'*Nothing to Do with Reality*': English Teachers' Perceptions of their Methods Preparation[1,2]

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Abstract

There is mounting evidence that novice language teachers enter the classroom without all the knowledge, skills, and practice they need, which has sparked a debate as to how well language teacher education programs prepare teachers (Burnett, 2011; Faez & Valeo, 2012; Farrell, 2015). Furthermore, teachers' voices are often absent in the discussions about what content or practical applications are to be included as part of their university preparation. Accordingly, the current study reports the findings of a survey addressing the opinions of recent graduates regarding their EFL teacher education programs in Chile and the methodological preparation they received in these programs. Findings show that the teacher education programs that these graduates attended are generally well-evaluated, but there are still important issues that are absent or lacking depth in the methodological preparation offered. Findings are compared with previously reported data (Martin, 2016) regarding what these methods courses generally cover and are discussed in light of various contextual pressures. It is argued that teachers' needs should be recognized in making decisions about teacher education.

Resumen

Existe evidencia creciente de que los profesores de inglés noveles entran a la sala de clase sin los conocimientos, competencias, y práctica que necesitan, lo cual ha provocado un debate sobre la calidad de los programas de formación docente inicial (Burnett, 2011; Faez & Valeo, 2012; Farrell, 2015). Además, las voces de los profesores están a menudo ausentes en las discusiones sobre qué contenidos y qué aplicaciones prácticas deberían incluirse en la formación docente. Por lo tanto, la presente investigación informa los resultados de una encuesta realizada a docentes graduados recientemente sobre sus opiniones con respecto a sus programas de formación inicial en la enseñanza de inglés como lengua extranjera y la preparación metodológica que recibieron en estos programas. Los resultados demuestran que los graduados evalúan bien, en general, sus programas de formación, sin embargo, señalan que hay temas relevantes que no están presentes o que no se les brinda una adecuada profundidad en la preparación didáctica. Los resultados se comparan con resultados previamente reportados (Martin, 2016) en cuanto a los contenidos que se abordan en los cursos de metodología y se discuten a la luz de varias tensiones contextuales. Se argumenta que hay que reconocer las necesidades de los mismos profesores en el proceso de toma de decisiones sobre la formación inicial.

Introduction

In the last few decades, in the field of second language teacher education (SLTE), there has been extensive research related to what language teachers need to know and to what they must be able to do once they enter the classroom and how SLTE programs should best meet these needs (Huhn, 2012; Kleinsasser, 2013; Kumaravadivelu, 2012; Wright, 2010). Although much of this research has been conducted in English-speaking contexts such as the U. S. and the U. K. (Berns, 2005), the interest in improving SLTE programs can be considered an international phenomenon, with the implementation of curricular reforms and the creation of standards for language teacher education evident in all corners of the world (Barahona, 2014; Karakas, 2012; Katz & Snow, 2003; Kuhlman, 2010; Nguyen, 2013; Prapaisit & Hardison, 2009).

Chile is one of the many EFL (English as a Foreign Language) contexts worldwide where authorities are struggling to prepare English teachers as part of the country's slow march toward a citizenry with sufficient competence in English to participate in a global market. There have been numerous policy initiatives to improve English education (Matear, 2008), such as lowering the starting age for English instruction, and creating the English Opens Doors Program in 2003 which was influential in promoting

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policies for improving EFL teacher education and generating the first standards for English teacher education programs (Ministerio de Educación, 2014).

It should be noted that the Chilean educational system consists of three types of schools: public, which are publicly funded and administered; private-subsidized, which are privately administered and funded, but also receive public funding; and private schools, which are privately funded and administered. These contexts can differ greatly in the number of hours of English instruction students receive per week, how early students begin English instruction, and availability of resources and teacher quality.

Teachers working in public and private-subsidized schools are required to follow the national English curriculum as established by the Ministry of Education (MoE). This curricular system involves curricular guidelines, content and objectives for each subject area, national standards in addition to textbooks designed for each school subject. In 2009, modifications were made to the English national curriculum, which meant a change in emphasis from receptive skills to a more communicative focus, aiming to develop all four language skills (Barahona, 2016). Such changes, however, meant further external pressures for English teachers to comply with these new requirements.

The learning outcomes resulting from the implementation of the curriculum are then evaluated through a set of national standardized tests called the *system for measurement of educational quality*[5] (SIMCE). The English SIMCE has been administered every two years to 10th grade high school students since 2010, and only aims to assess listening and reading comprehension. Thus, not only are English teachers required to comply with the four-skill scheme and content required by the national curriculum, but they are also pressured by administrators to prepare their students for the national standardized test that emphasizes receptive skills. Such a test may have washback consequences in the classroom, leading teachers away from the push to integrate the four skills (Cheng, 2008; Froetscher, 2016). This generates further tensions and pressures for EFL teachers. A bigger issue is that despite the plethora of policies aimed at improving English achievement at the school level, the results of the English SIMCE still show low achievement (Agencia de la Calidad de la Educación, 2013; 2015).

The little evidence gathered in this respect seems to point at deficiencies in the methodologies used to teach English in the classroom (Rojas, Zapata, & Herrada, 2013) in addition to the current working conditions of Chilean teachers, in general, who express dissatisfaction with low wages and excessive working hours (Ávalos & Valenzuela, 2016; Gaete Silva, Castro Navarrete, Pino Conejeros & Mansilla Devia, 2017). This finding is consistent with what has been found in other contexts such as Iran and the U.S. (Sadeghi & Sa'adatpourvahid, 2016; López-Gómez & Albright, 2009). Teacher dissatisfaction with wages and working hours may bring consequences for planning and creating resources, thus affecting the teaching of the language. Other research has found that Chilean teachers are similarly affected by students with negative attitudes towards studying English at school and pressures to use the L1 in the classroom by students and their parents (Gómez & Pérez, 2015).

This is the complex context in which Chilean novice teachers begin their teaching careers. With such a grim picture of the classroom in which novice teachers are inserted, it seems necessary to further inquire how Chilean universities prepare future English teachers to face these challenges.

Context and Significance of the Research

Although there has been increasing interest over the past few decades to examine how language teachers are prepared, there are two concerns in the literature that this paper will discuss. First, there is low level of correspondence between research findings in SLTEs and their implantation in SLTEs (Farrell, 2018; Wright, 2010). Accordingly, concepts and practices such as reflective practice, teacher cognition, the knowledge base of language teacher education or rethinking school-based experiences have not impacted "the daily reality of SLTE programmes" (Wright, 2010, p. 260). Additionally, with most of the studies conducted in BANA contexts (i.e., Britain, Australia, North America) where English is the main language of instruction and communication, one needs to consider how transferable this line of knowledge is. On the same topic, Nguyen (2013) argues that any analysis of the knowledge base of SLTE cannot assume that such knowledge is simply transferrable, without also considering contextual factors that can impact the development and implementation of programs that have to be designed to meet the specific needs of local teachers.

A second concern is that SLTE programs have either underestimated or over-simplified the complexities that characterize modern foreign language instruction; therefore, "there is a growing sense that language teacher education programs have failed to prepare teachers for the realities of the classroom" (Crandall,

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[5] SIMCE stands for Sistema de Medición de Calidad de la Educación in Spanish.

2000, p. 35). More recently, Farrell (2015) suggested that some programs "may have lost sight of whose needs teacher educators are addressing when preparing second language teachers" (p. 1). Other researchers have also indicated that there continues to be a gap between the content SLTE programs deliver and the needs of teachers as they complete their preparation and reach the classroom (Faez & Veleo, 2012; Peacock, 2009; Richards, 2008).

In order to be an English teacher in the Chilean context, teacher candidates are required to complete a four to five-year program in English pedagogy. Before the implementation of Chilean standards for EFL teacher preparation programs in 2014, there were no national guidelines for the 36 universities that offer English pedagogy programs. An analysis of the study plans publicly available (Torche, 2012) indicates that there are commonalities among these programs: they usually include general education courses (e.g., foundations of education, developmental psychology, curriculum planning, and evaluation); a very heavy language and linguistic component; specific language pedagogy components (e.g., English methods courses); and a series of practicums which include classroom observations at the early stages of SLTE, and full-time internship or student-teaching in the final semester of SLTE. However, for the component including the methods and practicum courses, Torche (2012) found an astounding variation in how much space this component occupied in the program: from 4-56% of the courses.

An additional issue in teacher preparation is that the majority of Chilean SLTE programs have traditionally focused on preparing middle or high school teachers. However, in 1998 the grade for starting mandatory English instruction in the Chilean school system was lowered from 7th grade to 5th grade. Moreover, following recent global trends introducing English for young and very young learners, in the last decade many Chilean schools have started introducing English as early as pre-school. This means that many English teachers at the elementary level were trained as high school teachers and are simply not prepared to teach young learners (Barahona, 2016). In fact, a third of those teaching at the elementary level in the public system have not received formal preparation to be English teachers at the elementary level. In addition, even at the high school level, teachers are often professionals from other areas such as translators who teach English classes but have not received pedagogical training (Rojas, Zapata, & Herrada, 2013).

There has been little research published in the local Chilean context regarding how Chile prepares EFL teachers. The existing research is limited to a few case studies investigating particular aspects of individual programs. One of the comprehensive studies available is based on a multiple-institution report that uncovered common challenges among six universities (Abrahams & Farías, 2010). These scholars underscored that "preparing generations of teachers to face the future can no longer be an isolated endeavor. […] the education process requires collaboration" (p. 117). Although it is somewhat unclear how these challenges were identified and whose voices were considered, it is, in many ways "a pioneering effort […] to improve the quality of English language teaching education in Chile" (p. 117). However, given that there are at least 36 institutions in Chile that offer SLTE programs, more overarching studies are needed to include more institutions and voices from all actors.

The present study is a step in this direction and focuses on how recent graduates from SLTE programs in Chile evaluate their programs and the preparation they received in their methods courses. These perceptions are contrasted with the only findings available regarding what content is typically taught in English methods courses in Chilean EFL teacher preparation programs (Martin, 2016). The purpose of doing this is twofold. First, it is expected that by further analyzing teachers' perspectives about the way Chilean EFL teachers are being prepared, a broader understanding of the existing challenges will be provided. Second, the study aims to examine the challenges novice Chilean EFL teachers face when they start their classroom teaching.

Empirical considerations

Empirical studies examining pre-service and in-service language teachers' perceptions of their preparation have found numerous criticisms, from excessive theory to a lack of practical applications (Akcan, 2016; Burnett, 2011; Cooper, 2004; Cosgun, 2009; Faez & Valeo, 2012; Goh & Matthews, 2011; Lange & Sims, 1990; Numrich, 1996; Raymond, 2002; Seferoglu, 2006, Vélez-Rendón, 2006). For instance, Lange and Sims (1990) found that foreign language teachers were dissatisfied with their preparation in areas such as classroom management, assessing students' proficiency, and finding resources. They also found that participants felt that they should have more practical opportunities to interact with experienced teachers. More recently, similar aspects have been highlighted in Akcan (2016), Burnett (2011) and Peacock (2009) where classroom management, particularly related to discipline issues, together with the need for more practical experience (Faez & Valeo, 2012) have also been identified as challenges of the classroom context.

From what research shows, it seems that novice teachers are in fact more critical of their preparation than experienced teachers when asked to evaluate their programs. Cooper (2004) linked it to the fact that novice teachers had more recent experiences of facing challenges and "may feel overwhelmed and not adequately prepared for the task" (p. 42). His findings indicated that participants evaluated both general education courses, as well as courses such as linguistics and EFL methods as not very useful. Participants recommended longer practicums and more practical training in areas such as classroom management, record-keeping, and dealing with parents. Faez and Valeo (2012) in evaluating their TESOL programs, investigated the perceptions of preparedness of novice EFL teachers. Reporting the results of both surveys and interviews, the authors found that newly qualified teachers most valued the practicum experience for the hands-on practice and the knowledge of their instructors. In the same study, the aspect these novice teachers found least favorable was the heavy emphasis on theory, rather than on how to apply the theory with concrete tools and skills for teaching. Similarly, novice teachers in Baecher's (2012) study, after facing the challenges of their teaching realities, evaluated their preparation as too theoretical and lacking in strategies for teaching students with special needs or dealing with standardized testing.

Although there are many studies that address language teacher perceptions in the U.S. and other major English-speaking contexts, there is a dearth of empirical research that evaluates EFL teacher preparation programs in contexts outside of these mainstream centers of research. However, few studies conducted in EFL contexts lend support to many of the issues found in the Chilean context highlighted earlier.

For example, Cosgun (2009) investigated pre-service teachers' attitudes towards the new national curriculum for English teacher education in Turkey and found that approximately 40% of pre-service teachers evaluated their ELT methods and their language testing and evaluation preparation as only partially sufficient. Nearly 30% of these future teachers claimed that their knowledge about classroom management, teaching English to young learners, and teaching the four skills was at least partially insufficient.

Similar perceptions were gathered from other pre-service teachers in Turkey, who were able to identify gaps in their preparation at an early stage during their practicum experience (Seferoğlu, 2006; Yüksel, 2014). Although the participants in Seferoğlu's (2006) study pointed to the importance of the methods courses in their SLTEs, they felt that some of the archaic or unusual methods were not applicable in their contexts, hence not very useful to learn. In general, they struggled to make concrete connections between "the theoretical knowledge studied and their practical application in real classroom contexts" (Seferoğlu, 2006, p. 372) and they wished for more hands-on, practical experiences and to see more diverse contexts.

Regarding perceptions of competence in different domains related to English language teaching, future teachers have indicated that they felt the weakest in classroom management and working with diverse students in the classroom and felt more competent with their content knowledge (Yüksel, 2014). In another qualitative study using reflective journals in Malaysia (Goh & Matthews, 2011), the most common issues participants worried about was classroom management and student discipline. Many student teachers were also concerned about choosing what to teach and how, indicating that they were worried about selecting methodologies and strategies that are "correct", innovative, or creative. This also suggests a gap between what SLTE programs provide regarding theoretical preparation and more practical applications that teachers need in order to start teaching in the classroom.

Other concerns seem to be related to fulfilling governmental policies. Shin (2012), for example, examined the socialization of English teachers in South Korea, addressing the question of why English teachers, even those with high English proficiency, fail to properly implement the policy of teaching English through English. Teachers, in general, cited their frustrations with classroom management and numerous institutional constraints, such as the amount of material to cover, the pace with which to cover it, and a lack of control over evaluations. New teachers, although they had been trained to implement a more communicative type of instruction, felt they had little freedom or opportunity to go against the grain and teach differently from the more experienced teachers. Shin suggests that teacher training programs need to better prepare pre-service teachers for the obstacles that exist in the school structure: "if novice teachers enter the classroom unprepared for the realities there, then the vicious circle of abandoning their values and conforming to existing school cultures will continue" (p. 559).

The Methods Component of SLTE Programs

Many of the gaps that have been identified in the previous studies addressing general program evaluation are related specifically to the methodological preparation. Within SLTE programs, the methods course

plays a fundamental role in preparing future teachers (Grosse, 1991, 1993; Hlas & Conroy, 2010; Huhn, 2012; Wilbur, 2007). The methods course has been defined as "a key delivery point where beginning teachers encounter a body of knowledge about teaching and learning" (Dhonau, McAlpine, & Shrum, 2010, p. 74). These courses offer the essence of what it means to teach and learn a second or foreign language.

According to Huhn (2012) "an in-depth look at the specific content of teacher education programs reveals that the methods course is deemed crucial to an effective program" (p. 169). There are not many focused studies available (Grosse, 1991, 1993; Warford, 2002; Wilbur, 2007) that explicitly address the content of methods courses; however, the evidence available does correspond with the findings from the program evaluations examined above in that theory and antiquated methods are still given priority. In general, there has been little consensus regarding what content should be taught, how it should be taught, and the impact of that knowledge on how prepared teachers feel once they are in the classroom.

In an analysis of the syllabi from methods courses from 16 Chilean universities and interviews with methods professors, Martin (2016) found that these courses are indeed quite theory-laden and lacking in practical application, both in the content they cover and the ways in which students are evaluated. Because there are few methods classes, too much content to address, and a large number of students, even the methods instructors recognized that they often could not provide the students with enough practical application or enough depth.

It is worth repeating that there is a scarcity of research regarding these topics outside of English-speaking contexts, where an increasingly large percentage of EFL teachers are prepared (Berns, 2005). Of the studies that are available in these contexts, there are even fewer that have taken into account the voices of recent graduates, working as novice teachers, who are the most affected by what content is present or absent in these programs and how this content is taught.

The Study

Aims of this Study

The empirical evidence presented above reveals the struggles that pre-service and novice teachers identify as they encounter classroom realities. Many of these struggles point to insufficient or overly-theoretical preparation and need to be addressed by SLTE programs. This study aims to investigate the perceptions of recent graduates about their teacher preparation programs in Chile and how they see the importance of specific methodological content within this preparation. The research questions guiding this study are as follows:

1. How do recent graduates evaluate their SLTE programs overall?
2. How do recent graduates evaluate the methods preparation in their SLTE programs?

Methodology

The data presented here are part of a larger mixed methods research project which aimed at analyzing the methods courses of English pedagogy programs in 16 Chilean universities. Eleven private universities and five public universities agreed to participate in the larger study. For this, 46 syllabi were analyzed through content analysis and the perceptions of methods instructors, program directors and recent graduates were elicited through a questionnaire (closed and open questions). Interviews were also conducted with program directors and methods instructors. Hence quantitative and qualitative analyses were carried out. The analysis of the 46 syllabi was presented in Martin (2016), together with the methods instructors' perceptions. The current paper will focus on the perceptions of recent graduates regarding their SLTE programs as well as their methodological preparation as elicited by means of a questionnaire. See Appendix A for complete questionnaire.

Instrument

The questionnaire created for this study was based, in part, on several surveys and interview guides found in the few empirical studies related to the content of methods course (Grosse, 1991, 1993; Warford, 2003; Wilbur, 2007). It was then slightly modified for each subset of participants: program directors, methods instructors, and recent graduates. The questionnaire was tested with three teachers and two local SLTE experts and then modified to assure that the language in the items would be understood and interpreted properly by recent EFL graduates. The instrument used is an example of intramethod mixing, a method of data collection that includes both closed-ended and open-ended items. These mixed questionnaires are beneficial because they provide the opportunity to elicit quantitative and qualitative data concurrently in the same instrument (Johnson & Turner, 2003).

The questionnaire had three main sections: the first section collected information about educational and work background. This section asked participants about 1) their educational background: what they studied and where and whether they have any graduate studies; and 2) their work situation: in what context they are currently working, how long they have been teaching, and aspects related to work conditions. This part of the survey aimed to gather demographic information about the participants and about their work experience.

The second section asked participants a few questions about their SLTE program in general and specific questions about their methodological preparation. This section included an item that asked participants to evaluate their SLTE program by giving it a grade on a scale of 1 to 7, the commonly used grading scale in Chile, 7 being the highest grade, 4 a passing grade (60%) and 1 being the lowest grade. Participants were also asked, in an open-ended question, to provide a reason for the given grade and to mention what they thought the program was lacking. This part also included questions about whether they had received sufficient methodological preparation, about how theoretical or practical they felt the methods courses were, and whether any relevant content, which from the perspective of their current practice, would have been useful, was absent from these courses.

Finally, in the third and main section of the questionnaire, participants were presented with a list of the most common areas of knowledge addressed in methods courses, compiled from the studies mentioned previously (Grosse, 1991, 1993; Warford, 2003; Wilbur, 2007). Participants were asked to rate how important they considered each topic to be on a four-point Likert scale: "extremely important," "important," "not very important," and "not important at all." Each answer was assigned a score from 1-4, 1 representing "not important at all" and 4 representing "extremely important." The average score for each item across all participants was calculated and the list of topics was ranked according to the score received, from the item with the highest score, or considered the most important, to the lowest, or least important. Participants were asked after each set of items whether any of these topics had been left out of the methods courses. The main purpose of this section was to understand the importance participants give to each content area typically addressed in methods courses.

Participants

Fifty-two recent graduates (38 females, 14 males; mean age: 29) answered the first part of the questionnaire regarding their program evaluation. These recent graduates had an average of 5.4 years of teaching experience. They were working in the following contexts: 50% were teaching in public schools; 32% in private-subsidized schools; 13% in private schools; and 5% were working in other contexts, such as language institutes and teaching private classes. These participants had studied in 30 different universities and had graduated between 2007-2014. For the second part of the questionnaire, 42 participants completed the rating of the methodological content.

Procedure

As part of the larger study, ethical approval was requested and obtained by the grant-financing institution. The questionnaire also included a section of informed consent, whereby participants read the conditions of the study and agreed to participate in order to proceed with the survey. The Ministry of Education agreed to aid the research by sending the questionnaire by email using their database of English teachers, in the public and subsidized sectors in all regions of the country, who would have graduated in the five years previous to the study.

Because the process was controlled by the Ministry of Education, it was impossible to confirm how many teachers received the survey and whether their contact information was updated. Hence, information such as the percentage of participants who received and answered the questionnaire could not be calculated. In future studies, it would be advisable to find alternative means of contacting teachers more directly.

Data analysis

Quantitative items from the survey were analyzed descriptively, using percentages, frequencies, and averages. Open-ended questions were analyzed using a general inductive approach (Thomas, 2006) and open coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Each answer was coded, and initial categories were created; items under each category were checked for fit. Overarching themes were developed from the final categories.

Findings

In this section the main findings observed in this study will be presented in order to answer the research questions set for the project. Thus, what follows will address the first research question that aimed to

determine the way recent graduates evaluated their programs. For this, the grades given by the participants will be first presented, followed by the reasons provided for the given grade, as well as their opinions on what their programs lacked in terms of content. The following subsection will be dedicated to the participants' perceptions regarding the importance of methods content: Whether they felt this preparation was sufficient, how theoretical or practical it was, and whether any relevant content was absent. Finally, the last subsection will deal with those areas considered important within their methodological preparation as reflected through the participants' rating.

Overall Program Evaluation

As explained in the methods section, participants were asked to give a grade, using the Chilean 1-7 grading system, to their teacher education program overall, to explain why, and then to identify what they thought their programs lacked in terms of their pedagogical preparation. Hence, to begin with the following subsection will deal with the grade with which participants evaluated their program.

Program grade

The average grade given was 5.5, which is approximately a 78%, or a C+. In general, participants gave a relatively high grade to their programs: four participants (7.7%) gave their program the highest grade and 24 teachers, nearly half (46.2%), assigned their program a grade of 6. A third of the participants, 33% (n=17) gave their programs grade of 5. A lower number of participants (n=5) indicated a barely passing grade of 4 and only one participant gave their program a failing grade.

Reasons for grade given

When asked to justify the grade given, 37 of the participants provided reasons. Despite the larger number of participants who gave a high grade to their programs, many of the reasons provided tended to explain the lower grades given or, in the case of higher grades, possibly explain why a perfect score was not given. In fact, only five of the participants who provided answers here cited positive reasons, such as excellent professors and a well-designed program in all areas related to English linguistics, literatures, didactics, and general education courses. One participant explained: *"I was well-prepared to face the challenges of the profession."*

As mentioned above, most of the comments (32 of the 37 comments) provided in this open-ended question pointed at what the programs were lacking. These justifications offered by participants were classified as criticisms and were categorized into three themes. The first of these themes, with the most comments noted by twelve participants, was a criticism of their methodological preparation. One participant argued that their program only included *"antiquated methods;"* another claimed there were not enough methods courses: *"I would have liked to have more courses on methods and instructional materials."* Other participants suggested that their methods course *"was too theoretical and offered no practical experience"* or that *"it was lacking context and practice."* One participant said: *"Maybe there should be a course with concrete methods for different levels."*

The second theme identified, based on comments by eight participants, was the lack of connection between theory and practice. Participants claimed that what they were taught in their program, particularly related to methods, had no connection to the reality of the Chilean classroom. One participant lamented: *"The methods we learned had nothing to do with reality."* Another one argued that *"the practicum is very distant from the theory"* they are taught. Others claimed that they were not given sufficient opportunities over the course of their 5-year program to practice what they were learning.

The third theme identified was related to job preparation, an understanding of the daily duties that teachers typically must carry out in their contexts. Participants expressed the feeling they were not prepared for the contextual and administrative realities they would face upon entering the teaching profession. One teacher felt that the practicums at private and subsidized schools did not prepare at all her for the realities of working in the public school system. Others mentioned that they felt they lacked knowledge and experience concerning *"details that you encounter when you work, like dealing with the class book, administrative issues, etc."* Two teachers commented that they would have liked more practical notions of how to use the national curriculum, which is supposed to guide teachers in planning and preparing their instruction: *"a more direct connection to the national curriculum is missing."*

What is missing?

Also related to participants' general assessment of their programs, they were asked to evaluate, in retrospect, what knowledge they would have liked to learn in their teacher preparation programs that would have prepared them better for teaching. The most frequently mentioned area was working with students with special needs, which often involves making curricular adjustments and differentiated

evaluations. Participants also mentioned that they lack specific strategies to work with elementary-aged students and expressed regret about not having received more preparation in classroom management and motivational strategies, a constant struggle for teachers with large classes in more vulnerable schools. Finally, teachers said they would have liked more concrete strategies, activities, and materials for developing the four skills.

Methods Preparation

In order to address the second research question, this section will present the participants' perceptions regarding their specific preparation in EFL methods. For this, the participants' general views on the way they are methodologically prepared will be first presented, followed by their rating of contents in terms of importance to finalize with their opinion of what is missing in these courses.

Overall views

When asked participants whether they felt their methods preparation was theoretical or practical, a higher percent (58%) perceived it to be as completely or principally theoretical; 40% claimed it was equally theoretical and practical; and only one participant (2%) said that methods preparation was mostly practical.

Participants were also asked whether they believed that their preparation in EFL methods had been sufficient, to which only 14% of participants considered it to be sufficient. In fact, most of these teachers perceive their methods preparation to be only somewhat sufficient (45%) or not sufficient at all (41%).

Importance of Methods Content

Forty-two participants completed this section, so only their answers are included in this part of the analysis. Participants were asked to rate the importance of each topic covered in their methods courses on a scale of 1, being "not important at all", to 4, being "extremely important." An average score for all participants was calculated and the list of contents was ranked from the item with the highest score to the item with the lowest score. Table 1 shows the list of items, the average score and the corresponding ranking of importance. In the case of more than one item scoring the same, the same ranking was given. In general, participants rated most items as important, with only a few exceptions. It is important to note that these are topics, identified in the literature, that are typically considered appropriate in methods courses (Grosse, 1991, 1993; Warford, 2002; Wilbur, 2007).

Methods Course Content Item	Average score (1-4)	Graduate Ranking
Teaching English to different age groups	3.90	1
Strategies for teaching listening comprehension in English	3.88	2
How to find, evaluate, adapt and/or design teaching materials	3.88	2
Strategies for teaching oral production in English	3.86	3
Communicative strategies for teaching ESL/EFL	3.81	4
How to increase student motivation for learning English	3.78	5
Strategies for teaching English to students with special needs	3.73	6
How to make curricular adaptations for special needs students	3.73	6
Strategies for classroom management	3.71	7
Strategies for teaching reading in English	3.71	7
How to evaluate the appropriateness of methods based on your teaching context	3.67	8
How to plan a lesson	3.67	8
Strategies for teaching writing in English	3.64	9
How to monitor and evaluate one's own teaching	3.63	10
How to teach in diverse educational contexts	3.61	11

Strategies for teaching vocabulary in English	3.60	12
How to formatively evaluate students in English	3.57	13
An emphasis on the most relevant approaches (CLT, TBL)	3.54	14
How to think reflexively and creatively to solve problems in the classroom	3.51	15
Strategies for correcting student errors in English	3.49	16
How to integrate other subject area content in English teaching	3.48	17
Strategies for teaching pronunciation	3.47	18
Theories of second language acquisition	3.45	19
How to make pedagogical decisions based on the principles of learning a second language	3.45	20
How to summatively evaluate students in English	3.33	21
How to incorporate the English national standards in teaching English	3.31	22
How to familiarize oneself with professional organizations in the field of ELT	3.29	23
Strategies for using technology in teaching English	3.29	23
How to follow the Ministry of Education's national curriculum	3.29	23
Strategies for teaching English grammar	3.17	24
How to use a textbook in English teaching	2.95	25
Strategies for teaching English speaking cultures	2.95	26
A historical look at methods and approaches	2.93	27

Table 1. Methods course content rankings

The item that most participants (n= 38) marked as extremely important or important, was "how to teach English effectively to students of different ages". The second highest ranking items were "how to find, evaluate, adapt, or design teaching materials", and "how to teach listening comprehension strategies"; all 42 participants marked these items as extremely important (n=36) or important (n=6). The following content areas in the ranking were "strategies for oral production", "communicative strategies", "increasing motivation", "strategies for working with special needs students", and "classroom management strategies".

The item with the lowest ranking score was "a historical look at EFL methods and approaches"; 17 participants marked it as not very important or not important at all. Other low-ranked items were "strategies for teaching different English-speaking cultures;" "how to use the textbook in English classes;" "strategies for teaching grammar;" "how to incorporate the national curriculum;" and "strategies for incorporating technology in English teaching."

Absence of Methodological Content

In conjunction with the list of methodological content areas presented above, participants were asked to identify which items were not addressed in their programs. The items are discussed based on how frequently they were identified as absent. The items mentioned most frequently, by 13 participants, as being missing were: strategies for teaching students with special needs, making curricular adaptations for special needs students, and how to teach English to young learners. Items mentioned less frequently, identified by 8 participants, were "communicative strategies for teaching EFL" and "how to evaluate the relevance of teaching methods". Finally, items mentioned 6 times were "strategies for teaching writing" "strategies for teaching listening comprehension", "strategies for increasing motivation", "strategies for classroom management", and "how to work in diverse educational contexts". There are clearly areas in which teachers feel they are not being sufficiently prepared.

Discussion

This section will address the research questions set for the study in light of the results presented above.

How do recent graduates evaluate their SLTE programs overall?

As seen above, even though a high percentage of graduates evaluated their programs with a considerably high grade overall, the reasons given for the lower grades assigned indicated their criticism of their preparation programs. Several weaknesses were mentioned: too much theory and antiquated methods, no connection between theory and practice, and no practical preparation for tackling the administrative duties that are required in their jobs. They also identified areas that are not covered by their programs and which need to be included: students with special needs, teaching at elementary level, classroom management, and motivational strategies. These findings confirmed findings reported in previous studies: teachers in other studies, have expressed a general dissatisfaction with elements of their preparation, identifying program weaknesses related to antiquated methods (Yüksel, 2014) and to the difficulty of connecting theory and practice (Baecher, 2012; Faez & Valeo, 2012; Seferoğlu, 2006; Yüksel, 2014). Findings also highlight that novice teachers feel that they lacked a more practical understanding of the administrative demands they face, such as record-keeping, discipline, and dealing with parents, which also confirms teachers' perceptions in previous studies (Cooper, 2004).

How do recent graduates evaluate their methods preparation?

Most participating teachers perceived their methods preparation as insufficient and theory-laden. The areas rated as most relevant to teachers' needs were related to effective teaching methodologies to deal with different age groups, the design and evaluation of materials, and strategies for listening comprehension. In addition, as occurred with the areas mentioned as lacking in their programs, they also identified several methods-related weaknesses. These had to do with strategies for dealing with special needs students, teaching English to young learners, and communication strategies.

These graduates' perceptions are consistent with what the methods course instructors mentioned in the study carried out by Martin (2016). The teacher educators perceived these courses as quite theoretical because they felt they did not have enough time for the implementation of practical activities. In addition, most of the content areas here identified by recent graduates as important are either not covered at all in their programs, as is the case with dealing with special needs students, or they are covered superficially, for example, the case of classroom management.

There are also parallels between the perceptions of teachers in this research and perceptions of teachers in other parts of the world with respect to other issues, not directly related to language teaching itself, such as classroom management. As shown in other studies (Burnett, 2011; Goh & Matthews, 2011; Yüksel, 2014) they were much more present as serious teacher concerns.

This study reveals clear gaps between the preparation teachers have received and the preparation they need for the problems they face in a typical classroom. In fact, mismatches were observed between what teacher educators consider essential in methods courses and the needs that have been identified by in-service teachers who have graduated from these programs (See also Seferoğlu, 2006). Similar to findings in other studies, these are teachers who are generally prepared to teach at the high school level, yet they are assigned to teach elementary-aged students, they realize that they do not have strategies to work with special needs students (Baecher, 2012), they struggle with low student motivation and classroom management issues (Peacock, 2009), and they are not sufficiently prepared to help students develop in all four skill areas.

Other content areas, which were also ranked as important, had to do with developing listening and speaking skills. These may be concerns related to external pressures that teachers face, such as the ones resulting from the curricular modifications done which emphasized the development of all four skills with a more communicative orientation. However, based on Martin´s (2016) findings about what content is present in EFL methods courses and what participants have expressed here, it seems that some of the Chilean universities from the sample have been slow in sufficiently incorporating content related to teachers' classroom needs into their syllabi. Most programs offer few methods courses, so these areas are not well-covered, and without enough practical application.

Another external pressure may be related to the national standardized English test (*English SIMCE)*. Because this test only evaluates listening and reading comprehension, this has naturally increased the interest in being able to better prepare students to deal with the listening comprehension section. This could help explain why strategies for developing listening comprehension were also ranked as quite high by the participants. These types of external pressures have also been evidenced in other studies where

participants have reported their frustrations in dealing with what is required by Ministry policies and how the reality experienced in their classrooms constrains policy implementation (Baecher, 2012; Shin, 2012).

All in all, the findings in this study coincide with Crandall´s (2000) claim that teacher education is not preparing teachers for the reality of the classroom. They also confirm the perspective of pre-service and novice teachers, seemingly world-wide, that programs are often too theory-laden and lacking in practical applications that would better prepare them for their daily demands (Baecher, 2012; Cooper, 2004; Cosgun, 2009; Goh & Matthews, 2011; Raymond, 2002; Seferoğlu, 2006; Vélez-Rendón, 2006; Yüksel, 2014).

Limitations

This study has only addressed the methodological content of EFL teacher preparation in Chile. However, there are other elements of these programs that should be addressed, such as the development of linguistic proficiency and how practicum experiences should be selected and designed. The number of participating recent graduates was also smaller than hoped for due to issues accessing in-service teachers directly. Even so, the findings here give a glimpse into issues teachers face and the work ahead for teacher preparation programs.

Conclusions

The findings of this study highlight and contribute to the call, identified worldwide, for EFL pre-service teachers to be better prepared to face the classroom realities (Cooper, 2004; Goh & Matthews, 2011). The recent graduates' perceptions of this process add to and confirm the theoretical-practical gap already claimed in other contexts (Faez & Valeo, 2012; Seferoğlu, 2006; Yüksel, 2014) as well as the pedagogical knowledge necessary to deal with the daily vicissitudes of their teaching practice. These findings give a voice to teachers in identifying the challenges the face in the classroom, which they feel their programs have not prepared them to resolve. Their voices, in conjunction with the previous study put forth by Martin (2016), which include findings from a revision of the methods course syllabi and perceptions of the methods course professors, give a more complete and corroborated view of some of the gaps in initial EFL teacher preparation in Chile, shedding light on specific areas of concern that teacher preparation programs should incorporate.

The findings here contribute new evidence to the international diagnosis that there is still a mismatch between SLTE programs and the realities of the classroom. If SLTE programs are to make a serious attempt at fulfilling the needs of their students, it is essential to give in-service teachers a voice in identifying the gaps in their preparation and then take concrete steps in integrating that information in future program reformulations.

With the publication of the new national standards for EFL teacher preparation programs many programs have already started making changes, reformulating study plans and finding ways to make smaller modifications in course syllabi. Teacher education programs in Chile have offered their own answer to the question "what do EFL teachers need to know?" However, as teacher educators redesign their answer to this question they need to take into consideration the perceptions of novice teachers to come to a better understanding of the realities of the classroom, the problems teachers face, and the needs they have. Further research is needed to follow up on how programs respond to the needs teachers have identified.

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Appendix A

EFL Methods Courses: Graduate Survey
(Original in Spanish, translated into English by the authors for purposes of this paper.)

1) Sex
2) Age
3) In what region of Chile do you live?
4) At what university did you study? (This information is only for purposes of the study; no institutions will be identified.)
5) What year did you graduate from your program?
6) Are you currently working as an EFL teacher?
7) How many years have you been working as an EFL teacher?
8) At what type of school do you work?
      Private   Subsidized Public
9) What type of contract do you have?
      Full time   Part-time   Hourly
10) In what grades do you teach English?
11) Indicate any graduate programs or certificate studies you have completed.
12) How many EFL Methods courses did you take during your undergraduate EFL preparation program?
13) Do you think that number is sufficient? If not, explain.
14) How would you define the EFL Methods courses you took?
      Totally theoretical   Totally practical
      Principally theoretical   Principally practical
      Equally theoretical and practical
15) Do you think, at the moment of taking the EFL methods courses, you had sufficient previous knowledge to take full advantage of them? Explain.
16) Did your EFL Methods professors teach the course in English?
17) Rate each of the following contents commonly taught in EFL methods courses based on the level of importance to you as a teacher:
      -Extremely important
      -Important
      -Not very important
      -Not at all important

*See Table 1 for the list of contents.
18) From the list of contents mentioned above, are there any that you think you should have been present in the EFL Methods courses you took, but was not included?
19) Is there any other content, related to EFL methods, not mentioned in the list above, that would have been important to cover, but was not included?
20) In general, are you satisfied with the preparation you received from your EFL teacher preparation program? Explain.