Reforming Practicum and Research Training in a Colombian English Teaching Program

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Reformas a las prácticas y a la formación investigativa en una licenciatura en inglés en Colombia

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Abstract

Over the last two years, the Ministry of Education in Colombia tightened the quality conditions that all teacher education programs must attain in order to operate within the law. In this chapter, the authors present a case study that assessed a curriculum reform implemented by an English teaching program at a private university in response to these government requirements. The study specifically focused on the nature and impact of the modifications made to the program's practicum and research training components. Data collection consisted in two phases. The first one involved a documentary analysis of (a) the policies restructuring teacher education and (b) the programs' previous and latest study plans. The second one entailed a series of semi-structured interviews to five participants selected through key-informant and critical-case sampling. The analysis revealed a significant increase in the number of credits allocated to practicum and research training as well as the intentional articulation between them. These changes may reconfigure the student teachers' practices and teaching identities. However, for this reform to produce the desired effects, the program needs to foster a new research-based culture among all its members.

Keywords: curriculum reform, educational policy, English teaching, practicum, research training, teacher education.

Resumen

En los últimos dos años el Ministerio de Educación Nacional de Colombia ajustó las condiciones de calidad que todos los programas de licenciatura deben cumplir para operar dentro del marco legal. En este capítulo, los autores presentan un estudio de caso que evaluó la reforma curricular implementada por un programa de enseñanza del inglés de una universidad privada en respuesta a dichos requisitos. El estudio se enfocó específicamente en la naturaleza y el impacto de las reformas a los componentes de pasantía y formación en investigación del programa. La recolección de datos incluyó dos etapas. La primera involucró un análisis documental de (a) las políticas que restructuran los programas de licenciatura y (b) los planes de estudio anteriores y actuales de los programas. La segunda fase incluyó una serie de entrevistas semiestructuradas a cinco participantes seleccionados mediante muestreo de informantes claves y casos críticos. El análisis mostró un aumento significativo en el número de créditos asignados a pasantías y formación en investigación, así como la articulación intencional entre estos. Estos cambios pueden reconfigurar las prácticas e identidades docentes de los estudiantes. Sin embargo, para que esta reforma produzca los efectos deseados, el programa debe fomentar una nueva cultura basada en la investigación.

Palabras clave: *reforma curricular, política educativa, enseñanza del inglés, práctica, formación en investigación, formación docente.*

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Introduction

As of May 30, 2018, Colombia joined the select group of emerging economies that make part of the *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development* (OECD) ("Colombia ingresa a la OCDE" [Colombia joins the OECD]). Obtaining this membership – and measuring up to it – involves a series of complex transformations in multiple areas of the national agenda that were formally set forth through the *National Development Plan 2014-2018* (Departamento Nacional de Planeación [National Planning Department, DNP], 2014). This long-term program portrays education as a priority to achieve peace and equity across the national territory and purports to turn Colombia into the most educated country in Latin America by 2025.

With these overarching goals in mind, the Ministry of Education (MEN) enacted a major reform to teacher education through two recent policies: Decree 2450 of 2015, which established the mandatory contents for teacher education curricula; and Resolution 02041 of 2016[1], which set the conditions that programs must meet to obtain or renew the *Register of Qualified Programs* (RQP)[2] and made them tantamount to the terms necessary to obtain the *High Quality Accreditation* (HQA)[3].

The Ministry of Education has made very serious demands on teacher education programs through these policies, which will invariably reconfigure the educational landscape of the country. Among other

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[1] Even though Resolution 02041 of 2016 was superseded by Resolution 18583 of 2017, researchers analyzed the former, because the English teaching program at Universidad Católica Luis Amigó was certified under the conditions set by the 2016 document.

[2] Issued by the Ministry of Education, the *Register of Qualified Programs* [Registro Calificado] is the official license that all teacher education programs require in order to operate under Colombian law.

[3] The Ministry of Education grants the *High Quality Accreditation* [Acreditación en Alta Calidad] to all higher-education programs that formally demonstrate the achievement of quality conditions established by the *National Accreditation Council* [Consejo Nacional de Acreditación]. For specific information on the process to obtain the HQA please visit https://www.cna.gov.co

requirements, these laws establish that all student teachers must both complete a significant amount of teaching practice before graduation and receive adequate training on how to conduct classroom research. The purpose of this study was to analyze the impact of these policies on the English teaching program at Universidad Católica Luis Amigó (Luis Amigó hereafter), particularly as concerns the resulting reform on those two fundamental aspects of its curriculum: practicum and research training.

Literature Review

Curriculum

For Toombs and Tierney (1993), a school curriculum can be defined as the "institution's entire educational program. It is the locus of corporate responsibility for learning that … encompasses all the sectors of the institution involved with the process of teaching and learning" (p. 195). Hence, the renovation of a program's curriculum should involve administrators as well as students and teachers.

In addition, the reconfiguration of the curriculum must answer to the demands of the socio-political context, often condensed in educational policies. According to Díaz-Barriga Arceo (2010), the curriculum, as a central and structural component of the educational activity, is subject to changes concerning the objectives, contents, and processes of schooling. In consequence, the curriculum becomes "the space to dispute power in every institution" (p. 55).

Therefore, curriculum reform usually emerges from the tensions between meeting the demands made by the government in office and answering to the concrete needs of the school community. For that reason, to assess the impact of a curricular reform is necessary to consider not only the legal requirements to which it responds but also the way in which it affects each member of the community vis a vis the position they hold within the program.

Practicum

According to Gebhard (2009) "A variety of terms is used to refer to the practicum, including practice teaching, field experience, apprenticeship, practical experience, and internship" (p. 250). For Castiblanco (2016), the practicum results from the reflection upon three elements: a specific knowledge, its inherent pedagogy, and their relation with specific teaching practices. Hence, he claims that the pedagogical practicum is the continuous and reflexive process through which every teacher education program must determine and be conscious of the integral advancement of its students (p. 5).

Research Training in Teacher Education

About research training, Restrepo (as cited in Madrid, 2014) says:

> One of the factors associated with the quality of higher education has to do with the practice of research, and this refers not only to the systematic production of research but also to the capacity to design and implement research training processes. In this way, it will be significant, for both teachers and students, the search and production of knowledge, the accumulation of experience on high-level investigation, and the linking of research products with the everyday life of the classroom (p. 33).[4]

Creswell (2002) defines educational research as a cyclical process of steps that typically involves identifying a research problem, reviewing the literature, specifying a purpose for the study, collecting and analyzing data, and forming an interpretation of information that will later be disseminated amongst the educational community (p. 627). His definition summarizes the steps that teacher researchers have to become familiar with, to conduct research.

Research training, however, should not be limited to learning the mechanics of the research process. Some authors (DeFaría & DeAlizo, 2006; Abad & Pineda, 2018) argue that it should also entail the

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[4] Original version in Spanish was translated for publication purposes.

development of specific attitudes, aptitudes, and competencies that enable researchers to successfully interact with others around the resolution of problems and the collective construction of knowledge.

In any case, some authors (Borg, 2006, 2013; Castro-Garcés, A. Y., & Martínez-Granada, 2016; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Edwards & Burns, 2016; Freeman, 1998; McKay, 2009) coincide in asserting that research training constitutes a key component of quality teacher education. For the Ministry of Education, research —and research training thereby—constitutes a key strategy "to develop a critical attitude and a creative ability in teachers and students with the mission of contributing to scientific knowledge, innovation, and social and cultural development" (Decree 2450 of 2015, p. 6).

In Colombia, nevertheless, there is an ongoing discussion about what research training involves at the different levels of education. Some authors (Augusto-Hernández, 2003; Restrepo-Gómez, 2003, 2007, 2008), for example, differentiate *formative research* from *scientific research*. Although formative research presupposes similar steps to those of scientific research, the former focuses on the development of research competencies at the undergraduate level whereas the latter demands a level of rigor that is typical of post-graduate programs and that must be proven through the publication of results in scientifically validated venues.

These conceptual differences notwithstanding, it is clear that pedagogical practicum and research training have become essential constituents of the teacher education curriculum. In fact, they should go hand in hand so as to prepare future teachers to articulate critical reflection with pedagogical intervention.

Antecedents of Reforms in Teaching Programs

Curricular reforms are the order of the day in education, let alone in teacher training. The case of *Teaching Scotland's Future* (Donaldson, 2014) exemplifies the type of curricular reform that seeks to improve the quality of teaching education programs. It emphasized three as-

pects: teacher training, leadership promotion, and program duration. By proposing to revalue the meaning of the teacher's role, this reform implied the renovation of standards, contents, and objectives in the teaching curricula of Scotland, with the so-called "Curriculum for Excellence" (CfE). About this, Donaldson (2014) reflected:

> CfE … poses significant capacity challenges to teachers, schools, local authorities, universities and national education bodies in Scotland. The complexity surrounding simultaneous developments in the curriculum, in the nature of the teaching profession, and in approaches to self-evaluation are considerable. Although developed separately and at different times, these interlocking aspects of reform establish the basis for fundamental, systemic reform, which may in turn lead to a much more dynamic education system (p. 189).

Teaching Scotland's Future shows how the successful implementation of curricular reform, particularly as concerns teacher education, involves the identification of both positive components that must be preserved and ineffective aspects that need to be revamped. Therefore, members of teacher education programs should evaluate and discuss any curriculum adjustments in a critical and meticulous way in order to meet the requirements set by the policies that intend to modify it.

Implemented at a teacher training program in the United States, *Cause* is another example of curriculum reform in teacher education. As stated by Waddell and Vartulli (2015), the *Cause* project restructured the curriculum in order to integrate the pedagogical practicum to the urban sector. In the case of this teaching program, which took place at an American university that chose to remain unknown, the project took around three years to start showing the results that ultimately made it a success. Based on this experience, the authors reflected, "We have rediscovered that the journey of reform must be holistic, tinkering with programs is not the answer and we cannot make changes to individual courses isolated from the program as a whole" (p. 20). From the analysis of this experience we conclude that curricular reform to teacher education programs is more likely to

yield positive outcomes when it takes place through a comprehensive, gradual, critical, and systematic process.

Finally, according to Popkewitz (1998), the history of curriculum has always been shaped by different theories and perspectives that never develop in the way they were proposed at first. In his view, the restructuring of the curriculum will always bring about unforeseen variations and unwanted consequences (p. 69).

From the analysis of the Colombian educational context and the review of concepts and antecedents regarding the reformation of teacher education programs, we came up with the following research question: What is the impact of the latest teacher education reform, materialized in decree 2450 of 2015 and in resolution 02041 of 2016, on the practicum and research training components of the English Teaching Program at Universidad Católica Luis Amigó? With this project we specifically sought to appraise the impact of the reform on the pedagogical practicum and research training components of the program.

Method

Research Design

Through case study research (Creswell, 2002; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2013), researchers seek to generate extended awareness and deeper understanding of a complex phenomenon, problem, or program by analyzing in detail specific aspects of it as they play out within a real context.

Under the interpretive paradigm (Taylor & Medina, 2013), through this program case study (Moore, Lapan, & Quartaroli, 2012) we explored the particular changes introduced into the practicum and research training components of a language teaching program in response to the recent educational policies described earlier in the chapter.

Context

Luis Amigó is a multi-campus university with 6 sites that spread across the national territory and nearly 12,000 students enrolled in over 40 graduate and undergraduate programs. Operating under a humanistic and Catholic approach, Luis Amigó has a twofold mission: (a) to preserve and disseminate scientific, technological, and cultural knowledge; and (b) to educate integral, ethical, and critical professionals with a social conscience.

The on-campus bachelor's degree in English teaching at Luis Amigó has been active since 1996. Nearly 1,000 students make it one of the largest programs of its kind in Colombia. During more than 20 years of existence, the program has had four different denominations, with their corresponding plans of studies and SNIES code numbers[5]. In this chapter we compare the last two versions of the program, to illustrate the changes made to the curriculum with regard to practicum and research training.

The previous version of the program corresponds to the B.A. Ed in English Teaching[6] (SNIES 104645) [ET program hereafter]. In 2016 it was awarded the HQA and in 2017 it obtained the renewal of its RQP. Although no longer being offered, it is still under operation because the last students who enrolled in it were accepted in 2017-01. This plan of study has 144 credits divided into 6 tiers: general knowledge, general pedagogy, specific discipline (English teaching), humanistic education, research training, and elective courses. The recent reform on teacher education gave way to the implementation of a curriculum reform that materialized in the latest version of the program,

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[5] SNIES (Sistema Nacional de Información de la Educación Superior [National System of Information for Higher Education]) is an information system created and operated by the Ministry of Education wherein the information of all higher education institutions and programs in Colombia is compiled and organized. The Minsitry of Education assigns a SNIES code number to all programs that have received their RQP to facilitate their identification.

[6] Licenciatura en Inglés.

the B.A. Ed in Foreign Languages Teaching with Emphasis in English[7] (SNIES 106287) [FLTEE program hereafter]. This new plan of studies has 160 credits and it started to function in 2017-II.

The practicum constitutes a graduation requirement, as established by the Program's Educative Project (*Proyecto Educativo de Programa* [PEP])[8] and by the plan of study. Although the practicum courses have specific pedagogical objectives, they are connected to take the student through a logical sequence that starts with the observation stages and finishes with a project.

Each practicum course fosters critical thinking and reflection by having students' complete executive reports and teachers' journals in which they portray everything that affects them emotionally, personally, and professionally during their observations and interventions. Student teachers must do their pedagogical practicum in English. In addition, the practicum must include at least one year of teaching in public schools.

On a different note, the development of research competencies is one of the main goals of the English Teaching Program. According to the PEP, the program graduates should be able to "research their own teaching practice and design research proposals in light of the social and educational realities and the changes required by today's world" (2016, p. 13).

The English teaching program at Luis Amigó has allocated several credits to research training. First, students take three general research courses offered by the *Office of the Vice Provost for Research* (Research Office); in these courses they explore both qualitative and quantitative philosophies, methods, and approaches.

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[7] Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras con Énfasis en Inglés

[8] According to the Office of Academic Affairs [Vicerrectoría Académica] of Universidad Nacional de Colombia (2012), the Program Educative Project (PEP) is a "document that contains the guidelines, policies, and principles that guide and direct the development of the program (…) This document must specify the learning objectives of the program and their articulation with the subjects included in the plan of studies, in such a way that the development of these objectives as well as their evaluation are evident" (p. 2).

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Afterwards, students have to complete a number of courses within the program in which they must design and implement a research project leading to the completion of a graduation thesis. Although the program favors action research (Burns, 1999, 2010), students and teachers can employ other qualitative methods.

Population

As researchers we resorted to *Judgment or Purposeful Sampling* (Marshall, 1996), a method that involves choosing those subjects who can provide the most relevant information for the completion of the study. Participant selection is based on the researchers' knowledge, whether theoretical or empirical, about the program or phenomenon under investigation. Evidence derived from the study itself may also inform the posterior inclusion of additional individuals.

Within this broad framework, we employed two sampling sub-types: *key informant sampling and critical case sampling* (Moore, Lapan, & Quartaroli, 2012). Through the former, researchers select subjects with expertise on a particular area of interest to the study; the latter, on the other hand, leads to the selection of individuals whose particular experiences endow them with deep insight on the phenomenon under investigation.

Following these criteria, we chose five subjects whose expertise, experiences, and position within the program classified them as key informants and critical cases: (1) the program director, (2) the practicum coordinator, (3) a faculty member who specializes in language policy; (4) the students' representative before the curricular committee; and (5) the head of the program's research line[9].

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[9] The School of Education at Universidad Católica Luis Amigó has one research group, EILEX (Educación, Infancia y Lenguas Extranjeras). EILEX is comprised by three research lines, coordinated by their respective heads. CILEX (Construcciones Investigativas en Lenguas Extranjeras) is the line under which all research associated to the English Teaching Program is conducted.

Data Collection

The project was a longitudinal study (Moore et al., 2012) carried out over the course of academic year 2017. Data collection involved two main stages: documentary analysis and interviews. For ethical reasons, we obtained authorization from the director of the program to analyze and reproduce the study plans as well as informed consent from all five participants.

The documentary analysis was sub-divided into two phases. In the first phase, we analyzed the recent reform on language teacher education programs. To that aim, we used index cards to note down the modifications required by Decree 2450 and Resolution 02041 on the pedagogical practicum and research training components of all teaching programs in Colombia.

In the second phase, we developed a contrastive matrix to compare the previous plan of study with the latest one, which was designed in keeping with the prescriptions made by the above-mentioned policies. The matrix displays aspects as broad as overall number of credits and duration of each study plan, while it simultaneously pinpoints elements as specific as the denomination, pedagogical progression, and curricular articulation of the courses.

After analyzing the documentary sources, researchers conducted semi-structured interviews (Longhurst, 2003) to appraise the impact of the reform on Luis Amigo's English Teaching Program. We designed the interview protocol in light of the information we had gathered through the initial documentary analysis. Furthermore, we piloted and field-tested the protocol to increase its validity. The interviews focused on having the five participants (a) describe the major changes introduced into the program's practicum and research training and (b) present their perspective on the impact these changes would have on the program as a whole and on its academic community. Table 1 shows how these stages responded to the research objectives.

Table 1. *Action Plan*

Method	Action	Specific objectives
Documentary analysis	Documentary analysis of educational policies on teacher education programs	To specify the modifications proposed by the reform on the pedagogical practicum and the research training components for Colombia's teacher education programs
	Contrastive analysis of practicum and research training components in both previous and latest study plans	To describe the curricular modifications done to the pedagogical practicum and research training components of Luis Amigó's English Teaching Program
Semi-structured interviews	Recollection and analysis of data regarding impact of curriculum reform as perceived by participants	To analyze the impact of the curricular modifications required by the reform on the pedagogical practicum and research training components of Luis Amigó's English Teaching Program

Data Analysis

In light of the iterative nature of qualitative research (Burns, 1999), we moved back and forth between data collection and analysis and between individual coding and group meaning making. We employed an *integrated approach* (Curry, 2015) to the categorization process. The initial analysis of the documentary sources guided the construction of pre-established categories. We then coded the transcripts, defined emerging categories, and distilled the final code structure.

We employed a 3+1 *table* (Appendix A) to describe the data using illustrative evidence and then to draw interpretations in relation with existing theory. To enhance the study's validity and trustworthiness, we employed *members checking* (Burns, 2010; Moore at al., 2012) with the program's director. As previously suggested, we also implemented *triangulation* of sources, methods, investigators, and time for data collection (Denzin as cited in Burns, 1999, 2010).

Results

In this section, we describe the main changes introduced into the practicum and research training components of the program and present the implications of this curriculum reform as perceived by the participants. For the purpose of describing the curriculum adaptations on both practicum and research training, we designed a contrastive matrix (table 2) that allowed us to compare the program's previous and latest plans of study. As indicated before, the former corresponds to the ET program (SNIES 104645); the latter, to the FLTEE program (SNIES is 106287). To determine the rationale behind the apparent changes on the curriculum, we supplemented the data collected through the documentary analysis with information gleaned from the interviews. The results of analyzing data from both sources are described below.

Description of Curriculum Reform

Practicum

The program's practicum underwent a critical transformation. The most noticeable change was the necessary increase in the number of credits, which forced curriculum designers to extend the overall duration of the practicum and to bring forward the time set for its commencement. In the ET program, the pedagogical practicum has 12 credits; the process starts in the sixth semester and goes all the way to the ninth and last semester. In the FLTEE program the number of practicum credits ascended to 50; as a result, the practicum starts in the second semester and ends in the tenth. It means that out of the 160 credits that comprise the new study plan, almost one third are devoted exclusively to the pedagogical practicum.

Program administration and faculty also segmented the practicum into distinct phases that serve different intentions. In the ET program,

practicum is divided into four courses. In the first course, students contextualize their practicum sites and develop a preliminary practicum project. During the second course, students implement their class project through activities aimed at overcoming the weaknesses and improving the strengths they identify during the observation period. In the third course, after the implementation, the practicum advisor takes students into the self-correction phase. Based on the feedback received, students have to redesign their projects with the aim of improving and applying it again with the target class. In the fourth and final practicum course, called social practicum, students apply for scholarships or engage in community outreach projects in which they undertake meaningful actions seeking to transform a social setting, whether it is educational or not. On the other hand, in the FLTEE program, the pedagogical practicum is divided into three main phases: First, the *observation practicum*, which covers semesters 2 through 4. Then, the *teaching or immersion practicum* and the *research practicum*, which occur simultaneously. They start in the 5th semester and go until the 10th semester.

Another major change introduced into the practicum involves the type of students with which pre-service teachers have to work. In the ET program, practicum students work either with children, in elementary school; or with teenagers, in middle school or high school. In the FLTEE program, students doing the practicum have to work for two semesters with each population —children, teenagers, and adults—, so they need six semesters to complete this phase. As suggested by one of the participants, the goal with this new requirement is to have student teachers reflect upon the demands made by different student populations, identify variations in their performance, and "analyze English teaching in different contexts" (Participant E1).

Research Training

The data collected shows an increase in the number of credits allotted to research training as well. The three general research courses were kept in both plans of study. However, students in the ET pro-

gram start taking them in the fifth semester whereas those in the FLTEE program take these courses as early as the second semester. In addition, in both plans, the program-specific research courses lead to the completion of a graduation paper or thesis. Nevertheless, the credits allocated for those courses were raised from only four in the ET program to 16 in the FLTEE program.

In the new program, teaching practicum and research training have been intentionally aligned to promote that students critically reflect upon and thereby transform their teaching practices. In fact, research training is considered another form of practicum, which was built under the title of *Teacher Researcher*. The program director discussed the reflective nature of the research courses as follows:

> We established some [research] courses (...) [whereby] I start to create my identity as a teacher researcher, that is, the teacher who reflects upon his or her own practice based on theory, systematic data collection and analysis, and academic writing (Program director)[10].

With this adjustment, the intention is to articulate both educational experiences, so much so that students in the FLTEE program are required to investigate their own teaching practices to produce their graduation paper. As one of the participants said: "The practicum is the setting wherein the preservice teachers are going to collect the data for their own projects" (Participant 5). On this point, the program director said:

> The articulation between practicum and research training happens in a spiral-like manner that allows the immersion practicum to enrich the teacher researcher practicum, but at the same time they complement each other. It means that practicum will enrich my research, but research will transform what I do in the classroom (Program director).

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[10] All excerpts from participants' interviews were translated from Spanish for publication purposes. Authorization was granted to the authors to use the title of the program director in connection to the comments she made. The identity of all the other participants was preserved for confidentiality purposes.

Impact of Curriculum Reform

For the participants, the reform of the curriculum will have serious implications for the program that we classified into benefits and challenges. First, we describe the ones regarding the program's practicum. Then, we present the ones regarding research training.

Practicum: Benefits and Challenges

Although the practicum has always been a key aspect of the program, it became even more relevant in the new study plan. In fact, the practicum became the axis that articulates all the other components of the curriculum (i.e. general knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, specific linguistic knowledge, and didactics of the discipline) to keep the wheel of teacher education running smoothly. In that regard, one of the participants commented:

> According to the new resolution and the new decree, the practicum is the articulating axis of all areas of knowledge within the program (…) it should also include what has to do with the specific discipline, which in our case is the English language (Participant 2).

In addition, the practicum constitutes a pedagogical laboratory that allows students to confront their expectations about teaching with the realities of the classroom. Therefore, it lends itself to be the educational milieu that best helps student teachers to build their *personal practical knowledge* (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995; Golombek, 2009) through their own process of analysis, reflection, and innovation. The same participant said:

> The practicum [agency] is not the only one that receives [benefits] by having students go to apply what they have learned. Although it obviously allows for that space of application, confrontation, and knowledge of reality, it also lets [the student teacher] get back, that is, understand what is missing, do that analysis and that constant reflection about how to improve [his or her] pedagogical practices (Participant 2).

Table 2. Comparative Matrix of Former and Latest Study Plans: Practicum and Research Components

COMPONENTS	SEMESTER			
	II	III	IV	V
	B.A. Ed in English Teaching - SNIES 104645			
Research Courses				General Courses
				AFIO1
				2C
Practicum				
	B.A. Ed in Foreign Languages Teaching with Emphasis in English - SNIES 106287			
General Research Courses	AFIO1		AFIO2	AFIO3
	2C		2C	2C
Didactics of the Discipline	Observation Practicum			Teaching Practicum
	Practicum in schools [1]	Teacher's Roles in the Practicum	English Learning Processes in the Practicum	Children
				I
	2C	4C	4C	4C
Program Specific Research Courses				Teacher Researcher
				I
				2C

Note 1: The course School and Educational Contents is a co-requisite of this course.

Note 2: AFIO1 – Generalities of the research process and construction of objects – AFIO2:
Theoretical construction in research processes – AFIO3: Methodological design.

VI	VII	VIII	IX	X
B.A. Ed in English Teaching - SNIES 104645				
		Program Specific		
AFIO2	AFIO3	Graduation Project I	Graduation Project II	
2C	2C	2C	2C	
Observation	Teaching		Social	
I	II	III	IV	
3C	3C	3C	3C	
B.A. Ed in Foreign Languages Teaching with Emphasis in English - SNIES 106287				
	Teenagers		Adults	
II	III	IV	V	VI
4C	4C	4C	4C	4C
II	III	IV	V	VI
	Methodological Design	Pedagogical and Research-based Intervention		Systematization
3C	2C	2C	3C	4C

Despite its clear benefits, the new practicum model poses some challenges, too. To begin with, the fact that practicum starts in the second semester of the program may prove problematic. At that point of their education, some student teachers may be too young to successfully take on the challenge of assuming teaching duties within an actual school setting. In this regard, one of the participants commented:

> The program has a great challenge, a very great challenge, because we do not know in what capacity a student in the second semester will be facing the reality of a classroom, for obviously they have neither the experience nor the maturity required to be in the classroom (Participant 4).

Even if students do have the required maturity, they may still lack the necessary theoretical and linguistic knowledge to respond to the demands of teaching English in the classroom. Another participant noted:

> There is a challenge if it is a practicum [set] for a student who is barely starting to build his or her theoretical knowledge. One could ask: How will a person [just starting in the program] be able to face this first level of practicum? (Participant 4).

Even though there is a clear intention on the part of the program to base the first practicum phase on student teachers' observation, school administrators and cooperating teachers often throw them into the teaching arena without giving them enough time to get acclimatized to the school culture, let alone the classroom dynamics. One of the participants commented:

> It is already happening. Many students in the practicum hardly have a week [to get familiarized with the school] before they say: "Ok. Come teach. We do not have a teacher [of English]." That is one of the deficiencies (Participant 4).

This may be particularly problematic for young student teachers, as they may become easily overwhelmed with the demands of teaching, and their lack of coping strategies may in turn provoke an early teacher burnout.

The vast number of credits allocated to the practicum may present an additional risk. One participant held the view that so many hours of practicum without proper preparation, guidance, and reflection may help to form teaching technicians rather than reflexive teaching practitioners. This person warned that "[one of the] implications of the practicum is that maybe it will make people more technical, more focused on doing things, and perhaps less reflexive" (Participant 3). Therefore, providing sufficient methodological and theoretical support and generating in-depth reflection and analysis of teaching realities are crucial elements to ensure that student teachers become critical and innovative professionals.

Research Training: Benefits And Challenges

As they did with the practicum, curriculum designers allocated a larger number of hours to research training than they had in the previous plan. Therefore, students will have more time for each of the stages of the research process, from writing up the proposal to systematizing the results, so the overall quality of their graduation projects will most likely improve. On this matter, a participant said, "Students will be able to spend a whole semester doing data collection, data analysis, and systematization, so this change benefits the quality of the research projects for graduation" (Participant 5).

Furthermore, a more intensive and systematic research training may lead to the reconfiguration of student teachers' identities as teacher researchers in the making. On this point, the director of the program stated:

> We included [a set of] courses we called the axis of the Teacher Researcher. In those courses I progressively create my identity as a teacher researcher, the teacher who reflects upon his or her practice in light of the theory, the systematization [of data] and the writing process (Program director).

Despite its inherent benefits, the potential for research training to effectively bring forth a new generation of language teachers who see themselves as potential teacher researchers is contingent on

the ability of the program to foster a new research-based culture among all its members. The curriculum reform introduced a number of changes, the major of which entails a deep articulation between practicum and research training. These changes, already under way, will generate a new academic culture involving all the members of the program, as the program director indicated in the following excerpt: "I think that [this reform] requires a mentality change not only in students but also in the program: teachers, practicum coordination, general direction, and the institution" (Program director).

As stated by the policies, in the creation of this new research-based culture, it is necessary that teacher educators conduct classroom research on a regular basis, and that they be prepared to pass on that technical, theoretical, and practical knowledge to the graduating teachers. Another participant was clear about this pressing requirement, as she stated:

> Hiring teachers who have all the requirements that the policies ask for —who have post-graduate education, who have a broad experience in teaching and research, and who are active researchers— involves a cultural change [that is] generating a different academic culture (Participant 5).

Hence, to promote this research-oriented culture will require the program to hire teacher educators with the competencies not only to conduct research of their own but also to teach others how to do it themselves.

Discussion

In this section, we address the study's limitations and potential contributions, summarize the main changes made to the practicum and research training components of the program, and condense the main implications of the curriculum reform in terms of the main challenges and opportunities they present.

The study has some limitations. It does not offer quantitative data to draw statistical generalizations. In addition, further research may have to be conducted to verify how the changes introduced in the curriculum play out. Nevertheless, in a climate of educational reform, in which renovating both practicum and research training has become a fundamental step to ensure the quality of teacher education, this study sheds some light on how to address these pressing demands.

Compelled by the recent policies on teacher education, program administrators and teachers introduced definitive changes into the practicum. For starters, the exponential increase in the number of practicum credits led the program to bring forward its initiation, which deserves some careful consideration. The fact that young students have to start their practicum quite early in schools that are often hungry for practicing teachers may have undesired consequences. If students are thrown into teaching too soon, their teaching performance could suffer due to their lack of emotional maturity and their insufficient linguistic and pedagogical knowledge. To preempt this problem, the program must ensure that students receive proper guidance and support from the initial stages of their practicum and that school agents allow them to have the necessary time to become accustomed to school culture and classroom dynamics.

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that practicum was carefully divided into phases, and that through them students will have the opportunity to work with various student populations. Practicing with children, teenagers, and adults in different types of educational institutions will enrich the practicum experience by informing student teachers of the necessary adjustments they need to make depending on their students' ages and school contexts. Furthermore, if the transition from observing to practicing is carefully tailored through the progressive and guided incursion into the multiple school settings that have been considered, upon program completion, graduating teachers will have an accumulated wealth of teaching experience that will prepare them for the school realities they ordinarily have to face once they join the teaching workforce.

As a complement to the practicum, research training plays a key part in transforming student teachers into professional educators and not just into teaching technicians. Changes introduced into the research component of the curriculum are pivotal towards achieving this goal. To begin with, as more time has been allotted to each of the research stages, the quality of the research paper required for graduation will most likely improve. Nevertheless, in order to maximize the quality of this formative experience, the program should make provisions to ensure that students have continuity and quality in their research training; that is, that they count with a steady group of properly qualified tutors to accompany them throughout the whole research process.

The alignment between practicum and research training can be very powerful, because it may lead students to use research as a catalyst to link theory and practice (Abad and Pineda, 2018). With the proper articulation between research training and practicum, formative research has the potential to generate a dialectics between pedagogical and experiential knowledge, as students have the opportunity to test the theories they learn in college within their own classrooms and to inform their teaching practices with theory- and research-based knowledge. This way, preservice teachers can further their professional development in a spiral-like manner in which theory and practice feed off each other. In other words, theory propelled by research can inform students' teaching practices. Likewise, teaching practices analyzed with the methodological rigor of research can bolster student teachers' pedagogical and practical knowledge.

In summary, the changes made to the curriculum in response to the reform had an undeniable impact on the practicum and research training components of the English teaching program. These profound changes present some opportunities as well as some challenges. Most importantly, the articulation between practicum and research training may renovate student teachers' collective teacher identity so much that they may eventually see themselves as teacher researchers and not only as classroom instructors. However, for these changes to come into effect, teachers, students, and admin-

istrators will need time to further a new academic culture that, as stated by the reform, requires them to make research a key component to prepare new language teachers for the demands of an ever-evolving profession.

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Appendix A: 3+1 Table

Presentation

The table was designed to help researchers organize data and separate the descriptive records required for the results section from the interpretive analysis usually presented in the discussion. Below the reader can find instructions on how to use the table and how it was employed for the first finding of the study herein reported.

3+1 Chart for Data Analysis and Interpretation Designed by José Vicente Abad		
Result:	**Evidence:**	**Interpretation + link to theory**
• Use the past tense to describe what the participants did, expressed, or showed. • Refer to the most relevant aspects of what the data is showing you. • Recognize and describe trends, patterns or relations, but restrict them to what happened in your study.	• Use sets of data derived from the study to support the results you have described. • Remember that any form of triangulation will increase the reliability and validity of your results • As much as possible, include different types of data, from different sources, collected at different times or through different instruments and techniques.	• Use the present tense to draw conclusions and build hypothesis to explain the results, i.e. why the participants responded the way they did. • Connect your hypotheses (interpretations) with the theory and research produced by other researchers. • However, make sure that you are not making unwarranted statements that cannot be supported by the data.

Finding 1: Length and number of credits

• The collected data shows that the pedagogical practicum process starts in the second semester and goes all the way until the last semester. • The practicum credits increased from 12 to 50 along the study plan. It means that 1/3 of the plan will focus only on the pedagogical practicum process.	• E3: "se empezará la práctica desde un segundo semestre y hacer unas prácticas de nueve semestres" • E3: "de los 150 créditos que tiene un programa dedicarle una tercera parte de todo estos créditos a la práctica" • E4: "la universidad como tal exige ¿si?, entonces bien sabemos que es/ pasan de ser 12 créditos de práctica, 3, 6, 9, 12 a ser 50 créditos de práctica" • E1: "tenemos 10 créditos para observación para para el primer nivel de práctica que sería la práctica de observación y a los otros 40 créditos los tenemos divididos entre lo que es la práctica de enseñanza y lo que es la práctica de investigación."	• A prominent change in the number of credits regarding the pedagogical practicum was made. • The fact that students have to start their practicum process at the very beginning of the study plan could have negative and positive consequences. If the students are exposed to a real classroom environment too early in their educational process, their teaching performance could be affected due to their lack of linguistic and pedagogical knowledge.