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Being a Pre-Service English Language Teacher in Covid-19 Times: A Narrative Study

Ser un profesor de inglés en formación en tiempos de covid-19: un estudio narrativo

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In the loving memory of Plubio Herlán

RESUMEN

Los procesos de formación de docente vía prácticas pedagógicas involucran tensiones entre los objetivos académicos de la universidad y aquellos de la escuela. Algunas tensiones se vieron exacerbadas por la contingencia del COVID-19. Este estudio narrativo cualitativo buscó comprender las perspectivas de tres aspirantes a profesores de inglés a medida que utilizaron innovaciones pedagógicas durante su práctica docente bajo la educación remota de emergencia. Los datos fueron recolectados a través de entrevistas semiestructuradas y analizados utilizando los principios de la teoría fundamentada. Los resultados muestran

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experiencias antes, durante y después de la práctica. Ellas ejemplifican métodos basados en conocimientos formales y experienciales para la práctica, preocupación por el acompañamiento de docentes o supervisores, y aprendizajes reflexivos a partir de experiencias vividas de aspirantes a docentes durante su práctica docente. Las conclusiones llaman a la concordancia entre los procesos involucrados en el desarrollo de la enseñanza de idiomas y las necesidades académicas, así como la autonomía de los futuros docentes para el enriquecimiento de la práctica.

ABSTRACT

Pre-service English language instruction is fraught with tensions between academic goals at the university and those at the school. These



conflicts were exacerbated by COVID-19 contingency. This critical qualitative narrative study aimed to understand three aspiring English language teachers' perspectives they designed pedagogical innovations during their teaching practicum in the context of remote education. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using grounded theory principles. Results show experiences before, during, and after the practicum. They serve as examples of both formal and experiential knowledge-based methods for practicum, as well as concern over the introduction of schoolteachers or supervisors. Finally, findings echo reflections from aspiring teachers' lived experiences during teaching practicum. Conclusions call for agreement between the processes involved in language teaching development and academic needs, as well as pre-service teachers' autonomy for the enrichment of practicum.

PALABRAS CLAVE

COVID-19, profesores de inglés en formación, experiencias, prácticas, innovaciones pedagógicas.

KEYWORDS

COVID-19, pre-service English language teachers, experiences, teaching practicum, pedagogical innovations.

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic outbreak in Wuhan, China, toward the end of 2019 affected educational settings all over the world. Since coronavirus disease infects people and spreads across continents, the World Health Organization declared it a global health concern in 2020. Similarly, to ensure everyone's safety, the Colombian government mandated the use of physical distance. As a result, each educational institution administration collaborated on the implementation of remote learning policies.

Some of these impinged upon the typical development of a face-to-face language instruction education program in Bogotá, Colombia, throughout 2020 and 2021, in the way pre-service English language teachers (PELTs) developed pedagogical practicum, this time, from home.

This research with PELTs was inspired by me and my classmates' experiences while creating lessons to inspire assigned students during the first lockdown in 2020. Hence, the goal of this study was to better understand the experiences of a group of PELTs while implementing pedagogical innovations for their teaching practicum during a global pandemic. This paper thus makes a plea for the incorporation and promotion of the idea of pedagogical innovations within teaching practicum settings by language teacher education programs. Given the study's scope and nature I adopted a critical epistemological positioning (Kincheloe et al., 2018). Thence, the research subjects are immersed in a "complex ontology" (p.437), while the researcher recognizes reality as a set of interwoven value systems in which thoughts are mediated by power relations and language. To avoid reductionism and discrimination, a subject's worldview represents a piece of the truth rather than a normative paradigm. As a result, bricolage (i.e., the appeal to multidisciplinary) emerged as an important tool for addressing the complexity of *knowledges* (de Sousa Santos, 2018) underlying PELT experiences.

PROBLEMATIZING THE RESEARCH TOPIC

The research problem assumes that PELTs' expectations and realities are complex and influenced by a variety of challenging situations in the context of contingent remote teaching. It stemmed from reflections with my colleagues on our teaching practicum. At first, it seemed that PELTs' interests in creating materials and the available resources to do so were at odds. There was a mismatch between PELTs' idealized



notions of teaching and the characteristics of the available environments (Dunn et al., 2018). PELTs stories illustrated how they faced unforeseen circumstances (Buenfil Burgos, 2010) brought on by Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) (Hodges et al., 2020) as they were developing and thinking about potential solutions.

Furthermore, PELTs concerned about a lack of interaction in remote classes given that the development of language learning necessitates more than simply dictating a specific topic. Herein, I deem body movement, smell, and temperature are additional elements that contribute to the creation of profound learning experiences amid social presence, (Kerres, 2020, as cited in Gabriel, 2021). Hence, PELTs showed a dissociation between these elements in remote situations facing difficulties during the teaching practicum because lack of socialization, contrasting to face-to-face scenarios.

The COVID-19 outbreak altered how PELTs feel about their preservice teaching time in school. Specifically, classmates mentioned they wanted to abandon their preparation for teaching languages since their practicum was demanding. In line with Méndez's (2020) discovery, pre-service teachers without a teaching vocation were more prone to have unfavorable feelings during the teaching practicum. Therefore, I investigated PELTs' depiction of their practicum experiences during remote teaching keeping in mind the crucial role of the teaching practicum in PELTs' identity formation during their initial stages (Çakmak & Gündüz, 2019) and the link between the emotional experiences lived during the practicum and their "motivations, attitudes, professional learning, and engagement in the teaching profession" (Rahmawati et al., 2021, p. 278).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

ON EXPERIENCES

Experience concept is two-fold. From an external origin, Larrosa (2006) depicts it as a set of circumstances or facts that occur independently of the individual's will. Similarly, Williams (2014) defines it as "the product of social conditions or systems of belief or fundamental systems of perception" (p. 85). Yet, experiences have an internal destination: the subject himself. Experience, thus, influences an individual's subjectivity, worldview, and beliefs (Larrosa, 2006). These dimensions are consistent with human experiences in a variety of phenomena. Research reports on teaching practicum experiences highlight critical aspects: Firstly, PELTs are prone to experience a wide range of emotions during the teaching practicum (Méndez, 2020). Second, they recognize and talk about the connection between emotions and PELTs' professional identities (Teng, 2017). Finally, constrained factors in the teaching practicum have a direct impact on PELTs' sense of agency (Rahmawati et al., 2021; Teng, 2017).

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PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' INNOVATIONS DURING COVID-19

Serdyukov (2006) defines *innovation* as "a new pedagogic theory, methodological approach, teaching technique, instructional tool, learning process, or institutional structure that, when implemented, produces significant changes in teaching and learning" (p. 8). Similarly, Rogers (2003) (as cited in Ismail, 2017) identifies five factors that influence innovation acceptance: *relative advantages* (i.e., innovation superiority to the idea it replaces), *compatibility* (i.e., innovation compatibility with group's value systems), *complexity* (i.e., innovation implementation difficulty), *trialability* (i.e., regular innovation testing), and *observability* (i.e., tangible innovation results). Research reports



regarding pedagogical innovations suggest the incorporation of theoretical approaches to innovations within the curriculum (Chin-Wen, 2019). Moreover, further studies approach in-service teachers' innovations in times of COVID-19 (Kidd & Murray, 2020). Thus, more practical approaches to pre-service teachers' innovations deserve attention.

ON TEACHER EDUCATION IN EMERGENCY REMOTE TEACHING

The term Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) alludes to “the use of fully remote teaching solutions for instruction or education that would otherwise be delivered face-to-face” (Hodges et al., 2020, p13). Existing research with pre-service teachers permits identifying key ERT characteristics: first, there is a preference to content delivery over social interaction (Juárez-Díaz & Perales, 2021; Özüdoğru, 2021; Rahiem, 2020). Second, there is an urge for supporting pre-service and in-service teachers' online strategies development (Burns et al., 2020). Given the foregoing, the literature documenting PELTs' teaching practicum experiences while implementing pedagogical innovations in COVID-19 pandemic times within the Colombian context is insufficient.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a narrative technique and a qualitative research strategy using participant stories as data (Barkhuizen et al., 2014). They distinguish between written, oral, and multimodal narratives. Correspondingly, the study used recorded and transcribed semi-structured interviews as data collecting instruments to obtain participants' oral narratives. Participants were three PELTs from a public university in Bogotá, Colombia, that offers a program in language teaching education. Next, *narrative analysis* using grounded theory was carried out (Cohen et al., 2018). Three steps engaged in said procedure: open coding, in which each

transcription's initial tags were formed; axial coding, in which tags were sorted into categories; and selective coding, in which categories from all transcriptions were grouped.

FINDINGS

This section discusses three main categories. The first one entails the background beliefs and knowledges (de Sousa Santos, 2018) that PELTs bring to their pedagogical experience scenarios. The second one embraces PELTs' experiences while developing their practicum and uses these experiences as a source of multidimensional educational innovations. The third is the final stage of these stories, which discusses post-practicum learnings with a projection of the present future. In this way, the presented categories share a narrative tenet that not only integrates participants' experiences but also makes their beliefs visible at three points: the beginning, the climax, and the end.

PRE-PRACTICUM EXPERIENCES: THE BEGINNING

Dunn et al, (2018) conceptualize the term *beliefs* as “knowledge, assumptions and dispositions about teaching” (p.45). In the case of PELTs, beliefs appeared as contrasted, replaced, or confirmed during the teaching practicum. In this study, these beliefs displayed relationality to the emergence of their subsequent pedagogical innovations (de Sousa Santos, 2018). In effect, this relationality is discussed through multiple subcategories as follows:

Pre-Service English Language Teachers' Beliefs as Source of Inspiration

Participants' beliefs are formed through a variety of events and sources (Richardson, 1996). Teachers' decisions on instruction and curriculum are influenced by their beliefs on teaching (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996, as cited in Dunn et al., 2018). Thus, formation of teaching beliefs is influenced by several variables, including



experiences with schooling and instruction, or one's experiences as a student or as a classroom teacher. To illustrate this, in Excerpt 1, Eva when describing her initial thoughts towards incorporating political issues in the classroom, conceived her practicing language teacher actions serve a two-fold purpose, balancing students' critical thinking and indoctrination. This suggests that she examines and critiques the role that political machinery plays in education (Alvarez-Uria & Varela, 1991): "As a practitioner, you must exercise extreme caution and avoid certain topics, such as political concerns. To what extent can a teacher exert authority to talk about politics? What does indoctrination mean?" To what extent is this my opinion? (Excerpt 1: Eva, Interview, My translation).

Concurrently, earlier formal education experiences, such as disciplinary learning and teacher training programs, contribute to participants' beliefs (Richardson 1996, as cited in Dunn et al., 2018, p. 46). Zoe questioned analytical approaches while emphasizing academic language learning theory. This shows an informed blending of instructional approaches linking mainstream teaching methodologies (Brown & Lee, 2015) with a narrative turn (Goodson and Gill, 2011). "The idea of using storytelling and TPR stemmed from my conviction of teaching grammar inductively". (Zoe, Interview, My translation).

Pre-Service English Language Teachers' Knowledges

Likewise, teacher education procedures and perceptions of the educational activity of educators are connected. Thus, teacher education is not confined to isolated activities developed within university walls; rather, it involves contact with schoolteachers as knowledge-rich human assets (de Sousa Santos, 2018). See excerpt 3: "I saw how *schoolteachers* interacted with students and noticed that relatively few students responded adequately. So, with that in mind, I planned

to design the most engaging slides I could. (Ana, Interview, My translation, my emphasis). Castañeda and Aguirre (2018) claim that in light of this, the skills required to become a language teacher arise independently of experience of formal teacher training. The participant's ideas (excerpt 3) regarding her schoolteachers' varied methods converged her experience becoming a teacher as well. In other words, there is a clear connection between the discourse-entwined educational practices of schoolteachers and the processes of language teaching training (Tartari & Lutaj, 2021).

Furthermore, Eva also exemplified experience-based *knowledges* during her first pre-practicum teaching employment. Because of her prior teaching practicum experiences, she developed her own teacher identity (Teng, 2017), which shaped her ideas and practical teaching knowledge. "So, I thought it has to be this way [class interaction], because it can't be, I'll talk, you guys follow me, but rather a conversation". (Eva, Interview, My translation, my emphasis). One of these ideas questions the top-down approaches to teaching English (Tartari & Lutaj, 2021) when experiencing struggles (Barahona et al., 2021) regarding hierarchical positions as a teacher.

Correspondingly, Zoe's beliefs seemed founded on the teaching expertise learned in language teaching formal training (excerpt 2). In this instance, this participant establishes her teaching strategy on generalized prescriptions of how a language is learned and acquired. Theoretical information derived from Second Language Acquisition (SLA) perspectives strongly supports her opinions regarding methodological choices (Brown & Lee, 2015; Richards, 2015). As a result, these participants faced tensions between ascriptions as passive technicians against that of reflective practitioners (Kumaravadivelu, 2003).

Similarly, knowledges derived from participant experiences (excerpts 2, 3, and 4) allowed



for the identification of relationships between experience-driven and theoretical knowledge. The teaching knowledge from experience (excerpts 3 and 4) corresponds to a form of awareness-knowledge (i.e., knowledge of the existence of the innovation), and a form of how-to-knowledge (i.e., knowledge on how to implement an innovation) (Rogers, 2003, as cited in Ismail, 2006). Contrastively, the formal knowledge displayed in excerpt 2 corresponds to the principles-knowledge (i.e., knowledge of the principles underlying the innovation). In this study, these knowledges (de Sousa Santos, 2018) were not disconnected and static as participants utilized their capacities to transform themselves and their pedagogical discourses.

DURING-PRACTICUM EXPERIENCES: THE CLIMAX

Teaching practicum experiences participants retained while implementing pedagogical innovations were reported and analyzed in light of environmental, institutional, and individual phenomena. Three steps comprised this process: describing and explaining the innovations made by PELTs in light of their desire to respond pedagogically to a real-world educational scenario, talking about PELTs' struggles and challenges, and presenting the outcomes of the participants' pedagogical innovation. The participants' interactions with their university supervisors and schoolteachers at schools (Çakmak & Gündüz, 2019) reflect on the knowledges (de Sousa Santos, 2018). They gained, while creating their innovations.

Pre-Service English Language Teachers' Pedagogical Innovations

Although modernity has attributed knowledge construction to academic "experts" (Cruz-Arcila, 2020), PELTs enriched this process through their experiences when developing pedagogical innovations. During the COVID-19 pandemic, I analyzed the manner PELTs' derived

knowledges and methodological knowledges (de Sousa Santos, 2018) articulated traditional and contemporary perspectives alongside their readings about socio-cultural phenomena. The first pedagogical innovation involved the design of a syllabus using the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) method, which a participant coined *local CLIL*. Although, similar to CLIL (Richards, 2015), there is a significant difference: By *local CLIL* she intended to merge local themes and contents that are more familiar to students' contexts with global ones. Specifically, during her secondary school teaching practicum, she incorporated the 2021 Colombian National Strike into the English language class grammar objectives. She had her eleventh-grade students compare local and international news items as a strategy for encouraging critical thinking (Freire, 2017). This entailed a *glocal* (Selvi & Rudolph, 2018) approach to language teaching advocating for the integration of universal and specific issues. "Because the practicum was held during Colombian National Strike, I introduced the topic of politics through national and international newspapers, as well as literal and inferential reading comprehension exercises". (Eva, Interview, My translation).

The strategies used in the second pedagogical innovation involving first graders, included adapting Total Physical Response (TPR) Storytelling, adjusting authentic material. At this point, the PELT's role shifted from reflective practitioner to transformative intellectual (Kumaravadivelu, 2003) since she recognized the role of research in connecting theory and practice for pedagogical purposes: "TPR Storytelling because it stems from Krashen's naturalistic approach, and research on this topic has yielded positive results. Also, I found and adapted illustrations, books, and simulations". (Zoe, Interview, My translation).

Contrastively, the third pedagogical innovation, implemented with primary and secondary



students, incorporated the use of varied teaching strategies (Brown & Lee, 2015) that encompassed learning platforms (i.e., Kahoot, Quizlet and interactive surveys) and learning activities (i.e., scavenger hunt). Nonetheless, this participant cited dynamic slides design as her most noteworthy pedagogical innovation. “If it was correct, it would send us a slide displaying congratulations, but if it was wrong, it would send us a slide that said, try again. (Ana, Interview, My translation). Although this strategy disrupts the rigidity of traditional use of slides, a dichotomous understanding of evaluation in ELT endures (excerpt 7). This can be even connected to a tendency towards corrective feedback beyond constructive feedback (Whitney & Ackerman, 2020).

Pre-Service Language Teachers’ Struggles

During their pedagogical innovations, participants experienced numerous context-bound challenges and innovation-related struggles (Barahona et al., 2021). Albeit challenges were constant and diverse, participants managed to face and deal with them resulting in multiple knowledges that contributed to their education as future teachers.

Context-Bound Struggles. The word *challenge* implies a distance between a subject and his/her target. Participants actively engaged in adapting their ideas to local settings, even when difficulties appeared. The COVID-19 era brought about a variety of difficulties, including changes in time and space that altered the conventional dynamics of teaching practicum while fostering the anticipated growth of pedagogical innovations. The first contextual challenge is a time lag between the university calendar and those of the public schools where the teaching practicum was completed. This unusual lag was caused by strikes that occurred both inside and outside of the university between 2019 and 2021. Hence, education is not to be understood outside social contingencies nor

limited only to English as a Second Language (ELT) understanding. Excerpt 8 demonstrates that language teaching is not isolated from the surrounding situational contexts: “In primary school, we started in October [the practice] as we were behind with the academic calendar at the university due to strikes. Because the students finished in November, the process with the students was cut in half” (Ana, Interview, My translation).

The second contextual challenge that participants faced, as evidenced by excerpt 9, concerned not only students’ access to but also their use of technological resources. Hodges et al. (2020) address the issue of a lack of technological resources during ERT, which has been identified as a significant challenge (Juárez-Daz & Perales, 2021; Rahiem, 2020; Özüdoğru, 2021). This is problematic because it reflects a pre-existing reality in Colombia that was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic: the digital gap, which is characterized by unequal access, use, or learning of digital technologies (Ragnedda & Gladkova, 2020 as cited by Restrepo-Quintero et al., 2021).

The problem is that the guys only had one device. In the case of Kahoot [platform], they have to use two [devices], or they could use one, but they have to know how to use it, and I didn’t know how to explain it either. (Ana, Interview, My translation).

Furthermore, when the digital gap makes it difficult for students to access education, they are more likely to drop out and eventually face social marginalization, which is a form of structural violence (Galtung, 2016). In other words, students who are denied access to school during ERT are more likely to be excluded from both the social and political arenas in the near future (Restrepo-Quintero et al., 2021).

Innovation-Related Struggles. Participants encountered challenges while designing and



implementing their pedagogical innovations. In contrast to context-bound challenges, the following innovation-related challenges were determined by participants' pedagogical decisions on how to face said contingencies. PELTs struggled with learning and unlearning curricular concepts, as well as methodological decisions. Initially, participants' pedagogical innovations were governed by difficulties in understanding curricular concepts because it outlined innovation's principles as well as tied to Rogers' Principles-Knowledge (as cited in Ismail, 2006). In excerpt 10, the PELT's guiding principles are aligned with CLIL and Freirean pedagogy. "Theoretically, developing this instructional project was one of my toughest challenges. Specifically, describing what Freire's pedagogy or CLIL is". (Eva, Interview, My translation). This suggests an emancipatory view of education that affirms the critical position of language teachers (Freire, 2017).

Simultaneously, participants struggled with selecting instructional themes. Indeed, institutional requirements favored an inflexible list of methods. PELTs were aware of these constraints and the importance of connecting with students' contextual realities as reflective practitioners (Kumaravadivelu, 2003). See Excerpt 11: "Choosing a topic was also difficult because we did not have the opportunity to conduct a needs analysis. The teacher refused to let us". (Zoe, Interview, My translation). Other participants discussed their material creation processes while adapting online teaching materials. According to Rahiem (2020) and Özüdoğru (2020), a constraint during ERT was a lack of learning resources. In excerpt 12, the participant considers both uniqueness and capacity for recursive teaching, as well as inequalities related to students' access to educational resources. Therefore, difficulties teachers confront present opportunities for creativity and sensible resourcefulness rather than grounds for victimhood and weakness

(Marcos, 2018): "the implementation of this innovation had many obstacles, as I said, obtaining material, paying for it, because I did not draw those illustrations". (Zoe, Interview, My translation).

After discussing the previous struggles in the planning and creation of the PELTs' pedagogical innovations, these participants encountered difficulties during their implementation. See for instance excerpt 13: "How do I take back control of my class? I'm the teacher, what do I do? Oh no, I'm going to cry, how do I go back? (Eva, Interview, My translation). This drives PELTs' problematizing behaviors and encourages them to assume their position as inquirers, innovators, and prospective transformative intellectuals (Kumaravadivelu, 2003). This might undermine the objectification of ELT, as Castañeda-Trujillo and Aguirre-Hernández both mention (2018). Furthermore, context-bound challenges persisted in the implementation of PELTs' innovations. Excerpt 9, for example, echoes PELTs' difficulties in explaining the use of various technological platforms and devices to their students. This participant advocates for technological didactic training in addition to the support of operative or instrumental teachers (Litwin, 1994, as cited in Montañez et al., 2019). This is also dependent on instructional literacies, which are educators' abilities and trust in using technology in their classes (Burns et al., 2020).

Outcomes of Pre-Service English Language Teachers' Pedagogical Innovations

Participants outcomes in terms of the instructional innovations were divided into two: those that adhere to an instrumental agenda of innovations and those that go beyond. Results of pedagogical innovations related to feelings of enthusiasm, confidence, and drive to keep innovating. They were also consistent with some of Rogers' (2003) characteristics of innovations, such as relative advantage and observability (as cited in Ismail, 2006).



Instrumental Outcomes. By *instrumental*, I refer to the dissociation of language cultural dimension from syntactical-based features where language is used as a tool for everyday activities (Oladi, 2013). The instrumental results suggest that learning grammar was accomplished in a shorter time in line with Serdyukov's (2017) notion that "productivity and learning efficiency" (p. 8) are elements of innovation used to describe the reduction of tangible and intangible learning resources. Thus, excerpt 14 states that, as an intangible resource, pedagogical innovations achieved their desired results in less time: "The students inferred grammatical structures and learned them super-fast" (Zoe, Interview, My translation).

Participants' pedagogical innovations, on the other hand, outperformed the instrumentalized agenda (Serdyukov, 2017). Rather than focusing on the productivity and efficiency of learning, participants applied humanitarian language teaching principles (Arifi, 2017). As PELTs considered students' social and affective dimensions (Benesch, 2017) important for language learning but often overlooked in traditional teaching approaches (Arifi, 2017). Accordingly, the goal of the humanistic approach is associated with a democratic vision of education: to educate sensitive and respectful of various forms of life citizens (Gil Claros, 2018; Nussbaum, 2012). To achieve it, the humanistic approach places interaction as the key factor for language learning. According to Arifi (2017), interaction cultivates belongingness and fosters the growth of active learning in students. This is congruent with all participants' experiences, whose students manifested motivation to participate in the language class. As one of the three major affective factors that influence language learning (Bao & Liu, 2021), students' motivation, reflected in students' interests in participating in excerpt 15, shares features of *intrinsic motivation*: "The guys had something to say, and whatever the grammar structure they

were using, they were more interested in, I have something to tell than how am I going to say it" (Eva, Interview, My translation).

In the same vein, participants claimed that their students felt interested in posing questions or expressing their opinions in English throughout their pedagogical innovations. For participants, this did not only lead the students to develop their speaking skills, but it also allowed them to share their experiences and emotional concerns. Participant in excerpt 16 remarks on her students' ability to feel committed to others' lives, including her teacher's, evidencing a key aptitude for citizens to live within democratic societies (Nussbaum, 2012).

As soon as that photo of Lucas emerged, a boy said, "I'm sad because I'm a young man, and Lucas was a young man fighting for his rights, and he's now dead." I also took up the microphone and told them about my experiences on the strike that day. "Do you feel okay?" they inquired. (Eva, Interview, My translation).

Another participant's account reflected democratic attitudes in excerpt 17 when receiving feedback from her mentor and schoolteacher. Unconsciously, she boosted her students' feelings of empathy and interest in nonhuman beings. This type of sympathetic emotion implies a helping behavior that is concerned with the well-being of others (Nussbaum, 2011). "I liked how you taught them about animal respect while showing them around the virtual museum. I hadn't noticed that before." (Zoe, Interview, My translation). Finally, these pedagogical innovations suggest different conceptualizations around what innovation can be. These conceptualizations seem correlational to PELTs' beliefs. Moreover, their struggles and tensions helped them to start problematizing their realities (Dunn et al., 2018).



Communication Between Pre-Service and In-service English Language Teachers

Communication between PELTs and schoolteachers and university mentors detaches from a unidirectional transmission model that emphasizes transfer (Klaus, 2021). Communication with teachers is associated with Carey's ritual model of communication, in which interaction "is a sharing of meaning and a condition of community" (as cited by Klaus, 2021, p. 13). Throughout the implementation of their pedagogical innovations, participants struggled with the absence, presence, and tensions with their teachers. Experiences with teachers' absence ranged from a lack of support to complete abandonment (Jalvo, 2015). In excerpt 18, a participant shared her experiences where she particularly struggled with lack of accompanying. "Regarding my university supervisor, more than her support, it was rather a lack of it. As I'd share the Google drive folder with containing lesson plans with her, but she never read them" (Zoe, Interview, My translation). Perceptions of supervisor abandonment were dissociated from Fuller's (1969) second and third competencies, namely the promotion of further awareness and reflection, as well as the provision of theoretical notions based on empirical research (as cited in Çakmak and Gündüz, 2019).

Teachers Presence. PELTs pointed out four features in their relationships with their mentors. Overall, these involved experiences of companionship from diverse standpoints. For example, the first feature that PELTs remark on their mentors is a humanistic feature reflected in their sympathetic attitude towards PELTs' concerns. Significantly, some participants in this study (See excerpt 19) developed a personal trust relationship with mentors. This is consistent with Carpintero's (2015) recognition of the teacher's closeness, which includes "being sensitive to the problems and circumstances of the students, as well as being approachable,

receptive, and easygoing" (as cited in Çakmak and Gündüz, 2019, p.13).

We formed an interpersonal bond that extended beyond pre-service teacher and mentor, and she accompanied me and assisted me. The teacher was sensitive when my internet went out twenty minutes before the session started, and I had the lesson in an auto parts store, which was the most uncomfortable thing, and the teacher said: "wow, I wouldn't have taught the class whatsoever". (Eva, Interview, My translation).

Second, PELTs indicate that their mentors have a supportive quality that allows them to propose initiatives without fear of being judged. For example, excerpt 20 describes a participant's new proposals to her mentor alluding Carpintero's (2015) characteristic of open-minded individuals "with a broad view of their professional development possibilities" (as cited in Çakmak and Gündüz, 2019, p.13).

I decided to bring new ideas to the teacher: "we can do this, professor" and she explained to me: "yes, we can do this, but" And she gave me the reasons why it could not be done. So, the teacher was a great help. (Ana, Interview, My translation).

Participants' experiences differed from Teng's (2017) pre-service teachers' dissatisfaction. In this way, in accord to post-structural theories, emotions emerge from articulating personal and broader socio-political spheres (Benesch, 2017). Precisely, PELTs' experiences in excerpts 19 and 20 illustrate non-hierarchical relationships with mentors, hence, no emotional regulation. Furthermore, other mentors were eager to learn from PELTs. In excerpt 21, the mentor asked the participant for help, demonstrating a characteristic of the mentor's unpretentiousness; a critical attitude toward initiating horizontal



and dialogical encounters (Freire, 2017). “The mentor texted me and wrote: look, I want to create some slides in Canva, because I really liked your designs, can you help me?” (Eva, Interview, My translation).

The third feature, knowledgeable teachers, emerged from three moments. One of them is illustrated in excerpt 20, when mentors provided critical feedback on PELTs’ performance, rather than corrective feedback (Whitney & Ackerman, 2020), although in some cases, experiences with supervisors related to teachers’ absence, because of the lack of feedback (See excerpt 18). Feedback has an important effect on PELTs, given that “assessing student performance is also a critical aspect in the teaching practices” (Çakmak & Gündüz, 2019, p.14). This feature is similar to Carpintero’s (2015) notion of an experienced teacher, who has attributed the capacity to guide others (as cited in Çakmak and Gündüz) through his/her knowledges (de Sousa Santos, 2018) as starting points for the development of PELT’s pedagogical innovations (See excerpt 22): “In my primary school case, it was the headteacher who led me to propose and implement this innovation. She’d worked with slides and applied games with them” (Ana, Interview, My translation).

The other instance involved collaboration between mentors and supervisors during the final evaluation processes. One PELT stated that the collaboration positively influenced her pedagogical style, to the point that her emotional state (Benesch, 2017) was renovated (See excerpt 23). This is consistent with the significance of feedback during the teaching practicum (excerpt 20), as well as the importance of collaboration between mentors and supervisors (Çakmak and Gündüz, 2019):

My schoolteacher and my supervisor stayed with me, and they told me a lot. Wow! but it was the first time I felt her [university supervisor] in her role as a

teacher, and I tried to keep in mind all the things they told me for the future. (Zoe, Interview, My translation).

The final feature concerns the active presence of mentors in language classes. In excerpt 24, support was essential for PELTs because of their quick response to unexpected class issues. This role is similar to that of an emotional supporter (Cakmak and Gündüz, 2019), who concerns not only with the conditions of the instrumental teacher but also with PELTs’ human dimension. Certainly, in addition to supervisors’ guidance, the role of mentors as counselors can be explicitly valued in language teacher education planning of PELTs’ practicum. “My device had frozen. The teacher asked me to calm down, send her the slides, as she would help me to display them. You think, wow, the teacher is accompanying me, she realized that I was dead nervous (Eva, Interview, My translation).

PELTs and Schoolteachers’ Tensions. PELTs conflicted with the normative discourses that regulated education in schools. In excerpt 25, a participant critiqued the institution’s imposition of a unique and traditional methodology with prescribed topics. As a result of fracturing the established, PELTs’ innovations emerged in these top-down hierarchies to become institutive (Buenfil Burgos, 2010). Relationships with schoolteachers, were occasionally broken, which exacerbated PELTs’ difficulties. Indeed, PELTs and mentors held opposing beliefs about language learning, which strained their relationships and disrupted “the natural balance of dialogue” (Hong et al., 2017). As a result, communication between mentors and PELTs revealed a complex nature to be revised in language teacher education:

It was a theoretical role in high school, but not because I wanted to be more theoretical, but because the teacher requested it. It happened to me in eighth grade, and the teacher asked us to

teach students grammar. [The teacher] limited the types of activities I could participate in because she was more concerned with the kids learning certain topics. (Ana, Interview, My translation).

In sum, comfort zones encounters create barriers to pedagogical innovations of PELTs (Serdyukov, 2017). Both schools and universities have a duty to constantly communicate with one another to transform their pedagogical conceptions so mentors can step outside their comfort zones to create and support PELTs' pedagogical innovations.

POST-PRACTICUM EXPERIENCES: THE END

The present section embraces both the consolidation of PELTs' knowledges coming from their pedagogical innovations lived before and during their practicum. First, PELTs' words and experiences allowed for the identification of considerable conceptualizations of what innovation meant in their training context as future language teachers. Moreover, I present further learnings, highlighted by PELTs. Subsequently, PELTs' beliefs around their teaching profession link to their projected selves, grounded in their experiences throughout their pedagogical innovations.

PELTs' Assorted Conceptions of Innovation

PELTs have diverse and *disruptive* (von Mutius, 2018) conceptualizations regarding the monolithic treatment to the term *innovation*. For instance, while one participant conceives innovation as the creation of a new idea in excerpt 26, "Innovation sounds like something from scratch to me" (Eva, Interview, My translation), in excerpt 27 another participant did not attribute such a feature of "newness" to the same term since she claims innovation involves not just creating original ideas but rather putting those preexisting ideas into practice (Ismail, 2006; Sánchez, 2011): "One thinks that innovation has to be something new from scratch. But not really, it is the idea that

brings positive results in a social group". (Zoe, Interview, My translation). From an economic standpoint, any implemented idea must bring successful results to be considered innovative (Sánchez, 2011). Hence, this PELT endorses the idea of innovation as related to *successful* results and the extent to which they focus on the needs of society (Watts & Zimmerman, 1978, as cited in Sánchez, 2011). This decision parallels the idea of locality, because it responds to hegemony in a local setting through empowerment (Oda & Toh, 2018). Participants acknowledge students' sociocultural and academic backgrounds as sources of inspiration for their inventions, as evidenced in excerpt 28. This suggests PELTs reinforce education as a common good whenever they take bottom-up consideration of specifics (Locatelli, 2018).

We can have a lot of activities, but when we try to put them into action, they don't work because of culture (as) we should consider students' age, English level, and devices, and innovation also goes through that. To concentrate on what the children require. (Ana, Interview, My translation).

INNOVATIONS AS CHANGEABLE.

PELTs continually assessed and changed their pedagogical innovations. Accordingly, participants' evaluations relate to Rogers' implementation stage as innovations go through constant "reinvention processes" (Ismail, 2006, p. 4). Albeit some PELTs have a behaviorist (Moreno, 2020) understanding of evaluation to transform pedagogical innovations, PELTs also engage constructively and collaboratively to reach goals (Aparicio Gómez & Ostos Ortiz, 2018) as seen in excerpt 29: "I would change a lot of things because I was learning. With the primary kids, it was trial and error, trial, and error" (Ana, Interview, My translation). Thence, dynamic features for redefining innovation emerged as PELTs constantly evaluated, and



transformed their pedagogical innovations, producing multiple understanding about what innovation is, and how it could be developed resulting in conflicting viewpoints as in excerpt 30: “I wouldn’t consider it so innovative, it’s just like grounding something that someone super intellectual thought of and that’s it” (Eva, Interview, My translation).

Post-Practicum Beliefs

PELTs were disruptive not only in the way they conceptualized innovations, but also in the way they began conceptualizing predefined aspects of the teaching practicum. This section explains how PELTs challenged traditional and restricted compositions of the teaching practicum’s main actors. Participants, on the other hand, advocate for the inclusion of “disregarded agents” in their pedagogical innovations. Furthermore, in their teaching, PELTs prioritize humanitarian goals over instrumental goals. Although it was evident throughout the practicum section, PELTs emphasize humanitarian aspects in their post-practicum learnings.

Disregarded Agents Behind Pedagogical Innovations. PELTs praised agents’ role played during their teaching practicum. Participants in excerpt 31 agreed that students’ feedback on pedagogical innovations was crucial for their transformation: “You have to pay attention to students’ comments, to what they say. They were giving me the tools themselves; I just had to stop and take note” (Eva, Interview, My translation). Herein, students’ comments on PELTs’ innovations position the former as active subjects and the latter as learners (Freire, 2017), challenging a banking notion of education (Freire, 2017).

The second agents correspond to students’ parents who indirectly attended PELTs’ classes. Therein, PELTs valued parental involvement in primary students’ and even PELTs’ own learning processes while contributing to an appropriate class atmosphere (Lee & Mak, 2021). Excerpt 32

evoked a mother’s participation during her child’s class and her impact to a PELT’s emotional state (Benesch, 2017). “A mother activated the microphone and thank me, she said thank you very much, teacher. My son learned a lot. Her emotion was noticeable and almost made me cry” (Zoe, Interview, My translation). In sum, partnerships between schools and parents are fundamental for educating human beings (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017).

The third group of agents involved PELTs themselves. As participants recognized the importance of experience sharing experiences with colleagues during school meetings. During these spaces they contrasted beliefs and shared knowledges (de Sousa Santos, 2018). To illustrate this let us observe excerpt 33:

My colleagues were behind me. They informed me: “Look, I gave it a shot. Try it out and see if it works for you.” So, they showed me the creation or activity they had designed, and I took what worked for me. (Ana, Interview, My translation).

Since social interaction is crucial in the construction of knowledge (Aparicio Gómez & Ostos Ortiz, 2018), fellow PELT’s comments on experiences allowed them to critically reflect on their teaching (Astika, 2014). Burns et al. (2020) scrutinize the triad of pre-service teachers, mentor teachers, and university supervisors in the teaching practicum. Herein, participants experience in this study allowed us to identify and analyze other agents involved in PELTs’ educational processes. This implies the beginning of a dialectical process involving “human beings’ rights to transform the world through words” (Freire, 2017). According to Méndez (2020), PELTs were aware of the role of external circumstances in the construction of students’ affective dimensions (excerpt 34), illustrating the post-structuralist idea that emotions are the result of people’s interactions with socio-political systems (Benesch, 2017).



In sum, a democratic education develops when PELTs prioritize the humanitarian sphere of their profession over an instrumentalizing agenda (Locatelli, 2018; Nussbaum, 2012). “A human component is always required. Background elements are highlighted when such close themes are combined. Concerns about how the guys are feeling. We notice external factors that we believe are not related to the class, but they are”. (Eva, Interview, My translation).

Experience Variety and Beliefs Around the Teaching Profession

Experience variety had a relevant role in the formation of PELTs’ teacher identity. Teng (2017) approaches this concept as the site “wherein teachers construct their own ideas or build practical knowledge about ways to be and act like a teacher” (p. 118). This emerges after ongoing articulations, contradictions, tensions, and antagonisms (Restrepo, 2007). For instance, some PELTs in excerpt 35 attribute the construction of their own knowledges to experience variety, including educational and labor ones in multiple lived situations. In the same vein, experience variety also allowed PELTs to change their pre-practicum beliefs towards the teaching profession. Excerpt 35 reflects a transition from the absence of an initial teaching desire to the development of their vocation to become educators:

I didn’t see it in my life project (teaching)
It was very revealing when you say, “it had to be this way”. I had to be in touch with kids, with adults, with adolescents to realize. And yes, I totally think that the teaching practicum and work experiences reinforced my conviction to continue. (Eva, Interview, My translation).

In this way, PELTs’ *pedagogical love* (Jiménez, 2021) beyond “natural vocation” is something they nurture with supervisors’ guidance while

refining their teaching process. Furthermore, PELTs expressed a desire to implement their pedagogical innovations as in-service teachers in the future. This means that their beliefs about their teaching profession were projected into their near future. They were particularly concerned with the implications of new technologies in their pedagogical innovations, as seen in excerpt 36, in which the participant expressed her concern about a digital gap (Ragnedda & Gladkova, 2020, as cited in Restrepo-Quiceno et al., 2021), as she acknowledges inequality in access to technologies during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, the implementation of these innovations in future face-to-face contexts require adaptations, new challenges which may trigger their abandonment: “Although I’d like to implement these innovations because I have seen how well they work, I would face obstacles. How could I present a museum simulation if there was no computer or video beam? It’d be nearly impossible” (Zoe, Interview, My translation).

CONCLUSIONS

This study qualitatively examined PELTs’ practicum experiences amid COVID-19 ERE. It maintained a narrative tone to reflect the pre, during, and post-practicum experiences and beliefs of former PELTs. Similarly, it highlighted innovative, yet complex teaching strategies used by PELTs during the pandemic. The findings show that PELTs relied on a variety of prior *knowledges* (de Sousa Santos, 2018) and concepts they brought to the practicum. PELTs addressed challenges, tensions, and outcomes of instructional innovations. Interestingly, during their post-practicum experiences, the PELTs re-configured several pre-service learning-teaching experiences.

Pre-practicum experiences, thus, served as a vehicle for the pedagogical innovations of PELTs. Here, tensions and preconceived notions from the classroom came to life. Some presumptions would either alter or remain



the same throughout the teaching practicum. Furthermore, PELTs' knowledges (de Sousa Santos, 2018) were equally diverse, emerging as both formal and experiential knowledges. The *experiential knowledges* of PELTs posed a challenge to the misalignment between university goals and actual teaching scenario. *During-practicum* experiences involved design of PELTs' pedagogical innovations throughout their teaching practicum. These included changes to teaching methods and the use of technology-based materials. One of the novelties of PELTs was approaching a glocal perspective that went beyond the idea of language teaching as the instruction of linguistic structures. Similarly, PELTs encountered a number of challenges during this stage: PELTs alternative teaching ideas and institutional rigid discourses, the presence or absence of schoolteachers, and supervisors. The *post-practicum stage* documented reflective learnings from PELTs' lived experiences throughout the teaching practicum. From disruptive conceptions of innovation to the plea for inclusiveness of what they perceived as canonically disregarded agents in education (students, parents of students, and PELTs themselves). Said stage highlighted practicum experience as a constitutive aspect of PELTs' teaching identity and their perception of the teaching profession, including their fondness for educating.

With this in mind, we suggest promoting consensus between the university and school demands along with the independence of PELTs to suggest educational initiatives. Research may focus on understanding and advocating said agents' potential contributions to language teaching education processes, especially regarding the pedagogical experience.

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