

La práctica docente en México

De estudiante a docente

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Coordinador



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Tefl Practicum in a BA Degree Curriculum

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Patricia Núñez Mercado

Gabriela Guadalupe Estrada Sánchez

Abstract

This article presents an exploratory study of English BA degree students' perceptions of their pre-service teaching experience, part of the programme's curriculum. It focuses on their reflection about their performance, the problems they faced and the solutions they gave them. The participants offered a 50-hour pre-service teaching in different institutions, from kindergarten to higher education, and from both private and public sectors, and were required to write a guided reflection report after they had completed their practicum. 14 reports were analysed using the Constant Comparative Method. Results seem to indicate that, despite not feeling sufficiently prepared to perform as language teachers having realised about the many implications of the teaching practice, the participants have an enthusiastic attitude towards the training they have received at the BA programme, having also acquired self-confidence to face different situations that may arise, even when these have not been foreseen.

Keywords: English language teaching, practicum, undergraduate students, perceptions.

Resumen

Este artículo presenta un estudio exploratorio sobre las percepciones de estudiantes de licenciatura en Lengua Inglesa sobre su experiencia en el *practicum* que realizan como parte del currículo del programa. Se centra en la reflexión sobre su desempeño, los problemas que enfrentaron y cómo los resolvieron. Los participantes realizaron 50 horas de *practicum* en distintas instituciones, desde nivel pre-escolar hasta universitario, tanto en el sector público como privado, y escribieron un reporte de reflexión guiada después del mismo. Se analizaron 14 reportes usando el Método de Comparación Constante. Los resultados parecen indicar que, a pesar de no sentirse aún lo suficientemente preparados para desempeñarse como profesores de lengua habiendo hecho conciencia de las muchas implicaciones del quehacer docente, los participantes tienen una actitud entusiasta con respecto a su preparación, y adquirieron seguridad en sí mismos para enfrenar diversas situaciones que pueden llegar a surgir, aun cuando no sean contempladas desde un inicio.

Palabras clave: Enseñanza del inglés, *practicum*, estudiantes de licenciatura, percepciones.

Conceptualising Teaching Practicum

Teaching practice refers to the professional experience of in-service teachers; that is, what teachers do on a daily basis in their classes; the term *practicum* is used to refer to the hands-on educational experience student teachers (or trainees) go through as part of their education; that is, the *practicum* is usually an educational experience, an integral component of a teacher education curriculum. Teaching *practicum* is usually defined as the time of constant teaching which constitutes a compulsory part of, or an entire course, in teacher education programmes. The *practicum* offers a context for teacher trainees to develop their personal teaching competence and to acquire and develop the knowledge of teaching and professional content knowledge of teachers (Shulman, 1987). It offers a chance for trainees to experience and experiment with the theoretical knowledge obtained along their professional studies and put it into practice. This is the reason why most teacher education programmes include in their curriculum some sort of *practicum*.

The *practicum's* conceptualization in the curriculum, in its most traditional idea, is a form of apprenticeship.

Historically, Second Language Teacher Education (SLTE) curricular design has attempted to balance the development of language knowledge and language teaching and learning with the development of professional teaching competence. According to Wright (2010), SLTE has not only incorporated many of the ideas and practices of reflection but it has also drawn increasingly on feeder fields of research and practice such as teacher cognition and professional cultures. Consequently, Wright argues, these fields have augmented, and somehow displaced, the original roots of SLTE in Applied Linguistics and Psychology. This has established a new knowledge base, contributing to the formulation of theory about language teachers' learning-to-teach, and its practices.

This knowledge base nourishes *practicum* in SLTE curriculum, since educational institutions usually adopt, rather than adapt, existing models of SLTE as its guiding principles. Regarding this, Barahona (2014) has identified three main models of curriculum used in SLTE: the *craft model*, the *applied science* and the *reflective model*. According to Barahona, these models reflect different conceptions of what teaching is and how teacher-trainees learn to teach English as a Foreign Language (EFL). She summarises each model in the following way,

The craft model views learning as an imitation process in which the pre-service teacher is required to replicate the teacher mentor's doing (Randall & Thornton, 2001). Though for the practicum, the apprenticeship model can be beneficial for pre-service teachers, it is not enough. This model does not encourage a change of teaching practices, but an accommodating attitude. Conversely, the applied science model sees learning to teach as the application of theory into the school context. This view is especially followed in English as foreign language (EFL) contexts in which English language proficiency and applied linguistics are the subject content knowledge and the core of the curriculum (Nguyen, 2013). The curricular model proposed by Wallace (1991) disrupts both the craft model and applied science model. It is based on the assumption that teachers develop professional competence through reflection on their own practice (Bailey, 1997). The reflective process is a mediating tool that enables pre-service teachers to tackle teaching problems, evaluate past experiences and take some action. (Barahona, 2014:47)

Starkey and Rawlins (2012:2) similarly summarise the development of teaching *practicum* from a behaviourist perspective which focused on student teachers' changing overt behaviours and attitudes as the *practicum* progressed to today's prevailing constructivist view of learning which emphasises a reflective *practicum* experience as theoretical knowledge is put into practice. These changes in approach to teaching *practicum*, according to Starkey and Rawlins, are the result of changes in theoretical perspectives, research concerns and policy priorities; all of which influence the direction of general education and SLTE. Lugton's (2000) research paper seems to support this historical development of the teaching *practicum* in teacher education programmes.

Barahona (2014) acknowledges that it is rare to see a SLTE program that relies only on one curricular type, since teacher-training programs usually follow a hybrid, integrative model in which different types of knowledge are integrated through the curriculum. She further explains that SLTE programs tend to structure their curriculum towards a developmental approach, i.e., teacher education aims at teachers to be prepared "for the contingencies of unforeseen future teaching situations" (citing Ely, 1994, p. 336) considering the policy expectations articulated in accreditation criteria, national standards and national curriculum.

In her study Barahona found out a constant tension between a developmental curricular model and a training model in which content knowledge competed with practical pedagogical knowledge. Her findings also confirm the tendency of English proficiency as the most prominent knowledge in the context of the study. As a result of her findings, Barahona proposes adopting more critical models such as Norton's (2005) and Kumaradivelu's (2012), which could offer some different answers to the teacher training demands of the future Latin American EFL teachers.

Starkey and Rawlins succinctly put forward the reason why studies of this type are necessary:

From a sociocultural perspective, understanding what and when student teachers learn during practicum within the context of initial teacher education could help teacher educators, mentors and programme designers to prepare teachers to meet the needs of twenty-first century learners. (Starkey and Rawlins, 2014:4)

The characteristics of the curriculum studied here as well as the type of model adopted for the *practicum* are explained in detail below.

The BA in English Language, Universidad Veracruzana

The BA program in English Language offered by the Universidad Veracruzana currently seeks to provide students with the necessary training mainly, but not exclusively, in the areas of language teaching and translation. It had its origins in 1961, when it was created as a program for English language teachers. In 1965 the teacher training focus was on secondary and tertiary education, and in 1968 the program evolved into a BA in English Language under the name *Licenciatura en Idioma Inglés*, including general training in both language teaching and translation. In 1976 the name of the language department changed officially to School of Languages (*Facultad de Idiomas*), and after several modifications, the most salient curriculum change, previous to the current one, took place in 1990, when it changed to its current name *Licenciatura en Lengua Inglesa*. This consisted of six semesters of a common core in the areas of English language, Spanish, Research, Study Techniques, Linguistics, General Culture, and English-speaking Countries Culture; and four semesters in one specific area: Teaching, Translation or Literature.

Nowadays, the BA curriculum is based on MEIF (for its initials in Spanish: *Modelo Educativo Integral y Flexible*, integrative and Flexible education model), a common model to all the bachelor's programmes of the university, which comprises 5 areas referred to as Basic (30 credits in five courses for all the programmes), Introductory, Disciplinary, Elective, and Terminal. The model is a student-centred proposal to seek not only their intellectual and professional training, but also their human and social development, and thus all courses are organized around three axes: theoretical-epistemological, heuristic, and axiological, which constitute their contents. This is the integrative element of the model in that it sees the student as an individual who will integrate to society and who needs a humanitarian vision and responsible attitude to meet its needs and development opportunities. It also cares for the individual development as a whole in that it offers the possibility of taking extra-curricular courses, including sports, arts and languages, among others. It is a flexible model because it offers a range of possibilities in terms of time and courses: students can decide how many and which courses to enrol during every term, as well as schedules and professors. The terms length is of 15 weeks in fall and spring, and 4 intensive course weeks in summer and winter. Students make their choices according to their needs, interests and abilities, as long as it does not take them more than a maximum number of terms established depending on the total

number of credits of each program. They are entitled to receive support for these choices from their academic tutor.

The BA in English Language is a 316-credit program that can be concluded in three years and a half (seven terms), and cannot take longer than five years (ten terms). Nevertheless, most students seem to finish the program within four years and a half in average, including already the Elective Area (16 credits). In the Introductory (98 credits), Disciplinary (136 credits) and Terminal (38 credits) Areas, there are twenty-seven compulsory disciplinary courses organized in nine different areas of knowledge: English language (including foreign language learning strategies), Spanish language, general culture, English-speaking countries culture, research, linguistics, literature, teaching and translation.

The compulsory courses in the teaching area are *Current Methods and Approaches of ELT* (8 credits, 4 hours a week), *English Language Teaching and Learning* (8 credits, 6 hours a week), and *Teaching Practice Planning* (6 credits, 4 hours a week). The first course contents include language acquisition and language learning theories, the different teachers' roles, and different language teaching methods, models and approaches. In *English Language Teaching and Learning* the main focus is on providing students with strategies and techniques to teach grammar, vocabulary, and the four skills, and there is a first approach to teaching *practicum*, although in some cases the context are not real. These two courses are planned for students with at least a B1+ level¹, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), and thus they are usually taken during the fifth term of the programme. *Teaching Practice Planning* includes contents on classroom management and interaction patterns, as well as evaluation in the language classroom. It also aims to provide practice in lesson planning development for language courses, integrating the systems (grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation) and the four skills. It incorporates a teaching *practicum* component, that is to say, students needs to actually perform some of the lesson plans they develop during the course in the real context for which they were designed. Students taking this course should ideally already have a B2 level, which means they usually take it during their sixth term, after the Upper-Intermediate English course.

¹ There are six English language courses in the BA, each corresponding to consecutive terms from the first to the sixth term: Beginners (A1), Elementary (A2), Pre-Intermediate (B1), Intermediate (B1+), Upper-Intermediate (B2), and Advanced (C1).

Apart from the compulsory disciplinary courses, the students need to take four optional courses (8 credits each), three from the Disciplinary Area, and one from the Terminal Area. They can choose among courses from the areas of teaching, translation, literature or English-speaking countries culture. Students can take courses from any of the areas of knowledge, but it is highly recommended to them taking all the courses from the same area in order to develop it more thoroughly. The optional courses for the teaching area are *Teaching Practicum* (8 hours a week) and *Technologies applied to ELT* (4 hours a week) from the Disciplinary Area, and *English Language Learning and Teaching to Young Learners* (4 hours a week) and *ELT through Literature* (4 hours a week) from the Terminal Area. The first two courses are designed for students with minimum a B2 level, and thus are usually taken during the sixth term; and the last two courses are designed for students with a C1 level, and they should then be taken during the sixth term. Students are also supposed to have already passed, or at least be taking at the same time in the case of *Teaching Practice Planning*, the three compulsory courses from the teaching area to take the optional courses; nevertheless, the term in which they take all these courses may vary depending on the language level they had before enrolling the BA and their specific skills and progress in the language during their academic trajectory.

The present study focuses on the first of these four optional courses, *Teaching Practicum*, which is why it will be described in more detail further on in the text. The second optional course aims to develop the students' skills in using different technological tools and devices in order to teach the language, the third one provides both theory and practice in teaching language to young learners, and the fourth course focuses on using contemporary literature to teach the language through a task-based approach. Very often, students who choose to focus on the teaching area carry out their *Social Service* giving English classes in a public or private school, which adds to pre-service teaching. To complete their social service, which gives them 12 credits, they need to report 480 hours, but every class hour as a pre-service teacher accounts for 2 *social service* hours. Another course that may also be related to the teaching area is *Experiencia Recepcional* (4 hours a week), in which students develop and carry out a research project, and those students focusing on teaching usually do research on this field. This course also gives them 12 credits. Both *Social Service* and *Experiencia Recepcional* are part of the Terminal Area, and cannot be taken until a 70% of the total credits of the program have been obtained. The *Experiencia Recepcional* course must be taken at the same time as another Terminal

Area course, *Writing Seminar for the final research paper* (6 credits, 4 hours a week), in which students are guided in their report writing, and thus have to become familiar with academic texts related to this area in order to reproduce a similar style.

The Teaching Practicum course

This optional course is designed to be taken at the same time or after the *Teaching Practice Planning* course by students with a B2 English level, usually during their sixth term in the programme. It is supposed to be 8 hours a week, 2 hours a day, but after a couple of weeks students can use some of those hours for their actual teaching *practicum*. It aims to provide students with the opportunity to put into practice what they have learned about language teaching in a real context, and in this way to be able to visualize their future teaching practice by analysing their *practicum*. It involves self-reflection about their values, attitudes and beliefs regarding ELT in a Mexican context. During the course they have to design and select or adapt appropriate materials, including course books, for the specific context they have decided to perform the teaching *practicum*, this according to the needs they have identified, as well as to design the lesson and unit plans which they are meant to put into practice, all of which will be supervised by the *Teaching Practicum* course facilitator. Students need to perform at least 50 pre-service teaching hours, and write self-reflection reports about it. All of their work is done and reported individually and to be evaluated they have to hand in a description of the teaching context (10%), a description of the needs' analysis of such context (10%), the tasks carried out to adapt a course book to it (20%), all their lesson plans (20%), their reflection reports on their own performance as pre-service teachers (20%) and the unit plans (20%).

Two sections (groups) of this course open during both spring (February–May) and fall (August–December) terms so as to meet the different students' needs regarding their specific academic trajectories. Students can choose the school where they will do their *practicum*; it can be from kindergarten to university levels, whether from the public or private sectors. The majority of the students who take this course are in their sixth term of the BA, although some take it until their seventh or even eighth term in the programme, and very few before that (only those with transfer credits because of studies in a previous institution or language certifications).

This study

During the fall term 2015, 21 students were enrolled in section 601 and 14 in section 602. The participants of this study were 8 students from section 601 and 6 students from section 602. There were 10 female students and 4 male in the sample, and they were between 20 and 25 years old. All the participants were in their sixth term, all of them were taking the course for the first time, and they all passed the course. 7 participants were high achievers and 7 were average students. The main purpose of this exploratory study was to look into the students' perceptions of their own performance during their pre-service teaching. The main source of data was the students' reflection reports about their own teaching *practicum*. The participants for this study were chosen taking into consideration their trajectory along the BA programme. In order to do this, the academic trajectory of every student enrolled in the course in both sections was revised, selecting seven high achievers and 7 average achievers.

After having selected the participants for the study, the analysis of their reports was carried out. First, each of the participants reports were transcribed into an Excel grid in the corresponding questions that they were given to carry out a guided reflection of their own teaching *practicum*. The questions were:

- What have you learned from this term's teaching? What stands out to you, feels new to you, excites you, or challenges you?
- What problems did you face when designing your lesson plans?
- What are your strengths and areas of opportunity?
- Why does this learning matter? Why does it stand out to you?
- What do you do from here? How will you take this learning with you? Does this learning change your perspective, your career goals, or your interests?

Then, following the Constant Comparative Method (Taylor-Powell and Renner, 2003), the key words in the participants' answers for each of the questions were identified and compared. The main aspects to identify the key words were their perceptions of their teaching practice, the problems they may face and how they would solve such problems, as well as identified strengths, areas of opportunities, and the learning that had taken place from this *practicum*.

Findings

Analysis of a composition data resulting from 14 students reporting the information regarding how they felt in this teaching *practicum* experience was done in the same order as it was collected. Students focused their reflection on the following aspects: What they have learned through this teaching experience, what problems they faced when designing their lesson plans, what their strengths and areas of opportunity are, why it is important what they did in the classroom and what they would do from this experience. All of the responses to these aspects seem to indicate that, at this stage, teacher students are keen to experience teaching in a wide-ranging way.

The participants of this study carried out their pre-service teaching in different schools, which used different methodologies and with a variety of regulations. The following figure shows the contexts in which students had the opportunity to perform such teaching *practicum*.

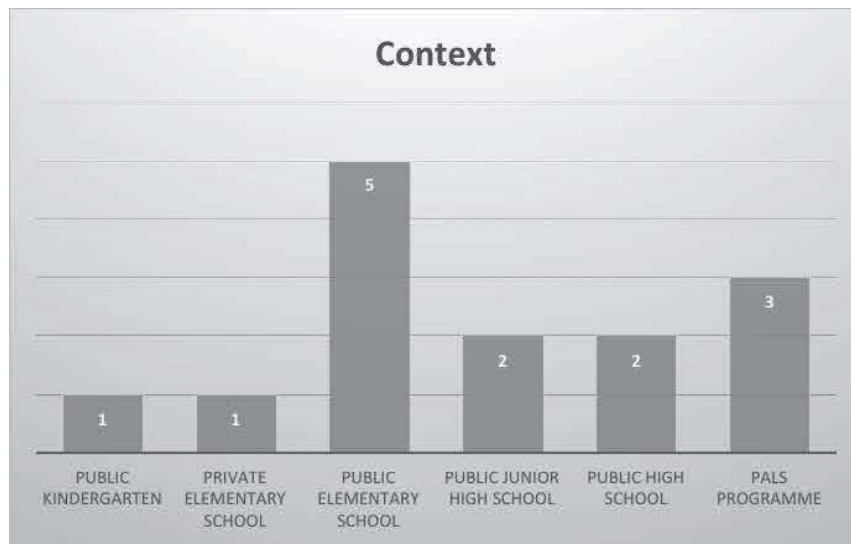


Figure 1. Teaching contexts for *practicum*, BA in English, University of Veracruz.

As can be seen in figure 1, most of the participants carried out their pre-service teaching in the public sector; only one chose to do it in a private institution. Many

preferred an elementary school for this *practicum*. Three other students decided to do their pre-service teaching in the PALS programme. This particular programme is an in-house peer support programme which allows high achievers at the BA in English Language to help their low-achieving peers to improve their English level.

Learning

Regarding what students learnt from this experience, participants mentioned that the most significant for them was to:

- Experience what 'real' teaching looks and feels like
- Realise that teaching is not as easy as it seems
- Figure out they can use different approaches to teach English according to the level of their students, especially at elementary level
- Know they may face different difficulties in the classroom and to deal with different kinds of students
- Be creative and organised
- Reassure they want to become teachers

Basically, students realised what being in front of a class means: to deal with real situations and to take into account different aspects such as the level of the students, their age, their interests and their background. The following verbatim quotations serve as illustration:

- *However, nothing compares to the actual feeling and experience you gain when you are actually teaching. (SS1)*
- *What I learnt with my teaching practice is that teaching is not an easy task. Behind teaching there is a lot of time you spend planning the lesson, designing activities and preparing appropriate materials for the students. (SS6)*
- *I learnt from talking to the head of the school to know how to treat the students and give a real class, with difficulties and missing material for classes. (SS7)*
- *I learned things such as follow a programme and plan the sessions based on it organizing the activities in a limited amount of time for each session, how to establish a good relationship with the students, how to react to unexpected situations and to be prepare to make on-the-spot decisions. (SS12)*

Lesson Plans

It was interesting to see how students perceive the different problems they face when being in front of a group and more importantly how they react to these situations. Lesson planning is one of the problems they encountered as they are not used to designing them on a daily basis. In this matter, they revealed that,

- *It takes a lot of time and dedication to make a lesson plan and it is really important to predict what it could happen if everything goes wrong; having a second lesson plan is a good idea to prevent chaos. (SS3)*
- *I faced some difficulties when doing my lesson plans because sometimes I run out of topics to teach. (SS4)*
- *When I design a lesson plan, I must take into account many aspects: students' needs and interests, the weather, whether students attend to the class or not, the number of students, the time (after/ before the break), the kind of videos/ music, the material used, even though the kind or number of activities. They can be a problem when you do not consider them in a lesson plan. (SS7)*
- *When I had to design my lesson plans the most difficult was to find interesting and fun activities to students because they get bored easily. (SS8)*

It can be inferred that students have difficulties when designing their lesson plans because they might not have had sufficient practice in previous courses. They seem to have realised that writing lesson plans on a daily basis for an entire course is time consuming. However, it appears that, even when they consider this activity difficult to convey, they are willing to do their best to fulfil such teaching requirement. It can be said that after having this practice, they are aware of the different aspects to take into consideration when designing their lesson plans as well as the materials and the equipment they may need.

Strengths and areas of opportunity

The third aspect students commented, strengths and areas of opportunities, was closely related to their ability to recognise not only what they are good at, but also where they can improve and work on. In students' words, their motivation, ability to adapt to different circumstances and to establish a good relationship with

their students, their perseverance as well as their love for teaching are their biggest strengths. As for their areas of opportunity, they mentioned that the areas where they consider they need to work on are,

- To improve their teaching strategies
- To be more creative when designing learning activities
- To be willing to design their lesson plans
- To know how to manage their groups

All of this is illustrated in the following extracts:

Participant	Strengths	Areas of opportunity
SS2	... my motivation and my interest to get good results in learners. As well as encouraging students in the autonomous learning and adequate my lesson plans to children with Special Education needs (SEN)	My areas of opportunity is [sic] improving my strategies to maintain the attention of students, because in some cases there were dispersed attention and I couldn't do all content of the lesson plan.
SS5	...my main strengths are my ability to adapt myself to unexpected situations and different people, and my attitudes towards students.	I think that I need to improve and be more creative when designing activities, due to the fact that sometimes when teaching I have to improvise and change the routine of the classroom.
SS6	The strengths I have are that I explain the topics well and that my attitude towards the students always is good [sic].	My weaknesses are that I don't like planning, but I know that it is necessary, and also that sometimes I get desperate easily when students start to talk to each other, don't pay attention or play.
SS8	I really like to teach and for that reason I try to do my best and focus my attention in [sic] the positive aspects of teaching and not in the negative things.	My area of opportunity is the class management in general. I have to learn how to organize my classes to use the time properly as well as how to control a large group.

It is clear that the students participating in this study have become aware of the features they must take into consideration when being in front of a group. They consider that, as teachers, they still need to improve in certain aspects, which is quite natural as they are beginning this teaching journey. However, it is vital that

they recognise from an early stage what their strong and weak areas are so as to know themselves and start reflecting upon what being a teacher entails.

Importance of this teaching practicum

This other personal aspect is also somewhat surprising considering these students could experience a real teaching context for the first time. The fact that they are able to identify the importance of being well prepared, regarding their abilities not just to pass on knowledge in general but their abilities to design the most suitable materials and activities as well, is vital for their professional growth. Besides, being willing to become better and to improve in the aspects they consider their weaknesses is a good opportunity for them to develop as good teachers. By reading the extracts below, it becomes clear why these students consider this experience important:

- *I want to become a teacher, a good teacher who can teach no matter what the circumstances are, teach not only children but people of all ages and education levels. (SS4)*
- *I think all the learning that I got from this experience is important because it will help me to realize what I did right, what I did wrong and how I can improve it. Also, it will help me to remember other aspects that are closely related to teaching, aspects that before this experience I was not completely aware of. (SS9)*
- *After this experience I want to improve the skills to teach and get better outcomes. Great results encourage me to continue in this area. I see as a teacher I must be updated in using new material and tools, and I also know it is not easy to be a perfect teacher but little by little to be better. (SS11)*
- *This experience was important for me because if I continue teaching I will be prepare [sic] to deal with these kind [sic] of situations, and because I still had the opportunity to go and ask my teacher for a piece of advice whenever I faced difficulties with something in the classroom. In addition, it is here where I could learn what to do or not to do while teaching, and what kind [sic] of activities or techniques worked better and why. (SS12)*

As can be seen, students feel that having a real teaching experience helped them realise about some of the difficulties teachers face on a daily basis. Most im-

portantly, they could experience how to overcome such difficulties and how to improve their teaching practice. They seem to understand the importance of being well prepared, to make the right decisions when needed and to take into consideration different aspects which would enrich their professional life.

From here to where

The last aspect participants were asked to take into account was related to their future as teachers and whether they had changed their perception, their career goals or their interests. From some of their insights and reflections the following can be concluded,

- Students' growth, both personally and professionally
- Students' willingness to plan better classes
- Students' awareness of what works into the classroom
- Students' reassurance of what they want to do in life and whether they are ready to become teachers.

The following are the most representative mentions of this:

- *Now I can see myself as a teacher because I really enjoyed this experience and I feel I grew professionally and as a person. This teaching practice changed the way I saw education. Not too long from now, I used to think as a student and now I'm able to see the situation from a different perspective.*
- *I wanted to give classes just to people from secondary school, but this opens my goals, now I pretend to teach in a primary school if someone requires me to do it, even when is [sic] difficult. (SS4)*
- *Although my perspective changed, my interests still [sic] are the same. What I can do from here is doing the same: observing in detail students' reactions, to improve my work and do the best. (SS7)*
- *Now I know what the aspects which I need to improve are. I made mistakes but I learned from them and with this learning will be easier to start the task of teaching in my professional life. (SS8)*
- *From here I will improve my knowledge as a student but also as a teacher. I realized I have to be prepared in many different aspects. (SS10)*

- *Now I have a clearer idea of what a student want, what I can give and what works and what does not work with students. (SS11)*
- *It helped to [sic] me to rethink about what I want to do in life. (SS14)*

All these ideas might be related to personal and professional growth, as they deal with the idea of the future and what students want to do in life. It is important to mention that it seems that students have a clearer idea of what they can do to improve their future teaching practice and to feel more comfortable with themselves in the professional field. Besides, they are willing to learn and to observe what happens in their contexts so as to become well-prepared professionals.

Conclusions

Practicum is a key component of every teacher training programme. Its implementation varies from institution to institution, ranging from the traditional view of apprenticeship to more constructivist approaches involving reflective practice. Nonetheless, it appears that a movement towards more innovative approaches is taking place. In the curriculum analysed in this study, it seems that the *practicum* follows a mixture of the applied science model and the reflective model, leaving behind the more traditional view of apprenticeship. From the former, we identified the sequence of teaching-related courses leading to the *practicum* and the strong component on English courses. In these courses, the teaching *practicum* is limited and mostly takes place in controlled and simulated environments (micro-teaching). This reflects the idea that the *practicum* should come after students have gained enough theoretical knowledge and a good command of the language, features of such model. However, once students start their *practicum*, in this case a one-hundred-and-twenty hour course, the approach shifts to a more holistic- reflective teaching experience, considering it takes place in real contexts which implies student-teachers to be in charge of their own groups. That is, it is expected that student teachers transfer the knowledge they have gained from other teaching-related courses in the curriculum in the school context in which they practice but reflecting and adapting to the circumstances of the school; all of which corresponds to the aims of the institutional educational model.

Regarding the findings, we have learnt that even though students report not being fully prepared to face the teaching realities, they do regard the *practicum* as an enriching educational experience which offers them the possibility of growing as a teacher since it has helped them gain confidence to be in front of a group and respond satisfactorily to the demands of their students. This has undoubtedly had a positive impact on these future teachers of English since they think that after the *practicum* they can perform better and that this experience may help them face their uncertain future teaching contexts in their teaching career.

One of the implications of the study might be that the programme studied may consider changing the approach to the *practicum*, considering the gains students report having while doing it. More *practicum* hours in different educational levels and a more critical approach to this may better prepare future generation of English teachers to face the changing contexts of our profession. Moreover, as a further step and to enrich this study, it would be interesting to interview some of the students so as to know more about what their perceptions and feelings of such practices are.

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