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Bridging the gap between pre-service teacher education and in-service teachers' experiences in Spain

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About the author

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Abstract

The first teaching years are critical for novice teachers as this transition period could lead to teachers leaving the profession (Farrell, 2012; Moon, 2007). Teacher education should prepare and support teachers to ensure teacher retention and avoid teacher attrition. This study aims to bridge the gap between pre-service teacher education and in-service teacher development, with the idea that novice teachers should experience a smoother transition from teacher preparation to their first teaching years. This investigation addresses the imbalance between the content delivered in the Master's for pre-service teachers in two universities in Spain and the training in-service teachers need in EFL classrooms. Data was gathered qualitatively by using classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with in-service and pre-service teachers. This study examined teacher education in Spain and its applicability in the classroom for novice EFL teachers in secondary and further education state schools.

Findings revealed the need for including more practical opportunities, a longer placement and for adopting a more realistic approach to teacher education. Several classroom challenges and resulting training needs were exposed and these included classroom management skills and improving pre-service teachers' competencies to safeguard inclusivity and diversity in the EFL classroom. This research suggests an urgency to reconcile pre-service teacher education objectives and in-service teachers' needs, and to inform teacher training programmes so that novice teachers can be better prepared for the complexity of real classrooms. Continuous and formal programme evaluation, as well as meaningful communication and collaboration among stakeholders, are some of the recommendations from this study.

List of abbreviations

ADD: Attention Deficit Disorder

ADHD: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

ANECA: *Agencia Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad y Acreditación* (National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation)

BACH: *Bachillerato* – equivalent to A Levels in the UK

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

ELT: English Language Teaching

ESO: *Educación Secundaria Obligatoria* – Compulsory secondary education

FP: *Formación Profesional* – Vocational and professional training

ICT: Information and Communications Technology

IST: In-service teacher

NEAE: *Alumnado con Necesidades Específicas de Apoyo Educativo* – Students with specific educational support needs

OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

PST: Pre-service teacher

QTS: Qualified Teacher Status

TESOL: Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages



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1

Introduction

Teachers often experience a dose of reality when they find unexpected classroom challenges and recognise the discrepancies between their training and the actual classroom. This reality shock can lead to early attrition and, therefore, teacher education plays a vital role in the development of new teachers and their skills. Given its crucial nature, the gap between teacher education and the classroom is addressed in this study. Although there has been a lot of interest in this field (e.g., Farrell, 2012; Peacock, 2009), there is limited research in the Spanish context, especially in the area of English as a foreign language (EFL) at secondary school levels and beyond. This study explores the

training delivered at two universities in Spain and its assessment from the perspective of pre-service and in-service teachers. This investigation goes beyond a survey of students' satisfaction with the programme, as has been done in other important studies (Jareño et al., 2021), by bringing to the forefront of teacher education research an in-depth qualitative analysis from two different angles: pre-service and in-service EFL teachers. The present study will advance the understanding of the overall effectiveness of the Master's programme while examining teachers' training needs and common challenges in the EFL classroom in the context of Spain.

2

A brief literature review

The constant and unprecedented changes in society are clearly reflected in the classroom where learners with diverse ethnic, social, linguistic and cultural backgrounds coexist. Teachers are not unfamiliar with the 21st-century, ever-changing society and continuous adaptation is essential to meet these needs. Consequently, language learning and teaching is continuously changing, and this has implications for language teacher education (Kubanyiova, 2020). Teacher education assumes a critical, but demanding, role in fulfilling teachers' training needs and ensuring that teachers are fully prepared to support all their students and overcome whatever challenges come their way. However, the success of teacher education depends on a variety of factors which could include the quality of its content and the quantity of opportunities for learning.

Scholars have discussed, for decades now, that teachers often experience a 'reality shock' after finishing their teacher training and arriving at the classroom (Veenman, 1984). This is experienced when teachers transition from the university classroom to the classroom where their teaching begins which is when their idealisation of the profession is weakened (Hong, 2010; Veenman, 1984). In this transition period and once teachers encounter the reality of the classroom and its challenges, they often realise that they have not been effectively prepared for the teaching role (Peacock, 2009). Traditional teacher education programmes have been found to fail in preparing teachers for the reality of the classroom for many years (Goodlad, 1990) and may have led to fomenting teachers' unrealistic expectations (Weinstein, 1988). Research is needed to avoid this 'reality shock' by understanding teachers' training needs and classroom challenges which could then be targeted and considered in teacher education, and this is the aim of the present investigation.

Teacher attrition is a phenomenon that occurs when teachers leave the teaching profession, and it is higher in the earliest teaching stages (Moon, 2007). Many novice teachers leave the profession in their first years before discovering how rewarding the teaching profession is (Farrell, 2012; Peacock, 2009). This is not unexpected as novice teachers struggle with the same challenges as more experienced teachers from the beginning of their careers (Farrell, 2012). Lacking sufficient preparation and essential teaching skills, among other challenges, could lead to teachers leaving the profession early in their teaching career (Farrell, 2012; Hong, 2010). High teacher attrition can have significant implications for the education system, and reducing teacher attrition and improving teacher retention is crucial for maintaining a stable and effective education system. Notably, support in pre-service teacher education is essential to ensure teachers can 'survive their first years' (Farrell, 2012, p. 442). Given the importance of this period of adaptation, this study will analyse EFL pre-service and in-service teachers' views during and after their training alongside the main challenges found in their first teaching years.

In view of the vital role of teachers and their training, researchers have had a long-term interest in teacher education, and some have assessed whether training programmes are relevant and meet trainees' needs (Baecher, 2012; Wallace, 1991) while others have examined how well these programmes prepare teachers for classroom teaching (Reid, 1996). Research has shown that novice teachers start their careers without having enough competencies for teaching (Grossman et al., 2009) and understanding trainees and their preferences is essential to improve the quality of teacher education (Jareño et al., 2021). Classroom contexts are now more complex than ever, and teacher educators need to adapt to the new student and teacher profiles by modifying teacher education programmes and

disregarding traditional and mainstream approaches (Clair, 1995). Highly qualified teachers, at in-service and pre-service levels, are key in guaranteeing successful education (Cortina-Pérez and Andúgar, 2021). Quality teacher education can lead to effective and successful education for learners and therefore, preparing new teachers is key to educational improvement (Sancho-Gil et al., 2017). If a desire for a profession in which teachers thrive, flourish, and remain motivated for a long time exists, pre-service training should be prioritised (Gadella Kamstra, 2020, 2021a).

Empirical studies in the field have shown the lack of data on graduates' experiences in their first years in the role and how important this information could be to analyse the effectiveness of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) training programmes (Baecher, 2012). In her study, Baecher (2012) found discrepancies between teachers' preparation and the workplace demands in public schools in the United States and teachers were concerned about supporting students' low-literacy and special needs. The importance of ensuring that teacher training programmes align with the demands of the real classroom should be emphasised. Unlike Baecher's study (2012), the present investigation will also consider the experiences of pre-service teachers while shedding light on the everyday challenges and needs of in-service teachers.

This study focuses on the context of Spain where the analysis of the quality and effectiveness of teacher education is often overlooked (Jareño et al., 2021) despite frequent governmental changes which lead to major educational reforms (Aguilar-Mediavilla et al., 2021; Aparicio and Arévalo, 2014; Sancho-Gil et al., 2017). Teacher education in Spain is often criticised and sometimes accused of being too traditional and impractical (Aguilar-Mediavilla et al., 2021; Sancho-Gil et al., 2017). In recent years, some studies have been carried out to examine teacher education for pre-school (Cortina-Pérez and Andúgar, 2021) and primary education (Martínez Agudo, 2017) EFL teachers in Spain. At more advanced educational levels, teachers are required to have a postgraduate qualification to teach, and this Master's has been analysed in only a few areas in Spain without giving much attention to EFL (Ayuso and Ortega, 2014). Jareño et al. (2021) analysed pre-service teachers' satisfaction with a survey and assessed the quality of the Master's in the region of Castilla la Mancha with a focus on students'

opinions about teaching resources and strategies. However, this investigation did not prioritise the English subject, which is a key area of the present study which will also present the views of in-service teachers who are absent from the study of Jareño et al. (2021). Following a qualitative approach, this investigation will analyse the perspectives of pre-service and in-service EFL teachers regarding their teacher training and their readiness as well as discussing classroom challenges and training needs in the context of Spain.

3

Research methodology

3.1 Research aims

Given the importance of designing effective teacher training programmes to avoid teacher attrition in their first years, and considering the classroom challenges and training needs identified in the literature, this investigation aims to answer the following research questions:

- What do pre-service and in-service EFL teachers think about the teacher training programme in Spain (i.e., strengths, weaknesses, improvements needed and overall effectiveness)?
- What are the challenges novice in-service EFL teachers encounter in state schools in Spain?
- What are the training needs novice in-service EFL teachers have?
- What training should be offered to pre-service EFL teachers to facilitate their transition to teaching?
- What are participants' feelings about their preparedness to teach English?

This study will examine teachers' perspectives about the Master's training course for EFL secondary school and further education teachers at two universities in Spain.

3.2 Study participants and context

There was a total of 35 participants, 20 of them were studying (pre-service teachers) and 15 had been enrolled (in-service teachers) on postgraduate teacher training programme at two publicly funded universities in Spain (University A and University B). The training programme is called *Máster en Formación del Profesorado de Educación Secundaria Obligatoria y Bachillerato, Formación Profesional y Enseñanza de Idiomas*, translated as Master in Teacher Training: Secondary Education, Vocational Training, and Language Teaching. This Master's is managed centrally by the government at the *Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte* but private and public universities have some degree of flexibility to operate this programme regionally. This Master's is a requirement to teach in state institutions at secondary and further education

levels (Aparicio and Arévalo, 2014). Teachers are awarded a qualification similar to the British Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) which enables them to teach at Spanish institutions.

This training offers similar curricular content at University A and University B, including information about the Spanish educational legislation, psychology, sociology, pedagogy, and a compulsory placement where pre-service teachers have the possibility to teach. The duration of the placement varies in these institutions, University A offering a nine-week placement and University B a seven-week placement.

Regarding the participants (Table 1), 20 pre-service teachers (ten from University A and ten from University B) were enrolled in the Master's at the moment of the interview, in the academic year 2022–23. The 15 other participants were in-service teachers (eight who had graduated from University A and seven who had graduated from University B). In-service teachers were alumni and they had finished their Master's after 2016 and were teaching compulsory secondary education (ESO) and non-compulsory further education (BACH and FP) in 15 different state institutions at the moment of the interview. All in-service teachers had fewer than five years of teaching experience in the Spanish public education system and the majority had between two and four years of teaching experience.

	University A	University B	TOTAL
Pre-service teachers	10	10	20
In-service teachers	8	7	15
			35

Table 1. Participants' background information

In terms of gender, there were only five male pre-service teachers among 20 pre-service teachers. However, there were eight male in-service teachers and seven female in-service teachers. Overall, there were 13 males out of 35 participants, showing the representative nature of gender in the Spanish education context.

3.3 Data collection

This study follows a purely qualitative approach which allows for a thorough analysis of participants' experiences during their teacher training and in their classrooms. This investigation used semi-structured online interviews and classroom observations. These tools supported each other and allowed for triangulation as observations provided real accounts of the challenges participants had mentioned in the interviews.

The research tools were piloted in March and April 2022. The pilot study included both online interviews and face-to-face classroom observations. The pilot enabled the improvement of the research instruments. The main study was conducted between November 2022 and February 2023. The interviews and observations were arranged at a time of convenience for the teachers and the researcher. All participants were recruited using purposive and convenience sampling principles and two collaborators (i.e., lecturers at the target universities) supported the dissemination and recruitment phases. Invitation letters were sent via post and email, and social media posts were also used to recruit participants.

The interviews

Pre-service and in-service teachers were interviewed online via Zoom. Given teachers' busy timetables, the online interviews allowed for flexibility and facilitated the data collection. The interviews were conducted in English, and they were voice-recorded. There was a total of 1,511 minutes of interview recordings. Interviews with pre-service teachers lasted an average of 37 minutes and an average of 51 minutes with in-service teachers.

Semi-structured interviews followed an interview guide (Appendix A and Appendix B) but there was space for flexibility, and discussions about other interesting ideas raised by participants were welcome and encouraged. The interview questions were inspired by key literature in the field (Martínez Agudo, 2017; Phan, 2015) and the interview guide included key topics related to the Master's effectiveness and ideas for improvements, participants' preparedness to teach, their current teaching experiences and their training needs.

After the classroom observations, there was a short follow-up interview (Appendix C) with the in-service teachers. These conversations helped the researcher to confirm any factors raised in the classroom observations and in the interviews. For example, teachers were asked: *In the interview, you mentioned some challenges that you currently face. After this class, would you like to add any other challenges?* These follow-up discussions enabled

teachers to voice their concerns and feelings after the observed classes and to give any clarifications when needed.

The classroom observations

In-service teachers (six out of 15; two from University A and four from University B) were observed to further understand the reality of the EFL classroom and the everyday challenges novice teachers face. These were overt, non-participant (the researcher just observed the class and did not participate) and semi-structured observations which followed an observation protocol (Appendix D). The structure of the observation protocol was designed based on CELTA resources and adapted from relevant research in the field (Cheng, 2006). The observation protocol focused on a variety of factors including classroom challenges and opportunities, such as classroom management, atmosphere, diversity and rapport.

There were 16 classroom visits made and most teachers were observed three times each with different levels and groups of students which allowed the researcher to understand teachers' real practices. Due to timetabling issues, one of the teachers was only observed once. In public institutions, teachers often teach a combination of compulsory and non-compulsory EFL groups at various stages. Twelve observations were made in compulsory education (i.e., secondary education – ESO) and four in non-compulsory education (i.e., further education, vocational training courses and *Bachillerato* – FP and BACH).

3.4 Data analysis

Data from the research instruments was analysed using NVivo.12 which enabled the triangulation of pre-service and in-service teachers' interviews, classroom observations and follow-up interviews. After the online interviews, the automatic transcriptions were corrected using Otter.ai. The final transcripts and the observation protocols were uploaded to NVivo where the thematic analysis was carried out. In the first coding phase, the data was read, and an initial list of codes was created. The second coding phase facilitated the merging of the codes and the creation of categories.

The support of a research assistant was vital in this study. Fernando Bustos López ensured the transcripts were of excellent quality and supported the cross analysis of the data by coding some of the interviews during the third coding phase when both researchers negotiated and discussed the final codes. In the last phase, after numerous rounds of coding, the codes were refined and finalised, generating a list of common themes. Patterns in the

overall set of data were found during the analysis, showing that the research instruments supported each other.

Research quality was guaranteed at all times in this investigation by engaging in researcher reflexivity (Gadella Kamstra, 2021b, Rabbidge, 2017) and by critically analysing the decisions made, such as choosing to employ rigorous data collection methods. Establishing inter-coder agreement supported the reliability of the study and providing thick descriptions and rich contextual information endorsed the validity of this investigation and facilitated its transferability (Bryman, 2016).

3.5 Ethical considerations

The project was granted ethical approval by the Ethics Committee at the University of Essex in February 2022. Once participants had accepted their invitation to participate in the study, they were sent a consent form, an information sheet, and a biodata information form to complete. All participants consented to their participation in writing via email prior to the interview and classroom observation, and verbally at the beginning of the interview. This study guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality for all the participants, and they were anonymised as Pre-service teacher (PSTx) and In-service teacher (ISTx). The participants understood their voluntary participation and their right to withdraw from the project at any time. The data was handled and stored safely in a password-protected device adhering to ethical guidelines. Participants also approved the reporting and publication of the collected data while ensuring participant confidentiality. The researcher is not involved in the teaching of this training programme, avoiding biases or potential influences on participants' responses.



4

Findings

The research instruments shed light on a variety of factors including pre-service teacher education strengths, weaknesses, potential improvements, and overall effectiveness. Classroom challenges and training needs were also identified by teachers whose feelings of preparedness were also discussed.

4.1 Pre-service teacher education strengths

Pre-service and in-service teachers shared their views on the training received and they recognised some key strengths of the Master's programme.

Being part of an interdisciplinary community of teacher trainees

The training programme includes some general compulsory modules for trainees from all subjects and participants valued the opportunity to meet and work with colleagues from different disciplines. Seven out of 15 in-service teachers and 14 out of 20 pre-service teachers found this factor extremely valuable.

'We had to do, like, a lot of teamwork in groups, but it was nice, because you got to, to know different opinions, different people and to work in, in groups, and that's actually what you do in school, so, that part, it was really nice.' (IST15)

Participants positively highlighted the advantages of working and collaborating with colleagues from other disciplines and in many cases, these collaborations resulted in long-lasting relationships in which they supported each other during their teaching career.

The school placement

Many participants emphasised the placement or practicum as a crucial part of the Master's. Ten out of 15 in-service teachers and six out of 20 pre-service teachers believed that the placement was the main strength of their training because 'that's where you really see if you like the job, if you can do it, how you manage to deal with a classroom' (IST9) and another participant said:

'During those two months, I felt that I learned on my own way, so much more than maybe nine months of just pure theory.' (PST20)

Participants believed that the placement was essential to fully understand what they had been taught in the previous months in the Master's. As IST9 said, during the placement, they assessed whether this was a job they enjoyed and wanted to pursue, and they also saw the reality of the classroom with their own eyes.

4.2 Pre-service teacher education weaknesses

Although the strengths were extremely important for participants, they also identified weaknesses of the teacher training received. Both, pre-service and in-service teachers discussed the limitations of the Master's programme.

Insufficient practical content

Most participants were extremely disappointed with the lack of practical opportunities in their pre-service teacher training. Fourteen out of 15 in-service teachers and 16 out of 20 pre-service teachers believed that practical content was vital to understand the real classroom, but this was lacking in their training.

'I need to know how everything works, so, leave theory aside [...] we cannot spend the 80 per cent of the time with the theory and 20 per cent with practice [...] they have to train to us, like, really train us and we cannot spend five hours every day sitting down, staring at a screen because that's not effective.' (PST3)

Participants harshly criticised their lectures and theoretical classes and according to them, these were not helpful in the pre-service stage.

'The theoretical and formal aspects might be a bit too overbearing, and all-encompassing throughout the subjects in the first semester and I don't feel like they have done much for me, I see them as an almost obligatory step really, that won't really contribute much to growing as a teacher and learning how to, how to do the job properly.' (PST16)

Participants hoped for more opportunities to practise and fewer theoretical classes and believed that this structure was not supporting them in their teaching development as many questions about 'how' to teach remained unanswered.

Unrealistic content based on a utopian classroom

Interviews with all participants revealed that the information presented in the Master's modules was considered to be utopic as it did not represent the reality of the classroom. All in-service teachers (15) reported that the training content portrayed an ideal and perfect classroom which was far from the reality of the 21st-century classroom.

'I learned the ideal case [...] this is what classes in a public school should be like [...] what we should be doing in classes [...] but as I said, it's something ideal [...] in the end, you do what you can.' (IST13)

In agreement, some other teachers described the training to be 'like a dream' (IST11) and pre-service teachers (15 out of 20), who were still in training, also realised the unrealistic content taught in the Master's.

'It was a little bit unrealistic, how we were dealing with it, and I felt a little bit disappointed because [...] they are teaching me how to teach the perfect class in the sense of kids that want to learn, kids that are motivated, kids that have super high level.' (PST6)

Pre-service teachers were disappointed because they were trained to teach English in a class that does not exist. PST6 and others understood the diversity in the classrooms, and all these participants wished for more realistic content which were specific to their own teaching context.

Educators with limited teaching experience in high schools

Some participants criticised the fact that some teacher trainers did not have much teaching experience in secondary schools or further education. Five out of 15 in-service teachers and eight out of 20 pre-service teachers questioned educators' abilities to train the next generation of teachers as they may have not taught in the target context before or have not been in a high school in a long period of time.

'If you're there to be a high school teacher, you need to be taught by someone who has been there and who is there. [...] If you have not been in a high school, as a teacher, you will not know half of things [that] have happened there.' (PST5)

Participants recognised the importance of educators having recent and relevant teaching experience to train future teachers to face the reality of the classroom.

4.3 Proposed improvements

All participants were asked to share their views on any potential improvements or changes that could enhance the quality of pre-service teacher preparation in Spain.

A longer placement

Although the duration of the placement was different at the two participating universities in this study (University A: nine weeks and University B: seven weeks), participants from both universities believed that the duration was limited, and the placement should be longer. Ten out of 15 in-service teachers believed that a longer placement could help them to be better prepared to face the reality.

'I think that they [teacher trainees] should have a wider view of how things work inside, inside the high school, in terms of teaching and how these students improve and to do that, I guess they should have at least one term, one full term [of placement].' (IST3)

Nine out of 20 pre-service teachers also highlighted the importance of having a longer practicum period where they could learn from teachers at the school. In University A, two pre-service teachers were allocated to the same institution for the placement, and they had to co-teach, leading to fewer hours of teaching practice. The limited time spent at the school was problematic for many participants who wanted to get to know their students and see their learning progress following the lessons delivered during the placement. Overall, participants believed that the duration of the placement was not enough and more time at the school was needed to ensure the professional development of these novice teachers.

More practical opportunities

Participants believed that there was insufficient practical content in the Master's and therefore, it is only logical that they have suggested having more practical opportunities as a key improvement. Most participants (13 out of 15 in-service teachers and 17 out of 20 pre-service teachers) wished for more practical approaches and lessons. They wanted to learn the 'how' of the profession and suggested the need to know more practical details such as 'how to actually go into that classroom and teach' (PST19). Although there were some examples of a few classroom scenarios and simulations during their training, this was insufficient.

'We did a simulation, like, a class simulation, so, our students were our classmates. So, maybe that kind of dynamic could be implemented more times, and not only once. So, maybe just trying to implement your lesson plan with your classmates and discuss what is effective and what is not, would be a good idea.' (PST13)

Participants valued the few opportunities they had had to practise but they would have welcomed more real examples, role plays and simulations and according to them, this was a much-needed improvement.

4.4 Pre-service teacher education overall effectiveness

All participants were asked about the overall effectiveness of the Master's. Figure 1 shows the answers from both pre-service and in-service teachers. Although participants harshly criticised the programme and outlined several weaknesses, as presented above, participants' views were divided in terms of the Master's effectiveness.

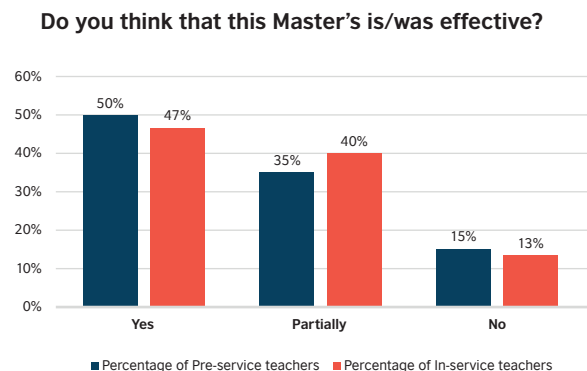


Figure 1. Pre- and In-service teachers' views on Master's effectiveness

Participants' positions were varied as a total of 53 per cent of the pre-service teachers and 50 per cent of the in-service teachers believed that the Master's was ineffective or partially effective. The rest of the participants believed that the Master's was effective but the fact that the training was a mere formality to obtain their teaching certificate which would enable them to teach in a state institution was highlighted. Some participants understood that this Master's was the beginning of their training and realised that most of the work will need to be done autonomously. In-service teachers were more critical, and some did not have positive memories from the Master's as 'it could have been more effective' (IST6) and another participant explained.

‘There were specific teachers, specific subjects that I liked, that I enjoyed but, in some others, I was thinking, “what am I doing here? I’m wasting my time because this has nothing to do with being in front of a class of 30 students”.’ (IST14)

In agreement, other teachers mentioned how they wasted time dealing with unrealistic content as was discussed above. Teachers also identified classroom challenges and their lack of training in those areas affected their views on the effectiveness of the Master’s.

‘We’re actually dealing with students that really need help. Our Master’s did not help us, or they did not prepare us to face those challenges at all.’ (IST4)

The overall effectiveness of the Master’s was questioned by some, especially in terms of addressing challenges and satisfying their training needs, as will be discussed in future sections.

4.5 Classroom challenges

This section presents the main classroom challenges identified by pre-service and in-service teachers (Figure 2). These challenges were mentioned in the interviews and observed in the classroom visits. The challenges are ordered based on their frequency and relevance in line with participants’ perspectives.



Figure 2. Classroom challenges identified by pre- and in-service teachers

Inclusivity and diversity

All in-service teachers (15) considered coping with inclusivity and diversity in the classroom as a significant challenge. Teachers shared their difficult experiences with students who had specific needs (NEAE) in various degrees (e.g., ADHD, ADD, dyslexia, autism, Asperger’s) and physical impairments such as blindness or deafness. Teachers felt that they were unable to support *all* their students.

‘When you’re in the classroom, what do you do with those people? Because it’s not them, it’s the rest, that’s the thing, you have 30 students, and you have two students that have special needs, and you cannot be with them the whole hour.’ (IST3)

These teachers were unable to guarantee inclusivity for all their students and this situation led to feelings of frustration.

‘Some students, I would have to be with them, like all the class, and I can’t be with them all the class, so I don’t know how to do, I really don’t know how to do it [...] But I feel I’m not getting to all the students [...] But I don’t know how to do it because I don’t have the resources.’ (IST10).

The importance of resources was often highlighted, especially in terms of having supporting staff to assist learners who required more attention. The importance of support staff was mentioned by 13 out of 15 pre-service teachers. Without this provision, teachers are left on their own in overcrowded classes and they have to resort to designing a booklet for students to work on their own or to separate them from the whole group. These were common practices among teachers who, given the circumstances, did their best to accommodate all students.

‘They worked aside and then, if they called me, I went in and explained doubts, but I was actually working with, with the class, and they were like aside, so it’s not really an inclusion. They’re just there working there.’ (IST15)

Teachers aimed to support all their students, but the lack of resources or supporting staff added complexity to the situation. Following the classroom observations, four out of six observed teachers also discussed how challenging it was to offer equal and inclusive opportunities to all their learners. IST1 and IST2 confessed to not supporting all their students in the observed classes and considered this to be

impossible in their particular context. Similarly, IST2 explained that the school support students were receiving was useless and did not facilitate the situation. Students were given extra homework to work on their English at home which was seen as a punishment by IST2.

Apart from the specific needs discussed above, teachers also mentioned other inclusivity and diversity factors which represent the reality of the classrooms nowadays. Teachers considered the importance of catering for high performing students but also multicultural students who did not speak Spanish or English. Additionally, some teachers also recognised the importance of access to resources and how this should also be accommodated in the classroom as part of inclusion and diversity measures, a topic which will be discussed at the end of this section.

Importantly, some teachers also revealed their concerns about inclusivity and the need to support students from the LGBTIQ+ community. IST2 wanted to 'accompany students that are transitioning' and recognised the importance of 'dealing with diversity in all this variety' as 'it's quite more challenging to work with students with that kind of difficult background'. This teacher acknowledged the fact that ensuring diversity goes beyond providing educational support and this poses a bigger challenge for teachers. Throughout the study, teachers also referred to students' homophobic behaviours (IST5) and shared examples of homophobic incidents towards the teacher (IST1) which shows that this is a classroom challenge affecting students and teachers.

Classroom management

Most in-service teachers (14 out of 15) pointed out the challenges they faced with classroom management. Students' disrespectful attitudes, misbehaviour and disruptiveness had many forms, for instance, teachers said they had received insults, threats, and homophobic comments but these situations were more often found in the relationships students had with each other (e.g., yelling, bullying, throwing things in class, devices and money withdrawal, and fights). These are other examples:

'It was especially difficult because I was lacking strategies to deal with them [...] "who are these little monsters? And what are they going to do with me?" Because they were kind of disruptive, they were talking over themselves. They didn't respect their turn. They didn't raise hands. I mean, it was kind of chaotic. They are sometimes rude.' (IST14)

In these situations, these novice teachers were sometimes overwhelmed as they struggled to manage the class. They also mentioned the fact that they were not being supported by their school as was the case of the following teacher:

'One student in the classroom who is always talking, who always wants to disrupt, wants to stop the lesson [...] he doesn't want to do anything in class, he just wants to be outside, he's not interested in learning anything. [...] it's just you, and you do something, then you don't get any response from the school, it's like pointless because the students know that they can do whatever they want, because they don't have consequences.' (IST7)

Importantly, some in-service teachers (four out of 15) and pre-service teachers (three out of 20) discussed their difficulties to become an authoritative figure which hindered their chances to manage the classroom as they were seen as older brothers or sisters by the students, for example:

'I need to know how to handle these situations and how to be like an image of authority without being like a police officer, you know, inside the classroom, just like be nice, but not be too nice, so they take your friendliness as an invitation for disrespect.' (PST6)

This challenge was accentuated in some cases. Female in-service and pre-service teachers reflected on gender differences and classroom management, and some had clear examples of how this affected them in their first teaching experiences in a classroom.

'Where to draw the line, also how to make yourself be respected in the classroom. [...] I was talking with my tutor who is also a young woman, how it is harder for us, for women or younger women, but women in general, to have the authority in a classroom. [...] I saw that so vividly how, when a man, when a professor, when a male professor would come into a class, everyone would just sit straight, would just listen to everything he had to say. When we came, [...] young, under 30, it was just like a game, they were just asking inappropriate questions, they were just wanting to play.' (PST20)

'I'm very young and I'm still learning, and being a young teacher, and being a young woman, it's difficult being with teenagers [...] I consider myself friendly, and then, it's difficult for me to set some boundaries.' (IST14)

As shown in the examples, these female pre-service and in-service participants believed that female young teachers struggled more than male teachers when establishing their authority in the classroom and managing the class. One male in-service teacher (IST3) also recognised that students were more disrespectful to his female colleagues than to his male colleagues.

Regarding classroom management in more general terms for all the observed participants, four out of six observed teachers seemed to struggle with class management issues in some of the classes. In these sessions, situations were observed in which students were cursing, not raising their hands to participate, not respecting each other's turns, or refusing to do the task. In addition, although there were school policies in place, there were also issues with lateness and phone use which teachers sometimes tackled straight away. To control and manage disruptiveness and misbehaviour, teachers threatened students with not having a break, leaving the classroom, or not using the same game in the future. Those were some of the techniques they would use to impose their authority in the classroom but overall, some of these novice teachers seemed to struggle with their classroom management skills.

Teacher-student ratio

Having a classroom full of students with various levels and needs is common in many contexts in today's classrooms. Still, 13 out of 15 in-service teachers recognised the teacher-student ratio as a strong limitation. Most challenges were aggravated by the excessive number of students per classroom and teachers struggled 'to face a class of 30 or 35 students' (IST15). Another example from a teacher:

'If classrooms were smaller, fewer children, fewer students in the classroom. I feel like I could give them more attention.' (IST5)

This teacher could better support students with special needs and manage the classroom more easily if there were fewer students in the classroom. Other participants agreed but recognised that regardless of students' needs, disabilities, and attitudes, the challenge of the crowded classes would remain.

'Even if it was 31, perfectly healthy, and very motivated students, it's 31 people in the same room.' (IST6)

Attending to everyone in an overcrowded classroom is extremely difficult, and this was also perceived in the classroom observations. Three out of the six observed teachers seemed to struggle with the excessive number of students in the classroom. In some of the classes, students needed the teachers' assistance, but the teacher was unable to support them, and teachers could not cope with all the demands and responsibilities. Some of these students were left with their hands up or with unresolved doubts due to the challenging teacher-student ratio.

Students' English level

The difference in learners' English levels was also identified as one of the key challenges by 11 out of 15 in-service teachers. They claimed that some of their students had an exceptionally low level or an extremely high level for their course, making it exceedingly difficult for teachers to prepare materials and manage the classroom when working on some tasks. For example:

'I find it really hard to do things that will also appeal to very good level students [...] when you're working in groups, they also get bored.' (IST13)

Teachers were aware of their need to adapt the materials or design added resources, but even those teachers with extra training on supporting diversity in the classroom found this situation incredibly challenging.

'Even though I have this training, it's very difficult because each of them has a different level. So, you need to adapt to all of them.' (IST9)

Managing heterogenous groups was also challenging for observed teachers, and the variety of levels was palpable in the classes of five out of six observed teachers. Most teachers adapted the tasks and the exams to the various levels in their classes. For example, IST2 explained the instructions to a task in English and then, in Spanish, ensuring that everyone, regardless of the level, was following. IST7 used the same worksheet with two different groups of students and although no major accommodations were made, one of the exercises was modified by allowing learners to write the definitions in Spanish

instead of English. IST2 and IST7 seemed to adapt materials for those with a lower English level but those with a much higher level were not catered for, and this was considered a challenging area for many participating teachers.

Multiple roles and responsibilities

The interviews and the classroom observations showed that in-service teachers had countless responsibilities in and outside the classroom. Ten out of 15 in-service teachers mentioned the complexity of the classroom where their challenging roles and responsibilities were manifold. The intricacies of the teaching role were perceived in the observed classrooms too. In terms of the roles, the role of form tutor was highlighted and some of the teachers struggled with this new role due to the lack of training.

'I don't remember being told how to be a tutor of a group. That's one of the things I missed the most in, in my first year as a tutor.' (IST5)

The teacher training programme did not seem to prepare teachers for their responsibilities as form tutors, for example, negotiating seating arrangements with other lead teachers, discussing future career prospects with final year students, and resolving conflicts among students which may happen after school hours. One of the teachers confessed:

'You end up spending lots of time trying to fix things that go way beyond English. [...] in many moments, you need to give priority to these other things that are not language related. [...] I don't have the time for that and it's a shame for them. But you have to survive, I have to survive, and they have to survive. So, I tried to find a balance in that.' (IST6)

This teacher struggled to find the time to offer students the support they needed because of the endless list of responsibilities which are part of the teaching profession. These novice teachers realised in their first years of teaching that their responsibilities go beyond teaching EFL. Participants mentioned that they were 'teachers, mothers, and psychologists' (IST15) and an observed teacher also mentioned other professions and confessed to being tired of being a 'policeman' and did not consider themselves to be a 'social worker' (IST2), but saw the importance of this role in the classroom.

With respect to the job responsibilities, teachers discussed the excessive amount of paperwork as

another important challenge and felt that they spent 'more time filling paperwork, then preparing lessons.' (IST5). Some of this paperwork was completed inside the classroom, as was observed in some of the classes. This showed that teachers were multitasking at all times. For instance, they completed attendance forms while tasks were being corrected, added positive and negative notes in their journals while students were reading a text aloud, wrote comments in the school platform for parents to read (e.g., students missing homework) while they were working on a task, and prepared the materials for the following class while students were doing peer correction.

In this challenging and stressful environment, it was common to see teachers struggling, for example, IST4 seemed to be suffocated as their young learners demanded a lot of attention. Another teacher also showed their frustration:

'I cannot be bothered, I'm only one person, I'm just one person, I cannot take responsibility, I'm doing my best, I'm doing my job, I'm not doing great, but I'm doing my job.' (IST1)

Teachers were frustrated because they were unable to perform as they would like due to the endless demands and the time pressures.

Learners' emotional and mental health

Some in-service teachers (six out of 15) recognised the challenges they faced when dealing with students' emotions and their individual mental health conditions. IST6 put it simply: 'students have their own stories and their own issues'; and teachers had to be prepared to support students with, for example, social anxiety, poor mental health and emotional swings. These conditions go beyond learners' academic experiences, but are related to their health and their everyday lives.

This challenge seemed to have been accentuated after the COVID pandemic. A few teachers considered the consequences of this unprecedented situation on students, for example, IST1 believed that COVID had strongly affected students emotionally. As a result of this situation, some teachers claimed to need training to support students' social and emotional development.

'After COVID I think most teenagers went, I don't know, like, they all have something like anxiety or social anxiety and this part I think, is at least necessary. Right now, maybe it wasn't before, but now.' (IST8)

IST8 rightly pointed out that supporting students' mental health has become more important now than ever and training in this topic should be reinforced. One of the teachers also recognised students' 'long, emotional instability' (IST1) as a result of the pandemic, but confessed to sometimes neglecting this area in their classes.

'Sometimes I just turn a blind eye. [...] I'm not sure if I'm responsible for solving this, okay? I'm an English teacher. In my contract, it's English teacher [...] I need to focus on that they learn English, obviously, they're sad, they're happy, that's important. But [...] that it's not under my scope. So, some training is fine, but it's not like, okay, I cannot be superhero. Okay, I cannot do everything. So, it's like, it's not my responsibility.' (IST1)

Given the excessive number of roles and responsibilities teachers have, as noted in the above section, it is only normal that some consider this situation to be outside their expertise or beyond their duties.

Motivation, engagement, and attitude towards English

In-service teachers (four out of 15) understood the complexities of learners' motivation, engagement, and attitudes towards English in the classroom. Students' lack of motivation was an important challenge for both groups of participants, pre-service and in-service teachers. One teacher described students' behaviour in the classroom:

'They don't want to have fun. They want to, well, we say "photosynthesise" because they want to stay in there, they don't want to talk, they don't want to do anything, they only want the hour to pass.' (IST12)

Students have to attend compulsory classes, but they seemed to be indifferent about learning English. One of the teachers discussed their students' attitude in this regard:

'It's really hard for me to motivate them to study because they always say like, "why, why do I have to do that? Why do I have to learn English?" and it's really difficult.' (IST15)

Other teachers agreed with IST15 and believed that students did not understand the importance of learning English in the context of Spain. This was

witnessed in the observed classes with in-service teachers (four out of six). There were many cases in which students did not want to work and were doing nothing, or chatted with their peers while not taking part in the tasks. In some classes, students were found to not complete their homework on a regular basis, to complain about the teachers' task choice or even to sleep for the whole duration of the class. Student engagement in some of the observed classes was partial or non-existent and teachers were sometimes disappointed by this behaviour, as was the case of IST7 who complained about students not doing their homework even after allowing for flexibility with deadlines.

Resources and facilities

In the interviews, five in-service teachers mentioned the difficulties they had regarding the resources and facilities available. One of them complained about the effect this challenge had on the teaching time, as all the preparation and unexpected issues did not allow for the full use of the class hour.

'By the time I get to the classroom, and they sit down, and they get the tablets because we use online digital books, and I open that, and then, the internet's not working, and then, because we've had issues with projectors and computers, you know, we don't have these resources [...] every day it's like a challenge. You go to school and you're like, "what's gonna happen next?" [...] the internet's not working or whatever and because we're using these digital books, then, what do you do? [...] I don't feel I've got all the resources.' (IST4)

These challenges were also highlighted in the observed classes. There were instances of ineffective or insufficient resources and/or facilities in the classes of all six observed teachers. Schools were said to not have enough money for resources such as books, as was the case of IST1. Interestingly, some of these schools had invested in laptops, tablets or Chromebooks which were used by students in all classes. However, with this technological development came other challenges as students could not take part in the classes when they had no battery or had internet connection issues, as was observed in the case of IST1 and IST4. After one of the observations, IST2 explained that the school tried to initiate a digitalisation project, but they realised that it discriminated against those who do not have access to any devices. This was also an important conflicting issue, as those books which are borrowed by more disadvantaged students always

come in print and never online. Those teachers with a digitalised book often had trouble with the projector due to its quality or location and some other teachers also had problems with the speakers as they were not working (IST2 and IST3) or had to be shared with colleagues. In terms of facilities, IST2 and IST3 struggled to start the classes on time as they had to go to a different class every hour and the school was organised in various buildings or floors and their allocated classrooms were far away. Overall, resources were limited in some of the observed schools, and some teachers claimed to have issues with this matter every day. The inadequate resources and facilities are problematic for all teachers, including those who are starting in their career and adjusting to teaching with limited training.

4.6 Training needs

Based on the above challenges, training needs were identified by both pre-service and in-service teachers. Participating pre-service teachers were asked about their views of the Master's after more than one semester as students. One of the questions was, 'So far, does this Master's meet your training needs?' Figure 3 shows the answers to this question. Only 15 per cent of the pre-service teachers believed that the Master's was meeting their training needs at the moment of the interview. As discussed in previous sections, participants believed that the Master's had insufficient practical content and a short placement. Still, their answers to this question should be analysed cautiously as not all pre-service teachers had started their placement at the moment of the interview and they were aware of the importance of this practical component in their training.

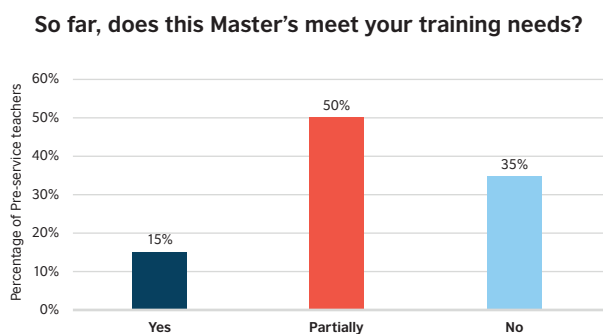


Figure 3. Pre-service teachers' views on their training needs

Pre-service and in-service teachers shared similar views about the training they wished to have. Students with little to no experience could already identify the classroom training needs they were going to have in the real classroom, and in-service teachers reflected on their recent experiences in the classrooms. Figure 4 shows the four main training needs identified by all participants and they are discussed in the next section.



Figure 4. Training needs identified by pre- and in-service teachers

Classroom management

In-service teachers with some years of teaching experience were asked about their training needs and 13 out of 15 teachers believed their classroom management skills could be improved. They were especially concerned about students' disruptiveness, and this teacher explained the lack of training they received in this area.

'We talked a lot about, we have these special needs students, we have these students who don't behave, okay, but how do I work with them? How do I make them improve? How do I manage this type of class? [...] We asked, and the answer was "You'll see".' (IST10)

This teacher insisted on the importance of learning the 'how' of the profession and they craved 'real strategies, specific strategies' (IST10) to manage heterogenous classrooms. Some of these teachers did not 'recall any formal training in that aspect' (IST5), meaning that class management skills may have not been effectively covered in their training.

After the classroom observations in the follow-up interviews, four out of the six observed teachers mentioned their wish to receive more training on class management and reflected on the difficulties experienced when dealing with disruptiveness and students' lack of interest in some 'uncontrollable' classes (IST4). They needed to learn specific strategies to manage the classroom but also to manage conflicts among students.

Managing the overcrowded classroom with a variety of English levels and students' needs was challenging for many in-service teachers in this study. In agreement, pre-service teachers still in training could also predict that their class management skills would be crucial for future teaching. Seventeen out of 20 pre-service teachers considered classroom management one of their key training needs. Some trainees did not feel prepared to adapt their materials to various levels and they were also concerned about the same issues as the in-service teachers, such as managing disruptiveness and misbehaviour and concerns about bullying, students' arguments and fights, and verbal and physical violent responses were also mentioned. Importantly, conflict resolution was highlighted, and they discussed the importance of receiving training on how to resolve issues in the classroom. For instance:

'I would like to learn more about class management. [...] if it's a difficult group, how can I address them? How can I teach English to this group? [...] if you have an easy group, okay, it's easy to know, to do what you have learned in the Master's, but what happens when, yeah, when you have a very difficult group?' (PST4)

According to this participant and others, the training received in the Master's did not seem to prepare teachers for managing those classrooms which were more challenging, and it was only considered to be useful when disruption was minimal, and students shared the same level of English and motivation.

In addition, as discussed in previous sections, pre-service and in-service teachers referred to the challenge of becoming an authority figure, and revealed some perceived gender differences. As a result, participants wished to have training to improve their classroom management skills, but this need sometimes went beyond the classroom walls, as this teacher mentioned:

'[Learn] how to have that authority, how to make ourselves really heard, not only in the classroom, but also in that environment with other teachers.' (PST20)

This teacher wished to improve her classroom management skills but also her leadership skills. Regardless of gender, learning these skills could be helpful for novice teachers and could be of use inside and outside the classroom when they interact with their superiors and with more experienced colleagues.

Overall, both groups of participants, pre-service and in-service teachers, considered their training on classroom management to be insufficient to deal with the realities of the EFL classroom nowadays, and wished for more effective training in this area.

Inclusivity and diversity

The need for training in navigating inclusivity and diversity was emphasised by most in-service teachers (14 out of 15). They recognised that this training was not sufficiently and effectively addressed in their teacher education. After some teaching experience, they still called for training in this area, for example:

'How to deal with these students, how to make my classes more inclusive. [...] they didn't tell me in the Master's degree, how to work with a student with these conditions [...] they've got a diagnosis, and you don't know what to do with them and it's up to you, it's in your hands to do research on that topic. [...] I should know all this before starting teaching. [...] And I think that if they gave us this knowledge before starting teaching, it would be very useful.' (IST13)

Teachers complained about not having received the adequate training in their course to support all students in their classes, particularly in the area of students' specific needs. Pre-service teachers still in training also realised the importance of catering for students' needs. Twelve out of 20 pre-service teachers referred to this topic.

'They teach us things, but it's very superficial, so, they mentioned it like "this is the type of students that you can have", but they don't teach us how to address this specific problem with this specific student. So, I don't feel I have the training to go to class with students who have special needs.' (PST4)

In agreement with this pre-service teacher, many participants felt that they lacked the training to support *all* their students. Importantly, some teachers understood the value of diversity and inclusivity in other vital areas, and wished to know more about these.

‘We should also consider diversity in all its aspects, for example, not only concentrating on students with special needs for educational support, but also, how to deal with a student who is transitioning or a student who doesn’t have the resources necessary at home or who is dealing with a difficult situation as well, because that is, actually, the reality. [...] I missed some kind of training in that area in the Master’s.’ (IST2)

This teacher highlighted a wider range of inclusivity needs which are equally important. Supporting the LGBTIQ+ community in the school was considered to be a challenge by some of the participants, as discussed in previous sections. Participants recognised the importance of having training in this area which would help them to ensure inclusivity and diversity in all its forms and not just in relation to educational needs. Another teacher also valued the importance of this training:

‘[Learn] how to integrate gender perspective, so they, the teenagers understand, you can harm people, like you’re in that age when you can harm people, if you say certain things, or if you think in a certain way. [...] There are a lot of queer people, there are a lot of people with issues and that [integrating gender perspective into the EFL classroom] helps people be aware.’ (PST7)

This teacher believed that there was a need to raise awareness and support the LGBTIQ+ community in the schools, but to ensure inclusivity, teacher training in this area is essential. Both, pre-service and in-service teachers lacked and wanted training to guarantee inclusivity and diversity in all its forms in their classrooms.

Technology

Training in information and communications technology (ICT) was missed by both, pre-service (seven out of 20) and in-service (eight out of 15) teachers. They explained that the teacher training course had only included a few lessons in this area, and they would like to learn more about technology, for example:

‘New ways and new online platforms that you can use for teaching, new ways to engage students in learning.’ (IST6)

Learning new resources to engage students in the classroom was especially important for these participants and they stressed their wish to learn about ‘gamification’ (IST10, IST15, PST12). Nowadays, classrooms are starting to welcome students’ own devices and being aware of ICT tools which students can use to practise English would be ideal, as this teacher mentioned:

‘They have laptops, and they use their mobile phones and laptops every day. So, we should use this digital part more and we need training as well.’ (IST10)

Overall, pre-service, and in-service teachers wanted to develop their awareness of new technologies, and wanted to learn new tools and resources to make the most of the EFL class while also motivating and engaging their students, as will be discussed in the next section.

Motivation and engagement

In-service teachers (six out of 15) wanted to learn new ways to engage students including some techniques and strategies to motivate students to learn English. Some of the teachers who were observed (three out of six) agreed and highlighted their need to learn how to teach, engage and connect with students who do not want to learn. Interestingly, pre-service teachers (seven out of 20) also appreciated the great challenge of motivating and engaging students, as this participant shared:

‘There are a lot of students who just don’t want to be there, but not because they find the class boring, but because they understand learning as not necessary for their life, because maybe their parents don’t give enough importance to education. [...] So, I would like to know how to motivate these students. [...] What do I need to do? How can I talk to these students so that they feel, at least, feel motivated to come to class?’ (PST1)

Even before finishing their teacher training, pre-service teachers were already aware of some of the difficulties they were about to find in their teaching careers, and they were especially interested in learning about innovative methodologies. Learning new methods and techniques which could engage and motivate learners was crucial for pre-service and in-service teachers.

Overall, the training needs identified by participants are clearly interconnected as classroom management skills could facilitate teachers’ ability

to manage diverse classrooms. Similarly, more training on technology and engagement techniques could motivate learners to learn English, and lead to changes in classroom behaviour which could ease classroom management for novice teachers.

4.7 Feelings of preparedness to teach English

The interviews supported conversations about how prepared pre-service and in-service teachers felt, considering the training received. Regarding the in-service teachers, they were asked about their feelings of preparedness after finishing the Master's and also, at the moment of the interview, after some years of teaching experience. Figure 5 indicates the changes in the degree of preparedness, showing higher levels of preparedness after teaching for some years in most cases, as would be expected.

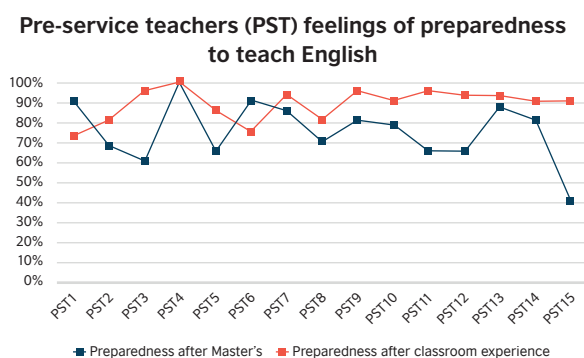


Figure 5. Feelings of preparedness after training versus after classroom experience

In terms of in-service teachers' degree of preparedness after graduation from the Master's, some participants believed that the Master's did not prepare them to do what they needed to do, and they struggled and experienced a reality shock in the first classes, for example:

'I was prepared to, like, prepare the lessons, assess students, plan everything, but I wasn't really prepared to actually, like, run a class or like, actually, know how the students could learn, how to adapt my lessons to their needs, how you need to, like, act in a different way for some students, like specially students that need, like, specific activities, specific attention, basically and I did not know that until I started teaching.' (IST7)

In agreement, some participants mentioned that they felt unprepared to support all the students in their classes, or that they initially believed to be prepared to teach English but realised they were not prepared once they got to the classrooms.

During the interview, participants were also asked about their feelings of preparedness at that point in time, after some classroom experience (up to five years). Most participants felt more prepared after some teaching experience, and this is the expected tendency. However, a few participants felt that they were still not fully prepared and mentioned the shock they experienced when they started their teaching on their own without the support of a tutor or an educator.

Pre-service teachers were also asked about how prepared they felt to start their placement and teaching experience, and some of them did not feel as prepared as they would like to be and had some negative views about the Master's.

'So, the sad thing is I don't have anything from the master's that I can take into that class.' (PST12)

'The thing is that I'm sure that when I get to the internship, I will realise that I'm not 100 per cent prepared for that. [...] I feel prepared, but not at all, actually, because of the class management and all the things that are related to the teaching [...] I don't feel like super well prepared.' (PST15)

These pre-service teachers struggled to find the link between the Master's content and what would be expected from them in the school placement. This has a real connection with one of the classroom challenges discussed above, the unrealistic content.

'I don't think you leave the Master's completely prepared. [...] I don't think they really prepare you for the real world, for the real teaching world.' (PST20)

The lack of practical opportunities and the unrealistic content were predominant throughout all the conversations with teachers. Interestingly, although many of the comments seemed to indicate a low level of preparedness to teach English and to deal with usual challenges in the classrooms, the degree of preparedness was above 60 per cent in many cases, but this should be interpreted cautiously, as it is subjective given it is the participants' self-assessment.

5

Discussion and conclusions

The findings discussed above showed that pre-service and in-service teachers agreed on their views about the teacher training programme and had similar training needs. Data collected from the semi-structured interviews, the classroom observations and the follow-up interviews answered the following research questions.

What do pre-service and in-service EFL teachers think about the teacher training programme in Spain (i.e., strengths, weaknesses, improvements needed and overall effectiveness)?

The lack of practical content was a main flaw, and this is a common weakness in teacher training in Spain. Participants stressed the need for more opportunities to practise and a longer placement at schools. Increasing the amount of teaching practice could improve the quality of teacher education and could benefit pre-service teachers (Martínez Agudo, 2017; Peacock, 2009). A longer placement and well-organised practicums in various public schools could provide teachers with a better understanding of their future role and the common challenges (Faez and Valeo, 2012; Whitehead, 2020).

Along the same lines, the excessive amount of theoretical content was criticised, and the necessity of including more practice in teacher education in Spain was once again exposed (Martínez Agudo, 2017). Practical lessons are often preferred to theoretical ones and research has revealed that student satisfaction increases when there are more opportunities to practise (Jareño et al., 2021). However, the importance of theory cannot be overlooked as teaching practice should be based on and supported by theoretical knowledge which is needed to reflect on and assess in-service classroom experiences (Cabrera and Leggott, 2014). In agreement, the importance of reaching a balance between theory and practice has been extensively discussed in the literature in the field (Baecher, 2012; Faez and Valeo, 2012), and positive results have been observed when teachers are open to theory and willing to draw on theoretical knowledge (Hascher and Hagenauer, 2016).

Participants also believed that their training differed from the reality of the classroom, and they considered the content of the programme to be unrealistic as it was preparing them for an ideal non-existent classroom. Novice teachers often experience a clash between the training they have received and their actual experience in the classroom (Korthagen, 2010; Sancho-Gil et al., 2017). It is essential that teacher training prepares teachers for real future teaching experiences to avoid early attrition (Moon, 2007).

Despite the above limitations of the Master's, participants valued the interdisciplinary nature of the programme and the possibility of being part of a community of teacher trainees from different fields, as has been found in other studies which revealed the positive impact of group work in this context (Jareño et al., 2021). Participants also valued the placement at the schools greatly as they could experience the everyday classroom alongside their duties and identify the usual challenges. Research shows that the placement has been highly valued by students since the beginning of this training programme in Spain (Ayuso and Ortega, 2014) and it has a positive and significant influence on students' satisfaction (Jareño et al., 2021). As discussed above, increasing the duration of the school placement could be an ideal solution to the limited practical opportunities in the Master's.

Although there were many weaknesses identified and several improvements proposed, some participants considered the Master's to be effective in terms of providing them with the necessary qualification to start their teaching careers, i.e., a mere formality. Pre-service and in-service teachers recognised that the Master's was just the beginning of their training and highlighted the 'magic' of experience and the importance of learning on the job. As a result, participants' views about the overall effectiveness of the pre-service teacher education programme varied.

What are the challenges novice in-service EFL teachers encounter in state schools in Spain?

Classroom challenges were observed and discussed at length throughout the research process. Participants revealed an extensive list of difficulties in the EFL classroom which are clearly intertwined. Ensuring equal and inclusive opportunities and managing the classroom effectively becomes more difficult with overcrowded classes and diverse levels, considering overtasked teachers, with limited resources and facilities, who are ill-equipped to deal with learners' increasing mental health issues and demotivation. Importantly, the COVID pandemic accentuated some of these challenges. The combination of all these challenges is a worrying blend for those starting in a profession with worsening working conditions and where public investment is limited and affects the teacher-student ratio (Aparicio and Arevalo, 2014).

The challenges encountered by participants in this study agree with other investigations in a variety of contexts. In the United States, classroom management skills, methodological diversification of teaching and the teaching of children with special needs were some of the challenges identified by teachers which could be linked to ineffective teacher training (Aud et al., 2013; Baecher, 2012). In the context of the Spanish education system, large classrooms and passive learning are common and teachers sometimes struggle to ensure equal and inclusive opportunities for all students (Aparicio and Arévalo, 2014; Jareño et al., 2021), as was revealed by participants in this study.

What are the training needs novice in-service EFL teachers have? What training should be offered to pre-service EFL teachers to facilitate their transition to teaching?

Given the similarities between the training needs identified by both pre-service and in-service teachers, the answers to these two research questions have been combined to avoid repetition. Most pre-service and in-service teachers identified some essential training needs which should be covered in their initial training. Better classroom management skills could facilitate their support towards students with lack of motivation in overcrowded classrooms. Classroom management skills are an asset to any teacher and novice teachers often wish to improve these and would benefit from more training in this area (Peacock, 2009). Other studies in the context of Spain revealed that little attention was given to classroom management skills in training for primary school EFL teachers (Martínez Agudo, 2017) and the current study reaffirms this in further education levels where

teachers struggled to become an authority figure, especially in the case of female novice teachers.

Teachers also wished for more training to understand their students' diversity and needs while guaranteeing inclusion, which was said to go beyond educational support in the classroom by including other forms of diversity (e.g., socioeconomic and cultural background, gender and sexual orientation). This aligns with similar research in the context of this Master's, where teachers reported insufficient training to support the social and emotional development of their students (Aparicio and Arévalo, 2014). In the context of Spain, teachers and their motivation have also been found to be negatively influenced by their lack of training in inclusive practices, showing once again the importance of training which is relevant to a diverse classroom context (Gadella Kamstra, 2020, 2021a).

According to participants, the above training, together with learning new technological tools and engagement techniques, could facilitate pre-service teachers' transition to their first teaching experiences. Other investigations in Spain have also revealed that student teachers felt less competent with ICT, creativity, and conflict-solving skills (Cabrera and Leggott, 2014) and therefore, more training in these areas is required. In this context, it is essential that training is improved at the pre-service stage because Spanish teachers receive less support for continuous improvement than teachers in other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries (OECD, 2018) and as a result, will have limited opportunities for in-service development.

What are participants' feelings about their preparedness to teach English?

In-service teachers shared their views about their feelings of preparedness after finishing the Master's and at the moment of the interview, after some teaching experience. They revealed the reality shock they experienced in their first classes when they had to teach on their own and when they realised that they were unprepared to teach English. Some in-service teachers confessed to feeling unprepared even after some years in the role. Similarly, pre-service teachers discussed their feelings of preparedness while enrolled in the Master's and the fact that they were not as prepared as they would like to be was exposed. Not all participants felt fully prepared to teach English and support their students, as has been the case in other research in the field (Peacock, 2009; Polat, 2010). Participating teachers revealed their difficulties to find the link between the training received in the Master's and the reality of the EFL classrooms. Improving teacher

education in Spain will empower teachers to feel more prepared to teach English while enhancing the programme's overall effectiveness.

The answers to the research questions lead to the following conclusion. Given the extraordinary number of classroom challenges, the weaknesses of the programme and the various training needs teachers have, EFL teachers may not be sufficiently qualified to meet the existing demands of the EFL classroom context today. Following the completion of the postgraduate teacher training course, EFL teachers in Spain may lack adequate preparation to teach EFL at secondary schools and further education levels.



6

Implications and recommendations

The findings from this study led to some clear implications for teacher education. This investigation has revealed the perspectives of pre-service and in-service teachers on teacher education in Spain. Teachers' viewpoints should never be overlooked and to guarantee effective and meaningful teacher training, communication with teachers is essential. Collaboration among teachers, teachers in training, teacher educators, school administrators and the government will allow bringing the real classroom to the teacher training programme while maximizing its content and time spent in the placement (Faez and Valeo, 2012; Whitehead, 2022). All stakeholders must work alongside each other to guarantee successful communication and collaboration to enrich teacher education.

Importantly, training which prioritises and focuses on theoretical classes will not suffice. Teacher educators cannot simply pass on their theoretical and methodological knowledge, as teachers need to experiment with different approaches on their own. Ensuring that pre-service teachers have plenty of opportunities to practise is vital and this could be achieved by increasing the amount of practical content and the duration of the placement. As it is, a one-year Master's may not be enough to provide teachers with the knowledge to teach in state schools in Spain and a more practical approach is needed (Jareño et al., 2021), especially if we want teachers to be more confident and more prepared when they get to the real classroom.

To better support teacher training needs and to ensure that pre-service and in-service teachers are prepared for the countless classroom challenges, researchers in the field call for different approaches to language teacher education, for example, a teacher-beliefs-driven teacher education approach (Kumaravadivelu, 2001; Polat, 2010) in which teachers are listened to and considered for the design of the teacher program; a realistic approach (Day, 2002; Korthagen, 2001, 2010; Jareño et al., 2021) based on real practical problems which encourages teacher-student communication and links theory and practice; or a more reflective approach (Farrell, 2012; Whitehead, 2022) which

addresses the issues faced in the first years of teaching and encourages self-reflection and the observation of other teachers. All the above approaches agree that teacher education must be tailored to teachers' experiences in the classroom and training needs, making sure that they are trained to develop the skills that they wish to improve (Day, 2002). Notably, a challenge-based training programme could ensure a more realistic approach to teachers' initial professional development while embracing the benefits of teacher reflection (Gadella Kamstra, 2021a).

In the Spanish context, the university education system is evaluated by an agency called ANECA (*Agencia Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad y Acreditación*) which translates to National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation in English. Ongoing evaluation is crucial to safeguard the quality of education, however, the evaluation provided by ANECA does not include regular classroom observations and does not consider student satisfaction or support teachers with methodological feedback (Jareño et al., 2021). Thus, the evaluation of teacher training programme in Spain could be improved to ensure that educators are supported and that teachers are well-equipped for their future teaching experiences.

Beginning in 2022, The Ministry of Education and Professional Training in Spain stated its intentions of making changes to the teacher training programme by increasing the duration of the Master's and strengthening the practicum with a remunerated placement. Catalunya is also piloting a longer teacher education programme (Sensei) in which trainees are learning and practising in schools and get a reduced salary (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2023). Still, final or major structural changes have not been made collectively at all universities in Spain and whether these will potentially resolve all the challenges exposed in this study will be revealed in due course. In the past, major and recurring changes to teacher education did not lead to improved results (Aguilar-Mediavilla et al., 2021; OECD, 2016). Once these new changes have been implemented, further research could compare the

results of the present study with future students' views and their experiences with the new structure of the programme.

The findings of this study have to be seen in light of some limitations which could inspire further research. Findings revealed pre-service and in-service teachers' viewpoints, but data could have been collected from lecturers in the Master's as has been the case in other studies in the field (Peacock, 2009). This could have allowed for an exploration of their views about the programme's content and effectiveness. Additionally, although this investigation only reports on the context of Spain with Spanish EFL teachers, findings are significant for contexts with similar classroom challenges or with similar teacher education programmes (e.g., in European countries such as Portugal, Italy and Greece).

Based on participants' experiences and beliefs, this study illustrates a few strengths and several weaknesses of the teacher training programme in two Spanish universities. This investigation may be a starting point towards a formal evaluation of this Master's which should aim to facilitate the transition from pre-service to in-service teaching and avoid the 'reality shock' that teachers often face. If we want to bridge the gap between pre-service teacher education and in-service teachers' experiences, there is need to design training which is based on a more realistic view of the 21st-century classroom, and we can only do this if we include the perspective of those who are currently teaching.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Interview guide (Pre-service teachers)

ACADEMIC AND TEACHING BACKGROUND

- Tell me about your teaching experience. Have you got any teaching experience?
- Have you always wanted to become an English teacher? Why or why not?

MA EXPECTATIONS

- What were your expectations of this Master's before you started?
- So far, does this Master's meet your expectations?
- What do you like the most about this Master's and why?
- What do you like the least about this Master's and why?

IMPROVEMENTS

- What improvements would you propose for this Master's and why?

TRAINING NEEDS / MA EFFECTIVENESS

- At the moment, what are your training needs?
- So far, does this Master's meet your training needs?
- Have you done extra training to learn something that the Master's hasn't covered?
- If you had the opportunity, what training/courses would you do?
- Do you think that this Master's is effective? Why?

PREPAREDNESS

- You will start the practicum soon, how do you feel about starting to teach?
- Do you feel prepared to teach in a real class at this stage? Why or why not?
- Do you feel prepared to teach in the practicum at this stage? Why or why not?
- From 0 to 100%, How prepared do you feel to teach in the practicum? Why? What's missing from the Master's?
- What training/courses could help you to feel more prepared in the classroom?
- When you finish this Master's, will you be well prepared for teaching English? Why or why not?

SELF-EFFICACY BELIEFS

- How confident are you about your abilities to teach English?
- How do you think you are or will be as a teacher?

Appendix B. Interview guide (In-service teachers)

ACADEMIC AND TEACHING BACKGROUND

- Tell me about your teaching experience. When did you start teaching?
- Have you always wanted to become an English teacher? Why or why not?

MA EFFECTIVENESS

- What did you learn from the Master's?
- Is what you learnt in this Master's useful in the classroom now? How?
- Do you think that the Master's was effective? Why or why not?
- What did you like the most about the Master's and why?
- What did you like the least about the Master's and why?

EXPECTATIONS

- Did the Master's meet your expectations?

IMPROVEMENTS

- What improvements would you propose for this Master's and why?

PREPAREDNESS

- When you finished this Master's, did you feel well prepared for teaching English?
- From 0 to 100%, how prepared did you feel when you finished the Master's? Why?
- What was missing from the Master's?
- And now, do you feel well prepared for teaching English?
- From 0 to 100%, How prepared do you feel? Why?
- Have you done extra training to learn something that the Master's didn't cover?
- If you had the opportunity, what training/courses would you do?

CURRENT EXPERIENCE

- Are you experiencing any challenges in the classroom at the moment?
- What training would you need to face the challenges you mentioned?

SELF-EFFICACY BELIEFS

- How well do you think that you teach English?
- What are your strengths as a teacher?

SELF-EFFICACY AND CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

- Do you think that you are competent in managing the classroom?
- Did you receive training to manage the classroom?

SELF-EFFICACY AND INCLUSIVE PRACTICES

- Do you think that you are effective in teaching all students in your class?
- Do you feel confident to support all students' needs in your class? (If you had the resources)
- Are you prepared to offer equal and inclusive opportunities for all students?
- Did you receive training in inclusive practices, supporting students' needs, etc.?

SELF-EFFICACY BELIEFS

- How confident are you about your abilities to teach English?
- How do you describe yourself as a teacher?

Appendix C. Follow-up interview guide (In-service teachers)

- Is there anything you would like to discuss after this observation?
- Did students behave as they would behave any other day?
- Did the lesson meet your expectations?
- How could you improve this lesson?
- In the interview, you mentioned some challenges that you currently face. After this observation, would you like to add any other challenges?
- Were there any challenges that you wish you had approached differently?
- Following this class, can you think of any training that you would like to have?
- How do you think you managed the classroom?
- Did you support *all* students in the class?

Appendix D

Observation Form – ELTRA Project (2022-23) – designed by Lorena S. Gadella Kamstra

Teacher	Date/time	Tick
Observer	Institution	
Lesson focus	Level/class	
N° of students	Materials	
PREPAREDNESS + TRAINING NEEDS		
SUBJECT MATTER CONTENT		Shows knowledge of subject matter Demonstrates breadth and depth of mastery
ORGANIZATION		Shows preparation States clear objectives Emphasizes main points Summarizes main points Starts on time Finishes on time
TEACHING METHODS (the use of aids, materials, techniques, and technology; includes variety - controlled and free practice tasks; different skills)		Includes the teaching of different skills Stimulating tasks Group involvement Uses examples Stays focused on the objectives Meets the objectives Checks students' understanding
INSTRUCTIONS		Gives effective instructions Gives clear instructions Checks students' understanding after instructions
TEACHER TALKING TIME + STUDENT TALKING TIME (classroom discourse; pauses)		Teacher-centred Learner-centred
FEEDBACK		Gives feedback about students' work Gives feedback on students' responses Correction Praise Punishment Encouragement Rewards
RAPPORT		Holds genuine interest in students Is respectful Is fair and impartial Encourages participation Interacts with students

DIVERSITY (understands students' personal culture, gender differences and disabilities)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understands students' differences Caters for special individual needs Assists students with academic problems Offers equal and inclusive opportunities Enables social and emotional development 								
THE TEACHER										
PRESENTATION + BODY LANGUAGE (facial expressions, gestures, hands, mime, eye contact, posture)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses a clear voice Strong projection Proper enunciation Uses grammatically correct utterances Evidences self-confidence Eye contact 								
EMOTIONS (negative and positive emotions)		<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td>Relaxed</td> <td>Frustration</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Enthusiastic</td> <td>Anger</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Inspirational</td> <td>Anxiety</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Friendly</td> <td>Stress</td> </tr> </table>	Relaxed	Frustration	Enthusiastic	Anger	Inspirational	Anxiety	Friendly	Stress
Relaxed	Frustration									
Enthusiastic	Anger									
Inspirational	Anxiety									
Friendly	Stress									
REFLECTION (analyses the tasks and the classroom dynamics and adapts the plan accordingly)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Makes changes to the initial plan Improvises 								
CLASSROOM CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES										
CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses time wisely Attends to students' interaction Demonstrates leadership ability Maintains discipline and control Maintains effective management Clear and effective stages 								
CLASSROOM ATMOSPHERE		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conducive to learning Engagement in the lesson Friendly environment Cooperation Uses humour to enliven the class Shares personal experiences Arouses curiosity Arouses attention 								
PHYSICAL ASPECTS OF CLASSROOM (layout of room, distractions if any, available resources, space, facilities)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effective resources Sufficient resources 								

Other comments:

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