Arab World English Journal
INTERNATIONAL PEER REVIEWED JOURNAL ISSN: 2229-9327
مجلة اللغة الانكليزية في العالم العربي

Arab World English Journal (AWEJ) Volume 11. Number3 September 2020 Pp. 73-91
DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol11no3.5

Entailing Professional Training and Thesis Development. An Innovation Experience at Universidad SEK Chile

Tulio Barrios Bulling
Faculty of Education, Universidad SEK
Santiago de Chile, Chile

Abstract

Teaching professional practice and thesis development are usually two independent and unrelated processes. However, some concerns arose at Universidad SEK (USEK) Chile Department of English. Students declared to be overloaded and that working on their theses did not contribute to solving real in-class problems. Professors considered that training was not achieving all the expected results and that theses quality of some students were below expectations. To address these concerns, the English department decided to create a direct and strong bond between these two vital processes through Action Research (AR). Studying this innovation process appears to be relevant as it may lead to a better understanding of its impact and the complexities involved. Consequently, the author aims to value the results of this innovation after five years of its implementation. How do involved agents such as students, professors, supervisors, and mentors ponder this experience? Qualitative information gathered through interviews evidenced some contentment regarding thesis and training improvement, a decrease in the students' overload perception, renewed motivation, and a positive thesis-training connection. Despite this promising perception, there are still some pending challenges, such as enhancing the spreading of the innovation and the quality of the feedback provided to school mentors.

Keywords: Action Research, professional training, thesis development, Universidad SEK

Cite as: Bulling, T. B.(2020). Entailing professional training and thesis development. An innovation experience at Universidad SEK Chile. *Arab World English Journal*, *11* (3). 73-91.
DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol11no3.5

Introduction

The English teaching programme at USEK University Chile ran from March 2009 until December 2019. According to data obtained from the academic registry, 311students enrolled in this programme, and 61 of them completed it successfully. Ten professors were in charge of imparting it, six under a full-time contract, and four under a part-time modality. They performed roles as field professors, training supervisors and thesis advisers.

The English teaching professional programme consisted of ten semesters. Students had to follow the 150-credit curricular structure illustrated in Figure one.

Subject	Semester	Credits
Written Communication	1	1
Educational Theories	1	2
Development Psychology	1	3
Educational Informatics	1	4
English Language I	1-2	6
Oral Communication	2	1
Foundations of Education	2	2
Educational Curriculum	2	3
Learning Psychology	2	4
Vocabulary Learning and Teaching	3	1
Neurosciences and Learning	3	2
Phonetics and Phonology I	3	3
Grammar I	3	4
Educational Design and Planning	3	4
English Language II	3-4	6
Visual Literacy	4	1
Learning Assessment	4	2
Phonetics and Phonology II	4	3
Grammar II	4	4
Reflective Practice Workshop: School Culture	4	4
Linguistics	4	6
Phonetics and Phonology III	5	1
Educational Projects	5	2
Reflective Practice Workshop II: Classroom Observation and Management	5	3
Anglo-Saxon Literature	5	5
Applied Linguistics: Second Language Acquisition	5	3
English Language III	5-6	4
ELT Methodology	6	2
Semantics and Pragmatics	6	2
Pedagogic Leadership and Educational Management	6	3
Reflective Practice Workshop III: The Teacher's Role	6	4
Anglo-Saxon Literature II	6	4
Innovative Pedagogy	7	1
Primary Education Didactics	7	2
The Society and Culture of English Speaking Countries	7	3
Practicum I: Primary Education	7	4
Cognitive Linguistics	7	4
English Language IV	7-8	6
Research Methods in ELT	8	2
Secondary Education Didactics	8	2
Differential Teaching	8	2
Practicum II: Secondary Education	8	4
Academic Writing and Presentation	8	3
Advanced English	9	2
Research Project (Thesis)	9-10	8
Professional Training	9-10	8
	Total credits	150

Figure 1. USEK English teaching programme curriculum

Until 2014, teaching professional practice and dissertation development were two independent and unrelated processes conducted during the final year (9th and 10th semester). At that stage, the staff of professors belonging to the USEK Chile Department of English realised that their students were reporting feeling overloaded and that working on their theses did not solve the problems they had to overcome during their training classes. Furthermore, professors considered that training was not achieving the expected results and that the quality of the theses was meeting the expected standards well. The final stages of a professional teaching programme may be very stressful for students as they have to cope with their teacher training demands and their thesis development obligation. In this regard, Bedewy and Gabriel (2015), Prabu (2015), and Young (2017) pointed out the failure to obtain and maintain a sound personal balance might lead to develop emotional problems and stress.

After several analysis meetings, the Department of English decided to create a direct and robust entailment between the thesis development process and the professional teaching practice. The main objectives were to strengthen the linking and articulation among subjects, to promote the pedagogical reflection in trainee students within their practice centres, and to turn both processes into a more meaningful experience for students. They also intended to have a positive impact on the students' overload perception, motivation, and personal satisfaction. Additionally, the Department of English expected to regulate graduation timing through this innovation.

The staff decided that Action Research (AR) was an excellent method to achieve these goals, authors like McNiff and Whitehead (2011), Kunlasomboon, Wongwanicha, and Suwanmonkhaa (2015), and Wood (2017) stated that AR allows to research while studying, training or working. This made the process more meaningful as students would research their training centres, identifying issues they would need to deal with, designing and implementing an in-class solution, and documenting and reporting them to fulfil their thesis requirements simultaneously. Thus students could stay focus, optimise timing, and have a more meaningful experience.

There were several implications the English department had to face. Firstly, they had to involve the Faculty authorities and to conduct the necessary curricular adjustments. The professors also decided to apply an Action Research (AR) approach to the dissertation development process. This implied adding the role of thesis co-advisers to all the class supervisors and generating coordination instances for the involved agents.

After the planning process, this innovation was established in 2015. The promoters dimmed necessary to incorporate a follow-up system. Students were accompanied by a tutor appointed by the university. They also were guided and supported by experienced teachers at their training centres, who acted as mentors. The class observation was enhanced by providing students timely feedback following personal meeting agenda. The school mentors presented regular written reports and informed about any irregularity. Thirty-seven students underwent this innovation.

Due to all the implication this innovation plan conveyed, it becomes relevant to ponder and appreciate the impact it might have had in achieving the expected goals. How do professors,

supervisors, mentors, and students value the entailment innovation? What are the main advantages and? What difficulties and challenges still remain?

This article aims to shed light on the perception of involved agents (professors, supervisors, mentors, and students) about the effects of this innovation, their degrees of contempt, the main advantages and difficulties, as well as, pending challenges.

Literature Review

In this section, the author reviews some contributions to the fields of teaching training, thesis development, and AR to provide the current study the necessary bibliographical support.

Teaching Professional Training

Teacher training is usually associated with professional development, but in the case of pre-graduate students, one may consider it the first step. Universities should develop training programmes that attend their future teacher graduates' formation needs. Boudersa (2016) identified five types of professional development that may guide such a plan: in-house, offered at school; organisational-wide, in multiple sites; institution-based, developing a common theme for a long time; professional inquiry group, groups of teachers learning something of common interest, and coaching, coaches supporting teachers at school in different ways.

Boudersa (2016) determined "an urgent need for a system of education which encourages and promotes active engagement and reflective teaching and learning" (p. 6). Though Bourdesa (2016) set this need in the Algerian reality, one may correctly assume it is a global challenge for teachers and educators. How to get students involved and teach critical thinking are two crucial demands teachers have to face nowadays. Professional training should help future and novice teachers to develop these skills, and experienced teachers to upgrade them.

Another essential notion Bourdesa (2016) developed was that professional training and professional development focus "on the aspects of change and growth in knowledge, beliefs and attitudes, and practices of teachers" (p. 4). The author transcended the cognitive domain by including attitudinal and practical contents, as well. Consequently, teaching professional training became a holistic process.

Darling-Hammond, Hyler, and Gardner (2017) also addressed the topic of professional development by defining it asstructured professional learning that results in changes to teacher knowledge and practices, and improvements in student learning outcomes. We conceptualize professional learning as a product of both externally provided and job-embedded activities that increase teachers' knowledge and help them change their instructional practice in ways that support student learning. Thus, formal PD represents a subset of the range of experiences that may result in professional learning. (p. 2)

As in Bourdesa (2016), professional development refered not only to knowledge but also to practice. Additionally, Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) also associated it with students' learning results, thus broadening its implications. The authors presented a series of seven characteristics an efficient professional development programme should have: content focused, learning,

collaboration, models and modelling, expert support, feedback, and reflection, and sustained duration. The authors reported that successful programmes could develop several of these elements at the same time. Regarding students' achievements, Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) stated that focusing on the content teachers teach has proved efficient. This was undoubtedly an excellent way to integrate training with subject content and the teachers' daily practice.

The authors (2017) strongly suggested developing learning communities as this might generate positive collaboration outcomes beyond school. In their words, "Teacher learning in a community can be a source of efficacy and confidence in the process of adopting new practices" (p. 18). Concluding, Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) established some difficulties institutions and teachers had to overcome when designing and implementing training and development programmes. These were inadequate resources, lack of shared vision on quality teaching, lack of time for planning and performing, conflicting requirements, and lack of adequate foundational knowledge.

Thesis Development Process

Many difficulties may arise when students have to face their thesis development process. For example, writing the thesis statements, devising the research questions and objectives, collecting data, and managing time. These obstacles may cause students to feel stressed out or overloaded with work; mainly, if they have to perform other tasks simultaneously. Russell-Pinsona and Harrish (2019) reported that stress might have different unwanted responses in students, such as cognitive difficulties, behavioural issues, physical symptoms, social signs, and emotional problems. According to the authors, stress was complex to handle as "Stress exists on a continuum. At one end of this continuum is the experience of meeting common stressors of daily life, during which time stress can wax and wane" (p. 64). However, certain levels of well-processed stress could be beneficial as they might activate motivation.

Russell-Pinsona and Harrish (2019) classified the following sources of stress in their research: perfectionism, competing priorities, reduced time and project management, writing anxiety, challenges with the supervisors, poor cognitive habits, and individual stressors. They also presented some sound recommendations for students writing their dissertations. Concerning stress signs, one should look after physical needs, practice mindfulness, self-compassion, and get family and friends' support. The authors also proposed creating a community of dissertation writers that could provide suitable support during the different stages of the dissertation writing process.

One can also find problems associated with stress while writing a dissertation or thesis in the context of distance education. Silinda and Brubacher (2016) attempted to measure stress during the referred process, and the amount of stress expressed from specific stressors. They identified twenty-four stressors being twenty-two of them statistically significant. These stressors were classified into five related and interacting categories: relationship stressors, time management/workload, health problems, financial and transport problems, and academic stressors. The authors reported that "Time management/workload and academic stressors had the strongest relationships with overall stress and the relationships were both positive" (p. 6). The qualitative analysis seemed to indicate that lack of obligations balance, a general absence of support, lack of feedback leading to loss of motivation, and uncertainty regarding what was expected of the

students were relevant sources of stress. To face these difficulties, Silinda and Brubacher (2016) suggested offering seminars and counselling in time management, strategies to support students with family responsibilities, interaction among peers, and social networking at different stages of the thesis writing process.

Matin and Khan (2017) also informed about problems students face when working on their thesis. In their case, they did not only refer to personal issues but also to contextual and administrative difficulties as well. After collecting data from supervisors and postgraduate students, the authors reported that most supervisors consider that students did not have adequate knowledge of the research works. Only a few students (20%) shared this opinion. Around one-third of the supervisors and students expressed their concerns regarding time constraints to complete their thesis work. Though informants did not mostly complain about time constraints and thesis work overload, Martin and Khan (2017) opined that these were issues to consider

> Time management and stress management were very important. Failure to keep pace with work overload, anxiety, isolation, frustration was the problem during the thesis works. Though few students and supervisors knowledge of the students. There might be misconceptions of had complained regarding time constraint and work overloads of the students but the factors need to be addressed to solve these difficulties for an overall improvement of thesis works of postgraduate students of various disciplines. (p. 25)

Funding is another issue that seemed to affect both supervisors and students which they suggested to solve through institutional support. A regular supervisors-student discussion was another difficulty the authors identified and whose importance students seemed reluctant to accept. The guidance provided by the institution was another controversial matter as most students considered it inadequate. This opinion was not shared by most of the supervisors. For Matin and Khan (2019), a gap in expectations might explain this discrepancy. Limited resources and infrastructure was another area of difficulty on which most of the informants seemed to agree.

Action Research

AR has been used as a useful tool for conducting research, trying to identify difficulties *in situ,* and implementing actions that may help to overcome them. Coghlan and Brannick (2005) postulated that AR centres on research in motion, democratic collaboration, developing scientific knowledge based on the implemented actions, and problem-solving through a sequence of events. For the authors, the main idea was that AR uses a scientific approach to study the resolution of significant social or organisational issues together with those who experience these issues directly. "Action research works through a cyclical four-step process of consciously and deliberately: planning, taking action, evaluating the action, leading to further planning, and so on" (p. 4).

Coghlan and Brannick (2005) presented an AR cycle that might help to research someone's organisation. There was a pre-step related to context and purpose, aiming to understand the meaning of the project. The four main steps of the referred cycle dealt with diagnosing, planning, taking action, and evaluating results. In the first step, the researcher established the main to intervene. During the second step, the researcher designed a series of work considering both the first steps and the context. Along the third step, the researcher would implement the determined

interventions. Finally, the researcher analysed the outcomes and results trying to determine whether the diagnosis was correct, the actions correctly applied, and if a new cycle of diagnosis, planning, and action was needed. Thus AR becomes a permanent cycle.

Education has not been an exception to this kind of research. Tomal (2010) determined three leading types of research quantitative, qualitative, and action research. He associated the first one with a scientific approach, the second type with a naturalistic approach, and AR with a process of finding problems and implementing solutions. He defined the researcher's role as follows. "An action researcher utilizes an appropriate intervention to collect and analyze data and to implement actions to address educational issues" (p. 11). Tomal (2010) considered that AR offered some advantages compared to the other two approaches as it did not need complex statistical analysis or long narrative explanations.

Regarding the different stages of AR, Tomal (2010) presented a six-stages sequence, which shared several elements with Coghlan's and Brannick's (2005) AR cycle. The first stage was the problem statement which included an initial diagnosis. The second was data collection, where the teacher researched the identified problems. The third stage consisted of analysis and feedback. Here the teacher dealt with the leading probable causes. Action planning came next; at this step, the teacher designed different possible solutions. The fifth stage included taking action and a contingency plan. The final stage was evaluation and follow up, which should also consider permanent improvement processes. All these stages constituted a sound guide to conduct research and solve problems within the classroom.

Following a similar line, Macniff and Whitehead (2010) considered that AR dealt with practice improvement and practice knowledge creation. Though action and research went together, the authors suggested analysing them separately. Consequently, they understood 'action' as an activity and 'research' as ways one might use to observe what was being done and how new knowledge was created after that.

Action research, therefore, combines the ideas of taking purposeful action with educational intent, and testing the validity of any claims we make about the process. It becomes the grounds for other social and professional practice; professional development is understood as grounded in the capacity to offer explanations for our work. (pp. 18-19)

Just as the previously revised authors, Macniff and Whitehead (2010) also proposed a series of steps to conduct AR. Project planning, project design, doing the project, knowledge claims and validation, and knowledge dissemination. Each of these steps had several associated actions. Project planning included collaborative work in institutional contexts. Project design comprised action planning and action checklist fulfilment. Project execution implied following the operation, finding data, processes documentation, data collection and management, data analysis, and evidence generation. Knowledge validation dealt with legitimising processes and reports. Finally, knowledge dissemination was associated with publishing and thus spreading the research. The first four steps or processes presented many similarities regarding the stages the other authors present. The last two represented a new contribution, as they were related to obtaining validation for the research from the scientific community.

The Study

The following objectives and research questions guided the current research.

Objectives

The present study aims to shed light on how professors, supervisors, mentors, and students value this innovation. Additionally, it intends to determine and comprehend the main advantages, difficulties, and remaining challenges.

Research questions

1. How do professors, supervisors, mentors, and students value the entailment innovation?
2. What are the main advantages?
3. What are the main difficulties and remaining challenges?

Methodology

The author followed a qualitative paradigmatic research approach. Firstly, he designed a semi-structured interview guide that was proof-tested. After analysing the feedback provided by the voluntary participants, the author applied some adjustments to the instruments. The interviews were conducted privately, independently, and recorded. Then they were transcribed and codified based on pre-determined thematic axis and code categories. During the analysis process, the author searched for common elements, differences, and eventual patterns following a code-by-code analysis method. Finally, he presented the results, discussed them, and drew some conclusions and recommendations.

Data Collection

The participants represented all the involved agents. Five professors and former professors were interviewed, eight students, and four school mentors. This sample represents 50% of the Department of English staff, 20% of the students who experienced this innovation, and 50% of the teachers who acted as mentors at the English teaching training centres.

The instrument used was a set of semi-structured interviews.

Results Presentation and Analysis

For processing the collected information, the author designed a three-thematic axis category system, being these axes directly related to the research objectives. The first thematic axis deals with the valuation of the entailment innovation; the second refers to assessment involved agents make of the thesis development process after the innovation, while the third axis takes into consideration the evaluation professors and mentors make about teaching training after the innovation. Figure two illustrates this system.

Category	Code	Definition
Action Research	ARE	approach used to entail thesis development and professional training
Attitudes	ATT	feelings and behaviours related to the innovation
Difficulties	DIF	aspects of the innovation that are difficult to solve
English teaching training	ETT	opinions about English teaching training after the innovation
Follow-up	FUP	perception regarding activities designed to accompany the innovation
Main Advantage	MAD	most positive aspect of the innovation according to involved agents
Thesis implications	THS	perception and opinions about the thesis administrative implications
Timing	TIM	how the innovation impacted timing

Figure 2. Category system

The author studied the codes by involved agents and thematic axis in search of common ground and differences. Figure three registers the codes that were applied to professors, mentors, and students, to professors and mentors, to professors and students, and professors only.

Agent/Code	Professors Mentors Students	Professors Mentors	Professors Students	Professors
	ARE ATT DIF MAD TIM	ETT	FUP	THI

Figure 3. Codes by involved agent

The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and codified using AQUAD 7.0 qualitative-quantitative text analysis software. Before initiating the code analysis, the author determined the frequency of use of each code. Figure four depicts this situation.

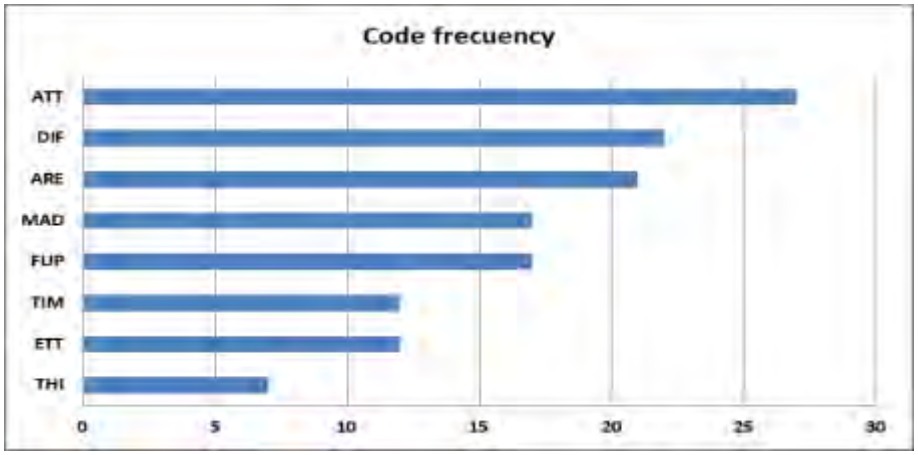

Figure 4. Code frequency

As one may realise, code ATT corresponding to attitudes related to the innovation was used twenty-seven times, followed by code DIF, which accounts for the main difficulties and pending challenges of the reported innovation with twenty-two references. The third-place corresponds to Action Research (ARE) with twenty-one allusions. Code MAD and FUP associated with main advantages and follow-up activities, respectively registered seventeen mentions. There is another draw between codes ETT (English teaching training) and TIM (timing), as they were used seventeen times each. Code THI related to thesis administrative implications obtained seven mentions.

Results Discussion and Interpretation

In this section, the author will describe, explain, and interpret the findings following a code-by-code methodology.

Code Analysis

The author conducted the data analysis by involved agents following both the thematic axis and the alphabetical order of the codes.

First thematic axis: valuation of the current thesis development and professional teaching training entailment innovation

Code ATT: attitudes associated with the innovation

The Professors' perspective

In the professors' opinion, students who undergo this innovation seem to be more motivated and less stressed than those who conducted thesis development and teaching training as separate processes before the referred innovation was established. In Professor's one perception, "trainee students seem to be more motivated. AR helps them to reflect on what is going on in the classroom and to design and implement alternative solutions". Professor two also reports a positive disposition in students when facing these two last stages of the English teaching programme. Professors three and four inform that being the demands almost the same as before the innovation was implemented; students' motivation tends to increase because they feel that advancing in their teaching training also means advancing in their thesis. Finally, Professor five considers that it is not easy to assess students' attitudinal aspects, but "one would tend to think they are less stressed because the number of overload complaints has decreased significantly." Additionally, she perceives an improvement in collaborative attitude among professors.

The School mentors' perception

Mentors at school share this positive perception. Mentor one states that trainee students seem happier, in good spirits and willing to collaborate in other educational tasks. He says "before the innovation, it was not easy to get them to fulfil other duties than those strictly established either by the school or the university." Mentor two seems to be more neutral regarding her valuation of the trainees' attitudes since she considers that it complex to keep track of all they do and how they do it. Mentor three believes that the trainee students' attitudes are positive and "they are willing to stay longer at school than the trainees before the innovation who rushed back to their homes or the university as soon as possible." Mentor four informs about finding it more comfortable to motivate trainee students of the innovation cohort.

The Students' perception

The perception of the students about their attitudes is also positive. As they did not experience the previous process, it only accounts for the current situation. Student one recognizes her desire to make the most out of her English professional teaching training. Hence, she tries to participate in every activity the school, as a teaching training centre, offers. Students two, five, and seven have a very similar point of view. They all consider that their training process is the closest teaching experience to real-life at a school, so they have to gain autonomy taking advantage of their mentors' and supervisors' guidance and expertise. Students three and four inform feeling a bit scared at the beginning of their training process and that they have to persevere in developing the necessary class management skills. Student 6 reports being optimistic about her process and feeling confident that her training will not only help her to become a good English teacher but also to develop a meaningful thesis. Student eight seems to be more skeptical, pragmatic, and somewhat less motivated. "I do not know how much this entailment will help me, but this is the way things are."

Code DIF: Difficulties regarding the innovation

As happens with almost any innovation process, there are some difficulties involved agents have to face.

The Professors' perception

For Professor one, it is necessary to collect the employers' opinions regarding the skills and competencies of USEK graduate students and to use that information to conduct further research to meet the school system demands. According to Professor two, some agenda adjustments are necessary to facilitate collaborative work among the members of the English department. Professor three considers that the studied innovation was not well-known by the rest of the educational community and the other Faculty departments. In his words, "this may be an important innovation conveying many implications, so it needs to be communicated and informed." Professor four expressed his concern about the use of some resources. "We need better bondage with the library resources. Many good resources are sub utilised. I feel we have not obtained enough support from the library staff, mainly because of their lack of knowledge about this innovation." This last sentence supports the previous concern for better communication of the referred innovation. Professor five goes a step further by suggesting that other faculties should also conduct their analysis processes concerning professional training and thesis development. She also agrees on the need to improve the communication of objectives and results. For her, the department should also systematise a long-term follow-up process and formalise some internal cooperation instances.

The School mentors' perception

School mentors do not seem to have too many issues regarding the implementation of the innovation. The main problem is the lack of feedback about the written report they issue at the end of each term. Mentor two even wondered if someone read them. Mentor's three statement exemplifies the general opinion well: "Ideally one should receive some feedback after each report one sends, if that is not possible, at least once a semester. Otherwise, it is discouraging, and one does not get to know if the reports contribute to the trainee students' formation process." If such is the case, this represents an issue in need of improvement.

The Students' perception

All interviewed students have something to say regarding pending challenges or situations that could be improved or corrected. For Student one, the whole process is too structured compared to what happens in the classroom. In her words, "being training a rigid process sometimes lacks the flexibility to respond efficiently and rapidly to emerging problems and situations." This lack of flexibility Student one perceives can be related to an allegedly excessive attachment to the class planning.

Student two considers that the development of the linguistic skills during the training process should also be associated with the context and not only to the international standards. This observation is certainly valid; mainly, because all trainee students perform their teaching in vulnerable environments. This situation is directly related to the service-learning approach USEK has.

Students three and four, who report having some class management issues, consider that class control should be developed more explicitly. "I do not feel well-prepared in terms of class management. One knows that this moment will come, but when facing a class, it is not always easy to get them to work." (Student three) Student four sustains that "class control techniques should be part of the curriculum. Sometimes I feel that I am developing them in an error-testing system which is not good." Doubtlessly, class management is a great challenge, even for experienced teachers. This area will certainly require further consideration. Student five informs having had more than one supervisor during her training period. "I would prefer to maintain the same supervisor all year long." A sensible observation, having different supervisors makes it challenging to determine the trainee student's performance development. Student five is the only informant reporting such a situation; hence, one may tend to think this is an isolated particular case.

Student six suggests intensifying the school mentor's and supervisor's support at the initial stages of the training process. "After the first term, class observation became more frequent. I would have preferred to receive more feedback and guidance during the first month." Probably, this student would have felt more secure if more frequently accompanied at the beginning of his training process. Nevertheless, some may argue that it is better to supervise trainee students once they are more familiar with their class and in a better domain of the situation. This is a situation to reflect about, and that should consider the communication and coordination between the school mentor and the university supervisor.

Students seven and eight both claim for the opportunity to interact with more experienced teachers. In student's seven words "though teachers with long professional trajectories surround us, we do not get the chance to interact with them. Either they are too busy or do not want to get involved with us." Student eight adds, "my interaction with experienced teachers is only as observant. I only share ideas and receive feedback from my appointed mentor and some students from time to time." The other informant students do not report on this particular topic.

Code FUP: perception about the actions implemented to accompany the innovation

The Professors' perception

All professors seem to agree the main changes regarding trainee students' accompaniment consisted of having an adviser and a co-adviser for the thesis development process. As seen when

the author introduced the context, the professors who acted as professional training supervisors became co advisers. The primary purpose of this was facilitating guidance for the entailment innovation. Additionally, Professor one reports an improvement in the possibilities to support trainee students regularly. 'Having two advisers increases the opportunity to provide feedback to our students." Professor three informs that despite the difficulties of coordinating meetings and collaborative actions, students feel well-supported.

The Students' perception

Trainee students declare to be satisfied with the number of meetings they had with both advisers and supervisors. Besides, they all seem to consider that the number of supervision visits they had was enough. Student four states that "having two advisers boosts the learning experience" as she could learn from two different and experienced professors.

Code MAD: the main advantage of the innovation:

The Professors' perception

This code reports all the involved agents' opinions about the main power of the studied innovation. Other strong points will appear associated with the other topics considered for the current research.

Professor one firmly associates the advantage with assessment, "when evaluating separately quality of either the thesis or the practice decreases. Consequently, a thesis that is the product of Action Research at an in-site teaching training process should achieve higher standards." For Professor two, the main advantage is that work is not duplicated, so this should reduce the students' overload perception. Professor three considers that the main advantage or positive aspect was a time reduction in the thesis development process. Professor four regards the accompaniment trainee students have received as the main benefit. At the same time, Professor five bases his opinion favourable opinion on numbers that would account for higher professional teaching training and theses grades.

The Mentors' perception

Though school mentors are not directly involved in the design and implementation of the current innovation, the author considered their opinion too as a complementary source of information.

Mentor one identifies a better teaching training and theory connection as the main advantage of the innovation. "Trainee students seem to have more solid theoretical support to apply in their English classes." Mentor two seems to concur as, in his opinion, "trainee students appear to be better equipped to reflect on what is going on in their classes." For Mentor three, the main advantage is that after the innovation, professional English teaching training appears to be a more meaningful experience. Finally, Mentor four reports that this innovation has allowed the trainee students a higher understanding of the teaching profession.

The Students' perception

For Student one, the main advantage of the innovation was the opportunity it offers to conduct training and the research at the same centre. Student two considers that researching the same place where you train allows a better knowledge of that reality. Student 3 believes the described entailment provides the chance to intervene in your class with theoretical support. Student four reports that researching while training helps her to keep the focus as 'work is not doubled.' Student five stories that this new system facilitates more profound knowledge of her students at school. For Student six, the main advantage is related to data collection. He states, "we can gather all the information we need within having to appeal to other sources." Student seven acknowledges higher consciousness of the training and thesis implication when working on them as interrelated processes. Finally, student eight has a similar perception as she informs a meaningful theory-practice entailment.

Code TIM: How the innovation impacted the timing

The Professors' perception

All five professors seem to agree that they need more time for coordinating activities and for collaborative work. This situation is due to the joint work that the professors in charge of guiding the theses have to do with the professors who act as English teaching training supervisors. The following quote taken from Professor's one interview helps to illustrate this point. "Now, we need to design new coordination actions under the Action Research approach to ensure the entailment between the students' teacher training and their thesis projects."

The School mentors' perception

The teachers who act as mentors at the training centres also have their concerns regarding timing. Though they value this innovation positively, they consider that the allocated time is not enough. School mentor two explains, "… before our main concern was to guide and counsel the trainee in terms of class planning, group management, instructional strategies, and assessment systems, now we also have to oversee that their actions align well with their thesis projects." There seems to be a sound consensus regarding needing more time to conduct research as well themselves.

The Students' perception

Students do not seem to perceive any difficulties regarding timing. They are not fully aware of all the administrative and logistics implications of this innovation.

Second thematic axis: thesis development process after the innovation

Code ARE: Action Research

The Professors' perception

Professors tend to value the introduction of AR positively. Professor one considers that AR helps trainee students to design actions according to their needs with theoretical support. Professor two highlights the positive impact of this entailment innovation. "Dissertation and teaching training became complementary and more meaningful experiences." Professor three values the time reduction in the dissertation development process. He states, "it seems that basing their theses on their current professional training though AR has helped the students to focus and to save time by

conducting in-site research." For Professor four, one can prove the positive impact of AR in the students' theses higher grading scores. Professor five reports a decrease in the students' overload perception based on a time reduction in the thesis development process and the subsequent decline of students' complaints.

The School mentors' perception

School mentors seem to share this positive perception about the contribution of AR in the trainee students' professional formation process though their reasons may sometimes differ from the professors' opinions. Mentor one informs that AR has helped trainee students to reflect on what is going on in the classroom and to design and implement alternative solutions. Mentor two considers that "professional training based on AR appears to be more meaningful as it strengthens the theory-practice connection." For Mentor three, trainee students acquire a better understanding of the teaching profession through AR. Finally, Mentor four reports that AR provides useful tools for students to understand the administrative tasks fulfilment implications fully.

The Students' perception

Student one believes that AR made the thesis development process a meaningful experience. She adds, "though I was a bit nervous at the beginning, once I learnt what AR is about, I was able to apply it and understand its usefulness." Student two also values AR positively. She considers that it allowed her to work in an integrated manner, which led to better thesis quality. Student three shares her opinion. For her, AR was an efficient tool that helped her to integrate the different aspects of her thesis planning and execution of her thesis. Student four believes that AR has enabled her to understand the thesis demands and implications and to relate them to her teaching training experience. "Whenever I learn something new from my research, I try to apply it in my classes immediately so that my students can also benefit from my learning." Student five reports that AR has been efficient for her since, through this approach, she has been able to develop her research based on personalised teaching strategies to meet their students' needs. Student's six report is entirely aligned with the previous one as she thinks that AR has helped her design her thesis project on attending the different learning styles her students have. Student seven informs that AR has been favourable as it facilitates to identify current difficulties, to design possible solutions, and to fulfil her thesis demands. She exemplifies this situation, "after two weeks I realised that some students were very reluctant to take part in activities that demanded oral production, so I had to enquire about their backgrounds and made then talk through puppets. This situation became part of my thesis study object." Finally, Student 8 opines that AR seems to be an efficient research process but that she still does not feel absolutely the command.

Code THI: thesis administrative implications

The author only applied this code to the professors' answers in their role of thesis advisers, as school mentors are not involved in the thesis development process, and students do not have control over the administrative implications.

The Professors' perception

The main implications referred by the informants are related to difficulties in generating formal coordination meetings. Professor one establishes that one of the main impact is to coordinate work with the professors who act as supervisors and that, after the innovation, also

perform roles as co-advisers. Professor two also seems to share this opinion. She acknowledges a sound degree of mutual collaboration but a lack of formal meeting instances. Professor's three perception is in the same line since he also reports having difficulties coordinating meetings. He informs, "as co-advisers also go to schools to supervise our students at their teaching centres, it is not always easy to match our schedules for team-work purposes." Professor four concurs and suggests that the head of the English department should allocate some time to formalize these meetings. Professor five informs that coordination with full-time professors is not a big issue but that it becomes more complicated when having to meet part-time professors.

Third thematic axis: English teaching professional training after the innovation

Code ETT: How the innovation influenced English teaching training

The author only considered professors and mentors in this code analysis on the apparent ground that informant students did not experience teaching training before the innovation.

The Professors' perception

The professors who act as supervisors inform about several positive implications. Coincidently, all supervisors have a positive impression of the classes they observed compared to those supervised before the department implemented this innovation. However, the reasons they provide are varied. In synthesis, Professor one reports an evident class planning improvement sustained in clearer learning objectives. Professor two perceives that trainee students have been able to customize English learning activities for a specific context. In her words, "customized teaching strategies are always essential; especially, when teaching in vulnerable contexts." Professor three informs an improvement not only in learning objectives quality but also in their alignment with teaching and assessment. For Professor 4 teacher training – thesis development entailment has also favoured the students' in-class performance as they have acquired better theoretical support. Professor 5 also considers that this entailment has been positive as "trainee students have gained better theoretical support and deeper knowledge of the school students' background." In his opinion, this may be due mainly to better and more suitable diagnostic processes.

The School mentors' perception

For the school mentors who have fulfilled this task before and after the studied innovation, results are also positive. Mentor one considers that trainee students improved the command of the stages of a lesson and that teaching timing became more precise. Mentor two perceives a broader management of teaching strategies, he states, "trainee students seem to be able to use diversified tools to capture and maintain the students' attention." Besides, he reports multiple ways to activate the students' previous knowledge. Mentor's three perceptions refer to trainee students' being able to provide more precise and clear instructions, as well as better content domain. Finally, Mentor four values that trainee students achieve higher levels of involvement and participation of school students due to the use of varied resources for linguistic skills development.

Conclusion

The innovation studied marked a turning point regarding the students' professional practice and theses development, as well as the role of professors, supervisors, and school mentors during

these processes. Considering all the implications involved, it seemed relevant to gain knowledge about the impact of the innovation considering the involved agents' perspectives. What their main advantages and difficulties were, and what remaining challenges there may still exist.

There seems to be enough evidence to suggest an overall positive impact of the innovation. In terms of attitudinal aspects, motivation appears to increase, while the work overload perception decreases. Some other attitudinal facets that seem to have been favoured by the innovation are disposition, willingness to participate, and collaborate. This fact is undoubtedly positive and may help prevent what Russell-Pinsona and Harrish (2019) reported as stress-driven unwanted reactions.

Regarding the main advantage, though expressed differently, there seems to be some common ground regarding facilitating assessment, time reduction by avoiding doubling the work and conducting in-site research, better theory-practice connection, and reaching a more meaningful experience. Training supervisors who also became thesis co-adviser appears to be well-regarded. Students felt accompanied, and professors had the opportunity to provide diversified and more constant support. This result seems to be well-aligned with one of Silinda´s and Brubacher's (2016) suggestions that granted counselling significant importance during the dissertation development process. Despite the general positive evaluation, the timing appears to be a complex issue. There is a consensus regarding the lack of time for coordination meetings, collaborative work, and for conducting research.

The decision to use AR as the primary means for this entailment innovation appears to be right. AR seems to help students customise research to their needs, bridge the gap between teaching training and thesis development, and reduce thesis completion time. This use of AR serves some of the purposes introduced by Coghlan and Brannick (2005), and Macniff and Whitehead (2010), who stated that this approach helped to developed contextualised knowledge, identify problems, and implement class-based solutions. However, some aspects of this AR innovation that seem beneficial for the students, have conveyed some extra demands for the professors, especially in terms of time and coordination instances.

In terms of the trainee students' classes after the innovation, both supervisors and school mentors report positive aspects. Better class planning, diversified teaching strategies, instruction-assessment alignment, theoretical support, and deeper involvement appear to account for this positive perception. This possibility was already anticipated by Bourdesa (2016) when he declared that professional training should not only convey developing knowledge, but also beliefs, attitudes, and practices.

Difficulties are also part of almost any innovation process. In the case of the professors, most of the issues they report relate to administrative implications. Collecting the employers' opinions about graduate students, agenda adjustments, disseminating the innovation among the university community, proper use of resources, and involving other faculties are some of their main concerns. For the mentors, the lack of timely feedback about their reports is their principal constraint. As one may expect, students relate most of their difficulties to what happens within the classroom. For some of them, the process is too structured and excessively attached to class

planning. Others would favour the context over international standards. Class management is another concern, as well as receiving more substantial support in the early stages of their training process. The possibility to interact with more experienced teachers is another of their demands.

Despite these difficulties, specific actions can be studied and taken to help overcome them. Administrative implications such as coordination meetings, time for conducting research, and efficient access to resources should become formal instances and be allowed a budgetary item. USEK has a communication department that could assist the English Department, through the means they have, newsletter, webpage, and networking to disseminate and share the studied innovation. The helpful feedback school mentors expect can be assured through protocols and datelines. Mentors and supervisors should give students a certain degree of flexibility to deal with the context demands of their training centres. Finally, supervisors and trainee students could agree on observation visits to receive this support when they consider they need it the most. Interaction with more experienced teachers is an issue the USEK Department of English would need to arrange with each school depending on their real possibilities.

Limitations

As the presented innovation was developed and implemented by the same staff of professors who report about it, there may be a bias towards positive perception. To minimise this possibility, the author also included the points of view of students and mentors who did not design this innovation. Besides, the author conducted the interviews in Spanish, the informants' native language, hence some nuances may have got lost in translation.

Considering that the USEK English teaching programme closed in 2019, there are limited possibilities to conduct further research. However, many of the topics this paper discussed may shed some light on the design of eventual future programmes.

About the author:

Dr. Tulio Barrios Bulling is a pedagogue, consultant, educational researcher, and administrator at diverse educational levels. Currently, he holds a full-time professorship at Universidad SEK in Santiago de Chile. His many interests include teachers' leadership and performance assessment, skills and competencies development, and educational management. https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6167-5592

References

Bedewy, D., & Gabriel, A. (2015). Examining perceptions of academic stress and its sources among university students: The Perception of Academic Stress Scale, *Health Psychology Open,* 1- 9. https://doi.org/10.1177/2055102915596714

Bourdesa, N. (2016). The Importance of Teachers' Training and Professional Development Programs in the Algerian Educational Context: Toward Informed and Effective Teaching Practices, *Expériences Pédagogiques*, *1*,1-15.https://exp-pedago.ens-oran.dz/experiences-pedagogiques/contributions_numero1/nacera-BOUDERSA.pdf

Coghlan, D., & Brannick, T. (2005). *Doing Action Research in your own organization* (2nd ed.). London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Darling-Hammond, L., Hyler, M. E., Gardner, M. (2017). *Effective Teacher Professional Development.* Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.

Girvan, C., Conneely, C. & Tangney, B. (2016). Extending experiential learning in teacher professional development, *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *58*, 129-139. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2016.04.009

Kunlasomboon, N., Wongwanicha, S., & Suwanmonkhaa, (2015). Research and development of classroom action research process to enhance school learning, *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, 171*, 1315 – 1324 https:// doi: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.01.248

McNiff, J., & Whitehead, J. (2010). *You and your Action Research project* (3rd ed.), London & New York: Routledge.

McNiff, J., & Whitehead, J. (2011). *All you need to know about action research* (2nd ed.) India: SAGE Publications.

Matin, M., & Khan, M. (2017). Common problems faced by postgraduate students during their thesis works in Bangladesh. *Bangladesh Journal of Medical Education, 8* (1), 22-27. DOI: 10.3329/bjme.v8i1.32245

Prabu. P. S. (2015). A study on academic stress among higher secondary students. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention, 4* (10), 63- 68 http://www.ijhssi.org/papers/v4(10)/Version-2/I04102063068.pdf

Russell-Pinsona, L., & Harrish, M.L. (2019). Anguish and anxiety, stress and strain: Attending to writers' stress in the dissertation process, Journal of Second Language Writing, 43, 63-71. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2017.11.005.

Silinda, F., & Brubacher, M. (2016). Distance learning postgraduate student stress while writing a dissertation or thesis. *International Journal of E-Learning & Distance Education, 32* (1), 1-13. http://www.ijede.ca/index.php/jde/article/view/958/1614

Tomal, D. (2010). *Action Research for educators* (2nd ed.). Plymouth, U.K.: Rowman & Littlefield Education.

Wood, A.B. (2017). Classroom-based action research with secondary school students of English Literature: A teacher-researcher's reflection, *English Teaching: Practice and Critique, 16* (1), 72-84 https://doi.org/10.1108/ETPC-08-2016-0100

Young, T. (2017). *Are Students Stressed? A Study of the Impact of Student Engagement on Student Stress*, (Unpublished Master's Thesis). University of Illinois, U.S.A.