

The usefulness of the “Teaching Knowledge Test” and its preparation course: A case study of test candidates in Tamaulipas

Utilidad del “Teaching Knowledge Test” y su curso de preparación: Un estudio de caso de los candidatos en Tamaulipas

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Abstract:

ELT in Mexico has gained crucial importance in recent years. Since 2009, the Mexican Ministry of Education has implemented English as a Foreign Language in the basic education curriculum. Universities around the country require their students´ a specific language proficiency to obtain their under and postgraduate degrees (UAT, 2006). Therefore, English teaching certifications become a matter of importance not just at a national level but at state levels. According to Coe & Delaney (2008), a certification helps an individual stand out in the crowded marketplace. It also signals to employers that a job candidate has the required skills to perform a specific job. Therefore, understanding EFL teachers´ experiences during the process of certification completion becomes vital. This multiple case study had the purpose of exploring the perspectives of three Mexican test candidates of the usefulness of the “Teaching Knowledge Test” (TKT) certification and its preparation course. Three interviews conducted at different stages of the study suggested that time was their main constraint and the practice of their English language skills was the main gain while preparing to take the TKT. This article will provide more insights on the study conducted, results obtained and the implications for the Mexican ELT community.

Keywords:

Language Teacher Certification, Language Teacher perspectives, Teaching Knowledge Test

Resumen:

En años recientes, en México la enseñanza del inglés ha ganado importancia crucial. En el 2009 la secretaría de educación pública de México ha implementado Inglés como lengua extranjera en el plan de estudios de educación básica. Las universidades en todo el país piden a sus estudiantes un nivel específico en cuanto al dominio del idioma inglés para así poder obtener su título (UAT, 2006). Por lo tanto las certificaciones de enseñanza del inglés se han vuelto de suma importancia no solo a nivel nacional sino a nivel estatal. De acuerdo con Coe & Delaney (2008) una certificación ayuda a una persona a destacarse en un mercado laboral muy competitivo. También es una señal para quienes dan empleo que un candidato tiene las habilidades necesarias para realizar un trabajo específico. Por lo que entender las experiencias de los maestros durante la realización de una certificación se vuelve vital. Este estudio de caso múltiple tiene el propósito de explorar las perspectivas de tres candidatos mexicanos en cuanto a la utilidad del Teaching Knowledge Test, su certificación y el curso de preparación. Tres entrevistas fueron conducidas en diferentes etapas del estudio las cuales sugieren que el tiempo es el mayor obstáculo y la práctica de sus habilidades en el idioma inglés su mayor beneficio mientras se preparan para tomar el TKT. Este artículo proporcionará más detalles del estudio conducido, resultados obtenidos y las implicaciones para la comunidad mexicana de enseñanza del inglés.

Palabras Clave: *Certificación de enseñanza de inglés, perspectivas de maestros de inglés, Teaching Knowledge Test*

Introduction

According to recent studies, learning and teaching English is not achieving the desired outcomes. Cronquist and Fiszbein in The book “Aprendizaje de Inglés en

América Latina” mentioned that exam results indicate that English proficiency in Latin America is relatively low and the education system does not generate students with the English ability needed or required (2017).

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Schools used to hire “English teachers”, many times native speakers of the language, if they knew how to speak the language, without considering their teaching skills. To obtain different results, the Mexican Ministry of Public Education (SEP by its Spanish initials) has taken additional actions to bring well prepared English teachers to the classrooms and provide better results regarding the proficiency of students in this foreign language. They opted to create strategic lines in the English National Program (PRONI by its Spanish initials) one of its main objectives is to promote the achievement of teaching English certifications where teachers or future teachers and their teaching abilities should develop to guarantee their students’ learning . (Diario Oficial de la Federacion, 2016).

The importance of certifications

The critical role of teachers in ELT reforms points to the important role of EFL teacher education, particularly in those countries where ELT reforms are a matter of serious concern (Yook & Lee, 2015). According to Coe & Delaney (2008), a certification helps an individual stand out in the crowded marketplace. It also signals to employers that a job candidate has the requisite skills needed to perform a specific job. Droval (2014), mentioned that a certification is achieved only if the participant proves through the evidence for instance, tests the domain of particular topics, knowledge and abilities required to succeed in a specific profession. Ingvarson & Kelnhenz (2006) defines certification as the acknowledgment given by a professional body to teachers who have achieved a determined teaching level. In colombia certifications such as ICELT and TKT are being used instead of traditional teacher preparation. (Moncada, 2009).

Certifications are medullar to the teaching English work field in Mexico. According to Gonzalez (2009), very few certifications exist for pre-service teachers to prove how well developed their teaching skills are...These certifications are the Teaching Knowledge Test and the In- service Certificate in English Language Teaching (ICELT). To certify language skills in Mexico the Language Level Certificate(CENNI) allows teachers to certify and give proof of their English language proficiency. Therefore, occasionally pre-service teachers in Mexico are considered to be trained to become teachers without taking part in formal language teacher education programs at established universities or colleges . Therefore understanding the role of certifications in the professional path of EFL teachers and their views of these language teaching certificates is crucial to understand the influence these have on EFL teacher professional development. This article focuses

on the “Teaching Knowledge Test” certification and its preparation course which will be further described below.

Teaching knowledge test course and certificate

The TKT is a teaching qualification that tests abilities and knowledge on different areas of English language teaching. This certification helps teachers to become more confident and achieve an internationally recognised qualification. The TKT is not only for pre-service teachers but for in-service teachers who look to prove and enrich their teaching abilities. (cambridge webpage). Cambridge ESOL offered this new teaching certification thinking on the current needs for future and in service English teachers (Khalifa, 2008).

The research network in 2005, mentioned that during the development of the TKT pre-service teachers and inservice teachers agreed that the TKT modules were reliable and language proficiency was not a problem to achieve a high grade. They considered it content relevant.

To measure how proficient a teacher is, Cambridge assessment English divided into the following five stages: Language and the learner, teaching, learning and assessment, language ability, language knowledge and awareness, professional development and values.

As visualized in figure 1. The English teaching framework created by Cambridge Assessment English has the purpose of helping teachers in every stage of their career by providing them the tools to self-reflect about what teaching aspects they need to improve to enhance their teaching abilities.

Stages	Foundation	Developing	Proficient	Expert
Learning and the learner	Has a basic understanding of some language-learning concepts. Demonstrates a little of this understanding when planning and teaching.	Has a reasonable understanding of many language-learning concepts. Demonstrates some of this understanding when planning and teaching.	Has a good understanding of many language-learning concepts. Frequently demonstrates this understanding when planning and teaching.	Has a sophisticated understanding of language-learning concepts. Consistently demonstrates this understanding when planning and teaching.
Teaching, learning and assessment	Has a basic understanding of some key principles of teaching, learning and assessment. Can plan and deliver simple lessons with a basic awareness of learners' needs, using core teaching techniques. Can use available tests and basic assessment procedures to support and promote learning.	Has a reasonable understanding of many key principles of teaching, learning and assessment. Can plan and deliver lessons with some awareness of learners' needs, using a number of different teaching techniques. Can design simple tests and use some assessment procedures to support and promote learning.	Has a good understanding of key principles of teaching, learning and assessment. Can plan and deliver detailed lessons with good awareness of learners' needs, using a wide range of teaching techniques. Can design effective tests and use a range of assessment procedures to support and promote learning.	Has a sophisticated understanding of key principles of teaching, learning and assessment. Can plan and deliver detailed and sophisticated lessons with a thorough understanding of learners' needs, using a comprehensive range of teaching techniques. Can design a range of effective tests and use individualised assessment procedures consistently to support and promote learning.
Language ability	Provides accurate examples of language points taught at A1, A2 and B1 levels. Uses basic classroom language which is mostly accurate.	Provides accurate examples of language points taught at A1, A2 and B1 levels. Uses classroom language which is mostly accurate.	Provides accurate examples of language points taught at A1, A2, B1 and B2 levels. Uses classroom language which is consistently accurate throughout the lesson.	Provides accurate examples of language points taught at A1-C2 levels. Uses a wide range of classroom language which is consistently accurate throughout the lesson.
Language knowledge and awareness	Is aware of some key terms for describing language. Can answer simple learner questions with the help of reference materials.	Has reasonable knowledge of many key terms for describing language. Can answer most learner questions with the help of reference materials.	Has good knowledge of key terms for describing language. Can answer most learner questions with minimal use of reference materials.	Has sophisticated knowledge of key terms for describing language. Can answer most learner questions in detail with minimal use of reference materials.
Professional development and values	Can reflect on a lesson with guidance and learn from feedback. Requires guidance in self-assessing own needs.	Can reflect on a lesson without guidance and respond positively to feedback. Can self-assess own needs and identify some areas for improvement.	Can reflect critically and actively seeks feedback. Can identify own strengths and weaknesses as a teacher, and can support other teachers.	Consistently reflects critically, observes other colleagues and is highly committed to professional development. Is highly aware of own strengths and weaknesses, and actively supports the development of other teachers.

Figure 1. Cambridge Teaching Framework. (Cambridge, 2018).

The format of the TKT is divided in three stages or modules. Each module consists of different abilities that the professor or future professor needs to develop or enhance.

Module 1 focuses on the teachers' knowledge of the language. In this module, participants learn or develop basic language teaching concepts. Theories that support learning and different materials and activities to teach English.

Module 2, focuses on the steps/stages for lesson planning and the use of different resources for teaching. In this second module pre - service teachers enhance their abilities to prepare lesson plans and evaluate them.

Module 3, managing teaching and learning process, emphasizes the importance of the teachers' knowledge of what happens in the classroom in terms of the language used by the teacher or learners, the roles the teacher can fulfill, and how the teacher can manage classroom events and interaction.

All the TKT course modules (1, 2, 3) have the purpose of introducing new terms about teaching and , Aulearning, to introduce to the readers current theories, approaches, practices, and activities in ELT classrooms. It seeks to share with readers resources, such as websites, grammar books, and to provide materials and activities that give them opportunities for professional development and reflection on their teaching practice.

The TKT modules are paper based. Each module lasts 80 minutes and consists of 80 questions that are multiple-choice and matching items. The modules can be taken together (the same day) or separately, in any order and any number. After finishing each module, the candidates will receive a certificate for each TKT module presented.

There is not a Pass or Fail result on the certificates. Results are reported in Bands 1–4, with Band 4 being the highest. Band 1 represents limited knowledge of the content areas tested; Band 2, basic but systematic knowledge; Band 3 shows a breadth and depth of knowledge and Band 4 extensive knowledge.

Different studies about the impact of the TKT had been done, to explore what are the perspectives of teachers. Valazza, 2012, found out that teachers in Uruguay consider the TKT important due to the fact that it brings formal teaching training even though they were already in service. The main reasons for this group of teachers were to have an international teaching qualification, to improve their teaching knowledge and their teaching skills as well as feel more confident.

Darling-Hammond & Lieberman(2012) and Maggioli(2012, argued that teacher education programs impact on each participants' teaching practices and development (as cited in Yook & Lee, 2015, p.523). Teachers' beliefs and perceptions about their teaching skills have a strong impact on their teaching effectiveness (Knoblauch & Woolfolk Hoy, 2008, as cited in Faez & Valeo, 2012, p.3). Considering perspectives is crucial to see if during the teaching preparation programs the participants feel prepared or not to face teaching in real contexts. Besides this, their perspectives could help to identify the elements that current and future English teachers need to improve to become better-prepared candidates. "The perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit" (Patton, 1990, p. 278). Therefore exploring TKT candidates' perceptions of the test and its usefulness to their teaching practice is crucial to provide the context in

which EFL teachers in Latin America interact with the TKT test.

Attending test preparation courses may be beneficial for course takers in different aspects. However, research has found that specific course preparation course may not have an impact on test scores (Green, 2007) while others have found a direct but moderate relationship of test preparation courses and test scores (Xie, 2013). Students perceptions of the usefulness of test preparation courses have explored tests such as TOEFL iBT (Xie, 2013) in China, Indonesia (Masfufah, 2018), Australia and Iran (Saif, May, May & Cheng, 2019) However, research has yet to explore the views of tests such as the TKT from a Latin American perspective where usefulness of courses may vary from the view of test candidates. Therefore, this study focuses exploring the perceptions of three pre service EFL teachers in the state of Tamaulipas regarding the usefulness of the TKT test for their professional development and their work positions in addition to the usefulness of the preparation course taken. It is guided by the following research questions:

- 1.-What are participants' expectations regarding strategies and approaches used in the TKT preparation course.
- 2.-Which is the perception of the TKT preparation course?
- 3.- Which is the perception of test candidates of TKT certification?

Methodology

To achieve the main purpose of this study a multiple case study approach was adopted, where more than one case is studied in order to investigate a phenomenon or particular condition (Dörnyei, 2007).

Research context

This study took place in a language institute located in the Autonomous University of Tamaulipas. The language institute provides English, French, and German classes. Students can take preparation courses for various language courses and certifications such as FCE and TOEFL and a teaching certification, which is the TKT.

In this language center every semester, preparation courses for these certifications are offered depending on the test takers' demand. During the August - December semester, two groups for the TKT preparation course were offered. Both groups were taught by the same teacher. As in previous semesters, the TKT is offered in different schedules, being one option from Monday to Thursday for two hours daily or Fridays and Saturdays for four hours on each day. This permits the participants to join their preferred schedule

Research participants

To collect different perspectives about the TKT, the three participants who enrolled in the same TKT course were chosen by a convenience sampling method, which means that all of them were easy to contact. Then they were asked to participate in the study. The age range of the participants was from 20-40 years old. All of them expected to have the proper preparation to become well-prepared English teachers but they had different English levels, different occupations, diverse backgrounds, and different ideas of what the TKT meant for them. To keep the identity of participants anonymous, pseudonyms are used to describe their background (Table 1: Participants' Background)

Valentina a 30-40 years old female, graduated from the teacher training college in Tamaulipas. She had two bachelor degrees, one in Educational Psychology and the other as a middle school English teacher. She also held a master's degree in educational administration and a TOEFL certificate. She had been working at the Ministry of Education since 1997 as a History teacher. She learned English while living in Seattle, Washington, however she had not practiced this language for more than 10 years. She was notified about taking the TKT and the financial aid to take the course and test through her work place.

Jorge, who is 20-30 years old, held a degree in psychology and a master's degree in teacher performance. He worked at The Mexican Ministry of Public Education at the time of the study, as a supervisor of a teacher training college in Tamaulipas. He did not have any teaching experience. He learnt English by listening to music and attending English classes. He was studying at the Center for Languages and Applied Linguistics of the State University where the study took place. He completed the first six courses before dropping out. He completed the program with the support of the state government He expressed not having extensive knowledge of English but he wanted to take the TKT course because it was offered to him by his workplace authorities.

Monica a 30-40 years old female, was preparing herself to become an English teacher at the time of the study. She learnt English at the Center for Languages and Applied Linguistics, but because of the lack of English knowledge, she moved to the United States seeking to develop her language skills. There, she started living with families, and then she became a nurse assistant.

After coming back to Mexico, she was ready to teach. She sought a teaching opportunity at a public elementary school run by the Mexican Ministry of Public Education where she was required the TKT. while starting to teach young learners informally. She currently holds a degree in teaching English and a TOEFL ITP certificate.

Participant	Age	Previous studies and professional background	Teaching Experience	English Knowledge	Awareness of the TKT
Valentina	30-40	B.A in educational psychology. Middle school English teacher. MA Educational administration. English certification: TOEFL.	Not an English teacher but a history teacher.	Lived in the United States.	At work.
Jorge	20-30	Degree in psychology. MA Teaching Performance.	No.	Music. Language center. Private classes.	At work.
Monica	30-40	Degree in Teaching English English certification: TOEFL ITP.	Not formally.	Language center. Lived in the USA.	She called the Ministry of Public Education.

Table 1. Participants' Background.

Data collection instrumentation

Considering that "interviews enable participants to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live, and to express how they regard situations from their own point of view"(Cohen et al.,2011, p.p. 657) providing a richer of participants' perspectives (Heighman & Croker (2009), three different interviews with different purposes were administered at other course moments (at the beginning of the course, after finishing the course, and after the test).

Interview 1. The purpose of the first interview was to discover what ideas and/or expectations the participants had about the TKT course. It consisted of a semi-structured interview. This interview had different categories such as: knowledge of the TKT, knowledge of the TKT course, expectations of the course, usefulness of the TKT certification and course, personal reasons to take the TKT.

Interview 2. The purpose of this interview was to discover whether their expectations of the TKT course were met or not, the difference and how this affected them. In addition to this, participants were asked about their perceptions were during the whole course including activities, content, strategies, etc. To achieve the specific purpose of this interview, specific categories were followed such as strategies used, self-learning and expectations and suggestions emerged.

Interview 3. Its purpose (Appendix C) was to discover how useful/meaningful the course and the test were for their teaching abilities and to discover if the TKT course had an important impact to achieve the TKT certificate. For this interview four categories were designed: perceptions, usefulness of the TKT course, administration and suggestions.

Data collection procedures

The collection of data was conducted in four stages. These are described below.

Stage 1: For the first step I wrote a consent letter to the principal of the language center. In this letter I asked for permission to interview some of the TKT participants and I

explained that I had to interview them three times during the course. Once the principal agreed, I spoke to the teacher in charge of the TKT and I requested if she could aid me in the selection of students for the interviews.

Stage 2: After I met my participants. I talked to them and explained about what this study was about. The participants signed a consent form where they allowed me to use their information for academic purposes . Also I let them know that the information they provided me would be anonymous. When they agreed I started the interviews individually. The first interview was applied at the beginning of the course. This interview was face to face with all of the participants. The three participants decided that the interview take place at the language center, where they were currently taking the course because of time constraints. For the purpose of the study it was audio recorded. The interview lasted about 25-30 minutes with each participant. After we finished with the interview I asked them if they would be able to meet me again when they finished the course and then I provided them my contact information.

Stage 3: I applied the second interview after finalizing the course. As well as the first interview, it took place at the same language center where they were currently taking the course. However, for personal reasons two out of the five participants were not able to continue with the study. For the other three participants I reminded them about the purpose of the study and explained the content of the interview so they felt more comfortable and prepared. This interview lasted about 20-25 minutes with each participant and it was audio recorded. At the end of this interview we agreed to meet for the last interview after the participants finished the TKT.

Stage 4: for the last stage of the data collection procedure I met them right after they finished the TKT. Two participants took the interview at the language center right after finishing the test while a third one was interviewed through a telephone conversation due to personal reasons. As well as the other two interviews it was audio recorded and lasted 20-25 minutes. All of the participants allowed me to use the information provided in the interviews for research purposes.

Data analysis

In this study participants felt more comfortable speaking in Spanish; therefore, I decided to do this exercise in their first language. First, I listened to each tape more than once to start this process so I would be able to transcribe each interview and adequately interpret what my participants wanted to communicate. It is important to mention that after transcribing, I translated the information into English. Then I started coding. While coding, I read and reread the information my participants gave me. I used open code, which allows me to look for similar words, concepts, and meanings. "An open code is simply a new label that the researcher attaches to a text to describe and categorize that piece of text" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, as cited in Cohen et al., 2011, p. 891). While highlighting, I started to identify and create my categories. I used different colors for similar and different ideas of each participant. After having my categories in my nine interviews, I put all the information in charts to see the words used, frequency, and extra information about the role of language level. This exercise gave me a clear view of what the perspectives were among the different stages. To ensure the objectivity of the data, the information was analysed by an expert on applied linguistics research. (Dorney, 2007).

RESULTS

Regarding RQ1, What are participant's expectations regarding strategies and approaches used in the TKT preparation course? Different and common perspectives were found as detailed below.

Valentina, strongly believed that this course would give her more job opportunities as she pointed out in the following quote: *"In labor issues, I am already teaching... I am not going to get salary increase... but I might actually have more work...It is good to have prepared for this certification"*. She had no doubt that this course would help her answer the test questions not only because of the knowledge provided but also in regard to test format. She had the option to take only the test, but

she decided to take the course to avoid surprises and be more prepared: *"The course shows us, the students, the question and answer format"*.

Valentina expected throughout this course she could get the opportunity to improve not only teaching skills but language skills that she had neglected for many years, as she pointed out: *"... This course is going to help me to be in touch with the language, as I am not an English teacher I have not had English practice for more than ten years."*

Jorge had no previous experience in the teaching field, for this reason he was not sure about what to expect regarding the activities or strategies that would be used during the course to prepare him. However, he expected content that was not too difficult. As he explained in the following quote. *"I expected to see something easy, but I checked the content and it seems to be difficult. I thought I was going to learn vocabulary and grammar rules"*. He expected this course would help him improve and learn English through the vocabulary and grammar explained.

Monica, expected to work with different exercises, more group work, and dynamic classes. She added: *"I expect there to be some activities in which we could participate as students and teachers...I don't want this to be a conversation in a coffee shop where I do not learn anything...to chat with someone I could do it at home..."* She also considers that during this TKT course, she could develop strategies to improve her teaching skills.

At the beginning of the course		
<p>Valentina expected throughout the course the opportunity to <u>improve not only teaching skills but language skills</u> that she had neglected for many years, as she pointed out: <i>"... This course is going to help me to be</i></p>	<p>Jorge had no previous experience in the teaching field, for this reason he was not sure about what to expect regarding the activities or strategies that would be used during the course to prepare him.</p>	<p>Monica expected to work during the course with her teacher, <u>she expected to work and learn how to work with different exercises, group work, and dynamic classes</u>. She added: <i>"I expect there to be</i></p>

<p><i>in touch with the language, as I am not an English teacher I have not had English practice for more than ten years."</i></p>	<p>However, he expected content that was not too difficult because of his language proficiency. As he explained in the following quote. "<u>I expected to see something easy. I thought I was going to learn vocabulary and grammar rules but then I checked the content and it seems to be difficult</u>".</p>	<p><i>some activities in which we could participate as students and teachers...I don't want this to be a conversation in a coffee shop where I do not learn anything...to chat with someone I could do it at home..."</i></p>
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Table 2. Participants' expectations

Regarding RQ2, which is the perception of pre- service teachers of the TKT preparation course?, participants had different perspectives which are described below

For valentina, the expectation of dynamism in the course was not fulfilled. In her opinion, the course was mainly for auditory learners, which affected people with other learning styles. This can be visualized in the following quote: "*The teacher made the class for auditive students and there was barely any interaction among us...and for people like me (kinesthetic) five minutes after the class started, we were on mars*".

She expressed that the course was stressful, and because of her learning style, she could not take advantage of the course, as she would have liked. She would have preferred that it involved all the students' learning styles in different learning activities. She suggested the course included: brainstorming, presenting new concepts and reinforcing what they learned with some exercises. She stated in the following quote:

"I am 100% kinesthetic... going to the course to sit and listen was not proper for me...I would have liked to brainstorm, introduce the new concepts and then exercises to reinforce and check them if

we were right or not... we did not have that in class".

After finishing the course, Valentina mentioned a lack of practice in the topics they were studying. She mentioned that they did have "practice," but all on paper, as homework, and then it was checked among them but in her experience, she considered it necessary for course takers to practice in front of real classrooms to gain more experience. However, she realized that the lack of practice was because of time issues, as she stated below:

"We had practice on paper...I would have liked to present but only if we had more time in the course...The teacher could have corrected us, give us tips to improve... I consider the practice necessary because only there you can see, modify, and suggest what you can improve on your teaching practice, and when being in front of a group have more experience".

This participant considered the course focused mainly on the test. And she suggested including practice to be better teachers: "*Maybe this course was not to help us practice our teaching techniques but I think practice is also important to prepare better teachers"*

Apart from this, she considered the course was very essential for her even when she had knowledge about teaching because she could learn from the other participants by learning from their advice: "*it is always good to take different advice...we are exposed to different experiences*". She also thought that those who were already teachers and were taking the course might learn more teaching strategies that they may not use or did not know.

Whereas some of her expectations were not achieved, she considered the course was complete, especially on teaching techniques. She mentioned it covered aspects such as what to do and what not to do in the class. She was interested in learning how to correct mistakes and consider students' feelings, and avoid making her students feel bad or uncomfortable while learning, an aspect covered during the course. However, once again, the time affected her learning. Time did not allow her to see topics in more detail. She explained, "*I would have liked to use at least three days per unit*", therefore suggesting that she would have liked to dedicate more time to content of the unit.

From this course, as mentioned above, Valentina developed new teaching techniques. She also mentions that being in this preparation course as a student made her empathize with her students and comprehend the impact that teaching has. She explained: *"It helped me to think about what I should do and not to do with my students. Now I was the student, so I could see... I could put myself on my students' shoes."*

Even when during the interview she mentioned the course was a little stressful, she considered this experience positive. With the preparation that she has received, she felt ready for the test and for teaching English. Concluding the TKT course with people from her job made her feel satisfied with her achievements, while considering that the course was worth the effort because she knew more people in the same situation as her. *"I feel satisfied and thankful for this opportunity. I would not have done it by myself, but with my colleagues I could do it. We cheer each other on...."*

At the same time, she suggested that the course include teaching strategies for all learning styles in addition to include strategies to avoid having too much content for small amounts of time. She thought it required more time to cover the different topics in more depth to include more teaching practice and speaking evaluation. She pointed out: *"...Everything is ok with the course but if we could had have more time there could be space for practice and speaking evaluation"*.

Jorge, the second participant of this study claimed that with this course they could have the opportunity to teach English and promote themselves in the teaching field as well as provide proof of their language knowledge and their foreign language teaching skills. He mentioned that the TKT course may not only prepare them to teach English but to teach other subjects in English: *"I feel the TKT prepares us not only to teach English but to teach other subjects as Spanish, Math or we can even go to a foreign country knowing English and now having the basic skills to teach"*. He considered that, this course could also help those who are already English teachers as he explains: *"If they are already teachers, they already have the skills to teach and the language, they just come to practice and reinforce"*.

The only aspect of the course he confessed to be unsatisfied about was the length of the course. He mentioned that it went very fast but he thought that he perceived it in that way because of his English level. He explained, *"I needed more time... for me it is very advanced... but maybe if you ask a teacher who knows more English they could say the time was enough"*.

The course made him feel tired but happy at the same time for all the things he learnt and considers this process as a positive experience. Jorge mentioned that in this course he learnt more things than he expected but not precisely teaching strategies: *"Personally the course prepared me not to teach, it prepared me to know more about the language"*. Therefore suggesting that the TKT preparation course had allowed him to learn more about language use.

He mentioned that language use was advanced but at the end he learned. *"...I learnt a little of everything, teaching techniques, words that I did not know, grammar. For me, all that was very advanced but with my classmates' help I could do it"*. He mentioned being pretty comfortable with the way the course was approached.

Finally, he explained he gained more English knowledge and preparation for the certification because all the input. In teaching aspects, he mentioned everything was new for him so he learnt as much as he could. He explained that taking the course was *"totally worth it"* and he saw academic and personal achievements in himself, as he points out: *"at a personal level the course helped me to know more English, learn how to write it, and understand it, and academically I could add another certification to my curriculum"*

He suggested the course take more time, so topics and contents be covered with more depth: *"Our course was very fast, I would add more time"*. He thought that he could have taken more advantage of the course if he would not have taken the course while working which makes him feel tired, he explained his experiences as follows: *"In my experience coming after work with no chance to rest... There were days that I did not want to come... in that case it was tiring"*.

Monica, She considered this course crucial for English teachers: *"The course is basic for every person who wants to teach a language. They have to have an idea of how to teach... This course must be taken"*.

Monica, the third participant, explained that the class was approached in an analytic and interpretive way which was not very favorable for her. She mentioned that her learning style includes visuals and being in movement. Therefore she could not enjoy the course as she wished as she explains below:

“The class was analytic, and I am a kinesthetic person, others can learn analyzing and that is ok but I like to move, for me doing other activities would have been better ...but I will do that when I have my students”.

She thought the course was useful for them because teachers had to be constantly updating their knowledge and teaching techniques. She mentioned that in her experience as a language student she had faced teachers who did not have adequate teaching techniques so she believed that the TKT could help them in this area. She points out that:

“It is important for teaching techniques. I have a teacher that is teaching us grammar in a foreign language but he does not teach us how to speak. Maybe he does not know that speaking is necessary in a language...Maybe this teacher has not taken the TKT”.

For her, this course helped her not only to obtain the certification but also to be professional in the area and what to do in front of a class. She decided to take the course because she did not know what the test was going to be about. *“I want to be professional...to understand what I am about to do and how I am going to do it...Also to be ready for the test”.*

She also considered that the course helps to achieve high bands; it was a big advantage compared with those who only took the course. *“They can do it but they will struggle because of the concepts... They could even require more time to answer”.*

After finishing the course Monica confirmed that the TKT course was for those who want to teach English. It gave her pedagogy and teaching techniques. She mentioned they saw all the content she expected but not in detail because of the time constraints.

From this course Monica learnt teaching techniques, however her expectations were not covered 100% and explained: *“My expectations were less theory and more practice and here they give you lots of theory”.* She specified that she learnt phonetic symbols, planning, and approaches. Also, she learnt how to teach depending on the age of the students. She emphasized the importance of the course and recommended the course to those who want to teach by pointing out that *“it is not the same to know a language than teach it”.* She added that the experience of the leading teacher of the course helped and enriched students’ knowledge.

On the other hand Monica pointed out that the course did not prepare you 100% to be a teacher because of the lack of practice, which she considered was very important. She detailed”...There was practice but only on paper. We never passed to the front and presented. I would have liked to do that because I am kinesthetic, I like to pass to the front and present the show”. *“Now, I feel ready, Now is like I got my sneakers and I am ready to walk and run”.*

Even when she enjoyed and learned a lot in this course, she thought the course needed more activities to practice and learn and she also suggested that the course should have more time to include realia, workshops, and more dynamics to present and practice the information. But she knew that because of the time and length of the course it was not possible:

“I would have liked to work with realia, workshops... represent the different approaches by teams something more representative, more movement...I know we did not use them because there were lots of concepts during the course and there was not enough time”.

At the end of the course		
<p>Valentina Valentina mentioned a <u>lack of practice</u>. She considered it necessary for course takers to practice in front of real classrooms to gain more experience but time was an impediment. <i>“We had practice on paper...I would have liked to present but only if we had more time in the course...The teacher could have corrected us, give us tips to improve...I consider the</i></p>	<p>Jorge Jorge mentioned that <u>in this course he learnt more things than he expected but not precisely teaching strategies</u>: <i>“Personally the course prepared me not to teach, it prepared me to know more about the language”.</i> Therefore suggesting that the TKT preparation course had allowed him to learn more about lexis</p>	<p>Monica She considered this course crucial for English teachers: <i>“The course is basic for every person who wants to teach a language. They have to have an idea of how to teach...This course must be taken”.</i> She emphasized the importance of the course and recommended the course to those who want to teach by pointing out that <u>“it is not the same to know a</u></p>

<p><u>practice necessary because only there you can see, modify, and suggest what you can improve on your teaching practice</u>" She also mentioned that she learnt from her classmates by learning from their advice: <u>"it is always good to take different advice and learn from different points of view"</u>.</p>	<p>about teaching and language functions. Jorge confessed to be unsatisfied about was the length of the course. He mentioned that it went very fast but he <u>thought that he perceived it in that way</u> because of his <u>English level</u>. He explained, <i>"I needed more time... for me it is very advanced... but maybe if you ask a teacher who knows more English they could say the time was enough"</i>.</p>	<p><u>language than teach it"</u>. She thought the course was useful for them because teachers had to be constantly updating their knowledge and teaching techniques.</p>
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Table 3. Participants' perspectives of the TKT course

To answer RQ3 Which is the perception of pre-service teachers of the TKT certification?, participants provided their views on the certificate and its nature. These are further detailed below.

Valentina, mentioned that her main reasons to take the TKT were rooted in the educational reform where the TKT certification was implemented as a requirement to teach English in the public school system. So with this certification she would be able to teach this FL. She explained: *"In my workplace they invited us and gave us the opportunity to achieve a scholarship...I decided to take it because I want to teach English"*.

At the end of the course, Valentina, mentioned that she was very happy being closer to achieving the certification. With this certification she felt ready to teach English. Now she is interested in doing another certification to keep improving and updating her skills but she was going to wait for her work institution to require it and stated: *"I would like to take the APTIS but I am going*

to wait until my work requires it because they will pay for it".

At the end of this experience, she concluded that an English teacher has to have three important skills: language proficiency, experience in front a group and knowledge on planning according to the students' needs. She considered the TKT certificate was satisfactory but teachers must keep constantly updating their teaching academic background: *"Teachers are constantly asked for more certifications especially language certifications but I think they should require more teaching certifications in this way we are updated in language and teaching abilities"*.

Finally, she suggested that in order to have good results and get a high band in the certification, test takers have to attend the course mainly because it teaches you the question and answer format of the test, which is one of the advantages they have. She added that the test takers should not take the three modules together, she considered it was not a good option because it can negatively impact their module score, *"...doing the three modules is overwhelming"*(Valentina).

Jorge, He pointed out the certificate would help him have more opportunities *"This certification will help me academically to add another certification to my curriculum"*. "I really do not know the prices but it brings lots of benefits. Although he did not know the prices for the course and the test, he was sure the certification gave them lots of benefits *"I hope they are not beyond the reach of people but I think it really worth it"*.

On the other hand, he considered this certificate required from candidates to have a high English Level as stated below

"I feel that the TKT is the last certification...This is what I think, first you have to take the basic courses of English, then present a certification like TOEFL and then some other certification (I do not know others) and then present the TKT. I feel the TKT is the last one".

Now he considers taking other certifications regarding language learning so he can improve more and be ready for more teaching certificates. Even with the certification he did not feel ready to formally teach a group. He thought he needed a master's degree in pedagogy or something else involved in pedagogy so he could feel more prepared. In this regard he explained: *"As my profession is not teaching I may need a master's degree on pedagogy to feel ready but I could try at the basic levels*

because high levels require more abilities". Jorge also added that he needed to work on teaching aspects and get experience to be better at teaching. Now that he had more knowledge, he mentioned that he was going to use this experience in case he wanted to do the course again and not start from zero. He explained "I will have the basis to understand a little bit better the course".

He concluded that a teacher needs to have two important aspects: language proficiency and second the different teaching techniques which were what the certification gave them. He considered this certification was enough for a teacher because it was complete and it is what someone needs to teach.

He suggested taking the course to see the content of the TKT test, which is one of the advantages of the course: "50% depended on the knowledge of the language but the other 50% depended on the course content". He invited test takers to come relaxed "I suggest the test takers to come relaxed on the test day because I was stressed and here during the test everything is very demanding".

Monica, claimed that the purpose of the TKT certification was to give knowledge and tools about how to teach English in different ways and to learn to understand students: "with this certification I obtained pedagogy". She became aware of the need of the TKT because she personally called the English program here in Mexico asking about the requirements to become a teacher in the public education system. She was indicated the certificate was an obligatory requirement. She considered the certificate would "open... a big door" and more importantly, understand what to do in front of a class. About the costs she was not sure if she should consider it expensive or cheap but she knew that there were possible ways to get a discount.

At the end of course Monica considered the TKT is enough for her because it was the only teaching certification that was required. She was not considering obtaining another teaching certification but a language certification because she did not know her English level: "I am ok with the TKT I may do another certification that does not expire but language certification to know my English level...I do not understand why certifications have to expire". Although she agreed that certifications were important she seemed to disagree with the expiration policy around these certificates.

She felt ready to take groups but she knew it was necessary to practice teaching aspects such as planning

according to her students' needs: "After this I only need to practice planning taking into account students' needs".

At the end Monica concluded from this experience that a teacher needs to know how to teach, how to correct and how to be patient. The TKT certificate, in her opinion, was not enough to teach. She considered a teacher had to be prepared and take into account different points of view that may exist in other certification: "I think the TKT is not enough to prepare a teacher in the sense that there are always different authors and points of view... it is good to be open to more options and choose what we prefer".

As suggestions she mentioned that because of her academic background she found the question format very confusing. So she would have liked that the questions were clearer. She explained: "In my studies the question format was always presented in a very clear and understandable way for me. They were simple so I was not accustomed to this format". Additionally, she considered the experience excellent and recommendable.

After presenting the TKT		
<p>Valentina With this certification she felt ready to teach English. Now <u>she is interested in doing another certification to keep improving and updating her skills</u> but she was going to wait for her work institution to require it and stated: "I would like to take the APTIS but I am going to wait until my work requires it because they will pay for it".</p>	<p>Jorge mentioned that with this certification he did not feel ready to formally teach a group. He thought he needed a master's degree on pedagogy or something else involved in pedagogy so he could feel more prepared. In this regard he explained: "As my profession is not teaching I may need a master's degree on pedagogy to feel ready but I could try at the basic levels because high levels require more abilities".</p>	<p>Monica She was not considering obtaining another teaching certification but a language certification because she did not know her English level: "<u>I am ok with the TKT I may do another certification...a language certification to know my English level...</u>" She considered a teacher had to be prepared and take into account different points of view that may exist in other certification: "I think the TKT is</p>

	<p><u>He considers taking other certifications regarding language learning</u> so he can improve more and be ready for more teaching certificates.</p>	<p><i>not enough to prepare a teacher in the sense that there are always different authors and points of view... it is good to be open to more options and choose what we prefer”.</i></p>
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Table 4. Participants’ perspectives of the TKT certificate

Conclusions

Findings of this study suggested that participants believe the TKT preparation course is a crucial element to obtain the TKT certification and therefore be able to teach English in Mexico. Participants suggested adding more time to the course (Monica & Jorge). This may play a main role in this process and function as a key to bring more prepared English teachers. It could open more opportunities to create modifications or adaptations during teachers’ professional development.

Similarly, practice was another suggested improvement to the course. Practice during this course would make them achieve better results inside a classroom and therefore students’ language development could be more successful (Maria). The opportunity to practice could be a huge step to more adequate test preparation, which may lead to successful test scores.

On the other hand, participants mentioned that the TKT test and the preparation course allowed them to develop not only new teaching techniques but empathy as well.(Valentina & Maria). The experience encouraged them to notice their flaws as teachers and provided them with insight regarding how students perceive their practices. Also, this experience gave them the opportunity to self-reflect on their weaknesses and improve upon them. Another advantage of this experience was that it helped them update their skills and knowledge while socializing with other course takers. Interacting with people in the same situation as them, listening and sharing experiences with others provided them with opportunities to enrich their knowledge by being exposed to different points of view and being prepared for different situations. as in Valazza, 2012 participants mentioned that the experiences of training allowed them to feel more confident.

Finally, this experience gave them inspiration to work more to obtain other certifications, as a means to be a competent candidate to teach English.

The limitations of this study was that this study should have considered perspectives of in-service English teachers on how they perceive this teaching certification when they are already teaching. Then, this study could have provided a broader picture of the impact of teachers’ perspectives.

Implications of this study could include the benefits of teaching certifications not only for candidates but also for schools, students and the English programs. Obtaining teaching certificates may allow teachers in a language program institution to grow professionally therefore improving the quality of their language lessons. Additionally, exploring the views of pre service teachers who are candidates for a teacher knowledge test may allow policy makers and language program decision makers improve the contents and strategies implemented in test preparation courses therefore leading to greater opportunities of obtaining successful test scores through preparation courses. If done so, opportunities to improve teachers’ teaching skills could be more empathetic. Including the voices of test candidates in the decision making process of a professional development program of a language institute may allow the involvement of candidates in these decisions therefore making it a more standardized and equitable process.

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