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MA Students’ Perceptions of their Professional Development

Línea de Generación y Aplicación del Conocimiento:
Innovación Educativa

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Abstract

This inquiry aims at examining postgraduate students’ perceptions of their current professional development. In the field of education, several studies have focused on students’ prior and current learning experiences and how these experiences influence learning and teaching outcomes. However, scarcely any have focused on postgraduate students’ voices in the context of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) in Mexico. This inquiry takes place at a Mexican university in the south-east of Mexico. In an attempt to identify the impact of an MA programme on students’ professional development and shed light on their perceptions about these experiences, this study explores TEFL students’ points of view of their professional development by means of a survey and interviews; that is, by employing a mixed approach to research. The findings that emerged from the data relate to students’ perceptions of their professional development while studying the MA based on three main features: professional identity, perceptions of the curriculum, and perceptions of the teachers. The study ends by discussing the implications of these findings for the context where it was carried out, as well as my reflections as a student-researcher. One recommendation in this investigation is for the authorities of the Mexican Education System, and teachers, to keep carrying out more research regarding future students’ perceptions of their professional development during postgraduate programmes, for as this research implies, a lot can be learnt by paying attention to what students have to say.

Key words: TEFL, postgraduate students, perceptions, professional development, teachers.
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Introduction

“The secret in education lies in respecting the student.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson

This inquiry reflects the training I received on the MA in Teaching English as a Foreign Language, at a Mexican University in the south-east of Mexico. As part of my professional development, I considered it paramount to implement the research skills I have worked with while studying this postgraduate programme. To this end, this project emerged from my interest to discover the perceptions of the main actors, the in-service EFL teachers who were studying this TEFL MA alongside me. This is an important issue given that it seems that many actors from the setting of this inquiry know little about how students feel, as well as what they experience, while studying postgraduate programmes. This is a serious omission that Longhinni (2001) has already noted. He explains that it is important for teachers and authorities to listen to what students have to say.

In the context of this study, all the actors that perform in it share a craft or a profession: teaching. It is through the process of sharing information and experiences that these actors learn from each other, and have an opportunity to develop both personally and professionally (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Consequently, this study is an attempt to report these students’ points of view regarding their training, the weaknesses and strengths of this curriculum, as well as to have an impact on this MA by reporting my findings. Thus, this project aims at sharing the data collected with students, authorities, and teachers. As a result, it is hoped that there may emerge solutions to the problems that students may face on the MA programme as part of their professional development. This study, therefore, may lay also the necessary foundations for future researchers to continue building a sound understanding of students’ perceptions of their professional development. In addition, this research may provide also relevant emerging data for other contexts that may contribute to the building of the field of research into perceptions and their value in the educational context.
This final paper comprises six sections. Section one describes the context and focus of the study. Section two presents the literature review followed by the methodology in section three. The analysis and interpretation of the findings are presented in section four. Finally, limitations of the research as well as conclusions, recommendations for further investigation, and my reflections are dealt with in the last part of the paper; sections five and six.

1. Context

In this section I describe the context where this research project was carried out. There are three elements that are to be presented: the institution where the MA students took the postgraduate programme, the School which is part of the university, and the programme students decided to study. For the sake of the study, I give details of each in the following sections.

1.1 The Institution

The institution where this research was carried out is in the south-east of Mexico. This university is an autonomous public institution. Its main functions are teaching, carrying out research, culture dissemination and the extension of university services. All these functions must take into consideration quality, pertinence, equity, and ethics. Furthermore, it should be in permanent connection with the different social sectors that generate and supply knowledge for equitable and sustainable development (Students’ Statute, 2008).

1.2 The School of Languages

The School of Languages is part of the Humanities field that the University offers. “This School seeks to prepare professionals to be critical, creative, and focused” (Student Guide, 2009, p. 1 [my translation]) by means of its different programmes: English BA or French BA, a virtual modality BA in Teaching English, and postgraduate programmes such as a TEFL diploma and an MA in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (referred to as MEILE hereafter). Thus,
...they will be prepared to contribute to Mexican social construction by strengthening identity, tolerance, and solidarity with other cultures—a paramount contribution to society

(Student Guide, 2009, p. 4 [my translation])

These elements contribute to satisfy the necessities of intercultural communication and knowledge production. The English and French BAs are designed to train individuals to master the foreign language, develop some teaching and translation skills, and become familiarized with English literature. That is, students are not specifically trained to teach a language.

1.3 MEILE programme

The MA programme, in contrast to the BA, concentrates on teaching English as a foreign language.

This MA programme seeks to train professionals who are able to optimise the teaching and learning process at the various educational levels where they perform, by making use of effective materials and adequate teaching resources that respond to the current and future educational needs in a framework of respect and tolerance.

(MEILE Study Plan, 2011, p. 14 [my translation])

In other words, this postgraduate programme aims at contributing to the professionalization of English teachers in the south-east of Mexico. Students develop their teaching skills, as well as methodological, and technological competences that may enable them to cope with the constantly changing demands of the Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) field. Students who join MEILE are requested to accomplish their studies within two years. However, they have the opportunity to finish earlier if they wish because of the flexibility of the programme. Students are able to revalidate learning experiences they have had during their prior training.

This postgraduate programme is nationally recognised for being a leader in teacher training, creation and implementation of knowledge, and has external certification. The MEILE is part of the PNPC (Plan Nacional de Posgrados de Calidad) (Quality
Postgraduate National Programmes) from CONACyT, (Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología) (National Council of Science and Technology) which means that the programme has been nationally recognised as a high-quality one since 2012, when the first programme was reviewed and restructured. As a result, all the MA students are able to apply for a scholarship throughout their studies on the MEILE programme.

1.4 Current MA students
The research sample belongs to the second and third semester of the MEILE; that is, the study focused on those students who were about to complete the MA credits requirement. These students had already taken learning experiences such as Language Learning Theories, Discourse Analysis, Language and Society, Language Analysis, Current Perspectives on Teaching English, Professional Development, Curriculum Design, Teaching Implementation (Action Research 1), and Evaluation. This group of students is the first intake of the MA since the programme was updated. Therefore, they faced the changes that had been made regarding the learning experiences syllabi and the curriculum of the programme itself. It is important to mention that due to the flexibility of the MA, some students who joined other postgraduate courses were able to revalidate some of the MEILE learning experiences. Nevertheless, it has to be mentioned that all the participants graduated from the School of Languages and are studying the MA on Teaching English as a Foreign Language (MEILE).

1.5 Problem
This research report presents the first step of the first action research cycle, planned at the beginning of the project. This investigation sought to discover students’ perceptions of their experiences during their studies on this programme. This is an important issue given that these particular students were the first intake of this new MA programme, and so were in the position to provide relevant information concerning its evaluation. Therefore, a possible second step in this action research project, after examining the findings in the first one, would be to implement ways and solutions for any problems detected, in order to strengthen
the MA programme, and contribute to this particular educational context. However, owing to time constraints, this would need to be carried out by me or other researchers in the future.

1.6 Objectives
This study, therefore, aimed at:

- Exploring students’ perceptions regarding the programme they are studying.
- Identifying students’ perceptions of the impact of the TEFL MA on their professional development.
- Reflecting on what students have to say about their education.
- Understanding to what extent the MA programme has impacted students’ perceptions of their professional development.

1.7 Research questions
For the purpose of this study, I focused on attempting to answer one main research question and two research sub-questions:

The main research question:
How has the MA in Teaching English as a Foreign Language impacted the students’ professional development?

Research sub-questions:
- How do students perceive their professional development before and after the MA?
- What are the issues that have influenced the students’ professional development during the MA?

In other words, this study attempted to discover how studying a postgraduate programme has impacted students’ professional development. Furthermore, owing to the lack of research examining the relationship between teachers’ professional development and studying a postgraduate programme, this study sought to address this gap in the literature.
1.8 Rationale
As a student on the TEFL master degree, it has been necessary and very illuminating to reflect on the teaching and learning process I have experienced, as well as on my professional development. That is why I believe it may be relevant to study other students’ perceptions of their professional development. The results of this inquiry may provide valuable feedback to possibly improve the curriculum design of the MA programme and perhaps the syllabus design of each learning experience. Furthermore, this study may even motivate other researchers to continue studying students’ needs and opinions about their professional development during similar programmes. In particular, this inquiry is important for me, as a researcher, as it is part of my professional development process as a MA student. Identifying students’ perceptions and examining the MA programme may be a turning point for me regarding my goals as a professional.

2. Professional Development
It seems paramount for teachers to study and to keep on learning throughout their whole careers. One feasible way is to study postgraduate programmes that contain rigorous and relevant content, strategies and organizational support that ensure the training and career-long development of teachers (USDE, 1996). Effective professional development requires and fosters the norm of continuous improvement (Tulsa Public Schools, 2000). The National Staff Development Council (NSDC, 2001) notes that staff development that improves the learning of all students will prepare educators to apply research to decision making. The NSDC furthered notes that effective staff development will prepare educators to understand and appreciate all students, create safe, orderly and supportive learning environments, and hold high expectations for their academic achievement (NSDC, 2001). However, many teachers are resistant to change and therefore are resistant to professional development activities (Fullan, 1991; Richards, 2002).

Richards (2002) affirms that teachers are resistant to change for several reasons. Among these reasons are; scepticism, increased burdens on the teacher, lack of ownership, fear of loss of control, lack of support, and lack of perceived benefits
Isolation of teachers creates one of the most formidable roadblocks to change and professional development (Dufour & Eaker, 1998).

Richards (2002) suggests that in order for professional development and reform to be effective, it must come from within the school and be implemented by the teachers in the school. One explanation of the old saying, *the more things change the more they remain the same*, is the fact that those who advocate and develop change usually experience more rewards than cost, and those who implement change usually experience more cost than reward (Fullan, 1991). In addition, Fullan (1991) warns that change is highly personal and that each teacher affected by the change must be allowed to work through the change in a way that allows for equal reward and cost to the teacher.

Murphy (2002) concludes, however, that it has been the common practice for professional development to be planned by the principal and to have intentions of achieving dramatic improvements in classroom teaching and student performance. Furthermore, professional development has traditionally been short-term, disjointed, and held outside of the school day, in physical locations and contexts that are far removed from the classroom (Murphy, 2002; USDE, 1996). Rivero (2006) refers to this type of professional development as one size fits all courses and warns that these parameters for professional development are no longer effective. Dufour and Eaker (1998) point out that all schools must embrace ideas about professional development and professional learning communities that are radically different from those ideas that have guided schools in the past.

Professional development must be guided by a common goal and data must be used to set and achieve this goal (Zmuna, et al. 2004). Elder (2005) asserts that data should be reviewed to identify the gap between the ideal and the real. Zmuna, et al. (2004) further note that innovations must be identified that may most likely close the gap between the ideal and the real. Once the data has been reviewed and innovations identified professional development can serve as the bridge between where prospective and experienced educators are now, and where they will need to
be, to meet the new challenges of guiding all students to higher standards of learning and development (USDE, 1996). The process or how of professional development, is as critical to improvement as the content and context (TPS, 2000).

The United States Department of Education (1996) has identified 10 standards for best practices in professional development, these are as follows:

1. Focus on teacher as central to student learning; yet include all other members of the school.
2. Focus on individual, collegial, and organizational improvement.
3. Respect and nurture the intellectual and leadership capacities of teachers, principals, and others in the school community.
4. Reflect the best available research and practice in teaching, learning, and leadership.
5. Enable teachers to develop further expertise in subject content, teaching strategies, uses of technologies, and other essential elements in teaching to high standards.
6. Promote continuous inquiry and improvement in daily life of schools.
7. Planned collaboratively by those who will participate in and facilitate that development.
8. Require substantial time and other resources.
9. They are driven by a coherent and long-term plan.
10. They are evaluated ultimately on the basis of their impact on teacher effectiveness and student learning, and this assessment guides subsequent professional development efforts.

(United States Department of Education, 1996, p.206)

Zmunda, et al. (2004) acknowledge that continuous improvement is reliant not on a fixed concept of success, but on a consistent striving to do better. They further acknowledge that the individual must realise that their competence is directly and indivisibly linked to the competence of the school.
2.1 Teachers’ professional identity in teachers’ training

Analysis of the literature shows how teacher training is more focused on ‘how to teach?’ rather than ‘what is a teacher?’ and ‘how to become a teacher?’ An American educational psychology handbook often used in teacher training, explains the reason for this:

...as an art, teaching calls for vision, intuition, talent, commitment, and creativity – very little of which can actually be taught. As a science, however, “teaching requires knowledge and skills that can indeed be learned”.

(Woolfolk, 1996, p.7)

Nevertheless, research seems to highlight that teachers’ sense of vulnerability rarely originates from their feeling of being not up-to-date, or bad at teaching. Jeffrey and Woods (1996), instead, explain that when teachers are challenged in educational reform processes, they may experience “a loss of self” (p. 331). Other studies show how the effort to meet the needs of so many varied constituencies, often evokes teachers’ emotions (Godar, 1990; Lortie, 1977; Nias, 1989). Moreover, Canadian and UK research on teachers’ emotions during educational reform highlight the importance of caring in the classroom (Barwell, 2005; Lasky, 2005; Sloan, 2006).

Teachers need to control their emotions that become more intense when they perceive an intrusion by parents or government officials into classrooms (Hargreaves, 1998, 2001; Jeffrey & Woods, 1996; Lasky, 2000). Jeffrey and Woods (1996) found that teachers subject to scrutiny may experience a sense of professional inadequacy, as well as a reduction of positive emotions and loss of self, pedagogical values, and harmony. They explain this sense of de-professionalization as the “move from professional to technician status” (Jeffrey & Woods, 1996,p.328).

Darby (2008) shows that teachers may experience fear and intimidation when their professional self-understandings are challenged. Only with adequate support by researchers and trainers are they able to reconstruct their self-understandings that
may, in turn, lead to improvements in student achievement, instructional practices, as well as positive changes leading to emotions of pride and excitement that are necessary in the development of a teacher’s professional identity. However, it appears often to be the case that the relevant role of teachers’ professional identity in teachers’ professionalism is not taken into account enough by training and evaluation. Training activities, therefore, need to support teachers more in managing emotional and personal dimensions that play a strong role in the teaching profession.

2.2 Overview of studies on MA EFL students’ perceptions
Exploring MA students’ perceptions, and reflecting on their potential impact on language teaching and learning, especially in more specific areas such as professional development, may contribute to accumulate more information regarding teaching practice, curriculum design, as well as teachers’ professional identities. In Mexico, however, the issue of MA students’ perceptions has rarely been incorporated into the research agenda. The few studies that have focused on what happens in the classroom are mainly at lower levels of education (e.g. Cruz, 2011; Yeladaqui, 2010; Tello, 2009; Mata, 2008). Discovering students’ attitudes and perceptions is possible, as it is generally accepted that language learners, in particular, are capable of bringing this knowledge to consciousness and articulating it (Willing, 1988). Therefore, this study attempts to report relevant data for the postgraduate context, which has not been taken into consideration in this context thus far.

3. The Study
According to The Oxford Advanced English Dictionary, “perception” means: “a way of seeing, understanding or interpreting something” (1995, p.359). According to Lindsay and Norman (1977), perception in humans describes the process whereby sensory stimulation is translated into organised experience. Because this process is not itself public or directly observable (except to the perceiver himself, whose precepts are given directly in experience), the validity of perceptual theories can be checked only indirectly. In this study, students’ perceptions refer to their opinions
about their professional development during their MA studies. Based on MA students’ perceptions, teachers and institutions may have a broader idea of how students feel in their classroom and what they might need to learn, as well as see the impact of the programme on their students’ professional development. Thus, I believe that by investigating students’ perceptions of their experiences on the MA they are studying may create an awareness for all the actors involved in education and, in this way, match students’ expectations with suitable actions.

Regarding methodology, I decided to employ a mixed qualitative-quantitative approach in this inquiry in order to answer the main research question and the subsidiary ones in order to achieve a better understanding of the phenomenon under study (Hernández Sampieri & Mendoza, 2008). In the mixed method there is a combination of at least one quantitative component and a qualitative one in just one study or research project. Johnson et al. (2004) describes this mixed research as a continuous process where there is a mixture of quantitative and qualitative approaches, focusing on one approach more than the other or equally.

I considered employing a mixed research approach for several reasons. First, because of the complexity and diversity of the problems and phenomenon that exist nowadays, I consider it is not enough to deal with that complexity with the use of a single approach. For that reason, the mixed approach was required (Hernández Sampieri & Mendoza, 2008; Creswell et al., 2008). Furthermore, in addition to the advantages before mentioned, Collins, Onwueguzie and Sutton (2006,p.550) identified four reasons to use qualitative-quantitative methods:

a) Enrichment of the sample (it may be better to use a mixed approach since it allows the researcher to go toward several sectors)
b) More reliability of the instrument (first a survey, then semi-structured interviews)
c) Integrity of the intervention (not implemented in the study, thus far)
d) Optimise the results (making it easier to identify the perspective of data, interpretations, and the utility of the findings) (Grounded Theory techniques were employed to analyse data)
After considering these advantages of using a mixed approach for this research, I decided to include both research paradigms in this study.

3.1 Action research

This study presents the first stage of an action research project. Action research, according to Ary (2006), is a tool that helps us find solutions to problems we encounter in a certain educational context and helps us improve our students’ learning and, as a result, our teaching practice. Action research can be applied to such areas as curriculum design, professional development, teaching strategies, school reform, and more. Action research is about taking action based on research and researching the action taken (Ary et al, 2006).

In particular, Action research is based on the premise that local conditions vary widely and that the solutions to many problems cannot be found in general truths that take no account of local conditions. Action research is more than reflection. It emphasizes a systematic research approach that is cyclical in nature, alternating between action and reflection. According to Ary (2006, p. 184), there are three main characteristics of action research:

1. The research is situated in a local context and focused on a local issue.
2. The research is conducted by and for the practitioner.
3. The research results in an action or a change implemented by the practitioner in the context.

The first step in action research is to examine the idea of a potential problem carefully in the light of the means available. Frequently, more fact-finding about the situation is required. If this first period of planning is successful, two items emerge: firstly, “an overall plan” of how to achieve the objective and secondly, a decision regarding the first step of action. Usually this planning also somewhat modifies the original idea (Smith, 2007).
As previously mentioned, it was considered that one or perhaps more issues could possibly be identified in this local context given that this was the first implementation of this programme. By employing only the first stage of a first cycle of action research in this inquiry, I attempted to identify the impact of the MEILE on MA students’ perceptions of their professional development, as well as examine what they think of the programme. It was hoped that the findings would not only enable me to understand my own context, but also provide the MA programme designers and authorities with relevant information that may be useful for improving the programme in some way.

3.2 Data collection methods
I collected data by means of two instruments: a survey (Appendix 1) and semi-structured interviews (Appendix 2). The survey was employed as primary data and the interviews as secondary. The survey gave me access to emerging categories that I then classified. After this, I employed semi-structured interviews to go into more depth in the data collected from the survey because semi-interviews are “more flexibly worded; a mix of more or less structured questions” (Merriam, 1998, p. 71), not asked in a specific order, but as the conversation unfolds.

3.2.1 Survey
This data collection method was developed by a team of researchers from the Universidad Veracruzana (UV), the Universidad de Quintana Roo (UQROO), and the Universidad de Colima (UCOL) working on an interrelated research to find out data about students, teachers, graduates and employers’ perceptions of teacher training. However, as a researcher, I modified it to suit the setting I was focusing on. It is important to say that many of the inquiries that adopted this kind of data collection method have reflected students’ perspectives on language learning, and offer useful insights for language teaching pedagogy (Horwitz, 1987).

The survey I employed was answered by fourteen MEILE students who were enrolled in the third semester of the MA; that means they were about to finish their studies. This survey was edited three times in order to improve the appropriateness
of the questions so that I could obtain enough data to suit my research purposes and achieve reliability. I divided it into three sections (Appendix 1): personal information, information about the programme, and information about the academic group. There were 19 questions in sum and two open-ended questions for students to write comments or suggestions at the end of each of the corresponding sections of the survey.

3.2.2 Interviews

Interviews were used to collect data and also to corroborate and probe the data collected from the survey. Arksey and Knight (1999) comment, that interviews are likely to enrich research. In addition, the main purpose of an interview, as Patton (1990) suggests, is to obtain a special kind of information where the researcher wants to find out what is “in and on someone else’s mind” (p.278). Therefore, interviewing was paramount for the sake of the study since I managed to ask five students questions about their perceptions of their professional development during the MA they were taking. It is important to highlight that I asked my participants questions based on their answers; that is, I asked questions influenced by their responses and related to the survey data I wanted to know more about. According to Arksey and Knight (1999), semi-structured interviews are a partially structured guide that the researcher follows which contains key questions and follows up ideas not necessarily used in order. Thus, I included other questions as needed while interviewing, influenced by the interviewees’ answers.

With this method of data collection, I was able to obtain the qualitative dimension that enriches the inquiry hereby presented. In order to satisfy issues of confidentiality, I omitted the names of the interviewees. I used a nickname for each one instead of their real names: “Case 1, Case 2, Case 3, Case 4, and Case 5”. Furthermore, one interview was in Spanish and four in English as the participants were free to speak in the language they felt more comfortable with.
3.3 Research Procedure

First of all, a survey was answered by fourteen students. (I had given my survey to eighteen students; however, only fourteen of the eighteen students on the MA answered it as four of them did not have the time to answer the survey nor to collaborate with an interview). Prior to this, I explained to them the research project I was carrying out, and asked them if they would sign a consent letter (Appendix 4) for me to use the data for research purposes. I told them that their real names would not be used, instead, in the paper they would be identified as “Cases”. That is, their real names would not be known by the readers. In the data analysis section, these participants are identified as cases: ‘Case 1’, ‘Case 2’, etc. I analysed the data collected and classified it. Various categories emerged during this analysis process.

After examining the data from the survey, however, I realised there were some aspects I wanted to know more about and clarify. Thus, I decided to interview five students to probe in depth their perceptions of the MA, and to what extent it has impacted their professional development. I arranged with five students to interview them at school, after having finished their lessons. All the students I wanted to interview accepted to participate in my project. Although, the interview guide was the same for each one, all the interviews were different since they varied because of each participant’s responses. The interviews lasted between twelve and fourteen minutes. I recorded and transcribed the interviews, and then started to look for key words that matched the categories in the survey data.

3.4 Grounded Theory

In order to analyse the data, I adopted Grounded Theory techniques. Holliday (2002) states that the main objective of Grounded Theory is to inductively derive theory which is ‘grounded’ in the data, hence its name. In this theory, the author suggests that “there is a continuous interplay between analysis and data collection” (Holliday, 2002, p.18). Merriam (1998) also considers Grounded Theory as a significant data analysis method because the researcher is able to compare one segment of data with another in order to first determine similarities and differences.
Then, the researcher can label, categorise, and arrange data that relates to each other to end up with a set of categories grounded in the data. In addition to these steps, in Grounded Theory, data is also analysed via the Constant Comparative Method. That is, after I transcribed the interviews, I started to analyse the data and look for similar ideas in each case (interviews and survey). I was able to find similar responses in different interviews; therefore, I gathered all these ideas into categories which I analysed in comparison with the data collected on the survey. By this means, I was able to begin theorising. Gillham (2000) indicates that in the stage of data analysis and building theory, there is a conscious interaction among the objectives of the study, the evidence taken from the data, and theorising which is constant through data analysis, and constantly provides direction to the inquiry. In sum, I engaged in an ongoing process of triangulating data from the survey, interviews, and theory.

4. Findings

In what follows, I will present the main findings of the study, mostly knowledge generated from, and related to, students’ perceptions of the MA and their professional development. These perceptions were obtained from the triangulation of the survey, interviews, and theory. For the sake of space, I am classifying the findings according to the issues that emerged. These issues are: professional identity, perceptions of the programme, and perceptions of the teachers. The professional identity category consists of how students see themselves before joining the MA and while studying it, both personally and professionally. This category is divided into five sub-categories: improvement, perceptions of the language level, self-confidence, awareness, and learning. The second one corresponds to the impact that the MEILE programme has had in students’ professional development. Finally, number three reports students’ perceptions of the academic group that teaches the MA, and the implications these perceptions have in their professional development.
4.1 Perceptions of their professional identity
This category is divided into five sub-categories: perceptions of their ‘improvement as professionals’, ‘perceptions of the language level’, ‘self-confidence’, ‘awareness of teaching practice, and perceptions of their ‘learning on the MEILE’. This category and sub-categories present students’ perceptions of their professional identities before and after studying the MEILE.

4.1.1 Improvement as professionals
First of all, the data suggests that students’ perceptions may have influenced their professional development activities, such as joining MEILE. That is, students reported that they wanted to study a MA because they mainly wanted to improve their teaching practice. Indeed, ‘improvement’ was a key and regular word students used to justify the reason why they decided to further their education and study the MA programme. Students reported why they decided to widen their professional development by studying a postgraduate programme. ‘Case 14’ sums up what eight of the fourteen participants said about the reason they decided to join the MA programme:

Because I wanted to improve my teaching practice.
(Case 14)

It is evident that most of the students joined the MEILE because they perceived a need for professional development. The participants appear to agree with Tateo (2012) that by sharing knowledge and experiences in a community of practice – MEILE - they will improve their teaching practice and they will be able to get better jobs as a result, which is why many students seem to care about their professional development. The idea of studying a postgraduate programme that may provide students with better jobs is not always tangible since there are many factors to take into consideration. For example, according to Nunan (in Bailey, et al., 2001), it would seem that English teachers are employed just because they speak the language fluently, not because they have a formal training as teachers. Thus, there may be several elements involved in getting a good job or a promotion.
Nevertheless, these students seem to believe that they need to improve as professionals by continually studying and preparing themselves, and, as a result, their current working conditions will change into more positive sceneries. We can observe in the following extract from the interviews, how one of the participants, similar to another three, now feels:

_Because when I entered this MA, as I told you, I felt more confident and if I get to the doctorate, I think that I would apply for a better job, maybe be the coordinator of my school or I don’t know maybe another work where I cannot directly work with children but to train other teachers to do their jobs, that’s something I would like to do._

(Case 3)

I asked this same participant to explain further why he believed he was more likely to be promoted in his job and he commented the following:

_Because none of the other teachers where I work have an MA and now that they know that I am studying an MA, they put much more attention in what I do and well, that feels good._

(Case 2)

According to this student, none of his colleagues has a postgraduate degree, hence his feeling of having a good reputation in his working context. He perceives he has been favoured owing to his studying a postgraduate programme and this sheds light on his future job opportunities such as to train teachers. This seems to be, from a social and cultural perspective, a matter of labelling. The professional development of this student gives him the advantage over his colleagues and that is one of the reasons he, at the beginning, decided to study this MA. That is, he seems to have been validated in his working context by studying this MA. Now, he is recognised as an educated teacher and that makes him feel motivated to keep growing as a professional.

In sum, according to these students, having a MA is thought to facilitate professional development. Therefore, it may be concluded that ‘improvement’ is a
key word when answering why it is important for students to study a postgraduate programme and continue growing as professionals. The participants in this study agreed that professional development is relevant for their future. An MA provides adequate practice, follow-up of strategies and techniques, as well as leads to better job opportunities. These are the basis for best practice in professional development (NSDC, 1996).

4.1.2 Self-confidence
As part of the impact that the MA has had on students, the sub-category ‘self-confidence’ emerged. This shows how they feel and act in their teaching practice after taking the postgraduate programme. The participants assured they feel more confident because of the training they obtained during the MA:

Yes, I feel more confident knowing I am not the only one dealing with teaching. Besides, some courses have been useful.”

(Case 5)

Yes, I feel more confident and I acquired more responsibility about my performance.

(Case 14)

Interestingly, ‘Case 5’ reports that the fact of feeling more confident is owing to sharing knowledge with a community of practice (Wenger, 2002); that is, the MEILE community. Furthermore, this participant believes that some learning experiences have helped him to feel more secure when teaching. For instance, ‘Case 14’ describes that she is now more responsible regarding her roles as a teacher, as well as confident enough to assume responsibilities. ‘Case 2’ succinctly reports what had changed in her performance as a teacher:

I have learnt how to... I don’t know if the word is ‘behave’ in front of the group, but I have more strategies to use for my students... to use in front of my students and these strategies have helped me a lot to have more control. I think that they feel more secure with you and they can... is like they can trust you and they can be there with you, something like that, I don’t know that is my perception of my practice now. Makes me feel very secure of myself, yes ‘secure’ is the word, secure about what I am doing in front of them, amm...
*feeling the security of them makes me feel secure about me, it’s really funny.*

(Case2)

In sum, as previously mentioned, teachers experience fear and intimidation when their professional self-understandings are challenged. Only with adequate support by researchers and trainers are they able to reconstruct self-understandings, leading to improvements in student achievement, instructional practices, and positive changes leading to emotions of pride, self-confidence, and excitement. However, first of all, the multidimensional nature: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and cultural, of teachers’ professional identity emerges (Darby, 2008). From the data presented it can be concluded that all these dimensions go together with teachers’ professional development. The MA programme has helped some participants to build this self-understanding and self-confidence through self-reflection. They seem to feel secure because they are studying a postgraduate programme. It is implicit that they are now more trusted than before by both their colleagues and their students.

### 4.1.3 Awareness of teaching

The category, ‘Awareness of the teaching practice’, contains data related to the issues students take into consideration in their teaching practices after their training at MEILE. This data may suggest, therefore, that the programme has had an impact on students’ professional development. This sub-category emerged from the intrapersonal side of teachers’ professional identity. It provides the students’ views and/or ‘awareness’ of the changes in their personalities and professions regarding their actions in their current teaching practice after joining the MEILE.

The MA students generally reported they are more aware about paramount elements of the teaching practice. Such factors as learning styles, multiple intelligences, teaching approaches to teaching, school policies, and knowledge of the context affect the teaching and learning process. The students from the MA reported the following when they answered what issues had changed after joining the MA programme:
Yes, I do. Because I have become aware of other factors that affect teaching and learning processes.

(Case 4)

Yes, I do. Now, I understand more my teaching practice. For instance, now I don’t get desperate easily as I understand why some things happen.

(Case 2)

It seems that the MA programme has really had an impact on students. They understand, reflect, and are more aware of their teaching practices and what being a teacher is. They see themselves as professionals who now understand that their field is really complex. Interestingly, there could be a mirror effect since they see themselves by looking at their students. For example ‘Case 3’ mentioned that:

I think I am doing the things I don’t like my students to do and that’s something I realize. . . From this different perspective I can appreciate more things that I hadn’t.

(Case 3)

‘Case 3’ recognizes he is acting in a similar way his students do. This self-recognition may suggest that this teacher/student is more willing to learn since he now appreciates issues that he did not appreciate in the past, before studying the MA. In other words, the students seem to have changed their concerns about education and teaching after joining the MA programme. For instance, ‘Case 2’ also said the following when asked how she felt the programme had changed them:

I have changed. I feel a little bit more secure about what I am teaching and I think that I have more presence in front of the students because I think that before of the MA they used to see me more like a friend, it’s not respect, but because before that they had been always respectful but I think that they see me a little bit older, I don’t know if older is the word but it’s a change in the behaviour of the students and everything because I think that I have changed my behaviour in front of them.

(Case 2)

It is interesting to see how the MA has helped ‘Case 2’ to see herself as a professional, as a teacher. In short, it is clear that these students have changed and
that the impact the MA has had on them has been projected in both their personality and professions.

In sum, it was found that there was a process of reflection. Currently, they are teachers and they now see themselves in a different way because they have played both roles now: the teacher’s and the student’s. As a result, they are now more likely to be more aware of their strengths and weaknesses as teachers.

4.1.4 Perceptions of their learning on the MEILE

Finally, the sub-category ‘learning on the MEILE’ reveals the repercussions of studying the programme and the implementation of knowledge in the students’ working contexts. In the survey employed, they were asked whether they felt or acted differently in their teaching practice after joining the MA or not, and how. The participants answered that they perceive they felt professionally different after studying the postgraduate programme. They mentioned words such as methodology, planning, flexibility, strategies, techniques, and approaches. These words found regularly in the data refer to the learning that the students’ experienced during their MA studies. The following extracts are examples of what they reported regarding the impact of the MA in their approaches to teaching:

Yes, I do. I feel better because every time I give a class, I analyse the results or consequences of my teaching practice, my methodology and planning. I reflect more now than in the past.
(Case 6)

Yes, I have implemented some strategies in my classroom I have learnt in MEILE.
(Case 10)

According to students’ reports, they have learnt the basis of the teaching and learning process. As teachers who want to improve their professional practices, they joined MEILE and, indeed, have achieved both pedagogical knowledge and knowledge of the subject matter. Changes are tangible in their teaching practices as
a consequence of their development and preparation at the MA. Now, they take into consideration more details such as lesson planning, the evaluation process, their very own emotions as human beings and teachers at the same time, and the complexity of dealing with people. Interestingly, ‘Case 7’ shares the idea of learning on the programme, but he states he has not been influenced by the MA at all. According, to him, he has reinforced teaching elements he had not acquired during his BA studies. However, that does not mean he is being influenced in his current practice.

I do, because I’ve learnt things I had not during my BA. But I do not consider that the MA influences my practice.

(Case 7)

This suggests that this participant sees their training on the MA as reinforcement for his teaching practice, but not as a factor that rules his techniques, strategies or methodologies which may sound contradictory. Learning influences our everyday life, thus in the working context too; that is, in teaching.

In contrast, ‘Case 5’, reports a renovation as a teacher after joining the MA. This participant was used to teaching the language with old-fashioned techniques, now he enriches his teaching practice by using the current approaches to English teaching:

Me ha ayudado mucho yo creo que a renovarme como docente, había muchas prácticas digamos de la usanza antigua, que definitivamente ya estoy tratando de eliminar, estoy tratando de suplirlas por nuevas formas de enseñanza y en general el gran aporte que me ha brindado la maestría es el crecimiento como profesionista, eso es lo gran... lo más significativo que tengo de la maestría.

(Case 5)

Definitely, he recognises himself as a new teacher and is facing a process of change. This transition occurred after joining this postgraduate programme and sharing experiences with colleagues. This is paramount for professionals to develop their
skills and self-understandings. If students are motivated to keep developing themselves as professionals, they may understand that teaching is a lifelong career. For example, ‘Case 2’ reported her intentions to keep studying due to the motivation she has acquired on the MA:

I have learnt a lot and I am thinking of taking a PhD in something, languages maybe, or something like that, keeping studying and keeping improving myself and keeping working and put into practice everything I am learning in these courses in these studies and everything and being preparing myself all the time.

(Case 2)

In sum, learning on the MEILE has motivated students to keep developing as professionals and implement the knowledge, techniques, and methodologies, in their own working contexts. Effective and regular professional development will prepare educators to understand and appreciate all students, create safe, orderly and supportive learning environments, and hold high expectations for their academic achievements (NSDC, 2001).

4.1.5 Perceptions of the language level
The ‘perceptions of the language level’ sub-category is important in order to report students’ perceptions of the programme and how they perceive the changes they present regarding their language competence and proficiency. It is interesting to take a look at what students reported regarding their level of English before and after taking the postgraduate programme since they reported they feel they did not improve, nor even learn, English in a conscious way. However, they seem to believe that their English may have become proficient unconsciously while studying the MA. The following graphic shows the students’ level of English before joining the MA; that is, the level of English students believed they possessed collected from the survey:
Most students assumed they had an advanced level of English. It is important to mention that the MA programme asks students for a certificate, for instance, EXAVER exam, FCE, or TOEFL. Thus, students were aware they had a B2 level in English, based on the Common European Referential Framework. According to the students, they did not enter the MA because they wanted to master the language, but to improve their teaching skills. However, when they stated to learn more English some barely noticed it. In particular, when the participants were asked if their level of English had improved during their MA studies, seven of them reported to have improved their language competence, mainly their academic writing. For example, ‘Case 1’ said:

**YES**

*I think so, regarding some terms and concepts I did not know and also because of the type of documents we have written.*

*(Case 1)*

However, three students did not accept the idea that they had improved as they think that proficiency in the language is not one of the aims of the programme, or theirs either as ‘Case 4’ mentioned:

**NO**

*I don’t think so as the aim of this programme is not to improve our English level but to give elements that help us to improve our teaching practice.*

*(Case 2)*
In addition four learners believe they may have improved after practicing on the MA although they were barely able to notice it, “**MAYBE. It’s hard to answer this question but it may have improved after a year**” (Case 13).

These answers may suggest that the students did learn certain aspects that favour their English proficiency although the programme is not designed to teach English. That is, through learning experiences related to English teaching, language practice was present in students’ professional development. That is why four students are not sure whether their English improved or not. It is known that most students considered having an advanced level of English, but they may have practiced some parts of the language that had an impact on that level. The students’ perceptions of their language level may have repercussions and impact in their professions and development as teachers; therefore, there is a need to investigate further how they see this knowledge of the subject matter (English language) before and after their MA studies. Nevertheless, ‘Case 4’ sums up in which ways he has improved his English level at the MA:

*Yes, definitely it has. As I have been reading a lot, I have been writing a lot in English, I have been offering presentation and I have attended several presentations, including the CAE course, definitely my English has improved.*

(*Case 4*)

In sum, whether in a conscious or unconscious way, students have improved their English level because of the professional development activities they have carried out during the MA. In a broad sense, part of being a better professional includes the knowledge of the subject matter (Wilson et al, 1987) and students seem to have reinforced that point.

### 4.2 Perceptions of the programme

This category, ‘perceptions of the programme’, reveals students’ perceptions of the MA. Students expressed what they feel towards the programme, and also, they provided potential solutions to problems they faced. In order to know and
understand such problems, students were asked to say whether they are totally satisfied with the programme, just satisfied in certain issues, or they are not satisfied at all. The following graphic presents the answers from the survey:

**Survey question 12**

**I feel satisfied with the programme of the MA**

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<th>Totally agree 4</th>
<th>Agree 8</th>
<th>Disagree 2</th>
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</table>

Essentially, we can see that the majority of students feel satisfied with the programme. However, some of them do not feel satisfied at all. ‘Case 1’, ‘Case 5’, and ‘Case 6’ commented that one of the reasons why they are not satisfied with the programme is owing to the curriculum organisation. For example ‘Case 5’ stated:

*Algo que nos complicó, bueno en lo particular a mí se me complicó mucho en el segundo semestre, fue tener materias intercaladas, un viernes una, un sábado otra, un viernes una, un sábado otra, y yo creo que esa sería una de las cuestiones, creo yo, modificaría.*

*(Case 5)*

In answer to this problem, ‘Case 1’ suggested the following:

*I would like to work the MA in blocks, when we have many subjects at the same time it is very stressful, complicated, and sometimes confusing. Also, I’m writing my last paper, however I haven’t finished the other subjects yet, I don’t think that is going to help me to do my research.*

*(Case 1)*

Students appear to think the MA curriculum is poorly organised since some of them are taking learning experiences from the last period and they have not covered the courses which may provide them with resources and information to finish their final paper. Furthermore, the participants experienced a change regarding the
organisation of the courses in each semester. ‘Case 5’ reported he faced difficulties in the transition from the first semester to the second, as he was used to going one step at a time; that is, to take one course and finish it, then to take another one. In the second semester, the students had to take three learning experiences at the same time, which may have produced uncertainty, confusion, or even stress. Interestingly, this experience might have had an impact on students’ professional practices since they were demanded to devote more time to their education. They made an effort to meet the needs of so many varied constituencies regarding their studies and teaching practices. As a result, their emotions were evoked when they were asked about their feeling towards the programme (Godar, 1990), and they provided a couple of suggestions for it to improve. In the interviews, the students were asked if they had any suggestions for the programme to improve and they suggested the following:

1) to devote more time on Professional Development lessons. (Case 11)
2) to have more practice. (Case 4)
3) to relate the theory with the practice and to have a specific task to apply it in my groups. (Case 2)
4) more practical courses. (Case 3)

All this information that students shared are their perceptions about what they have faced in the MA and they stated they need more practical courses. They believe that by putting into practice the knowledge and skills they have acquired in each learning experience, they would be able to achieve meaningful learning. It is valuable for teachers to have a wide repertoire of options when dealing with a wide variety of student needs (Walker & Shea, 1998). Thus, practical courses may give students the opportunity to make use of the approaches and methods they are experiencing in the postgraduate programme. I believe it is important for students to put into practice what they have learnt in their working contexts. That is, they are studying the MA programme to be able to apply new strategies or techniques in their classrooms. It will be task of the corresponding authorities to listen to the students’ recommendations in order to strengthen the programme and meet learners’ needs.
4.3 Perceptions of the teachers

This category responds to the participants’ perceptions of their teachers on the MA and how they have influenced their professional development during their studies. As evident in the following graphic, most of the students feel satisfied with the MA teachers’ performances:

![Pie chart showing satisfaction levels with teachers' performances.]

However, when five of the participants were interviewed, their perceptions of the teachers vary a lot. According to students, one general idea was that they are not able to generalise about all the teachers, since there are good teachers and bad ones.

*We can’t generalise. There are some teachers.... who are well-trained and promote our interaction.*

*(Case 2)*

Although there are several opinions about the teachers, it is not possible to generalise since they are very different. ‘Case 2’ expresses that old teachers seem too tired to teach. I asked him to elaborate and he answered the following:

*Well, the thing is that I would strongly recommend that the coordinator put much more attention in the work that teachers are doing here...For example, the class we had with X, it was very... it was a very nice class because all we read, we put it into practice and we... well, at least I feel that these things I can remember and now I’m more conscious about the roles and my identity, but some of the other courses are like “I passed, I read” and that’s it, as if teachers were not creative anymore.*
According to this participant, the expectation he had at the beginning of the programme regarding his MA teachers was disappointing. He proposes something that may change the teaching practice on the MA:

_to be honest, I was expecting more from some people. Some teachers are just too old; I think some opportunities should be given to younger teachers who are fresh in the EFL field. Someone who can come up with new ideas and innovative ways of teaching._

Another student commented that, in his opinion there are two basic elements to be modified. This participant mentions the importance and relevance of the students’ attitudes towards studying a postgraduate programme. Furthermore, he highlights the teachers’ approach to teaching and says that it needs to be different:

_well, regarding the teachers, I feel very comfortable, I mean, they are very good people they seem to be professional, but as I said, I still think they can be a little bit more strict, more organized and to demand a little bit more from us...However, I would change everything, about myself, about the programme, maybe about the programme not, about the approach the teachers have on the programme, the way we are immersed in the programme, more guidance probably, since the very beginning._

In short, if the teachers renovate their approach to teaching and students show a positive attitude towards the programme; that is, the commitment they have with the programme, the perceptions might be different. Furthermore, here emerges the idea that students may not distinguish the difference between demanding teachers and the students’ lack of autonomy; that is, it would be related to a cultural fact that needs to be studied. A change in the teachers’ approach to teaching plus a change in students’ commitment may produce better training for professionals studying a postgraduate programme, and therefore their professional development would be favoured.
5. Limitations, Discussion and Reflections

This section first presents the limitations of this inquiry. Then what has been achieved, the implications of the findings obtained and what needs to be taken into consideration in a future step of the action research project. Finally, my reflections after carrying out this research are presented.

5.1 Limitations

It is important to mention what research limitations there were. The main one is clear: there was not enough time to complete an entire Action research cycle since I only had around five months, from January to May to plan, design, read the appropriate literature, carry out a field study, write this report and then make the pertinent corrections and engage in the editing process in June before the submission date.

In addition, information to describe the context was not at hand in English, therefore translation was required. That is, it is not firsthand literature, but my own translation of official papers that contain the School policies and objectives, therefore the information provided to describe the setting may be not as accurate as the original papers that describe each point more meticulously.

Being a complete participant of the MA and a researcher at the same time may have had an impact on students’ responses. I cannot ignore the fact that I was also part of the group, which means that our relationships were close. Therefore, this fact might have influenced the students’ willingness to express their deepest feelings and emotions or what they really had on their minds. However, I strongly believe I created an appropriate atmosphere as possible for the participants to express what they really felt.

5.2 Discussion and Reflections

The aim of this study was to establish an understanding as to what extent the MA has impacted students’ professional development. To this end, how students perceived their professional development before and after joining the MA and the
issues that have influenced them were explored and analysed. The findings of this study will be the basis for the discussion of the implications and for future research.

First of all, students’ perceptions of their professional development after joining the postgraduate programme vary. However, in a broad sense, they seem to have achieved more preparation; that is, knowledge of teaching methodologies, classroom management, and knowledge of the subject matter (English language). Although some students are not satisfied with the MA programme they affirmed they have learnt. Moreover, some of them may feel more confident when dealing with students owing to their preparation on the MA. Teaching is a complex profession and students seem to be aware of this fact after reflection. They seem to have become more critical and they even suggested some ideas to improve the programme.

All these elements show the impact that a postgraduate programme has on students’ professional development. Teachers’ professional development is a process; however, it is also a tool for sense-making (Sloan, 2006) and undoubtedly a project (Valsiner, 2007). Students’ professional development during the MA seems to have been strong. It is strong because it covered a large part of their needs and expectations; that is, they perceive themselves as different teachers after joining the programme because they evolved both personally and professionally. Furthermore, there is a sense of self-recognition that seems to have appeared after reflecting on their practices while studying the MA, as already mentioned. Students seem to have the idea of being able to gain a higher status after preparing themselves on a postgraduate programme. They believe they are seen differently because they have studied a MA.

In a period of change of the MA programme which was being restructured, students’ experienced a sense of vulnerability that may have affected their practice and effectiveness regarding their professional development. However, the students’ professional identity emerged from the students’ perceptions as a space of negotiation between personal, professional, and emotional dimensions constructing
the complex everyday life of teachers. Studying a postgraduate programme may help teachers as a self-recognition dynamic that may be important in the struggle with the growing social pressure professionals usually face.

6. Conclusion, Implications, and Recommendations

Finally, this section of the research contains the conclusions of the study and the implications for the MA students and for the authorities. In addition, at the end of the section, some recommendations for further investigation are suggested by the researcher.

6.1 Conclusions and Implications

The results of this inquiry may provide valuable feedback to possibly improve the curriculum design of the MA programme and perhaps the syllabus design of each learning experience. Furthermore, this study may even motivate other researchers to continue studying students’ needs and opinions about their professional development, not only on the MEILE, but on other similar programmes.

This study aimed to explore students’ perceptions of their professional development. The conclusions drawn from this study provide points of consideration for the MA when considering whether or not to keep on with the same curriculum structure in order to benefit students’ development. Three main categories emerged from the data: 1. professional identity, 2. students’ perceptions of the MA programme, and 3. students’ perceptions of the teachers.

I conclude that students’ professional identity, after joining the MA, seems to be a mixture of cognitive and emotional factors that involve students’ professional development. The data indicates that their professional development was successful in terms of improving their teaching practice. Furthermore, they reported factors they perceived during their training such as self-confidence and awareness. These issues may have had a good impact on their professions. Students became aware of the complexity of teaching; that is, they are conscious of the number of
elements to take into consideration when teaching. The students’ professional development activities at the MA seem to have been beneficial in the improvement of their knowledge of the subject matter, knowledge of the context, and pedagogical knowledge. The data indicated that students improved their language level at the MA whether as a conscious or unconscious process. Furthermore, the learners feel that their training both offered them beneficial strategies for their classrooms and reinforced the ones they were already using.

Most of the students perceive the MA programme and the MA teachers as positive elements in their professional development. In contrast, some students indicated that they believe there are some teachers who should be up-dated to meet their needs. On the one hand, the data indicated that students perceive that there are some teachers who are adequately prepared to handle classroom management on the MA. On the other hand, there are others who are just used too old-fashioned. That is, some teachers on the MA may not be providing students with the adequate training for them to effectively perform in their working contexts. This should be listened to by the authorities and other stakeholders to act upon what is happening in the classroom.

The focus on professional development in this study was to provide data regarding the impact a postgraduate programme has on students. A majority of the students agreed that their professional development was favoured by the programme. I strongly believe that education curriculum developers might consider a review of their coursework requirements and content, as well as teachers’ approaches to teaching. Many teachers enter the field feeling unprepared to handle a variety of problems they encounter on a daily basis. Perhaps the curriculum needs to be re-evaluated with the emphasis on re-evaluation being a means of preparing teachers with more practical courses. If teachers are better prepared to handle their teaching practice, they will be provided with more resources to grow as professionals and as people.
6.2 Recommendations for further investigation

This research could be more widely applied to future generations on the MA. It is suggested that the potential solutions to problems suggested by these students be implemented for the following student intake. Furthermore, it is recommended to replicate this inquiry on a wider scale examining graduated students’, teachers’, and employers’ perceptions at this and other schools in Mexico. That is, this study only looked at one postgraduate programme in the Southeast of Mexico from students’ points of view, but it could be carried out in similar settings and with other educational actors.
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Appendix 1: Survey

The aim of this survey is to collect data for research purposes about your perceptions of your professional development. Your participation as a MEILE student is paramount for this study. The information you provide here will be strictly anonymous. Thank you very much!

a) Personal information

Please, answer the following questions.

1. Why did you decide to join MEILE?

2. Your level of English before you joined MEILE was:
   ___ Elementary
   ___ Intermediate
   ___ Advanced
   ___ Proficient

3. Has your level of the English language improved while on the MA programme you are studying?

4. Do you feel or act differently in your teaching practice after joining the MA? Why and how?

b) Information about the MA programme you are studying

Write an X in the option that best fits your opinion according to the following:

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<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I know the objectives of the programme.</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
I know the curriculum of the programme.

I know what I am learning during my studies and which skills I will have developed when I finish.

I know where I can work after my studies.

I consider that the programme sets up achievable objectives.

I think there are enough learning experiences in the curriculum.

I think that the syllabus of the learning experiences is well organised.

I feel satisfied with the educational programme of the MA.

13. Comments or suggestions:
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

14. Information about the MA teachers

Write an X in the option that best fits your opinion according to the following:

4   Totally agree
3   Agree
2   Disagree
1   Totally disagree

14 I consider that my teachers are well trained to teach the learning experiences they do.

15 I think that the methodology that teachers use is adequate.

16 I think that the way teachers evaluate students is adequate.

17 I consider that my teachers give sufficient academic or professional advice.

18 I consider that my teachers have the teaching skills to promote motivation and catch students’ attention and interest.

19 I consider that my teachers show values such as respect, justice, commitment, dedication, honesty.

20 I feel satisfied with the teachers’ performances at the MA.

21. Comments or suggestions:
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

Thank you very much!
Appendix 2: Semi-structured interview guide - Students’ Perceptions of their Professional Development

1. In a broad sense, what do you think of the MA you are taking?

2. How do you feel with the programme?

3. Have you learnt something from the programme?

4. Have you changed in any aspect after taking the MA?

5. Has the MA helped you in some way? How?

6. Are you satisfied with the preparation you have experienced at the MA?

7. Is there something you would change about your training at the MA?

8. What do you plan to do after finishing the MA?

9. Do you think you need to further your education?
Appendix 3: An interview transcription of one of my participants

0001 Cli | Hi, thank you for your time. You are case number 1. I won’t say your name because it is going to be anonymous and your name won’t appear in my writing. This is only for research purposes. In a broad sense, what do you think of the MA you are taking?

0002 Lili | Ahhh, what am I thinking about that? It’s haaa... it’s a programme that in general terms, it is not what I was expecting, I mean, it is not what I expected, like the programme, it is something different, I don’t know exactly how to define that, but it is different, I mean, the subjects or the professors, in general the programme is not what I expected.

0008 Cli | What did you expect from the programme? And what is it actually?

0009 Lili | OK, I thought that it was a... this programme would be something like professional, I mean, more demanding actually, and the level of the professors, I thought that they were like more prepared, like ahhh... more demanding and in general terms, the whole programme I thought that it would be different and actually it is not as good as I thought.

0014 Cli | OK, thank you. Ahhh... have you learnt something from the programme?

0015 Lili | Yes, I learnt different things. Something remarkable for me is the discipline in general to research, to do research. It is my concern now, as professional, to research more, and this is because I learnt different things here in the programme, and as in the BA it wasn’t my area, I didn’t know many things about teaching, and as I teach actually, I considered at the beginning that, when I started this programme, I considered that I needed more education, more... how do you say that?...more, training actually in that specific area, but now that I’m here, I’m afraid that I didn’t received what I thought, yeah.

0023 Cli | OK, thank you. Tell me, have you changed in any aspect after taking the postgraduate programme?

0025 Lili | Yes, changes about teaching you mean?

0026 Cli | Any aspect...

0027 Lili | Well, a lot of things have changed since I’m here, professionally I think, yes... what changed was my concern about education and teaching. I believe that it is something personal, is doesn’t have to do nothing with the programme, actually, or not in the way that someone would believe, because, for example, the programme is, well in my opinion, is not complete, but you change your way of teaching because you learn things, or you change the things that you consider because you learn the things that you can learn, I mean, I told you, if I didn’t receive the training during the BA, ahhh... I learnt how to teach some things, but it is not full training, well, that is my opinion.

0035 Cli | Does getting the MA degree represent something for you?

0036 Lili | Yes, I just realize that I changed my personal view about this career, not because I am a better person for being in the MA, but it is because you are aware about the lack of knowledge that you have, actually, and just because of that.

0039 Cli | Has the MA helped you in any way? And if it has, how?

0040 Lili | Well, I got a scholarship and that is important because it is not any scholarship, it is the CONACyT one, so I think that studying the MA helps me in that way.

0042 Cli | OK, thank you. Are you satisfied with the training you have experienced here?

0043 Lili | Of course not, as I already told you, no, I’m not. I consider that this programme should be better in many different ways, for example, I consider that the level of the professors should be like higher and well, it is important to recognize that also the level...
of the students because, well as far as I know, the general level of the students is like ahhh... is like ahhh... I don’t know how to say it...

Lili

Low level?

Oh yeah, but in general, I mean, for the students, because I believe that they... I mean, the programme should demand more from the students because in general, the English level, or the management of the language in general is not what a master’s level should demand, well, in my opinion.

OK, is there something you would change about your preparation at the MA?

Yes, I could suggest different things, for example, the schedule of the subjects, maybe, we should separate the categories, I don’t know how to classify that, but for example, I consider one subject that is more or less from my area, the literature one, it is for example, it is not what it should be because in general if the professors that studied the MA here didn’t get that training about literature, they should receive something else, I mean, how to really use the literature in the teaching or in the classroom and some strategies or something like that, I don’t know because, for example, if I teach literature, I use different tools and resources that they didn’t teach here, so that is a point of comparison in my opinion because if I talk about what is teaching tools or training, I’m not sure if I have the tools to say that because I didn’t receive that training. And, well, I’d change probably the organization, I may suggest that the professors should be more committed with the programme, with the students, and they should demand more discipline, more level, not only about the language but about the level, the performance of the student because they are like permissive or, yes they are like light teachers and sometimes I consider that if one student in particular didn’t present all the things, the works, or the tasks they were asked, they shouldn’t continue in the programme, but they actually continue, so that is my opinion about the level of the students and in general of the professors.

OK, now, what do you plan to do after finishing the programme?

Well, that is uncertain. I wanted to go to England and stay there for about one year, but now I’m not sure about that, also because the personal life is getting complicated now, and I’m not sure about that. What I’m planning is to finish this, to get the degree, and of course to publish the thesis.

Do you think you need to further your education or you need to stop?

No, I think that you never stop learning things and I always need, I mean, I always have this necessity of studying something, I’m not sure what subject or what is next, if the question is about the PhD, I’m not sure, but what I’m sure about is that I will study something, I don’t know if about education because I consider that now my professional development is not complete, I mean, I believe that I didn’t get enough training or education about teaching, and I don’t know if I... I look for a different education, I mean, the PhD or something else, maybe a special training if that exists, I don’t know. That’s it.

OK, one last question, why do you have that necessity to keep studying?

Why? To be honest, I don’t know, but it is just about my personality or my concern as person because it doesn’t matter if I have to learn... I don’t know, about English or about anything else, I will learn because I like to learn things.
Estimado (a) estudiante de la MEILE:

Por medio de la presente quiero invitarte a participar en un proyecto de investigación que se lleva a cabo en la Maestría en Enseñanza del Inglés como Lengua Extranjera como parte de un estudio que tiene como objetivo principal conocer tus percepciones acerca de su desarrollo profesional, así como tus experiencias como estudiante de dicho programa. El estudio abarca:

1) La aplicación de una encuesta.
2) Entrevistarte, en un lugar y horario convenientes para ti. El objetivo de esta entrevista es profundizar sobre algunas de sus respuestas en la encuesta. Las entrevistas se harán en inglés o en español, según nos indiques y sea tu preferencia.

Si decides participar, tu privacidad será un asunto de suma importancia. Para asegurarme sobre dicha privacidad, primero, se usarán pseudónimos en lugar de nombres reales para que nadie pueda identificarte. El reporte final, que será parte de mi reporte de proyecto terminal, no incluirá tu nombre. También, además de posibles publicaciones, como investigador podría presentar los resultados en congresos y foros académicos, siempre sin identificar tu nombre real. Puedes estar seguro de que toda la información que me proporciones será confidencial.

Se planea grabar en audio todas las entrevistas. Estas grabaciones serán escuchadas solamente para propósitos de investigación. Las narraciones llevarán un número de código en lugar de cualquier información personal que pudiera identificarte. Las grabaciones serán utilizadas solamente para cumplir con los objetivos del proyecto.

Tienes el derecho de decidir si quieres participar en este proyecto o no. De tener preguntas más generales acerca del proceso de consentimiento o acerca de tus derechos como participante, no dudes en contactarme al correo electrónico clcruz@uv.mx.

Por favor, si deseas participar en el proyecto, deberás firmar la forma que está incluida. Agradecemos de antemano tu apoyo.
Atentamente:

______________________
Cliserio A. Cruz Martínez

CONSENTIMIENTO PARA PARTICIPAR EN ESTE ESTUDIO

sí

[ ] He leído y entendido esta forma de consentimiento. El investigador ha respondido a todas mis preguntas y dudas. Deseo participar.

[ ] Doy mi permiso para las entrevistas y el uso de los datos que proporciono.

NO

[ ] No doy mi permiso y prefiero no participar en el estudio.

__________________________________________________________________________

Nombre y firma del estudiante       Fecha

Correo electrónico ____________________________