ENGLISH TEACHERS IN PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS IN EL RETIRO: A REFLECTION REGARDING THEIR PROFESSIONAL PROFILES

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ARTICLE

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ABSTRACT

This article focused on describing the profiles of the English teachers in a municipality of Eastern Antioquia in which was necessary to characterize aspects that allowed to identify the policies from the regulations of the MEN implemented in Colombia and international standards (CEF) and how they are accomplished in their contexts. This study conducted four questionnaires and two interviews that facilitated the description and analysis of the development profile of the teachers being a qualitative approach that permitted the description of their profiles in which the English teachers develop their professional development and how their professional activity and level of language are carried out in local contexts from other international contexts. Additionally, the training of English teachers in these areas has constantly been conducted by different entities that permit the enhancement of English teaching at promoting programs to facilitate their professional growth. In addition, the contributions of this characterization of English teachers in the municipality supported to the bureau of education updates and systematizes the profile of English teachers for the absence of information of teachers that the entity might to consolidate. To add another relevant aspect is the contribution the university offers in continuing the process of training in which the university implements courses of English that facilitate the enhancement of the language to conduct in the municipality.

Key words: Teachers' profile - professional development - professional activity - professional training - rurality - English level

RESUMEN

Este artículo se enfoca en describir los perfiles de los docentes de inglés de un municipio del oriente de Antioquia en la cual fue necesario caracterizar aspectos que permitieran identificar las políticas del MEN implementado en Colombia, basado en los estándares del Marco Común Europeo de Referencia (MCER) y cómo éstas políticas y estándares son llevadas a cabo en sus contextos.

Este estudio aplicó cuatro encuestas y dos entrevistas que facilitaron la descripción y análisis del perfil profesional docente siendo el método cualitativo el que permitió la descripción de los mismos, en los cuales los docentes de inglés ejercen su desarrollo profesional y cómo su actividad profesional y nivel de lengua se llevan a cabo en contextos locales a partir de contextos internacionales.

Sin embargo, la formación de docentes de inglés es constantemente dirigida por diversas entidades permitiendo así el fortalecimiento de la enseñanza de la lengua inglesa al promover programas que faciliten el crecimiento profesional de los docentes; además, las contribuciones de esta caracterización de los docentes de inglés en el municipio permitió a la oficina de educación la actualización y sistematización de los docentes de inglés debido a la ausencia de información de docentes que la entidad debía consolidar.

Otro importante aspecto para anexar es la contribución por parte de la universidad la cual ofrece la continuidad del proceso de formación donde se implementan cursos de inglés que facilitan el fortalecimiento de la lengua para su desarrollo en el municipio.

Palabras claves: Desarrollo Profesional - actividad profesional - formación profesional -

ruralidad - nivel de inglés - perfil docente

INTRODUCTION

This reflection article introduces from a reflexive position the profiles of the English teachers in a municipality under urban and rural contexts characterizing their professional profiles demanded by the *Ministerio de Educacion Nacional* (MEN).

Reflecting on what English teachers are and need in a municipality in Eastern Antioquia according to what MEN demands is an important exercise, as it is important to reflect on the teachers reality and not only on the students needs', and much more in the case whereby the context is rural and urban with a higher rural reality. There is a strong demand to improve the English level in Colombia according to the current administration of Colombia but identifying the reality will show us if this is identified in some municipalities in the eastern Antioquia taking as a sample one municipality as most of the municipalities in the region have the same characteristics as La Union, El Carmen, Sonsón, not so La Ceja, Marinilla and Rionegro. The current reflections have kept in mind the relevance of having an understanding of what English teachers profile is.

This characterization of English teachers in a municipality in Eastern Antioquia helps the understanding of the public school teachers' reality by the academic sector as well as the public administration.

A particular element to characterize is that the municipality has four public schools in the rural sector whereby only two have English teachers and one is urban with three teachers, therefore as Alarcon de Ortega affirms (2012), for "rural teachers, the pedagogical professional profile was not demanded" (p. 33). This study is relevant as it showed the reality of English teachers in contexts with similar characteristics as El Retiro, therefore in this study, answering the question: What is the English high school teachers' professional profile in a municipality in the Eastern Antioquia? Becomes pertinent.

Furthermore, it was important to explore some previous studies that facilitated the understanding of the characterization of English teachers developed not only in Colombia, but also around the globe. A study done in the University of Barinas, Venezuela (British Council, 2015) described the aim of this study by analyzing the current situation of the English teaching Program. The questions were answered by 30 teachers of Barinas, through a questionnaire conducted by a group of teachers from different public universities of Venezuela.

The questionnaire provided to the 30 teachers was oriented to determine their beliefs in relation to the English teaching Program, their profile as specialized teachers in English, the strategies used in the classrooms, their disposition to receive professional training and knowledge in official programs.

The obtained data disclosed that 19 teachers - the most of non-graduated in English teaching - considered that a teacher graduated in Comprehensive Education could be a specialist in English teaching of a certain professional training.

As a result, the training should focused on developing the communicative competence and also in the teaching methodology and on the foreign language testing. 14 teachers considered that they did not have a good command of English; however, the teachers believed that the training they have was sufficient to teach English in elementary school. 20 of the teachers expressed the use of readings as a strategy of teaching with material taken from magazines, newspapers and books as well as 25 teachers taught an average of two hours weekly per grade, indicating that the most of the teachers expressed the time as a limitation.

A second study done by Cherrez Hernandez (2014) described the b-learning (blended learning) as a methodological strategy in order to enhance learning-teaching process of the English learners (and English teaching for teachers) in the hybrid courses modality of the specialized department of languages at *Universidad Técnica de Ambato, Ecuador*. This paper contributed to the relevance of technologies in English teaching-learning and how well the English teachers are in these new trends. In addition, a report of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development OECD (2013) emphasized the results of the research: *Technology-Rich Innovative Learning Environments*. This paper included data basis from more than 120 reports related to innovative learning environment from 120 countries that participated in this initiative. The previous project searched for examining how young people learn and under what conditions they might learn easily (OECD, 2010).

Finally, a third study developed by Ramirez (2011) outlined initial results in order to explain the main ideas of the literature review conducted by the University of Sonora at public

schools of some states from Mexico, where the author emphasized of the faced difficulties for or related to the participants in the programs, that is to say: English teachers, principals, parents and students. One of the difficulties that Ramirez (2011) highlighted was the absence of training of English teachers and absence of experience, who are mainly professionals that have a wide knowledge in English being hired in institutions that require a high English level more than training in English Teaching (ELT). It was evidenced in conducted interviews in which they have hold the experience in teaching for having lived in the United States. According to Ramirez (2011, p. 4) this phenomenon was showed for the absence of English teachers who got jobs in few periods of time, due to the difficult labor conditions the teachers experienced.

CONCEPTUAL REFERENCES

This study deepened into the following conceptual references as very relevant to understand the construction of the methodology that led to the categorization of the information.

- 1. Teachers' training and professional development in Colombia (Curricular contents and academic regulations)
- 2. Teachers in the Programa Nacional de Bilinguismo (NBP)
- 3. Rurality (concept of rurality by MEN and DNP)

Teachers professional development and training in Colombia

The MEN demands guidelines for tertiary education that develops the bachelor's degree in foreign languages which emphasizes on its denomination a language of specialty; it means that the institutions of higher education in the structure of its curriculum, the students have the possibility to elect a language different of the specialty language (MEN, 2017, resolution 18583. p. 4). According to this, the MEN wants to have better prepare English teachers that are able to face the present global demands.

Besides, the Resolution 18583 of 2017 given by the MEN (2017) mentions that "Por la cual se ajustan las características específicas de calidad de los programas de Licenciatura para la obtención, renovación o modificación de registro calificado" (p.4).

In this resolution the MEN disposes the curricular contents and academic regulations for tertiary education for which the universities must include in their curriculum design, the theoretical basis, and the pedagogical and didactic guidelines of the programs indicating a purpose and a training profile in order to carry out the integrality, flexibility and interdisciplinary nature of the programs that include the training of future English teachers as it is given below (MEN, resolution 18583, 2017. p, 5).

First, in the following guidelines for the bachelor's degree in foreign languages, the MEN designs regulations for graduates in which the universities guarantee that all the bachelor's degree, as Math, Physical Education and History teachers to mention just some, accomplish an A2 Level or above according to the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR) which is verified with the results of national tests or others recognized by the MEN but with the commitment to move to B1 or higher (p. 9).

In relation to foreign language teachers, the resolution emphasizes that the future teachers must have a C1 in the major language according to the CEFR, verified according to the national tests or those recognized by the MEN. This resolution is trying to respond to the present global demands for future English teaches as the resolution is giving a three years time limit (p.9) to implement the demands. According to this resolution the teachers must have in their training some important components, general foundations as reading and writing (L1), and mathematics. A second component must be related to the specific concepts related to the field (Language). A third component is related to pedagogy including Language Teaching theories, evaluation. The

didactic component construct the skills to how to teach a language including practice, all of them connected through research (pp. 5 - 7).

According to Cardenas et al, (2010) the professional development of English teachers must take into account some relevant concepts such as the aims at teaching, the duty of the teacher, the learning of teachers and teachers' training procedures.

Along with, the author (Cárdenas, Kumaravadivelu 2010) describes and focuses on three main types of teachers who develop their educational process through the history such as: first, passive technical who represents a passive consumer of knowledge, that is to say, those who have a serial of prescribed activities. These types of teachers basically work in discipline and their training is based on very specific aspects. A second type of teacher is described as a reflexive practising who has the personal knowledge and the probability to promote research into the classroom in order to enhance his/her work. A third type of teacher as Kumaravadivelu (Toward a postmethod pedagogy, 2001. p 13) described in his paper is the intelectual transformer who holds mainly the two last aspects previously described, and besides, seen as teachers who not only develop their teaching into the classroom, but also their work process is carried out into the society in having a holistic vision of teaching Cárdenas, M., González, A, & Álvarez, J. (2010. p, 50).

As Kumaravadivelu (2003) includes, "the professional development of English teachers is the capacity of having a holistic vision of teaching in which this is carried out from outside of schools and classrooms in order to be elaborated it in the community" (p. 6).

Teachers in the Colombia Bilingüe

The main objective of the program refers to have citizens who are able to communicate each other in English with comparable international standards which insert the country in the universal communication processes, in the global economy and in the cultural openness. In order to comply with the objective proposed by the government, the implementation of the program Colombia Aprende looks for training English teachers at applying English teaching texts that permit teachers to consolidate the teaching quality processes in public institutions; the texts are articulated with the suggested English curriculum that develops pedagogical and methodological tools to implement in the classrooms.

Additionally, the program promotes motivations of foreign immersion for English teachers. Through these immersions the teachers participated in academic and cultural activities in which their English communicative competences were enhanced and reinforced their pedagogical practices in the classroom. The Ministry of Education defines the curricular guidelines to direct the teaching process of English teachers in elementary and higher education. Nevertheless, a big number of elementary school English teachers and teachers of different subjects have still an English low level (A1- and A1: basic), showing the low communicative competence in foreign language of the most of English teachers. (A1-A2: basic) Cardenas (2014).

In order to comply with guidelines for the competence of language the government of Colombia has implemented the program "Colombia Bilingüe" from NBP (Programa Nacional

de Bilingüismo) stated in 2004, which it is developed as a program that promotes the growth of professional development for all the citizens as well as for public English teachers. For accomplishing the guidelines of the development and enhancement of the English teaching for English teachers, the government implemented strategies with digital resources collection (My ABC English kit, ECO and Bunny bonita) that supply teachers English teaching strategies. The digital resources collection contain audios, pdf files, posters, flashcards, videos and pedagogical guides.

The program Colombia bilingue targets are focused on strengthening English Teaching and learning processes in elementary and high education for 2018 as the quadrennial program developed since 2014.

Rurality

Another relevant aspect to add in this reflexive article has also been defining rurality contexts in Colombia and on how a foreign language is appraised and developed in rural contexts as the municipality as mentioned previously has four public schools in the rural sector compare to the one urban school for the whole municipality. Consequently, one of the reflections views and approaches treated is about what rurality is in Colombia according to Ramirez ((2006) who pointed out that "rurality is defined of opposition to urbanity. Urbanity as lifestyle in the city under the paradigm of globalization and modernization" in which the rural contexts are partially kept into account by the government which gets interested in developing programs in main cities or capitals.

According to Ramirez (2006) "Rurality are territories in where the population is determined in sharing particular spaces with social relations, interrelation with nature and cohabitation with settlers".

The DNP (Departamento Nacional de Planeación) characterizes the rural inhabitants with the statistical criterion of the "rest". That is to say, regions located out of the municipal capitals from large cities, intermediated or minor towns which nowadays it represents 11.302.519 inhabitants; 23,7% of the total population (DNP, 2014, p. 10).

METHODOLOGY

The methodology conducted in this reflection article was a quantitative and qualitative data collection methods that were implemented in order to obtain the information (Kus, E. 2003, p. 4) besides, the implementation of case study approach in order to examine (quantitative) and describe (qualitative) the professional development and training of English teachers, the level of English and the professional activity in a municipality of the eastern of Antioquia of two rural sector high schools and one highschool of the urban sector.

Through these two collection data the researcher analyzed then relevant aspects that are included or contained in the questionnaire and the interviews, which could be connected based on contexts of individuality of teachers, ages, training and specializations (Mills, Durepos, Wiebe (2010, p 66.) that will approximate into a coherent result of what the researcher argues in this reflection article. The previous connected theories mentioned in this article will help the

researcher to describe the profiles of the English teaching in the public sector according to the different approaches used in the study.

Data Collection Methods

The method conducted as a quantitative design to collect data was a questionnaire in which the results of the study were collected, analyzed and interpreted; along with, this method helped the researcher involves within the processes. (Creswell, 2009. p, 37). The questionnaires as data collection instrument consisted of a series of questions to gather information in which some aspects of the profile of the English teachers were collected for the office of Education in El Retiro and analyzed in order to be systematized and updated the English teachers of the municipality mentioned Abawi (2013, p. 2).

Four questionnaires were directly responded by the English teachers of one high school in the urban sector (IE Ignacio Botero Vallejo) in the municipality of El Retiro and two interviews by two English teachers from the same schools (HQ of IE Ignacio Botero) in the rural area (I.E.R Dolores e Ismael Restrepo (Sede Salados and El Chuscal) of the same municipality. The questionnaires had a series of items in which the researcher observed the training and professional development of each English teacher by allowing to describe and analyze the process of English teaching in the school where they currently develop their professional activity.

Another instrument implemented was an interview to two teachers. For this qualitative method was relevant the information contained of the participants (Creswell, 2009. p, 112). The participants that comprised two teachers, -one teacher from urban area and the another teacher

from rural area - who were interviewed in order to transcribe their main lived experiences of their professional training and development that they have developed in both sectors (rural and urban).

This method also facilitated face to face interviews with the participants which included open-ended questions (Creswell, 2009. p, 232). Furthermore, it helped to involve the researcher experience the reality which these sectors have, and to interact with the interviewed to identify the voices of the participants that contribute the study.

To sum up, the researcher conducted these two types of methodologies not only to identify the profiles of English teachers in a municipality having a significant rural sector, but also to hear from the participants their expectations in terms of supporting and training by the government in order to fulfill the MEN demands for English teachers in Colombia considering that as an aim of the project of the PNB program.

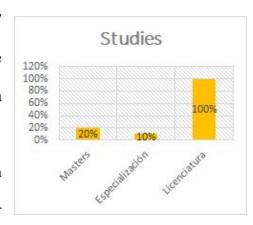
RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The following categories found after interviewing two teachers and the questionnaires implemented to five teachers that represent the 100% of the English teachers of the municipality. The results have helped the researcher to identify the characterization of English teachers in public high schools, supported by theories that define these concepts.

Professional training

Questionnaires conducted on August 22nd 2017 evidenced that 100% of teachers hold a bachelor's degree in foreign languages, and one of the teachers holds a master degree in Educational Technology Management.

Nevertheless one of the teachers interviewed on April 26th 2018 manifested that he is currently studying a master



degree in Information and Communication Technologies, information that had not been reported in the questionnaire as the teacher was still taking the studies by them. It is possible to infer that although two of the five teachers have a master degree that contributes to their teacher profession it has no direct relation to English language development but it is also a response to today's needs for interdisciplinarity.

It is important to highlight that the two teachers interviewed had taken advantage of the opportunities given by the local government through programs implemented together with the

Catholic University of Eastern Antioquia (UCO). The program offered to the secondary school teachers an English course at the university campus to improve the language level, even this same course was offered to all the high school teachers and those from primary who wanted to take part of it. This course has empowered and engaged teachers with their teaching process.

González (2007) argues that the MEN implements policies and language standards which cover other types of contexts, and the professional training is not the same in all cases; for this reason, it is necessary that the MEN implements policies which the English teachers carry out in their own contexts so that teachers have a better meaningful teaching of a new language (English). The policies implemented by the government concerning programs as Colombia bilingue do not cover municipalities like El Retiro, due to the programs are developed in certified municipalities. The advantage of the program Colombia bilingue directed by the government in certified areas in which the program develops the training English teachers, strategies and materials that are focused on official sectors. In contrast, the program is not developed in the municipality and it does not permit the teachers training; nevertheless, the municipality and the university make efforts to offer training of English teachers in the municipality to conduct strategies of English teaching and resources to facilitate the English learning and the municipality becomes more competitive.

Level of language

According to the information collected in the questionnaires the teachers' English level comply with the guidelines implemented by the MEN in *Estándares*



básicos de Competencias en Lenguas Extranjeras: Inglés (MEN, 2006). The 60% of teachers holds a B1 English level that fulfill the demands of MEN related to the level of English in Colombia. Consequently, the 40% of the teachers holds a B2 level of English according to CEF's standards. An important element that was identified is that three teachers that represent the 60% of the teachers belongs to the urban school and two teachers that represent the 40% are located in rural schools which showed that the teachers in the urban school have lower level compared to those in the rural sector, at the same time it is identified that priority is given to the urban sector for the number of teachers allocated. Therefore it might be relevant to inquire the reason it happens that way

Another relevant aspect in terms of the English level was about the language certification being the 90% of the teachers certified whereas the 10% remaining is not certified at the moment in which the survey was applied, but it is relevant to mention that this research did not not intend to verify this information as it trusted the information given by the teachers. Besides, one of the teachers, according to the information gathered in the questionnaire holds a TKT test (Teaching Knowledge Test, certified).

Professional activity

The professional activity of the five teachers showed the number of hours per week assigned to the English classes. In the schools there is a schedule implemented of three hours per

week, and there is a school that has two hours per week taking into account the immersion that is necessary to learn a new language according to what MEN points out



in relation to the number of hours per week to teach English in order to fulfill the demands of the government in constructing a competitive society.

In relation to interviews T1 works in the rural area where the hours per week are carried out based on what the policies of the Ministry of Education demands in terms of number of hours.

T2 works in the urban area giving the same number of hours per week. Nevertheless, T2 teaches tenth and eleventh grades respectively. In the urban area the institution has three English teachers with three hours per week that permit students to have more hours of English.

It evidenced that the municipality focused more on developing programs of English that facilitate the learning of language in urban areas more than rural areas as it is evidenced for the number of teachers assigned.

One of the interview was conducted in a rural area and the other one carried out in the urban area of El Retiro. In the interviews some aspects were observed such as programs developed by the municipality and UCO where those programs have impacted more in the urban area, but it has a strong impact on the rural elementary school teachers.

CONCLUSIONS

This reflection article has firstly described the evidences from the questionnaires and the interviews of the profiles of the English teachers of two public high schools in the rural area and one public high school of the urban area where the municipality has briefly implemented programs of enhancement of the level of language and professional development for teachers. Consequently, the programs are carried out in urban and rural areas where the English teachers enhance their professional training in order to conduct effectively their professional activity in both contexts.

Secondly, evidences have been obtained that indicated their reality in rural contexts concerning the number of hours of English per week (between two and three) which were not sufficient taking into account the quantity of teachers in both contexts, representing a few number of teachers in relation to hours per week where they manifested the responsibilities they had in the schools and other type of activities that did not allow them to develop their teaching activity appropriately.

Though this current study was limited by the absence of more information from both contexts urban and rural English teachers of the municipality, on one hand it has evidenced the commitment of the municipality and the university to develop and to implement programs of training; nevertheless, the programs partially cover the demands for the two sectors, but considering that the programs are focused more on urban sector. On another hand, the teachers

are also interested in taking part of the programs developed by the municipality and the university in order to comply with the regulations of the MEN.

Another important implication was related to the English level of the teachers complying with the regulations of the MEN; nevertheless, English teachers from rural context evidenced that they hold a better level of English than teachers from the urban area of the municipality. Therefore, this study could be a useful aid for future implementation, developing, enhancing and continuing programs that facilitate the training of the English teachers concerning language proficiency and other needs considering that the English teachers of the municipality have had programs for English teaching effectively; however, one of the teacher manifested in the interview the absence of time and space to participate of the programs offered by the municipality and university.

Concerning other types of profiles of the English teachers that this studied took into account was related to the age of teachers and its average that correspond to the 90% of English teachers of an average of 34 years old, considering it a young population of English teachers of the municipality. Another relevant aspect was regarding the regions where each teacher comes from; the questionnaires evidenced that the 20% of the teachers were from the region of different municipalities in the east of Antioquia; while a 80% of teachers are from other regions of Colombia, such as Choco, Santander and Bogota, from where the teachers hold their diploma at campuses of their regions and two of the teachers are from Rionegro. That is to say that no one of the teachers was from the region of the municipality, but they come from other different regions of the country.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A: Consent Form

CONSENTIMIENTO INFORMADO

Caracterización Docentes de inglés del Municipio de El Retiro, Sector Oficial

Extiendo esta invitación a hacer parte de un proceso de investigación a través del cual se busca caracterizar a los docentes de inglés de bachillerato del municipio de El Retiro. Para esta selección se ha tenido en cuenta sólo los docentes del área de inglés del municipio de El Retiro del sector oficial.

Su participación en este estudio es necesaria y consistirá en dar información que permita la caracterización de los docentes del municipio con el objetivo de brindar información clara sobre la realidad de los docentes de inglés de bachillerato a la coordinación de Educación.

RIESGOS Y BENEFICIOS

Su participación no representa riesgo alguno. No obstante, será necesario destinar un tiempo prudencial para la realización de las acciones anteriormente mencionadas.

ANONIMATO

La información siempre permanecerá en el anonimato y solo será entregada a la Coordinación de Educación en caso de requerirse. Al momento de describir el estudio, tanto escrito como verbalmente, se usará un seudónimo del participante que le será asignado a fin de proteger su nombre y sus datos personales.

Entiendo que mi participación es completamente voluntaria y sin ningún tipo de consecuencias.

Nombre del participante que acuerda:
Firma del participante que acuerda:
Fecha del acuerdo:
Nombre del investigador que recibe el acuerdo:

Appendix B: Questionnaire Form

UNIVERSIDAD CATÓLICA DE ORIENTE

Degree in Foreign Languages

Dear Teachers.			
The following questionnaire has as purpose collects data that permits the development of the			
Research Project that will take place	in public high schools in order to identify the professional		
profile of the English teachers in the	municipality.		
1. Personal Information:			
Full Name:			
Age:			
Name of the institution you work:			
Grade(s):	Number of students per grade(s):		
2. Academic Training:			
Undergraduates(s):			
University (ies):			
Year of graduate:			
*Postgraduate(s):			
University (ies):			

Year of graduate:

*Specialization(s):	In:
*Master's degree:	In:
English Level: A1 A2 B1 B2 B2+	C1 C2
Certified: Yes N	0
3. PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE Time:	CE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING
Academic Institution(s):	
How do you feel in your English tea	aching course?
4. GENERALS	
Do you have knowledge of the police	cies of Education related to English teaching as foreign
language in the municipality of El R	Retiro?
YES NO	
How many hours do you teach in th	e academic institution weekly?
What would you provide to the imp municipality of El Retiro?	rovement of the policies of Education for languages in the

Appendix C: Interview Form

La siguiente entrevista tiene como objetivo recolectar los datos para dar continuidad al proyecto de grado que se viene desarrollando en el municipio relacionado al perfil profesional de los docentes de inglés en colegios del sector oficial de El Retiro.

- 1. Desde su experiencia ha tenido procesos de formación para la enseñanza del idioma? ¿Cuándo fue la más reciente?
- 2. ¿Cree que las políticas tanto gubernamentales como municipales le permiten desarrollarse como tal?
- 3. ¿Qué programa de formación docente y de lengua se llevan a cabo en la región?
- 4. ¿Ha participado en los programas de formación docente en la región?