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Presentación

En verano pasado el proyecto más importante de nuestra red, esta revista, entró en una etapa de consolidación con la publicación de nuestro primer número y la conformación del comité editorial, integrado por cuatro académicos, tres de los cuales habían venido trabajando desde el principio, y a partir de este verano me integro en calidad de nuevo editor de la revista. El comité discutió asuntos de gran relevancia como la razón de ser de esta revista, su potencial y las metas a mediano y largo plazo. Crear una revista académica no es cosa simple, y es mérito del equipo que me precedió lograrlo; una vez superada esta etapa, podemos mirar hacia el futuro con ambiciones mayores. Este comité tiene la determinación de trabajar arduamente para consolidar nuestra revista en el mediano plazo, con la mira puesta en la eventual indexación de la revista. La indexación es una meta muy alta que requerirá años de esfuerzo conjunto de esta comunidad; el lograrlo significará un impacto mayor de nuestro trabajo en la comunidad académica internacional y también la elevación del nivel de competitividad de la revista que conlleva la recepción de más trabajos originados en más lugares dentro y fuera de nuestro país. Sin olvidar nuestra razón de ser como órgano difusor de la investigación que se hace al interior de nuestros cuerpos académicos, esta revista se ve a sí misma como una revista abierta al mundo y con lectores y contribuyentes màs allá de nuestro gremio y nuestras fronteras.

Estamos conscientes de la titánica labor que esto representa; no es esto trabajo para un solo hombre, ni basta el equipo de cuatro que somos el comité. El cumplimiento de nuestras metas y la continuidad misma de la revista dependerá del apoyo continuo de nuestra comunidad académica.

Agradezco a quienes enviaron propuestas de entre las cuales seleccionamos las tres que publicamos aquí, éste número no se hubiera logrado sin ustedes; de igual manera agradezco a los árbitros que nos ayudaron con su retroalimentación, al comité editorial de la revista y a todos los miembros de la recale por la confianza que han depositado en nosotros.

RECALE-Journal tiene un futuro promisorio. Sin embargo, la realización de nuestras metas implica especial rigor en la selección de propuestas, además de trabajo arduo de edición y

documentación de todo lo que hacemos. Esperamos la comprensión de todos quienes han remitido por las demoras en devolverles la retroalimentación; a manera de justificación sirva este pensamiento de Antonio Machado "Despacito y buena letra, que el hacer las cosas bien, importa más que el hacerlas."

Diciembre de 2013

José Miguel Rodríguez Reyes

Editor

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The effect of proficiency level on the identification, comprehension and retention of l2 idioms

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Abstract

This article presents the results of a study into the effects of proficiency level on the use of Code-Breaking Strategies (CBS) when reading and on Idiom Identification (II), Correct Idiom Code-breaking (CIC) and Delayed Retention (DR). 31 Mexican EFL college students participated. The data was gathered through an Immediate Retention and Elicitation Questionnaire (IREQ). Language outcomes were collected through an immediate test and a delayed test, the latter was administered three weeks after the learners had the reading task. Proficiency was determined by two measures: Nation's Vocabulary Levels Test and a measure of proficiency assigned to the students in the previous semester. The results indicated that more proficient learners (MPLs) used 'Inferencing from Context' (IC) and 'Bilingual Dictionary' (BD) with more success than less proficient learners (LPLs). MPLs ignored fewer idioms than LPLs. The results provide evidence that MPLs were significantly more successful in identifying, code-breaking and retaining idioms than were LPLs.

Introduction

The objective of this article is to present the differences obtained by high proficiency and low proficiency learners concerning their use of code-breaking strategies and the effect of their use of those strategies on product measures such as II, CIC and delayed retention (DR) of idioms.

Many of the studies focused on the lexical processing strategies that learners use when reading have considered 'proficiency' (P) as an important variable. The relevant literature in this area points at two important studies focused on inferencing strategies; the first one is Haastrup (1991) who provides one of the most thorough investigations in the area of lexical inferencing. Haastrup's main objective was to find out the knowledge sources that learners at two proficiency levels use when inferencing and to what extent learners combine information from different linguistic levels (top-down and bottom-up processing). 164 Danish secondary school learners participated in the study. They were distributed in two different groups: 31 pairs of highly proficient learners and 31 pairs of low-

proficiency learners[1]. As the researcher hypothesized, both proficiency groups made use of all three knowledge sources (intralingual, interlingual and extralingual). The highly proficient learners however, used the intralingual and interlingual knowledge sources more than the low proficiency learners. Moroever, a marked difference was found in that the highly proficient learners used the wider co-text more than the other group.

Morrison (1996) replicated Haastrup's study in a way that differed from Haastrup: a) Morrison had a lower number of subjects (20 students), b) her students were studying French, and c) their L1 was mostly English. Morrison (1996) unlike Haastrup (1991) tested the successfulness of inferencing. The results showed that highly proficient learners inferred successfully 74% of the target words using contextual sources (21%), contextual and intralingual sources, (16%) and contextual + intralingual+ interlingual sources (16%). Low-proficiency learners inferred only 34% using contextual sources (5%), contextual and intralingual sources (10%), contextual and interlingual sources (19%). Interestingly, highly proficient learners were more successful when using contextual and intralingual sources, which implies deeper knowledge of the target language. In the area of dictionary-related strategies, Knight's (1994) is one of the most complete studies on the use of dictionary. This study aimed at investigating incidental vocabulary learning from context and two factors that might have influenced it: dictionary use and language competence. A second factor investigated was the effect of dictionary on reading comprehension. The study also evaluated the effect of dictionary use on delayed retention, as seen on Table 1 below.

Table 1: Mean scores of word comprehension and retention according to dictionary and test types: Knight (1994).

	exposure immediate test			exposure delayed test		
Supply definition	HP	LP	overall	HP	LP	overall
No-dictionary	7%	5%	**6%**	11%	6%	**8.5%**
Dictionary (bilingual)	21%	19%	**20%**	13%	14%	**13.5%**

[1] Proficiency was tested through teacher assessment, the Michigan proficiency test (international proficiency measure) and a cloze and multiple choice test for reading comprehension.

The results revealed that the students had understood (and remembered) some of the target words in immediate retention (or comprehension). The high proficiency students learnt more words than the low-proficiency students and students who used a dictionary learnt more than those who did not. There is a significant difference between the ability levels on both the vocabulary learning measures; there was a significant difference between the dictionary and no-dictionary conditions on vocabulary learning measures, d) there was a significant difference between dictionary and no-dictionary use concerning comprehension, the high correlation between scores and number of words looked up for the low-proficiency learners indicates that dictionary look-up does not disrupt the short-term memory, it actually enhances comprehension.

Likewise, Wingate (2002) presented a study that was a partial replication of Knight's study. The main difference was that Knight compared a dictionary group with a no-dictionary group; another aspect is that Knight's study was focused on the comprehension of the meaning of single vocabulary items and on delayed retention. Wingate aimed at testing whether either the German-English bilingual dictionary or the monolingual dictionary was more effective for reading comprehension and incidental vocabulary learning of German and did not explore effects on delayed retention. The experiment took place in two stages. 46 second-year (intermediate) university students of German from two different Chinese universities participated. The 46 subjects were divided into highly proficient and low-proficiency according to their scores in the second semester of their second year and they were randomly allocated to two conditions: bilingual and monolingual dictionaries (Table 2).

Table 2: Mean scores of word comprehension according to dictionary and test types: Wingate (2002).

Supply definition	HP	LP	Overall
Bilingual	23.1%	11.7%	**17.4%**
Monolingual	11.8%	8.6%	**10.2%**

The results showed that there was a significant difference between the bilingual and monolingual dictionaries users in the supply definition test. The highly

proficient learners were significantly more effective using the bilingual dictionary than the other three groups.

The last study of our relevant literature is Alseweed (2000) who focused on the training of word-solving strategies. Alseweed aimed at finding out to what extent the use of word-solving strategies was affected by training and what use of these strategies high and low-proficiency students made before and after instruction. 19 Saudi Arabian university students participated in the study. The proficiency of the learners was determined by their English final exam. The results showed that successful contextual guessing increased almost significantly, and successful morphological guessing increased as well but unsuccessful morphological guessing increased as much as successful morphological guessing. The dictionary was used significantly more but only by the highly proficient learners. Bad skipping decreased significantly especially with the low-proficiency learners and misidentification decreased in both high and low proficiency students: the difference is not significant but the low-proficiency students continued making more misidentifications than the high proficient students. The findings of the researchers cited above allow us to pose the following hypotheses to be answered in our study:

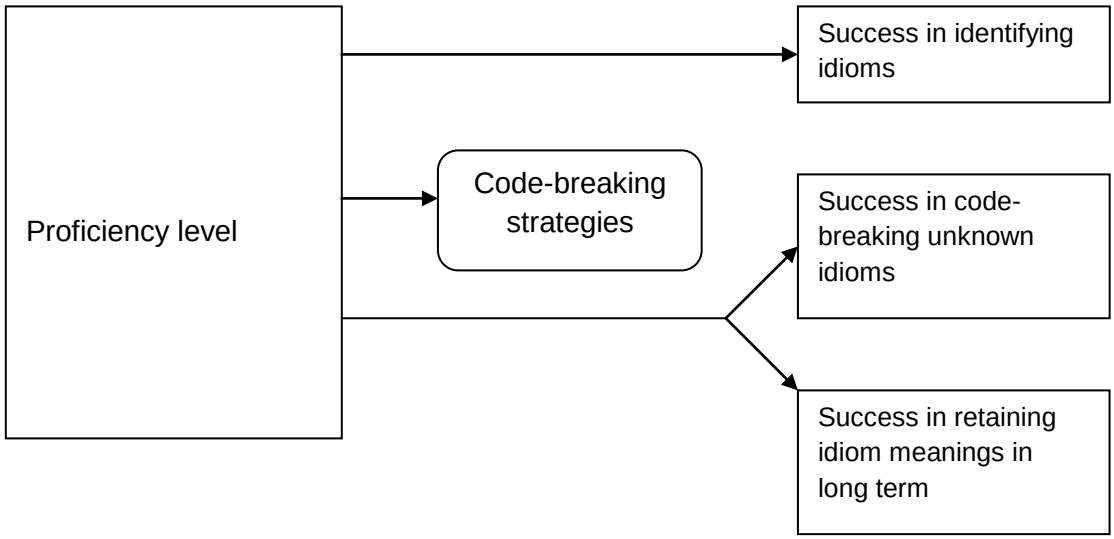
- *Hypothesis 1: There will be a positive relationship between the frequency of use and success of inferencing from context and the subjects' proficiency level (Haastrup 1991, Morrison 1996).*
- *Hypothesis 2: There will be a positive relationship between the frequency of use and success of the dictionary and the subjects' proficiency level (knight 1994, Wingate 2002, Alseweed 2000).*
- *Hypothesis 3: There will be a positive relationship between the success in 'Correct Idiom Code-breaking' (CIC) of the target idioms and the subjects' proficiency level. (Knight 1994, Wingate 2002)*
- *Hypothesis 4: There will be a positive relationship between the success in 'Delayed Retention' (DR) of the target idioms and the subjects' proficiency level. (Knight 1994).*

The study

The nature of the research is to a great extent exploratory, but it contains a correlational design relating the measures of proficiency (P) with frequency and success of code-breaking strategies. P was also correlated with the general measure of Idiom Identification (II), with Correct Idiom Code-breaking (CIC) and

with DR. The data will be analysed by having subjects as cases to look at the relationships of the subject variable P with strategies and success. The variables, processes and products involved in this section of the study and their respective relationships are represented in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Subject variables, process variables and product variables.



The explanatory variables of the study are the subject variables. The dependent variables are found in the processes such as the strategies used to code-break the meaning of the unknown idioms and on the products, namely, the success in identification, code-breaking and retention of idioms.

Setting and Participants

Our study involved the voluntary participation of 32 students in their 6th semester of a BA programme in Applied Linguistics at the State University of Tlaxcala, Mexico. Students had an intermediate/upper intermediate level of English. Two measures of proficiency were obtained from them, first the Nation's Vocabulary Levels Test at the 3,000 word level that the learners passed with an average of 71% success. The second measure was the evaluation of their previous term with an average of 78.9%. All students were Spanish L1 speakers, noone spoke an Amerindian

language i.e. Nahuatl, they all belong as well to the same social mix which is mostly working class.

Instruments

The (reading) text

The text used in the main data collection task was selected taking into consideration criteria that were determined by the nature of the study but also by the results of the pilot study[2]. The most important criteria are described below:

- The vocabulary in the text should be graded so as to meet the vocabulary level of the students in the 2,000 word level. The text should have a readability level of 98% within the 2000 frequency band (Hsueh-chao & Nation 2000 and Nation 2001) in order for the students to have a chance of comprehending it thoroughly

- The length of the text had to range between 1000 and 1200 words. This amount of words was determined by the results in the pilot study and was considered convenient[3] in order to:

- Insert twenty-one idioms[4] in it without altering too much the style of the text, keep its original nature and in order not to be too obvious. Also, to allow enough context for guessing without another idiom being in that context.
- Enable subjects to read the text in one hour

- The text was obtained from a web site called Voice of America[5]. The site provides factual and fiction stories that have been simplified in order to suit different levels of vocabulary. In this case, the text selected falls in the category of texts within the 2,000 most frequent words. The analysis of the text in terms of readability was done through the same web instrument used for the pilot text, 'the vocabulary profile' in the website called 'The Compleat Lexical Tutor'.[6]. The vocabulary profile of the original text indicates that it has a readability level of 98.4% of running words in first 2000. The lexical density was 340/1159= 0.29[7] and the reading ease is[8]

  206.825 – (.846 X **132**) – (1.015 X **13.2**) = **81.89**
  - 111.54 13.39

- The immediate retrospective and elicitation questionnaire (IREQ)

- The immediate retrospective and elicitation test along with the interviews, elicited retrospective information from the subjects to record the strategies they used to code-break the idioms. The questionnaire provided information not only about the strategies selected but also the sequence of

[2] It should be noted that the reading text was different from the pilot text.
[3] Be flexible enough
[4] Roughly one idiom per 50 words where one in 20 is the minimum recommended for new items.
[5] www.voanews.com/SpecialEnglish/adv_search.cfm
[6] Site: http// 132.208.224.131/ The Compleat Lexical Tutor
[7] Number of content words divided by the number of words.
[8] The reading ease was calculated with the Flesh Reading Formula

use of those strategies. It tested the meaning comprehended of the idioms and checked what idioms were previously known by the students. It also provided information about the words in the idioms that were familiar to the students. The code-breaking strategies elicited by the instrument were determined by other studies which attempt to evaluate the lexical processing strategies used by the learners while reading e.g. Alseweed (2000), Fraser (1999). See Table 3 below for an example.

Table 3: An example of the elicited information for each target idiom

Be at someone's beck and call
1.- I knew the idiom before reading the text, it means: _____
2.- I did the following when I read the idiom (1-4)
( ) Looked it up in the dictionary: *bilingual / monolingual / electronic/ pocket*
( ) Asked for its meaning from: *teacher / peers/ overheard*
( ) Ignored it
( ) Inferred its meaning through: *context /word meaning/ Spanish similarity /metaphor*
3.- The meaning of the idiom is: _____
4.- I know the meaning of the following words in the idiom:
_____ _____ _____ _____
The delayed retention test

The delayed retention test has as a main objective the testing of the delayed retention of the idioms that were unknown to the students in the reading. It should be noted that by the end of the first set of tasks all the learners knew which items were idioms in the text but they had never been told the correct meaning or whether whatever meaning they code-broke was correct. The delayed retention test was administered in Spanish. Its questions were expressed as follows:
Be at someone's beck and call
a) This idiom was included in the text yes ( ) no ( )
b) This idiom was included in the text but I don't remember its meaning
c) This idiom was in the text, it means: _____

Procedure

The data collection was carried out in two different sessions. In the first session the learners were asked to read the text in detail in order to answer comprehension questions. They were told they had one hour to read the text and were free to ask questions or to look up unknown words in their own dictionaries or the dictionaries provided by the researcher. When they finished they were asked to identify the idioms contained in the text by underlining them. The researcher collected the texts and distributed the IREQ (see 3.2.2). The researcher and the learners went through one section together in order to be clear about how the learners were

expected to answer this instrument. After the administration of the retention questionnaire, students were interviewed by five teachers including the researcher. The objective of these interviews was to gather more specific data about the decisions that the learners claimed having made at the moment of the reading and which were recorded in the IREQ. The questions were made taking as a basis the text and the IREQ. Retrospection worked as a triangulation of the information provided. The teachers received training from the researcher to carry out the retrospective reports. The second session took place 20 days after the first session and it was basically aimed at collecting data on the retention of the meaning of unknown idioms with the administration of the 'delayed retention test' (see 3.2.3) and the possible use of retention strategies to voluntarily learn the meaning of idioms.

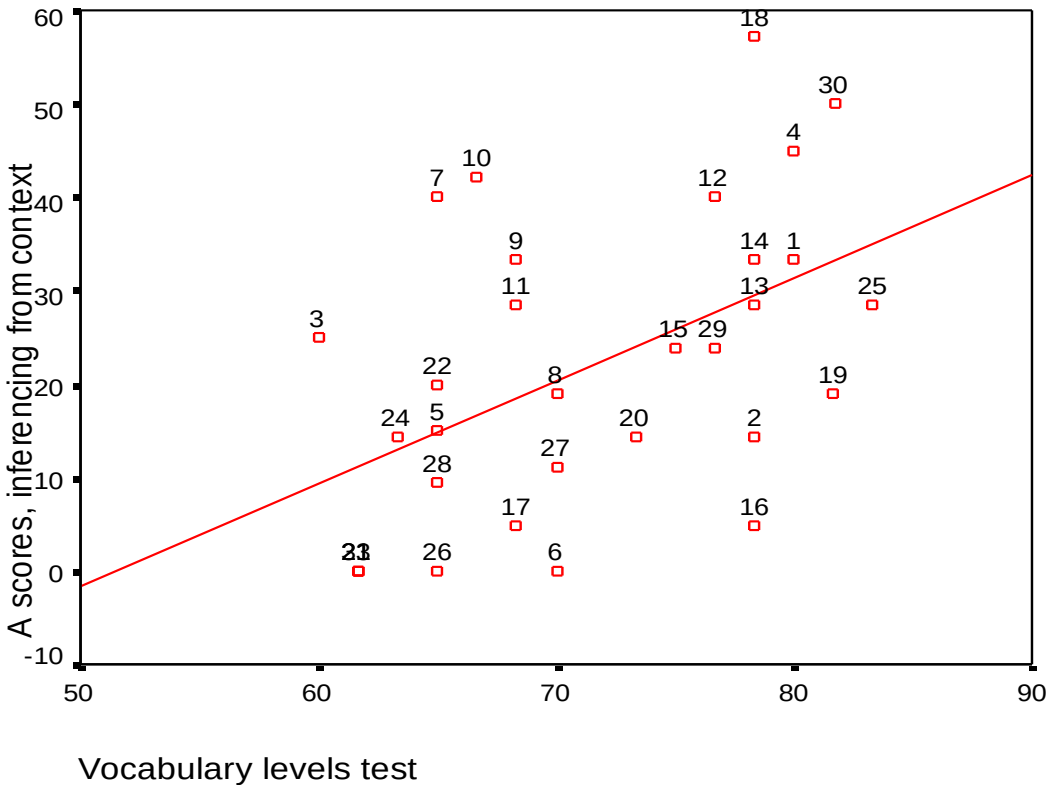
Data analysis

The quantitative analysis was carried out using the programme SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). The data collected was organised in percent scores in two main files: a) having the idioms as cases and recording scores in percents for all the aspects measured, b) having the subjects as cases. All scores in the files related to correct idiom identification, correct idiom code-breaking and correct idiom retention were calculated excluding the idioms that a subject knew before the reading task. The section of our study referred to proficiency level and its relationships required the information of b) subject as cases hence, VLTs results together with the proficiency scores were recorded separately. There were no groups of 'high proficient learners' and 'low-proficiency learners' as in previous studies, the correlations were carried out with the individual subject- variable scores, process-variable scores and product-variable scores.

Results and discussion

Proficiency level in relation to frequency of use and effectiveness of code-breaking strategies. Proficiency has been a common variable in studies that involve the frequency of use of inferencing and its success in code-breaking.

Figure 2 - Correlation between the percent of the frequency of use of 'inferencing from context' and VLT.

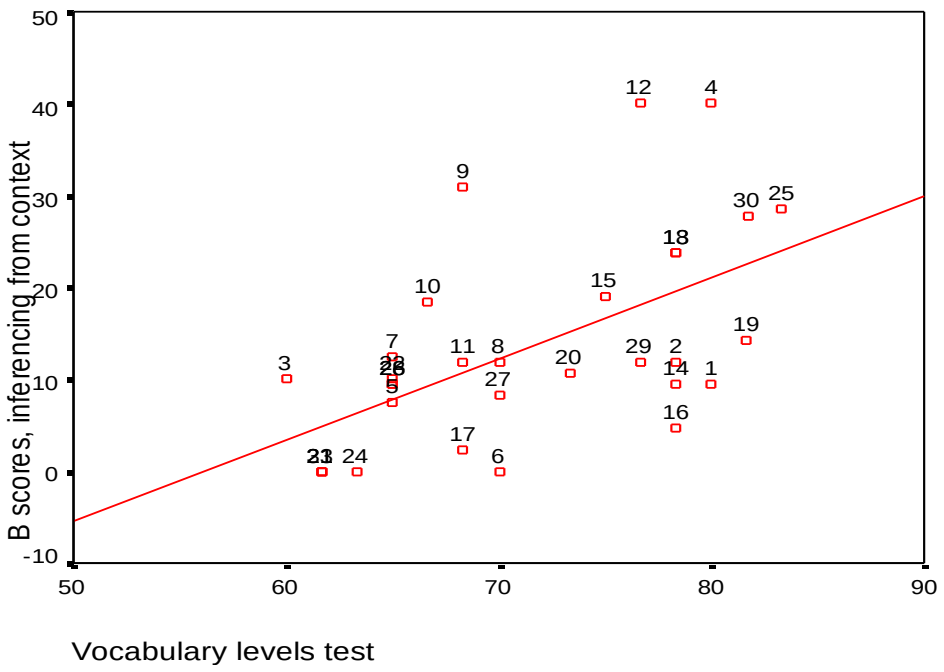


Our study explores the relationship mentioned above to see to what extent the findings in the learning of single vocabulary items coincide with our study on the code-breaking of idioms. Necessarily the statistical information that will be discussed in this section and further sections was derived from an analysis of scores with the subjects as cases. In this form we were able to include the scores of two measures of proficiency: the learners' results in a) the Nation's 'vocabulary levels tests' VLTs (vocabulary proficiency), and b) the results that the learners obtained at the end of the semester they finished before the study took place. This second measure was called 'proficiency'. Haastrup (1991) & Morrison (1996) found in their respective studies that highly proficient learners used inferencing from context with more frequency and with more success than low-proficiency learners. The use of Pearson correlation in our study confirmed the first hypothesis, ($r = .495$, $n = 21$, $p = 0.005$, two-tailed). More proficient learners used IC more

frequently than less proficient learners. This positive relationship can be seen in Figure 2 above.

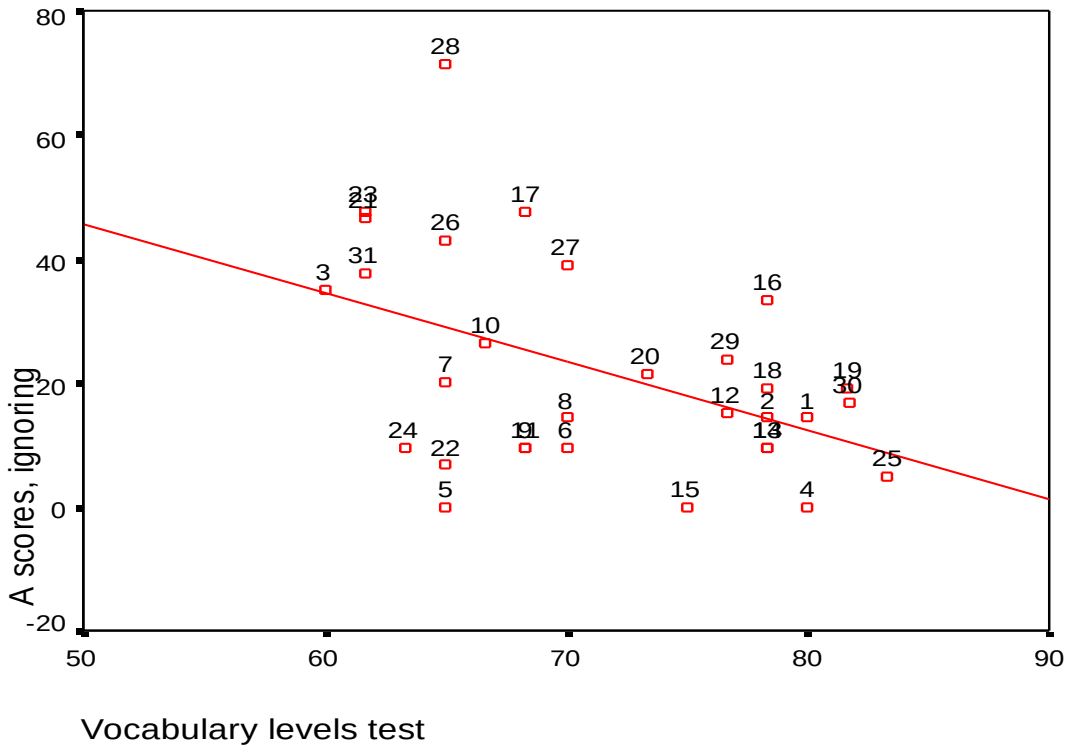
Concerning the second part of the hypothesis, the results on the 'Correct idiom Comprehension' (CIC) when using 'Inferencing from context' (IC) turned out in a positive and significant relationship that was even stronger (r = .572, n = 21, p = 0.001, two-tailed). Such relationship is illustrated in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3: Correlation between the percent of correct idiom code-breaking of the idioms when using 'inferencing from context' and VLTs.



We can conclude in this respect that the proficiency level of the learners determines the frequency and success of IC. Notwithstanding, the frequencies of use of the other ten code-breaking strategies were explored to find possible correlations with the VLTs measure. Only 'ignoring' showed a negative significant correlation with VLTs. (r = -.466, n = 21, p = 0.008, two-tailed) depicted in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Correlation between the percent of the frequency of 'ignoring' and VLTs.



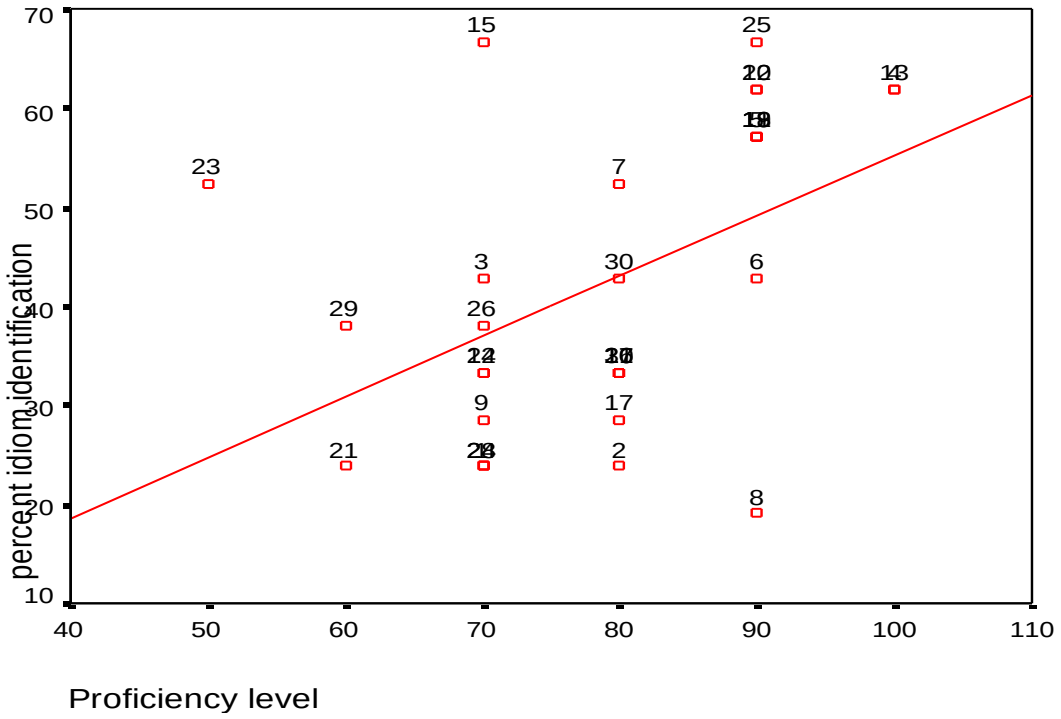
This negative correlation shows that more proficient learners ignored fewer unknown idioms than less proficient learners, which makes sense. Concerning CIC, the other CBS were explored to find significant relationships with VLT. The only significant relationship was found between CIC when using 'Bilingual Dictionary' BD and VLT, (r = .438, n = 21, p = 0.014, two-tailed). This positive correlation with BD indicates that the more proficient learners use the BD with more success when code-breaking unknown words than the less proficient learners. These results confirm our second hypothesis, generated by the results found in Wingate (2002) who compared the bilingual and the monolingual dictionary. Both in frequency and in success, more lexically proficient learners scored higher than less proficient learners when using the BD (23.1% vs 11.7% respectively). There is no study available where many CBS were used when reading texts and where the proficiency levels of the learners could be correlated with their frequency of use and with their correct use. Fraser (1999) included various strategies but the correlation with P was unfortunately not calculated.

P in relation to the product scores

P in relation to Idiom Identification (II)

We will report here the correlation between II and P. The Pearson correlation indicated that there is a significant positive correlation between the measure of 'proficiency' and the overall scores in identification of all subjects (r = .478, n = 31, p = 0.007, two-tailed). See Figure 5

Figure 5: Correlation between the scores of 'proficiency' and overall scores of 'idiom identification'.



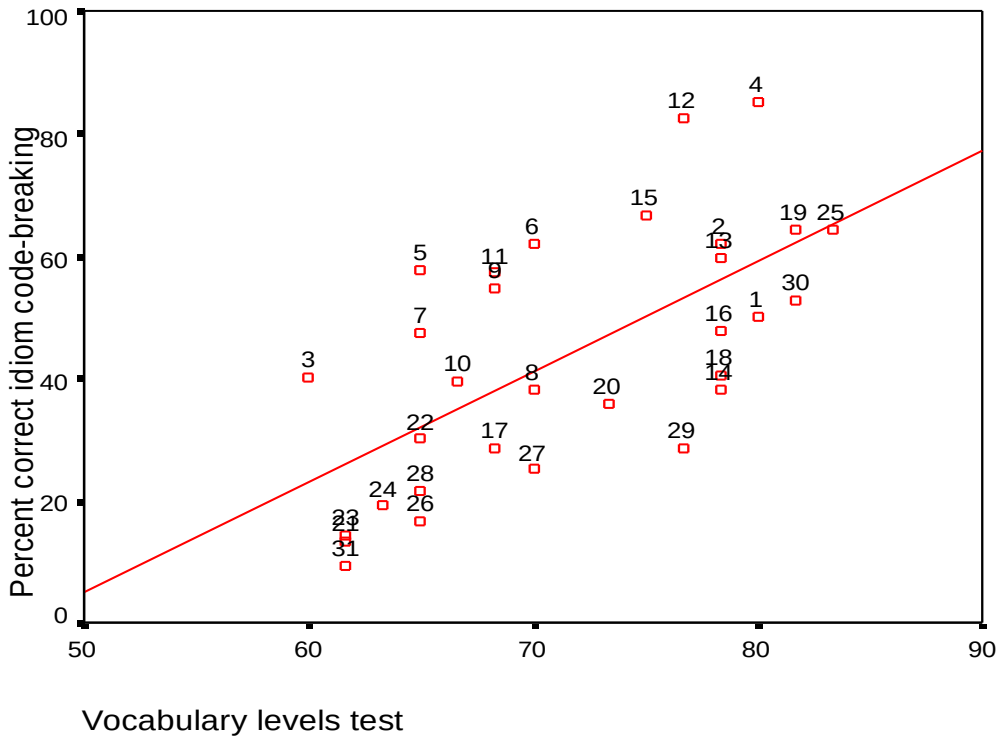
This positive relationship indicates that more proficient learners were able to identify more idioms than less proficient ones. None of the previous studies on single vocabulary items or idioms has correlated P with II. They have, however, correlated it with comprehension and retention. The next section will describe the results of these relationships in our study.

P in relation to correct idiom code-breaking (CIC).

Pearson correlations show that there is a significant positive correlation between CIC and VLTs (r = .646, n = 31, p < 0.0005, two-tailed). The results of the

correlation between DR and P was significantly positive as well (r = .637, n = 31, p < 0.0005, two tailed).

Figure 6: Correlation between the overall score in 'correct idiom code-breaking' and the score in the VLTs of each subject.



These results suggest that the learners who obtained a higher score in the VLTs were more accurate in getting the meaning of the target idioms correctly and vice versa, the learners whose score in the VLTs was the lowest, were less accurate in getting the correct meaning of the idioms. Figure 1 illustrates how the learners whose proficiency level was higher, were more successful with the use of IC than the low-proficiency learners. Considering these results, we assume that the successfulness of the CBS such as BD and IC is related to the proficiency level of the learners. Similarly, the second correlation indicates that more proficient learners were more able to get the correct meaning of idioms than less proficient learners. Figures 6 above illustrates such relationship.

With these results we have reasons to posit that there is a positive relationship between CIC and P. Other studies have found that the P is related to the success in getting the meaning of words. In inferencing studies, for example, Haastrup (1991) and Morrison (1996) found that highly proficient learners inferred successfully 74% of the target words while low-proficiency learners inferred only 34%.

P in relation to delayed retention (DR)

We will follow the same procedure as in section 4.2.2 to find out if the results of DR have a positive relationship with P. The Pearson correlations between the two measures of proficiency and DR turned out significantly positive. VLTs: r = 0.562, n= 31, p = 0.001, two-tailed / P: r = 0.513, n= 31, p = 0.003, two-tailed. These results suggest that that the learners who obtained a higher score in the VLTs or in P were more able to retain idioms than the learners who had a lower score. The results of the two previous correlations confirm the findings in Knight (1994) where significant differences were found between the scores of highly proficient and low-proficiency learners in immediate and delayed retention measures of the 'supply definition' type like ours.

The results of the Pearson correlations confirm hypothesis four. There is a positive relationship between the success that the subjects had in CIC and DR and the subjects' proficiency level. The higher the level of proficiency of the subjects the more successful they were in code-breaking and retaining the meaning of the target unknown idioms.

Conclusions

Studies on word-solving strategies when reading have proved with single vocabulary items that the proficiency level influences the success to get the meaning of those lexical items as well as the retention of their meaning in the long run. Those studies have also found that certain strategies are recurrently used with success namely, 'inferencing from context' and 'bilingual dictionary'.

Our study on the identification, code-breaking and retention of idioms has confirmed that there is no significant difference between the procedures and results obtained in the comprehension and retention of unknown single vocabulary items vs. the comprehension and delayed retention of idioms, when the variable tested has been the proficiency level of the subjects.

Our study's new discovery is the confirmation that the success in the identification of the unknown target words correlates as well with the proficiency level of the subjects. Another small contribution of our study consisted in proving that the proficiency level of the students determines the amount of target words ignored when reading. Low-proficiency learners tend to ignore more unknown words than the high proficient learners.

The previous results have some pedagogical implications worth mentioning. The trend shown by low-proficiency learners when ignoring many target unknown lexical items, highlights the importance of providing learner training which strengthens students' skills in reference to the identification of unknown single vocabulary words and also unknown multi-word units which include idioms. Raising awareness about the 'deceptive transparency' of single words and lexical units and favouring the use of global and local context in order for the learners to test their hypotheses will surely help in achieving a higher level of accuracy when identifying, code-breaking and retaining idioms.

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Challenging perspectives in dealing with the drawbacks of group work

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Abstract

Due to a number of reasons, including those derived from socio-constructivist theory, group work is a widely used and encouraged type of interaction in language teaching. In spite of the advantages of this collaborative assignment, both for the student-teachers and teachers, this type of work has its own shortcoming. For instance, it is not easy to guarantee that everyone in a small group will achieve a balanced development of competences. Mindful of the fact that students' grades do not reliably represent the development of all the group members' competences, an unusual approach to grouping students was proposed by a small group of teachers. This paper presents the particular context in which a different grouping students scheme was carried out, discusses the advantages and disadvantages of it, presents the unanticipated reactions from other teachers and from the students and opens the door to challenging well-known perspectives on group work in Durango's public university and, by extension, in Mexico.

Key words: group work, drawbacks, students, teachers, alternatives, performance, perspectives.

Introduction

The new global village requires individuals capable of coping with the demands of an ever changing world. The importance of teamwork in the working world is widely acknowledged (Cappelli and Rogovsky (1994) in Cohen and Bailey (1997), Stein and Hurd (2000) and Nunan (1999)). Concerned about meeting society's expectations, higher education institutions have been promoting teamwork as part of their strategies for comprehensive education aimed at equipping graduates with the interpersonal relationship skills required in the current world of work. The topic has been the focus of research of academics in response to the relevance for their graduates' future real world activity (Cohen and Bailey, 1997). Building useful abilities for the world of work such as expressing and sharing ideas is best done in small groups than in classroom settings where the teacher is the only possibility for interaction (Nunan, 1999, p. 83). Higher education institutions in México as well as other Spanish-speaking countries have been adhering to the Tuning Project for Latin America. The ability to work in a team is part of the generic competences this

Project aims to favour. One of the Mexican institutions that has been promoting this project's generic competences and including them in their study programs is the Universidad Juárez del Estado de Durango (UJED), located in a big developing state in the north of México. Since its design and approval in 2008, the BA in ELT from the UJED has been endorsing these competences.

This paper presents a general background to group work; interweaving research findings with comments made by fifth semester students of the BA in ELT in a questionnaire applied seeking to find out their perceptions and preferences regarding group work. The specific situation which triggered exploring alternatives to grouping students for project building is described, followed by the not very welcomed proposal to address the problem. The outcomes and findings in this paper derived from the implementation of the proposal are based on data collected from students in questionnaires applied before and after putting the proposal into practice. A final reflection includes aspects which might trigger interest in researching.

The issue of group work

Arguments in favour of the importance of students working in groups in the foreign language classroom include the time each group member has for using the language for communication purposes (Harmer, 1991, p. 245, Long and Porter, 1985, Brown and Abeywickrama, 2010, p. 225, 227). In a lockstep group organization, the amount of student talking time is reduced to seconds (Long and Porter, 1985), especially in large classes. In small groups, the opportunities to use the target language are importantly increased as groups of students interact with each other at the same time, rather than interacting only with the teacher one at a time. However, it might be believed that in settings where students share the mother tongue, they comfortably switch to it as soon as they feel they do not have the language command required to express themselves (Harmer, 1991, p. 51, Brown and Abeywickrama, 2010, p. 227). This might be true in many Mexican language classes especially in lower levels; however, switching from the mother

tongue to the target language provides more opportunities to use the foreign language than what a lockstep activity is likely to offer. Having to switch to the mother tongue might even have a positive effect on students who may realize their lacks, motivating them to learn how to communicate their ideas. There are a number of techniques teachers can resort to for overcoming this inconvenience and motivate the use of the target language.

For most individuals, the learning experience throughout life has been to a high extent a social experience, requiring interaction, mainly with the teacher or the most skilled ones. Learning theories stress the importance negotiation of meaning has in the learning process (Lightbown and Spada, 1993, Pica et al., 1987). Negotiation of meaning in understanding what has been said appears to take place more likely in small groups where student-student interaction is possible, rather than in a teacher-led activity. (Nunan, 1999, Long and Porter, 1985). Besides, it is quite unlikely that there would be sufficient opportunities for this kind of interaction between the teacher and every student, especially in large classes' contexts.

Insights from a pre-intervention survey

Researchers claim that learning is more effective when students question, discuss and take active participation in learning than merely sitting down listening to someone presenting a topic (Davis, 2009, p. 204). When students work in teams, there should be the need to explain to each other and discuss among the group members to clarify ideas. By having to verbalize their thoughts and understandings, students are capable of defining their own ideas and are becoming unconsciously aware of their own understandings. Concepts and understandings are defined or redefined through interaction, making the learning process an active action. By discussing and negotiating, learners learn to listen to others, respect others' opinions and acknowledge they might not always be correct. In this respect, the first questionnaire applied was illustrative. For instance, Student 2 in the study wrote *"…we learn…to be tolerant and respect decisions taken by others…*". Student 2's comment denotes awareness of the benefits

working in groups brings to the individual at a personal level. Group work also helps students become aware of the importance of others' participation, building on their own responsibility to the task assigned. Concerning this, the same student in question said that group work helps learners "…learn…to be responsible not only individually but also in a group…", and student 10 said that it "…helps develop skills such as …responsibility…" revealing perceptiveness that responsibility is not something that comes integrated in the individual, but it is learned or developed. In addition, this classroom management technique promotes student cooperation and problem-solving skills (Stein and Hurd, 2000). This view was expressed in student 1's comment who said that teamwork "…teaches that others have different points of view, enriching our way of thinking and opinion…". By learning to listen to others and acknowledging the richness of others contributions, individuals widen their perspectives of the world, realizing there is often more than one way of doing things.

Grouping students

Even though Blatchford et al (2003) assume that there is clear understanding among teachers that group work implies more than sitting students next to each other to work together, discussion among peers of different Mexican universities suggest there is a misconception of what having students work in groups implies. Mexican university students are not commonly trained on group work skills as undergraduates in countries such as the United Kingdom or the United States of America are. Having students work together in a group is more than just telling them to do so (Stein and Hurd, 2000). However, this and nothing else, is the common practice in many contexts, such as most higher education institutions in Mexico. Whether the students are allowed to decide who they want to work with or the class teacher assigns groups, sometimes at random, nothing else is commonly done beyond that. After providing instructions for the task assigned, there is almost no communication between groups and the class teacher regarding the task allocated to be done in a group, until the assignment date is due. In this respect, groups are frequently left to their fate to accomplish the task. It might be

considered that because learners are at university level they are responsible and do not require teachers to be attentive to the process of achieving the task assigned. However, this is not necessarily true: student responsibility does not imply the ability to successfully participate and tackle the complex interpersonal relations working in groups might bring along. In this respect, student 4 wrote *"…being able to successfully work in groups does not happen naturally, even when the group members are acquaintances…*". This comment reveals awareness that working in groups is not something that comes natural to everybody. Some personalities might be more willing to work in groups, while for others a conscious effort might be required.

There are different positions in relation to the most positive way of grouping students. A common practice used in some countries such as the United Kingdom is to organize students in groups by ability. The decision is taken based on test results applied at the beginning of the school term (Ireson & Hallam, 2001). Advocates of a different position towards the way of organizing groups consider Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (1978) theory the answer to fostering weak student development. ZPD is considered to be one of the influences behind grouping students of heterogeneous strengths, mixing low, average and strong students in a group. It is thought that weak students' learning process is awakened through ideas exchange and interaction when placed in a group of more developed ones, hopefully evolving into the students' development. Opposing arguments consider lower strength students will be shadowed by the stronger ones, without much opportunity to participat (Harmer, 1991, p.246). A necessary condition for a weak student to benefit from working with a more skilled individual is the guidance of a supportive adult or expert. The role of the more knowledgeable partner is to challenge the individual's mental processes taking the novice in a step by step assisted journey towards learning, or presumably development, according to the latter's' mental development stages. It cannot be assumed that all stronger team members are capable of being the supportive guide weak students require. Assuming the role of the sensitive guide to help the weaker partner develop

requires special skills which may not be naturally present in all individuals. Moreover, regardless of their ability to take this mentoring role, it is also crucial that the expert peers are willing to undertake the task. Not everybody is willing to undertake this supportive role. In this respect, student 3 in the present study expressed "…it is difficult to work with people who do not know much…". This comment reflects the student's preference to work with people who is at the same level of knowledge, though the comment does not state unwillingness to work with somebody who knows less, it is echoing a situation considered undesired.

The previously described conditions: willingness and ability to be the patient guiding expert for a weaker colleague, are unlikely to take place in most groups of people who have decided to work together to fulfill a given task. Needless is to suggest the possibilities of imposed groups to exhibit this interaction pattern is quite improbable. On the other hand, high strength students might willingly decide to do all or almost all the work as they find it easier to do so, rather than having to help a weaker friend, or relying on an irresponsible group member. When group members are friends or are trying to fit in into a group, they might be abused by other team members. In addition, students wishing to fit in into a group might feel pressure to do more than others, expecting to gain acceptance by team members.
Many factors might interweave to create each group's unique interaction environment. According to Trevithick (2005, p. 82) when more than two people work together in a group there are a range of processes taking place among participants while attempting to reach a common goal. Each group member will bring along his own personality, beliefs about group work, self-expectations and expectations of others, task perception and understanding, conflict solving strategies, degree of responsibility, etc. All this baggage brought along by each member will influence the characteristics and interaction of the group. Many groups might drift trying to reconcile group members' perceptions and expectations, sadly, some might ever reach harbor undamaged.

The Context

The BA in English Language Teaching at the UJED promotes teamwork along the whole program of studies. Regardless of the amount of teamwork done during the semester, for three years, every semester, students are required to work in teams in an end-of-semester final project. This final project, carried out in teams, integrating all (or almost all) subjects, represents 30% of their final grade, being the semester's portfolio the remaining 70% of the final grade for each semester. Each semester's project's characteristics and mechanics are set by the semester's faculty, though final decisions are the semester coordinator's authority. The strategy to grouping students has mainly been that of allowing students to decide who to work with, under the premise that people work better in an environment where they feel comfortable (Lightbown and Spada, 1993; Long and Porter,1985; Brown and Abeywickrama, 2010, p. 225). By selecting the members of their team, it is assumed that they are deciding to work with classmates they get along well with and somehow feel identified with them. In line with this idea, groups are usually conformed of close friends, who know each other well. Nevertheless, in very few occasions acquaintances are not grouped with pairs or trios of close friends, according to task specifications. Yet, they regularly to decide who they prefer to work with so that groups are frequently a mixture of academic achievement, varying to a high extent the combination of low, average and high performance students.

Students should be working on the final project some weeks before the end of the semester, however, considering the amount of work such projects require, one week before the final project presentation is dedicated solely to it. In these periods, groups of students frequently work outside of school, though it is not uncommon to see them working on their final project at the library. However, as teachers approaching groups to check for doubts confirm, not all group members appeared to assume their responsibility in the teamwork.

Defining the problem

Students decided who they were going to work with for the final project, for which it is assumed that personality crash problems is not an issue. It is expected that, since students get along well with the classmates they are working with, all of them will be happily working and helping each other, discussing and reaching agreements. Taking into account Vygotsky's ZPD theory, it was believed that team members' strengths were balancing others' weaknesses and that all team members were participating in building the project. These considerations given, all team members should be able to elaborate and justify decisions taken. However, during the final project presentation, it was found that not all team members were able to elaborate when questions were asked. Stronger colleagues frequently jumped into the rescue of vague or unrelated responses. It was then that subject teachers at the BA in ELT at the UJED noticed that some groups were not working together as a team. Some groups found convenient to split the task into the team members. These groups commonly started to work shortly before the project presentation date. They decided who was doing which part and who would be joining all the sections together before the due date. In this working organization, one person was responsible for one part only, therefore, others were not aware of the exact contents of the rest of the project. If a team member failed to do his/her part, that part could remain undone, in the naive belief that only the student in question would assume the consequences of the working approach chosen by the team. Some team members made a good effort in their parts and could talk about what they did, while others did not really understand the contents and were not able to elaborate if questions were made. Sections of literature were usually memorized, without being comprehended.

Yet, other groups were working, but not homogeneously. High strength students found it easier to almost ignore lower strength students, assigning them certain tasks, without integrating them into the whole process, or vice versa. Lower strength students did not participate and left almost all the responsibility on other team members. This situation became evident and repetitive every semester. It was clear that the competences developed during the semester and being

demonstrated in the final project had not been equally mastered among group members. Since the grade assigned to the final project was the same for all team members, many low strength students were passing the semester due to the final project's grade. Much discussion was carried out among faculty members at academic meetings, but no real actions had been taken to effectively deal with this situation.

Approaching the problem

A different way of organizing groups was proposed in a faculty meeting to approach the situation of uneven competency development among students. The proposal was to organize the groups in which fifth semester students were to work for the development of the final project. The basis for grouping students was students' individual performance in the different subjects during the semester. The online Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines *performance* to be "the act of doing a job or an activity, etc." and *ability* to be the "the power or skill to do something". According to this, students were to be grouped considering the perceived effort they have been laying in their semester subjects, not their perceived skill in a specific subject. Students' grouping was not to be grounded on their intelligence, but in the level of effort they have demonstrated to have exercised in the different tasks and activities set by the teachers during the course of the semester. This approach was to be applied to the 12 students in fifth semester only, hence the proposal came from this semesters' cadre. Though rejected by most faculty members, and not without concerns, the implementation of the proposal in question was accepted. Students were to be grouped according to the individual performance they had shown during the semester.

Group members were to be decided among fifth semester teachers. Teachers looked at students' progress in their portfolios before agreeing or suggesting changes to the grouping proposed by the semester coordinator. The few changes made to the original student grouping proposal indicated that perceptions on students' performance were quite homogeneous among faculty. Students were not being categorized by their intelligence or ability; groups were organized according

to teachers' perceptions, based on portfolios, of students' development and dedication to subjects throughout the semester. This was made clear to students when told about the change in the strategy to grouping for the final project. The one thing fifth semester faculty was concerned about was avoiding students' feeling they were being labeled as "non-intelligent".

Before announcing the new grouping arrangement to students, a short questionnaire was applied to them regarding their previous experiences in group work, as well as their feelings and perceptions of what working in groups implies. A different questionnaire was applied to them at the end of the final project presentation. Students' reactions were as varied as unexpected. Some of them rejected the idea of being grouped according to performance arguing that they might be forced to work with someone they did not get along well with. Other learners expressed no particular concerned about the issue, signaling that they were able to work with anybody; they were interested in giving their best effort to the design of a good project. Another group of students exhibited an indifferent attitude, stating that if the decision had already been taken, they would just accept it. Other students were identified as being anxious or stressed by the new grouping strategy. A final group of students conveyed a feeling of relief, stating they were not going to have to work with peers who had not shown much interest in their academic performance.

Not all students were surprised when they were assigned to their new group. Most of them were almost certain or had a pretty clear idea of who their team members were to be, as they perceived them to be at the same level of performance they considered themselves to be in. However, some students were surprised to find out they had been allocated to work with students they perceived to have exhibited lower performance than themselves. Interestingly, the students who were surprised with the grouping decision were those perceived by teachers as poor performers during the semester.

Insights from direct observation

Teams were organized in terms of three main categories of performance: low performance, average performance and high performance. In line with direct observations conducted right after assigning the teams, some low strength students experienced the grouping process to be a "reality check" since perceptions of their own development seemed to be beyond their teachers' views. In addition, it was found that groups composed by low strength students experienced more difficulties in order to develop teamwork. For instance, after realizing that conflict solution was absorbing their time without allowing them to concentrate in the assigned task, some teams had to be personally coached by the semester coordinator. It could be suggested that low performance students had more problems in working together because they have not been in the position of having to make decisions and take actions. Presumably, their previous group work experience had quite passive. Finding themselves working with students at a similar level of performance might have awaken in them the need to take a more active role in the group dynamics, one that perhaps every group member was taking at the same time without much previous experience in it.

By contrast to what occurred with low strength performance groups, it seems to be significant that students organized in average performance groups and high performance groups did not exhibit any remarkable problems to work with the members of their new teams. In this respect, conflicts appeared to be rapidly solved without damaging the groups' interpersonal relations.

Insights from a post-intervention survey

A survey conducted after this new grouping experience shed light on the students' preferences and perceptions. First, almost all the learners preferred to work with classmates at the same level of performance and the majority of them rejected having to work with classmates at a lower level of performance. Second, nearly all

the learners valued the experience "positive" academically speaking and in terms of the "reachable challenge" it represented.

Findings

Students' self-perception might affect their performance in the semester. Some of the students were surprised to know how their teachers perceived their performance due to the fact that their self-concept on performance during the semester was above their teachers' perceptions. By the time the grouping-based performance took place, students already knew their portfolios' attainments; however, this was not an element for them to signal an average of weak performance. It was until grouping took place, that awareness was awakened. Some of their comments reflected concern about teachers' insights. It can be suggested that some of them might have exerted different effort, had they been aware of external perception.

Work among low performance groups resulted in lower attainment, while work presented by average performance and high performance groups resulted in better attainment. The depth of answers to questions made during the final project presentation corresponded to the performance group. For example, low performance groups were unable to elaborate and provide justification for decisions taken in project building beyond surface, while average and high performance group members' presentation exhibited more developed and detailed responses. In addition, better organization and work presentation characterized both average and high performance groups, while in low performance groups, content omissions were identified.

Even though no group failed the final project, teachers' perceptions of students' performance in the final project coincided with the one individual students have exhibited during the semester and with their subjects' evidence portfolio. Teachers' perceptions on the reliability of each student's final grade in their subject increased,

and they believed that individual final grades obtained at the end of the semester represented fairly well the competences developed in the course of the semester.

Conclusions and recommendations

An overall analysis of the pre-intervention and post-intervention surveys revealed a mismatch between what students say about group work (i.e. that group work favours the quality of their own learning) and how they act out when actually dealing with this learning strategy (i.e. that most of them do not really carry out group work, thus, split the task). As a result, it could be assumed that learners may not be completely aware of the benefits of this learning strategy. This hypothesis opens the need of exploring more in depth to what extent they have been trained to effectively make use of group work not only throughout previous semesters of the BA but also in previous educational levels.

Similarly, when contrasting the observation of the intervention and the post-intervention survey it appears to be evident that intermediate and high performance learners are usually not willing to support classmates with a low strength performance. If this idea can be confirmed, it seems to be logical that, at the time of grouping, these learners may not really benefit from following a theoretical framework which is strongly supported on Vygotskian ZPD. In fact, following such a model appears to widen the gap between the level of performance learners can achieve.

In the course of this research project which emerged from a genuine interest in improving the quality of group work for the benefit of our fifth semester learners, as researchers realized that it represents a day-to-day problem commonly ignored by teachers and by students themselves. This awareness has been translated into founding and leading a national project to start a research project on the arena of student's group work outside the classroom in 4 Mexican Universities in Mexico. We found this to be a very promising initiative in order to systematically approach the drawbacks of group work in a variety of contexts. Only future actions, (such as

the ones explained at the end of the last two paragraphs), may reveal alternatives to shed light on a pedagogy to deal with the intriguing but important process of group work and its connections to learners' beliefs shown in and out of the classroom.

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What do future teachers reflect about? An exploration of student-teachers' journals

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Abstract

Reflection is a powerful tool for teachers to identify strengths and areas of opportunity, and therefore to grow professionally. In the case of student-teachers, reflection helps them make connections between theory and practice and then, make better sense of what teaching means (Correia & Bleicher, 2008). The aim of this research was to explore and analyze the reflection journals written by eight student-teachers of an Bachelor of Arts in English Language Teaching (BA in ELT) along their last teaching practice experience. The results show that in early stages of their teaching practice student-teachers' reflections tended to be technical (Valli, 1997) since they focused on matching their experiences in the classroom with the theory or with the instruction they had received at -school. It is important to notice that as student-teachers advanced in their teaching practice, their reflections changed and became reflection in action or reflection on action and deliberative. From the findings, it could be assumed that student-teachers changed the focus of their reflection as they progressed along the teaching experience, moving from contrasting what they have to or can do in the classroom with what they were told at school to concentrate on in order to improve their own performance and even questioning some of their beliefs. The results from this study suggest that reflection on teaching should be promoted since the early stages of the BA in order to help student-teachers' become more critical and aware of their own practice and beliefs.

Key words: Student-teacher, reflective teaching, teaching practice, journals

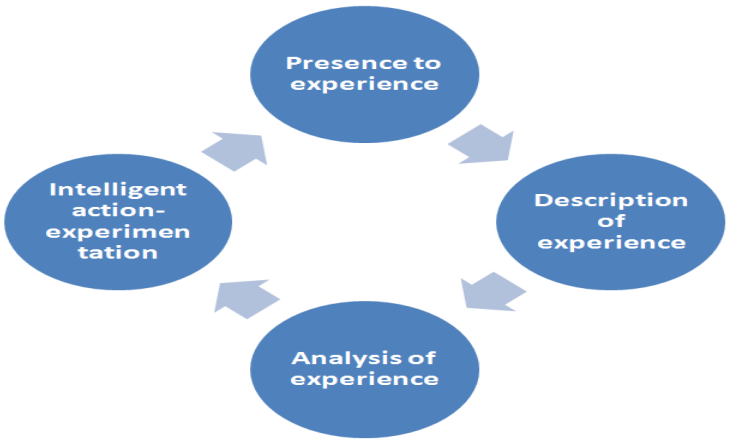
Introduction

Second Language Teacher Education (SLTE) has experienced some significant changes during the last decades. In the 1970s SLTE consisted mainly of short training courses focused on introducing teachers to specific approaches. In the 1980s, more attention was given to the teacher and his/her professional development; it was back then when the term 'teacher-learner' was created to convey that teacher's education was a constant process. In the 1990s SLTE was redefined. It was in that decade when the term Second Language Teacher Education was originally created and used by Richards to refer to the preparation of second language teachers (Wright, 2010, p. 260) and also when attention was given not only to what teachers learned, but also to how they learned it. Richards & Nunan (1990) state that there has been a transition from making teachers aware of

standard techniques that could be used in the classroom to letting them formulate their own hypothesis about what effective language teaching is.

In the last decade emphasis has been placed on the fact that there are other reasons, besides teacher education, that influence the way teachers behave. Johnson, (2006) states the importance of moving from a positivist paradigm in second language teacher education to a situated one which considers how teachers' previous experiences, interpretation of those experiences, and the beliefs that emerge from them as well as the context in which they are insert, influence what they do in the classroom and their reasons to do it. This view necessarily involves reflecting in one's teaching practice, taking us to the process of reflective thinking described by (Dewey, 1933) who considers reflection as a series of steps which follow and support one to another and that constitutes an organized and continuous process. Rodgers, (2002) examines and adapts Dewey's model and suggests that reflection is a complex and systematic process more than an end itself; this process is based on the scientific method and includes several stages of an experience: *observation, analysis, formulating a hypothesis and ,testing it.* The process is continuous and cyclical, since a new experience will appear when testing a hypothesis.

Figure 1 - Rodgers' revision of Dewey's reflection process



Reflection has been acknowledged as an essential component of teacher development and has taken a key role in recent second language teacher education programs. Richards, (1998, pp. 21–22) identifies three components of critical reflection: *an event, the recollection of the event and a review and response to it,* and also identifies some procedures that are used with teachers to promote this process, these include writing journals, learning a foreign language different from the one the teachers teach, audio and video recordings of classes, among others.

Reflective practice requires reflective thinking, Thompson and Thompson (2008: p 23) state that this kind of thinking "…*helps us make sense of our practice, what is required of us, how best to respond and so on*", and go further when they state the importance of integrating theory and practice through the process of reflection. Following the same line of thought, Valli (1997) discusses the importance of reflection in teaching and, therefore, the need of Teacher Education programs to include it in their syllabi and to promote it among student-teachers so they can make informed and conscious decisions. The same author concludes that there are five types of reflections and that they consider different sources of information and lead to different kinds of choices and actions: *technical reflections, reflection-on-action and reflection- in- action, deliberative reflection, personalistic reflection and critical reflection.*

Teachers whose **reflections are technical**, compare their teaching practice to external guidelines such as what the ones emitted by researchers or evaluators. They follow someone else's (the experts') voice which limits the application of this kind of reflection to past experiences only. **Reflection on action** takes place after a lesson has been taught and **reflection-in-action** refers to actions in progress, during teaching practice. In both cases, teachers follow their own voice since reflection is based on their particular situation, belief and context. **Deliberative reflection** involves the consideration of a variety of factors present in the teaching

practice. Teachers do not limit the sources they use as input to reflect and focus on their experience, what research says, what peers advice, what they believe, etc. They listen to every voice they find useful and it is the teachers' role to decide which voice they follow.

When teachers reflect in a personalistic way, they consider both, their and their students' lives, focusing on their wants, needs, goals and personal situations and not only on academic performance. Since teachers listen to their students´ voices, empathy is a powerful tool for them. However, when teachers reflect critically, they aim at improving the society and human condition. They listen to the voice of society, especially to the one from disadvantaged groups and act with the purpose of improving their conditions.

Methodology

The study herein sought to come to a further understanding of the reflection process of student-teachers at the BA in ELT. For that purpose, a set of three research questions were formulated:

- 1 What do student-teachers discuss when they reflect on their practice?
- 2 How do these reflections show evidence of critical thinking skills?
- 3 How conducive has the teaching practice being in leading student-teachers to be conscious of their own actions in the classroom?

Participants

The participants were eight student-teachers from the eighth semester of the BA in ELT. In this program, student-teachers are required to comply with their Professional Social Service (PSS) when they reach eighth semester. To complete the required number of credits, students need to engage in a "real teaching situation". The program coordinator helps the student-teachers get placed in a school. It may be private and public, either as teacher assistant or head teacher, but this depends on the receptive school regulations. The student-teachers are

responsible the whole semester for teaching the group they have been assigned. By the time student/teachers have reached the eight semester their ages are in between 19 and 21. The groups the student/teachers work with are from the school's Languages Centre.

Data collection and analysis

Within their PSS, student-teachers are required to write daily journal entries, where they reflect about their teaching. Being this the first experience student-teachers have reflecting formally on their teaching practice, the program coordinator provides a set of questions to help the students reflect (see appendix 1). The students are not required to answer all of the questions, instead, they are invited to respond to the questions that they feel drawn to according to the particular experiences they had during that day.

For the purpose of the analysis Vali's typology of reflection was adopted to aid the researchers in the evaluation of the depth of the reflections. With the intention of increasing the study's validity, two of the three researchers analyzed the data separately by reading each journal several times, identifying salient features in the data and then categorizing it using the selected typology. The second phase of the analysis involved the revision of each individual analysis by both researchers and agreeimng in terms of the categorization.

Results

The reflective thinking process

Within their writing, the participants showed a capacity for *mindfulness* and *creative thinking,* a way of thinking that is beyond the everyday thinking process and that helps us wonder; this wonder leads us to wisdom which lets us be creative in our practices (Thompson and Thompson, 2008, p.34*)*. Taking Rodgers' (2002) reorganization of Dewey's(1933) thinking process as reference, we can identify every step in the next extract:

> It was hard for me because I had to made9 5 sets of 8 cookies for each table to make their own Moon Cycle. 1 Ss did it very well but I had some problems when grouping Ss because everyone wanted to have the cookies or eat them, so I had to tell them to be quiet more than twice (even more). At the end Ss could eat the cookie but just when placing the correct moon phase in the correct place. 2 Ss enjoyed this activity but next time I'll give instructions before doing the activity. 3 Today I taught the same thing. But this time I didn't have money to buy so many cookies so I decided to use the board to draw the Moon cycle. Definitely it was more difficult. I made the drawings and work individually, but Ss were asking me too many questions but I could answered them. The class took longer and it was not as interactive as with the other group but the goal was reached: Learn how the moon cycle works.3
>
> Ss5 female

Ss5 describes in her Journal how she has put some thought into the way she will present the topic she is teaching, coming up with the idea of presenting moon phases with cookies (presence to experience). She then goes on to describe the experience, telling us how her students reacted to the activity. She continues by analyzing the experience, deciding on things she would like to change for future use. In the experimentation phase, the student-teacher decides to approach the same teaching objective with a completely different technique (a more prescriptive one), she then discusses the pros and cons of each of the approaches used. Extracts like the previous one show the participant's mindfulness, and her capacity to think back on her own work, evaluating and comparing the success of each activity. The extract also shows that the reflection has been done in depth going beyond mere classroom management issues, to the evaluation of the activity's success based on the objectives the student-teacher had for that particular class.

Technical reflection

A vast number of reflections fell on the technical side. Several instances of descriptive narratives of what was happening in the classroom were found within the student-teachers' journals, which suggests reflection does not come easy to them as we can see portrayed in the following extracts:

[9] The extracts from the student's reflections have been inserted verbatim for the sake of authenticity. The reader will find language inaccuracies frequently.

> I speak English language all class, effectively use of voice, I respect lesson plan, I apply activities that include the four skills through class, apply techniques to maintain good behaviour are characteristics I consider as strong in my teaching.
>
> Ss1 Male

In this extract, Ss1 seems to be answering one of the guiding questions (What strong points do you consider as characteristics of your teaching?). He limits himself to listing every point he considers strong in his teaching however, he does not discuss them any further. This suggests Ss1 engaged in discourse that lacks thought. Thought is a necessary feature of reflection; however, he limited his commentary to the description of his actions in what appears to be the externalization of an internal dialogue in which he compares what he did in class to what others (teachers, tutors, researchers) say should be done. Some other extracts show a brief attempt at reflecting, starting with a description of the experience and closing with a brief evaluation. This can be identified in the following two extracts:

"I could explain vocabulary meaning without saying the word in Spanish I just gave them an explanation in English, so it was a good experience."

Ss2 Female

> As a warm-up I pasted some sheets of paper with adjectives and adverbs on them around the classroom and I had Ss put them in the correct section 'Adverbs or Adjectives', They really enjoy this activity.
>
> Ss5 Female

These extracts show us Ss2 and Ss5 giving very brief descriptions of an action and a short evaluation of the experience. We can tell from the language used by Ss2 to describe the experience that she feels some sort of pride at what she has accomplished, however she only evaluates it as "*a good experience*". Similarly, Ss5 discusses her approach at a *warm up*, and again evaluates it only by saying "*they really enjoyed the activity*". While these are "more reflective" comments, they do not draw on explicit knowledge, which doesn't allow the student/teachers to

discuss why they think their actions are appropriate for the situation at hand. Therefore, we can assert that some student/teachers were capable of recalling and evaluating activities and that they have knowledge of what they should do in certain situations, and that a superficial reflection can be identified.

Personalistic reflection

Some of the most interesting findings refer us to the student-teachers' consideration of the personalistic side of teaching. They frequently referred to the emotional and affective sides of their practice, which suggests they are able to approach it from different perspectives, and that they are aware of students' needs beyond the subject matter:

> something very good was that Abram created a good work and he did not fight in my class but in the break I could see how he fight with some classmates, It was so sad because he hit the cleaning lady then I was talking with Abram and he told me that he just have 3 friends and his friend did not want to play with Abram for that reason he hit them.
>
> Ss 8 female

In this extract, Ss8 demonstrates concern about a child that usually misbehaves in class. She is concerned enough to try to approach her student and find out what is wrong. This type of reflection shows that students acknowledge their own and their students' emotions, which makes them prompt to engage into action and try to solve the problem that triggers such emotions (Felten, Gilchrist & Darby, 2006). Similarly, in the next extract Ss5 expresses concern about a student and tries to find a way to solve the issue at hand:

> I had some problems with Alex, is a very active boy, and he was not writing anything at all, so I decided to go to his place, bend on my knees and refocus him by reading with him and writing the beginning of some sentences. When I let him write and monitored the other Ss, he was concentrated and writing his writing sentences ☺ .
>
> Ss 5 female

Reflection-on-action/in-action

The value of reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action is undeniable. The capacity we human beings have of thinking on our feet as a response to a situation that has not resulted as we expected it to (whether the result is positive or negative) gives us the possibility of looking for alternative means to tackle the task at hand. Translated into teaching practice, this prepares the practitioner to face a wide range of situations that might arise in the classroom. The following example of a participant reflecting-on-action portrays this process:

> I worked with grammar and I feel that I did not explain the rules of the grammatical point good enough. I said so because students did not understand very well, so I gave them examples and I explain again the grammatical point. What I thought after class is that maybe I need to use other strategies, like using color paper to identify the subject pronouns by color, for example the 3rd person one color and the rest another so I feel that this strategy might work better.
>
> Ss2 Female

In this extract Ss2 shows a capacity of thinking back on her action and evaluating it effectively, which gives her the possibility to think of alternative possibilities that might have a better result. Another example can be identified in the following extract.

> Today the activity did not work as I expected because it involved a game out of the classroom and I lost the control completely of the group, but if I carry out the activity but did not meet my expectations that I expected, this will help me to know what kinds of activities work best and what helps them learn more

Later in the journal:

> How the activity from Monday did not work, I decided to change the way I apply it to the another group and in this occasion was more productive because I had more control of the group and so I know if they really learned the vocabulary and which had more trouble pronouncing and I could strengthen it more.
>
> Ss6 female

This particular extract shows how Ss6 reflects on and in-action, as well as her ability to criticize her own actions. As Schön, (1983, p. 50) asserts, this type of reflection gives her the possibility to surface what had failed in her action, criticize it

effectively, restructure, and engage into action once again. This willingness Ss6 has for learning from her experience shows she possesses the *growth competence*, which will possibly enable her to continue learning from her own experiences once the educational program is finished. Given the fact that we cannot prepare student-teachers to face every single situation they might face in their future professional life, developing the growth competence should be one of the main goals of SLTE. (p. 47)

Deliberative

As mentioned previously, when reflecting deliberatively student-teachers show openness to listening to different voices that feed their knowledge and their actions. In the following extract we can see Ss2 connecting her action in the classroom to a recommendation a teacher has given her:

> *I taught phonetic, spelling and new vocabulary and it also some reading. I felt really good after finishing the class because I felt much more secure while being in front of the group. I also had a very good control of the class; I actually use the technique to get the student's attention that Mrs. V told us in the morning and it really work.*
>
> Ss2 Female

Ss2 seems to be giving more credit to the activity now that she has experienced it and describes how its success has also had an impact on her emotional well-being and self-confidence. In the next extract, referring to behavioral objectives to justify the course of action she has selected,Ss5 is listening to the voice of theory,:

> *As a classroom teacher I try to study the topic -if I do not know what it is about- before teaching it and I think about the questions students might ask. I do write behavioral objectives by using accommodation, I have read that this works better with kids. Sometimes it is difficult to maintain classroom behavior and keep students attention all the time, but behavior is one of the most important elements when teaching. I think I need to find new techniques to control students' behavior since the ones I have tried have not worked very well.*
>
> Ss5 Female

Although the justification of the use of behavioral objectives is brief, Ss5 seems to have a clear understanding of what the theory entails. Similarly, in the following

extract, Ss3 resorts to theory to justify her actions. In this particular instance of reflection Ss3 shows a clear understanding of the theory and its applicability in her particular situation:

> *I just would add some TPR activity before they enter to the classroom, because they come so enthusiastic and with tons of sugar on the body, that they need to place the brain in the class. Some Total Physical Response activity will allow students to enter on the mood of class and don't be playing around or asking for permission every minute. Then with the words they saw I could imagine an activity for review, write on the board the words and some tricky ones that looks similar or that sound similar or that are spelled quite similar, so they get confused and they need to pay attention to the words, discuss what word is the correct and which one doesn't, so they comprehend the differences, because I could saw them quite confused with the use of: an. Then they could copy the words as the teacher did with the definitions.*
>
> Ss3 Female

This particular reflection portrays Ss3 as a "knowledgeable doer" (Thompson & Thompson, 2008, p. 22) in other words, a practitioner that is able to integrate both theory and practice. While this is an interesting example of deep, mindful reflection, instances like it were not found frequently in the student-teachers' journals, which suggests that students have not yet become entirely reflective and that they would benefit from more training on how to engage in reflection.

Critical Reflection

Although critical reflection was very rarely found in the journals, on some occasions student-teachers expressed their concern for the impact in society. The following extract is an example of this:

> *I had a misspelling in one of the words, so i have to pay more attention on that because students learn what I show to them so I got to be very careful.*
>
> Ss2 Female

In this extract, Ss2 expresses concern about her spelling, she seems to be genuinely worried about the effect that her errors might have on her students, which shows a clear sense of responsibility regarding the impact that her actions may have on her students and ultimately, in society.

Conclusions

The value of helping student-teachers become reflective has been well established in the field of teacher education and more recently in the SLTE field. The research herein sought to coming to a better understanding of how the process of reflective thinking could positively impact the practice of student-teachers at the BA in ELT. The journals student-teachers kept provided with sufficient data to come to the following conclusions:

- *1 What did student-teacher's discuss when they reflected on their practice?*

The student-teachers that participated in the study discussed a wide variety of topics related to teaching practice in their journals. There were frequent references to a range of problems they had to face in the classroom, as well as discussions of evaluative character of their own performance as teachers. There were also instances of reflection that acknowledge the context where the student-teachers were developing their activities, and how there were "contextual constraints" that had weight when deciding what to do in their classes. The participants also showed a highly empathic, emotional and personal side of their practice, mentioning in different instances their emotional reactions to different situations, as well as paying attention to their students' needs and wants, and leading their activities towards those needs. Regarding RQ1, we can conclude that students reflections cover Valli's typology and go beyond it. There were instances of every kind of reflection on the journals: technical, personal, in-action/on-action, deliberative and critical. The fact that the latter type of reflection appeared only once, could be attributed to the inexperience of the student-teachers who, at early stages of their teaching practice, could be more concerned about their everyday experiences and their 'immediate needs' as teachers than about the well-being of the society. Perhaps, once student-teachers gain more experience and get used to dealing with usual situations, they could start reflecting in a more critical way.

- *2. - How do these reflections show evidence of critical thinking skills?*

Evidently, not all the reflection instances were mindful enough to show evidence of critical thinking, however, there were certainly several instances that did have an element of critical thought. For instance, every reflection that did a conscientious evaluation of an action involved an element of criticality; whenever a student-teacher made reference to theories and to their teacher comments this criticality came up one more step in the reflective thinking ladder, shaping it into an academically found critical reflection. Reflection thus, in this particular case, has demonstrated to be conducive to critical thinking.

- *3. - How conducive has the teaching practice being in leading student-teachers to be conscious of their own actions in the classroom?*

The experience of being in charge of a group for a consistent period of time made the student-teachers live situations which might have only been presented to them as part of a class, a discussion or a case analysis. This first formal teaching experience could have provoked some cognitive dissonance which triggered their critical thinking and resulted in reflection processes; based on that, it can be said that there is a need for exposing student-teachers to real teaching situations, initially accompanied by prompted reflection. Regarding this, the use of action-research accompanying student-teachers first practice experiences would be suggested; the sooner they are introduced to reflecting on what they see and/or do in class, the more prepared they will be to reflect when teaching a group during their SSP.

Since each and every one of the reflection types presented in Valli's typology could be useful at different stages and situations of the teaching practice, actions should be taken to ensure that student-teachers know and experience all of them and their benefits during their BA, so they are able to use them when teaching. In order to guide student-teachers to climb the reflective ladder mentioned before, they could

be exposed to teaching principles, methods and standards in an early stage of their studies so they could make some connections between these guidelines and their practice and engage in technical reflection initially. In order to progress in the ladder, students should be exposed to different teaching situations, through observing classes in a variety of contexts (i.e. different levels, different needs, different policies, etc.). This could help them reflect more in and on action and make decisions based not only on external principles, but also on their own perspectives. Personal reflection, could be strengthened if teachers training these student-teachers model a humanistic approach to teaching. Experiencing this situation could help them develop empathy and consider their students' situation to make decisions when teaching. By presenting opportunities for student-teachers to experience and engage in reflection, the two more complex types of reflective practice, the deliberative and critical, could be promoted since they would be the logical next step to follow.

The results presented and discussed above provide some indication of actions that could be implemented to strengthen the reflective capacity of student-teachers; however, forming reflective and informed practitioners is a process that requires of continuous monitoring which allows gathering data, which in turn, will require of a reflective process from teachers, trainers and curriculum designers.

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