UNIVERSITY OF EL SALVADOR

SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

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GRADUATION WORK

“THE ACADEMIC PREPARATION OF TEACHERS IN CHARGE OF SPECIALIZED COURSES OF THE LICENCIATURA EN IDIOMA INGLES OPCION ENSEÑANZA IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGES DEPARTMENT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF EL SALVADOR”

TO OBTAIN THE DEGREE OF

LICENCIATURA EN IDIOMA INGLES, OPCION ENSEÑANZA

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In the changing environment of higher education institutions, characterized by competitive global educational market, the importance of staff development has been recognized as essential to support new approaches to learning and teaching and the changing needs of institutions (Blandford, 2001). In this changing environment, one of the obligations of university leadership is to choose to grow its staff professionally so as to support learning and improve student performance (Bank and Mayes, 2001). This improvement in the professional competencies of academic staff in the university helps to develop knowledge and skills of the staff in support of current role, or prepare a staff for future role (Fullan, 1992). Jocelyn Butler defines competencies as knowledge, skills, attributes and behaviour traits required for individual and organizational success (Butler, 2006). As the ultimate outcomes of the educational process must be student progress, development and achievement, and a crucial contributor to student learning is professor learning.

Education is a process that should rest on strong basis; therefore, educators should be qualified, highly skilled and well trained to become the pillars that hold and ensure the excellence in the teaching-learning process. Quality education will be the key to long-term benefits. That is why many districts of The United States demand from professors a certificate renewal and it can be done if professors complete at least 150 hours of continuing professional education, and it includes participation in institutes, workshops, seminars, conferences, graduate courses, or training programs which are taken through an accredited institution of higher education.

Nowadays, Higher Education Institutions, in foreign countries, have developed training courses to enable their academic staff to refine and improve their teaching skills; for instance, the University College of Dublin (Ireland), encourages its academic staff to register for programs that facilitate participants in their professional development as educators and learners. These kinds of programs are of great help and importance for

professors because they encourage them to reflect on their teaching not only in general areas but also in specific ones.

In this new millennium in which technology and science have become most important, there emerges the necessity to be updated with all the changes raised in the “field of knowledge.” Due to this, higher education institutions have the challenge to integrate in this “Globalized world.”

In this respect, institutions are constantly checking and improving their curriculum in which there are specialized courses that require special attention and preparation by the professors in charge of those courses. For example, in El Salvador, the Don Bosco University has created a training program for professors who are in charge of such subjects, even though it has not been put into practice yet. Also the university college of Dublin (UCD) has a program to support academic staff in their teaching and learning role within the university. Thus, its main goal is “to enable professors to refine and improve their teaching skills by the application of theoretically validated methods.”(University College of Dublin, 2005).

According to consulted sources, “teachers should meet some requirements as knowledge, skills, techniques, methods, and courses of specialization of the subject to be taught.” (National Commission on Excellence in Elementary Teacher Preparation for Reading Instruction).

In developing countries, such in the case of El Salvador, important Higher Education Institutions like the University of El Salvador (UES) do not seem to have a permanent and systematized program that can support the Foreign Languages Department academic staff in their teaching and learning role within the University either to teach the specialized areas of the Licenciatura en Idioma Inglés Opción Enseñanza or the basic ones during the second semester of 2006. However, professors

look for ways to improve their teaching by their own. Even, some of them have good ideas about how to create training programs.

Then, being aware of how important to be prepared is, it results necessary to analyze how teaching is working inside the Foreign Languages Department in the University of El Salvador. All this in order to maintain aspects actually working in the classroom, or on the other hand, to change or improve non working methods when teaching specialized courses.

It will also be good to consider the idea of having some kind of training in the department as a tool to continue growing up as professionals, and also to give professors the support and enhancement to continue improving their knowledge and to share it with their colleagues when necessary in order to have better results in the classroom.

Good preparation of university academic staff is a must in order to update professors in their fields of experience and offer them training opportunities to fulfil the required profile to be a professor of specialized areas. However, they have not only to be aware of different options of training programs but also to be willing to prepare themselves on their own since **the highly specialized academic background education that professors in charge of some specialized courses in the Foreign Languages Department of the University of El Salvador have contributes to a better and effective way to teach in the areas of English Composition, Readings and Conversation, Didactics, Morphology and Phonology, Grammar, and Literature and this can be achieved through the following measures: First, by updating professors in their fields of experience as part of the university issues. Second, by offering training opportunities to fulfil the required profile to be a professor of specialized areas. Third, by being aware of different options of training programs. Fourth, by being willing to prepare themselves on their own and finally, by setting regulations and standards to commit universities for preparing academic staff.**

Teaching is a complex process which can be conceptualized in a number of different ways. Traditionally, language teaching has been described in terms of what professors do: that is, in terms of the actions, knowledge and behaviors which professors carry out in the classroom and the effects of these on learners.

According to an interview carried out during semester II-2006 to professors of the foreign Languages Department (FLD) in the University of El Salvador (UES), good teaching is to provoke good learning of good quality to make critical students to continue learning and to apply knowledge. They also think that it is achieving the objectives planned and planning in advance to make sure students have learned. It is also making use of a mixture of techniques, strategies and principles of learning according to students’ needs and interests. They also consider good teaching as having the commitment with their profession, having good delivering and understanding, as well as helping students be independent. All this means that professors define teaching not only as being prepared for every single class or being knowledgeable in the field but also being committed and interested for their students’ learning and performance. All professors are aware of what is implied in good teaching. They are conscious that there are many things that they have to take into account before teaching a class, and the extent of teaching. On the other hand, they define a good professor as someone who is well prepared and updated, someone who loves his/her profession and students, someone who is a facilitator and makes students be independent to take charge of their own learning by their own means. Taking this into account, it can be said that professors consider a good professional not only as the one who is academically well prepared but also as someone who knows about methodologies to teach effectively and makes students learn taking them into account in all aspects.

Similarly, students were asked to answer a questionnaire, and it is observed that they are also aware of which should and should not be the features implemented in the classroom in order to have the best methodology in the class. Some aspects that students

from the Foreign Languages Department said they like about the professors’ methodology are: the dynamic development of the class and the previous preparation of the professors to carry out every class. They also mentioned they feel satisfied because there is rapport with their professors, and there is constant encouragement to participate in all the activities which allows them to practice the language.

Some other aspects they like from their classes are the appropriate selection of the material to support the topics to be studied, the mastering of specific contents, and the good teacher-student interaction during the class. However, there are also aspects they do not like about the professors’ methodology; for example, they said that there is inflexibility toward students mentioning that the professor is not very understanding in some situations. They consider that sometimes the contents are not selected appropriately because some topics had little to do with the things they expected to learn in the course. Besides that, sometimes professors are not creative enough because they spend too much time in the same kind of activity, and students also think some professors are ineffective when giving examples.

Having mentioned some of the most important characteristics that professors should meet in order to succeed in the teaching process, it can be said that those specific aspects are obtained and improved through the years of experience in the teaching field and preparation because **the academic preparation of professors by means of specialization produces an improvement in the teaching quality and contributes to the professional development**. As having good professionals makes a great difference in the quality of education received in the English classes, it has also a positive effect on professors because that makes them have a strong feeling of efficacy in their practice when they are well prepared. For example, professors from the Foreign Languages Department commented that sometimes they have wondered if they are ready to teach a specialized subject since it would be the first time teaching it, also handling with different students and new contents makes them feel a little bit nervous. There are also

professors that claim to feel well prepared because they are familiar with the contents and have good resources since they had experience in the field before. So, feeling afraid when teaching a specialized course could be due to inexperience or unpreparedness.

When professors are professionally fulfilled, demonstrate job satisfaction, skills and knowledge, they are more likely to motivate students to want to learn (Stoll and Fink, 1996). Stoll and Fink further claim that probably, nothing in educational institution has more impact on students in terms of knowledge and skills development, self-confidence, or classroom behaviour than the personal and professional growth of their professors. Therefore, professor learning has to be a goal, a key component and outcome of institutional development. If classrooms are going to be effective, institutions must be effective as well, and professors as major part of the institution must be developed (CHUKWUNENYE Stephen, 2007).

*Empowerment and job satisfaction* are related to workers’ superior performance. In modern organization job satisfaction for staff takes the course of making staff feel satisfied in their academic work. One way of doing this is to provide the staff the necessary rewards and incentives, as a way of empowerment that enhances job performance. It is when the staff in the university is satisfied in their work that quality teaching can be ensured, which in turn can raise the level of student learning in the university.

As it was suggested before,continuous education as a form of staff development must be deemed important because it will prevent knowledge obsolesce. Continuous education of staff plays a key role of advancing knowledge and skills of staff for them to play new roles. It prepares staff for development needs as well as for better teaching and research. In addition, continuous education is seen as a way in which staff is empowered to perform well in teaching and research roles. As universities are faced with accelerating changes in their environment, professors need to improve their skills in the acquisition and management of new knowledge. The aim here is that staff working in the

university will acquire the skills and knowledge needed for pedagogic purposes and for professors to have better or more effective teaching skills. The importance of continuous education and training is that institution’s competitiveness in a global or national setting will depend on the expertise of the staff. If the competence of staff is continually maintained and developed, they will gain a lasting motivation.

Academic preparation, such as trainings, makes professors feel self confident when teaching specialized courses. This can be noticed in many aspects of professors’ attitude and performance during the class; for example, students from the English Department (UES) said they noticed that their professors seemed to enjoy the class, which is of great importance since not only has a good effect in the students’ learning process but it also makes them feel comfortable in class. They also consider that professors must have the academic abilities and skills to teach the specialized courses. This is noticed on their attitude at the moment of teaching because they feel self confident regarding the knowledge in the field and how to transmit it to students. Another important thing is to be fond of the course. Most professors like the courses they are teaching for different reasons. One of them is that they are familiar with the contents and have different kind of resources as support. But there are the ones that sometimes feel it is difficult when it is not their area of competence which could be reflected in their attitude because sometimes they are just assigned to teach a course without being asked, and that is one of the main problems for professors do not like their classes.

From this perspective, faculty development has to enable academic staff to cope more effectively with daily demands at work, to protect significant time and energy for life beyond work, and to grow personally and professionally in ways that enhance feelings of intellectual excitement, accomplishment and esteem. The quality of the staff in institutions of higher education are thus central to their effectiveness, in the same way that it is to all people-centered organizations. A recent World Bank paper on staff

development comments “a high quality and well motivated teaching staff and a supportive professional culture are essential in building excellence” (World Bank, 1994).

**There is crucial importance of improving staff quality by keeping them updated in their fields of experience**. Higher education professors have to be updated to deal with new educational methods. This puts a higher emphasis on the students’ ability to direct their own learning process, like problem based learning, experiential learning and project organized learning. This means they have to acquire competencies related to new professor’s roles, like facilitator skills, advisory skills, etc. At the same time, the professors will have to acquaint themselves with new teaching technologies ranging from Internet software to simple presentation tools. Hence, professors in higher education will have to become self long learners. Didactic skills are becoming more and more important in higher education all over the world.

The importance of having continuous learning and updating to teach specialized courses is because new methodologies are emerging, and some new elements are being added to traditional methods, this is in order to improve teaching quality in classrooms. Some resources are training courses, workshops, seminars, technological resources, research, useful material, tutoring; however, there is not a specific aspect that will improve the quality of teaching. It is necessary to take into account many tools and methods that combined and well implemented could bring better results during instruction.

Professors from the Foreign Languages Department (FLD) in the University of El Salvador (UES) use a variety of methods in their classes; for instance, the communicative approach in which they focus in producing by means of communicative activities, discussing and analyzing; making their courses practical. Some others use the traditional method (teacher-centered classroom) and situational method, as well as a lot

of vocabulary and mostly they base the lesson plans in developing the classes fostering the four macro skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing). Most of them are trying to put into practice different and new methodologies to teach, and just a few of them remain using the traditional method. This is important to take into account because using different techniques and methods can improve in a better way the skills professors are trying to develop in students. It makes a great difference using a variety of resources and techniques than just using the traditional method to teach a class since this could affect the students’ attitude if professors continue with the old way of teaching making the learning process monotonous.

Most professors are now searching about new techniques and methods to make their classes varied and interesting. They do not use the same method to teach the courses as the one used when they were taught because it results really important to take into account the students’ characteristics to try to implement different activities like promoting debate and using authentic material to motivate them. All this benefits their students because professors try to update themselves about pedagogy, and they can realize and evaluate which things work better in the classroom and which do not. The majority of professors are committed with their professional development since they do research constantly about methods and some other important topics related to teaching. However, there are professors that do not keep researching on new methodologies to improve their teaching quality, justifying that there is not much material or techniques to teach a specific course, which shows little commitment with their responsibility at university level of updating themselves. It would be because they do not feel an acute interest of their professional development and specialization at taking it effortlessly.

Moreover, it is important to consider the students’ point of view. Some students from the Foreign Languages Department consider that the methodology their professors implement in the classroom could be improved by updating their knowledge, techniques and strategies when developing the contents in the classroom because this kind of

students are not completely satisfied with the way of teaching the course. It has to be remembered that certain techniques work and are effective for some students but for others are not. So, for professors who consider that continuous learning and updating is not really necessary, they have to analyze their position and ask themselves why they think like that to conclude if it is due to lack of interest or mere ease.

According to some Heads of Foreign Languages Departments of some Universities in El Salvador such as Universidad de El Salvador (UES), Universidad Francisco Gavidia (UFG), Universidad Don Bosco (UDB), and Universidad Pedagogica de El Salvador (UPES), a continuous learning of a professor is essential to get ready in advance because it will not only help professors to improve themselves but also they will be able to improve the teaching process; in this way you will also have the best candidate for a specific field since every course requires a specific professor. Besides, it is a good way to put into practice the knowledge they have gotten, improve and deliver it in the best way, but it has to be remembered that it is also a personal matter because people can not be forced to continue studying. It should not be thought either that the more diplomas or degrees gotten, the best professors you will have since having many diplomas is not going to make a good professor. Therefore, being a good professor is something that has to be shown with results in the classroom.

Definitely, diplomas or degrees do not make the best professors but appropriate preparation of professors is an important element of the education system and **the balance between what is required from them, how they are trained, and what is offered to them as professional development opportunities has a significant effect on the quality of their classroom teaching**. Recent studies suggest that the professional development received by a professor influences classroom practices because professors are more likely to engage their students in higher-order thinking skills, which lead in turn to improved students performance. Sanders, W., & Rivers, J., in their book *Cumulative and residual effects of teachers on future student academic*

*achievement* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1998), and other researchers have shown the enormous difference that teachers can make in the achievement of their students. One study in Dallas in the mid-1990s, for example, showed that “children assigned to effective teachers in a row scored an average of 49 percentile points higher on a standardized reading assessment than children assigned to three ineffective teachers in a row. Although there is much debate about what makes one teacher more effective than another, research findings point overwhelmingly to the importance of teacher’s mastery of his/her subject matter.”

For instance, it is well known that the professors’ profile in foreign universities such as VÄXJÖ University in Sweden, it is to have a PhD or at least a Master’s degree to teach at the higher education level. In order to illustrate this, some professors’ profile at that university can be mentioned such as the case of Maria Esting Vannestal, a qualified professor of English and Swedish at VÄXJÖ, who teaches grammar and essay writing as well as she supervises essays in linguistics and language didactics. She possesses a PhD in Syntax and has some publications. Another professor is Steven Hartman who has a PhD in American Literature and American culture. He has been teaching and supervising essays in Literature for more than a decade at universities in Sweden and The United States. According to M.a. Allison Kellum (English Fellow from the USA Embassy in El Salvador), English Institutes at university level generally have people with master degrees teaching English and have the students prepared by means of one year of specialization in a specific field, so it is all focused on going to the university when they are done with that institute.

In like manner, the Heads of the Foreign Languages Department of the local universities mentioned above, said that some of the requirements that a professor must fulfil in order to be hired as a member of the staff are: To have the B.A in English, to be highly proficient in English, to have experience in the field he/she is going to teach.

Besides, the candidate has to take some exams to prove he/ she masters the language, and to get a minimum score of 551 in the TOEFL.

As it can be noticed through the examples mentioned above, universities require more and more the best academic preparation from their academic staff and professors must have an excellent profile to fulfil those requirements. However, comparing Salvadorean Universities requirements with the ones in North American Universities, it can be said that professor’s profiles are less demanding. Instead, in some foreign Universities, holding a master or PhD as a requirement is a must.

According to David Cro (Umea University) there are four main elements that professors must have in order to get the ideal professor’s profile. The first one is the **professor’s general level of education**, usually marked by a diploma or degree. Cro says that teachers should be well educated people whatever their specialty is; therefore, they have to have a stipulated status attained in a school, college or university before starting teaching. Concerning this, professors of the Foreign Languages Department (FLD) of the University of El Salvador in charge of specialized courses such as English Composition, Didactics, Literature, Grammar, Readings and Conversation, and Morphology and Phonology, were asked about their academic preparation. It was found that some of them have a master’s degree besides the B.A in English Language that is required to become part of the FLD staff. Undoubtedly, professors are trying to grow up professionally to fulfil what is required from them and obviously to improve the teaching quality in the classroom, as well as to get personal satisfaction as professional people. The second element is **subject competence** which is related to the level of English needed if the language or specialized areas are to be taught effectively. This agrees with what Allison Kellum (USA Embassy in El Salvador) commented that one of the most important things that English professors or future professors must have is a very strong grasp of English. “A lot of time what I’ve seen is that there are some teachers who lack language skills and so… How can they begin to teach literature,

Grammar or anything else if they don’t have the language? So I would say first of all teachers have to have very strong language skills, then they need to have enough knowledge both theoretical and practical to teach the specialized area.” Then, it is really important that professors master the language so they can not be sidetracked by language weaknesses when teaching. The third element to take into account is the professors’ **professional competence**that involves the professors’ ability to plan and execute lessons, to use a textbook selectively and to produce valid supplementary materials and tests. In other words, it concerns the professors’ awareness of current approaches, educational theory, cognitive psychology, class management skills, etc. Regarding this element, professors of the FLD(UES) shared their opinions about it, based on the area they were teaching. For example, grammar professors said that the most important competence that a professor in the area has to possess is to be a specialist in the field as well as to know different approaches to teach Grammar, so this means that educators in charge of specialized courses ought to have not only an excellent academic background related to the specialized area but also the skills to teach the topics. Lic. Stanley Oviedo (UPES) expressed himself as follows: “Requirements are not enough because sometimes you have a really nice profile, a really nice teacher with a lot of qualities but once they face students…they’re just that “knowledge” and a teachers must have knowledge but also the skills to transmit that knowledge to students.”

On the other hand, the professor in charge of Literature and the one in charge of Morphology and phonology of the FLD (UES) coincided in their answers and said that professors who are teaching those courses must have knowledge and experience in the field. In like manner, English Didactics rofessors said that educators in charge of this course should have not only experience in the area or knowledge but also they have to be updated about methodologies to put them into practice. Besides, Readings and Conversation professors added that professors developing this kind of courses must possess knowledge about language (very strong language skills), and also have general culture and good interpersonal relationship skills. In addition, English Composition

professors agreed that professors in this field must have good writing skills and to master grammar structures. Holding David Cro’s idea, professional competence not only involves knowledge or language skills but the ability to plan and develop the lessons previously planned, and the creation of authentic materials that can support the topics that are being taught. Regarding this matter students’ opinions of the FLD of the UES was highly positive since most of them said that professors not only have an excellent previous preparation to execute every class but also they use appropriate didactic material to support the topics to be taught. The fourth element that Cropoints out as essential is the professors’ **attitudes toward teaching***.* These are the professors’ beliefs about education, their relationship with students and colleagues, their sense of humour, their level of vocation, their work ethic, their general motivation and willingness to be involved in extracurricular activities, their personality and ability to engender enthusiasm, etc. Related to this element, students from the FLD (UES) agreed that their professors enjoy the class at the moment of teaching; therefore, they are fond of the courses they are teaching.

Certainly, the professor’s general level of education, the subject competence and the professional competence, and his/her attitudes toward teaching have such powerful effects on the classroom climate and learning, and therefore, on the teaching quality in the classroom. Although, having an excellent professor’s profile is not the only factor that contributes in the improvement of the teaching quality but also the professional development opportunities that a higher education institution offers to its staff play an important role on this issue so that it can be a balance between what is required of professors and what is offered to them.

In accordance with a study about managing professional competencies of teaching staff in the university of Helsinki (Finland, 2007), carried out by Ph. D Stephen Chukwunenye Anyamele, one of the obligations of the university leadership is to choose to grow its staff professionally so that it can be an improvement in the professional

competencies of academic staff in the university and at the same time this can help to develop knowledge and skills of the staff in support of current role, or prepare a staff for future role.

Some Salvadorean universities, like in the case of Universidad Don Bosco, have started looking for ways in which they, as a higher education institution, can offer their staff opportunities for professional development. For example, they have like a project profile oriented to help professors from the FLD to get well prepared in their professional area. Although, the project has not been carried out yet due to financial support, the university is trying to get committed itself with its staff. On the other hand, the Foreign Language School of the UPES has like a training program that is developed every year where professors who are part of its staff can share knowledge and teaching techniques to improve their teaching role in specialized areas. Of course, this is not a formal training but this is the manner the UPES tries to promote and enhance professional development.

Unlike the institutions mentioned above, the FLD of the UES promotes these professional development opportunities by allowing its staff to attend workshops, seminars, or conferences that are developed by other educational institutions or in some cases by foreign institutions. However, these opportunities do not seem to be a permanent program established by the FLD that can support academic staff regarding a more formal training. In fact, most of the FLD professors concurred in their answers when they said that they have studied or prepared themselves at specialized areas because that was something they were interested in, and not because the Department had established a permanent program to do so. Maybe this is due to the FLD is on a tight budget; however, there are some ways that could contribute to set up permanent programs to benefit academic staff. For instance, university authorities can either look for financial support through private institutions that are willing to help in the development of such projects like in the case of Universidad Don Bosco that is trying to

get a budget to develop their project or they cannot only encourage the academic staff to participate in scholarship programs but also help them to participate in those programs.

For example, the Fulbright scholarships program is one of the most successful programs world-wide that promotes the academic excellence and helps professional people to have professional development in specific areas. This program offers three different kinds of scholarships and professors can apply to them through the higher education institution they work with and the USA embassy in El Salvador. The first scholarship is administered by the Latin American Scholarship Program of American Universities (LASPAU) which is addressed to higher education institutions and it invites them to nominate their academic staff, researchers or even their leadership members to study abroad in order to obtain a masters’ degree. Some of the requirements for applying to the FULBRIGHT-LASPAU scholarship are:

* To be a university professor.
* To have an excellent academic score
* To get compromised with the teaching and researching activity, and with the university administration.
* To get the support of the university he or she works for.
* To master the language and to get a minimum score of 550 in the TOEFL.
* To get back to his/ her origin country.

The second program is the Fulbright Scholarship which is addressed to individuals who are interested in getting a masters’ degree on their own. The requirements in order to apply to this scholarship are:

* To have a diploma or university degree.
* To have an excellent academic score.
* To have at least 2 years of work experience in El Salvador.
* To master the language and have a minimum score of 550 in the TOEFL.
* To get back to the country after finishing their studies.

The third program is the Hubert H. Humphrey scholarship that has been created for professional people that want to improve their professional practice and knowledge regarding a specific area and some requirements for this are:

* To have an excellent academic record.
* To have a B.A. or masters’ degree.
* To have at least 5 years of work experience.
* To show ability in leadership.
* To be between 30 and 45 years old.
* To master the language and have a minimum score of 550 in the TOEFL.
* To get back to the country after finishing their studies.

It is well known that some professors of the FLD of the UES have already participated in these kinds of programs; however, most of them state that it was not the university that encouraged them to participate but they were the ones who got interested and asked to participate in these programs. According to Stephen Chukwunenye, staff development is central to the quality of higher education and even in business and the professions there is a wide recognition that the skills of their staff need to be continually strengthened and enhanced. In the face of challenges from national and international competitors, the best companies are investing more resources in the continual training and re-training of employees at all levels. Therefore, it can be said that the university has the challenge of continuously offer staff development opportunities.

On the other hand, if it is not possible for professors, under any circumstance, to have professional development opportunities by means of a formal training, **there are some other ways in which they can train themselves through teaching techniques that enable them to improve their professional development**. However, it would be necessary to have in mind what professional development means. According to Dale Lange, who has worked for many years in preservice foreign language professor education in the United States, writes “Teacher development is a term used in the literature to describe a process of continual intellectual, experiential, and attitudinal growth of teachers” (Nunan, 4). Having this as a basis, training can be carried out by different ways. Approaches to professional development can be done either individual or as a joint effort. Some examples are: self-observation, the processes of keeping a teaching journal and the experience of compiling a teaching portfolio. Still other procedures are: peer observation, coaching, and peer teaching. By definition, you need one or more colleagues to work with you when you are engaged in these professional development activities.

The approaches listed above are fundamentally about self-awareness, and how professors can bring about positive changes in their teaching by means of individual and collaborative development. First of all, individual development will be discussed. One way to increase our self-awareness is to monitor or observe our own behavior as professors. Jack Richards (Nunan, 26) explains that **self-observation** is “a systematic approach to the observation, evaluation, and management of one’s own behavior... for the purposes of achieving a better understanding and control over one’s behavior.” Richards feels that self-monitoring can provide us with feedback for our ongoing professional growth, even within the constraints of our busy schedules. Second, self-monitoring can lead to critical reflection about our work, which is an important component of being able to improve. In addition, it can help us “better understand our own instructional process,” thereby bridging the gap between what we actually do and

what we think we do. Finally, self-monitoring relocates the responsibility for improving teaching squarely with us as individual professors.

Why should professors bother to write in a **teaching journal**? Teaching journals can be used as data collection device in practicing reflective teaching, in conducting action research, or as the basis for a diary study. Journal writing is viewed “as an opportunity for professors to use the process of writing to describe and explore their own teaching practices.” Writing a language learning autobiography can also be a useful professional development exercise for language professors or professors-in-training.

David Nunan, in his book Pursuing Professional Development, highlights four key benefits of keeping a teaching journal. These include (1) articulating puzzles or problems (including posing hypotheses for further research), (2) venting frustrations, (3) clarifying and realizing, and (4) stretching ourselves professionally. Belinda Ho and Jack Richards, who investigated about journals kept by some professors in Honk Kong, located five main patterns among the topics discussed in the professors’ journal entries: (1) theories of teaching; (2) approaches and methods used in their lessons; (3) evaluations of their teaching; (4) self-awareness about their own strengths and weaknesses; and (5) questions (used, e.g., to speculate about why things happened or to ask for advice).

Another approach to individual development is to keep **portfolios**. James Green and Sheryl Smyser emphasize that portfolios are *not* just products. As they put it, “a portfolio must be viewed as an on-going process” (Nunan, 224). They provide seven answers to the question, “What makes a teaching portfolio a different kind of evaluation? They say that portfolios:

1. Give teaching a context,
2. accommodate diversity,
3. encourage professors to capitalize on strengths,
4. allow professors to self-identify areas for improvement,
5. empower professors by making them reflective,
6. encourage professional dialogue, and
7. integrate all aspects of teaching.

In relation to this, it can be mentioned that in the Foreign Languages Department of the University of El Salvador, professors are used to keep a portfolio of the subjects they have taught. The only difference is that it is not done in a reflective basis. Mostly, their portfolios contain all the documents, information, classes, articles, etc. used during the course that can be employed in future courses.

What can be included in a teaching portfolio? In terms of the portfolio’s contents, we see three main thematic categories: documents related to our actual teaching duties, to our professional development, and to our administrative responsibilities. On the other hand, Maureen McLaughling and MaryEllen Vogt (Nunan, 227) describe five sorts of content that could be included in teaching portfolios: educational philosophy, professional development, curriculum and instruction, student growth, and contributions to schools and community.

Otherwise, it can be discussed two collaborative development approaches: peer observation and peer teaching. They are the ones that can be considered as the most useful. Julian Edge (Nunan, 10) has developed an approach to professor learning that he calls *Cooperative Development*. He says,

“I need someone to work with, but I don’t need someone who wants to change me and make me more like the way they think I ought to be. I need someone who will help me see myself clearly. To make this possible, we need a distinct style of working together so that each person’s development remains in that person’s own hands. This type of interaction will involve some new rules for speaking, for listening, and for

responding in order to cooperate in a disciplined way. This mixture of awareness-raising and disciplined cooperation is what I have called *Cooperative Development* (1992, 4).”

When conducting classroom observations, it is useful to distinguish among three related concepts: **observations, inferences,** and **opinions**.

Donald Freeman (Nunan, 167) has suggested that arrangements for observing a peer should include three components: 1- the *contract* (the specific purpose of the observation, or what the observer will be watching for); 2- the *duration* (when the observation will begin and end); and 3- the *resolution* (what the next step will be between the observer and the observee).

Peer observation is a very valuable professional development tool, particularly if it is designed to benefit the observer. In many programs, however, peer observation is used as pseudo-supervision to evaluate the professor being observed. This sort of feedback can provide useful information, but the real educational power of peer observation is found in the sheer luxury of watching someone else teach for a time and discussing the teaching afterwards. Similar to this approach, in the University of El Salvador in the Foreign Languages Department, there is a new program, not put into practice yet, in which ESL professors can take advantage of it as a tool to specialize in a specific field. For example, professors that want to work in the fields of didactics, grammar, morphology and phonology, literature, or other specialized courses, attend some classes of colleagues that have a specialization and are in charge of those courses with the purpose of having a way to specialize with the help of peers in the department.

Talking about **peer teaching,** it is worth mentioning that in El Salvador, there are some universities, like Universidad Gavidia and Universidad Pedagogica de El Salvador, where professors in the staff specialize themselves by means of their experience they get through the years and by peer-teaching because the Heads mentioned that in some periods professors prepare a training course in which they are the ones in charge of

training their co-workers. Professors are assigned some topics and they have to make a thorough examination of it and then they have to present it to their colleagues. Heads mentioned this is a good and suitable training.

The question raised is whether staff can be developed? Oldroyd calls for a replacement of the term “staff development” by the phrase “continuing professional development (CPD)” to signify the notion of career long learning as an entitlement and necessity in rapidly changing modern societies. Oldroyd explained that as individual staff and their group strive to cope with new curriculum, increasing school autonomy and changing social norms and expectations, the imperative for continuous learning grows. In this consideration, the tension between the needs of the individual and of the team and school remains a central challenge to the managers and providers of continuing professional development.

According to Human Resource Policy (HRP) of the University of Western Australia, staff development is also a commitment to optimize opportunities for all staff to improve their levels of skills and knowledge to improve the quality of workforce productivity and staff satisfaction (University of Western Australia, 2006). A definition given by the University of Sussex in its Policy statement on staff development is that which says that staff development policy of the university is to “commit itself to the development of its staff through encouraging an environment conducive to learning, and providing resources for learning in a variety of ways” (University of Sussex, 2006).

Related to the idea above, when Heads were asked if the Foreign Languages Departments should provide teacher training courses, or they have take responsibility for their own learning path toward teaching competencies, half of them said that it is the professors responsibility, and the other half points out that professors’ competencies should not be only a personal matter but also an institutional matter because the institution should guide people to study in the areas of development they see necessary

in a near future, and as a department, they have the commitment and compromise to improve and make sure that professors do really implement innovative methodologies, and that they are successful in their teaching, but it is also personal because they have to have the initiative to continue preparing themselves. Besides, all Heads said that the Foreign Languages Departments have files of each professor’s educational background, which means that they could be taken as the basis for the creation of a training program. They commented that they also ask the professors what they need to be trained on in order to reinforce that area. By having a file of each professor, they identify the weaknesses and the kind of necessities in the department.

In another contribution, Bell (2006) pointed out that The Dearing Report of 1997 emphasizes the importance of staff development in the current changing higher education landscape. According to the report, higher education institutions are highly recommended to put in place appropriate staff development strategies to support all staff and encourage involvement in the development and implementation of university-wide policies and strategies, because effective staff development is essential to support new approaches to learning and teaching, and meeting changing needs of institutions. Bell hinted that in a competitive global educational market, universities are keen to be awarded national prizes and investor in people (IIP) award through a framework of an institution-wide staff development strategy.

Following the idea above related to policies and strategies for staff development and training, the Foreign Languages Department in the University of El Salvador (UES) does not have a formal training for professors of the specialized courses. However, when professors were consulted if they consider that it is really important to receive a special kind of training before teaching these courses, eighty two percent of professors answered they think so ascribing it to a need of empowering the weak parts in their teaching. They mentioned that all this will help students to excel. The most common opinions were that this would be the ideal course of action because what happens, usually every semester, is

that professors are assigned to courses and sometimes they have to go back to study and remember specific topics related to the courses, and then, it comes the situation that next semester they are assigned to different courses and cannot give continuity to the previous one. They suggested that a continuity in the same field would give them the opportunity to specialize in a specific area but if not they have to go back to the same starting point.

Higher education institutions should recognize that their staff is their vital and valued asset. **The university should therefore, commit itself to encouraging and enabling staff to realize their potential by providing opportunities for all colleagues to gain the knowledge, skills, and experience necessary for them to enhance their contribution to meeting individual, area, and organizational objectives**. Not only that staff development should be among a clutch of institutional innovations thrust upon universities but also it is a technique or tool to increase quality, efficiency and output, and it can be associated with high quality professional performance resulting in career advancement, strategic development, and initiative to sustain change (Chukwunenye, 2007).

It cannot be said it is the same case in the Foreign Languages Department(FLD) at UES because when professors were asked the question “Did you receive a prior training before teaching the specialized course?” the majority of them (89%) said they have not received any. They explained that their prior training was their major or their career through the practice and experience gotten along the years of teaching. Some others mentioned that they are just informed about seminars, workshops, etc. given by certain institutions but it is covered from their own pocket, and only eleven percent of professors received a training course before teaching the course having their masters’ degrees as the training received by the department. It is observed that not all the staff has had the same opportunities for different and diverse reasons. However, Heads of the previously mentioned local Universities expressed that professors with trainings are

prepared in the best possible way. That is what they call “professional development,” and it should be an institutional requirement. But another aspect they said could create problems is professors’ schedules because some of them are not able to continue preparing themselves by attending trainings unless they do their own research to be updated. Moreover, Heads mentioned one thing to consider is that trainings should be formal with longer periods of time because it is not a matter of one or two weeks since it takes more time.

One can say that it is almost impossible for an individual staff member to remain in touch with the course without conscious investment in scholarship and self-tuition. Surely, institutions should recognize these changes and have a strategy for enabling each individual to confront this task. Institutional leaders should not sit back and ignore the fact that their teaching staff is providing out-of-date information in an inefficient way. Therefore, in considering any strategy for developing staff in the university as an institution must consider that its staff can play crucial roles in helping students to learn, and in enabling and facilitating environment that favours learning. On the other hand, there is something that cannot be left out, that is the professor’s willingness to receive specialized training. For example, when the professors in the FLD were interviewed if the Department has provided them with the opportunity of training in the specialized areas, eleven percent of professors said that there are opportunities for them but they have not had the time because of their schedules. So, it is obvious that this represents a relatively small group because fifty percent answered they have not had the opportunity. However, focusing on the smaller number mentioned above, another aspect that is important when preparing the teaching staff would be their readiness to learn and attend the opportunities provided. Sometimes, opportunities may be there, but there has to be the interest in getting more knowledge in the field.

We do not have to forget that a better prepared professor is a better source of good learning and sets the best environment in the teaching-learning process. Students of

the specialized courses during the semester II-2006 in the FLD (UES) consider a training course necessary for professors of specialized courses. Eighty six percent answered positively to the question. This could mean that even though most students think their professors have had the appropriate preparation to teach certain courses, this does not mean that they do not have to be updating their knowledge through other trainings. In addition to this, when students were asked “would it be a good idea that the Foreign Languages Department designed a training program for professors in charge of the specialized courses?,” ninety four percent considered it would be good for them. This agrees on the idea of most professors of the FLD since they think a training program would be a tool to improve their teaching techniques and methodologies in those areas.

One of the ways of enhancing the quality of academic staff in the university is the introduction of development and appraisal scheme for all academic staff within the university. This will allow them the opportunity to discuss their professional needs and development in research. This process provides a valuable channel of communication between staff and encourages academics to view their own contribution to the quality of university teaching (Chukwunenye, 2007). Regarding the importance of a continuous analysis of professors’ competencies and performance, the interviewed Heads (from the local universities) said that they evaluate professors by a supervision program, so if they discover there is a lack of certain skills for a specific subject, they will make the appropriate changes in order to overcome deficiencies in the teaching process. Moreover, they also agreed on having a continuous analysis of professors because it is part of their professional development, and that means they are constantly monitoring professors’ knowledge through their academic quality department, as happens at Don Bosco university, in order to demand a better performance. One of the Heads said that the most important reason to have an analysis of professors’ work is that in this way they can be assigned to the correct area and get better results.

In an attempt at broadening faculty competence, emphasis must be focused almost exclusively on helping professors master their subject matter. Peter Seldin and associates have identified four main approaches to faculty development programmes that stress teaching improvement:

 1. In-service workshops that develop specific skills.

2. Feedback that provides professor with information on students’ and colleagues’ perception of their teaching effectiveness.

3. Lectures and discussion groups devoted to broad issues of higher education.

4. Financial incentives that encourage innovative instructional practices

Wilson reports that the University of California at Berkeley (UCB) has developed an increasing fusion of student evaluation and faculty development called Personal Improvement Teaching Guide (PITG), an approach tailored to the needs of the individual faculty member. In this programme, faculty members were supplied with simple, proven, and practical suggestions that can be used to improve their teaching.

Nevertheless, all these measures already mentioned along this essay are not going to help and be useful if they are not put into practice at all. Little is being done from the University to try to support professors to grow academically. Institutional efforts are necessary to get the help and tools to set up a supporting training program that enables them to be updated in the different fields, taking into account that it has to be an institutional matter if the university main goal is to have the best teaching quality at this level. However, one of the limitations that the FLD faces is its tight budget, which creates boundaries to obtain any kind of academic improvement. It is required to provide with formal educational support to the teaching staff, but it is also important that they show the interest in getting more knowledge in the field they are working on. While

most professors try to keep updated by doing their own research with their own resources there are some professors who claim that it is not that necessary to have a training program in the Foreign Languages Department, and that they do not keep researching on new methodologies because there is not much material to teach certain courses. Then, a change of attitude also results very important from the institution and from professors. For instance, it is not part of the regular issues of the Department to advise teaching staff about specialization programs when they are available. On the contrary, they have to look for opportunities by their own with just having later on the required consent from the authorities to attend these kinds of programs. Considering as well that this contributes for professors to grow up professionally and for pupils to get better results academically since one of the students’ opinions in the questionnaire administered to them is that eighty percent said that the methodology their professors implement in the classroom in the different courses can always be improved.

The paper has shown that staff development or improving the professional competencies of academic staff must be a part of the culture of universities.  Moreover, the identification of professors’ training needs is important because it can be useful to create further changes in the institution. For this, the Foreign Language Department of the UES staff training in the use of the Internet and email facilities has to aim at making staff acquire the knowledge and skills to conduct their own Internet search for information related to research and study because the role in the use of the Internet has become important in the provision of information for both research and learning in higher education. At the same time, the University of El Salvador has to commit itself to encourage and enable staff to improve their potential by providing opportunities for all colleagues to gain the knowledge, skills, and experience necessary for them to enhance their contribution for the institution, and must incorporate staff development into budget and performance expectations by giving professors scholarships or other kind of training. Besides this, all new staff without previous teaching experience has to receive prior training and induction to teach specialized courses and to have an experienced

mentor during the early stages of their career so it would serve as a feedback for the improvement of their teaching practices. Furthermore, staff development satisfies individual learning needs to build up a new environment. The commitment to staff development and the belief in the professors’ performance evaluation and planning process is the integral part of individual and institutional development to establish future goals for career growth.

It has also been found from the research that improving or rather enhancing the professional competencies of academic staff of the university is of crucial importance, as a way of keeping staff current in their respective fields not only by opportunities provided by universities but also by making use of their own educational resources. Development and training needs to prepare staff to acquire new knowledge and skills to play new roles in order to have better teaching which will also make staff grow and be judged in the context of organizational learning and development.

As Foreign Universities are giving continuous training to their staff, University of El Salvador must be committed to ongoing staff preparation because the highly specialized academic background education that professors in charge of specialized courses in the Foreign Languages Departments have contributes to a better and effective way to teach in those areas since staff development as part of institutional innovations encourages the university in managing the professional competencies of its academic staff.