



**UNIVERSIDAD DE QUINTANA ROO**  
DIVISIÓN DE CIENCIAS POLÍTICAS Y HUMANIDADES

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**ALUMNI AND STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON  
THEIR ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING  
PROFESSIONAL TRAINING**

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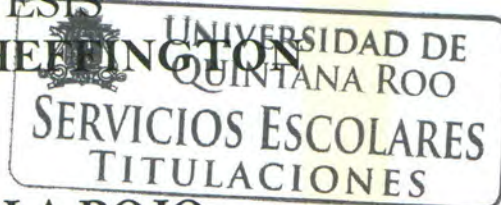
TESIS  
Para obtener el grado de  
**LICENCIADA EN LENGUA INGLESA**

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ASESORÍA Y APROBADA COMO REQUISITO PARCIAL PARA OBTENER EL  
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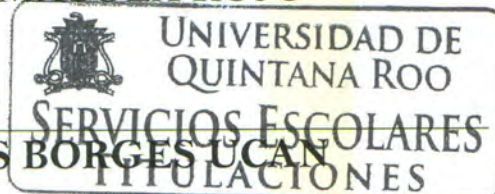
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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Recently in Mexico, one of the main concerns of many public universities is to offer high quality educational programs, which include well prepared and capable people who are able to work successfully in their professional area. *United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization* (UNESCO) pointed out that schools should prepare students for the new challenges in a globalized world where the contact between multiple languages and cultures is increasingly common. In this context, education should help pupils understand the diverse cultural expressions that exist in Mexico and the world (Delors, et al, 1996). The Secretariat of Public Education (2007) stated that the same criteria used for the improvement in the quality of education should also apply to the training of teachers, the updating of the curricula and their contents, pedagogical approaches, teaching methods and teaching resources.

Teaching English as a Foreign Language has become more important in matters of the educational system in Mexico. Over five years ago, in the majority of states, the government introduced English in the curriculum of elementary schools. This program called Programa Nacional de Ingles en Educacion Basica (PNIEB) arose from the necessity of including the teaching of the English to the first three levels of education: preschool, primary and secondary. This decision was made due to several reasons, mainly because of the low level of English students have when they arrive to higher education. Most of the students had limited contact with the language during secondary and high school; furthermore, this contact did not reflect upon students' command of the language. Moreover, those who came from rural areas had no contact whatsoever with the foreign language until they arrived to the university. The objective of this program is to ensure that when



pupils finish secondary school, *they will have developed the multilingual and multicultural competencies they need to successfully meet the communicative challenges of the globalized world, build a broad vision of linguistic and cultural diversity at a global level, and respect their own culture and that of others.*

It is well known that, there is a comprehensive range of factors that influence and affect students' learning process, such as: age, learning strategies, learning styles, etc., but it is also well known that language learning is facilitated when there is a prepared teacher. The teacher is and should not be held totally responsible for students' learning; however, his/her role is very important to help students' reach their goals throughout their learning process.

Teachers are very important and their influence on student learning could depend on knowing exactly how or why the students are motivated will mean finding out how they feel about learning English (Harmer, 1991). Clearly, when we realize that a teacher not only teaches the language, but is also an example of what students want to become, the teacher becomes their role model. The teacher motivates students to improve their language skills, therefore preparing future teachers whom are capable of overcoming different kind of obstacles in their professional career such as unexperienced in teaching, classroom management, or students' behavior.

To recruit well prepared teachers, it is very important to take a look at their curriculum and this curriculum has to agree with the necessities of the EFL students to become competent English teachers. At the University of Quintana Roo, there is a major focused on the teaching of English and how English should be thought to EFL students. According to the English Language program, the alumni will be capable to design courses,

develop programs, assess, adapt, or develop training materials and design, implement and interpret assessment tools.

As former students from the University of Quintana Roo, specifically from the English Language program, we think that exploring into students' and former students' perceptions of their training in English language teaching will help improve the practice in our country. This classroom research can offer guidance for both EFL teachers and students.

Both students and English teachers should be conscious about some problems they may face throughout their professional development. Having had some practice as English teachers, it is possible to state that it is not easy to manage these difficulties in the most positive way the first time they are encountered.

When students finish the major, it is believed they are well prepared to work in the field they studied, but most of the time, this preparation gives them only the basic tools needed to start. Once they start teaching, they can notice there are many situations that a teacher must face and if some of them were included in the curriculum it would be of great use to novice teachers. English teachers must be prepared to work at both private and public schools, and it is evident that teaching in one environment is completely different from the other. For example, most students who finish this program have no idea of how to prepare a lesson plan for pre-school or for primary school children, most of them being ages from 3 to 10 years old.

Furthermore, classroom management is another weakness we have noticed in our practice; for instance, how to deal with 38 students in a small classroom, some of them sharing desks and chairs. We were not aware of the existence of specific strategies or

techniques that needed to be used with children who had certain disabilities, or even young learners who did not know how to read or write, or even hold a pencil yet. We had mainly practiced with micro- teaching activities simulating situations in the classroom in our teaching practicum courses. The students we practiced with during our training were around 15 in number, sitting in a comfortable classroom, and they were over 20 years old, even though they were supposed to act as five year old students, while the lesson was taught, we were the teachers.

While facing these difficulties, we talked with some former classmates who shared similar problems. After reflecting upon this situation, we consider it essential to study students and former students' opinions about their learning experience and if the preparation they are receiving or have received is appropriate and useful for them as future English teachers. Therefore, the main aim of this research is to compare students' and former students' perceptions regarding the English Language program offered at the University of Quintana Roo.

This research will be helpful for both teachers and students in order to improve the teaching-learning process. It will provide a solid basis of what the real needs of the students are and help suggest some strategies that could be implemented in the program and some considerations future English teachers should be aware of in order to be prepared to identify and solve different problems they may encounter in their professional career.

This study is part of a macro research project which aims at comparing the perceptions of students, former students, teachers, and employers regarding the training of English

language teachers. This project is being carried out simultaneously at four public universities in Mexico: Universidad Veracruzana, Universidad de Guanajuato, Universidad de Colima, and Universidad de Quintana Roo. Therefore, the results obtained will be highly useful for not only these four universities who have similar programs, but for other institutions with TESOL/TEFL programs.

Many authors have studied students' beliefs and attitudes about teaching and learning the English language. The preoccupation for voicing educational actors' perceptions and beliefs has found echo in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT). This type of studies emerged out of the recognition of the diversity of language learners in terms not only of their purpose for learning but also of the ways they learn (Benson and Nunan, 2005). Also, in the classroom context, the perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, and metacognitive knowledge that students bring to the learning situation have been recognized as a significant contributory factor in the learning process and ultimate success (Bree, 2001).

According to these authors, there is a big influence of the students' perceptions in the learning process. It is essential to recognize and understand the importance and necessity of this study, in order to help both teachers and students improve the teaching-learning process.

The teaching of foreign languages in Mexico, particularly English, is established as compulsory within the curricula of secondary and high schools. However, few studies have been conducted in these areas, among some of them are Gonzales, Vivaldo, and Castillo (2004) who studied the English level students had when starting higher education. This research, which emerged by initiative of the ANUIES and took place in Mexico City, was focused on measuring the proficiency in English (CLI) of students who are

admitted to Higher Education Institutions (HEI). In order to do so, they used the "Nelson English Language Test" (NELT), which evaluates CLI with 400 hours of study. The results obtained show "a grim prospect", considering that all the students surveyed had passed six previous courses of English for at least three hours each of class per week, which is an average of 600 hours of instruction in that language. However, only 10.6 % of the students who participated passed the test. The scene described before reflects the situation that most universities in the country face; in particular, the English language majors because of the low level of English many students have when beginning their higher education.

At University of Quintana Roo, in Cozumel, Duran Howard, Lemus Hidalgo & Martínez Sánchez (2008) carried out a study where the main objective was focused on understanding the levels of language. These were made available to the new students to support them in improving their study skills. The dissemination of that information to the tutors enabled both the tutor and student to decide on the best way to lead the academic life of the student. Similarly, the fact that the students understood the results obtained concerning their language level helped them to realize their strengths and weaknesses in the language, and thus be able to take consciousness about the importance of effort and dedication they would have to input in their studies. That work revealed that the low level of English skills students have when they are admitted to higher education is not exclusive to one state or a region; on the contrary, it is probably a problem faced by many states in the country.

A similar study was carried out at the University of Quintana Roo, in Chetumal, where Borges, et al (2009). It consisted of two main phases: 1) The main aim was to find out whether students in the English language program would pass the PET exam after 384 hours of guided study and identify their strengths and weaknesses in language skills. 2) The TOEFL

examination was applied to the same group of students. The results in both examinations were carefully analyzed in order to define the level of the development of the skills. The results showed that skills are not developed at the same level.

Another factor studied is concerning the motivation students have when they choose the major. Dzay and Narvaez (2012) conducted a research based on identifying the causes for early- leaving at a public university in Mexico. A mixed approach was used in order to identify these cases in all three campuses of the University: Chetumal, Cozumel, and Playa del Carmen. Among the results, they found that the reason why students choose a particular career is a clear example of how motivation can influence the decision of the students in order to request a change in career and/or abandon their studies.

They also gave some reasons that could impact on the dropping out of school; for example, being away from home, family problems, lack of economic resources, inadequate spaces to study, need of working while studying, health problems or addictions, lack of basic skills prior to their admission to the university, high demand of the academic performance, an inappropriate choice of the major, and the expectations of the students; this last reason implies that the academic program does not meet the expectations of the students. Based on their results, Dzay and Narvaez suggest that it is pertinent to carry out studies that reveal the degree of satisfaction of educational programs which contribute to the improvement of quality in education. Studies of relevance and feasibility of the educational programs of UQROO have one main purpose: to meet the current needs of society.

From our point of view, this problem also influences the students' perception of the major; for example, when students are admitted to the university, they usually have

different expectations. While some expect to study the English major to work as teachers, others want to work in the tourism field in hotels in the northern part of the state. Due to the differences in the perceptions and expectations students have when entering the University, and after realizing that the graduation profile they wish for is not the same, they will very likely decide to change majors or abandon their studies.

In this research, participants can reflect about their own perceptions of the major, for instance the good experiences and the ones than can be improved. Also, this could help them in real life situations and in their future development as English teachers. On the other hand, teachers will understand and analyze the ways students perceive the learning process and, as a result, they would have a better understanding of what students need and how they could improve the language major.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Having presented some of the main reasons why we are interested in carrying out this study, in Chapter 2, we will present a detailed review of the literature that is available in this field. Because this study is based on perceptions, we will start by defining ‘perception’ according to different authors. Moreover, how the different methods conceived the role of the teachers, the characteristics of a good English teacher, the teacher professional development and finally the previous research on the topic will also be discussed.

### 2.1 Defining Perception

A perception may be defined from a physical, psychological and physiological perspective. According to Oxford Dictionaries (2013), a perception is the ability to see, hear, or become aware of something through the senses: *the normal limits to human perception*. Eggen and Kauchak (2001) provided a cognitive dimension of a perception; they see a perception as the process by which people attach meaning to experiences. They state that after people attend to certain stimuli in their sensory memories, processing continues with perceptions. A perception is critical because it influences the information that enters the memory when it is working.

For the purpose of this study, we will refer to a perception as the way we identify things, the idea we have about something or someone, according to our personal opinion. And, the way people perceive things could be very different; for instance, the way students perceive their learning process is very different from the teacher’s view. According to



Jordan (2002), other investigations highlight the likely mismatch between students' expectations and those of the teachers.

These opinions, ideas, or perceptions, are very important because they influence the way students behave in specific situations. In the classroom, for example, Richards & Lockhart (1994) state that the perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes students bring with them to the learning situation have been recognized as significant contributing factors in the learning process and ultimate success. Rojas & Reyes (2009) discussed the importance of how the beliefs students hold can be related to the materials or activities used in class, the best age to learn a language, and the methods learners believe to be useful for them to learn.

## **2.2 Definition and Implications of Training English Teachers**

The vocational and professional aspects of teacher training must depend on the detail of their design upon who trainees are and in what circumstances they will be employed. However, according to Long & Richards (1987), a few general principles can be adduced:

- 1) There is a difference between *initial training* and *training*, in which the applicant is first introduced to the nature of the profession, and all further training.
2. Within initial training there are two main streams of content: (1) general training as a teacher, irrespective of any particular subject specialty, and (2) special training as a teacher of a specified foreign language.
3. Initial training will deal with an appropriate mixture of the three components of *practical*

*skills*, a component of *relevant information*, and a component of *principle and theory*.

One of the most important foundations for language teachers are the methods and approaches underlying the principles of teaching foreign languages. There are many different language teaching methods and approaches. Whether you choose to follow a specific teaching method or an eclectic approach will depend on different factors, including the school you work at, the program you are following, your students' needs and characteristics, among others. Larsen-Freeman (2000) mentioned that, as a language teacher, you have thoughts about your subject matter: what language is, what culture is, and about your students: who they are as learners and how it is they learn. You also have thoughts about yourself as a teacher and what you can do to help your students learn. It is very important for you to become aware of the thoughts that guide your actions in the classroom. With this awareness, you will be able to examine why you do what you do and perhaps choose to think about doing things differently.

According to the different methods in ELT, the role of the teacher has been conceived from different perspectives, in this case and from the view of Larsen-Freeman (2000):

| Method/Approach            | Role  |
|----------------------------|---|
| Grammar Translation Method | The teacher is the authority in the classroom.  |
| Direct Method              | In the teaching/learning process, the teacher and students are like partners.               |
| Audio-Lingual Method       | The teacher's main role is a model of the target language. Teachers should provide students |

|                             |  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| The Silent Way              | The teacher serves and speaks only when necessary. The teacher should respect the autonomy of the learners in their attempts at relating and interacting with the new challenges.                  |
| Suggestopedia               | The students must trust and respect the teacher. Students will retain information better from someone in whom they have confidence since they have confidence.                                     |
| Community Language Learning | The teacher recognizes how threatening a new learning situation can be for adult learners, so he skillfully understands and supports his students in their struggle to master the target language. |
| Total Physical Response     | Initially, the teacher is the director of all students' behavior. The students are imitators.  |
| Community Language Teaching | The teacher is one who facilitates communication in the classroom.   |
| Communicative Approach      | The teacher facilitates communication in the classroom. One of his major responsibilities is to establish situations likely to promote communication. He acts as an advisor, monitoring students'  |

*Table 1 Role of the teacher in ESL methods/approaches*

The different methods and approaches each have their own concepts of the essential knowledge, skills and attitudes a teacher should have in order to be considered a good teacher. In our opinion, a good English teacher is capable of identifying the weaknesses and strengths of the students and helping them to improve their language skills according to the students' needs. The teacher also motivates students and encourages them to be better in achieving their aim: learning a language.

Fanselow (1897 cited in Richards, 2005) encourages teachers to develop their own methods of teaching through exploring alternatives to conventional prescriptions for good teaching:

*Judgments and prescriptions based on preconceived notions of good teaching given by outsiders, general in nature, and with no means to explore congruence between practices and prescriptions, obviously serve a critical function in teacher preparation and development. These practices are widespread, and almost all teachers have experienced them. It is partly because of the fact that most teachers are aware of the normal rules in teacher preparation that I provide a different set of practices. The practices I invite you to experience are basically the exact opposite of those most followed. Thus, I invite you not to judge, or if you do, to withhold your judgment, to substitute specific descriptions for general prescriptions, and as a result to be free to generate alternatives unrelated to your preconceived notions of good and bad teaching, to serve as your own expert rather to depend on those in authority, and to explore congruence between what you think you do, what you want to do, and what you actually do. (1987:2)*

Long & Richards (1987) stated that, ideally, all teachers should receive the chance of further training, either in the form of “in- service” training, or by being withdrawn from teaching in order to be given additional full-time training, not just once but at suitable intervals throughout their careers. If such opportunities are available, additional training in principle and theory can be provided for those whose professional work especially requires it, and for those whose personal abilities can best assimilate and use it, while at the same time all teachers can keep up with new ideas, share their experiences, consider the future, and in general, give a professional dynamism to language teaching.

### **2.3 Becoming an English Teacher**

Lengeling (2010) argues that the sociocultural perspective of teacher education more realistically represents teacher education, but we suggest that more emphasis should be given to identify formation and emotions in order to fully examine the complexities of teacher education. Knowing how teachers feel about their professional growth, identify formation and emotions, as well as the struggles they encounter as learners, helps us more fully understand

the nature of teacher education. As we can see, what students think, feel and expect, is part of their learning process as well as it is in their training to become English teachers. Also, the training students receive will be reflected on their development as an English teacher because after all, a good English student is the clear reflection of an effective teacher Lengeling (2010).

When students finish the major, they will have gained knowledge about the theories, methods and techniques for teaching English, combined with some practice, but then as teachers, they will have to face the real needs of their students, which will vary highly according to the school they will work at, whether the institution is public or private, etc. Each of them has their own educational programs and different degrees of attention for English classes.

Currently, in the educational system, the importance of learning English has grown. Nowadays, most of the private and public schools, consider this foreign language as a necessary tool for their students and a chance for advancement in their professional lives. In many schools, there are students who want to study abroad and will therefore need English to communicate, write reports, essays or participate in seminars. For these and other reasons, English is needed as a part of the school curriculum. Nevertheless, there are many factors that influence the performance of the teacher in the classroom; depending highly on the institution they work at. For some schools, the teacher is the one who makes decisions about goals, materials, teaching methods, and assessment. In other settings, these kinds of decisions are made by a principal and the teacher is only responsible for carrying out the decision making. These situations could also depend on the sociocultural perspective, the sector and the institution where the teacher works.

Johnson and Golombek (2003, cited in Lengeling 2010) have commented on how a sociocultural perspective broadens our view concerning second language teacher education ( L2 Ted) in the following quote:

*The explanatory powers of a sociocultural perspective on teacher learning enable the field of L2 teacher education to move beyond simple descriptions of teacher learning as, for example, largely experiential, but allow it to trace the inherent complexity of those experiences ultimately lead to. By capturing this transformative process, teacher educators are able to see the rich details of how teacher learning emerges out of and is constructed by teachers within the settings and circumstances of their work (p.735).*

Another author, Roberts (1997, cited in Lengeling 2010), sees contextually-based teacher development from a holistic perspective:

*Our personal development cannot be isolated from our social experience. While each learner-teacher construct his or her own understanding in personal terms, this takes place in social context, where our development is inseparable from our personal and working relationship, such that "social exchanges are continuous and essential bases for advance in individuals" ways of thinking and acting (Hennessy in Bell and Gilbert, 1996:13). (p.7)*

Roberts mentions several critical points in the previous passage. First of all, teacher development and the context cannot be separated. Each teacher has a very personal and individual way to build his/her own learning. That is, in reality both professionally and personally indivisible many contexts are presented. Finally, Roberts emphasizes the idea that the argument of the co-formed identity in "social exchanges are continuous and essential foundation for advances in the way individuals think and act".

As a side issue, Johnson (2002, cited in Lengeling 2010) has stressed the importance of considering context for curriculum design in teacher education:

*I believe the particular content and structure of any teacher education program must be decided locally. It must represent locally constructed responses to particular groups of teacher learners, who will be or are teachers of particular types of content, in particular instructional context, and in particular institutional settings. (p.1)*

Richards (1994) mentioned examples of how a teacher functions in a “traditional school” and in a “private language school”. In the “traditional school”; the school operates strictly on a hierarchy: one principal, several senior teachers, and a large number of regular teachers. The senior teachers make most of the key decisions. The regular teachers do most of the teaching and more or less have to do whatever they are asked to do. Teaching schedules are issued, but there is little monitoring of what teachers actually teach or how they teach it. The students, too, have very little choice over the courses they study. They are streamed into science or art sections, based on teacher’s predictions of student ability and exam results.

In a private language institute, the teacher’s role is very different, there is no fixed hierarchy within the school. A number of teachers have to serve as coordinators, but these roles rotate and everyone must do it in turn. Likewise, there are no fixed curriculums or courses which students must follow; instead, counselors work with the students when they come into the program and courses which are tailor-made for the students’ needs are developed. Within the classroom, the content of the course is negotiated between the teacher and the student. Many teachers would prefer to work in an institute where individual teachers make their own decisions about course goals and syllabus content and how they should teach and monitor their own classes.

As Lengeling (2010) mentions, historically in the private sector, primary-through-high school, English language study holds a marked presence. Bilingual schools can be found in large cities that cater to elevated social classes. Certainly, this contrasts with the public school system, where English language study receives minor attention. In the state of Guanajuato, where this author carried out her study, English is frequently considered as an option, not a necessity in the public sector. In our state, English has recently formed part of the curricula in some primary schools; however, in other schools, it is still considered as an extra-curricular class, in which students are not always obliged to take the class. Unfortunately, for most of the students who attend the class, their parents do not support the English program and they collaborate to discourage their children about the class even when the children want to stay and be part of the English class.

## **2.4 Characteristics of a Good English Teacher**

Long & Richards (1987), in the widest sense, consider the teacher is the human agency responsible for presenting foreign language material to a learner. The other sense of the word “teacher” is the technical and professional one which distinguishes between individuals whose capabilities merit the label and those who do not. In this sense, a teacher is identified by the possession of certain characteristics which affect his ability to perform as a language teacher. According to these authors, an absolute minimum statement of the requirements of an adequate language teacher might be the following:

- A nondiscouraging personality
- Adequate classroom command of the language being taught



- Adequate presentation skills as a teacher

Long & Richards (1987), in addition to these minimum requirements for any given individual teacher, state that the profession requires the majority of teachers to also possess and display dedication to learning in general and to language learning in particular. This entails two parallel and continuous lines of concern: first, a high degree of self-awareness as a teacher, including conscious effort to improve his or her command of the foreign language (or at the very least, taking steps to counter the gradual attrition in one's foreign language ability that normally occurs with the passage of time), and seeking always to extend and improve the grasp and understanding of the profession by keeping in touch with changing ideas and techniques.

Thus, the teacher must at all times be committed to his profession, know that he must be constantly updated in all areas, and should especially consider improving his own language proficiency. Currently, there are many ways to be constantly updated about teaching techniques, both in general learning and in the teaching of a foreign language.

Harmer (1991) conducted a study in which he asked both teachers and students what they thought "makes a good teacher". The teachers were English teachers in Britain, Finland, and Spain. The participants were studying English as a foreign language, and half British secondary school children. The two areas that most of the participants mentioned were the teacher's rapport with the students and the teacher's personality. People wanted a teacher who was "fun" or one who "understood children". But many participants also mentioned the need for teachers to motivate students through enjoyable and interesting classes; and quite a few wanted their teachers to be "well prepared" and to be teachers they could have confidence in.

This does not mean that the teacher lacks an academic preparation and the vocation of being a teacher. An English teacher should be knowledgeable, patient, a good listener and approachable. We cannot forget that the main objective of a teacher should be to transmit knowledge to students, but we cannot ignore the need for teachers who are also prepared to deal appropriately with crisis in the classroom. Students look up to teachers who not only seem intelligent, but also have feelings.

Thus, teachers should not only have a certain academic level, but should also try to understand their students, worry about them and prove it. A simple word of encouragement to the students can generate that interest and desire to learn. Sometimes, the topic could be difficult or boring, but the teacher should try to make dynamic and interesting activities enabling the teaching process where students feel interested in learning. This does not mean that the teacher does not have to be well prepared academically. For students it is as a whole, both the knowledge and the human part that should be the master, which they define as a good teacher.

Melnick & Zeichner, (1988, p 88 cited in Brown, 2008) said “Quite simply, it is the responsibility of teacher educators to help all teachers, novice and experienced, acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and dispositions needed to work effectively with a diverse student population”. By knowing their potential, personality, abilities, strengths and weaknesses, the teacher can adequately prepare teaching methods, strategies and techniques in order to properly equip students.

If we try to remember some of our English teachers from our first years of schooling through the university, we believe that some memories about the good characteristics of our

teachers will come to mind, but we will also remember the bad ones. Both good and bad characteristics leave a significant impact on us.

We can say that the qualities or characteristics of a good or bad teacher will probably depend or vary on the perception of each student. This example shows that there is not a definitive description or definition of a bad or good teacher. Nevertheless here we have a perception of Harmer (1991) who generalizes some characteristics of a good teacher:

1. Personality matters a lot (and yet this is the most difficult to quantify and to train for).
2. Teachers provide interesting and motivating classes.
3. Teachers need to be able to show that they know their subject.

According to Harmer, the teacher has to do everything possible to have a good relationship with the students. A teacher needs to show that he cares for the well-being of the students. We need to keep in mind that for many students, the teacher is also the parent, the counselor and sometimes even the doctor. Teachers do not play merely one role as educators. Also, the teacher becomes the second parent to the students, the person they trust, and even the person they expect can tell them what to do when they are feeling sick. Therefore, a caring teacher is an advantage in the classroom, and as Hammer considers in his generalization, the motivation which is essential to have students first of all attendance and then interest in classroom subject matter, and as a result keep them interested in learning, motivation is something that energizes, directs and sustains behavior. It also provides the confidence to receive high results on assigned projects.

As teachers, we should know as many strategies and techniques to motivate students to learn and behave in ways that promote their long-term success and productivity. Furthermore, a

caring teacher will ensure that the lesson is given in a clear and interesting manner. This encourages students that only take the English class as a necessity, not exactly for fun or pleasure, to keep working and learning the language. The teacher can use hands-on activities to involve the students in the learning process. Students enjoy being active learners and this ensures that students maintain themselves motivated. On the other hand, the teacher has to demonstrate that he dominates his subject; he has to be prepared for student's doubts or questions. A student can lack credibility in the teacher if wrong content is relayed. Teachers need to be knowledgeable of the subject matter to enhance quality learning.

## **2.5 Teacher Professional Development**

According to Long & Richards (1987) teachers being, by definition, among the educated rather than the uneducated members of society, the selection and training of language teachers necessarily includes attention to the individual teacher's personal education, as well as his or her professional training, and ideally should include a measure of temperamental suitability and of a sense of vocation.

The education and professional development of each teacher needs to be seen as a lifelong task, to equip the teacher with the skills and competences needed for his new roles. It is essential to have both quality initial teachers and a coherent process of continuous professional development to keep teachers up to date with the current skills required.

We are conscious that when students finish their major, there are different ways for them to continue their professional development; for example, maybe the place or institution where they work can provide them the opportunities to continue their preparation. Nowadays,

as we can see, there is a variety of schools, and as they become more autonomous, with open learning environments, teachers assume greater responsibility for the content, organization and monitoring the learning process. Besides those responsibilities, the teacher has to extend boundaries of professional knowledge through a commitment to reflect practice, through research, and through commitment of continuous professional development from the beginning to the end of their professional life. It is well known that a language teacher has to be updated and his/her teaching and knowledge about the language is constantly evaluated. These evaluations are in order to keep the high professional standards which are generally required to work as an English teacher in most institutions.

Cambridge English Language Assessment (Cambridge English) is a department of the prestigious University of Cambridge, in England. Its mission is to be the experts in language assessment: delivering excellence and innovation. Also, to facilitate to students and teachers of English language, in a wide variety of contexts, the access to diverse examinations and international evaluations of the first level, as well as to certifications for teachers of English language, which will help them to reach their goals, since they have a positive impact in their experience and their educational and professional development.

Nowadays, Cambridge English and the SEP work together: TKT (Teaching Knowledge Test) has been included in the preliminary design of the “Agreement for decisions regarding policies, standards and recommendations related to the teaching and certification of foreign languages”. The TKT is an example of the evaluations teachers have access to. It has been developed for people who:

- Are already teaching, but would like to take an internationally recognized

qualification to gain formal recognition for their experience.

- Want to enhance their career opportunities by broadening their teaching experience into specialist areas.
- Want to keep their teaching skills up to date.

Preparing for the TKT helps teachers to increase their confidence as a teacher and gives them the knowledge and skills that will help them develop their career. The TKT contains three modules; module 1 is about language and background to language learning and teaching, module 2 refers to lesson planning and use of resources for language teaching and module 3 is about managing the teaching and learning process. It seems that regarding professional development, alumni and students have the opportunity to present these examinations, which will help them to fulfill their professional and personal goals.

According to Richards (2005), development usually refers to general growth not focused on a specific job. It serves a longer-term goal and seeks to facilitate growth of teachers' understanding of teaching and of themselves as teachers. It often involves examining different dimensions of teachers' practice as a basis for reflective review and can hence be seen as a "bottom up" approach. The following are examples of goals from a development perspective:

- Understanding how the process of second language development occurs
- Understanding how our roles change according to the kind of learners
- Understanding the kinds of decision making that occur during lessons

- Reviewing our own theories and principles of language teaching
- Developing and understanding different styles of teaching
- Determining learners' perceptions of classroom activities

Richards (2005) also mentions that professional development, therefore, should go beyond personal and individual reflection. He suggested that this development can include exploration of new trends and theories in language teaching; familiarization with developments in subject-matter, knowledge such as pedagogical grammar, composition theory, or genre theory; and critical examination of the way schools and languages programs are organized and managed.

On the other hand, Bartlett (1987, cited in Richards, 1994) sees the key to professionalism in teaching as centering on giving teachers the means for a better understanding of their own classroom practices:

*I think we should be thinking about the means or best professional development practices that will make teachers **professionals**. We need to find the best ways for helping them to explore their practice... that practice involves exploring the relationship between the individuals teacher's thinking and acting within the four walls of the classroom and how this reproduces and/ or transforms values and social ideas in society. (p.148)*

## 2.6 Previous Research

Taking into account the necessity of knowing the perceptions of the students and alumni about the training they are receiving or have received and how they conceive their learning process, it is useful to revise some research carried out by previous authors and the results they obtained in their studies.

David Block (1992) investigated the extent to which students and teachers agree in the views of classroom roles. Data from both groups show that whereas teachers express their ideas in accordance with the literature in applied linguistics, learners had developed their own conceptualizations. In 1994, he focused on the micro skills of classroom activity showing that teachers and students also have different perceptions on the intention a salience of particular activities.

Carter (2009), using autobiographical accounts, discusses learners' stories in three contexts linked to higher education, providing rich insights into language learning which resonate beyond the individual in her research. She concludes that giving voice to the learners' experience has enriched foreign language education for all her participants (teachers and students alike).

Horwitz (1988) conducted a descriptive study; his objective was to investigate the beliefs of 241 beginner students from the university, about language learning. The instrument used was Beliefs about English Language Inventory (BALLI), which locates the students beliefs' in five dimensions: 1) difficulty of language learning; 2) aptitude for foreign language; 3) nature of the language; 4) learning and communication strategies; 5) motivation and expectations. The study indicates that students believe in the hierarchy of language, in the



ability of the children to learn a language, in the difference between learning a language and other topics that exist to people, the ones who have a special gift for languages and the importance of practicing and having an excellent pronunciation.

Alkhawaldeh (2008), in his study, attempted to explore the accomplishment achieved by 78 EFL student teachers who were taking the practicum courses in the second semester 2004/2005. To achieve this purpose, an open questionnaire was used to elicit data from the participants in this study about their accomplishments in the spheres of classroom management skills, lesson planning, development and design and production of instructional aids, instructional methods, and the acquisition of interpersonal skills and finally the evaluation of EFL classroom students' learning. The results of the study, above all, pointed to the importance of the practicum. It was also found out that most of the instructional skills were acquired by the EFL pre-service teacher, gradually, as the pre-service teachers advance in the practicum. About the classroom management, their acquisition was linked to the nature of the classroom, its size; relationships with EFL classroom students, quality of instruction and nature of teaching methods adopted by the pre-service teachers. In the sphere of lesson planning, the pre-service teachers discovered, through lesson planning, the importance of new teaching methods and media and aids as well as the importance the lesson plan itself. In the acquisition of interpersonal skills, pre-service teachers pointed to the importance of establishing links with practitioners in the co-operating school and the significance of such interpersonal skills in solving problems classroom students encountered.

Berchoud & Cignatta (2003) were interested in knowing how teachers consider their job and their opinions about the training received or desired on their teaching culture. This study was carried out in different countries: France, Germany, Poland and Italy. Four teachers per

country (three women and one man; experienced / less experienced teachers) were asked to answer the questionnaires and interviews. The authors found that teachers like their job. They appreciate the contact with students, the freedom they have with respect to organization and the variety of the work. Also, that oral practice appears to be very important for students, as a part of their preparation for their integration to the modern world. Slight differences can be noted according to age and professional experience. Younger teachers may be more open to evaluation-related issues.

The results found in this study proved they could see that teachers appreciate having the freedom to set their own criteria of how they work. It is also important for teachers to have that close relationship with the students, so teachers are more alert to any situation that may arise within and outside the classroom. Although there are differences among teachers, as the years pass and teachers acquire experience, become more confident with their job, but that does not mean that teachers with more years of service know everything about teaching. There are sometimes young teachers and those who do not have much experience, who are willing to make changes, implement new techniques and strategies in the teaching-learning process.

Lengeling (2010) investigated about the formation of EFL (English as a Foreign Language). The participants were 18 trainees who went through a one-year in-service training course – Certificate for Overseas Teachers of English (COTE). The purpose of this research was to explore a sociocultural perspective of teacher education and how it applies to the Mexican context. In this qualitative ethnographic approach, three concepts were used as a basis for inquiry: voices, reflexivity and bricolage. The sources of the data were journals, observations, interviews and a focus group of tutors. The data reveals how the trainees construct meanings of gained knowledge with their fellow colleagues and transform their

identities. More importantly than the gained skills, the trainees gained self- confidence. This empowered them emotionally and professionally.

As we can see from the previous investigations, there is a great interest in obtaining data and conclusions regarding the perceptions students have and the pre-service teachers.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Institutions of higher education aim to provide qualified professionals with the necessary competences to perform successfully in the area of their preparation. This study focuses on identifying the perceptions students and alumni from the English Language major have about the training they are receiving or have received during their major, as well as their degree of satisfaction. The results obtained in this study will provide a solid basis for the evaluation, modification or improvement of the English Language program and at the same time, will be very useful for other universities that have similar programs, who can use these results as a reference.

### 3.1 Research Questions

Throughout this research, two main research questions will be answered:

- How do students from the English Language major perceive their own professional training?
- How do former students from the English Language major perceive the training they received?

### 3.2 Research Design

This study is part of a broader research project which aims at comparing the perceptions of students, alumni, teachers, and employers regarding the training of English language

teachers. This project is being carried out simultaneously at four public universities in Mexico: Universidad Veracruzana, Universidad de Guanajuato, Universidad de Colima, and Universidad de Quintana Roo. For the purpose of this study, a quantitative approach will be used providing a descriptive statistical analysis of the data recollected through the instruments.

### **3.3 Research Participants**

The participants in this study include students and alumni of the English Language major offered at UQRoo, in its Campus Chetumal:

- a) 96 Students who were enrolled in the English Language BA at the time of the research and who had achieved at least 50% of their credits considered compulsory to graduate. These students were enrolled in the sixth, eighth, and tenth semester. This number of students represents 31.7% of the total number of students registered in the program.
  
- b) A representative sample of 38 alumni that finished their studies in the last 5 years (2006-2012), and are currently working in the TEFL field in any of the different educational levels (preschool, elementary, secondary, high school, university, as well as other language schools). We also include a varied sample from both private and public schools.

### **3.4 Instruments**

In this research, we administered questionnaires to both groups of participants: students and alumni. The purpose of the questionnaire is to collect information about the linguistic, educational and human competences which students of the English major should possess and compare the level of satisfaction they have of their program with the real needs of the society.

#### a) Questionnaire for the students

In the first part of the questionnaire, students are asked general information concerning the level of English they had before starting the major and the reasons why they decided to study in the English Language program; in the second part, students are asked about their perceptions regarding the institution, the educational program and, finally, about the academic staff. There are also open questions so students can express themselves more freely.

#### b) Questionnaire for alumni

The questionnaire given to alumni starts with questions about some personal information regarding their current workplace, the number of years they have been teaching English, the level of English language they had before starting the major and the reasons why they decided to study in the English Language program; in the second part, participants are asked about their perceptions and suggestions regarding the institution, the educational program and, finally, about the academic staff.

In each part of the surveys, there are blank spaces where both students and alumni can write some suggestions or comments which will be very useful for the process of the revision and modification of the curriculum. Participants are also guaranteed that the data obtained will be used only and exclusively for the research, without revealing their identity.

### **3.5 Data Generation Procedure**

Firstly, the Sistema de Administración Escolar (Portal SAE) was consulted in order to identify the schedules for students who are enrolled in sixth, eighth and tenth semester in both the morning and the afternoon groups. At the same time, a list of alumni from the English Language program was requested from the Departamento de Servicios Escolares. In the case of students, the questionnaires were administered to one group per semester. In the case of alumni, they were selected randomly based on contacts provided by research participants, social networking service, email, and other means.

Initially, the questionnaires were elaborated and agreed upon between the research participants in different universities. Afterwards, they were validated at the different universities and modified, if needed. Once the suggestions gathered were incorporated in the instruments, the surveys were applied to the participants and the data was analyzed.

### **3.6 Data Generation Analysis**

Once the data was collected, descriptive statistics were used to present a distribution of frequencies and measures of central tendency through the use of SPSS 16.0. This research

was complemented with some graphics elaborated with the program Excel, based on the data collected showing the predominant perceptions of students and alumni. These results are also enriched with the comments obtained from participants' responses on the questionnaire.

### **3.7 Results**

This research will provide a positive impact in the institutions where this study is being carried out, but also in other public universities which have similar programs. The results obtained will serve as a solid basis to evaluate, update, and modify the educational programs, fulfilling the real needs of society in order to train competent and qualified teachers. This research will benefit not only participating students and alumni, but also the other students who are going to have a learning process guided by the graduates of new generations. In addition, it could be used as a reference in future research about perceptions. Finally, this work could give insights for other colleagues who are interested in pursuing research in this field.



## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this part of the thesis, we will show the results of the questionnaires which were applied to the different groups of participants in this project. The information presented is quantitative data which represents the perceptions that the students and the alumni have regarding the professional training received in the English Language major. This information is organized according to the two research questions that emerged from the beginning of the project:

- How do students from the English Language major perceive their own professional training?
- How do alumni from the English Language major perceive the training received in the English Language Major?

### 4.1 Perceptions of Students

As it was mentioned in the Methodology, the English Language major has been offered at University of Quintana Roo, campus Chetumal, since 1992. In 2012, this educational program had 302 students, from which the questionnaire was answered by 96 of them who were studying the sixth, eight and tenth semester of their major (31.7 %).

Using the data collected through the questionnaires, a descriptive analysis of the perceptions of the students is presented, concerning the following: a) reasons for joining the English Language Major; b) Level of English before starting the program; c) Compliance with

the objectives of the major; d) Balance of the number of subjects and hours in each semester; e) Importance of the different content areas; f) Satisfaction of the students with their own performance; g) Methodology, evaluation, academic advice, teaching skills and teachers' values; and h) Degree of satisfaction that students have with the program.

### A) Reasons why Students Join the English Language Major

Recently, a study by Dzay and Narvaez (2012) indicated that one of the main reasons why students abandon their studies at UQRoo is because they did not want to study that program, originally. Taking into account the importance of motivation in being an English teacher, we thought it was necessary to identify the reasons why students choose this major (See Figure 1).

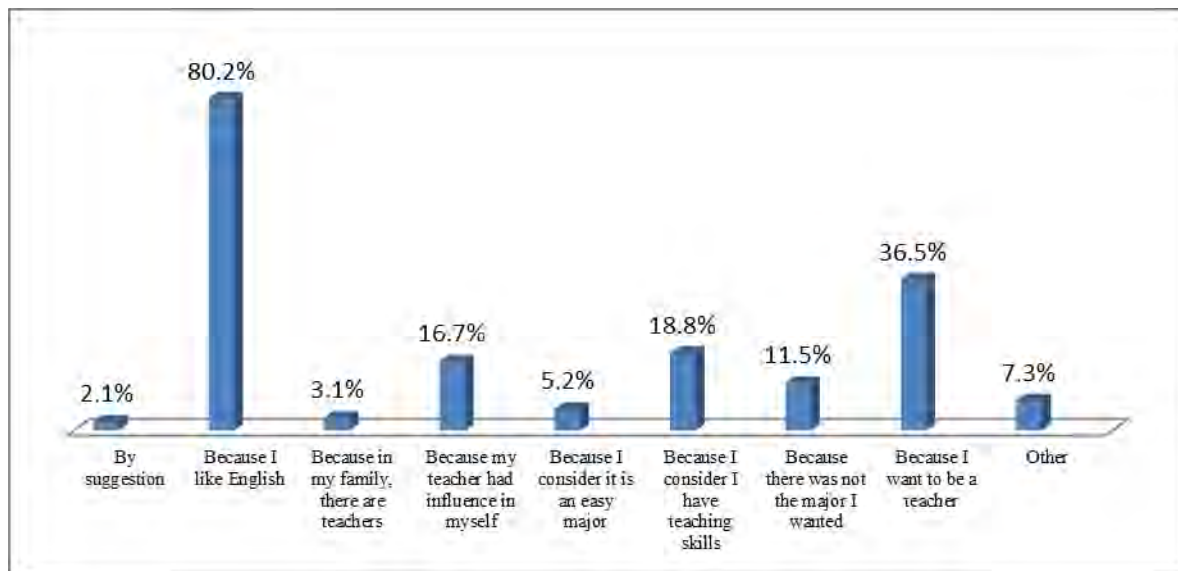


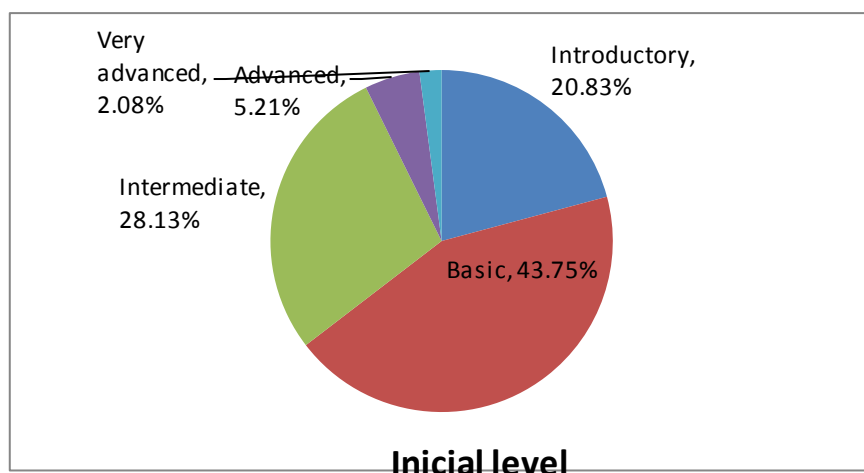
Figure 1 Reasons why students join the English Language major

Considering that the main focus of the English Language major is to train English teachers, it is alarming that 80.2 % of the students (equivalent to 77 cases), who join the major, due so because they “like English” and only the 36.7 % because they “want to be a teacher”. It is

also important to point out that 11.5 % of the participants indicated that they entered the program due to the fact that the major they wanted, was not offered. Among other reasons (7.3 %), we can find: 1) They want to be translators, 2) It is the similar to the major they wanted to study, 3) It is a challenge to study the English Language 4) By obligation 5) To learn the English Language well.

### **B) Level of English Students Have when Entering the Program**

Nowadays, some universities establish a minimum level of English as a requirement to join the educational program they want to apply for. The Consejo para la Acreditación de Programas Educativos (COAPEHUM) also recommended UQRoo to establish an entry level of English so more time could be dedicated to other subjects. However, it can be noticed that many students that join University of Quintana Roo do not have a high level of English. In the questionnaire, students were asked about their level of English (See figure 2):



*Figure 2 Level of English students have before entering the major*

As it can be seen in Figure 2, only a few students join the university with a very advanced level of English (2.08%) and with an advanced level (5.21%). Most students start the major with a basic level of the language (43.8 %) and a 20.8 % of the students start with an introductory level. It is important to point out that even though most of the students (64.6%) had a low level of English when they joined the major, they have made progress by improving their level of English, and are currently enrolled in the sixth, eighth and tenth semester of the major. With this result, it can be said that the level of English that students have before they join the major does not affect their possibility of completing the major successfully.

It is important to clarify that these percentages refer to the perception that students have about their level of English when they joined the major, but it would be interesting to compare these results with the placement tests which were applied when students entered the program.

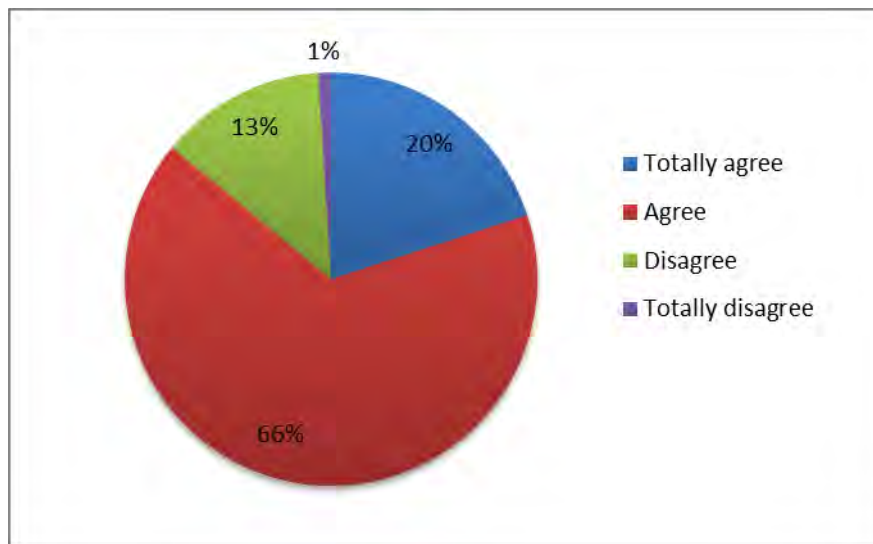
### **C) Compliance with the Objectives of the Major**

The English Language major has the following aims:

1. Revise and design courses of the English Language according to the specific objectives and needs of courses.
2. Implement, apply and/or improve, in a creative and flexible way, the methods adapted to the needs of each course.
3. Make the processes of teaching and learning easier through the use of suitable methodologies and techniques.
4. Analyze, revise and design the appropriate materials and means of support to the objectives and particular needs of a course.

5. Conduct didactic, methodological or linguistic research in order to improve the teaching process.
6. Design and/or adapt instruments for the evaluation of the objectives and needs of each course and as a tool for feedback that allows the necessary improvements during the process.

When the students were asked if they thought the major achieved the objectives established in the program, the following answers were obtained: 86 % said yes (66 % agree and 20 % totally agree) and 14% said no (13 % disagree and 1% totally disagree) (See Figure 3).



*Figure 3 Compliance with the objectives of the major*

#### **D) Balance of the Number of Subjects and Hours in Each Semester**

In the program, it is noticeable that students take less subjects in the first semesters than in the last semesters, and most of the subjects taken at the beginning are general and/or divisional subjects. On the other hand, during the last semesters, students have more subjects and at the

same time they have more responsibilities in those subjects. In Table 2, there is a comparison about how the subjects are balanced taking into account the number in each semester and the responsibilities that each one implies. The possible answers were: *Totally agree* (4), *Agree* (3), *Disagree* (3), and *Totally disagree* (1).

| Statistics  |         |                    |                                  |
|-------------|---------|--------------------|----------------------------------|
|             |         | Number of subjects | Responsibilities in the subjects |
| N           | Valid   | 95                 | 95                               |
|             | Missing | 1                  | 1                                |
| <b>Mean</b> |         | <b>3.03</b>        | <b>2.78</b>                      |

Table 2 Balance of the number of subjects and the responsibilities in each one

In Table 2, a  $\bar{x}=3.03$  was obtained, which means that students perceive the number of subjects they have each semester is suitable (*Agree*). However, there is a contrast in the responsibilities throughout the different subjects, which shows students *Disagree* ( $\bar{x}=2.78$ ), which reflects how students perceive that some of the subjects are more demanding than the others.

#### E) Importance of the Different Content Areas

In order to know the students perceptions about the importance of the different subjects and content areas, it was necessary to obtain the mean of *Totally agree* (4), *Agree* (3), *Disagree* (2), and *Totally disagree* (1) (See Figure 4).

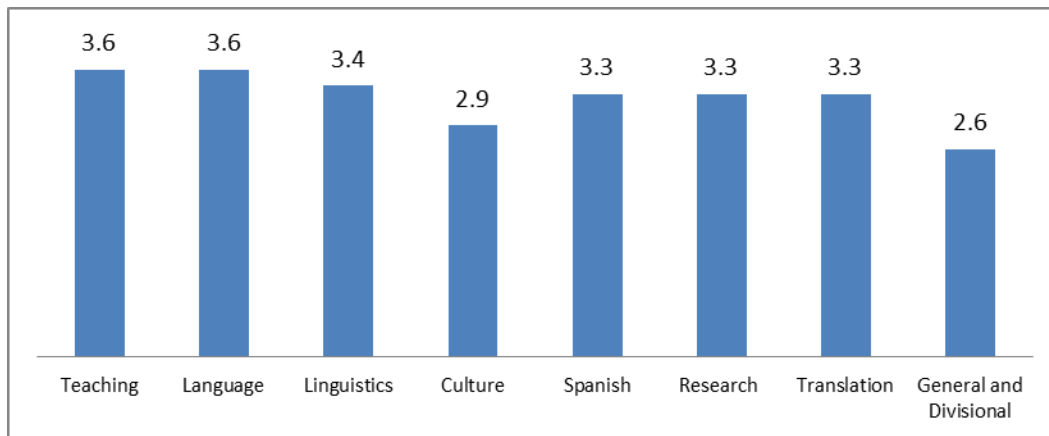


Figure 4 Appropriateness of the different content areas

According to the previous figure, it can be observed that students agree that the most appropriate content areas in the English Language major are Teaching ( $\bar{x}=3.6$ ) and Language ( $\bar{x}=3.6$ ), while the least appropriate are General and/or Divisional subjects ( $\bar{x}=2.6$ ) and Cultural ones ( $\bar{x}=2.9$ ). This inference was also confirmed when asking students about the number of subjects in each content area “more subjects are required (3), there are enough subjects (2) and less subjects are required (1)”.

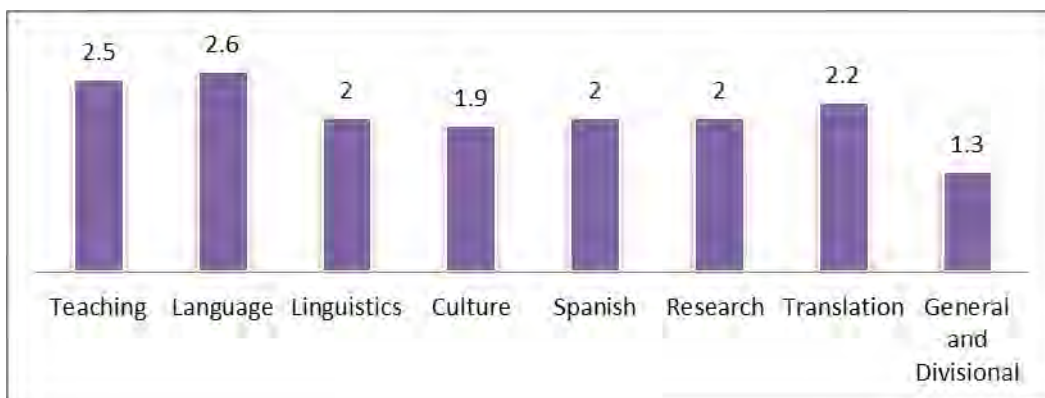


Figure 5 Number of subjects and time of instruction of the different curricular lines

Some students make reference to language as something very important that needs to be taught since the beginning of the major due to the fact that in the first semester, they only take general, divisional and/or additional subjects: *“Creo que el inglés debería verse desde primer semestre.”* (“I think English language should be taken since the first semester.”) (UQRoo/Enc/Est/61).

Another important thing to consider about this content area is the variety of English used in the courses, which is different from the one used in final examination to obtain their degree, as a student mentions: *“Que las materias de idiomas comiencen a aplicarse en inglés británico ya que durante la carrera solo nos enseñan el americano.”* (“English subjects should be taught in British English since during the major they only teach us American English.”) (UQRoo/Enc/Est/52).

Regarding the content area of Teacher training, some students mentioned the need to reinforce it, including more teaching practice in real contexts and since the beginning of the major:



*“Me gustaría que se emplearan más materiales ((sic)) como Práctica Docente, no al final de la carrera... y que éstas sean "prácticas" en escuelas...enfrentarnos a un medio real.” (“I would like to add more subjects ((sic)) like Teaching practice, not at the end of the major...and that these subjects are more “hands on” in schools...facing a real context”)* (UQRoo/Enc/Est/67)

At the same time, students consider that more courses about teaching can help them to get important tools in order to improve their practice in the field: “...to train future teachers, there are many courses missing; for example, evaluation and curriculum planning.” (UQRoo/Enc/Est/48)

Regarding the content area of Cultural subjects, the participants show an agreement with the number of subjects that are included; however, they consider that the subjects should be focused on the cultural features, instead of history: *“La materia de Vida y Cultura de Estados Unidos y Gran Bretaña debería basarse más precisamente en cultura y no tanto en historia de los países.” (“The subject of Life and Culture of the United States and Great Britain) should be focused especially on culture and not so much on history.”)* (UQRoo/Enc/Est/94).

There are some subjects that students consider unnecessary in the major; for example, the general and divisional ones ( $\bar{x}=1.3$ ), because they do not find a relation between these subjects and their major or how those subjects influence in their training:

*“En las generales y divisionales convendría que no nos pidan llevar muchas y sólo enfocarnos en lo que es la carrera.” (“It should not be a requirement to take many General and Divisional subjects, we should focus only on the major.”)* (UQRoo/Enc/Est/74)

*“Con respecto a la materia de ‘Principios de la Psicología’ me gustaría que implementaran no sólo las bases sino algunos casos más, ya que como maestros debemos saber cómo reaccionar, hablar con las*

*personas...especialmente con niños.” “(Concerning the subject “Principles of Psychology, I would like to be taught not only the fundamentals, but beyond that because as teachers we have to know how to react, talk to people...especially to children.”) (UQRoo/Enc/Est/31)*

## **F) Satisfaction Students Have with Their own Performance**

The students who participated in the surveys answered a self-assessment question, in which most of them (67%) are satisfied with their own performance as students in the major.



*Figure 6 Students satisfaction with their own performance*

However, a considerable percentage of students are not satisfied with their performance (32%), and sometimes they leave this responsibility to the teachers.

## **G) Methodology, Evaluation, Academic Advice, Teaching Skills and Teachers' Values**

In the following figure (See Figure 7), it is possible to observe the mean obtained regarding their perceptions of teachers and the teaching process at UQRoo. The scale used to measure the different aspects is: *Totally agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2) and Totally disagree (1)*.

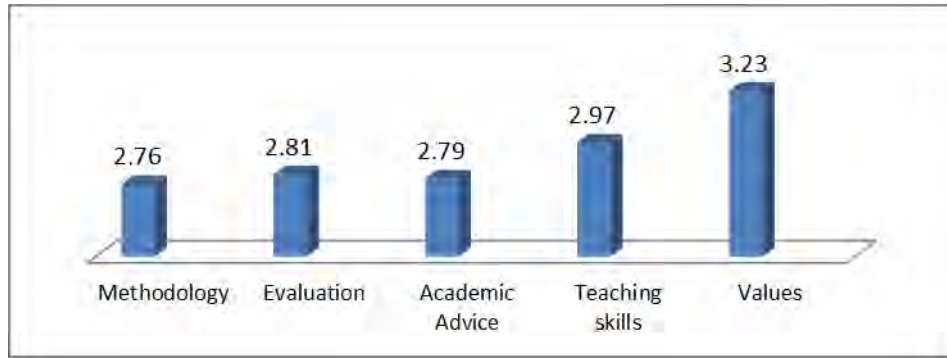


Figure 7 Methodology, evaluation, academic advice, teaching skills and teachers' values

It is noticeable that students *Disagree* with the Methodology that teachers use ( $\bar{x}=2.7$ ); the Academic Advice ( $\bar{x}=2.79$ ), the Methods of evaluation used in some subjects ( $\bar{x}=2.81$ ) and the Teaching skills used to encourage the motivation, interest, attention and participation of students ( $\bar{x}=2.97$ ). The only positive variable ( $\bar{x}=3.23$ ), taking into account that students Agree, is the teachers' values and attitudes (respect, justice, commitment, dedication, honesty, etc.) However, there is a contrast which shows a contradiction between the perceptions that students have according to the general satisfaction with the teachers (See Figure 8).



Figure 8 General satisfaction with the teachers

There are some comments that students made about the teachers, some of them mention that there are really good teachers, but also some of them lack teaching skills and/or dedicate most of their time to doing other activities instead of teaching, like: doing research, academic-administrative positions, etc:

*“Algunos maestros son realmente buenos. Ellos tienen el talento, es decir, las habilidades. Además, poseen los valores y actitudes de un docente.” (“Some teachers are really good ones. They have the talent, that is the skills. Moreover, they have values and attitudes of a teacher.”) (UQRoo/Enc/Est/95)*

*“Algunos profesores son muy buenos y cuentan con los estudios necesarios, pero otros dejan mucho que desear. Ellos deben ser el ejemplo puesto a que están formando a futuros docentes.” (“Some teachers are really good ones and they have the necessary formation, but leave so much to be desired. They should be the model to follow since they are training future teachers.”) (UQRoo/Enc/Est/3)*

*“Mucha carga de trabajo, algunos maestros no reflejan planificación de clase y no asisten como está programado en el programa del curso.” (“A lot of work, some teachers show that they do not plan their classes and they do not attend as it is established in the program.”) (UQRoo/Enc/Est/49)*

## H) Degree of Satisfaction Students Have with the Program

Considering the results obtained according to the students dissatisfaction with their program (54.1%), it is clear that the program needs to be revised and modified (See Figure 9).



Figure 9 Level of satisfaction with the program.

The results shown in this part show the dissatisfaction some students have with different aspects related to the major; however, it is important to mention that the students are only one group of participants that voiced this study, that is why, we will present the results obtained with the group of alumni in the following section.

## **4.2 Perceptions of Alumni**

In this study, it is very important to take into account the perceptions of the alumni of the English Language major about their training due to the fact that they have already had the opportunity to work as teachers. These perceptions were obtained through a questionnaire, which was applied to the alumni of the last five years (2007-2011) of the English Language major.

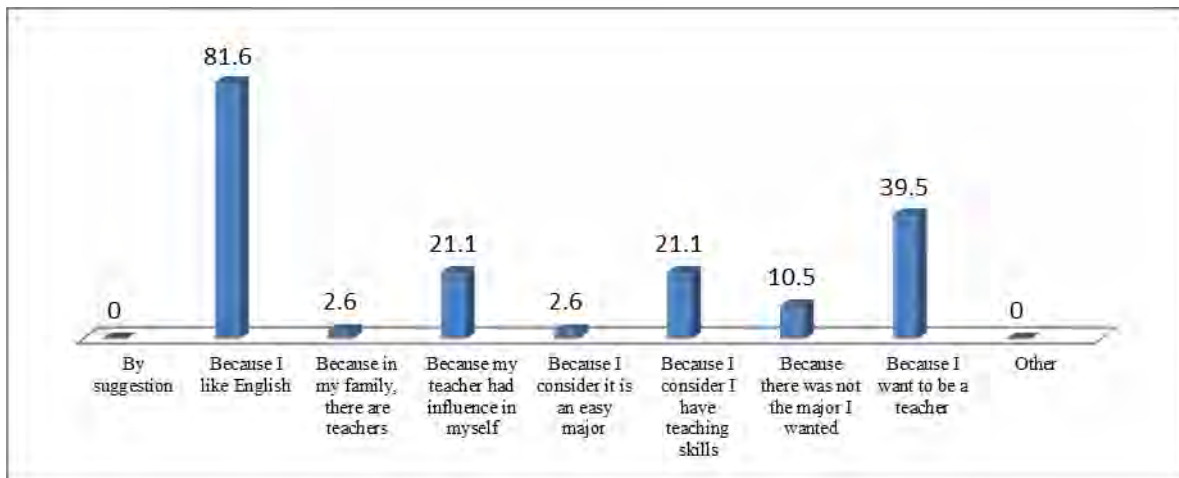
The total number of alumni of that period is 147, from which 38 of them answer the questionnaire (25.8%) and five of them were interviewed. All of them are currently working: 48.8% in elementary education, 2.4% in secondary school, 7.3 % in high school, 31.7% higher education and 9.8% in language schools.

Some of the factors that were analyzed in this part of the study were: A) The reasons why they chose the English Language major; B) The level of English they had when they joined the major; C) Perceptions of alumni regarding the educational program (objectives, subjects, responsibilities, content areas, satisfaction with the major), and D) The faculty.

### **a) Reasons for Choosing the Major**

One of the first questions that the alumni answered was about the reason why they chose the English Language major (Figure 10) and this is because the educational program has the

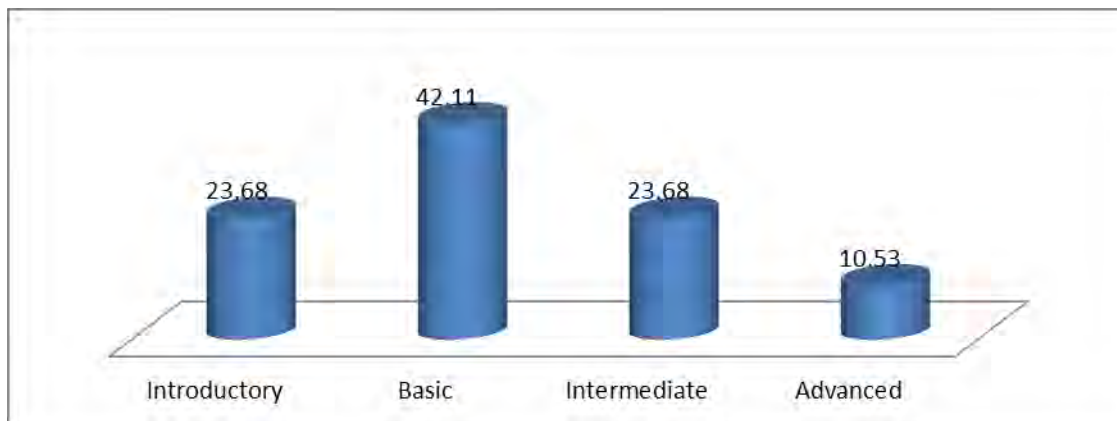
purpose to train English teachers so the students who chose this major had to like both teaching and also the language. In this question, students could choose more than one answer.



*Figure 10 Reasons to join the English Language major*

In Figure 10, it is noticeable that 81.6% (31 cases) of the alumni chose the major because they liked the English language, which can be observed as one of the main reasons to join the major. While the 39.5% (15 cases) showed interest in the major because they wanted to be teachers and 21.1% (8 cases) because they considered themselves to have teaching skills. There is something important to observe, the last two reasons have a lower percentage, considering that the educational program focuses on teaching the English language. Based on these results, it can be said that most of the applicants who decided to study this major did not have a clear idea of the main objectives of the program or their motivation was different.

The educational program does not establish a specific level of English as a requirement to apply for the major, in some cases differently from other universities. For that reason, it is important to know if that is a positive, negative or null variable when students finish the major.



*Figure 11 Alumni' English level before they join the major*

As it can be observed in Figure 11, 42.11% of the total alumni who participated in this study joined the program with a basic level of English and 23.68% with an introductory level. On the other hand, only the 34.21% entered with an intermediate or advanced level of English. The previous data summarizes that having an introductory or basic level of English before joining the major doesn't seem to have a negative impact in students' successful completion of the major.

The English language major has eight curricular content areas: English, Teaching, Linguistic, Culture, Spanish, Research, Translation, and General and Divisional subjects. It is important to know the perceptions that alumni have about the pertinence of each area, and the requirement of the subjects and/or hours of instruction (Figure 12). The participants used the following scale: Totally agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2) and Totally disagree (1).

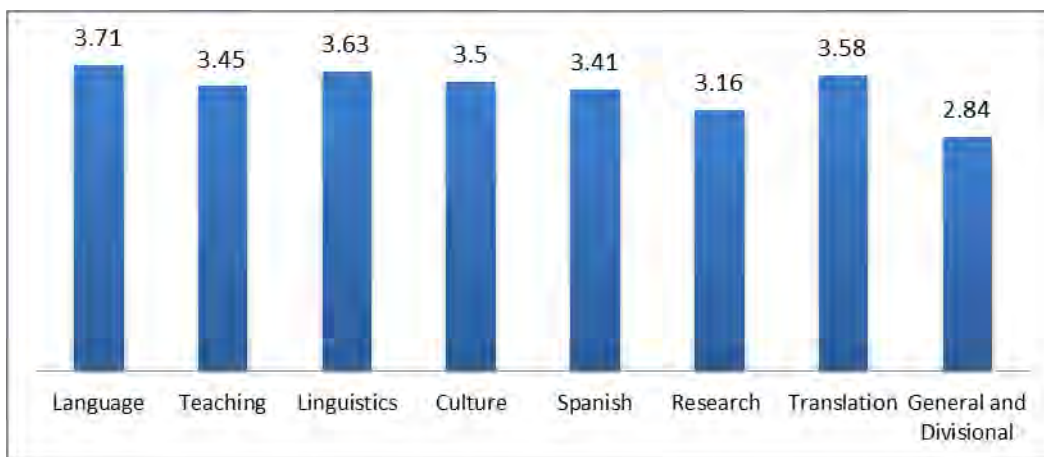


Figure 12 Alumni' perceptions about the pertinence of the curricular content areas in the major

It is noticeable that the alumni agree that the different curricular content areas are important, except for the general and divisional subjects, which are considered unnecessary for their training, so the alumni disagree ( $\bar{x}=2.8$ ) and this can be reinforced with some comments they made:

*“Creo que las generales y divisionales deberían ser opcionales, ya que muchas veces no tienen que ver con la carrera y, sin embargo, sí tienen que ser tomadas” (“I think that general and divisional subjects should be optional, since sometimes they have nothing to do with the major and, however, it is mandatory to take them.”) (UQRoo/Enc/Egr/13)*

*“Le quitaría las materias de tronco común y la mayoría de las generales, ya que ocupan tiempo y dedicación valiosa que podría ser usada en asignaturas más afines a la enseñanza del inglés y en el desarrollo de la tesis.” (“I would eliminate the initial subjects and most of the general ones, due to the fact that they make us to spend valuable time and dedication that could be used in subjects that are more related to English teaching and the development of our thesis.”) (UQRoo/Enc/Egr/8)*

The data collected shows clearly that alumni consider there is no relation between the general and divisional subjects and their professional training. That is the reason for making an analysis about the pertinence of those subjects.



Secondly, in Figure 13 it is possible to see how these results are confirmed with the number of subjects in the different curricular content areas. When students were asked if they agreed with the number of subjects and hours of instruction in each area, they ranged from: More subjects and/or time of instruction is required (3) to There should be fewer subjects and/or time of instruction in this area (1).

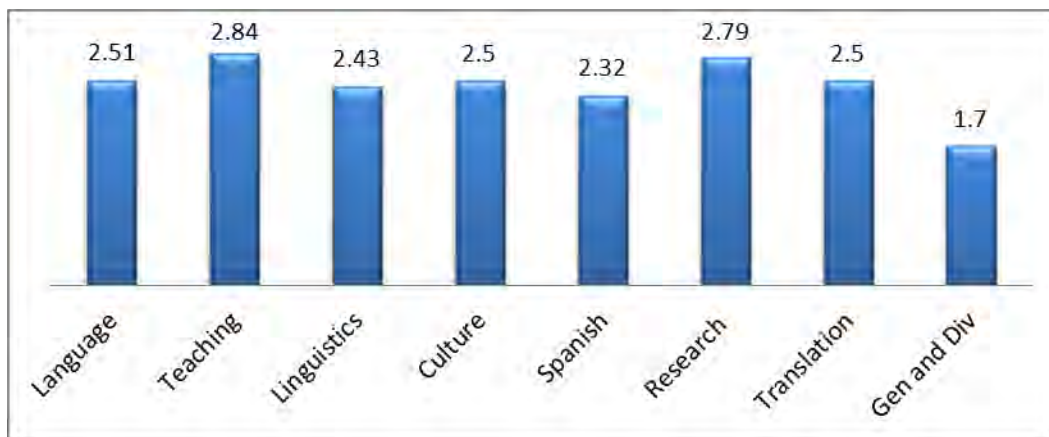
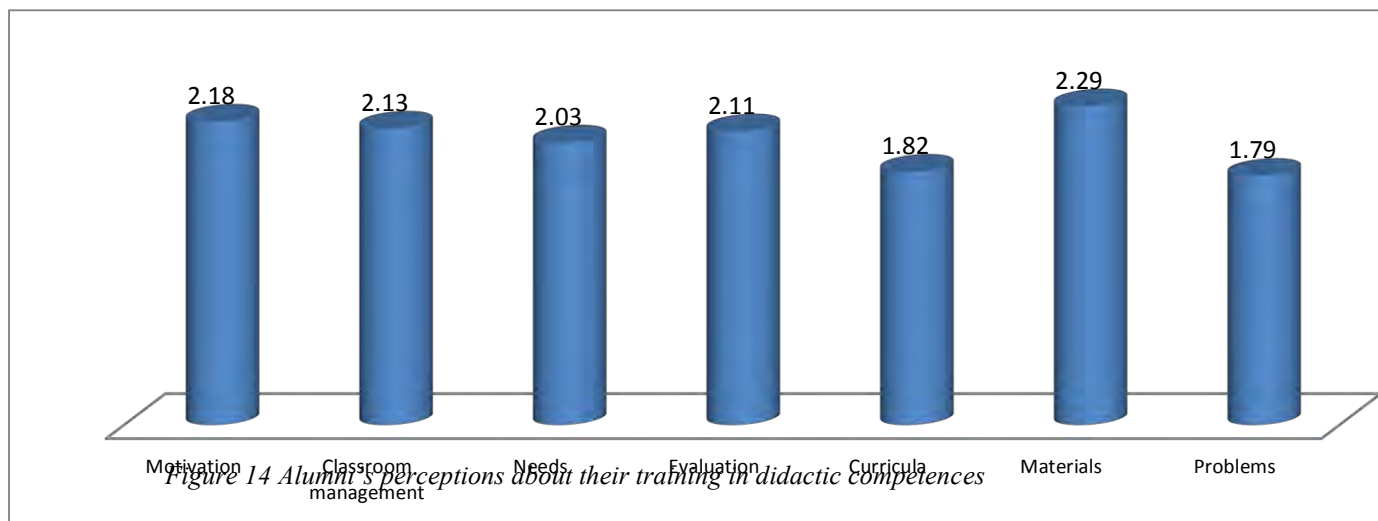


Figure 13 Requirement of subjects and hours of instruction in the curricular content areas

Participants consider there are enough subjects and hours of instruction in the following areas: English Language ( $\bar{x}=2.51$ ), Teaching ( $\bar{x}=2.84$ ), Linguistics ( $\bar{x}=2.43$ ), Culture ( $\bar{x}=2.5$ ), Spanish ( $\bar{x}=2.32$ ), Research ( $\bar{x}=2.79$ ) and Translation ( $\bar{x}=2.5$ ). However, considering the comments that students made on the questionnaire about the requirements of subjects and hours of instruction, there is a contradiction among their answers and their comments regarding the Teaching training.:

*“Me hubiera gustado tener más materias sobre docencia, más prácticas, más pedagogía.” (“I would have liked to have more subjects about teaching, more practice, more pedagogy”). (UQRoo/Enc/Egr/19).*

The main curricular content areas in the program are teaching and English, which is why it was important to ask students about their training in the different didactic competences, such as: Skills to motivate their students, Use of techniques in the classroom, Recognition of students' needs, Evaluation and Assessment of learning; Design and adaptation of a curricula, and Selection of instructional materials, like the Diagnostic of learning problems in students and the progress of them. In figure 14, the results in each didactic competence is shown, according to the scale: Complete (3), Regular (2), Minimum (1).



As it is possible to see, the alumni perceive their level of training in Motivation, Classroom management, Recognition of students' needs, Evaluation and Assessment of the learning process and Design and selection of instructional materials as "Regular"; while the results about their Design and adaptation of a curricula and Diagnostic of learning problems in their students and the progress of them are lower than Regular. Due to these results, it is considered alumni needs reinforcement in those competences in the program. The following comment reinforces this idea:

*"Me hubiera gustado que el programa hubiera sido más integral y real. Me refiero a que se hubieran otorgado estrategias de enseñanza y aprendizaje para*

*motivar, evaluar e identificar las necesidades de nuestros futuros alumnos”. (“I would have liked the program to be more complete and real. I mean there should have been subjects on teaching and learning strategies that motivate learners, evaluation, and how to identify the necessities of our future students”). (UQRoo/Enc/Egr/35).*

There was a part in the questionnaire in which alumni was asked about the faculty in the educational program, regarding: a) Methodology, b) Ways of evaluation, c) Academic advice, d) Skill to promote motivation, interest, attention and participation of the students and e) Values and attitudes of a teacher. The possible answers ranged from: All teachers (4), Most of them (3), Some of them (2), A few (1).



*Figure 15 Alumni's perceptions about the faculty*

In Figure 15, it is noticeable that the highest score obtained was on values and attitudes of a teacher ( $\bar{x}=3.13$ ). This information is very important since teachers are expected to promote values like: respect, justice, dedication, and honesty. According to the results on evaluation ( $\bar{x}=3.05$ ), it is shown that the majority of the alumni perceive the teachers' ways of evaluation as appropriate. In addition, alumni perceive that the teachers of the English Language major use an appropriate methodology ( $\bar{x}=2.97$ ). The mean of Academic advice ( $\bar{x}=2.82$ ) and the skills

teachers have to enhance motivation, interest, attention, and participation of the students ( $\bar{x}=2.74$ ) were the lower results, as evidenced in the following comment:

*“mejores herramientas didácticas ya que lo que los maestros predicán, son solo palabras, ya que no usan las herramientas que enseñan.” (“Better didactic tools because teachers preach with words, but they don’t really use the tools when teaching.”) (UQRoo/Enc/Egr/23)*

At the end of the questionnaire, participants were asked about their general satisfaction with the teachers in the major (Figure 16).

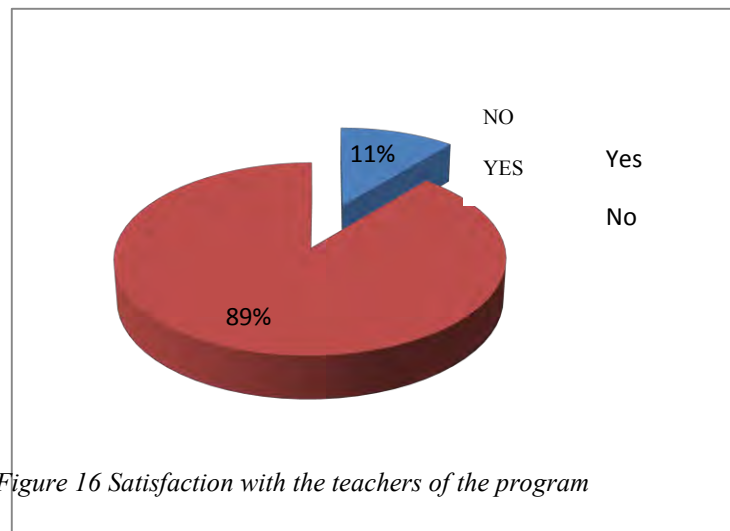


Figure 16 Satisfaction with the teachers of the program

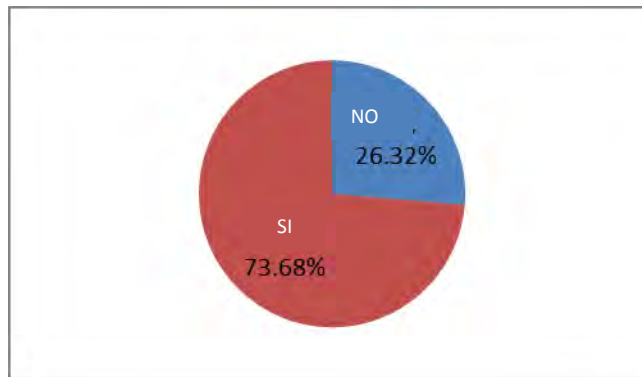
As we saw in Figure 16, most of the participants were satisfied with the teachers in the program (89%):

*“Los maestros fueron excelentes, lo que me faltó fue tener la iniciativa de buscar más información sobre lo visto en clase. Vimos todo lo señalado anteriormente pero obviamente el tiempo no daba para conocerlo todo así que no dudo que hay mucha información al respecto que desconocí y que a lo largo de mi trabajo docente lo he ido conociendo”. (“The teachers were excellent; I should have had the initiative of looking for more information about the topics seen in class. We covered all the topics mentioned previously, but obviously there wasn’t sufficient time*

*to learn everything. I don't doubt there is a lot of information that I didn't know about and have learnt throughout my experience in teaching.” (UQRoo/Enc/Egr/20)*

### **Satisfaction of the Alumni about the Program**

It is very important to know the satisfaction that the alumni have with the program. The information they provided is of great value because they are working in the field, nowadays, so they have a better idea of their training, and if they are satisfied or not. Figure 17 shows the overall percentage of alumni's satisfaction with the program.



*Figure 17 Satisfaction of the alumni with the program*

The 73.68% of the alumni are satisfied with the program. However, the 26.32% are not satisfied, that does not minimize the importance to take into account the suggestions of the participants and to consider them when restructuring the educational program:

*“Me hubiera gustado tomar más clases relacionadas a la práctica docente frente a grupo. Por ejemplo una materia donde hagamos prácticas reales en primarias y los maestros vayan a inspeccionar y observar nuestro desempeño. Me hubiera gustado tomar una materia en la cual haya un viaje o una estancia en un país de habla inglesa”. (“I would have liked to take classes more classes related to the teaching practice in front of a group. For example, a subject where we have real practicum in primary schools and the teachers go to check and observe our performance. I would have liked to take a subject in which we could go on a trip or stay in an English speaking country”.) (UQRoo/Enc/Egr/4).*

*“No me siento satisfecha con el programa con el que cursé la licenciatura ya que hasta los últimos semestres fue donde se enfocó a la docencia y no se hicieron prácticas presenciales en las escuelas como actualmente se hacen. Tampoco se enfocó al inglés británico que nos exigieron al final de la carrera para presentar CAE; este inglés debió manejarse desde el principio de la carrera, al igual que el formato del examen”. (“I am not satisfied with the academic program in the major because it only focuses on teaching in the last semester and there were no face-to-face practices in schools, as nowadays. Also, it was not focused in the British English which was demanded at the end of the major in order to present the CAE exam; this English should be taught since the beginning of the major, the same as the format of the exam”).* (UQRoo/Enc/Egr/11).

## Students vs Alumni's Perceptions

Having presented the description of the results about the perceptions of both groups of participants, students and alumni in a separate way, it is relevant to make a comparison of the opinion of both groups taken from the questionnaires.

### a) Reasons to join the English Language Major

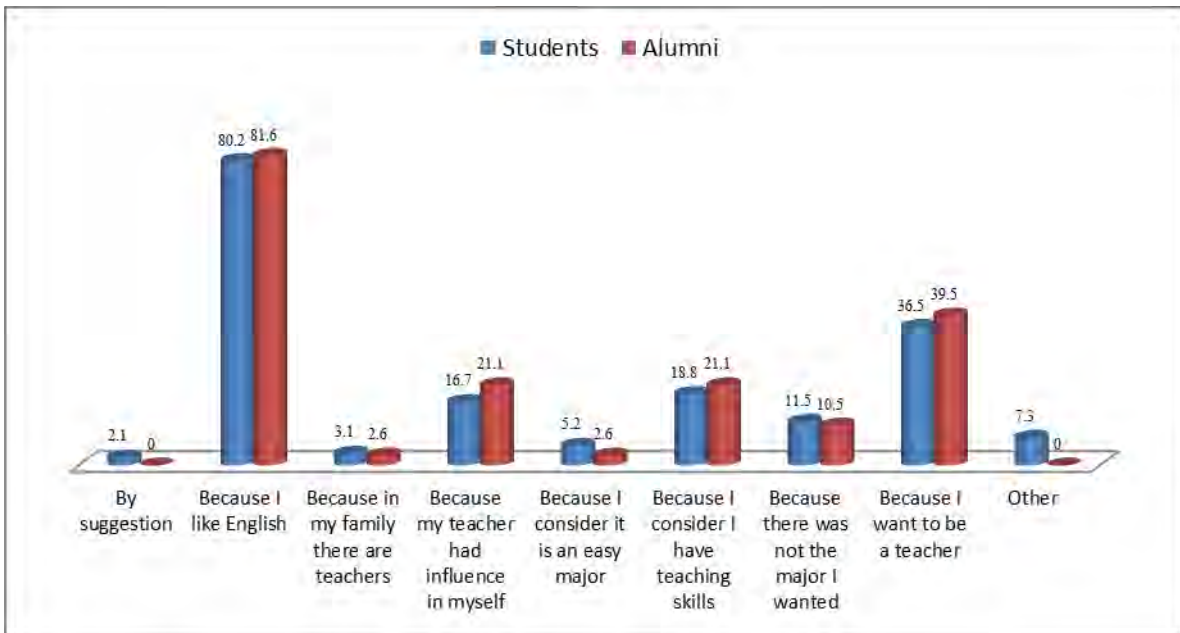
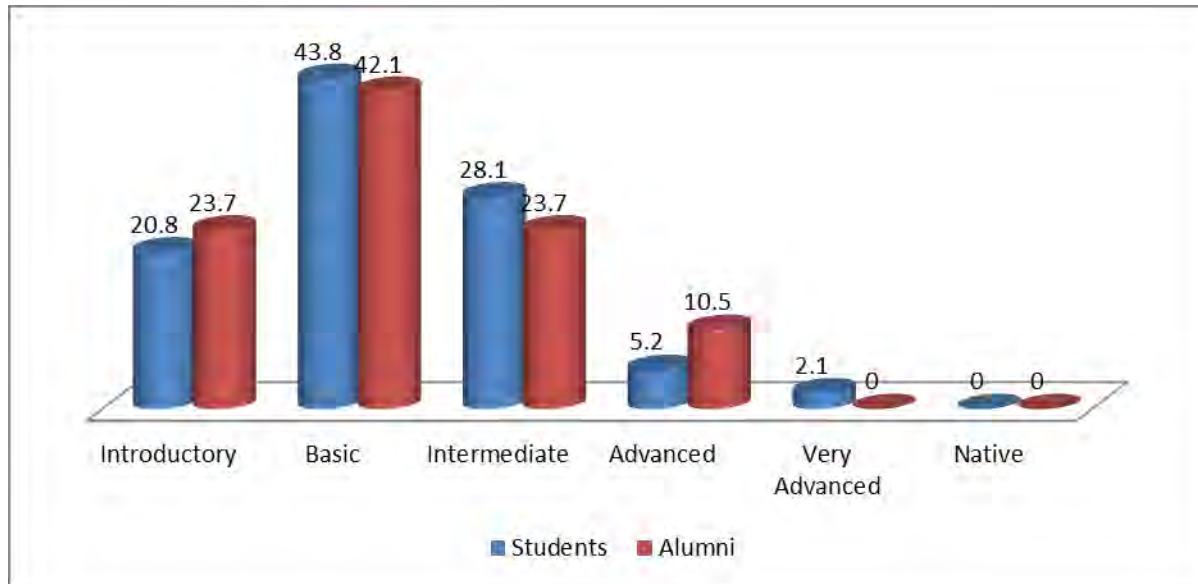


Figure 18 Reasons to join the English Language major (students vs alumni)

Considering that the main focus of the English Language major is to train English teachers, it is important to notice that there is a similarity between the reasons why both students and alumni join the mayor. Students and alumni coincide in their answers, 80.2% of students and 81.6% of alumni say that they join the major because they like the English language while the 36.5% of students and 39.5% of alumni because they want to be English teachers.

b) Level of English before Starting the English Language Major.

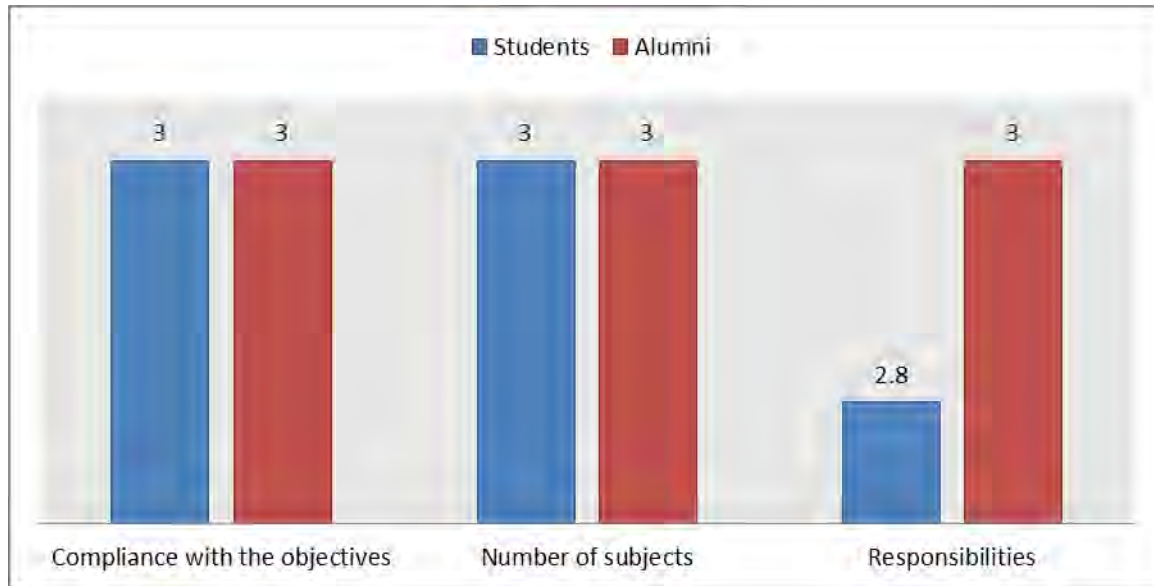


*Figure 19 Level of English before starting the English language major*

This figure presents the comparison made between the level of English of students and alumni before they join the major and again there is a similarity between them. The majority of both groups enter the major with a basic level of English with a 43.8% and 42.1%. The 20.8% of students and 23.7% of alumni start the major with an introductory level of English and nowadays, they are studying in the more advanced levels of the major (sixth, eighth and tenth semesters).



c) Compliance with the Objectives of the Major, Number of Subjects and Responsibilities



*Figure 20 Compliance with the objectives, number of subjects and responsibilities*

In Figure 20, it is noticeable that both group of participants, students and alumni, agree that the major fulfills the established objectives ( $\bar{x}=3$ ). In the case of the number of subjects, students and alumni also agree they are adequate. However, there is a difference that can be observed about the responsibilities that the program has, alumni agree with the responsibilities while students show a disagreement in that case.

d) Importance of the Different Curricular Content Areas

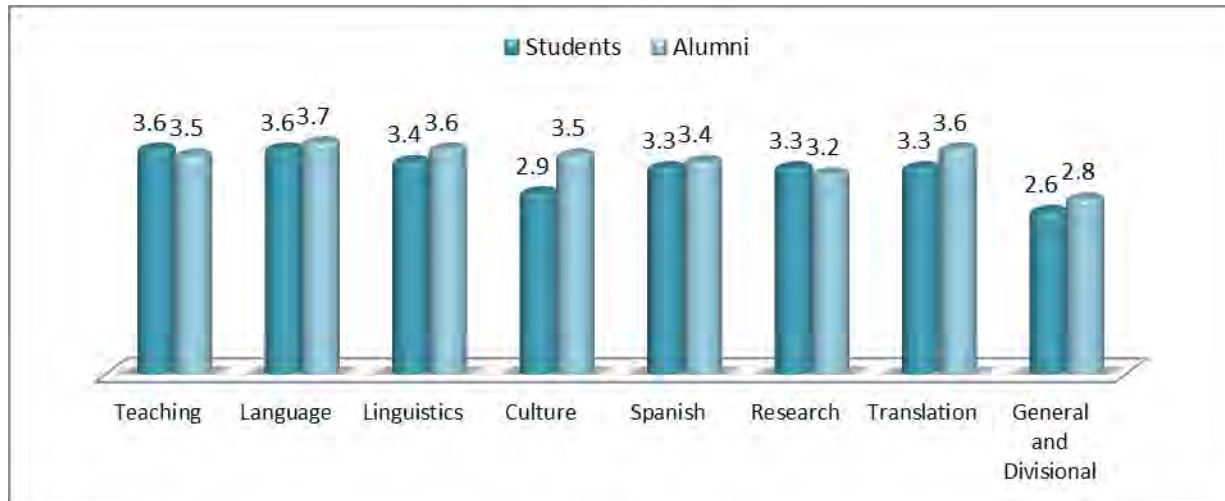


Figure 21 Importance of the different curricular content areas

In general, there is a similarity between the means of the students and alumni about the importance of the different curricular content areas. Teaching and English Language appear to be the most important ones in the major while the least important ones are Translation and the General and Divisional subjects. The following comments support the previous results:

*“Sugiero reestructurar el mapa curricular de manera tal que las habilidades docentes se impartan desde el inicio” (“I suggest restructuring the organization of the subjects in the program so they start learning the teaching skills since the beginning of the major”)* (UQRoo/Enc/Est/1)

*“Algunas materias son de relleno, mejor concentrarse en materias de inglés y docencia” (“Some subjects are extra ones, it is better to focus on the English and Teaching subjects”)* (UQRoo/Enc/Egre/6).

e) Number of Subjects and Hours of Instruction in the Curricular Content Areas

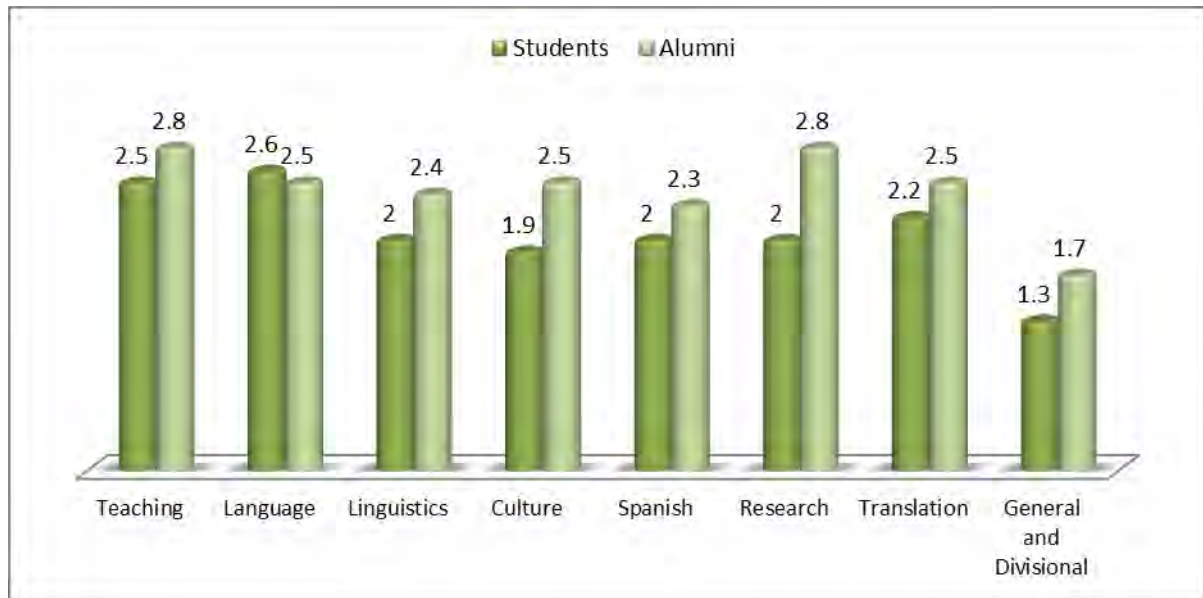


Figure 22 Number of subjects and hours of instruction

In Figure 22, it is observed that the results obtained from the questionnaires coincide with both groups of participants. They consider that there are enough subjects and the hours of instruction are appropriate in the different curricular content areas except for the General and Divisional subjects because both groups suggest that there should be fewer. However, some comments may show a contradiction because it is suggested to add more subjects of Teaching:

*Me gustaría que se emplearan más materiales ((sic)) como Práctica Docente, no al final de la carrera... y que éstas sean "prácticas" en escuelas...enfrentarnos a un medio real." ("I would like to add more subjects ((sic)) like Teaching practice, not at the end of the major...and make the "practice" in schools...to face a real context") (UQRoo/Enc/Est/67)*

f) Perceptions about the Teachers

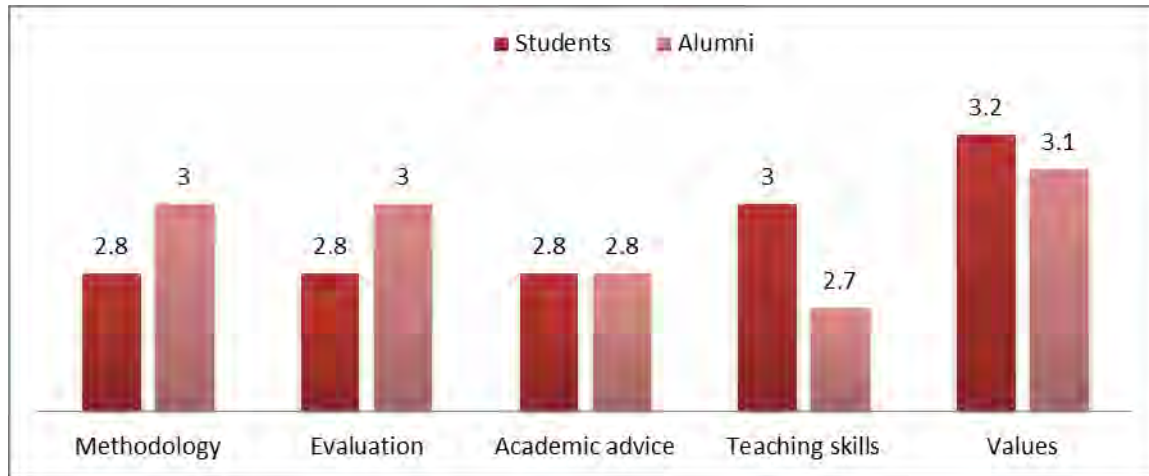


Figure 6 Perceptions about the teachers

Students and alumni show a disagreement about the perceptions they have of the teachers due to the fact that the mean is between 2.7 and 3.2. It is important to mention that the two groups of participants agree with the only one point “*Teachers show the values proper of a teacher*”.

d) Satisfaction with the Program

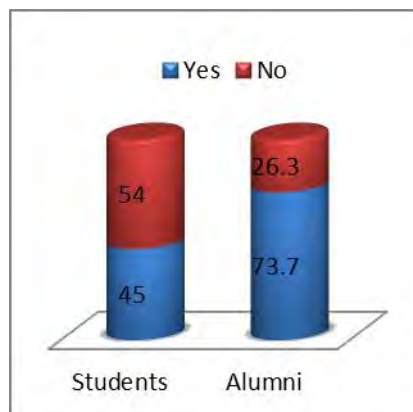


Figure 23 Satisfaction with the program

As it can be seen in Figure 23, there is a relevant difference between the satisfaction that students and alumni have about the program. The majority of the alumni are satisfied with the program of the English language major (73.7%) while the majority of the students are not satisfied the program (54%).

## Conclusions

In this study, carried out at the University of Quintana Roo, the main objective was to identify the alumni and students' perceptions on their English language teaching professional training. Two research questions were answered: 1) How do students from the English Language major perceive their own professional training? And 2) How do alumni from the English Language major perceive the training they received?

This study was part of a macro research project carried out simultaneously at four public universities in Mexico: Universidad Veracruzana, Universidad de Guanajuato, Universidad de Colima, and Universidad de Quintana Roo. The objective was to compare the perceptions of students, alumni, teachers, and employers regarding the training of English language teachers.

The main objective of all these programs, and specifically at UQROO is to train English teachers. From our point of view, knowing that makes a big difference in the success of the students because students should be aware, before starting the admissions process, that the major is focused on teaching English. According to the results found in the study, both students and alumni chose the English language major because they liked English and only few because they wanted to be English teachers. We consider that this information should be provided to the students prior to the start of the process of admissions to the University. This way, the applicants can choose, in a more conscious way, what they want to study.

We remember when we entered the University, the idea that we had about the major was not the correct one, we thought that the major was about learning English and becoming a tourist guide, also that the major was focus on the teaching of many other languages, not only English.

We know that other languages are offered, but they are optional and they are not linked to the teaching program, at least not enough.

Another result obtained from this study refers to the necessity to modify the name of the program, and to revise the curriculum of the program, because it should include what the major is really focused on, which is a degree in teaching or English teaching.

According to the results obtained, and our own experience as alumni, during our university years we could learn from very well prepared teachers, most of the teachers demonstrated to have good values. Furthermore, some of them really cared about students' progress, their English development and the way they were improving their teaching skills, techniques, etc. On the other hand, there were some teachers who did not give the students enough confidence and encouragement during the major. Also, we consider that this has to do with their own motivation and encouragement as teachers.

Based on the results students had very good experiences in the classroom but also they realized that the practice of the English teaching was not enough and when they faced that, it was a problem in the real world. Based on the results the major needed more real practice and to place future English teachers in real contexts so they can have more realistic experiences. Fortunately, some changes in the curriculum have been made. In this way, students have the opportunity to get more practice and they can improve their teaching techniques.

According to the alumni's and student's perceptions there are many different ways the program can be improved but also they mention that the major provides them the knowledge, techniques and skills to be English teachers but as far as we concern learning and acquisition of the knowledge, strategies, techniques and skills as English teachers, depend not only from the major we study. Also, depend on further learning, like workshops, seminars and courses that

students and alumni can take in order to preserve improving and learning, because learning is something we do constantly.

According to the results we found in the study, there were few students who had an advanced English level before they started the university, most of them had a basic level of English and few of them had an introductory level. We have to mention that there was not a big difference between the students who entered with a high English level and the ones who had a very low language level, and we can say that this difference does not affect their possibility of completing the major. And we have to mention that we are part of the ones who started with a low English level, but as far as we are concerned, when the student has the interest and he is worried about his own development, there are many tools that can help him and many of them are available at the Self-Access Center (SAC), at the university, which has very good material that students can use to improve their English level.

According to participants in this study, the UQRoo offers exchange programs with many different countries in Mexico and abroad. These programs offer students the opportunity to improve not only their language skills, but also their intercultural competencies. In our personal opinion and based on our experience, these opportunities to improve our learning and experience are not well advertised, we remember very few teachers mentioned it during all the semesters we studied there; or for instance, what the requirements were to have access to an opportunity to study in another university. It could be because when we were enrolled in the university, the technology to maintain communication between students and teachers was not as good as nowadays. And this can be subject for a future study: the ways students perceive technology and how it helps them in their development during the major.



As we mentioned before and according to the results obtained the level of English students start with does not affect their success during their studies or to finish their major. Because there are many other factors which force students to abandon the university, this could also be another area for future research. Also, we have to remember that this study only presents the quantitative research results, derived from the major research project which includes a qualitative component that compares, completes and enriches this study carried out at University of Quintana Roo.

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