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Teachers' Perceptions of Their Professional Development and the Design of Continuing Education Programs in ELT

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Abstract

This study examines the perceptions and expectations of English Department faculty at the Universidad de Oriente regarding their professional development and willingness to engage in a continuing education program. Adopting a qualitative, exploratory approach, the research employed multiple instruments, including a questionnaire, a needs analysis, a SMART goals form, and semi-structured interviews with 19 teachers. The findings reveal a strong commitment to continuous improvement and a pronounced interest in obtaining international certifications in TESOL. Participants expressed preferences for virtual courses and face-to-face workshops, emphasizing the value of collaborative work and the integration of technological tools in teaching. Key barriers identified include limited institutional time and resources. The study offers practical insights for the design of contextualized, relevant, and sustainable teacher training programs aligned with institutional strategies and international standards.

Keywords: Professional Development; Teacher Training; TESOL; Educational Technology; Higher Education

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INTRODUCTION

In the context of higher education in El Salvador, institutions face the constant challenge of ensuring that their teachers remain updated and aligned with contemporary pedagogical demands. At the Universidad de Oriente (UNIVO), the English Department has demonstrated a solid academic offer and links with the professional environment. However, this dynamism has not been accompanied by a systematic strategy of continuous training for its teaching staff. To date, updating efforts have been fragmented, based on personal initiatives or specific activities, without an institutional structure that reflects, interprets and responds to the real training needs of the teaching staff. This situation creates gaps between the competencies required for innovative English teaching and the real resources available to teachers to update their pedagogical practice.

Against this background, it becomes necessary to understand how teachers perceive their own professional development, what they expect from a training program, and what barriers they face in participating in these initiatives. The general objective of this research is to explore the perceptions and expectations of teachers of the English Department of the Universidad de Oriente regarding their professional development and the proposal of a continuing education program. Based on this, the following research questions are posed: What are the teachers' perceptions of their own training needs? What characteristics do they consider relevant for an effective professional development program? What obstacles and facilitating factors do they identify in their environment to participate in these programs?

Various research in the field of teaching English as a foreign language has highlighted the importance of continuous training in teacher professional development as confirmed by (Loaiza-Aguirre & Andrade-Abarca, 2021) where it mentions that "training in new professional competencies, technological skills, critical reasoning, teamwork, communication and socioemotional competencies is essential for teacher development." (p.164)

According to (Mendieta Toledo et al., 2021) "the professional and continuous training of the English teacher is key to educational success. The requirements of societies are constantly changing, there is an endless dialectic, in terms of English language learning." (p. 986)

Nevertheless, despite the progressive interest in continuing education on the part of English teachers, there remains a significant gap in Salvadoran educational research. Most studies have focused on school contexts, but not on higher education institutions such as the Universidad de Oriente.

Thus, there are recognized international frameworks such as the British Council's CPD; however, their concrete application, relevance and alignment with teaching needs in local contexts have not yet been sufficiently explored. This knowledge gap restricts the possibility of designing contextualized, effective and sustainable professional development programs. Therefore, the present study proposes to explore the perceptions of teachers in the English Department at UNIVO regarding their professional development and their readiness for a continuing education program.

In his work (Moreno, 2021) highlights that "university teachers must be open to change, with a transformative teaching vision, which leads to improving their own reputation and that of their institution where they work." Regarding continuing education, she considers that, "continuing education is a tool that promotes people to be concerned about remaining prepared and seeking professional development to improve their competitiveness in the workplace and/or workplace." (p. 117)

According to (Mata Marroquín & García González, 2022) it is highlighted in their study that:

The development of communicative competence in the formation of English professionals with the sole purpose of adopting, executing, socializing and promoting high-level methodological strategies that raise the academic quality of this process and contribute to form competent students. (p. 121).

Additionally, it emphasizes another valuable element to take into consideration in the continuous training of English teachers, highlighting "the relevance of neuroscience in the teaching-learning process, including emotional and cognitive aspects" (p. 121). This can support the inclusion of neuro-educational approaches in continuing education programs.

Conceptual framework on teacher professional development (TPD).

As outlined by (Arceo & Canto Herrera, 2021) as cited in Peralvo et al., 2017, "teacher professional development is understood as a dynamic process that demands

innovation, not only in social planning and institutional management, but in all procedures of the educational system. This process includes reflection, improvement and professional and personal improvement of the teacher." (p. 233)

Another relevant contribution is that of (Loayza-Maturrano, 2021) who outlines that "traditional approaches to teacher professional development focused on the transmission of specific knowledge and skills, while contemporary approaches seek to develop broader competencies, such as innovation, critical thinking, digital literacy and global connectedness." (p. 181).

Models of continuing education in ELT.

In their study (Arán Sánchez et al., 2022) accentuates that "teaching practice in English language teaching is a process under constant construction, and that initial training is often insufficient, highlighting the need for continuous training to update pedagogical practices and language skills." (p. 2 and 8). This may support teachers' perceptions about the importance of continuous training to improve their practice.

Teachers' perceptions of PDD.

According to (Diaz Soto et al., 2025) "research has provided substantial evidence on the positive valuation of these programs by teachers, as well as on the significant impact they have on improving pedagogical practices and professional development." (p. 15).

Role of technology and hybrid training.

In his study (Cedeño Sempértegui et al., 2023) examines that:

Hybrid education (blended learning) allows adapting the pace and style of learning to individual needs, offering a more personalized and effective experience. This is especially useful in continuing education programs, where teachers can combine face-to-face and online modalities according to their preferences and availability. (p. 115).

In addition, the study notes that, "by participating in virtual modalities, teachers develop technological competencies and self-management skills, essential for their professional growth and to meet the challenges of modern teaching." (p. 116)

However, according to (García Macías et al., 2025) "teachers identify critical obstacles such as limited connectivity, lack of technological devices among some students which generates a digital divide, and the additional time required to plan effective digital activities." (p. 340).

International frameworks of reference.

In the words of (Battle Rodrìguez et al., 2020) it is pointed out that:

The importance of CPD and the need for its implementation at all levels of teacher education have led several institutions to develop reference documents that aim to promote CPD processes among the community of foreign language teachers, in different contexts and situations of teacher training and development. (p. 221).

They also state that "in the context of CPD in foreign language teacher education, innovation and transnational collaboration are central aspects from which continuing education should be developed."

This exploratory research seeks to understand the teachers' perspective on their professional development, recognizing their needs and expectations. The findings will allow us to lay the foundations for designing future continuing education programs that respond in a pertinent manner to their context and realities. At this stage, the aim is not to intervene or evaluate changes, but to explore the phenomenon for future institutional actions. This approach recognizes teachers as active agents in the construction of their professional development and continuous training as a process that should arise from listening and evidence. The small sample size and the lack of statistical validation of the ad hoc instruments are recognized as limitations. Future studies could apply mixed methodologies and extend the sample to other universities.

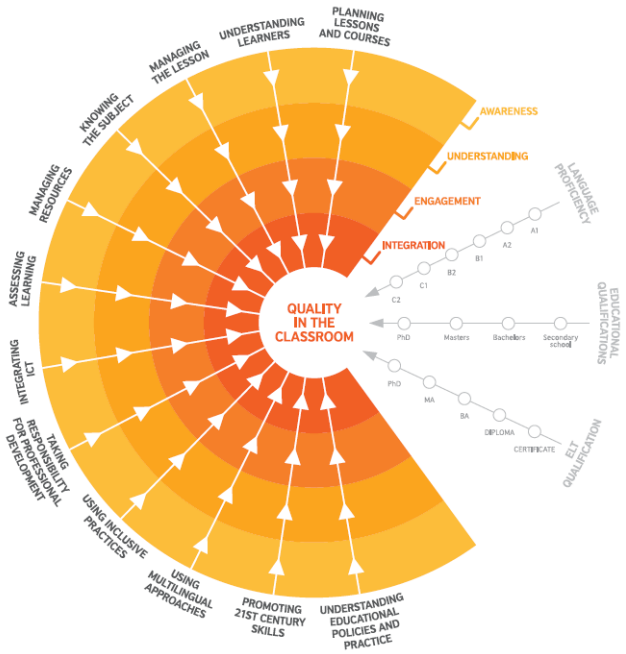


Figure 1: The Continuing Professional Development Framework of the British Council

METHODS

This study is framed under a qualitative approach with an exploratory character. It sought to understand the perceptions and expectations of the teachers of the English Department of the Universidad de Oriente regarding their professional development.

The participant population consisted of 19 active teachers of the English Department. Three main instruments were applied: a questionnaire, a needs analysis instrument and a Smart goals form. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 3 teachers to deepen the answers obtained. To guarantee the validity of the research process, methodological triangulation was applied through the use of the various instruments. This strategy allowed contrasting and enriching the understanding of teachers' perceptions from different angles, favoring the correlation of results and increasing the credibility of the findings. The research was carried out respecting established ethical principles, with informed consent by each teacher, guaranteeing anonymity and confidentiality of the data.

Table 1 Thematic coding integrating interviews and teacher questionnaire.

Code	Thematic category	Textual fragment and/or key finding	Source	Interpretation
INTE-CERT	Interest in international certifications	79% of the teachers expressed interest in certifications such as CELTA, DELTA or TESOL.	Questionnaire	There is a strong orientation towards professionalization through internationally recognized credentials.
BARR-TIEM	Structural barriers	"Lack of time to look for new methodologies." 15 out of 19 teachers mentioned lack of time as the main obstacle.	Interview + questionnaire	Time represents the most significant barrier to participating in formative processes.
TEC-USO	Use of educational technologies	"The diversity of(technological) resources and strategies that I use..." 94% use LMS platforms or resources such as Kahoot or Quizlet.	Interview + questionnaire	High technological adoption, although its use tends to be mainly instrumental
PRAC-REFLE	Reflective practice	"Reflective teaching, peer assessment..." most reflect daily or weekly on their practice.	Interview + questionnaire	Reflection is presented as a consolidated practice, reflecting commitment to continuous improvement.
MENTO-INTER	Interest in peer mentoring	"Peer evaluation"; 12 out of 19 teachers are	Interview + questionnaire	There is an emerging culture of teacher

Code	Thematic category	Textual fragment and/or key finding	Source	Interpretation
		open to participate as mentors or mentees.		collaboration that can be strengthened institutionally.
NECE-FORM	Training needs	"How the brain works..."; interest in neuroeducation, task-based learning, motivational strategies.	Interview + questionnaire	Training needs identified include current and student-centered pedagogical approaches.
DESAL-INSTI	Institutional misalignment.	"I'm not sure" (interviewee about alignment with institutional continuing education strategy); perceived disconnect between individual and institutional goals.	Interview	Weak connection between teacher development and institutional goals identified.
MODA-VIRT	Preferred modalities.	"Online courses are the preferred ones...": 16 out of 19 teachers prefer the virtual modality.	Interview + questionnaire	The flexibility and accessibility provided by virtual modalities are valued.
DEBI-PLAN	Weaknesses in planning and feedback	"I find it difficult to provide in-depth and individual feedback"; difficulties in time management and planning.	Interview + questionnaire	Structured accompaniment is required in operational aspects of teaching practice.
BIEN-ESTU	Student welfare approach	Helping students improve their mental and physical well-being "; interest in personalized and motivational strategies.	Interview + questionnaire	A holistic and humanistic view of the teaching role is evident.

The research was carried out respecting established ethical principles, with informed consent by each teacher, guaranteeing anonymity and confidentiality of the data.

RESULTS

The data analysis was organized using an inductive approach based on thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) , from the applied instruments: questionnaire, SMART goals form AND teaching needs analysis. The coding process was based on emerging semantic categories that dialogue with the theoretical frameworks on teacher professional development and continuing education.

In total, 15 categories of analysis were defined, which were organized around four main thematic axes: teacher motivations, institutional barriers, methodological preferences and conditions for the design of a continuing education program.

Interest and disposition towards training.

One of the most notable findings was the high degree of interest in international certifications in the area of TEFL , CELTA or DELTA, evidenced by 79% of the teachers (**Table 2**). This result reveals a clear orientation towards strengthening the professional profile of teachers and an openness to international quality standards.

Table 2 : Teachers' interest in international certifications.

Level of interest	Number of teachers interested
Very interested	15
Somewhat interested	4
Little or not at all interested	0

This interest is articulated with the SMART goals, in which multiple purposes were identified related to the implementation of innovative methodologies, the use of AI in the classroom and the strengthening of students' communication skills. The formulation of these goals reflected a high commitment to continuous improvement, although some objectives lacked clear indicators for impact evaluation.

Structural barriers and environmental conditions.

Despite the enthusiasm expressed, teachers face significant structural barriers that limit their participation in formative processes. Lack of time and limited access to institutional resources were the most frequently mentioned (**Table 3**)

Table 3: Main barriers to participation in continuing training

Barrier Identified	Number of teachers
Lack of time	15
Limited access to resources	7
Lack of motivation	2

These data reflect a reality that highlights the need to provide natural and symbolic conditions that promote teacher training as a structural part of a work culture and institutional growth.

Pedagogical reflection, mentoring and collaboration.

Another emerging aspect was the high frequency of reflection on teaching practice, with the majority of participants indicating that they reflect daily or weekly. In addition, a positive disposition towards peer mentoring programs was identified, especially when they are designed according to the local context and with sustained accompaniment (see**Table1** and

Table 4: Level of openness to peer mentoring).

Table1: Frequency of reflection on teaching practice

Frequency	Number of teachers
Daily	10
Weekly	8
Monthly	1
Rarely	0

Table 4: Level of openness to peer mentoring

Willingness	**Number of teachers**
Yes, as a mentor	3
Yes, as a mentee	9
Depends on program	7
No	0

Institutional alignment and training needs.

Teachers recognize the need to align their professional development with institutional standards, as well as with the needs of their students. In this line, they highlighted topics of interest such as *task-based learning*, curriculum design and student motivation as specific training areas (**Table 5)**

Additionally, the teaching strengths expressed, such as commitment, creativity and adaptability, contrast with weaknesses related to curricular planning and time management, which suggests that any training program should include support and structured planning, not only of technical content.

Table 5: Priority areas for professional development according to the CPD framework

Category	Number of teachers
Integration of 20th century skills I	8
Classroom management	6

Category	Number of teachers
Lesson Planning	5
Inclusive practices	0

The findings of this research reflect a significant affinity between teachers' perceptions of their professional development and the key areas of the British Council's Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Framework (**Figure 1**) Such training allows not only to understand training priorities, but also to guide future institutional actions.

Analysis of interview data

As part of the qualitative approach, individual interviews were conducted with three teachers from the English Department at UNIVO. They will be identified as participant 1, participant 2 and participant 3 to respect the anonymity of the study. The objective was to deepen their perceptions about professional development and their disposition towards continuing education programs. The responses were analyzed by thematic coding and triangulation of the findings obtained in the questionnaires applied.

On the meaning of professional development.

The three interviewees expressed an integral formative approach in their vision of professional development. Interviewee 1 highlighted the desire to improve not only the English level of his students, but also their emotional well-being...:

"I would like to help students improve their English level, as well as their physical and mental well-being."

Alluding to the development of soft skills and positive attitudes in the classroom. This position coincides with current trends that conceive teacher professional development as a process that articulates academic, emotional and ethical dimensions.

Interviewee 2, for his part, emphasized the power of example and reflective learning by saying:

"I consider it very important to conduct microteaching sessions, reflective teaching, and peer self-assessments and evaluations."

Interviewee 3, on the other hand, expresses a professional orientation very focused on continuous improvement and impact on learning.

"I consider that acquiring specific teaching methodologies that influence the learning process of students is a must."

On self-reported strengths and weaknesses.

Regarding strengths, interviewee 2 highlights:

"*Some of my strengths are the relationship I establish with my students, the diversity of sources and strategies I use in class, and my commitment to teaching."*

However, he also notes a relevant weakness:

"I find it difficult to provide detailed feedback to all students on all the activities they do in my class."

Interviewee 3 offers a summary of his teaching style:

"Enthusiastic and open-minded about learning."

And as a personal weakness he notes:

"Lack of time to look for new methodologies."

The testimonies coincide in pointing to lack of time as a central barrier. This reinforces the quantitative findings (**Table 3**), and highlights that individual commitment is not always accompanied by favorable structural conditions.

On teachers' training interests.

Regarding continuing education interests, interviewee 2 indicated:

"How to differentiate instructions and activities according to students' needs and learning styles."

Interviewee 1 shared:

"I am curious about how the brain works and how that affects learning."

Interviewee 3 mentioned:

"Efficient interactive teaching-learning methodologies."

These areas of interest coincide with what was reported in the general questionnaires and align with approaches such as *task-based learning*, neuroeducation, and the use of technologies.

The interviews reveal a teaching staff with high commitment, reflective awareness and critical vision of their role. Their literal expressions allow us to observe that the training needs they prioritize coincide with the central dimensions of the British Council's CPD framework.

It is also clear that the weaknesses do not lie in the personal disposition, but in the institutional environment: lack of time, isolated planning, absence of mentoring. Por tanto, los hallazgos cualitativos respaldan el diseño de propuestas de formación continua basadas en acompañamientos, accesibilidad y pertinencia contextual.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this research allow us to establish a discussion on the situation of teacher professional development in the context of higher education in El Salvador, specifically in the English Department of the Universidad de Oriente (UNIVO). This discussion is nourished both by the empirical evidence obtained and by the international frameworks on continuing education for English language teachers.

The emphasis of the discussion is to interpret objectively the findings from the three research questions: (1) What are the teachers' perceptions of their own training needs? (2) What characteristics do they consider relevant for an effective professional development program? (3) What characteristics and facilitating factors do they identify in their environment for participating in these programs?

First, the results show that teachers in the Department of English at UNIVO perceive their professional development as a constant need, related to the improvement of pedagogical practice, the mastery of innovative methodologies and linguistic updating. The strong interest in international certifications such as CELTA or TESOL also reflects the search for validation under international quality standards.

Regarding the desirable characteristics of a training program, teachers value virtual modalities, collaborative work, mentoring and contextual relevance. In the case of UNIVO, these practices can be key to overcoming structural limitations and promoting an institutional culture of continuing education.

On the other hand, teachers also identify important barriers, such as lack of time, administrative burden and scarcity of resources. These conditions, which are not exclusive to UNIVO but common in many universities in El Salvador, limit participation in training processes. In this sense, teachers' familiarity with tools such as LMS, mobile applications and multimedia resources constitute a key opportunity to implement flexible and accessible programs.

In addition, the results indicate that teachers value peer mentoring, self-assessment and teacher reflection as essential elements of their professional growth. This is consistent with the British Council's CPD framework, which emphasizes the importance of critical reflection and collaborative knowledge management. However, the low recognition of professional practices in international frameworks on the subject suggests the formative gap that must be addressed from a strategic planning by the institution.

Finally, the alignment between teaching needs and the dimensions of the CPD framework validates the usefulness of this approach as a guide for the design of institutional programs. Elements such as classroom management, lesson planning, authentic assessment and the pedagogical use of technology emerge as priorities. Therefore, universities such as UNIVO have the opportunity to lead contextualized, sustainable and transformative continuing education proposals, recognizing teachers not only as beneficiaries, but also as active and relevant agents of their institutional mission.

Table 6: Linking components of professional practices according to the CPD framework.

Category	
Lesson and course planning	Participants show that lesson planning is one of the priority areas (see **Table 3**), which is directly linked to this domain. Also, teachers report a medium need to improve their curriculum planning and time management, revealing critical awareness of the need to structure more effective lessons.
Student understanding	Although aspects of learning styles or individual differences in learning are not directly addressed, the inclusion of topics such as neuroeducation and motivational and personalization strategies (see **Table 4**) reflects a growing interest in understanding how their students learn, which aligns with this component of the framework.
Lesson management	Classroom management was selected as one of the priority areas of professional development (**Table 5:** Priority areas for professional development according to the CPD framework). In addition, weaknesses such as time management (**Table 5**) indicate specific challenges in this area. These findings reflect a key formative need in terms of control, organization and classroom dynamics.
Subject knowledge	In terms of language proficiency, 93% of teachers report a high level of English language proficiency (**Table 9**), which represents a significant strength in this area. However, writing (8) and speaking (7) skills are perceived as more difficult to teach (**Table 10**), which may be related to the methodological approach rather than to language proficiency. Additionally, the interest in approaches such as *task-based learning* and active methodologies such as Inverted Classroom (**Table 4**) suggests a proactive attitude to update their knowledge and teaching practice.
Resource management	The use of LMS, multimedia resources and educational applications (**Table 8**) demonstrates effective management of technological resources. However, training is required for their effective integration in the classroom.

Category	
Evaluation of learning	The data reflect a varied assessment practice: projects, rubrics and formative assessment (**Table 6**). However, the sustained use of traditional tests (10) suggests that teachers are still moving towards more authentic models of assessment, as proposed by the CPD framework.
ICT integration	One of the most outstanding aspects is the intensive use of digital tools: LMS (18), multimedia resources (16) and educational applications (14) (**Table 8**). However, a high need to improve the pedagogical use of technology is identified (**Table 3**) and a weakness in this area, indicating that integration is more instrumental than strategic. This aligns with the CPD on the axis of a reflective and effective integration of ICT.
Professional development	Teachers express a high interest in continuing education (**Table 2**), opting for flexible and accessible modalities such as online courses (**Error! Reference source not found.**)
Inclusive practices	Although this category was not prioritized by teachers (**Table 5:** Priority areas for professional development according to the CPD framework) Inclusive practices with value 0), the CPD framework highlights its importance. This finding suggests that inclusion could be an emerging training area that requires greater visibility in future institutional strategies.
Multilingual approaches	The multilingual practices axis was not considered in the study. This is due to the fact that the context is relatively homogeneous linguistically.
21st century skills	The category of Integrating 21st century skills was prioritized by 8 teachers (**Table 5:** Priority areas for professional development according to the CPD framework), placing it as the most prominent area of development within the CPD framework. This evidences an understanding of the teacher's role as a promoter of competencies such as critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and communication.

Table 2: Preferences on teacher training modalities.

Category	Number of teachers
Online course	16
Face-to-face workshops	11
Seminars or conferences	10

Table 3: Training needs identified by teachers.

Category	Value
Improve the use of educational technology	High
Learn new active methodologies	High
Design innovative didactic materials	Medium
Improve curriculum planning and time management	Medium
Accessing peer mentoring and collaboration	Average

Table 4: Contents of interest for future training

Category	Number of teachers

Category	Number of teachers
Task-based learning and flipped classroom	12
Neuro-education applied to English Language Teaching	9
Curriculum design	7
Motivation and personalization strategies	6
Use of artificial intelligence	5

Table 5: Common strengths and weaknesses identified by teachers

Category	Comment
Strength	Dynamic activities, commitment, patience, communication.
Weaknesses	Time management, planning, use of technology.

Table 6: Evaluation strategies used by teachers

Category	Number of teachers
Project and homework	16
Formative evaluation	12
Traditional written tests	10
Rubrics and specific criteria	12

Table 7: Teaching practices for feedback on performance

Category	Number of teachers
Self-evaluation	9
Peer feedback	2
Only when required	7
Does not evaluate	1

Table 8: Technological tools used most frequently

Category	Number of teachers
LMS (Moodle, Canvas)	18
Multimedia resource	16
Language applications	14

Table 9*:* Level of English proficiency according to CEFR

Category	Number of teachers
C2 (Proficient user)	4
C1 (Advanced)	14
B2 (Upper intermediate)	2
B1 or lower	0

Table 10: Most challenging language skills to teach

Category	Number of teachers
Writing	8

Category	Number of teachers
Speaking	7
Listening comprehension	4
Reading comprehension	0

CONCLUSION

This study has analyzed the teachers' perception of their professional development and the design of continuing education programs in English language teaching. The results of this research allow us to conclude that the teachers of the UNIVO English Department manifest a clear disposition towards their professional development, motivated by the desire to improve their teaching practice, adopt active methodologies and achieve internationally recognized certifications in the field of teaching English as a foreign language.

Despite this motivation, teachers face persistent structural barriers, such as lack of time, limited institutional resources, and limited integration of professional development into a formal academic policy of the institution.

Professional development should be articulated within international theoretical frameworks, such as the British Council's CPD framework, but adjusted to the local reality. In this sense, teachers demand training programs that are flexible, accessible, contextualized, technologically integrated and sustained over time.

Likewise, factors such as peer mentoring, institutional support and the creation of professional learning communities stand out. These strategies can contribute to strengthening a training culture that promotes innovation, pedagogical reflection and collaborative learning.

Finally, it is recognized that the role of universities, such as UNIVO, is fundamental to lead sustainable formative transformations. This implies designing and implementing institutional policies that recognize professional development as a strategic axis to improve educational quality and respond to the contemporary demands of English language teaching in local, national and international contexts.

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