

PRE-SERVICE TEACHER MENTORS' PERCEPTIONS REGARDING THEIR ROLE AND PREPARATION FOR MENTORING IN CHILE

PERCEPCIONES DE ASESORES DE DOCENTES EN FORMACIÓN SOBRE SU TAREA Y SU PREPARACIÓN PARA EL ACOMPAÑAMIENTO EN CHILE

PERCEPTIONS DES INSTRUCTEURS POUR ENSEIGNANTS EN FORMATION SUR LEUR RÔLE ET LEUR PRÉPARATION À L'EXERCICE DU MENTORAT AU CHILI

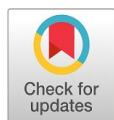
PERCEPÇÕES DOS SUPERVISORES DE ESTÁGIO DOCENTE EM FORMAÇÃO INICIAL SOBRE O SEU PAPEL E A PREPARAÇÃO PARA A ORIENTAÇÃO, NO CHILE

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ABSTRACT

The study of pedagogical internships has gained greater importance over the last decades around the world. In Chile, many researchers have been attempting to delve deeper into this reality; however, little is known about the experiences of pre-service teacher mentors when tutoring pre-service teachers of English pedagogy. Following the qualitative paradigm, this exploratory descriptive study aims to investigate the perspectives and expectations of pre-service teacher mentors' regarding their key roles as mentors in initial training. Seven English teachers with experience as mentor teachers were interviewed. One group interview and four individual interviews were conducted with English teachers working with pre-service teachers in their practicums. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the data. Issues related to the multiple roles of mentor teachers were discussed, as well as the relationship they construct with their students, the university, and the school where practicums are carried out. The main findings of this study suggest that pre-service teacher mentors expected clear guidelines from universities and the government to better guide future teachers. Moreover, they expected to be more involved in training pre-service teachers to contribute to their classrooms. Implications shed light on the need for incorporating the voices of pre-service teachers' mentors in future research studies concerning pedagogical practicums in ELT in Chile.

Keywords: pre-service teachers' mentors, pedagogical internships, initial teaching training, ELT, teacher mentors' expectations and experiences

RESUMEN

El estudio de las prácticas pedagógicas ha cobrado gran importancia a nivel mundial en las últimas décadas. En Chile, muchos investigadores han intentado profundizar en esta realidad; sin embargo, poco se sabe acerca de las experiencias

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de los asesores de práctica cuando orientan a profesores en formación de pedagogía en inglés. Siguiendo el paradigma cualitativo, este estudio exploratorio descriptivo pretende indagar en las perspectivas y expectativas que tienen los asesores de docentes en formación respecto de sus roles claves como asesores en la formación inicial. Se entrevistó a siete profesores de inglés con experiencia como asesores. Se realizaron una entrevista en grupo y cuatro entrevistas individuales a profesores de inglés a cargo de los futuros profesores en prácticas. Se empleó un análisis temático para analizar los datos. Se debatieron cuestiones relacionadas con las múltiples funciones de los asesores de práctica, así como la relación que establecen con sus estudiantes, la universidad y los centros educativos donde desempeñan las prácticas. Las principales conclusiones de este estudio sugieren que los asesores de docentes en formación esperaban directrices claras de las universidades y el gobierno para orientar mejor a los futuros profesores. Además, esperaban implicarse más en la formación de los docentes en prácticas para contribuir a sus aulas. Las implicaciones arrojan luz sobre la necesidad de incorporar las voces de los asesores de práctica de los docentes en formación en futuros estudios de investigación relativos a las prácticas pedagógicas en ELT en Chile.

Palabras clave: asesores de práctica, prácticas pedagógicas, formación inicial del profesorado, ELT, expectativas y experiencias

RÉSUMÉ

L'étude des stages pédagogiques a globalement gagné en importance au cours des dernières décennies. Au Chili, de nombreux chercheurs ont tenté d'approfondir cette réalité ; cependant, on sait peu de choses sur les expériences des instructeurs d'enseignants en formation lorsqu'ils encadrent des enseignants en formation de pédagogie de l'anglais. Suivant le paradigme qualitatif, cette étude descriptive exploratoire vise à étudier les perspectives et les attentes des instructeurs d'enseignants en formation initiale en ce qui concerne leurs rôles clés en tant qu'instructeurs dans le cadre de la formation initiale. Sept professeurs d'anglais ayant une expérience de tutorat ont été interrogés. Un entretien de groupe et quatre entretiens individuels ont été menés avec des professeurs d'anglais travaillant avec des enseignants en formation initiale dans le cadre de leurs stages. Une analyse thématique a été utilisée pour analyser les données. Les questions liées aux multiples rôles des instructeurs ont été discutées, ainsi que les relations qu'ils établissent avec leurs étudiants, l'université et l'école où les stages sont développés. Les principales conclusions de cette étude suggèrent que les instructeurs d'enseignants en formation attendaient des directives claires de la part des universités et du gouvernement afin de mieux guider les futurs enseignants. En outre, ils attendaient d'être davantage impliqués dans la préparation des enseignants en formation pour qu'ils puissent apporter leur contribution dans leurs salles de classe. Les implications mettent en lumière la nécessité d'intégrer la voix des instructeurs d'enseignants en formation dans les futures études de recherche concernant les stages pédagogiques en ELT au Chili.

Mots clef : instructeurs des enseignants en formation initiale, stages pédagogiques, formation initiale à l'enseignement, ELT, attentes et expériences

RESUMO

O estudo do estágio docente ganhou grande importância globalmente nas últimas décadas. No Chile, muitos pesquisadores têm tentado se aprofundar nessa realidade; no entanto, pouco se sabe sobre as experiências dos supervisores de

estágio docente quando orientam professores de inglês em formação. Seguindo o paradigma qualitativo, este estudo descritivo exploratório tem como objetivo investigar as perspectivas e expectativas dos supervisores de estágio com relação às suas principais funções como orientadores na formação inicial. Foram entrevistados sete professores de inglês que têm experiência como supervisores de estágio. Uma entrevista em grupo e quatro entrevistas individuais foram realizadas com professores de inglês que trabalham com professores em formação em seus estágios. A análise temática foi empregada para analisar os dados. Foram discutidas questões relacionadas às múltiplas funções dos supervisores de estágio, bem como o relacionamento que eles constroem com seus alunos, a universidade e escola do estágio. As principais conclusões deste estudo sugerem que os supervisores de estágio esperavam diretrizes claras das universidades e do governo para orientar melhor os futuros professores. Além disso, eles esperavam estar mais envolvidos formação docente inicial para contribuir com suas salas de aula. As implicações lançam luz sobre a necessidade de incorporar as vozes dos supervisores de estágio em futuras pesquisas sobre práticas pedagógicas em ELT no Chile.

Palavras chave: supervisores de estágio, estágios pedagógicos, formação inicial de professores, ELT, expectativas e experiências

Introduction

Within the context of initial teacher training, the relationship between pre-service teachers and pre-service teachers' mentors during pedagogical practicums plays a pivotal role in shaping the formers' formative experience, as they are tasked with "facilitating a real experience in the educational field" (Romero & Maturana, 2012, p. 657). However, pre-service teachers' mentors often express concerns about the scarcity of information, preparation, and tools provided by universities to adequately meet the expectations associated with pedagogical practicums (Hirmas Ready, 2014; Baeza, 2010).

Hence, addressing these concerns is essential to ensure that future educators receive the necessary support and resources for successful pedagogical practicums. Furthermore, the lack of institutionalization of the pre-service teachers' mentor role and the challenges associated with defining specific tasks and concrete goals often result in the invisibility of their formative work (Tapia et al., 2016). International studies conducted by OCDE (2005, 2018) have consistently emphasized the need to improve the quality of education for teachers globally. This has direct implications for policymaking regarding student teachers training.

In Chilean teacher education, research primarily focuses on professional practicums, assessing efficacy, uncovering challenges, and exploring student perspectives (Cornejo, 2014; Díaz & Bastías, 2012; Jofré & Gairín, 2009; Labra, 2011; Latorre, 2009; Montecinos et al., 2011). This local focus aligns with the global push for higher teaching standards and policy-informing research; yet there's a dearth of exploration into pre-service teachers' mentor experiences and perceptions within Chilean practicum centers, in English language education. Understanding these perspectives is crucial for shaping effective training policies in teacher education programs.

To address this research gap, the current study aims to explore the experiences of these crucial actors by attempting to answer the following

research question: What are the perceptions of English pre-service teachers' mentors regarding their role and expectations in pedagogical practicums in initial teacher education processes?

The main objective of this study is to explore the perceptions of English pre-service teachers' mentors in initial teacher training processes. The specific objectives of this research are threefold: first, to examine the perception of pre-service teachers' mentors of their role; second, to describe the type of preparation they have received; and third, to investigate their expectations regarding their role in initial teacher education processes, focusing on their relationships with students, the university, and the school.

Theoretical Framework

In the following sections, we will discuss previous studies conducted in the field of pre-service teachers' practicums and the role of pre-service teachers in Chile.

The Significance of Pedagogical Practicums in Chile

The study of initial teacher training processes has gained great importance during the last decades (Sanjurjo, 2012; Zeichner, 2010). Quality education is crucial for a country's development, and there is a link between teacher training quality and students' classroom education (Ávalos, 2011; Villa & Brunfaut, 2023). For future teachers, pedagogical practicums usually represent one of the most important aspects in initial teacher training (Rajuan et al., 2008; Tang, 2003) because they allow "the gradual approach of students to professional environments and, at the same time, they facilitate the construction and internalization of the teaching role" (Ávalos, 2002, p. 108) whilst contributing to the development of future teachers (Palacios & Reedy, 2022).

Indeed, pedagogical practicums do not only represent the implementation of what has been learned at university (Bailey, 2009; Barahona, 2015, p. 41)

but also appear as a fundamental element in the development of competence, identity, and professional experience of teachers in training (Boz & Boz, 2006; Hirmas Ready, 2014; Mattsson et al., 2011; Yan & He, 2010). Therefore, classroom and school community experiences have been understood as a key step in mediating the transition from student to teacher (Barahona, 2015; Gao & Benson, 2012; Moraru & Ríos, 2019). These immersive experiences not only solidify theoretical knowledge but also hone practical skills, preparing educators for the multifaceted challenges of their profession and ensuring their readiness for the educational landscape ahead.

Initial Teacher Training Across Latin America

Great disparities exist not only on a global scale and within Chile but also across the Latin American region (Palacios & Reedy, 2022; Soto & Díaz, 2018). Studies conducted in Brazil, Chile, Colombia (Archanjo et al. 2019; Palacios & Reedy, 2022), and Argentina (García & Pico, 2017) underscore the urgent need for continued exploration in this field. Vaillant's study (2013) explores challenges in teacher training, highlighting a gap between standardized test results and education quality, evidenced in tests for in-service and pre-service teachers in Chile. Additionally, universities face scrutiny for their disconnection from school contexts, contributing to low test results and inadequate teacher training in the Latin American region.

Pedagogical Practicums in Chile

According to a report by the Program for the Improvement of Quality and Equity in Tertiary Education (Microdata Center, 2017), one of the challenges in higher education in Chile in terms of the quality of initial teacher education goes into creating practicums that are "more rigorous and effective" (p. 7). That is to say, following Contreras et al. (2010), it would be necessary to conduct research on pedagogical practicums that addresses the roles of all the agents involved, their

practices, reflections, and the conditions in which these practicums are carried out to be able to analyze and rethink their development in pedagogical careers.

Although such studies may be crucial for teacher training, research on pedagogical practicums in Chile is scarce. According to a study conducted by Cisternas (2011), where he reviews research studies on education in Chile between 1996 and 2007, only 10% of such research focuses on pedagogical practicums; and the current situation is not far from that panorama. Most of the studies referring to practicums are devoted to senior-teacher-student internships, either identifying the effectiveness of such practices (Báez et al., 2015; Cornejo, 2014), supervising mentor teachers (see Cornejo, 2014; Díaz & Bastías, 2012; Jofré & Gairín, 2009; Labra, 2011; Latorre, 2009; Montecinos, Barrios & Tapia, 2011) or exhibiting the tensions and challenges of such final practicums (Gorichon et al., 2015; Hirmas & Cortés, 2015; Montecinos & Walker, 2010).

Despite this, in accordance with Hirmas and Cortés (2015), research after 2010 does not only cover professional practicums but also earlier ones in areas such as the connection between theory and practice (Montecinos, Walker, Rittershausen, Nuñez, Contreras & Solís, 2011), the forms of accompaniment in practicums (Solís et al., 2011), or the reflection and perception of students (Rittershausen et al., 2004; Tagle et al., 2012; Williamson et al., 2015). In light of the limited research available on pedagogical practicums in Chile, there exists a significant research gap waiting to be explored.

The Role of Pre-Service Teacher Mentors

The relationship between prospective and mentor teachers significantly shapes the formative experience pivotal in providing authentic educational exposure (Romero & Maturana, 2012, p. 657). Nonetheless, experienced school-based teachers might not always effectively collaborate (Romero & Maturana, 2012, p. 657). Baeza's study (2010,

pp. 90-101) outlines two polarized dynamics in this relationship: (1) over-delegation, assigning tasks beyond the practicum's scope, and (2) over-structuring, constraining the preservice teacher's autonomy beyond the practicum's scope. Both extremes cause tensions, leading preservice teachers to feel that their work lacks validation, diminishing its value (Hirmas Ready, 2014). Consequently, they perceive insufficient commitment from mentor teachers towards their training (Labra, 2011). Moreover, Romero and Maturana (2012) note that even though mentor teachers offer workspaces, they lack involvement in trainees' learning processes. The essence lies in students' preference for classroom autonomy coupled with mentor teachers' support and feedback (Baeza, 2010).

Although pedagogical practicums are considered a crucial step in initial teacher education, mentor teachers highlight the scarcity of the information, preparation, and tools universities offer to meet the expectations of pedagogical institutions in relation to pedagogical practicums (Hirmas Ready, 2014; OEI, 2010).

Several studies emphasize the lack of institutionalization in the role of pre-service teachers' mentors (Baeza, 2010; Romero & Maturana, 2012), which leads them to occupy "an undefined and solitary role [...] within the school institution" (Hirmas Ready, 2014, p. 140). According to Hirmas Ready (2014), this demonstrates the "invisibility of the important formative work that they can play in the processes of knowledge construction from practice" (p. 140) and recommends the delivery of the necessary tools for their performance as pre-service teachers' mentors, as well as rethinking their working conditions. The expressed concerns of pre-service teachers' mentors regarding the aforementioned inadequacies underscore the need for exploring their voices to enhance significant contributions towards reshaping essential aspects of pedagogical practicums.

Baeza (2010) identified ten key roles for pre-service teachers' mentors, encompassing aspects like

understanding trainee teachers, providing guidance, modeling behaviors, and fostering reflection. However, these data, while valuable, are outdated and not specific to English teachers. Lattanzi and Vanegas Ortega's study (2019) in Chile highlights some challenges faced by teacher trainers, especially in differentiating their roles as classroom teachers and mentors. Despite this, the study illustrates that pre-service teachers' mentors can effectively navigate these challenges, evolving into adept teacher trainers. This transformation involves adopting a new identity that allows for a deeper understanding of practice and the integration of perspectives from theory and classroom experiences (Lattanzi & Vanegas Ortega, 2019, p. 115).

Consequently, it is important to explore the experiences of pre-service teachers' mentors through their own voices. In this context, where pre-service teachers' mentors are considered key actors in the accompaniment of initial teacher education processes, it is crucial to establish how they perceive their role, what kind of preparation they have received, and what their expectations are in initial teacher education processes in relation to the students, both at university, and school levels.

Method

This article employs phenomenological research, a qualitative approach aimed at understanding the essence of a phenomenon by exploring individuals' experiences while setting aside researchers' preconceptions. It operates on the assumption that people share a universal essence in making sense of their experiences (Groenewald, 2004; Bliss, 2016). Thematic data analysis is used to identify, and report shared patterns in participants' reflections, revealing meaningful conceptualizations. This analysis involves systematically organizing, interpreting, and coding the transcriptions to identify recurring themes or patterns that capture important aspects of the data. These codes are then grouped into broader themes that represent key ideas or concepts present in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Data Collection Methods and Instruments

In the first phase, a semi-structured group interview with three EFL pre-service teachers' mentors who have been working with trainee teachers was conducted. The second phase consisted of conducting semi-structured individual interviews with four pre-service teachers' mentors. This type of interview consisted mainly of open-ended questions, which were used to "obtain highly personalized information" (Gray, 2004, p. 214) in a dynamic manner. In addition, this tool allows the use of spontaneous stimuli (Leech, 2002) to encourage the clarification of responses, the expansion of these, or to open new topics that initially had not been part of the interview but that help to fulfil the objective of the research (Gray, 2004).

Participants

A total of seven in-service teachers participated in this study. Teachers who were pre-service teachers' mentors or had experience as mentoring EFL pre-service teachers from different universities were invited. Three teachers participated in the group interview and four teachers in individual

interviews. In order to comply with the necessary ethical procedures, the names of the participants were replaced with culturally appropriate pseudonyms as a way to protect data confidentiality. Issues related to in-service teachers' restricted time availability and hectic schedules limited the access to a larger number of participants.

Table 1 summarizes participants' information regarding the type of school they work in, the years of experience they have as English teachers, and their years of experience as pre-service teachers' mentors.

Exploring the voices of pre-service teachers' mentors in student-teachers' professional practicums demands a consideration of variables such as experience, institution type (university or school), and geographic context (urban or rural). These factors significantly shape perspectives and challenges. Consequently, our study includes participants with diverse backgrounds, encompassing different experience levels and institutional settings. This approach helps to ensure a comprehensive phenomenological analysis, capturing the richness and diversity of the perspectives of pre-service teachers' mentors.

Table 1 Participants' Demographic Information

	Pseudonym	Type of School	Occupation	Years of Experience as a Teacher	Years of Experience as a Mentor Teacher
1	Mauricio	semi-private	Secondary School English Teacher.	13 and a half years	3 years (interrupted)
2	Claudio	private	Secondary School English Teacher.	10 years	9 years
3	Héctor	municipal	English teacher with a high school education program at an adult correctional facility.	13 years	1 year
4	Luis	(Currently teaching at university)	University English Professor	6 and a half years	4 years
5	Maria	semi-private	English teacher at a rural high school	31 years	10 years
6	Pamela	semi-private	Primary school English Teacher	6 years	3 years and 5 months
7	Rodrigo	state-run	Primary and secondary school English teacher.	1 year and a half	1 semester

The Practicum

The professional practicum for student teachers spans one semester, immersing them in real teaching experiences. During this period, student teachers are placed in schools where they actively engage in teaching specific courses. Under the guidance and supervision of designated mentor teachers employed by the hosting schools, these student teachers undertake a set of predetermined activities. The mentor teachers, mandated by the schools to fulfil this role, oversee and guide the student teachers throughout their practicum. Their responsibilities extend to offering guidance on instructional techniques, classroom management, and professional development.

Ethical Considerations

Since this study involved collecting data from people, ethical procedures were followed. It is important to mention that because of the sanitary conditions, for this study, consent forms were distributed via Google Forms. Firstly, an information leaflet was provided to the participants in order to explain the details of the project such as the objective and issues related to confidentiality, anonymization, and treatment of the data. After reading the information leaflet, participants were invited to fill in a consent form. It is important to mention that, before starting the focus group and the interviews, the participants were asked orally if they agreed to

participate in the study. After orally re-affirming consent, the process of recording the focus groups and the interviews started. The ethical forms were prepared in Spanish as this is the teachers' mother tongue. To preserve anonymity, we have used nicknames instead of the participants' real names. (See Table 1 above) The nicknames were randomly assigned. Quotes from the seven participants will be discussed in the data analysis section below.

Data Analysis

The group interview and the individual in-depth interviews were audio recorded. After data collection, both group and individual interviews were transcribed. Then, the responses gathered in the interviews were analyzed through inductive thematic data analysis. Firstly, the researchers familiarized themselves with the data and generated themes individually by identifying and analyzing frequent themes that emerged from the participants (Braun & Clarke 2006, p. 79). Secondly, the researchers worked together on the coding process to identify the main themes and sub-themes. Thirdly, a compilation of the researchers' ideas on the themes was shared and collaboratively reviewed. Lastly, the researchers established the main topics together considering preliminary analyses and the research objectives of this study. Consequently, the main themes and sub-themes were established as shown in Table 2.

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Table 2 Summary of Themes and Sub-Themes that Emerged in the Coding Process

Themes	Sub-Themes
The characterization of the role of a mentor teacher	The role of a mentor teacher is multilayered.
	Mentor teachers are motivators and shape pre-service teachers for their future.
	Mentor teachers are providers of a real experience.
Mentor teachers' expectations	Of pre-service teachers' organization skills
	Of pre-service teachers' proactivity
	Of pre-service teachers' as agents of innovation
	Of schools: Reduction and redistribution of pedagogical hours
	Involvement of universities strengthening the triad
	Pedagogical internships as part of the national curriculum
	Pedagogical internships as spaces for reflection

In addressing the scarcity of literature on mentor teachers' roles, this analysis followed an inductive approach. Themes were not predetermined due to the lack of established expectations, allowing data to determine themes (Alhojailan, 2012). Employing a semantic approach, the analysis focused on the explicit content of data to explore mentor teachers' perceptions without extracting beyond participants' statements (Javadi & Zarea, 2016).

Results and Discussion

This section discusses results from analyzing main themes and sub-themes emerging from group and individual interviews. Firstly, teachers' descriptions of their mentoring role are presented. Secondly, responses regarding mentor teachers' expectations for pre-service teachers, schools, and the national curriculum are discussed. Lastly, the importance that pre-service teachers' mentors place on practicums as spaces for reflection is presented.

The Role of a Mentor Teacher

One of the objectives of this research was to explore mentor teachers' voices on their perception of the role they must play in pedagogical practicums. In this respect, a common vision of the participants with regard to their role as mentor teachers was that such a role is multilayered. Subsequently, among other perceptions, the results of this study suggest that the role of a mentor teacher is principally perceived (1) as being a motivator and shaper of pre-service teachers' future and (2) as the provider of a real educational experience.

Nevertheless, the participants argue that the lack of systematization in their role and the scarcity of information from universities lead to a lack of consistency in the pedagogical process in the practicum. In other words, they feel that, eventually, they must do what they believe is right in accordance with their own experiences and personal beliefs rather than accomplishing standardized duties with regard to the goals, responsibilities, and methodologies for their role.

The Role of Pre-Service Teachers' Mentors is Multilayered

First of all, when reflecting on their role during practicums, most participants agreed that defining a specific role for their work as a mentor teacher was not possible because of the multiple functions they must perform. According to our participant Pamela, "You are acting also as a guide, a monitor, a supervisor, and a companion in this professional training process."

I perform as an evaluator, definitely, and I base my evaluations both in pedagogical and quantitative aspects [...] In the role of a mentor teacher, I am also a counsellor because I'm not only interested in what has to do with the discipline, but I also care about the personal aspects of my students creating a work profile. (María)

This reflects what Hirmas Ready (2014) entails regarding the lack of clear information from both universities and schools in relation to the expectations for the role that teachers must meet when becoming mentor teachers. Given the lack of institutionalization of the role of the mentor teachers, educators are prevented from performing specific tasks which would contribute to the practicum process in a more specific manner. Hence, it can be inferred that participants perform various tasks to meet their own personal expectations, executing what they believe they must do instead of what should be done.

Pre-Service Teachers' Mentors as Future Career Shapers

Within the different roles mentor teachers believe they must play, the participants agreed on the idea that one of the most important characteristics of this role is to help shape pre-service teachers' future. As Claudio commented:

I focus on the trainee's personality traits, not only the contents but also his social skills and problem-solving skills [...] I tell them that this will be useful for their future work as teachers.

These interviewees highlight, directly or indirectly, that they expect to have a meaningful impact on these future teachers' training process in terms of their social and pedagogical capacities, and that, as mentor teachers, they should be able to provide the necessary guidelines to help pre-service teachers to become good educators. However, although participants' intentions and visions can be clear and shared, the scarcity of specific goals and the rigorousness of the practicum do not provide objective guidelines to ensure these goals are achieved.

This problem has already been addressed in the Improvement of Quality and Equity in Tertiary Education Program (Microdata Center, 2017), where it is stated that, to provide high-quality practicums in Chile, a more in-depth analysis of mentor teachers' voices is necessary to ensure a standardized development in the pedagogical practicums with collective and concrete goals to be achieved. This lack of systematization obliges teachers to be active agents and to train themselves by means of self-taught practices in accordance with their personal expectations rather than working collaboratively to provide their trainees with the necessary tools for their future. Pamela reflects upon this matter.

We were not prepared for that [practicum], so either we needed to be self-taught and to train ourselves to deliver these tools to our trainee teachers so that they themselves do not have a bad time when they are working as teachers and do not feel they do not know about it or were not taught how to do that.

Given the importance these participants give to have a meaningful role as mentor teachers for their trainees, it can be inferred that they perceive their role as being of strong impact on pre-service teachers' formation for both their present and future teaching careers. Hence, they also identify and acknowledge the importance of showing motivation for their role because this motivation can and should be transmitted to their trainees to become good educators. Therefore, plenty of importance is given to remaining motivated with their own job as teachers and to motivating others so as to successfully contribute to shaping pre-service

teachers' future. Rodrigo refers to this topic in the statement below.

For me, having students in their first year or first internships is more motivating because you can always guide them along the way [...] If you ask me what my goal is when receiving students in their practicum, one is to motivate them and the other is to help them enjoy the experience.

Similarly, in the excerpt below, Héctor addresses the importance of promoting motivation in their trainees because, to become high-quality teachers, pre-service teachers must immerse themselves in their role as educators with passion. Such passion can and must be perceived by pre-service teachers in their mentors.

As a teacher, you must love pedagogy. So that's what I look for when I receive trainees. The idea is that they feel motivated that they are going to be teachers. They are going to be trainers. That the students will see them as a role model.

Consequently, it can be observed that the participants of the study perceive their role as mentor teachers as being motivating for their trainees because they perceive such motivation as a key component in the process of becoming good educators. Hence, motivated guide teachers will build motivated pre-service teachers, and that motivation is necessary to take full advantage of the pedagogical practicum. This connects their role as shapers of pre-service teachers' future with the need to provide an authentic and meaningful experience during the internship.

Pre-Service Teachers' Mentors as Providers of a Real Experience

Most participants in this research value the relationship they construct with their trainees because they acknowledge the importance of building pedagogical skills during the pedagogical practicum with a mentor whom pre-service teachers feel comfortable with (Romero & Maturana, 2012). Pamela talks about the importance of building a strong professional relationship with trainees:

The mentor teacher and the trainee teacher go hand in hand because they are your colleagues, and they are colleagues who are learning, and who, at some point, are going to be in the same situation we are now.

The participants are aware that, as mentor teachers, they are responsible for providing a “real experience in the educational field” (Romero & Maturana, 2012, p. 657), and since they already work in the system, they know its inner workings, and have some clear ideas regarding what pre-service teachers can expect from both their practicum and working as educators. Claudio refers to this issue:

Because every teacher has experienced what it is like to work in different schools, so we have the experience, and we know the context [...] I believe that the importance lies in showing pre-service teachers the system and the real state of the Chilean educational system from a critical perspective.

This participant’s reflections provide a strong basis for the crucial idea that mentor teachers, in order to successfully fulfil their role, must use their pedagogical experience and knowledge of the educational context to connect with pre-service teachers. They are certain that their personal experiences working in the field will be of great contribution to their trainees because it will help them to prepare for their future careers.

Therefore, mentor teachers in this research seek to become role models for pre-service teachers by means of transmitting useful pieces of advice, orientations, and methodologies in line with their working experience and expertise to provide a systematic and meaningful pedagogical practicum for their trainees. These orientations, however, do not prevent trainees from developing their own teaching skills and pedagogical identity because the participants in this research comprehend that pre-service teachers need to do this by themselves and that they should not mirror their mentors. Pamela talks about the importance of pre-service teachers’ autonomy in the process:

I can guide you through your professional training, but I can’t do your job. I can’t do your interventions, plan,

or review the material you have to review [...] I can’t hinder this process that is so personal for you. I have to accompany you in it, but I cannot do it for you.

Accordingly, participants consider of the utmost importance providing autonomy to polish the pedagogical skills of their trainees. With regard to this matter, it should be noted that María is the only participant with ten or more years of experience as a pre-service teacher mentor; the rest of the participants can be considered relatively new to this vocation.

This might illustrate part of Romeo and Maturana’s research (2012), who highlighted that “a teacher in school, with years of experience, is not always a good collaborator” (p. 657) because, as Baeza (2010, pp. 90-101) observed, one of the cases observed showed that these teachers might build an overly structured relationship, leaving little room for the development of their trainees’ autonomy. Thus, one could argue that the more years of experience a mentor teacher has, the less space for autonomy is provided. However, the participant of this research who has been teaching for more than thirty years is also committed to helping her trainees develop their own teaching competencies. In the following statement, María comments on this:

Of course! The process is done by the students, and I help. I revise their profile and pave the way for them to live the necessary experiences in the classroom [...] Being an evaluator involves giving them the opportunity to teach as well as providing meaningful feedback for them.

In this context, it appears that the mentor teacher remains committed to fostering the autonomy and development of her trainees’ teaching competencies despite having over thirty years of teaching experience. This suggests that the correlation between years of experience and reduced autonomy is not absolute and may vary depending on the individual’s teaching philosophy and approach.

Expectations of Pre-Service Teachers’ Mentors

Several issues were identified among the respondents regarding their expectations. The data showed

an urgent need for mentor teachers to feel part of the training triad as valid members who can have a say in the training of the practicum students.

Organization Skills in Pre-Service Teachers

On the one hand, a variety of perspectives were expressed regarding pre-service teachers' organizational skills and proactivity. A common view among interviewees was the importance they gave to managerial skills. The trainee teachers are expected to display a professional attitude, which was understood as being punctual, showing a clear disposition to work with children under their care. In this regard, some interviewees commented:

Basic competencies to work in the labor world independently. (Pamela)

First of all, they know what they have to do or should do in the course of the training. (María)

Firstly, [there should be] no type of violation against children, neither physical, nor digital, nor verbal. (Claudio)

Having clear goals and clearly knowing what to expect from the students emerge as a recurrent topic among these teachers. When requesting and sending pre-service teachers to schools, universities are expected to carry out an organized process. As María said,

[It needs] to be a methodical orderly process, clearly stating what it is expected of the university that the students meet.

Proactivity in Pre-Service Teachers

Interestingly, proactivity to thrive while doing a pedagogical practicum seems to be fundamental. According to these teachers, proactivity has different layers as it could imply having a good attitude and a good disposition to work as well as being active in providing ideas, and activities and being willing to think outside the box. As Pamela pointed out:

Pre-service teachers should pay special attention to commitment, proactivity, and inquisitiveness, asking everything as many times as necessary.

Trainee teachers are expected to be active members in their practicum processes; as they become teachers in their assigned practicum centers, they should adopt the role of a teacher and even push the experience forward. It was observed in the data that practical internships are perceived as the moment in which students should be curious and thirsty for gaining as much knowledge as possible. This comment from Rodrigo illustrates this idea:

[I expect my students to] ask questions, to propose ideas or say things like, 'I want to do something.'

Surprisingly, for Mauricio, being proactive is the most important characteristic a teacher-trainer must have. In his words,

I think one of the most relevant features you must have is proactivity. When one is a practitioner, the mentor teacher will not give you the complete path for you to walk. Your guide-teacher will show you a path, but what one expects as a mentor teacher is that the teacher-trainer looks to the sides and draws resources not only from you but also from other sources which complement your work.

The data strengthen the idea that pedagogical practicums are seen as a crucial opportunity for trainees to exhibit curiosity and a strong desire to acquire knowledge, emphasizing the importance of proactive engagement in their learning and teaching experiences.

Pre-Service Teachers as Agents of Innovation

Pre-service teachers are perceived by mentor teachers as agents of innovation who should bring new ideas to help in-service teachers update their knowledge. The data suggests that trainee teachers become the bridge between classroom teachers and topics such as updated methodologies, current trends in education and/or ELT. For example, according to Claudio,

'I have this situation, I have this problem, this is what I think'- So when they come to a solution, the student can realize another solution and end up teaching [mentor teachers themselves] you new trends in the academia.

In addition to this, María noted,

The problem with the teacher in the classroom is that he disconnects from what innovation is, he disconnects from what is happening; so if you are not sheltered in an institution that innovates, you're going to be replicating what you saw and end up knowing this by your fifth and senior years.

In the statement below, María mentions that trainee teachers are expected not only to bring new ideas to their mentor teachers but also challenge them by taking the initiative and going beyond what is expected of pre-service teachers. In the same light, practicum students are also expected to be agents of innovation when creating materials. However, according to one of the respondents, it is also important to address the future teachers' confidence. For example, Claudio commented on how incorporating the trainee teachers' materials into his class is also a way to provide good rapport. Claudio said,

Let's take care of the students; they are also learning, so that investment of time is good when you have good working teams that bring new ideas and generate good work and generate good material, and I tell them, 'Keep the authorship, because this is a shared job, between you and I. keep a copy because this will help in your work life'

As data suggest, practicum students are not only expected to be innovative in creating teaching materials but also to build their confidence, which indicates a dual emphasis on innovation and confidence building in teacher training.

Reduction and Redistribution of Pedagogical Hours

Mentor teachers' expectations regarding school administrators were not particularly prominent in the interview data. Although the teachers agreed to take the responsibility of being mentor teachers and were generally happy to adopt this role as it reminded them of their own trainee process, there were some issues the participants drew on.

Concerning the expectations of school administrators, teachers directly addressed time issues, which

seems to be one of the most recurrent struggles underpinning teachers' jobs. In fact, in their current teaching conditions, these mentor teachers did not have specific time allocated to provide feedback or check their mentees' work on their weekly schedule. It seems necessary to distribute those mentors' teaching hours to provide time enough to work with their trainee students. As Luis complained,

For the same reason I think that beyond the economic incentives, there should be a redistribution of our duties in such a way as to generate spaces for that teacher to feel comfortable and to have enough time to execute the tasks that are requested as a mentor teacher.

An interesting insight emerged from Luis's interview as he also mentioned the necessity to acknowledge the demands of being a mentor teacher in their daily schedule, considering that when receiving a trainee teacher, mentor teachers are taking additional specific tasks and responsibilities, which exceed their monthly-hour contract. When talking about this issue, Luis commented,

I definitely think that a fundamental requirement is the hourly adjustment of these teachers. [...] We should think in detail how it could work, we should also as I say systematize from the State so that schools or employers could be willing to this hourly reduction for the teacher, of course keeping the payment.

Another reported problem was the lack of guidelines and standards from the Ministry of Education to work with students doing their practicums. This issue came to light as an example of the need to unify and standardize the processes of pedagogical internships. According to the respondents, this responsibility should not only rely on universities and schools but also on governmental institutions and gatekeepers that should oversee, providing the minimum professional conditions to receive trainee students from universities.

Pedagogical Internship Guidelines as Part of the National Curriculum

As Hirmas Ready (2014) stated, as expectations are not clear, there is often a clash between the demands

of universities and the ones from schools. Whilst there are no national or state standards to regulate the role of each actor in pedagogical internships, pre-service teachers training will continue to be unequal across the Chile. For example, Luis noted,

Students do not come to the educational system without knowing what is expected of them, but this should be a part of the curriculum and teacher training.

Since pedagogical internships are not mentioned in the Chilean National Curriculum there is a lack of dialogue with teaching training programs given by universities. At the same time, there are no appropriate spaces or guidelines devoted to planning and articulating this process. It is tremendously necessary to consider the perspectives of the different actors involved in order to better shape pedagogical internships.

Strengthening the Triad-Expectations of Involvement with Universities

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A variety of perspectives were expressed by the teachers interviewed regarding their expectations of the collaboration with the universities with which they work. According to them, strengthening the training triad is key for the appropriate conduction of the pedagogical internship. At the same time, for the interviewees, it was crucial to develop a close relationship with the university or the supervisor. These teachers are expected to share a certain “complicity” and ideally work in constant coordination with the university that sends pre-service teachers to their classrooms. Pamela refers to this issue as having “clear goals that should be stated together, alongside.”

Another issue reported was communication. The interviewees expressed that fluid contact with the university should enable better coordination among the parts involved in this process. At the same time, the teachers discussed details regarding this communication as it should be direct and permanent with the mentor teacher from school, the supervisor from the university and the trainee teacher. In this sense, the mentor teacher and the

tutor should work together. As a result, the pre-service teachers may have a clearer idea of what is expected of them to avoid confusion.

So, if a university would take the time to take the practicum centers and look for modelling teachers, not destroyers. (María)

Another participant also expressed a desire to be involved in making decisions when accompanying students doing their practicum, for instance, when evaluating them and when providing feedback. Concerns were expressed regarding the need for more guidelines to work with the pre-service teachers from the university. The comment below serves to illustrate how Héctor feels there should be a sense of complicity between the university and the school.

I do believe that this possible link with the university is necessary because if at the end of the day, they have the confidence to have a trainee student in practicum. Let's agree on the points that are really important within the evaluation, that is to say, which is what the university really expects of what the student is capable of doing beyond the document itself that arrives constantly. Okay, perfect. We always know that there is one point more important than another, so it would be nice to have that kind of complicity with the university to effectively know what they are looking for.

In addition to this, Mauricio comments on the supporting role that universities should adopt when sending students to practicum. He states,

Besides that, there is also a university behind us, one hopes the best from that university and that the students also know where I come from and where they aim in the future.

Systematizing practicum processes can help to increase articulation. A smoother dialogue in the training triad (the school, the university, the mentor teacher, and the pre-service teacher) will only happen if clear standards from the State that every member involved in the process can follow.

Pedagogical Internships as Spaces for Reflection

Beyond administrative issues, it is relevant to mention that for mentor teachers, pedagogical

internships are also an opportunity for engaging in meaningful conversations that may lead to reflection. Many universities state in their programs that practicums should be a reflective process. However, time constraints and teachers' exhausting schoolwork leave little to no time to talk or discuss issues underlying the teaching practice together with more practical topics such as planning activities, materials, or classroom management.

According to Lattanzi and Vanegas (2020), pedagogical internships are seen as opportunities for the trainee teachers to reflect on their own roles as novice teachers. In this sense, the role of mentor teachers is crucial as they are the ones who should feel prepared enough to enable reflective spaces and interactions within pedagogical internships.

However, there is a feeling that practicums do not meet the expectations or do not meet the standards, that is to say, the skills and knowledge future teachers will need in school contexts. Russell (2017) points out that there is an apparent lack of reflective spaces when pre-service teachers enter their training process. According to María, pre-service teachers should "Come willing to have a pedagogical dialogue." This correlates with what teacher Diego states:

The disadvantage is that, I think, it is a very important job, and I think that we need to have such a space of reflection. That allows us to move comfortably and dialogue freely with the student not only in terms of reflections but also for example in the preparation of activities, in the preparation of material, in the demonstration of certain types of educational models..., and unfortunately we do not always have the time. We all know the workload we have as teachers, not only in the classroom, in planning hours, but also in personal life; so this is a big disadvantage that not only crosses personal aspects but also this type of activities.

Having a good disposition to engage in the practicum will not be enough for the trainee teachers. At the same time, the way mentor teachers receive these future teachers in their classrooms is another essential piece of the jigsaw. Pre-service teachers should feel that their mentors are open to sharing

their experiences by facilitating and engaging in reflective dialogues. As this issue emerged in the data, María expressed:

The benefit is always going to be that when one is open to learning, every situation is an opportunity to strengthen your teaching skills, as easy as that. If I am closed to the possibility, obviously, I will see the trainee teacher as a lump or a problem, not as an opportunity.

Teachers valued when the trainee teachers brought new ideas (perceived as agents of innovation) and at the same time challenged the mentor teacher. In the following excerpt, Héctor describes a situation he encountered when working with two pre-service teachers from different universities.

I did not expect him to question me. He said, "What for, teacher?" and I said, "Look, I need this in order to do this, that, and the other with such and such class that has such and such characteristics" and I had no problem. The activities that both boys brought me were completely different. The one from university x understood what I really wanted, as Mauricio said, 'look to another side,' 'go a little further.' So, the idea of questioning me is never to see something like this in a bad way. I was shocked by the question, but it was absolutely positive.

Having the opportunity to engage in reflection moments seems to be present as an added constructive element when managing to work collaboratively with the pre-service teacher. According to Héctor,

Sometimes, pre-service teachers arrive, and it is a pleasure to work in teams with them. Those questions take you to pedagogical reflection. I share the passion.

Conclusion

It is clear that trainee teachers need more than just a positive disposition for their practicum; the way mentor teachers receive them is crucial. Open and reflective dialogues between mentors and trainees are valued, as they create opportunities for both parties to learn and grow. Teachers appreciate when trainees bring new ideas and challenge their methods, which is why they see them as agents of innovation rather than problems. Additionally,

adapting practicum experiences to address current social paradigms and encourage freedom of thought is considered important for training future English teachers effectively.

This study explored the perceptions of mentor teachers in Chile regarding their role in initial teacher education. Emphasis is placed on strengthening the triad in teacher education, working towards nationwide standards, and improving the structured definition of mentor teachers' roles. The study highlights the necessity for a systematic role of mentor teachers aligned with clear institutional goals and guidelines.

In that line, findings underscore the impact of institutions providing clear guidelines to prevent mentor teachers from deviating from institutional goals to pursue personal expectations instead. The study emphasizes the essential role of mentor teachers in developing future teachers' identity and pedagogical skills within the Chilean teaching context. It reveals an urgent need for national standards covering practicum programs, to emphasize shared dialogue among mentor teachers, university supervisors, and pre-service teachers.

Additionally, the study stresses the importance of planning for time, space, and preparation, so that mentor teachers can prepare to perform effectively. The practicum is seen as a space for reflection, as facilitating the exchange of ideas and learning between mentor teachers and pre-service teachers. The non-hierarchical relationship between them is viewed as an opportunity for professional growth and adapting to modern student needs.

While providing valuable insights, we acknowledge limitations, such as a limited sample size due to time constraints. It suggests expanding the participant pool for diversity and including both novice and experienced mentor teachers to explore how their roles evolve. Despite these limitations, the study lays the foundation for further research into the multifaceted role of mentor teachers in shaping pre-service teachers formative experience.

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