The Design and Implementation of an In-service EFL Teacher Training Model in the Costa Rican Public School System[1]

El Diseño e Implementación de un Modelo de Capacitación para Docentes de Inglés en Servicio en la Educación Pública Costarricense

Patricia Córdoba Cubillo, Xinia Rodríguez Ramírez
and Tatiana Hernández Gaubil[2]*
University of Costa Rica and Distance State University, Costa Rica

Abstract

In response to the challenges of the 21st century and to the need for students in the public school system to have a higher level of English proficiency, English was declared an issue of national interest in Costa Rica in 2008. For this reason, a decree called Multilingual Costa Rica was signed by the government, setting the stage for an in-service EFL teacher training project. This article deals with the analysis of the design and the implementation of a training model, which led to the improvement of the linguistic skills of approximately 80% of the teacher population in the Costa Rican public school system. This study includes a description of the components of the teacher training model as well as the results of the linguistic performance of the participating EFL teachers on the TOEIC© test administered prior to and after three years of training.

Keywords: EFL teacher training, teachers of English from the public school system, improvement of English language proficiency, professional development in EFL

29

Resumen

En respuesta a los retos del siglo XXI y a la necesidad de la población estudiantil del sector público por poseer un nivel más alto en el dominio de la competencia lingüística en inglés, el idioma inglés fue declarado un asunto de interés nacional en Costa Rica en el año 2008. Por esta razón, el gobierno costarricense firmó el decreto Costa Rica Multilingüe, el cual permitió formular un proyecto para docentes de inglés como lengua extranjera. Este artículo aborda el diseño y el análisis de la implementación del modelo de capacitación profesional para docentes de inglés como lengua extranjera del sistema educativo público de Costa Rica, que condujo al mejoramiento de las habilidades lingüísticas aproximadamente del 80% de la población docente del sistema escolar público costarricense. El estudio describe los componentes del modelo de capacitación docente así como los resultados del desempeño lingüístico de los docentes en la prueba TOEIC©, aplicada antes de la capacitación y tres años después de la misma.

Palabras clave: Capacitación docente en inglés como lengua extranjera, docentes de inglés del sistema educativo público, mejoramiento del nivel de dominio del inglés, desarrollo profesional en inglés como lengua extranjera

Resumo

Em resposta aos desafios do século XXI e à necessidade da população estudantil do setor público por possuir um nível mais alto no domínio da competência linguística em inglês, o idioma inglês foi declarado um assunto de interesse nacional na Costa Rica no ano 2008. Por este motivo, o governo costarriquense assinou o decreto Costa Rica Multilíngue, o qual permitiu formular um projeto para docentes de inglês como língua estrangeira. Este artigo aborda o desenho e a análise da implantação do modelo de capacitação profissional para docentes de inglês como língua estrangeira do sistema educativo público da Costa Rica, que conduziu à melhoramento das habilidades linguísticas aproximadamente 80% da população docente do sistema escolar público costarriquense. O estudo descreve os componentes do modelo de capacitação docente bem como os resultados do desempenho linguístico dos docentes na prova TOEIC©, aplicada antes da capacitação e três anos depois da mesma.

Palavras chave: Capacitação docente em inglês como língua estrangeira, docentes de inglês do sistema educativo público, melhoramento do nível de domínio de inglês, desenvolvimento profissional em inglês como língua estrangeira

30

Introduction

The importance of English for the Costa Rican social, economic, and cultural development has been historically acknowledged by political authorities. For this reason, different governments have sponsored several initiatives with the purpose of improving the teaching of English in the public school system of the country. Córdoba, Coto and Ramírez (2005) report that the inclusion of English in the Costa Rican higher education curriculum dates back to the early 1800s. They add that English became a subject in the high school curriculum during the second half of the 19th century. However, English was officially incorporated into the curriculum of elementary schools until the end of the 20th century in 1994.

Today, the challenges that the 21st century poses, such as globalization, competitiveness, communication and information technologies, among others, demand a student population with a higher proficiency in English to have access to better opportunities in the labor market. As a result, English teachers also need to be better prepared and qualified for their jobs to help students achieve high levels of English performance. In response to these new challenges, the Costa Rican government signed a decree called Multilingual Costa Rica in which English was declared of national interest in 2008 (*Decreto Ejecutivo 34425-MEP-Comex*; Calderón & Mora, 2012). As a result, the Ministry of Public Education (MEP), in collaboration with private and government institutions, designed the National Plan of English, whose main goal was to help better the level of English in the public school system. The Plan aimed first at improving the teachers' English proficiency and teaching practice, and then at tackling the ultimate goal of a more proficient student population.

To start with in 2008, the Ministry of Public Education tested the language proficiency of its in-service English teachers through an international standardized exam. The results showed that only 14% of the teachers working in public schools in Costa Rica had a C1 level of proficiency, and the rest was placed within the intermediate and basic bands with 48% scoring at the B1 and B2 levels, 31% at the A2 level, and 7% at the A1 level, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).The results of the lower levels (A1, A2, and B1) were considered unsatisfactory by the Ministry of Public Education to meet the challenges of the country. Therefore, once the problem was identified, the next stage consisted of designing and implementing a training model that included linguistic skills courses for teachers with a low English proficiency level, and methodology skills courses for teachers at the most advanced levels.

31

Thus, the purpose of this article is to examine the design and implementation of this Costa Rican training model, as well as to present the results of the English teachers' performance after taking the linguistics skills courses designed for the training process.

Literature Review

This section focuses on two areas: a brief review of two EFL government initiatives conducted by other Latin American countries and the curricular decisions for the design of the Costa Rican model.

EFL Teacher Training Programs in Other Countries

A look into similar recent training projects carried out in Chile and Colombia, where English is a foreign language, reveals different approaches when establishing national policies in regard to the teaching of English. These two government EFL initiatives were reviewed. Like the Costa Rican model, the Chilean and Colombian projects share a common goal: improving the level of English proficiency nationwide to increase productivity (de Mejía, 2011). However, there are important differences in the issues involved in the articulation and implementation of the language policies. In the case of Colombia, the National Bilingual Programme Spanish-English was implemented in 2004 by the Ministry of Education in coordination with the British Council. Such program was based on the CEFR standards to help define proficiency levels. According to de Mejía (2011), the policy did not consider the local context of a multilingual and multicultural Colombia that has dozens of indigenous languages. De Mejía also calls attention to the debate regarding the exclusion of local experts in the design of the training. Along a similar line, Usma Wilches (2009) criticizes "the standardization of language teaching and learning [which] depicts a lack of trust in teachers, universities and schools" and the tendency of adopting "international models of quality" (p. 136).

In the Chilean experience, The English Opens Doors Program, created in 2003, included a variety of components and targeted both students and teachers in the process of improving English proficiency. The program, also based on the CEFR standards, has implemented a teacher training strategy with linguistic skills and methodology courses, teacher networks, and classroom support for teachers of English through educational resources. The results of the diagnostic test administered to the teachers revealed that more than 50% ranked at the intermediate levels 2 and 3 according to the Association of Language

32

Testers of Europe (ALTE) guidelines. However, results of the teachers' performance after the training were not available at the time of this study.

Curricular Decisions for Program Design

Before initiating a new language program, vital work in the form of information gathering must take place. The fact-finding stage provides answers to the curricular key questions in any program: Who are the learners? Who are the trainers? Why is the program necessary? What will the goals of the program be? What will be taught? Where will the program be implemented? How will it be implemented? What view of language learning will be considered? How will learners' performance be assessed? What type of tests will be used?

The information derived from these questions is necessary because "a curriculum [is] understood in the broadest sense as the philosophy, purposes, design, and implementation of a whole program" (Graves, 1996, p. 3). The answers to such questions then become the basis for establishing policy and formulating goals in a communicative curriculum (Dubin & Olshtain, 2000). In addition, decisions at the macro level must be narrowed down to develop a local model to meet the specific learner needs (Kumaravadivelu, 2012). Therefore, the curricular decisions for the Costa Rican training model followed the previous process: starting from policy making for the learning of foreign languages in the country, and going through the stages of assessing the learners' needs; developing goals and objectives; designing and implementing the courses; testing the learners' performances; and evaluating the program (Brown, 1996; Graves, 1996; Richards & Renandya, 2002).

All this process falls within the framework of a mixed-focus curriculum (Finney, 2002) for language learning. Finney explains that a mixed-focus curricular model is based on "an *integrated approach*, which is essentially learner-centered" and which combines "the product-oriented model and the process-oriented approach" to English language teaching, proposed by Nunan (as cited in Finney, 2002, p. 74). Taking into account a product and process orientation to curriculum design helps to reconcile two important components in a teacher training model: the product, in other words, the content or skills to be learned, and the process, i.e., the learners' needs, interests, and strategies.

Regarding the view of language learning, the implementation of the in-service teacher training model was based on a number of

33

teaching and learning principles for effective communication (Brown, 2001). The participants were viewed as teachers capable of contributing their own experience as language learners, and as language teachers constructing learning communities (Kumaravadivelu, 2012). Thus, they could reach professional competence (Pettis, 2010). Within this perspective, the principles considered in the training model included also the development of communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1981; Hymes, 1972) within a learner-centered, safe environment based on meaningful learning experiences simulating real-life contexts (Nunan, 1998). The view of language learning for this training model is also congruent with the position held by Calderón and Mora, co-participants in the Costa Rican teacher training project, who state that professional development in linguistic skills should be obligatory for language teachers to guarantee quality in the EFL class (Calderón & Mora, 2012, p. 10).

Finally, an important concern in any curriculum is the type of assessment used to diagnose and to test the learners' linguistic performance. A decision in this regard includes whether to use an international standardized test or a teacher-created one. Although standardized tests may have detractors with criticism ranging from ideological, cultural, and economic issues to linguistic ones (Bradley & Nagy, 2011; Canagarajah, 2006), these tests have a number of advantages, for large-scale testing purposes, over those teachers create. According to Brown (2004), when testing language proficiency, tests must be based on accurate "constructs of language ability" that allow teachers and program administrators to collect "legitimate samples of English language use in a defined context; therefore, "language teachers would be wise not to create an overall proficiency test on their own" (p. 45). Thus, standardized tests are generally considered objective measures of proficiency that have undergone considerable item analysis, can be administered to large populations, and can be graded efficiently and objectively. However, it is important to mention that no single test can accurately determine a person's language performance. Within the high number of standardized tests available, TOEIC© has become a popular examination currently administered by a large number of organizations around the world to measure linguistic competence. It is used to make decisions in job-related contexts where English for international communication is a priority.

Methodology

Research Design

This study followed a mixed methods approach to find out if the training program designed for the Costa Rican in-service teachers of English in the public school system and carried out from 2008 to 2011 proved effective to help the trained teachers improve their linguistic performance in English. In order to determine the teachers' level of proficiency before and after the training, the results the teachers obtained in the diagnostic (before training) and output (after training) TOEIC© tests were compared. The research also included a descriptive analysis of the components of the teacher training model that, in the long run, could have helped participants better their linguistic performance in English.

Context and Participants

The training program for in-service teachers of English was implemented nationwide from 2008 to 2011 in the 27 school districts in Costa Rica. The courses were taught in the facilities available in each region, for example, branches of the state universities, community centers, and schools.

Approximately 3,000 in-service teachers, representing all levels of the public school system, from kindergarten to 12th grade, took part in the training project. The teachers, who ranged from very novice to very experienced, worked in either academic, vocational, or bilingual schools in urban or rural areas. Spanish was their L1, and most were full-time teachers with 40 instructional lessons a week. Concerning their academic preparation, the teachers had university degrees in English Teaching or in Teaching with an emphasis in English from both private and public universities.

Data Collection Instruments

Diagnostic test of the in-service teachers' language proficiency (before the training). The Ministry of Public Education of Costa Rica (MEP) and *Fundación para la Cooperación Costa Rica–Estados Unidos* (CRUSA) sponsored the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC©) as the diagnostic test to evaluate the in-service teachers' language proficiency in 2008. The Ministry of Public Education selected this test after weighing the cost-benefit relationship of administering an international test and designing a whole new exam.

35

Nevertheless, it is important to mention that the Costa Rican teacher population took a modified version of the TOEIC© test that included an oral interview.

To administer the diagnostic test and interview the participants, MEP hired the Costa Rican American Cultural Center (CCCN), the only accredited organization in the country. Its certified raters, including mostly Costa Ricans and Americans, were responsible for carrying out the application of the TOEIC© test to 91% of the teacher population working for MEP in all school districts. CCCN also scored the exams, ranked the participants, and sent the results to the Ministry for decision making.

After-the-training test of the in-service teachers' language proficiency. The participants' linguistic skills were evaluated through a subsequent administration of the modified version of the TOEIC© test that included an interview. The test was administered to all trainees as they were finishing the training in the years 2010 and 2011. This teaching population represented approximately 78% of those who took the diagnostic test and finished the training program. Once again, the Costa Rican American Cultural Center (CCCN) administered and scored the tests.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

To gather information about the improvement of the in-service teachers of English in the public school system of Costa Rica, the results of the diagnostic and after-the-training TOEIC© tests were first analyzed. Then, taking into account the standards of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), these results were compared to shed light on the progress of the participants regarding language proficiency. They [the results] are presented with a bar chart to show the migration of the teachers from 2008 to 2011 to the higher bands of CEFR.

Results

This section is divided into two parts: the first one is devoted to examining the elements involved in the EFL teacher training model designed by the Academic Committee, and the second one is devoted to analyzing the impact of the linguistic courses on the participants' proficiency level in English.

36

The EFL Teacher Training Model

The teacher training model was designed considering legal, administrative, logistics, and academic aspects based on the Costa Rican context and the Ministry's goal for the training. This training model might be replicated in other countries where English as a Foreign Language is taught by making the necessary adjustments, given local differences and needs.

Legal requirements. Due to its national scope and complexity, this teacher training model required a legal framework to efficiently administer the funds allocated to the project. Therefore, the Ministry of Public Education and the universities in charge of the training signed a general cooperation agreement and annual specific agreements. The purpose of these specific agreements was to regulate the type of course; the number of groups and instructional hours; the regions to be covered per university; the responsibilities of the parties involved; and the budget administration regarding aspects such as the purchase of textbooks and learning materials, the trainers' salaries, and their travel expenses.

Budget administration. The budget for the project was assigned by the Ministry of Public Education (MEP) to the Teacher Development Agency (IDP) for its annual allocation to the universities. MEP invested a total of approximately 4.5 million USD to carry out the four-year training project, and the funds were transferred annually depending on the courses to be taught and the number of groups assigned to each university. The funds were administered either through the university's main administrative office or through their research foundations. The latter proved to be the most efficient administrative system for three of the universities because of the expedited procedures for hiring trainers and clerical workers, paying salaries and travel expenses, and purchasing materials. In relation to the materials, it is important to clarify that, for each course, the participants were given a set of texts with no charge. The budget also included unforeseen occasional expenses such as courier services, classroom cleaning services, and classroom rental.

Logistics of the model. The implementation of this national training model required a lot of planning, coordination, cooperation, and supervision from the parties involved. Given that the results of the TOEIC© test indicated that the proficiency level of many teachers was low, MEP authorities considered the need of carrying out a teacher training program with the cooperation of the state universities (Calderón & Mora, 2012). This strategic alliance was due to the fact that the higher scores on the TOEIC© test were obtained by teachers

37

who graduated from the state universities. Thus, an inter-institutional academic committee was appointed to design and implement the training project for the in-service English teachers. The Academic Committee was formed by a representative from the Ministry's Teacher Development Agency (IDP) and two professors, with ample expertise in the field of TESOL, from each public university: the University of Costa Rica (UCR), the National University (UNA), the Distance State University (UNED), and the Technological Institute of Costa Rica (ITCR). Based on their expertise and experience in other training projects, the Academic Committee joined efforts to design a feasible training model based on the Ministry's goal of improved linguistic proficiency for its EFL teachers. The Academic Committee was in charge of course design, budget administration, and implementation of a four-year program.

Some specific responsibilities of the Committee were the following:

a.   coordination with the Ministry's advisors and Teacher Development Agency (IDP),

b.   weekly meetings during the four-year period for decision-making and course design,

c.   design of a total of 10 courses with the selection of the corresponding materials,

d.   design of exams, guidelines, and rubrics for all courses,

e.   selection and recruitment of trainers and external evaluators,

f.   organization of workshops for the trainers before each new course,

g.   visits to the 27 school districts for observing and supervising classes, and conflict resolution when required,

h.   receiving and giving feedback to trainers and participants,

i.   coordination and supervision of approximately 200 groups every year, and

j.   elaboration of final reports for authorities.

38

Because it was necessary to establish a liaison between MEP and the universities to deal with the distribution of all official communication, the selection of the training centers, and the distribution of material, MEP authorities appointed the Ministry´s Teacher Development Agency (IDP) as such contact. IDP was responsible for distributing the Ministry´s official communication to inform school principals about

the trainees with a study permit. It is important to mention that this was a paid study permit. Another official procedure consisted of having the participants sign a contract to make them accountable for their professional development. For this purpose, IDP provided the official control forms for trainers to guarantee the participants' mandatory attendance to the training because the training sessions were scheduled during working hours. IDP also contacted school principals so that they made the necessary schedule adjustments in order not to affect students during school time.

Finally, in coordination with IDP, the Ministry's regional advisors selected the teaching centers in the different schools districts of the country. They were also responsible for the distribution of the materials to the participants during the first two weeks of class and control the participants´ attendance to the training courses.

The trainers. To make this model successful and effective, the selection of a highly qualified team of trainers was essential. Most trainers recruited to teach the courses were university instructors, and some others were experienced high-school teachers. The trainers held a Master's degree in TESOL, or pursued studies in a TESOL Master's program. They were required to have worked a minimum of two years in a higher education institution or five years in a public high school. They had to show mastery of English in the job interview conducted by the Academic Committee, and also had to attend the required academic and administrative training sessions to learn about the objectives, contents, methodology, guidelines, and official documents of the courses to be taught.

In addition to their regular teaching responsibilities, the trainers had to build a supportive learning environment by establishing an atmosphere of trust between trainers and participants; to motivate the participants and lower their affective filter; to build their confidence; to boost their professional image; and to effectively deal with conflict when required. One of the most important highlights of the trainers was the decision to establish collaboration networks to share lesson plans, materials, activities, and experiences with other trainers. Although this idea was not originally part of the model, it became a successful component that ensured team work and uniformity in the courses, and therefore should be contemplated in similar teacher training programs.

39

Finally, the trainers' role in this model was that of a facilitator of learning, based on the courses designed by the Academic Committee. The trainers facilitated learning by raising the participants' awareness of their language learning process and by scaffolding the learning

experiences through challenging activities adapted to their proficiency level. Due to the flexibility of the curriculum of the model, the trainers could make their own decisions regarding the emphasis to be given to the objectives, the activities to design/adapt, and supplementary materials to use, depending on the participants' needs. They were also required to provide feedback to the Academic Committee during and after each course to help make the necessary adjustments and, thus, better meet the participants' needs in future courses.

The learners. The following description of the learners in the training project was obtained from trainer reports, class observations by the Academic Committee members, and classroom reports from external evaluators hired by the Academic Committee. Such learners' description was based on the affective, the cognitive and the linguistic domains, congruent with Brown's language teaching principles (2001).

Regarding the affective domain, this population was more fragile and defensive (Brown, 2007, p.72) than regular beginning learners because they were in-service teachers becoming language learners once again. It is important to mention that many participants started the training process showing rejection toward the training and questioning the results of the diagnostic test. Once the courses began, the trainers reported that those participants did not feel confident when using the language; therefore, it was necessary to strengthen their self-confidence by providing opportunities for language use in a safe learning environment. Concerning the cognitive domain, learners at the basic levels showed weak knowledge of the English language. As observed when interacting in class activities, the trainees in levels A1 and A2 were not fluent speakers; as a result, they often resorted to their L1 –Spanish. In addition to their weak knowledge of the target language and their apparent lack of sufficient exposure to it, classroom observations revealed that participants concentrated more on form than on meaning and/or messages, and most were not autonomous learners (Brown, 2007). In relation to the linguistic domain, the development of the learners' communicative competence was crucial because a large segment of the in-service teacher population were at early stages of their interlanguage, as revealed by class observations and trainers' reports.

40

The courses.

The course design stage. The course design stage for this training project was approached from the point of view of a mixed curriculum, which focuses on both the product and the process (Finney, 2002). Thus, the curricular decisions involved a) setting communicative

objectives, b) using international standards for describing learner proficiency, c) having homogenized criteria for the syllabi and materials, d) implementing a communicative methodology, and e) allowing flexibility to respond to the evolving learners' needs. Each of these elements will be discussed below.

To improve the participants' level of proficiency, it was important to set communicative objectives to guide the curricular design of the different courses. The communicative objectives progressed from everyday, familiar contexts to less predictable ones, as the participants developed their skills. It was also necessary to use international standards that helped describe the participants' proficiency level in relation to knowledge, abilities, and skills. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) was taken into account as one of the elements for the curricular design. Therefore, the Academic Committee decided on the required number of hours for each course following the guidelines of the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE) to achieve the CEFR levels. Thus, the courses ranged from 70 to 140 hours of instruction and were taught in sessions of five or six hours a day, once or twice a week, depending on the emphasis of the course.

Each course in the training project was planned with standardized criteria to get results that could be compared nationwide. The Academic Committee designed a communicative syllabus for each of the courses; the guidelines for quizzes, exams, and projects; and the evaluation rubrics to be used in the communicative activities of each course. Depending on the task, this evaluation was either summative or alternative. For the training project, the Academic Committee also selected the instructional materials to be used in the different linguistic courses in the 27 school districts of the country. It is important to point out that such resources helped learners be exposed to authentic materials and be able to participate in communicative tasks. The methodology of the training model was not based on any particular method but rather on principled methodological decisions (Brown, 2001; Kumaravadivelu, 2012; Richards, 2001). The courses integrated the skills that the participants needed the most, i.e., listening, speaking, and reading. Even though a few writing tasks were included in the linguistic courses, writing was not taught explicitly. Pronunciation, grammar, and culture were also considered to develop and consolidate language skills.

41

 Even though the homogenized decisions were made at a macro level by the Academic Committee, the curriculum was flexible enough for the trainers to design their own activities, based on the course objectives. This flexibility allowed trainers to make the necessary

changes considering the participants' linguistic knowledge, affective situations, or any other situation that could come up along the way. Without the trainers' careful contextualization of their own courses, the standardized curriculum proposed by the Committee would have probably failed. As Coleman states "learning becomes impossible" when local contexts are not taken into account (as cited in Kumaravadivelu, 2012, loc. 540).

The following table shows the courses designed for the different in-service teacher populations in the training process from 2008 to 2011.

Table 1. Linguistic courses designed for the EFL teacher-training model in Costa Rica

Target Population	Year	Courses	Hours a week	Number of weeks	Total number of hours
Basic Users A1 and A2	2008	MCE A1 Linguistic Skills for In-service Teachers of English	10	14	140
		MCE A2 Linguistic Skills for In-service Teachers of English	10	14	140
Independent Users B1	2009	MCE B1- Linguistic Skills for In-service Teachers of English	6	17	102
		MCE B1+ Linguistic Skills for In-service Teachers of English	6	17	102
	2010	Oral Communication and Strategies for Listening and Reading Comprehension for In-service Teachers of English	10	7	70
Independent Users B2	2010	Academic Listening Comprehension and Oral Communication I for In-service Teachers of English	6	15	90 + 30 hrs. online = 120 hrs.
	2011	Academic Listening Comprehension and Oral Communication II for In-service Teachers of English	6	15	90 + 30 hrs. online = 120 hrs.

The linguistic courses. Linguistic courses for basic users. In 2008, two different courses were designed for the population of basic users (A1 and A2) so that they began developing their skills. The participants were given intensive integrated courses in the four macro skills with an emphasis on listening and speaking.

Linguistic courses for independent users. The following years (2009-2010) the B1 population that joined the training took three courses, totalling 274 hours of instruction, while the population who started the training at the basic levels needed a total of 414 to 554 hours of instruction to consolidate the B1 level. Two of the three courses focused on the developing of listening and speaking skills, and the other one was designed to help participants learn strategies for listening and reading comprehension in preparation for the post test (the TOEIC©).

After the post test was administered, the results were analyzed to make further decisions regarding the participants' linguistic needs at that particular point. Two main findings were evident: a) 18% of the participants who were placed in B2-, according to the TOEIC© test, were ready for developing academic skills, such as argumentation, group discussions, critical thinking, among others, to consolidate their level. Therefore, two courses on academic listening and speaking, with an online component, were designed, and b) there were still a few teachers placed in the level B1- who were not ready for academic skills courses. As a result, two additional courses on reading and oral communication skills were designed for this population because the test showed these were their weakest areas. Table 2 contains the additional linguistic courses designed for the teacher population still ranking in level B1-, corresponding to approximately 9% of the trainees, after a three-year period of training.

43

Table 2. Linguistic courses designed for the population still ranking in B1- after three years of training

Target Population	Courses	Hours a week	Number of weeks	Total number of hours
Independent Users B1-	1. Reading Strategies and Oral Communication I for In-service Teachers of English	6	16	96
	2. Reading Strategies and Oral Communication II for In-service Teachers of English	6	15	90
	3. Oral Communication and Strategies for Listening and Reading Comprehension for In-service Teachers of English (TOEIC)	5	14	70

Note. Adapted from Calderón, R. (2012). *Capacitación a docentes de inglés en servicio del MEP: Informe 2008-2011.* San José, Costa Rica: Ministerio de Educación Pública.

Even the participants who did not require extra courses to reach higher levels of proficiency (B1 and B2) needed a higher number of instructional hours that varies considerably from the hours recommended by the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE). The Costa Rican in-service teachers required approximately from 50 to 200 additional hours of instruction to become independent users. Table 3 illustrates such differences.

44

Table 3. Comparison of the approximate number of hours required to consolidate a CEFR level in the Costa Rican in-service teacher training model

Level	ALTE Guidelines	Costa Rican in-service teacher training model
A1 (Basic users)	Approximately 90 - 100 hoursA	140 hours
A2 (Basic users)	Approximately 180 - 200 hours	140 - 280 hours
B1 (Independent users)	Approximately 350 - 400 hours	414 - 554 hours
B2 (Independent users)	Approximately 500 - 600 hours	654 -794 hours
C1 (Proficient users)	Approximately 700 - 800 hours	Not applicable

Note. Adapted from C.E.F. (n.d.) *A teachers' guide to the Common European Framework [PDF].* New York: Pearson Longman and from Calderón, R. (2012). *Capacitación a docentes de inglés en servicio del MEP: Informe 2008-2011.* San José, Costa Rica: Ministerio de Educación Pública.

The reasons why the participants needed a much higher number of instructional hours to increase their level could be attributed to factors such as the possible lack of exposure to the target language in their previous university programs, as the Ministry of Education found in their analysis of the in-service teachers' performance (Ministerio de Educación, 2008), and the lack of practice in their work environments. It could be safely assumed that the participants started this training program with a not very strong professional competence that hindered their performance and slowed down their progress that due to their low level of English proficiency.

Impact of the Training Project

As mentioned before, the impact of the training project on the participants' linguistic performance was measured through a second administration of the TOEIC©. The results the participants obtained in the 2008 diagnostic TOEIC© test were compared to the ones achieved in the post test in 2011. Thus, Figure 1 shows the level of proficiency of the in-service teachers both at the beginning of the process and after approximately three years of training.
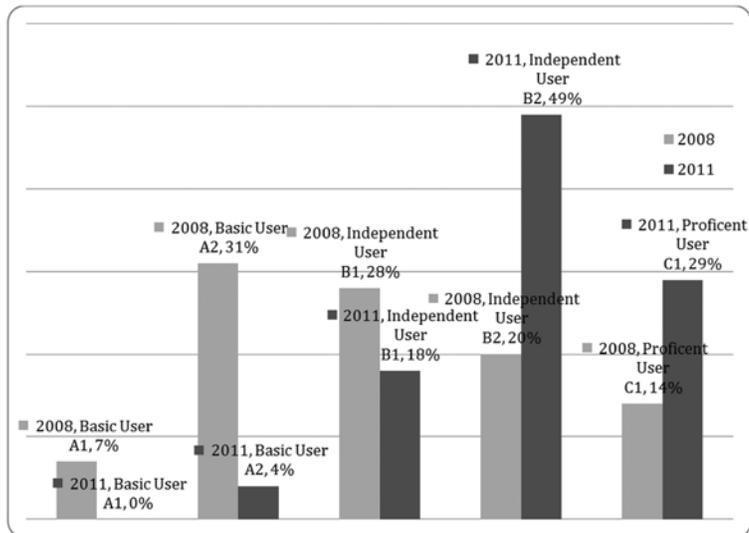
45

Figure 1. Results of the linguistic performance of in-service teachers in 2008 and 2011. Adapted from Calderón, R. (2012). *Capacitación a docentes de inglés en servicio del MEP: Informe 2008-2011*. San José, Costa Rica: Ministerio de Educación Pública.

The comparison of the linguistic performance of the in-service teachers shows evident migration from lower to higher bands. It is important to point out that while 38% of the teachers ranked in levels A1and A2 at the beginning of the training, only 4% of the participants still ranked in level A2 after taking the courses of the training program. The percentage of participants at the B1 level also decreased in 10% because of those teachers who migrated to higher levels. Another positive result was the fact that the percentage of teachers at the B2 and C1 levels at the beginning of the training more than doubled after three years of training. These results show that a significant 78% of the teacher population trained became independent (B2) and proficient (C1) users of the English language.

46

Conclusions

This study revealed that, after taking the three-year training, approximately 80% of the Costa Rican in-service teachers were able to migrate to higher levels of proficiency. This positive result sheds light about the appropriateness of the decision-making process that gave birth to the teacher-training model. On the one hand, all major components—goals, objectives, course methodology, types of courses, number of instructional hours and course evaluation—were adequately articulated to design a coherent curriculum (Dubin & Olshtain, 2000; Graves, 1996; Richards & Renandya, 2002). On the other hand, these components were conceived within a local framework (Kumaravadivelu, 2012) that paved the way for a training model to be carried out within the Costa Rican context. In this way, both key curricular elements and local needs were reconciled to ensure success. The results are more significant when considering that the outcome of this teacher training model was evaluated by means of an international standardized exam—the TOEIC—as a measure of performance.

However, an important drawback of the study is its sole reliance on test results to evaluate the model. Two important sources of information (Genesee, 2001) that could have been considered as part of the evaluation process of the model were the participants and the trainers. Even so, the study sheds light about a teacher training model that offers the possibility of replication in similar EFL contexts provided that the particularities of the setting are adjusted.

47

References

Brown, H. D. (2001). *Teaching by principles: An interactive approach to language pedagogy.* New York: Pearson Longman.

Brown, H. D. (2004). *Language assessment: Principles and classroom practices*. White Plains, NY: Pearson Education.

Brown, H. D. (2007). *Principles of language teaching and learning* (5th ed.). New York: Pearson Education.

Brown, J. D. (1996). *Testing in language programs.* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Calderón, R., & Mora, Y. (2012). Formación permanente del docente de inglés: Una experiencia exitosa en Costa Rica. *Revista Iberoamericana sobre Calidad, Eficacia y Cambio en Educación 10*(4). Retrieved from http://www.rinace.net/reice/numeros/arts/vol10num4/art7.htm

Canale, M., & Swain, M. (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics,1*, 1-47.

Canagarajah, S. (2006). Changing communicative needs, revised assessment objectives: Testing English as an international language. *Language Assessment Quarterly 3*(3), 229-242.

C.E.F. (n.d.). *A teachers´ guide to the Common European Framework* [PDF]. New York: Pearson Longman.

Córdoba, P., Coto, R., & Ramírez, M. (2005). La enseñanza del inglés en Costa Rica y la destreza auditiva en el aula desde una perspectiva histórica. *Revista Electrónica Actualidades Investigativas en Educación, 5*(2), 1-12.

Calderón Mora, R. (2012). Capacitación a docentes de inglés en servicio del MEP: Informe 2008- 2011. San José, Costa Rica: Ministerio de Educación Pública.

Curriculum and Evaluation Unit. (n.d.). English Opens Doors Program. Ministry of Education of Chile. Retrieved from http://www.ingles.mineduc.cl/

De Mejía, A. M. (2011). The National Bilingual Programme in Colombia: Imposition or Opportunity? *Journal of Applied Language Studies 5*(3), 7-17.

Decreto Ejecutivo [Executive Decree] 34425-MEP-COMEX. (March 28, 2008). La Gaceta No. 61. Retrieved from http://www.gaceta.go.cr/pub/2008/03/28/COMP_28_03_2008.html#_Toc194385851

Dubin, F., & Olshtain E. (2000). *Course design.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Finney, D. (2002). The ELT curriculum: A flexible model for a changing world. In J. C. Richards, & W. A. Renandya, *Methodology in language teaching: An anthology of current practice* (pp. 69-79). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Freeman, D. (1982). Observing teachers: Three approaches to in-service training and development. *TESOL Quaterly, 16*(1), 21-28.

Genesee, F. (2001). Evaluation. In R. Carter, & D. Nunan, *The Cambridge guide to teaching English to speakers of other languages.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Graves, K. (1996). *Teachers as course developers.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Hymes, D. (1972). *On communicative competence*. In J. Pride, & J. Holmes (Eds.), Sociolinguistics. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books.

Kumaravadivelu, B. (2012). *Language teacher education for a global society.* [Kindle edition]. New York: Routledge.

Ministerio de Educación (2008 August, 06). "Divulgación de resultados." [press conference]. San José, Costa Rica.

Nunan, D. (1988). *Designing tasks for the communicative classroom.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Pearson-Longman. (2002). *Teacher's guide to the Common European Framework.* New York: Pearson Education.

Pettis, J. (2010). Developing our professional competence: Some reflections. In J. C. Richards, & W. A. Renandya, *Methodology in language teaching: An anthology of current practice* (pp. 393-396). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Richards, J. C. (2001). *Curriculum development in language teaching.* London: Cambridge University Press.

Richards, J. C., & Renandaya, W. A. (2002). *Methodology in language teaching: An anthology of current practice.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Usma Wilches, J. (2009). Education and language policy in Colombia: Exploring processes of inclusion, exclusion and stratification in times of global reform. *Profile 11*, 123–142.

49

Authors

*Patricia Córdoba Cubillo is an Associate Professor of English at the University of Costa Rica. She holds a Master's in TESOL from the University of Costa Rica. She has published different articles on linguistics, pronunciation and writing. She has also published some books on the listening skill for high school students of the Costa Rican public school system. Her research interests are on English grammar, listening and writing.

*Xinia Rodríguez Ramírez is an Associate Professor of English at the University of Costa Rica in San José. She received her Master's degree in TESOL from Indiana University of Pennsylvania. Her recent publications include *Let's Listen for 9th Graders* and *Let's Listen for 8th Graders* (Editorial UCR, 2015). Her research interests include English for Specific Purposes and EFL composition.

*Tatiana Hernández-Gaubil works as a Professor of English at Distance State University, Costa Rica. She has ample experience in the field of TESOL, working as English Professor, Outreach English Program coordinator, curricular designer, and English Consultant for the National Teachers Association (COLYPRO) and Oxford University Press. She has also represented her university as speaker in national and international workshops and seminars.

50