions, in some cases, offered small classes, this lets them have better control over teachers and students. Orquidea added that the class time was enough to work with her students, explain grammar and practice the language. She said that the results of the exams at the end of the term were the proof of the time well spent. In addition, parents and the school's administrators could notice the progress in students' learning and English was seen as an asset, making the school a popular one. According to Orquidea one advantage she had had, as a teacher in the private sector, was that 9 out of 10 students knew more English than in a public school. Therefore, for her, the English subject was more productive because she could teach her class 90% English, and her students could understand almost everything. She explained that one reason might be that some students had had the opportunity to travel and practice the language in the real world. Orquidea also

agreed with the idea that Amelia had about the lack of recognition the institution gave to its teachers. She added that teachers were not allowed to do all the activities they wanted to do in the classes to respect the teaching methodology offered by the school. Orquidea said that one advantage was that teachers could use different devices and equipment in their classes under the schools' supervision, which made them get good results.

However, Orquidea commented that being small schools, they tended to overprotect the students. Teachers are watched over and most of the time the institution focused on the wrong things that teachers did and ignored the right ones. She argued that if something was wrong in the institution, they always blamed the development of the teachers in the school. In addition, Orquidea said if the institution could give her the opportunity to use different methods in the classroom, her classes would be better and the performance of her students as well. Nevertheless, she said sometimes she felt judged by the school for using different approaches during her classes.

According to Nelly's perceptions, the educational demand of the parents and the institution towards teachers in the public sector are not as many as in the private one. Public institutions gave teachers more freedom to use different methods in the classes, then, Nelly said that it let them use all the material they want, teachers' development is better. In addition, Nelly commented that the environment in which she worked was good for her; that the school's English academy was balanced because colleagues behave respectful and professionally. For her, having a good job environment made her give better classes. Nelly added that working in a public school was better because teachers had more opportunities to get a permanent work position, getting a better salary, benefits and perks.

Despite what Nelly said before, she complained about the way her boss treated the teachers. The principal made teachers accept the students' bad behavior in order to lessen the problems with the parents. In addition, sometimes she felt there was no one interested in the teachers' lesson plans and the material they would use in the classes. She noticed the lack of interest in the teachers' material; this had an impact on their development. Additionally, she commented that most of the schools did not have all the material required to give a well-planned English class. For example, in Nelly's workplace, when she wanted to use slides to explain a topic, she had to borrow the equipment some days in advanced since there were very few of them. In addition, Nelly previously said that she agreed with the idea of having a special place for practicing the language. For example, a section in the library where students could find different books in English and dictionaries as well to motivate their learning.

Gonzalo agreed with Nelly about the lack of material in the public sector because that made teachers unable to give a more varied class. Although Gonzalo commented that one advantage of not having all the equipment in the school was that teachers were forced to work with what they had at hand. Also, he said that teachers needed to adapt to any situation. Gonzalo shared Nelly's about having a special place to practice English. He mentioned that public education would put more emphasis on communication than any other skill. For example, he said when students learn a new language it is important for them to be surrounded by an environment where the student can improve the language. So that, the learning process would be enhanced.

Challenges in the classroom (regarding students, parents, institution)

According to Amelia, her first challenge in the classroom was that some students have some knowledge about the language, making them feel superior over their classmates and even with teachers. Amelia commented that to solve the problem she explained that even if they had a better knowledge of English, they would always have something new to learn. To solve that problem, she gave them some advanced material to keep them busy. In addition, she showed good disposition to their questions. She said that students responded positively.

Orquidea said that dealing with parents was one of the challenges she had to face when she started working as a teacher. She mentioned that some students did not bring their homework, so she had to ask their parents to talk to them about their behavior. Another challenge she had to face was that she had to work with mixability classes. Therefore, she had to get used to the different levels during her class, which was not easy but a challenge she could overcome. The solution she had was to help students to produce the language during the classes and let them talk in Spanish some words they did not know. Also, some students did not participate in the classes, this was because students were afraid of being judged by their classmates.

Nelly commented that the biggest challenge she had to face up was that students did not want to have the class in English. They were not used to having the whole class in only English. So; she had to combine the two languages in the class (English and Spanish) as suggested by the principal. Another challenge was the lack of interest students showed in class. What Nelly did to solve the situation was to find new strategies, games and activities to motivate the students and keep their attention. She also explained that teachers had to play different roles in the classroom to provide students with more organized guidance to foster their learning.

Gonzalo mentioned that having large classes results in students' lack of attention during the class; students show little or no interest in the language, then, he agreed with Nelly about this situation, and suggested finding out students' likes and interests to give them different activities to practice. He also stated that when students paid attention, they seemed to improve their learning.

CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this study was to find out the teacher's own perceptions about their teaching development in their workplaces. These perceptions might be either positive or negative of being an English teacher in a private or a public school; their teaching development, their working conditions, and the challenges they during their teaching.

The results of this research paper showed that teachers from both sectors had different perceptions about their teaching. Teachers from the private sector argued that the school taught them to be more organized with all their teaching and administrative duties. Also, the school gave the English class more support than it appeared in the public sector. However, teachers perceived that it was not easy to have and develop a professional career.

On the other hand, teachers from the public sector stated that their institution gave them the freedom to use all the material and activities they wanted to get more organized classes. They might not have support and equipment, but the opportunities to grow professionally are permanent and it motivated them to keep on their teaching training.

According to the teachers interviewed from the private sector, the institution's administrators did not value whether teachers are qualified or had certifications; every teacher earned the same, the ones who are certified seemed to feel undervalued and demotivated. Another thing that was commented was that the time given for the English class in both sectors was different. Teachers who work in the private sector said that it was enough; however, teachers from the public sector disagreed as for them, two or three hours a week seemed to be insufficient to cover all the topics stated in the syllabus.

For private school teachers, being observed and monitored might be helpful to correct their possible mistakes when teaching and improve their classes. It might be a useful way of improvement. They also suggested that the English level of their students played an important role in the classroom because they explained that it helped them planned more varied classes to practice the language and used the language 90% of the time. In contrast, for public school teachers, it was the opposite as they complained about the lack of knowledge and mixability classes. It made them combine Spanish and English so that everybody understands the instructions and activities to be done.

Another challenge that both public and private teachers mentioned was to deal with parents. In the private sector, parents demand too much from the teacher as English is an asset the school offered, and they wanted to see the results in their children language. Whereas in the public sector, parents seemed to be very flexible, students, then, seemed to be more relaxed in the class even to show no interest.

Finally, both group of teachers agreed that having a special place where students could find books, dictionaries and different information sources in English might be good for the students' language learning.

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this research paper have some important implications in secondary education. For example, it is necessary to give teachers the importance they have in the educational process. Parents, students, and institutions need to be aware of the effort teachers make when teaching a new language and show some respect to their work. Teachers might face different challenges in their teaching process, but they are always willing to find solutions to deal with them for the sake of the students. It is expected that the result of this study should help those students who want to become teachers understand and be aware of the different scenarios they might find and be prepared for that.

FURTHER RESEARCH

In order to know more about this topic, it would be necessary to study other levels, such as teachers at elementary schools or secondary schools. With this information, a comparison could be made between the perceptions of teachers at different educational levels to have a more illustrated panorama.

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