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MARTHA YAZMIN VIVAR COYOTL

LANGUAGE TEACHING PRACTICUM IN NORMALES AND PUBLIC  
UNIVERSITIES IN CENTRAL MEXICO

BENEMÉRITA UNIVERSIDAD AUTÓNOMA DE PUEBLA

THESIS DIRECTOR:

DRA. VERÓNICA SÁNCHEZ HERNÁNDEZ



# **BENEMÉRITA UNIVERSIDAD AUTÓNOMA DE PUEBLA**

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## **Language Teaching Practicum in Normales and Public Universities in Central Mexico.**

**A thesis submitted to the School of Languages  
For the degree of**

**MAESTRÍA EN LA ENSEÑANZA DEL INGLÉS**

**Presented by: Martha Yazmin Vivar Coyotl**

**ID: 217461008**

**Thesis Director**

**Dra. Verónica Sánchez Hernández**



**January 28th 2020**

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“Language Teaching Practicum in Normales and Public Universities  
in Central Mexico”

This Thesis has been read by the members  
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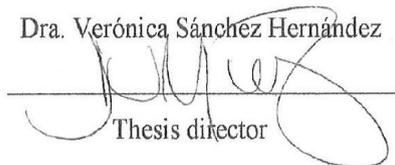
MARTHA YAZMIN VIVAR COYOTL

And is considered worthy of approval in partial fulfillment of the  
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MAESTRÍA EN LA ENSEÑANZA DEL INGLÉS

Committee Members

Dra. Verónica Sánchez Hernández



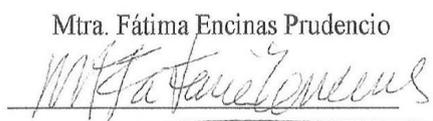
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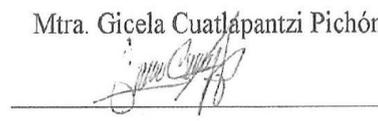
Committee Member

Mtra. Fátima Encinas Prudencio



Committee Member

Mtra. Gicela Cuatlapantzi Pichón



Committee Member

Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla

January 2020

## **“Language Teaching Practicum in Public Universities in Central Mexico”**

**Martha Yazmin Vivar Coyotl**

### **ABSTRACT**

English Language Teacher Education within the public system in Mexico relies on two main institutions: Normales and Public Universities. Despite having similar purposes, so as to form future English Teachers, there seems to be a number of coincides but mainly discrepancies between these two. Research in Mexico that allows concrete comparisons between Normales and Universities has been scarce. The present research aimed to explore and analyze the practices carried out by both Normales and Universities emphasizing in a crucial stage of their Teacher Education Programs: the teaching practicum. Undertaking a qualitative study, this case study was conducted within two Normales and two Public Universities in Central Mexico. Data collection strategies involved the revision of documents, semi-structured interviews, questionnaires and focus groups. Data obtained was analyzed through the lens of the Sociocultural Theory in Language Teacher Education. The findings brought light to good practices carried out in each program and institution, however they also revealed an absence of support for S-T or the minimum tools to guarantee their professional development during the Teaching Practicum.

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## **CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM**

### **1.0 Introduction**

The present chapter attempts to depict a general overview of the issue this research is mostly concerned with. By describing the importance of the issue as well as the contribution that this research would represent to the field, it is hoped that the reasons behind the investigation will be clearly presented to the reader. Finally, the research questions that guided the entire study will also be presented.

### **1.1 Introduction to the problem**

The numerous attempts to improve English Teaching in Mexico, from the basic to the highest levels of education, have resulted in the implementation of both state and federal programs (Reyes Cruz, *et al.*, 2011). National programs such as the PNIEB (Programa Nacional de Inglés en la Educación Básica), more recently known as the PRONI (Programa Nacional de Inglés), are examples of the urgency of the Mexican government to stay up to date with the needs and demands of an increasingly globalized world. Sayer (2013) argues that, besides the use of specific methodologies, innovative curriculums or textbooks; the students' success or failure in learning a second language (henceforth L2) will essentially depend on the quality of the teachers that are set to execute such programs. In this line of responsibility, it could be asserted that in order to meet the challenges of today's education, the efforts should be invested in the programs in charge of preparing future teachers: Pre-service programs.

Pre-service programs represent a crucial component in the lifelong process of the professional development of teachers, as it equips prospective teachers with the necessary subject knowledge and professional skills and attitudes for effective teaching (Ping, Lock, Cock & Brook, 2009). Throughout most preservice programs, student-teachers are required to

participate for short periods of time in school-based experiences known as Teaching Practicum. Serdar and Çeçen (2016) recognize this stage of the process of becoming a teacher “as a learning arena where pre-service teachers maximize their opportunity to bridge theory with practice” (p.2). However, this might seem as a too broad and simple definition to describe such complex process considering that the practicum involves more than the mere application of theories within an English classroom. In agreement with Crookes (2003, as cited in Burns & Richards, 2009) the practicum allows student-teachers to question, articulate and reflect on their teaching decisions. Likewise, it promotes the awareness of their own philosophy of learning and teaching which have been built on their own set of assumptions, beliefs, values, educational and life experiences.

Historically, it has been the role of the *normal* school to perform as the main institution responsible for the training and preparation of public education teachers in the basic levels: preschool, primary and secondary school (Navarrete-Cazales, 2015). It was throughout time and in accordance with the needs of society, that the lines of specialization for such teachers in *normales* enhanced; From preparing basic level teachers in general subjects, to offering degrees in the English Language Teaching field, although only for the middle school level. In the same way, a significant number of public universities in Mexico apart from their academic offer, do also provide ELT teacher education programs.

Based on the report of the 2017-18 school year from the *Asociación Nacional de Universidades e Instituciones de Educación Superior* (ANUIES), there are 36 public universities and 44 Normal Schools that offer a BA in English Language Teaching.

Nonetheless, despite having similar objectives so as to form and educate student teachers, there seems to be a number of discrepancies between both *normales* and public universities regarding the construction and implementation of the Practicum.

## **1.2 Significance of the study**

The recognition of the importance of the Teaching Practicum within Second Language Teacher Education (SLTE), has encouraged researchers to explore this practice from various aspects, such as support (Farrell, 2008); evaluation (Rodríguez, 2009), mentoring (Encinas-Prudencio & Sánchez-Hernández, 2015), and the resignification and attitudes towards the Teaching Practicum (Reyes & Fortoul, 2009; Morales, 2016; Fajardo & Miranda, 2015; Castañeda-Trujillo & Aguirre-Hernández, 2018).

Similarly, Ong'ondo and Jwan (2009) carried out a review on research literature on Teaching Practicum. Findings and concluded that most of the collected literature could be classified into five categories or trends: 1) student teacher learning; 2) collaboration amongst student teachers; 3) collaboration between student-teachers and cooperative teachers; 4) supervision; and 5) organization of the Practicum.

Ong'ondo and Jwan (ibid) concluded that although research has been quite extensive, they pointed out that it has also been too concentrated in particular and isolated aspects of the Practicum. These assertions would suggest that there is a need for more holistic studies, since the varied factors that surround the Teaching Practicum affect each other and therefore impacting student-teacher learning greatly. It is also worth mentioning that from the studies considered for Ong'ondo and Jwan's literature review, none of the investigations took place in contexts similar to those in Mexico.

Although research in SLTE in the Mexican context has considerably expanded in the last decade, very little research has focused on comparing two of the main public institutions responsible for English teaching education programs: Normales and Public Universities. This research could benefit both institutions since it provides an opportunity for institutions to observe, consider and probably adapt some successful practices to fit them into their contexts.

### **1.3 Context of the research**

The present study will be conducted in two *Normal* schools and two Public Universities in Central Mexico. These four institutions offer a Preservice Program in English Teaching, where the normal system is appointed to secondary levels, one University is focused on high school and higher education, and the last University does not focus on a specific level of instruction.

This research will be conducted as a case study, within the qualitative paradigm. To collect data, a first questionnaire will be piloted in order to review the clarity of the items and improve it for later application. Documents, such as the curriculum of institutions, syllabi among others that involve the Practicum will be examined. In addition to this, a series of interviews with the participants and focus groups will be performed to triangulate the data. In the case of the focus groups and interviews, these will be audio-recorded for later transcriptions and analysis. For the analysis of data, the author will follow Creswell's six steps for qualitative research (2003 p.191). Which consists of the following: 1) organizing and preparing data; 2) reading through the data; 3) coding; 4) description of the information; 5) representation of the findings; and finally, 6) interpreting the data.

### **1.4 Purpose of the study**

The purpose of the present research is to explore the practices that are being carried out in Normales and Public Universities preservice programs regarding the Teaching Practicum. Considering that *Normales* and Public Universities are in charge of such determining stage of student teachers' process (Teaching Practicum), it would thus be of interest to gather some of the practices carried out by each institution and identifying their characteristics. It is hoped that this case-study will represent a contribution to the field of SLTE in the Mexican context, and a guideline for future reference in the creation of Language Teacher Education programs, specifically regarding the Teaching Practicum. More

importantly, it is hoped that this investigation will reach the main actors involved: student-teachers.

### **1.5 Research Questions**

1. How is the Teaching Practicum officially established in Normales and Public Universities?
2. What are the practices being carried out by both Normales and Public Universities regarding the process of the Teaching Practicum?
  - What are the characteristics of these practices?
  - What factors enhance/limit the development of these practices?
  - How is the process of mentoring or supervision assisting the professional development of student-teachers?

## **CHAPTER II: CONTEXTUAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.0 Introduction**

The present chapter offers a general overview of the history of ELT in Mexico. Then information about preservice programs in ELT from both institutions is provided. It is considered important to lay out the differences according to contexts, as well as a description of the institutions in question and the way each of them establish the Teaching Practicum in their curriculums.

### **2.1 ELT in México**

To better understand the particular case of Mexico, it is necessary to review some the most relevant history of the teaching of English, as well as the stages it has gone through. English has been taught in middle schools in Mexico, since 1926 (Quezada, 2013; IMCO, 2015). However, there was not an established national policy to teach English at lower levels, it was until 1992, that with the decentralization of basic and teacher education, that the federal government transferred responsibilities to each state (31) for their students, teachers, and schools, while still abiding by national reforms dictated for the entire system by the federal power (British Council, 2015). This decentralization movement led to individual efforts from some states to create their own programs to introduce English teaching in basic education. Until 2009, there were 21 states who had applied for an English state program. Nevertheless, one important disadvantage to these efforts, as identified by Ramírez-Romero, Pamplón, and Cota (2012), was that all of the programs differed in several aspects including the methodology, materials, hours of instruction and the process of teacher recruitment.

Apart from the state programs, during the 2000-2006 federal government, the program *Enciclomedia* was piloted in 13 states (Ramírez-Romero, 2016). This program was presented as an innovative approach to education in general, since its main tenet was bringing

technology into the public education system with the use of electronic whiteboards, projectors, multimedia resources and the digitalization of textbooks. This program addressed English as a subject through *Inglés Enciclomedia* and was implemented as part of the piloting process only in the sixth grades of the 13 states during the 2005-2006 school year. Ramírez-Romero and Sayer (2016) stated that one of the issues this program faced was the false belief that “by using technology students and teachers could easily learn English at the same time, without any guidance or support other than the materials.” This evidenced that the ones in charge of implementing such program were not specifically English teachers, but instead, it was the regular teachers (Spanish, math, science) who were now in charge of the subject without any particular preparation. Not to mention, the low or null feasibility to replicate this program, if we take into consideration that not all but many public schools in Mexico face serious infrastructure problems such as access to internet and even electricity, to say the least. *Enciclomedia* depicted a harsh reality of the actual needs of education, which not necessarily involved the use of technology but was more aligned with what quality in education should look like.

Another attempt to introduce English within the national curriculum was the National English Program for Basic Education (NEPBE or *PNIEB* in Spanish). This program aimed to teach English in the three levels of basic education, pre-school, primary and secondary or middle school, starting in 3rd year of pre-school to the 3rd year of middle school. Its main objective was:

“To guarantee that, by the time students complete their secondary education, they will have developed the necessary multilingual and multicultural competencies to face the communicative challenges of a globalized world successfully, to build a broader vision of the linguistic and cultural diversity of the world, and thus, to respect their own and other cultures” (SEP, 2011, p. 55).

The NEPBE responded to several factors, all equal in importance. The lack of a national and homogeneous language program in Mexico, the poor results obtained in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) evaluation of 2006, which led to the twelve recommendations made by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to the Mexican education system (British Council, 2015; Salas and Sánchez, 2013; Ramírez-Romero and Sayer, 2016; Reyes-Cruz, Murrieta-Loyo and Hernández, 2011).

The program seemed as one important step for Mexico since it involved the adoption of a new pedagogical approach, the development of materials and teacher training programs to carry it out successfully; however, many controversial opinions on the NEPBE arose since its implementation. On the one hand, Roux (2013) claimed that the demands for English teachers of the NEPBE were more focused on the attainment of certifications than the concern for becoming better practitioners. She also mentioned that the participation of more private than public institutions including editorials, universities and English language test examiners, suggested that there were more economic benefits for each institution than educational ones for Mexican students or teachers. On the other hand, Reyes-Cruz, Murrieta-Loyo, and Hernández (2011) add to this topic by stating that the generation of such innovative policies do not contemplate the big picture in terms of the context they are aimed to be implemented, and it could be considered that they are simply advertisement tools used by politicians to win votes with the already familiar discourse that “English learning represents better opportunities for children.”

The fate of the National Program of English in Basic Education became rather unclear when the new federal government of 2012 took office. This, in turn, translated into confusion among teachers from the NEPBE since they were not certain of their future within the program (Ramírez-Romero, Pamplón-Irigoyen, and Cota-Grijalva, 2012). In 2013 new

agreements like the *Programa para el Fortalecimiento de la Calidad en Educación Básica* (PFCEB) were established, and the teaching of English was once again the responsibility of each state, but financially supported by the federal government (SEP, 2015b). The PFCEB did not officially eliminate the NEPBE, yet in 2016 it was renamed as National English Program or PRONI (for its initials in Spanish). The PRONI followed basically the same curricular framework as the NEPBE. As the SEP documents from 2017 reflect, only a few aspects were added to the program, such as suggestions for the evaluation process, or very explicit description of each grade's proficiency level and the expected learning outcomes. The PRONI continues having the same hours of instruction, the same stages from preschool to secondary school, and the same methodology. It is clearly stated by the SEP that the PRONI remains focused on language products and highlights the importance of these products within the social practices that are placed in three environments: 1) academic; 2) literary and ludic; and 3) family and community (SEP, 2017).

Ramírez-Romero and Sayer (2016) identified that one of the shortcomings that could be found in the PRONI was the feasibility to implement the “new” methodology which despite being innovative for the Mexican context, seemed a drastic change due to its traditional educational setting, and thus very difficult to achieve. Along the same line, Villarreal and Olave (2015, as cited in Ramírez-Romero and Sayer, 2016) argued that the activities proposed in the PRONI can be described as being out of context, being meaningless for students, and establish that the types of interaction promoted in the program are in general artificial and insufficient to help students develop the competencies or the social functions of language they are required to.

One of the latest attempts to address English learning can be seen in the National English Strategy, launched in 2017, which is a program that has two general objectives: teaching education and the introduction of English learning and teaching into the *normalista*

profile (students from the *normales*). According to the former Secretariat of Education Aurelio Nuño, “as of the school year 2018-2019, all students who enter any of the 263 *normal* schools in Mexico, will also graduate with a degree in English teaching, and be certified by the University of Cambridge. In order for this to be accomplished, a total of 1200 teacher positions will be created and introduced in the 2018-2019 school year in the *normales*. The goal is to educate the first 20 thousand bilingual teachers in a matter of 5 years, and in 20 years Mexico is expected to become a bilingual country” (Solera, 2017, p.14).

Although this initiative contemplates very ambitious objectives, the entrance of a new federal government (2018-2024) makes the completion and evaluation of the program something highly uncertain if the hopes are based on past experiences. As Ramirez-Romero and Sayer (2016) state “there is a need to formulate state policies that allow education-related matters to go beyond presidential periods”, after all, the fulfillment of any type of program objectives require time, evaluation and eventually, the seek for improvement. Overall, even though English Language Teaching in Mexico has been present within the school curriculum for more than twenty years, it is still evident the need for more consistent, enduring and coherent programs, along with a proper evaluation.

It would seem that the emergence of the National English Strategy, has accurately appointed to Mexico’s historical need to attend and improve the initial preparation of teachers. In agreement with Banks (2017), if the Mexican education system should hold teachers as responsible for students’ outcomes, this would logically turn the responsibility to the education system itself, to provide quality in teacher education and give teachers and student-teachers access to the best practices if the goal is to guarantee qualified and competent teachers in the classrooms.

## 2.2 Teacher Education in Mexico: Normales & Public Universities.

Teacher Education within the public system has relied on two main institutions: *Normales* and Public Universities. The creation and constitution of each of them, are the result of the historic and socio-cultural demands of the country at the time of their emergence. Over time, the growth and development of *Normales* and Public Universities has been equally affected by socio-cultural movements combined with political forces. The role that these institutions play in the present study, compels the researcher to examine from the historical to the structural, the most important aspects of each institution.

As stated previously, the *Normal* school system in Mexico has historically been one of the main institutions in charge of the education of future teachers, specifically aimed to the basic levels of instruction: preschool, elementary and middle school. According to the National Institute for the Evaluation of Education (INEE for its initials in Spanish) in 2015, 75% of teachers in public schools came from *normal* schools.

Originally, *Normales* were not considered to be a part of the higher education system, mainly because in order to enroll, it was necessary to have the middle school certificate/diploma as the main requirement, and at the end of the *normal* studies, students would automatically receive their high school certificate/diploma together with their bachelor's degree as teachers. At a later stage, due to a National Reform to the *Normal* Education system in 1984, *normales* acquired the status of higher education institutions and the high school certification became necessary to enter. Though, it should be noted that up to this point, the *normal* school system had already gone through seven different reforms (see Navarrete-Cazales, 2015).

There are two important aspects of the *normal* school system that must be taken into consideration, the first and most controversial, is the big influence that the *Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación* (the National Union of Workers of Education)

has had over the years within the public education system. For many national researchers (Oppenheimer, 2015; Loyo, 2002; Tatto & Vélez, 1997;) and in the words of Banks (2017) this National Union “has been described as an obstructionist and bureaucratic force that has plagued the Mexican education system with a culture of favors, exchanges, and professional nepotism that have obstructed social justice for teachers and students” (p.36). The second, but not less important is that the implementation of major structural or curricular changes are rendered and dictated by the federal government. Thus, due to this lack of autonomy the possibilities of any academic improvement that should come from the inside are significantly reduced (Navarrete-Cazales, 2015).

In comparison with *normales*, public universities have exercised their autonomy since 1945. Most, if not all of these institutions emerged thanks to the long-lasting endeavors of the *Universidad Nacional de México*, known today as the UNAM, considered to be one of the first Universities in Latin America. Said autonomy was only accomplished after several socio-political movements like the Mexican Revolution, and many years of struggle with the government who seemed relentless to hand over power (Silva, 1990; Marsiske, 2006).

Public Universities that are currently recognized as autonomous -as established in the *Marco Jurídico de la Autonomía Universitaria* (1999)- are characterized with the “faculty of determining their own curricula and programmes under the principle of its academic freedom and research (...)” (p.3). Therefore, teacher education in both *Normales* and Public Universities has been carried out with one fundamental difference: that is the implementation of the curriculum each of them are set to follow, how it is structured, who establishes it and what principles they will be guided by.

### **2.2.1 Second Language Teacher Education in Normales.**

According to the General Management of Higher Education for Professionals in Education (*Dirección General de Educación Superior para Profesionales de la Educación*) there are 44 Public Normal schools in Mexico that offer a BA in English Language Teaching, which receive the name of *Licenciatura en Educación Secundaria con Especialidad en Lengua Extranjera, Inglés* (Bachelor in Secondary Education with Specialty in a Foreign Language: English). As previously mentioned, the curriculum is established at a national level for every Normal. In this case, the curriculum for Secondary Education with specialty in ELT was established/implemented back in 1999 and used until 2018, when a new curriculum was established/implemented. It is important to note that this investigation was carried out with the last cohorts under this curriculum in each *normal*. In the following sections a description of the curriculum and the Teaching Practicum are presented.

#### **2.2.1.1 Description of the curriculum**

Throughout the foundational precepts in the curriculum is established that the initial preparation of teachers at the *normales* will be concerned in preparing student-teachers (henceforth S-Ts) who: 1) Recognize their students' interests in order to use them to make the class more appealing; 2) Create positive learning environments and establish good communication and relationships with the group; 3) Inspire students the interest to study the foreign language and confidence to participate in class, helping them value personal achievements that motivate them to aspire to continue learning (SEP, 2000, p.8). In addition, the curriculum highlights that the function of secondary teachers graduated from the normal, rather than being only specialists in linguistics, they will be educators who know a foreign language and are able to teach it to adolescents. Based on these goals, the curriculum requires

S-T to have sufficient knowledge of the language equivalent to intermediate-advanced (B2), as well as the use of English as a means of communication in every subject of the specialty.

Moreover, the curriculum is divided in three formative lines. Firstly, the Improvement of Communicative Competence (*Perfeccionamiento de la competencia comunicativa*). Since S-Ts are required to enter with an intermediate level of English, the subjects within this formative line will provide fundamental aspects about language, cultures, literature, literary genres, as well as the historical evolution of the language. In this line, it is suggested that linguistic abilities are diagnosed in order to identify and differentiate S-T needs to strength their communicative competence. Secondly, the Development of Didactic Competence (*Desarrollo de la competencia didáctica*) considers specific subjects to “ensure that S-Ts are able to design, select and put strategies and resources in practice to promote the development of students’ reading and listening comprehension (...)” Also, the set of subjects from this formative line will prepare S-T to select and apply assessment procedures that are consistent with the approach for language teaching in secondary education (Communicative Language Teaching). The document highlights the close relation between Improvement of communicative competence and the Development of didactic competence, since the former will limit or enhance the S-T confidence to try different and innovative teaching strategies with adolescents.

Finally, the third formative line is concerned with Adolescents’ Knowledge and Teaching Practice. This stage is characterized by subjects dedicated to preparing, develop and analyze the teaching practice. At this point, S-T will be carrying out school-based experiences for longer periods each time. In the following Figure 2.1 the curriculum can be visualized according to semesters and subjects.

	Primer semestre	Horas/ Créditos	Segundo semestre	Horas/ Créditos	Tercer semestre	Horas/ Créditos	Cuarto semestre	Horas/ Créditos	Quinto semestre	Horas/ Créditos	Sexto semestre	Horas/ Créditos	Séptimo semestre	Horas/ Créditos	Octavo semestre	Horas/ Créditos	
A	Bases filosóficas, legales y organizativas del sistema educativo mexicano	4/7.0	La educación en el desarrollo histórico de México I	4/7.0	La educación en el desarrollo histórico de México II	4/7.0	Seminario de temas selectos de historia de la pedagogía y la educación I	4/7.0	Seminario de temas selectos de historia de la pedagogía y la educación II	4/7.0	Evolución histórica de la lengua inglesa	4/7.0					
	Estrategias para el estudio y la comunicación I	6/10.5	Estrategias para el estudio y la comunicación II	4/7.0	Inglés I	4/7.0	Inglés II	4/7.0	Inglés III	4/7.0	Inglés IV	4/7.0					
	Problemas y políticas de la educación básica	6/10.5	Introducción a la enseñanza de: Lengua extranjera (Inglés)	4/7.0	Los adolescentes y el aprendizaje del inglés	4/7.0	Literatura en lengua inglesa I	4/7.0	Literatura en lengua inglesa II	4/7.0	Elementos básicos de gramática comparada inglés-español	4/7.0					
			La enseñanza en la escuela secundaria. Cuestiones básicas I	4/7.0	La enseñanza en la escuela secundaria. Cuestiones básicas II	4/7.0	Estrategias y recursos I. Comprensión de la lectura	4/7.0	Estrategias y recursos II. Comprensión auditiva y expresión oral	4/7.0	Estrategias y recursos III. Lectura y escritura	4/7.0					
	Propósitos y contenidos de la educación básica I (Primaria)	4/7.0	Propósitos y contenidos de la educación básica II (Secundaria)	4/7.0	La expresión oral y escrita en el proceso de enseñanza y de aprendizaje	4/7.0	Planeación de la enseñanza y evaluación del aprendizaje	4/7.0	Opcional I	4/7.0	Opcional II	4/7.0	Taller de diseño de propuestas didácticas y análisis del trabajo docente I			Taller de diseño de propuestas didácticas y análisis del trabajo docente II	6/10.5
Desarrollo de los adolescentes I. Aspectos generales	6/10.5	Desarrollo de los adolescentes II. Crecimiento y sexualidad	6/10.5	Desarrollo de los adolescentes III. Identidad y relaciones sociales	6/10.5	Desarrollo de los adolescentes IV. Procesos cognitivos	6/10.5	Atención educativa a los adolescentes en situaciones de riesgo	6/10.5	Gestión escolar	6/10.5						
B	Escuela y contexto social	6/10.5	Observación del proceso escolar	6/10.5	Observación y práctica docente I	6/10.5	Observación y práctica docente II	6/10.5	Observación y práctica docente III	6/10.5	Observación y práctica docente IV	6/10.5					
	Horas/semana	32		32		32		32		32		32			16	16	

Área de actividad	
A	Actividades principalmente escolarizadas
B	Actividades de acercamiento a la práctica escolar
C	Práctica intensiva en condiciones reales de trabajo

Campos de formación	
---	Formación general para educación básica
---	Formación común para todas las especialidades de secundaria
---	Formación específica por especialidad

Fig. 2.1 Curriculum for Normales. Specialty in Foreign Language: English. (SEP, 1999)

### 2.2.1.2 Description of the Practicum

As shown in Fig. 2.1, the Teaching Practicum within *normales* is located in the third semester of the career/program and it is called Observation and Teaching Practice I, II, III and IV, from the seventh semester the name changes to Teaching Practice I and II. Since information about the Practicum in the curriculum is not sufficiently detailed. The description of the Practicum is based on the document “The activities of observation and teaching practice in secondary schools.” The purpose of this document is “to provide basic information about the characteristics of the activities carried out by S-Ts, the aims they pursue through them and the type of support they require when attending secondary schools to work with adolescents” (SEP, 1999).

As stated in Figure 2.1, it can be considered that S-Ts start being exposed to real contexts from the third semester. The document mentioned above, states the main characteristics of the Teaching Practicum. Firstly, the fundamental purpose is to insert S-Ts in the context where they will eventually carry out their practice as professionals. Secondly, it describes the Practicum as systematic, reflexive, analytical and one that promotes the development of didactic competences in the future teacher.

In another important aspect, the functions of *normal* schools and secondary schools in the education of S-Ts are described as a shared task. This task highlights the responsibility of supervisors from *normales* and school teachers at secondary schools who receive S-Ts in the Practicum. In the case of supervisors, these responsibilities start with 1) Orienting the S-T in the preparation for the work in secondary schools, such preparation includes coordinating and defining the specific aspects which S-T have to observe, guiding S-T in the creation of lesson plans to provide feedback at a later stage. 2) Organizing visits to Secondary Schools in order to observe and guide their work. 3) Attend Secondary Schools where S-Ts are inserted, observe their Practice, register important information that will need to be analyzed in class at the *normal*, talk with school teachers about the S-Ts performance and inform them about their own function in this process. 4) Promote and guide reflection, and analysis of the Teaching Practicum, based on the information collected through the visits to secondary schools.

On the other hand, the functions of school teachers who receive a S-T from *normales* are mainly to guide S-T and provide them with suggestions for them to reflect on their competences achieved, as well as those aspects of their practice that they need to improve. In addition to this, the document advises school teachers to establish a clear communication with S-T about content, methodologies, characteristics of the group, and the criteria to evaluate the S-T performance at the end of the Practicum.

Equally important, school teachers are encouraged to keep in mind the characteristics needed to comply with these functions. Staying at all times in the classroom while S-T is practicing is one of these characteristics, it mentions that if the school teacher does not observe, the S-T is deprived from necessary information to reflect about her practice. It is worth noting that the environment fostered by school teachers as well as the way feedback is provided to S-T, appears in the document but only in the form of a footnote. With regards to the structure and times dedicated to each of the activities in the Teaching Practicum, the following table (2.1) is provided. Originally the table is in Spanish but for the purpose of the research it was translated to English.

	Grade attended in secondary school.	Activities in the first session		Activities in the second session	
		Observation	Practice	Observation	Practice
<b>Observation and Teaching Practice I</b>	1st grade	One group is observed, during the entire week.	Practice in one group, one class session. Time destined for the activity: 1 hour.	Observation in two groups, one should be the same from the last session. S-T stays a full day in the group she is practicing.	Practice in two groups of 1st grade, when possible, class sequences are applied. Time: 6 or 10 hours (according to specialty).
<b>Observation and Teaching Practice II</b>	1st and 2nd grade	One group of 2nd grade is observed during the entire week.	Practice in one group of 2nd grade, class sequences are applied. Time destined for the activity: 2, 3 or 5 hours (according to specialty)	Observation in two groups, one should be the same from the last session and the other from 1st grade. S-T stays a full day in the group she is practicing.	Practice in two groups from 1st and 2nd grade, when possible, class sequences are applied. Time: 5, 6 or 10 hours (according to specialty)..
<b>Observation and Teaching Practice III</b>	1st, 2nd and 3rd grade	One group of 3rd grade is observed during the entire week.	Practice in one group of 3rd grade, class sequences are applied. Time destined for the activity: 2, 3 or 5 hours (according to specialty).	Observation in three groups, one should be the same from the last session, one from 1st and other from 2nd grade. S-T stays a full day in the group she is practicing.	Practice in three groups from 1st, 2nd and 3rd grade, when possible, class sequences are applied. Time: 8, 9, 10 or 15 hours (according to specialty).
<b>Observation and Teaching Practice IV</b>	1st, 2nd and 3rd grade	Three groups of different grades are observed during the entire week. The S-T stays for a full day in one group.	Practice in three groups of different grades, class sequences are applied. Time destined for the activity: 8, 9, 10 or 15 hours (according to specialty).	Observation in the same groups of practice during the entire week. S-T stays a full day in one group.	Practice in the same groups from last session, class sequences are applied. Time destined for the activity: 8, 9, 10 or 15 hours (according to specialty).

*Table 2.1 Approaching Activities to the School Practice in the subjects of the Specialty of the Degree in Secondary Education (SEP, 1999b)*

As can be observed, the Practicum is divided in two *Jornadas* (sessions), which in turn are divided in observation and practice respectively. It should be noted that every

semester the time of practice in front of the group is increasing gradually. After each session at school has passed, S-Ts must return to the Normales for a workshop in order to reflect on their experiences on the Practicum.

### **2.2.2 Second Language Teacher Education in Universities.**

According to the National Association of Universities and Institutions of Higher Education (ANUIES for its initials in Spanish) there are 36 Public Universities in Mexico that offer a bachelor's degree in English Language Teaching. Historically, most SLTE programs in Mexico emerged from Language Departments within public Universities starting in the 80's.

Since the universities that were involved in this research have different curriculums, the description will be divided in *University A* and *University B's* description.

#### **2.2.2.1 Description of the Curriculum: University A**

As described in the objectives of the curriculum in *University A*, S-Ts who enter this Bachelor Degree will 1) be provided with a conceptual basis of applied linguistics to the teaching of English; 2) develop knowledge, abilities and attitudes to carry out the profession of English teacher or as a consultant of the English language; 3) be analytic, critical and reflexive professionals who contribute to solve the problematic of their field; 4) be tolerant, and respectful for multiculturalism to adapt the teaching of English to different contexts and promote these same values; and 5) be encouraged to carry out research in order to contribute to the continuous improvement of their practice.

The curriculum is organized in 8 semesters, which contemplate 49 subjects to be completed in a matter of 4-5 years. Additionally, it is divided in four core areas: 1) Linguistic instruction; 2) Teaching instruction; 3) Teaching and management; and 4) Research. As noted in the table below (Table 2.2), each subject is identified with the number of each core area. Professional Practices in this case has been located under the core area of Research.

1st Sem	2nd Sem	3rd Sem	4th Sem	5th Sem	6th Sem	7th Sem	8th Sem
English I (1)	English II (1)	English III (1)	English IV(1)	English V(1)	English VI(1)	English VII (1)	Lesson Planning (2)
Reading and Writing in Spanish (1)	Culture and civilization of Anglo-Saxon countries (2)	English as an International Language (1)	Phonetics and phonology (1)	Teaching receptive skills (2)	Teaching productive skills (2)	Evaluation of teaching and learning in languages (2)	<b>Professional Practices</b> (4)
Multicultural Mexico (2)	Psychology in education (2)	English morphosyntax (1)	Teaching grammar and vocabulary (2)	Academic writing (4)	Elective I (3)	Elective II (3)	
Learn to Learn (1)	Applied linguistics (1)	ELT Methodologies (2)	Resources and materials (2)	Discourse Analysis in ELT (2)	Curriculum design (2)	Social Service (3)	
Learning Theories (2)	Sustainable development and environment (2)	Language Acquisition (2)	Strategies and techniques for self-learning (2)	Research Methodology foundations (4)	Research Seminar I (4)	Research Seminar II (4)	

*Table 2.2 Curriculum for University A*

In order to extend the description of the curriculum, it seemed suitable to take into consideration the progressive profile for S-T provided by *University B*. The information provided suggests the abilities that S-Ts will have acquired at the end of 3rd, 5th and 7th semester.

According to Progressive Profile, at the end of the third semester the S-T will be able to identify the basic contents of the ELT profession, understand the learning process and will be able to design strategies to facilitate such process. Additionally, the S-T will be able to exchange and express ideas in a written and oral form, use ICT as a supporting tool to develop basic contents. Finally, S-T will be critic and reflexive towards the various methods and ELT approaches available.

Regarding the fifth semester, the S-T are able to understand greater sources of written expression and can recognize implicit meanings. Also, S-T are critic, reflexive and are able to identify problematic areas on a research protocol. At this moment of the career, S-T should have a sufficient fluency level to be able to communicate with native speakers of English. On the other hand, the progressive profile states that the S-Ts are able to design classes to teach grammar, vocabulary, and receptive skills as well as make use of different strategies and methodologies for teaching. Finally, the S-T by the end of seventh semester will be able to produce clear, well-structured and of a certain complexity level written texts, in addition to designing curriculum according to the needs of a given context and making decisions about the most appropriate teaching methodology. Furthermore, at the end of this semester (7) the S-T are capable of designing classes for the teaching of grammar, vocabulary, receptive as well as productive skills. Apart from this, they will be able to conduct a class under supervision and without supervision. From this, the S-T will be able to reflect on their teaching based on the process of evaluation in order to make the necessary changes when needed. In the following section the Practicum from *University A* will be explored.

#### **2.2.2.2 Description of the Practicum: University A**

As stated in the curriculum, the Practicum was found in the last semester of the BA and it is presented as a subject called *Prácticas Profesionales* (Professional Practices). This is one of the two final subjects to complete the BA. In order to access this information, it was necessary to access the institution's General Management of Professional Practices website. Although it is not specifically referring to the ELT Program, it contains information on what the objectives of the Practicum are as well as the benefits for S-T involved in it.

In a first moment, the Practicum is described as “the provision of supervised, mandatory and temporary activities with a formative nature.” Through which the S-T develop, practice and perfect their professional competences, and create links with different

sectors, regional, national and international. Similarly, the benefits for S-Ts who carry out their Practicum are reported as follows: 1) Opportunity of reinforcing and putting knowledge into practice by integrating into a professional field; 2) Being able to carry out the Practicum in Receiving Units according to their professional profile; 3) Know the social reality that allows them to develop their analytic capacity, and be propositive in light of the adversity; 5) Receive advice and direct training in the RU for the development of the assigned tasks; 6) Receive academic advice, and be supported in the accomplishment of their Professional Practices, thus accrediting the subject; 7) Link social service and professional practices in a single project; 8) In some cases receive economical support to help S-T cover personal expenses incurred during the Practices; 9) Enrich the curriculum, since the Practices are considered as work experience; 10) Link to the reality of their professional field to be known as a competent professional with enough values to fulfill their social responsibility; 11) At the conclusion of the Practices the S-T must be a highly competitive professional, thus affirming their values to meet the requirements of the professional field; 12) Comply with the normativity to obtain their professional degree.

Lastly, the General Management of Professional Practices of *University A* concludes in a specific objective of the practicum which reads:

To contribute to the integral formation of practitioners who are applying their knowledge, abilities and are developing competences of employability by creating links with institutions and agencies from the public, private and social sector in an international and national level (University A, Professional Practices)

In another aspect the Practicum is carried out according to the guidelines established by the same Professional Practice General Management. The process begins by attending a mandatory talk where the process is explained, as well as the steps to follow in order to register to the practices. The second is pre-registration online for the practices. Third (optional), register a Receiving Unit (the place where the Practice will be carried out) this

option is for S-T who want to carry out Practices in a non-registered Receiving Unit. Fourth step is consulting a list of Receiving Units and selecting three main options. The next step is consulting the same webpage to learn which Receiving Unit was assigned to the S-T, this will depend on the average of S-T throughout the BA. Sixth, a Presentation Letter must be issued by the Coordinator of Practices and taken by S-Ts to their Receiving Units. Finally, to formalize the beginning of the practices before the General Management, S-T must present their Plan of Activities (see Table 2.3), Letter of Acceptance and the List of Subjects where the Professional Practices are included.

<b>University A</b>	Attend to talk at the Faculty	Pre registration to the Practices	Consulting Receiving Units available	Selecting Receiving Unit	Presentation Letter	Plan of Activities	Letter of Acceptance	List of subjects
<b>Description</b>	Each semester the talk is given at each faculty.	S-T pre register online.	S-T consult online, the options of RU	Selection is organized according to the best averages of S-T.	Issued by the Faculty, presented at the RU.	Format given by the University to be filled out by S-T and presented to General Management.	Issued by the RU, and presented to General Management.	Issued by the University and presented to General Management.

*Table 2.3 Requirements to begin Professional Practices*

In the Table 2.3 above, a summary of the requirements to commence the Practices for S-Ts in *University A* is presented. The information is based on the documents available in the General Management of Professional Practices of the institution.

With regard to finalizing the process of the Practicum, a different set of steps must be completed, as shown in the following Table 2.4. These are mandatory formats that S-T must present to obtain a certificate.

<b>University A</b>	Online evaluation	<i>Carta de terminación (Completion Letter).</i>	<i>Reporte Global (Global Report).</i>	<i>Evaluación del desempeño del practicante (Evaluation of performance of the practitioner)</i>	Payment Receipt
<b>Description</b>	S-T fill out an online evaluation.	Issued by the Receiving Unit, signed, stamped, hours completed.	Format given by the University, to be filled out by s-t, signed by mentor, supervisor,	Format given by the University, to be filled out, stamped, and signed by the Receiving Unit	Payment on behalf of the University to issue the Professional Practice Certificate.

*Table 2.4 Mandatory aspects to conclude Professional Practices*

Since the obtainment of a certificate of the Professional Practices is a graduation requirement for every student in the institution, the documents in Table 2.4 will not only apply to S-Ts from the preservice program in question, but also to every faculty at *University A*.

### 2.2.2.3 Description of the Curriculum: University B

The curriculum of *University B* involves 47 subjects and is established as a four-year program to become an English Teacher. As shown in the Table 2.5 below, this program is divided in nine areas and their respective subjects which are identified as: 1) Target language; 2) Teaching; 3) Linguistics; 4) Research; 5) Electives; 6) Culture; 7) Professional Practice; 8) General University Studies; and 9) Spanish.

1st Sem	2nd Sem	3rd Sem	4th Sem	5th Sem	6th Sem	7th Sem	8th Sem
Target Language I (1)	Target Language II (1)	Target Language III (1)	Target Language IV(1)	Target Language V (1)	Academic reading and writing Workshop (1)		
Educational System in Mexico and language policies (2)	Observation in the classroom (2)	Traditional and digital materials workshop (2)	Phonetics and phonology (3)	Semantics and Pragmatics (3)	Research Methodology (4)	Research Seminar I (4)	Research Seminar II (4)
Learning Theories and Processes (2)	ELT Methodologies I (2)	ELT Methodologies II (2)	Evaluation of Learning (2)	Workshop for Reading and Writing in Teaching (2)	<b>Teaching Experience</b> (2)	<b>Professional Practices</b> (7)	Social Service (7)
Introduction to the study of language (3)	Morphology and syntax (3)	Language Acquisition (3)	Cultural studies (6)	Cultural Manifestations (6)	Evolution and history of language (6)		
Academic Writing I (9)	Academic Writing II (9)			Curriculum design (2)	Discourse Analysis in ELT (3)		
Development of Higher order thinking abilities (8)	Human and Social formation (8)	Elective I (5)	Elective II (5)	Elective III (5)	Elective IV (5)	Elective V (5)	

*Table 2.5 Curriculum for University B*

In order to complement the Table 2.5 above, the bases of the program were taken into consideration. Within the document of the foundations of the curriculum are established seven competences that by the end of the program S-Ts must have developed as part of their

integral formation. In the first place, it mentions that S-Ts should be able to reach a B2 level (CEFR) in English, in order to communicate fluently and appropriately, taking into consideration the given context and the use of effective strategies for each situation. Next, S-Ts apply effectively theories and methodologies for the teaching learning process, keeping in mind the cognitive, affective, axiological, and attitudinal of students. The S-Ts design and evaluate lesson plans to attend to the diverse situations they might face in the classroom, it is planned with a sequence and considering the characteristics of students and the different educational contexts. S-Ts put in practice the principles of language teaching-learning to face and solve difficulties by using traditional and technological teaching means.

The S-Ts identify and apply the linguistic principles for the use and mastery of a language, in addition to the theories of acquisition of an L1 or an L2 in order to carry out their practice, as well as taking into account previous knowledge and contexts of the students. They also recognize and analyze the aspects that compose a language, as well as the ones that allow effective communication in order to apply them through the use of methods and strategies according to the context and purposes of their students. In the end, the S-Ts apply their knowledge and research abilities to identify and solve problems in the field of English learning and teaching, considering the characteristics of the contexts.

As can be observed in Table 2.5, the subjects identified as Practicum are in bold, and according to the curriculum these are part of two different areas, on the one hand, the Teaching Experience is aligned with the area of Teaching (2), and on the other hand the Professional Practice is aligned with the area with the same name, along with the social service subject. Finally, it is worth noting that, as reported by the institution, the program has been developed under the socio constructivist and socio humanistic approach.

#### **2.2.2.4 Description of the Practicum: University B**

As noted above, University B comprehends two moments of Practicum; the first one is called Teaching Experience and the last one, similarly to *University A*, is called Professional Practice. It should be mentioned that this description is based on the curriculum and most importantly on the documents obtained, such as the Teaching Experience Syllabus, and the Curriculum Foundations of the BA in *University B*.

The moment of Teaching Experience is located in the 6th semester of the career and the purpose of the subject is for the S-T:

To integrate and use the theoretical and practical knowledge about methodology in English Teaching, in order to design and apply lesson plans for a specific teaching context with official recognition and under the supervision of a professor or mentor. The student-teacher self-evaluates and co-evaluates in a critical manner the teaching practice through reflection (Teaching Experience Syllabus, 2016).

According to the syllabus, S-Ts must comply with 20 hours of teaching and in agreement with the curriculum foundations they will achieve certain professional competences such as integrating theories and methodologies for learning-teaching English taking context and communicative needs into consideration. In addition S-Ts will develop their own lesson plans keeping in mind the different situations that might emerge in the classroom. There is sequence in their classes and contents are gradually provided according to the individual needs of the students. Finally, the S-Ts puts in practice in an effective way the principles of language teaching-learning to face and give solution to the difficulties encountered in the practice, by making use of traditional and technological means of teaching (Teaching Experience, Syllabus, 2016).

Teaching Experience requires to study three units in class before going to practice, first S-T are introduced with the 1) Educational Context, where topics like analysis of the context, teachers and students' roles in the classroom, stages of linguistic development, and a

set of “effective” practices are carried out in the classroom. The second unit deals with 2) Lesson Planning, the different types of methodologies and lesson plans are presented, the organization of a class, time management, type of interactions, materials and resources, along with the formats available according to levels of instruction. Followed by the third unit, 3) Analysis and Evaluation of the Teaching Experience, where S-Ts cover topics like observation, types of observation, elements of a reflexive practice, self-observation and peer observation formats, writing a journal or a log, to conclude the unit with the scheduling of the prescribed teaching hours. Furthermore, the syllabus states that attendance to the class, presentations and homework assignments, the 20 hours of teaching, a weekly report which includes the observation formats from the school teacher, supervisor and peers, a portfolio with evidences and the final session (final feedback session and reflections) will be taken into consideration for the evaluation and the accreditation of the subject.

In contrast to this first moment of Practicum, the *Professional Practices* are coordinated by a General Management which establishes the requirements to be met by students within the University. Similar to *University A*, this process is a graduation prerequisite for *University B*. In order to accredit Professional Practices, the number of hours to be completed are a total of 240. However, for the SLTE program specifically, the hours are divided into 60 hours of teaching and 180 spent on extra activities such as planning, material design and meetings with supervisors. According to the General Management of Professional Practices, the objectives for this moment are:

To consolidate professional competences, knowing technological and scientific advances in the professional field, developing creativity, innovation, risk taking and the planification and management of projects. Finally, adapting to a work environment (University B, Professional Practice)

Based on the information obtained in the website, the steps to begin the process of Professional Practices at *University B* are presented in the Table 2.6 below.

<b>University B</b>	Attend to talk at the Faculty	Application to Professional Practices	List of subjects coursed	Proof of active medical insurance	Select institution	Assign and confirm institution	Registration of the S-T & tutor assignment	Registration sheet & Presentation letter	Letter of Acceptance
<b>Description</b>	Each semester the talk is given at each faculty.	S-T fill out a format given by the University and present it to the coordination	S-T present it To the coordination	S-T present it To the coordination	S-T select according to average.	S-T confirms with institution and coordination.	Coordination formally registers S-T and assigns a tutor	Coordination issues registration sheet and a presentation letter for S-T to give to institutions.	S-T delivers Letter of acceptance to the coordination.

*Table 2.6 Requirements to register to Professional Practice at University B*

As described on the table, there are nine procedures to be officially registered in Professional Practices. On the other hand, there are different procedures to follow in order to conclude the moment of Professional Practice, and obtain the certificate, which is needed to graduate.

After S-Ts have completed the hours of teaching and are able to provide evidence of the rest of 180 hours of planning, meetings and material creation they are required to comply with a set of procedures in order to conclude the Professional practices. In Table 2.7 a summary of the procedures necessary to conclude the Practices with the Coordination is presented below.

<b>University B</b>	<i>Hoja de Firmas</i> (Signature sheet)	<i>Carta de término</i> (Completion Letter)	<i>CD de Evidencias</i> (CD of Evidence)	<i>Carta de término</i> (Completion letter)	Completion Letters
<b>Description</b>	Signed by school, and student teacher throughout the Practices	Issued by the school	1)Work plan 2)Attendance log. 3)Daily evidence log (60hrs of class) 4)Lesson plans and reflections (60 hrs of class). 5) Evidence and evaluations 6) Mentor evaluation 7)Final report	Issued by the preservice program, coordination of Practices after reviewing that the CD is complete and contains everything asked for.	Deliver letters to the General Management of Professional Practices.

*Table 2.7 Mandatory aspects to conclude Professional Practice in University B*

It was necessary to present an adjacent table, since the CD included in turn a different set of formats and requirements to formalize the Practices. As it is shown in the following table, there are certain specifications for each of the points.

<b>1) Work plan</b>	Reviewed and signed by tutor and S-T.
<b>2) Attendance log (60hrs of class)</b>	Format given by the University , reviewed and signed by S-T, supervisor, mentor.
<b>3) Daily evidences log</b>	Format given by the University , reviewed and signed by S-T, supervisor, mentor.
<b>4) Lesson plans and reflections (60 hrs of class)</b>	Signed by S-T, supervisor, mentor.  *If the same class was taught in two groups, there must be a different reflection for it and a document that states so.
<b>5) Evidences and evaluations</b>	Photos of the materials created for the PP, pictures of students and facilities of the school. Reflections on the practice per week, signed by the s-t and supervisor.
<b>6) Mentor evaluation</b>	Format given by University, to be filled out and signed by the school teacher.
<b>7) Final Report</b>	Essay answering 4 questions about the practicum. To be signed by s-t, supervisor, and responsible at school. 1) In what way and how has the practicum influenced your professional development?; 2) What have you learnt about the institution, students and teachers that can be helpful for your professional development?; 3) What did you contribute to the institution and in what way?; 4) How do you visualize your future integration to the professional field of education?

*Table 2.8 Content of CD of evidence for University B*

It must be remembered that the timely and complete deliver of the aspects described above (Table 2.7 and 2.8) will have an effect on the completion of graduation prerequisites, which will be further explored in the discussion chapter.

## **2.3 Conclusion**

In this chapter it was important to establish the context (ELT and Teacher Education in Mexico) in order to understand and explore the underlying issues that promoted this investigation. As it was previously indicated, there is evidence of the need for this type of studies, especially if Mexico has officially been required to improve initial preparation of Teachers and has a problematic history with the learning of English as a foreign language.

## CHAPTER III: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 3.0 Introduction

The purpose of the present chapter is to locate this research within the sociocultural framework. It provides the reader with the necessary definitions of the main concepts presented and discussed throughout the whole study. The purpose of this is to establish a clear discussion, accessible to all of whom wish to become involved in the topic.

### 3.1 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that underlies this research is the Sociocultural Theory, first proposed by Vygotsky (1978), Wertsch (1991), Moll (1990), Lantolf (2000) and more recently within the field of SLTE by Johnson (2009), Johnson and Golombek (2011) and Swain, Kinnear & Steinman (2011).

Vygotsky (1978) -in contrast to theorists of his same time- believed that the individual could not be studied or understood in isolation, but only as part of a history, of a culture and of a society. The foundation of his work maintained that all forms of higher mental functions occur mainly in social interactions and are mediated by culturally constructed materials -*mediating tools/artifacts*- and it is the reconstruction and transformation of these resources that characterize cognitive development (Swain, Kinnear & Steinman, 2011). *Mediation* becomes then a pivotal aspect to analyze when undertaking a Sociocultural Framework in the investigation of the teaching practicum since it is the *when, where, how, and why* everything happens during this process, which will significantly influence the development and learning of future teachers.

Highlighting the role of *mediation*, Johnson and Golombek argue that individuals do not act directly with their environment, but they use various artifacts to mediate their

activities (2009, p.4). These artifacts can be organized into two types: 1) *tools* and 2) *signs or symbols* (Vygotsky, 1978 as cited in Swain, Kinnear & Steinman, 2011). All concrete/material objects which are externally oriented will be considered *tools*, and all abstract representations such as numbers, artistic forms, diagrams, and, most importantly, language, will be considered *signs or symbols*. In this regard, they will both serve as mediating means (if intended to), but they will differ in the way each one orients human behavior. The first, as it is externally oriented, will lead to changes in objects, while the latter, as it is internally oriented, will aim at mastering oneself (Ibid.).

Equally important to the work of Lev Vygotsky and thereby to the Sociocultural Theory, is the notion of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The ZPD has been extensively studied ever since Vygotsky's work first emerged to these days (Wertsch, 1985; Moll, 1990; Lantolf, 1998; Hernández, 1991; Johnson and Golombek, 2009; Swain, Kinnear & Steinman, 2011). The definition of Zone of Proximal Development is "the distance between what an individual can do on her own and what she might achieve with the assistance of other more knowledgeable peers and the appropriate mediating artifacts" (Swain et al., 2011, p.21). This confirms the role of mediation to be vital in reaching the ZPD. After all, it is the assistance provided, whether by peers, tools, or artifacts what will shorten the distance between the individual's actual and potential developmental level.

As stated above, the ZPD is determined by the actual level of development of the individual and the form of instruction involved during it (*mediation*). Tudge (1990, in Moll, 1990) points out that instruction and development must not be taken as synonyms, but rather as two processes that exist in a complex interrelationship. He considers as "good instruction" the one that proceeds ahead of development, puts in motion a series of internal processes that could have only been possible at the time of the external interactions, but which will eventually become part of the internal property of the individual (p. 450).

This internal process of transforming and appropriating knowledge has come to be known as *internalization*. Lantolf (2000 p.14) interprets Vygotsky's *internalization* and defines it as "the process through which a person moves from carrying out concrete actions in conjunction with the assistance of material artifacts and other individuals to carrying out actions mentally without any apparent external assistance." Under those circumstances, it can be understood that internalization should only be achieved through the use of mediating artifacts during the ZPD.

It is somehow surprising how the concepts mentioned above are interrelated and depend on the existence of the other to give place to the development of the individual. In the following section, the Sociocultural Theory will be discussed in relation to the field of Second Language Teacher Education in order to make more meaning of the concepts and the way they will be analyzed in this research.

### **3.2 Language Teacher Education**

Freeman & Johnson (1998) explored the idea of reconceptualizing Language Teacher Education through the lens of the Sociocultural Theory. They argue against the traditional transmission model, suggesting that the simple accumulation of accepted theories and practices on the discipline proved as "effective", without context or any explicit and immediate connection to real-life situations, would not turn into successful teaching practices. Freeman (1993, as cited in Johnson, 2009) referred to this view of teacher learning as "front-loading", where preservice programs equip teachers in advance for all they will need to know and be able to do throughout their teaching lives. However, it should be emphasized that to this day, this is still the general practice among many Second Language Teacher Education programs (SLTE).

Freeman & Johnson (1998, as cited in Johnson, 2009) maintained that in order to build a solid knowledge-base for SLTE, preservice programs should not only deal with subject matter knowledge (how language is used, structured, and acquired) but also with how language is actually taught in L2 classrooms as well as teachers' and students' perception of this content. Bearing this in mind, adopting a sociocultural perspective in SLTE as suggested by Johnson (2009), would involve the understanding of the act of *learning to teach* as a socially negotiated one, and will also allow us to recognize the interconnectedness of the cognitive and the social. Since student-teachers' knowledge of teaching is constructed through experiences in and with colleagues, administrators, parents, teacher educators, and at one point, their own students (p.10). A very clear scenario of this social process can be observed in the teaching practicum: a particular moment (or different moments in some cases) of preservice programs where student-teachers are required to be immersed in real school contexts to either observe or apply what they have learned throughout their education. Regardless, student-teachers are only exposed to these types of interactions for short periods before they enter the profession.

It is, therefore, of critical importance for this research to view the process of *learning to teach*, specifically at the teaching practicum stage, as more than the simple reproduction of practices but instead, as “a dynamic process of reconstructing and transforming those practices to be responsive to both individual and local needs” (Johnson, 2009, p.13). In other words, student-teachers should be able to fully appropriate, understand, and even shape as they see fit for their development as teachers, the concepts, notions, or activities that are provided for them throughout their instruction in their preservice programs.

Another aspect that significantly affects how student-teachers learn to teach, according to the sociocultural theory, are the student-teachers' own previous experiences as learners, along with their beliefs and personal conceptions about teaching, a term previously

coined by Lortie as *apprenticeship of observation* (1975, as cited in Johnson & Golombek, 2011). Freeman (2002) adds to this by emphasizing, that these preconceived notions are somewhat limiting since they are based on observations and a very superficial understanding of the profession, which in turn can negatively influence the development of teachers.

Vygotsky (1963, as cited in Johnson, 2009) defined these notions as “spontaneous and non-spontaneous concepts” also known as *everyday concepts*, these are understood as the concepts acquired through concrete practical experiences and can be accessible (non-spontaneous) or sometimes invisible (spontaneous) to conscious inspection. He also identified *scientific concepts*, which are the result of theoretical investigation within specific fields, and are systematic, coherent and generalizable. In agreement with the sociocultural theory, it is the responsibility of preservice programs to enable student-teachers to make connections between their everyday concepts, and their scientific concepts about language, language teaching, and language learning. The links made between this expert knowledge (scientific concepts) and the experiential knowledge (everyday concepts) of student-teachers, allows them to reframe the way they perceive themselves and their practices in the classroom, and to transform and adapt practices that are appropriate and meaningful for their own instructional contexts (Cochram-Smith & Lytle, 1993, as cited in Johnson, 2009).

This overview of the sociocultural theory applied to SLTE, and the concepts involved in learning to teach, have confirmed the importance of adopting this perspective when referring to the process of the Teaching Practicum, which will be further explored in the next sections.

### **3.2.1 Language Teacher Education Models**

Historically, most preservice programs in teacher education have relied on a transmission model (Tatto & Vélez, 1999; Mercado, 2007). Wallace (1991) analyzed and suggested a categorization for the most common types of models that are followed by

preservice programs in Language Teacher Education: 1) the craft model (Fig. 3.1); 2) the applied science model (Fig. 3.2); to finally suggest a third type of model which he would call: 3) the reflective model (Fig. 3.3). It is relevant for this research to explain these categories and their characteristics, since it is the chosen type of model the one that informs the actions and sets the goals to be pursued by any preservice program.

The *craft model* is defined as one of the most conservative models. In general, it relies on an expert practitioner who instructs the student-teacher on what to do and how to do it. Wallace makes an important point when he suggests that to apply this model would be to believe we live in a static society, when the reality is that our contexts are constantly evolving (ibid. p.6). For this reason, the craft model, at least in the field of education, might be regarded as outdated, even more so for the teaching of English as a foreign language.

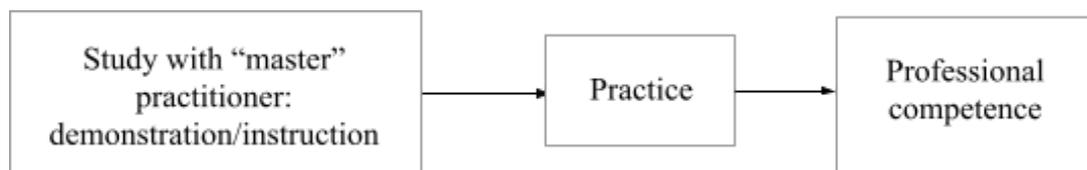


Figure 3.1 The craft model of professional education (Wallace,1991)

The *applied science model*, as the name suggests, is informed solely by scientific findings within specific areas of a field. It is one of the most common models implemented in almost any profession. It expects the student-teachers to be able to implement the empirical knowledge that has been studied and constructed by recognized experts. In this scenario student-teachers are meant to apply and prove theories, yet there is no space to challenge them or prove them wrong when they are only practitioners. Wallace (ibid.) demonstrated that the division between experts and practitioners becomes even more palpable in the field of education, and nowadays it has even become a matter of status. Researchers provide the

knowledge to be applied by practitioners (in-service teachers, student-teachers), even though the latters are first-hand witnesses of the issues to be “solved.”

As it is mentioned in the previous chapter (CH2), the decision of which model is going to be followed by Mexican preservice programs relies generally in authorities who may not be directly in touch with the process or the immediate results. In the case of the *Normal* system the responsibility of the setting of a model comes from a national level. This becomes a problem when, in the attempt to pursue a real professional development, the contexts and needs of student-teacher are not taken into account to carry out the Teaching Practicum. In the case of Public Universities, the model to be followed is generally the result of international trends. This once again, does not mean that international trends are the best possible models for Mexican Universities to follow, a point we will discuss later.

Moreover, Preservice Teacher Education around the world has come to a time where the providing of knowledge, theories, and skills to student-teachers is not nearly sufficient to satisfy the 21st century demands. As Darling-Hammond (2006) points out, teachers are now expected to prepare virtually all students for higher order thinking and performance skills that were once reserved to only a few. Given such ambitious goals for education, the pressure on preservice programs becomes even higher.

Although it is enriching to understand those who have come before us and have tried to give answers to the many questions in education, SLTE should not completely rely on a Craft or an Applied Science Model, based on the nature of the profession itself. Considering that teaching involves dealing with human beings who bring different experiences, stories and interests into the classrooms, it becomes quite pointless to expect the same results or reactions when trying to prove a theory. The following *Figure 3.2* shows the process that the applied science model considers achieving professional competence.

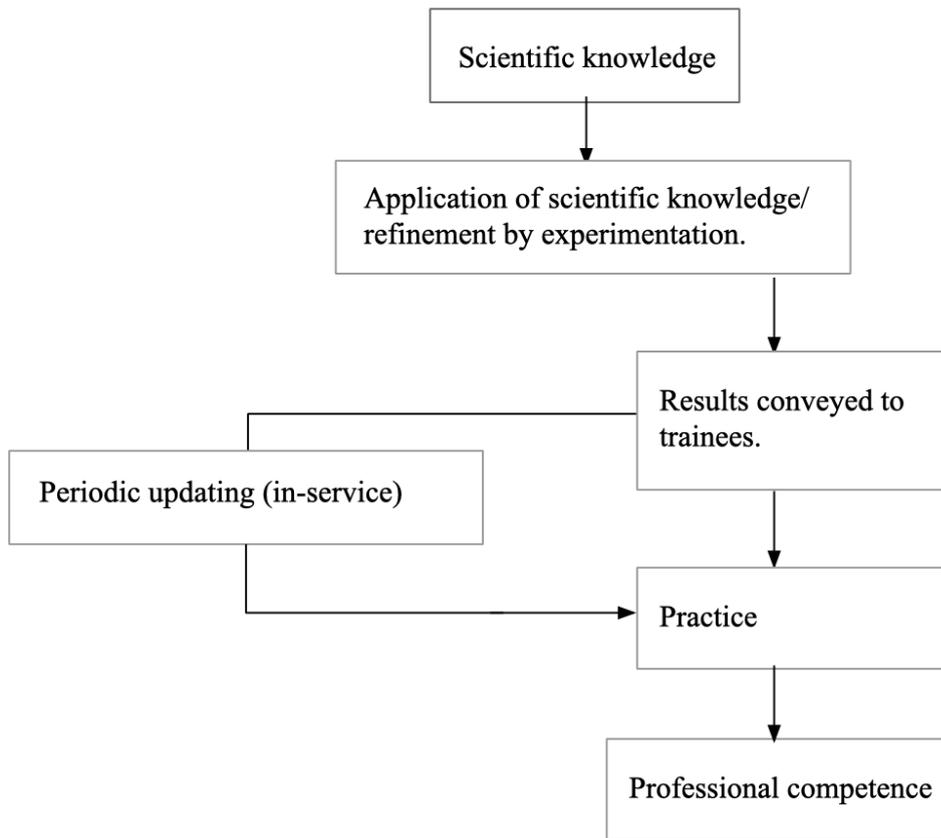


Figure 3.2 Applied science model (Wallace, 1991)

The *reflective model* was developed and adapted by Wallace (1991), taking into consideration the studies of Donald A. Schön (1983). As can be observed in Fig. 3.3, this model is seen as a two-stage process before reaching the goal of *professional competence*.

In contrast with the *applied science* and *craft model*, this model recognizes as part of the first stage, the fact that student-teachers bring their own experiences, attitudes, beliefs and ideas to the preservice programs. Wallace refers to these as mental constructs or mental schemata (1991, p. 50). The second stage involves a *practice-reflection* moment, and includes two types of knowledge which, in turn, will inform each other, as well as the process of professional education: received and experiential knowledge.

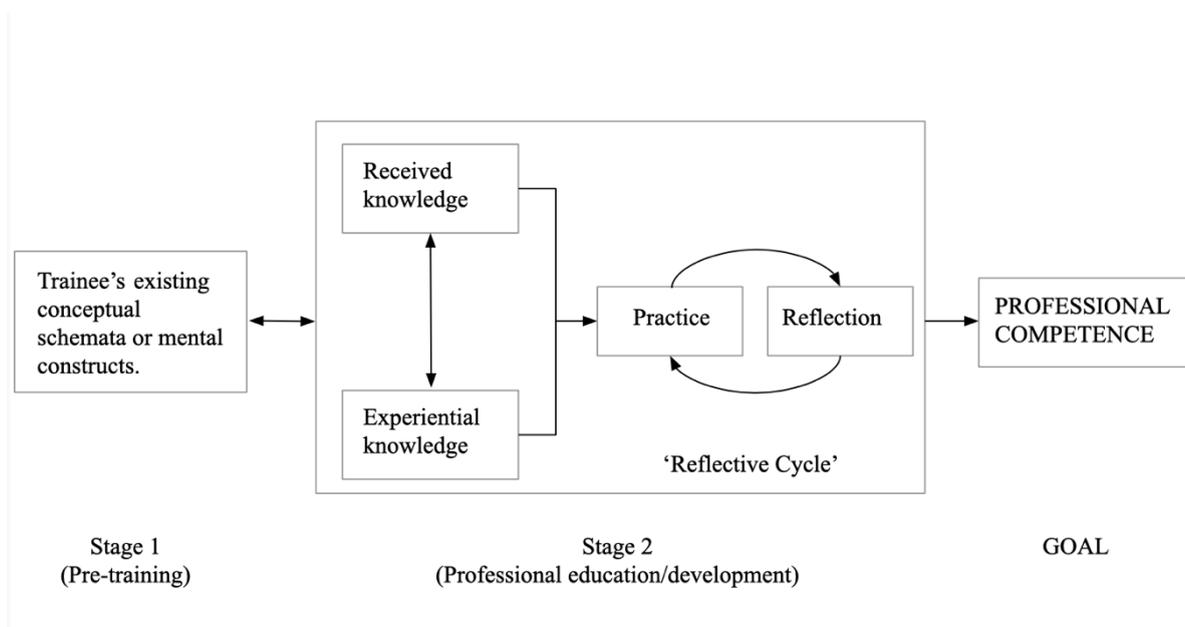


Figure 3.3 Reflective practice model of professional education/development (Wallace, 1991)

In this case, received knowledge makes reference to the data and theories associated to the profession, a compilation of theories that emerged mostly in the 1970's. Meanwhile, experiential knowledge refers to the practical experience (practicum) that student-teachers are able to obtain during their preservice programs. Wallace emphasizes *reflection* by stating that “practice is valuable for professional development to the extent that it is reflected upon (...) and the issue is not whether or not there is reflection, but it is the quality of the reflection itself” (1991, p.54) the one that will lead to any development.

As can be noted, the *reflective model* seems to be well aligned with the sociocultural theory, since it takes the student-teachers' experiences as the first step towards professional competence, taking into consideration that at some point, there will be someone or some artifacts mediating the development of student-teachers. It gives as well, a great deal of importance to the reflection happening during the practical experience. It is in this process where, according to Wallace, the quality of the practicum lies on. Nevertheless, it is necessary to weigh the feasibility to implement such model in a country like Mexico where reflection is

unfortunately not a common practice and education is carried out with a teacher-centered approach in public education. Students in general are not taught or encouraged to reflect on their actions, presenting a limitation for the application of the reflective model.

There is a considerable amount of work by well-known international scholars, who have contributed to the discussion of what quality in Preservice Programs in Language Teacher Education would imply (Richards & Nunan, 1990; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Farrell, 2015; Ball, 2000; Fullan, 2007; Bailey, 2006; Beck & Kosnik, 2006), and while all of the contributions are absolutely valuable, it is only logic to assert that they are all thought to be applied in contexts similar to those where they emerged (Canada, US, and Australia for the most part). Unfortunately, Teacher Education in Latin America is far from relating to the above-mentioned contexts, where differences can be found in all aspects of society, economic, socio-cultural, and undoubtedly educational; thus, making it difficult to implement or follow any innovative model or methodology that was not created by having in mind such characteristics.

Despite all this, it is the case of countries like Mexico where the adoption of foreign models and methods is a common practice. Liddicoat (2004) maintained that these practices respond to a lack of strong and adequate policies in education, and that stating a method as the “solution” to a wider problem without taking other important factors into account, leads to poor results, thus the failure of policies. This is not to say that contributions from external parties should not be followed by any Latin American country, though, it opens the debate and is left for consideration the extent to which these foreign models are followed.

Although the discussion on Teacher Education in Latin American countries specifically in Mexico has increased over the years (Carnoy, 2005), the conversation about initial preparation of English Teachers is yet to be adequately addressed. Even though studies at initial teacher preparation in Mexico have been somehow enlightening (Ramírez-Romero

& Sayer, 2016; Ramírez-Romero, Pamplón & Cota, 2014; Quezada, 2013; Sayer, Mercay and Blanco, 2013; Sayer, 2013), they have mostly remained in the periphery (Banks, 2017, p.2), since they are mostly based on the current practices carried out by teachers, but has not yet turned to see how these teachers are actually being prepared. In addition, students' outcomes are also taken as important sources of information for how good or bad a teacher is. These challenges point out the need for more detailed investigations on initial education for English Teachers specifically in the context of Mexico.

### **3.3 Teaching Practicum in Language Teacher Education**

As it was mentioned in the first chapter, one of the main statements of this research is based on the assumption that the Teaching Practicum represents the most crucial component of a Preservice Program (Castañeda-Trujillo & Aguirre-Hernández, 2018; Farrell, 2008; Farrell, 2007; Fajardo & Miranda, 2015; Méndez & Bonilla, 2015; Caires, Almeida & Vieira; Morales-Cortés, 2016; Serdar and Çeçen, 2016). Crookes (2003 as cited in Burns & Richards, 2009) argues that this field-based experience is the one that allows student-teachers to question and reflect on their own teaching decisions, and in alignment with the sociocultural perspective, the practicum raises student-teachers' awareness of the way their own values, beliefs, personal and educational experiences have an impact on their philosophy of learning and teaching. Provided that the model of the practicum to be followed has these aspects of reflection and awareness as their objectives, and works continually towards the accomplishment of such. Throughout this investigation, the term Teaching Practicum will be used to refer to any moment on SLTE Preservice Programs where student-teachers are required to develop their professional practice in a real school context under some form of guidance or supervision (Ahn, 2011).

Wallace (1991) discusses three types of Practicum based on the period spent at the practice setting and the preservice programs. First, the Serial School Experience, which is usually organized on a basis of one or two weeks and runs alongside with the preservice programs. Second, the Block School Experience, where student-teachers spend about five months to (in some cases) a complete semester in a school, but there may be occasional reunions back in their preservice programs with other classmates in order to reflect on the experience. Third, similar to the block school experience the Internship considers a longer stay at school settings, but the Internship takes place at the end of the preservice program. This may also be complementary to the other types of Practicum. In Table 3.1 the three models for practicum identified by Wallace (ibid.) are presented.

<b>Type of Practicum</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Limitations</b>
Serial school experience	Short periods at the practicum setting while still taking classes at the preservice program.	Superficial knowledge of the context, not real connection with students, or school staff, very touch and go.
Block school experience	Longer periods, coordinated reunions with preservice program supervisor/mentor and colleague student-teachers.	School placement. Liaison with schools. Alignment of goals and expectations for student-teachers between schools and preservice programs. Absence of supervision, mentoring or both. Lack of qualified/trained mentors or supervisors at school.
Internship	Long period situated at the end of the programs.	Supervision is not guaranteed, supervisors at school may not be prepared to guide student-teachers in this “learning to teach” process, can even become counterproductive if something goes wrong. Student teacher feels alone. Preservice programs do not have control over this specific practicum experience.

*Table 3.1 Types of Practicum and limitations (adapted from Wallace, 1991)*

As it is shown in *Table 3.1*, each type of practicum will entail certain limitations, which should be considered according to the context of the setting. The Serial School Experience offers student-teachers a glance of what a real school setting is like, yet this brevity impedes a true knowledge of the context and the people within. The block school experience on the other hand, provides a much richer involvement of student-teachers with the school context, the students, the administrative staff and the rest of the teachers. In this case the next aspects will be accounted as limitations if not present in the practicum, though it is important to note that their presence without any real quality and effort towards the development of student-teachers will have been surely in vain.

First, the process of school placement has generally two options, preservice programs assign a school via a pre-existing liaison, although, it is often the case where student-teachers must find a school on their own because of the lack of agreements with surrounding schools. Second, schools and preservice programs are not usually aligned with what to expect and demand from student-teachers. This miscommunication regularly leads to overwhelming student-teachers with workload, leaving student-teachers alone in classrooms, to even undermining their work in front of pupils. Third, the quality of supervision and feedback student-teachers receive, whether from school teachers, mentors or supervisors from their programs. This generally responds to the absence of training for such roles (mentoring or supervising), and eventually depends on the experience, time and effort of the person in the role of mentor or supervisor.

Finally, the main constraint of the Internship type of practicum is that it does not necessarily involve any type of mentoring or supervision, at least not as a formative aspect

during the practicum, but instead as a more bureaucratic feature since, it is mostly a prerequisite in Mexican universities, regardless of the career, to obtain the bachelor's degree.

There are some critical but well-based arguments on the importance that should be given to the teaching practicum and the way it is planned. For instance, Gregory and Allen (1978) recommend caution to program planners before relying too much on the benefits of the teaching practicum, since there are also negative effects that this field-based experience can have on student-teachers (see Kourieos, 2015). On the other hand, they suggest it would be beneficial to “identify the factors which cause a negative impact (...) and if those factors can be reliably identified and dealt with in planning, the value of the practicum may be improved substantially” (p.54).

Many researchers have approached the Teaching Practicum from different perspectives. Some have analyzed how student-teachers resignified this experience and what were the attitudes towards teaching that existed before the practicum, and the attitudes that changed or emerged from experiencing it (Reyes & Fortoul, 2009; Morales, 2016; Fajardo & Miranda, 2015; Castañeda-Trujillo & Aguirre-Hernández, 2018; Suárez & Basto, 2017; Kourieos, 2012); there are others that have focused on the support that student-teachers receive during this practice (Farrell, 2008), either from school teachers or mentors (Encinas-Prudencio & Sánchez-Hernández, 2015); the challenges that student-teachers experience (Alamri, 2018); and the process of evaluation of the practicum have also been present in research (Rodríguez, 2009).

While investigation within SLTE in the Mexican context has grown over the decades, research on the Teaching Practicum as a whole process in preservice programs, has been somewhat limited with a few studies about reflection (Ariza, 2016; Dzay, Mejía & Cano,

2019; Gullotti y Vermont, 2018); practicum in-situ (Fernández de Castro and Toledo, 2013) and a self-exploratory research on supervisory practices (Estudillo & Sánchez, 2013). In the analysis coordinated by Ramírez-Romero about the state of research on SLTE in Mexico (2013), it was shown that Teacher Education until the year of 2011 occupied only 7% of the investigations at a national level. Concluding that the lines of investigation in the Mexican context were yet to be consolidated.

At an international level, Ong'ondo and Jwan (2009) carried out a literature review on Teaching Practicum, and found that most of the studies considered at the time, could be classified in five categories: 1) student teacher learning; 2) collaboration amongst student-teachers; 3) collaboration between student-teachers and cooperative teachers; 4) supervision; and 5) organization of the practicum. Based on their findings, Ong'ondo and Jwan (ibid.) suggested that research on Teaching Practicum can be characterized for being too concentrated in particular and isolated features of the practicum. It is also important to mention that none of the studies that were considered for this classification took place in contexts similar to those in Mexico. Nevertheless, this helped the researcher gain perspective and acknowledge the need and importance of this type of investigation.

Another key aspect is the lack of studies that allow Mexican researchers to make well-founded comparisons on what is being done in Teaching Practicum within two important institutions that prepare future English Teachers in Mexico: *Normales* and Public Universities.

### **3.3.1 Supervision**

This investigation intends to approach the terms of mentoring and supervision separately, even though in some programs -as we will see in the discussion- the terms are

used interchangeably. The role of supervision and mentoring in the process of the teaching practicum whether in Public Universities or Normal Schools is a crucial factor to consider when exploring these practices by reason of the impact they have on the experience and the development of S-Ts. For example, if a S-T does not have any type of guidance or assistance in this first experience, there is a possibility of her not making the most of the practicum, this of course, will mostly depend on the type of student. There can be students who feel more comfortable when having an expert telling them what they do right or wrong, as well as there can be students who will not mind being left alone to adjust and learn independently.

Brenes et al., (2010 p. 17) developed the following Table 3.2 to summarize the different titles supervisors or mentors receive in Universities and Normales in Mexican SLTE programs.

<b>Mentor/supervisor Titles</b>	<b>Sites</b>
<b>Supervisor</b>	<b>In universities;</b> those working with student-teachers, or <i>practicantes</i> , in their <i>licenciatura</i> programs.
<b>Asesor</b>	<b>In normales;</b> those working with student-teachers, or <i>practicantes</i> , in their <i>licenciatura</i> programs.
<b>Mentor</b>	<b>In schools;</b> mentor teachers working with student-teachers, or <i>practicantes</i> , from the universities.
<b>Tutores/Titulares</b>	<b>In schools,</b> mentor teachers working with student-teachers, or <i>practicantes</i> , from the <i>normales</i> .

*Table 3.2 Mentor/supervisor Titles used in Mexico. (Brenes et al., 2010)*

As can be seen in the table above, each of these institutions use different titles to refer to the person in charge of S-Ts during the Teaching Practicum from each of their Preservice Programs. Nevertheless, throughout this investigation the term Supervisor will be used interchangeably within Normales and Universities in order to avoid confusion.

Wallace (1991) defines a supervisor as “any person who has the duty of monitoring and improving the quality of teaching done by other colleagues in a given educational

situation” (p.107). Supervision can be divided in two broad categories: general and clinical supervision. General supervision can be described as only concerned with administrative aspects of the practices, curriculum and it is sometimes seen as purely bureaucratic. On the other hand, clinical supervision is concerned with what actually happens inside the classroom, however, it also involves a whole other range of varieties within itself, which will be further explored in this section.

The term *clinical supervision* was originally coined by Cogan (1973), where he suggested this to be considered as a training mode, based on interactions face to face between supervisors and trainees. These interactions must make reference to previously observed classroom teaching, where they are discussed and analysed in order to achieve professional development.

Further on, Freeman (1982) proposed three approaches to this type of supervision to be finally complemented by Gebhardt in 1984. These five categories were: directive supervision, alternative supervision, collaborative supervision, non-directive supervision and creative supervision. In contrast to this, Wallace (1991) suggests seeing supervision in a simpler way: a series of possible supervisory behaviors within two general approaches: Classic Prescriptive Approach and Classic collaborative approach (*Table 3.3*).

<b>Classic prescriptive</b>	<b>Classic collaborative</b>
1. Supervisor as authority figure.	Supervisor as colleague
2. Supervisor as the only source of expertise.	Supervisor and trainee or teacher as co-sharers of expertise.
3. Supervisor judges.	Supervisor understands.
4. Supervisor applies a “blueprint” on how the lesson should be taught.	Supervisor has no blueprint, she accepts the lesson in terms of what the trainee or teacher is attempting to do.
5. Supervisor talks, trainee listens.	Supervisor considers listening as important as talking.

6. Supervisor attempts to preserve authority and mystique.	Supervisor attempts to help trainee or teacher develop autonomy, through practice in reflection and self-evaluation.
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*Table 3.3 Supervisory Behaviors (Wallace, 1991)*

As can be observed, there are two contrasting ways to approach supervision. Firstly, the prescriptive approach could be directly linked with the features of the *applied science model*, since the trainee only receives theories and goes out to prove them. In this scenario (practicum) the supervisor is the one and only source of information supported sometimes by theories and others by their own “expertise.” This contrasts the collaborative approach, which relates more with the characteristics of the *reflective model*, where trainees are expected to achieve autonomy or professional competence, by reflecting on their own experiences and practices.

As reflected by Wallace, there can be supervisors who present characteristics from both approaches in their practice, he argues that much of this will respond to the characteristics and the needs of S-Ts (1991, p.10). As an illustration of this point, Freeman suggested that a prescriptive approach could provide a type of certainty for both trainees and supervisors (1982, as cited in Wallace,1991). Similar to Copeland (1982 as cited in Wallace,1991), who found out that there are some S-Ts who feel more at ease when being told what to do when they first start to teach. In this case trainees know what is expected from them, and are even provided with guidelines to get there. As mentioned before, there are authors who have used the Mexican context to carry out research on supervision (Lengeling, 2007;). However, some of the investigations are focused only on in-service teachers (see Ariza, 2016; Estudillo & Sánchez 2013).

### 3.3.2 Mentoring

Mentoring is recognized as part of professional development, which provides non evaluative and nonthreatening sources of support (Bailey, Curtis and Nunan, 2001). Various authors (Eisenman and Thornton, 1999; Bland, Taylor, Shollen, Webermain, Mulcahy, 2009;), trace the term “mentor” back to Homer’s Odyssey and the origins of the apprenticeship system of crafts.

Bailey, Curtis and Nunan (2001), define the term mentoring in the English Language Teaching profession as “an interpersonal, ongoing, situated, supportive and informative professional relationship between two or more individuals, one of whom (mentor) has more experience in the profession”, they go on to say that even though it is an unequal power relationship, it is not meant to be supervisory. In addition, Malderez & Bodóczy (1999, as cited in Bailey, Curtis and Nunan, 2001) identify five roles in mentoring, where mentors serve as 1) models; 2) acculturators; 3) sponsors; 4) supporters; 5) educators.

<b>Mentors as:</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Models</b>	To inspire and to demonstrate
<b>Acculturators</b>	To help the mentee become accustomed to the particular professional culture
<b>Sponsors</b>	To open doors and introduce the mentee to the right people. Power and control are not shared; the mentor has primary responsibility for managing the process. Directive styles such as coaching and guiding are used.
<b>Supporters</b>	To provide the mentee with a safe place to release emotions or let off steam.
<b>Educators</b>	To listen to coach and to create appropriate opportunities for the mentee’s professional learning.

*Table 3.4 Descriptions of specific mentoring models (adapted from Encinas Prudencio et al. 2015)*

According to Bland, et al. (2009) mentoring can also be divided in three different models: traditional, peer and group mentoring. As it can be observed in *Table 3.5* (mentoring models) these models require big efforts, such as human resources (experienced), as well as the appropriate organization to introduce it to a preservice program. There are also many constraints to any of these models, which will be discussed in the following chapters in accordance with each of the institutions involved in this research.

<b>Mentoring model</b>	<b>Main characteristics</b>	<b>Limitations</b>
<b>Traditional mentoring</b>	Mainly hierarchical, experienced member of preservice programs serves as mentor. Mentee has access to the expertise of the mentor.	The status quo prevails. Not enough “expert” teachers to serve as mentors, imbalanced proportion of student-teachers vs. mentors available and willing.
<b>Peer mentoring</b>	Communication is easier due to the lack of hierarchical structure. Student-teachers feel safe.	The lack of expertise amongst peers, puts in question the development that student-teachers can actually attain.
<b>Group mentoring</b>	Differs from peer mentoring because it has a designated leader (expert) on the field. Helps developing peer mentoring relationships within the group.	Level of involvement, sense of belonging among student-teachers. Student teachers’ attitudes towards the group. Relationships among mentor and mentees to create a safe environment.

*Table 3.5 Models of mentoring (Bland et al., 2009)*

As proposed by Bland et al. (2009) a variation of models can also be a good option, as long as the needs of all those involved and the resources available (human and material) are taken into consideration. Finally, to see mentoring in a broader way, they suggest three basic characteristics that any mentoring model should involve in order to provide a successful mentoring experience: 1) Quality of the mentoring relationship matters and must be attended

for optimal learning to occur; 2) Mentees should be able to have different mentors in order to gain different perspectives and a variety of types of support; 3) Formal and intentional approach to mentoring, this is to say, every interaction between mentors and mentees should be deliberate, structured and goal-oriented.

### **3.3.3 Mediation in SLTE**

*Mediation*, as discussed at the beginning of the chapter, is one of the most important aspects when adopting a sociocultural theory. Since, “it shapes the interactions (occurring through written and verbal dialogue) and the qualitative transformations that occur in the process of mental development” (Golombek and Johnson, 2019). With this in mind, *mediation* is considered a priority in this investigation, for the impact it has on student-teachers’ development during the process of the Teaching Practicum. After all, it is through *mediation* how student-teachers transform what is relevant from their preservice programs, for their own contexts and purposes. As Golombek and Johnson conclude, “the focus then, is not on the teacher educator or the student-teacher, but on the quality of the activities they engage in together, and especially the resources they use to accomplish certain goals (professional competence)”(ibid.).

Johnson (2009) suggests that SLTE presents an outdated division between theory and practice. She states that student-teachers may know all there is to know about SLA, language learning or language use, but they are still not being taught how to proceed from said knowledge. Vygotsky’s theory proposed that, there is a dialectic relationship between *everyday concepts* and *scientific concepts*, since each is acquired in relation to the other. In other words, student-teachers make sense of new scientific concepts through their everyday

concepts as well as scientific concepts can have the potential to restructure student-teachers' everyday understandings. As discussed earlier, SLTE programs are responsible for mediating student-teachers' understanding of theories and concepts, enabling them to move beyond their everyday concepts into more theoretically and pedagogically sound instructional practices (Johnson and Golombek, 2011). According to Golombek and Johnson (2019) SLTE programs should create *structured mediational spaces*, where S-Ts will be encouraged and supported (both emotional and cognitively) to externalize within a safe environment their current understandings of concepts. At the same time, *structured mediational spaces* and teacher educators in charge of them, should be aware of S-Ts real zone of development to implement strategic activities to expose S-Ts to scientific concepts. Thus, fostering the transformation of both S-Ts and their concept development. These activities and their potential input will depend on the type of mediation planned by the teacher educator.

Unfortunately, it is still very complicated for *mediation* to be placed at the core of preservice programs both in theory and in practice, considering it is a rather new concept on the field of SLTE and it implies a true understanding of the concepts of the sociocultural theory and every action and artifacts teacher educators use in this process must be goal-oriented, structured and by all means intentional.

On the other hand, as mentioned in the contextual chapter, another limiting condition in Mexico for SLTE programs and public education in general, is the deeply ingrained tradition of teacher-centered classrooms, decontextualization of the curriculum and memorization as a sign of learning. Even if the national curriculum is allegedly based on the sociocultural theory, teachers that are supposed to enforce the curriculum in the future are

still being prepared in a cognitive and very prescriptive way. This will most likely lead to student-teachers replicating the practices they observed during their preservice programs.

### **3.3.3.1 Mediating artifacts**

All human-made objects (material and symbolic) can be considered artifacts but not all artifacts can be accounted as mediating tools. Swain, Kinnear & Steinman (2011) explain that artifacts may have the potential to become mediating means but only until used as such. In other words, artifacts can only become mediating artifacts if there is a clear purpose to utilize them. One of the main aspects in the everyday and scientific concepts dialectic relationship involves the use of language (symbolic tool). Golombek and Johnson (2019) argue that the use of *dialogic mediation* is an essential part of development within the SCT. If student-teachers can verbalize (to themselves or others) their current understandings of new knowledge, and through the use of their everyday concepts are able to reconceptualize and appropriate such knowledge, then it can be said that they have begun to *think in concepts*, bringing them closer to the goal of professional competence.

In SLTE programs it is very common the use of checklists, mandatory formats, journals, portfolios and a long list of etceteras as evidence of learning and completion of a stage of the preservice program. Nevertheless, as Swain, Kinnear and Steinman (2011) highlight, it is not only the simple use of these tools what will transform them into mediating artifacts, but the use of these tools in a deliberate, structured and goal-oriented manner will set the distance between a bureaucratic tool and a *mediating artifact* that will lead to professional competence.

Bearing this in mind, the *mediating artifacts* used and the quality of *mediation* throughout the teaching practicum, will unquestionably be an aspect worth analyzing in both

Normales and Public Universities. Provided that teacher educators in these programs carry out the process of mediation, deliberately and structured as such.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

In this chapter the main concepts of the Sociocultural Theory were addressed in order to provide a stance on how SLTE might best be carried out. As it is the framework of the investigation, it was necessary to highlight the importance that concepts such as mediation, and mediating artifacts have on the process of the Teaching Practicum.

## CHAPTER IV: METHODOLOGY

### 4.0 Introduction

The next chapter focuses on the description of the settings and participants that were part of the research. In addition, the methodology to be followed and the data collection strategies are explored in depth in order to provide the reader with information that can justify the selection for such methodology and data collection strategies. Finally, the role of the researcher, limitations, and the ethical considerations of the methodology are presented.

### 4.1 Research Design

Given the nature of the process to be studied [Teaching Practicum], the use of qualitative research seemed to be the most suitable decision to carry out the investigation. As explained by Richards, the use of qualitative research will provide in depth information such as patterns and reasons that lie behind human behavior (2003, p.9). More specifically this qualitative research can be described as a case study approach, based on the institutions to be explored, which is defined as:

A qualitative approach in which the researcher explores in depth a program, an event, an activity, a process, or one or more individuals. The case (s) are bounded by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures (Stake, 1995, as cited in Creswell, 2003, p. 15).

As stated above, the use of four different strategies to obtain data gave this investigation the possibility to triangulate information from different sources, thus enhancing validity and reliability of the study (Creswell, 2003, p.196). Moreover, in view of the few studies that have tried to reconcile contexts such as *Normales* and *Public Universities*. This research is presented as an innovative perspective, since the use of exploratory and

ethnographic methods will enrich the investigation, and therefore broaden the scope of the study.

As previously mentioned, this case study is focused on the process of the Teaching Practicum in two specific settings: *Normales* and *Public Universities*. In the following sections, information about the participants, the settings, and the data collection strategies are presented.

## 4.2 Settings

As mentioned earlier, the purpose of this research is to explore the structure and implementation of the Teaching Practicum in two of the main public institutions with English language teacher education pre-service programs. As stated in the previous chapter, these institutions have undergone a series of political and social movements which have marked the path they both have followed. On the one hand, the *Normal* school system has historically depended on the decisions made by the federal government for the implementation of programs or curriculum development, thus proving it difficult to achieve any type of change that could better suit their contextual needs. On the other hand, Public Universities have enjoyed academic freedom and it is each University or its faculties, the ones who develop and implement their curriculum, sometimes assessed by national or international consultants.

For the selection of the institutions the requirements were: 1) being a public institution; 2) programs focused on preparing English Teachers and 3) Teaching Practicum being specifically addressed in the curriculums. Moreover, the selection of only two preservice programs from Normales and two from Universities was established due to time constraints to develop the research, proximity of the institutions, availability of participants within the programs and most importantly access granted to the researcher by each of their authorities.

In order to gain entry, the researcher made use of personal contacts (from Universities), email exchanges with coordinators from both institutions, as well as providing paperwork (in the case of *Normales*) with specifications on the aims of the research, the instruments to be used, the participants required, and the dates to carry out the collection of data. It is important to emphasize that the majority of the connections were first established in an International Conference for Foreign Language Educators (CIFEL, 2018), where some of the coordinators, supervisors, and the researcher were presenters or attendees. This has proven the importance of sharing research nationally and internationally, since it gives way to new and surely necessary research within the field.

### **4.3 Participants**

Throughout the Teaching Practicum (TP) there are different actors with whom student-teachers are compelled to work with, such as school teachers, mentors, colleagues, administrative staff from schools and administratives from their own institutions. In this case, participants were selected according to access and involvement in the Teaching Practicum.

The participants of this research are student-teachers, which from now on will be represented with the acronym S-T. In addition to Teacher Educators in charge of the practicum, which are commonly named differently depending on the institution, but who will be addressed as Supervisors throughout the entire discussion in order to avoid confusion.

The participants were four groups of preservice S-Ts, two from *Normales* and two from Public Universities who completed their Teaching Practicum in both public and private sectors. Since the step of procuring a place to carry out practicums in a school is part of the process being investigated, it would be of interest to understand if the linkages between schools and institutions have an important impact on the accompaniment of the TP. As for the

supervising roles of the TP, the participants were one supervisor from each institution and two coordinators from one Normal and one University.

#### 4.4 Data collection strategies

Considering the research questions that guided this study, and the purpose of comparing the same process within two different institutions. It was determined to divide the investigation in stages in order to contrast information obtained from documents and participants. As illustrated in Table 4.1 below, a piloting stage was initially implemented in order to examine the effectiveness of the instruments and providing the researcher with a first experience leading an interview and a focus group.

	<b>Instruments</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Purpose</b>
<b>Pilot</b>	Questionnaire, focus group.	Student-Teachers	Evaluate the efficiency of the instruments.
	Interview.	Supervisor.	Changes: Language, amount of questions, materials needed.
<b>Stage 1</b>	Revision of documents	Curriculums Syllabi	Explore the curriculum, and the moment where TP is introduced. Explore the objectives and structure of the TP.
<b>Stage 2</b>	Questionnaires, focus group. Interviews.	Student-Teachers,  Supervisor, coordinators.	Explore the actual practices, experiences and opinions of the participants.

*Table 4.1 Stages of the data collection.*

As it is shown in the table above, the results obtained from the piloting stage required the researcher to implement changes to the instruments. For instance, based on the responses of participants, it was found that the implementation of questionnaires in English could become a limitation for S-T who might not possess the sufficient competence in the language to provide full and in-depth answers. Considering that the purpose of this investigation is by

no means measuring S-T level of English, it was decided to carry out the entire data collection process in Spanish.

Regarding the rest of the stages, the purpose of the first stage dealt with what is officially established as the Teaching Practicum in the curriculum of each program, such as the first moments where the Practicum is located and if the objective and structure are stated within the documents. Furthermore, the second stage would explore opinions and experiences on the process from the S-T and the Supervisors' perspectives. As for the data collection strategies, these were selected in agreement with Creswell's description of the characteristics of qualitative research presented above, where he suggested the use of a vast array of material and multiple methods that are interactive and humanistic (2003, p.182). In the following sections each of the strategies used throughout the research will be explored.

#### **4.4.1 Revision of documents**

One of the purposes for carrying out a revision of documents is to examine what is the official objective and structure of the Teaching Practicum according to each program, as well as the moment this is first included in the curriculum, in addition to exploring the official process to carry out the Practicum including the supervision aspect if available. This information would be a starting point to compare what does the curriculum establish the Practicum should be, and what is actually happening between and within these institutions.

As explained by Creswell, there are different advantages when using document analysis. For example, it is an unobtrusive way of obtaining data and it can be accessed at a convenient time for the researcher. In addition, the creation of such data represents thoughtful and previous work it does not necessarily require too much time to access to it. (2003, p.187) Nonetheless, there are some limitations such as the difficulty to find specific documents, since they might be protected or confined to a certain audience. Also, the authenticity and accuracy of the material require close attention.

In the following Table 4.2, the documents used for the analysis are presented, in addition to where each one was obtained.

<b>Institutions</b>	<b>Type of document</b>	<b>Retrieved from</b>
<b>Normal A &amp; B</b>	1) Curriculum 1999	<i>Dirección General de Educación Superior para Profesionales de la Educación</i> (General Management of Higher Education for Professionals of Education) <a href="https://www.dgespe.sep.gob.mx">https://www.dgespe.sep.gob.mx</a>
	2) <i>Las actividades de observación y práctica docente en las escuelas secundarias.</i> (The activities of observation and teaching practice in secondary schools)	SEP, 1999 <a href="https://es.scribd.com/doc/188488742/Actividades-de-Observacion-y-Practica-Docente">https://es.scribd.com/doc/188488742/Actividades-de-Observacion-y-Practica-Docente</a>
<b>University A</b>	1) A Resource guide for TEFL Mentors and Supervisors in Mexico.	Published guide. (Brenes, M. G., et al., 2010).
	2) Curriculum	University's website
	3) Professional Practices: student's manual.	
	4) Format of S-T performance;	
	5) Global Report;	
	6) Activities plan;	
	7) Applicant's, progressive and graduate's profile.	
<b>University B</b>	1) Curriculum 2016	
	2) Applicant's & graduate's profile.	University's website
	3) Syllabus for Teaching Experience.	Personal contact
	4) Mentor's evaluation	Personal contact
	5) Content of CD	Personal contact
	6) Log daily evidences	Personal contact
	7) Log S-T attendance	Personal contact
	8) Log meetings with tutor.	Personal contact
	9) A Resource guide for TEFL Mentors and Supervisors in Mexico.	Published guide. (Brenes, M. G., et al., 2010).

*Table 4.2 Documents used in the analysis*

As shown above, there are considerably more documents obtained from both Universities than those from *Normales*. In the case of *Normales* the curriculum was found in

the website of the General Management of Higher Education for Professionals in Education (*Dirección General de Educación Superior para Profesionales de la Educación*). In addition, the document on Observation and Teaching Practice was found through websites from a different institution. Since every normal is supposed to follow the same protocol, this document therefore applies to the analysis of the practicum of these institutions.

#### **4.4.2 Questionnaires**

As it was previously stated, a first questionnaire for S-T was piloted (see Appendix 1) in order to explore the weak aspects and be able to improve it for further implementation. The questionnaire was divided in three stages of the Practicum to be explored: 1. Before the practicum, which had eight questions related to school placement, mentor assignment, and their perception of this first process. 2. During the practicum, which had fourteen questions related to planning, observations and environment at school. 3. After the practicum, which had five questions related to the completion of the practicum and the process to be followed. The division of the questionnaire in these three stages, is based on the supervision protocol established by Goldsberry (1987). It is also considering the stages which S-T are normally evaluated, since the process begins before they go to schools, continues during their stay, and finalizes even after they have completed their mandatory hours.

The total of questions was twenty-seven and the approximate time to answer was 40 min. It is relevant to mention that the questionnaire was written in English taking into consideration the nature of the preservice program to teach the English language, which would require teachers to attain a good level of proficiency. Nevertheless, the piloting process evidenced that student-teachers were not able to answer open ended questions in depth, or the answers were vague and unrelated to the questions. The previous, led to the decision to carry

out the entire process of data collection in the participants native language: Spanish (Appendix 2).

The application of questionnaires was carried out according resources and closeness to the participants, an online questionnaire was available for one of the institutions. Regarding the Normales, the questionnaires were printed, answered and later emptied on a database according to institutions.

#### **4.4.3 Interviews**

In order to give voice to participant's perspectives and experiences when being part of the Teaching Practicum, it was decided to carry out personal and group semi-structured interviews. Creswell claims that through interviews, participants are able to provide historical information, and the researcher has control over the line of questioning. He goes on to mention that some of the limitations might be that information is filtered through the view of respondents, as well as the participants' answers might be biased by the presence of the researcher. On the other hand, participants are not equally articulate and perceptive (2003, p.186).

##### **4.4.3.1 Personal interviews**

The personal interviews were carried out with supervisors, and in some cases coordinators of the preservice programs. In this process, the purpose of the study was explained, and participants signed a consent form in order to use their responses throughout the investigation while at the same time ensuring their anonymity. Additionally, the semi-structured interview was divided in the same three stages as the questionnaires (before, during and after the Practicum) (see Appendix 3). At the same time, the interview was

recorded with two devices for later transcription and analysis. In the case of the student-teachers, given the number of participants in the groups, a different approach was used to exert their opinions, this is explained in the following section .

#### **4.4.3.2 Focus groups (group interviews)**

In order to triangulate the information obtained from the questionnaires, a focus group was carried out with the student-teachers (see Appendix 4). This data collection strategy has been defined by Krueger & Casey (2000) as “carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment”.

The selection of this data collection strategy was also influenced by the number of student-teachers involved in the institutions, and the fact that focus groups would allow the researcher to gain a large amount of information as well. It is also recognized by some researchers that participants are more willing to participate and provide more thorough answers when they are surrounded by colleagues and are able to bounce back responses and ideas. For this investigation, the focus groups were audio-recorded and transcribed for later analysis, and each session contained the three stages of TP: previous, during and after.

#### **4.4 Data Analysis procedure**

This section will provide a thorough explanation about the data analysis procedures carried out by the researcher regarding each of the strategies implemented. As it was previously stated, the investigation was divided in three different stages, taking into consideration the piloting phase. First, the document analysis was entirely guided by the first research question. Each official document of the participant institutions where the Practicum was mentioned were reviewed. In order to compare and analyze the information obtained

from institutions, three graphic organizers were created. From this point on, a description of the practicum was provided about each of the institutions, this was followed by the interpretation of the researcher based on the literature reviewed. As Creswell points out, the essence of qualitative research lies on the interpretations of the researcher. These are drawn at specific socio-cultural and political moments which are inevitable personal biases that need to be acknowledged and reflected upon (2003, p.182)

For the second stage of the analysis, the amount of information was divided into 30 questionnaires, four focus groups and six interviews. In Table 4.3 the information obtained is organized according to institution.

	<b>Normal A</b>	<b>Normal B</b>	<b>University A</b>	<b>University B</b>
<b>Questionnaires</b>	6	10	6	8
<b>Focus groups</b>	1	1	1	1
<b>Interviews</b>	1	2	2	1

*Table 4.3 Data obtained per institution.*

In order to easily access to the information for the analysis, all focus groups and interviews were transcribed. In the case of questionnaires, the ones answered on paper were emptied to a Google form in order for the information to be concentrated in single files. Since all three data collection strategies addressed the three stages, before, during and after the practicum, the most salient information from these stages was emptied into three different tables, before, during and after the practicum. These tables in turn, allowed to compare and contrast the information provided by S-T or Supervisors among the four institutions. An example of one of the tables is provided below.

<i>Before the practicum</i>	<i>University A Student-teachers</i>	<i>University A Supervisor</i>	<i>University B Student-teachers</i>	<i>University B Supervisor</i>
<i>Liasion</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>S-t perceive placement in a school as acceptable. (Q)</li> <li>S-t perceive there should be more options to choose school. (Q)</li> <li>Most s-t practice within the faculties of the University. (FG)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Process is dictated by the General Management of Professional Practices. (I)</li> <li>Supervisor considers this as a limitation to actually carry out the objective of the practicum. (I)</li> <li>Coordination gathered RU to provide guidelines for school teachers. (I)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>S-t in <i>Teaching E.</i> perceive the process as good, sometimes facilitated by their supervisor of the subject. (Q)</li> <li>S-t in <i>Teaching E.</i> are in charge of looking for a school. (Q)</li> <li>S-t in <i>Professional P.</i> think is too slow. (Q)</li> <li>S-t perceive is harder to access SEP schools than others. (FG)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>S-t are free to find schools for <i>TE.</i> (I)</li> <li><i>Professional Practices</i> are directed by the Coordination. (I)</li> <li>School teachers are not required to fulfill any type of role. (I)<sup>o</sup></li> </ul>
<i>S-T level of preparedness in English</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Half of s-t consider they are very well prepared in English. (Q)</li> <li>Some s-t consider they need to review aspects of English before teaching. (Q)</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Most s-t consider they are sufficiently prepared in English. (Q)</li> <li>Two s-t consider their English level to be insufficient. (Q)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some s-t are limited on the language competence, impeding their practice.</li> <li>S-t should have finished English classes of their Preservice Program.</li> </ul>
<i>S-T level of preparedness in Pedagogy</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>S-t consider they are sufficiently prepared in pedagogic aspects to carry out Practicum. (Q)</li> <li>S-t consider they received too much theory but needed more practice in real contexts. (FG)</li> <li>S-t face practicum until the end and is a shock.</li> <li>Some s-t perceive micro-teaching to be far from reality.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Most s-t consider they are well prepared to carry out the Practicum. (Q)</li> <li>Some s-t consider micro-teaching to be unreal and sometimes not helpful.</li> <li>Some s-t struggled with classroom management. (Q)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>S-t sometimes need to review methodologies with supervisor.</li> </ul>

Fig. 4.1 Example of tables for analysis.

As can be observed in the example, categories were established according to the most salient issues emerged from the data collection strategies. According to the source of information, each bullet point is identified with the initials of Interview, Focus Groups or Questionnaire.

In order to analyze the data, it was necessary to consider Creswell's steps for qualitative research. In a first moment, the data should be organized and prepared, in this case transcriptions and emptying questionnaires was carried out. Second, reading through all the data in order to obtain a general sense of the information. For this step, comments were made on the transcriptions. Third, begin detailed analysis with coding process. Coding is defined by Rossman and Rallis (as cited in Creswell, 2003) as "organizing the material into chunks before bringing meaning to those chunks."

In this step, responses from various questions of a certain moment of the practicum were labeled under the same category. Fourth, with the use of coding, begin the description of the findings, settings and categories found. Fifth step begin with the representation of the findings. In this case, most of the findings are presented according to S-T perceptions' and

Supervisors' perceptions separately. However, there are certain categories where separating S-T and supervisors was not needed due to the length and deepness of the information.

Finally, the sixth step involves the interpretation of the meaning of the data (Creswell, 2003 p.193) Based on the ideas of Richards (2003) the aim of this investigation is to share insights with the community, not only involving researchers but administrators, school teachers, supervisors and anyone involved directly or indirectly in the process of Teaching Practicum within Normales and Public Universities.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

As this investigation is established under the qualitative paradigm, this chapter provided a description of the methodology to be used. In addition, the participants, as well as the settings and the steps to gain access are described. Further on the data collection strategies were defined, the advantages and limitations of each were mentioned. Finally, the procedures to carry out the data analyses were grounded on theory and described in depth.

## **CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS**

### **5.0 Introduction**

This chapter introduces the results obtained from the research regarding the process of the Teaching Practicum at two essentially different institutions: Normales and Public Universities. First, the research questions that guided the investigation are revisited. Second, the results are presented according to the three stages in Practicum. These are in turn based on Randall and Thornton's Three Stages of Supervision (2001). Translated into a wider scope than supervision, thus viewing at Teaching Practicum in three important moments: 1) Before the practicum; 2) During the practicum; and 3) After the practicum. Each stage will review Normales and Public Universities separately. Finally, these stages are to be subdivided into the categories drawn from the instruments applied to S-T (questionnaires + focus groups), supervisors (interviews) and coordinators (interviews) at Normales and Public Universities.

### **5.1 Research Questions**

1. How is the Teaching Practicum officially established in Normales and Public Universities?
2. What are the practices being carried out by both Normales and Public Universities regarding the process of the Teaching Practicum?
  - a. What are the characteristics of these practices?
  - b. What factors enhance/limit the development of these practices?
  - c. How is the process of mentoring or supervision assisting the professional development of student-teachers?

Due to the triangulation of instruments through questionnaires and focus groups to S-T the information provided was successfully complemented. Questionnaires were applied

ahead of the focus groups, thus giving S-T certain time to rethink and even enhance their answers. Sometimes S-T were not able to answer a question in a shortly manner during the questionnaire, but they were able to navigate through their own stories and anecdotes, even comparing and complementing ideas with their colleagues during the focus groups, this without a doubt, enriched the investigation greatly. It is worth mentioning that both sources of information, questionnaires and interviews, are used interchangeably to present the evidence.

## **5.2. Document Analysis**

In order to answer the first research question that guided the investigation, it was necessary to look at the way the Practicum is officially established throughout the curriculums at the BAs. This was mainly done by contacting coordinators, professors and accessing the institution's websites and documents. In the case of both Universities most of the information was available directly on each of their websites or by personal contact. Regarding the documents for Normales, it was possible to download the curriculum through the website, although "official" documents such as the formats they work with during the Practicum could not be found nor facilitated by the teacher educators involved. In the following Table 5.1 all the documents used for this part of the analysis are presented, including how this was accessed to.

<b>Institutions</b>	<b>Type of document</b>	<b>Retrieved from</b>
<b>Normal A &amp; B</b>	1) Curriculum 1999	<i>Dirección General de Educación Superior para Profesionales de la Educación</i> (General Management of Higher Education for Professionals of Education) <a href="https://www.dgespe.sep.gob.mx">https://www.dgespe.sep.gob.mx</a>
	2) <i>Las actividades de observación y práctica docente en las escuelas secundarias.</i> (The activities of observation and teaching practice in secondary schools)	SEP, 1999 Retrieved from: <a href="https://es.scribd.com/doc/188488742/Actividades-de-Observacion-y-Practica-Docente">https://es.scribd.com/doc/188488742/Actividades-de-Observacion-y-Practica-Docente</a>
<b>University A</b>	1) A Resource guide for TEFL Mentors and Supervisors in Mexico.	Published guide. (Brenes, M. G., et al., 2010).
	2) Curriculum	University's website
	3) Professional Practices: student's manual.	
	4) Format of S-T performance;	
	5) Global Report;	
	6) Activities plan;	
	7) Applicant's, progressive and graduate's profile.	
<b>University B</b>	1) Curriculum 2016	University's website
	2) Applicant's & graduate's profile.	University's website
	3) Syllabus for Teaching Experience.	Personal contact
	4) Mentor's evaluation	Personal contact
	5) Content of CD	Personal contact
	6) Log daily evidences	Personal contact
	7) Log S-T attendance	Personal contact
	8) Log meetings with tutor.	Personal contact
	9) A Resource guide for TEFL Mentors and Supervisors in Mexico.	Published guide. (Brenes, M. G., et al., 2010).

*Table 5.1 Documents used in the analysis*

### 5.2.1 Description of the Practicum in Normales

This investigation took into consideration two different Normales which offered a BA in English Teaching for secondary education in Central Mexico. *Normal A* and *Normal B* is the way they will be referred to throughout the discussion. These Normales were selected due to the closeness of the institution and the access granted to the researcher by each of their authorities. As it has been discussed in the contextual chapter, Normales are characterized for enforcing a national curriculum which is set for all Normales in Mexico. Until the moment of the investigation, the S-T that participated in each *Normal (A and B)* were the last cohort to follow the *Plan 1999*, this, due to an update of the curriculum in 2018.

As can be seen in Table 5.2 and according to the *Mapa Curricular* (curriculum) (SEP, 2000) S-T are exposed to different contexts from an early stage, since they have to complete cycles of observation and start practicing their teaching since the 3rd semester of the preservice program. The curriculum for Normales highlights that “observation, analysis and reflection during the practicum are the basic elements from which students will be able to perfect their practice and build a teaching style of their own, in agreement with the desirable features of the teacher” (SEP, 2000 p.14). However, the curriculum does not delve into the Teaching Practicum.

In order to go in depth with the description of the Practicum in Normales, a different document was found. Although it was not found in any of the *normal* participants, all Normales are supposed to follow the curriculum and syllabi generated by SEP. Thus making this document is relevant to the research. Published in 1999 by the SEP, “The activities of observation and teaching practice in secondary schools” discusses Practicum at Normales, the results expected from each stage of the Practicum, the pedagogical implications for S-T when carrying out the Practicum. Equally important, it includes the characteristics expected from supervisors and school teachers, as well as the collaborative work expected from authorities

from both institutions. Finally it refers to the evaluation process carried out by supervisors and school teachers on the S-T performance. Although it is not referring specifically to the specialty of ELT it serves the purpose of the analysis. In the following Table 5.2 a summary of the main aspects proposed by this document is presented.

<b>Characteristics of the TP</b>	Systematic Reflexive Analytic
<b>Supervisors from Normales, functions.</b>	-Guide S-T in the preparation of the work at the secondary school: Guide lesson plans, review lesson plans. -Organize the visits to secondary schools, coordinate work with school teachers. -Attend secondary school to observe, register useful information. -Encourage and guide reflection and analysis of the practice during the workshop.
<b>School teacher's functions in the TP</b>	-Guide S-T, give suggestions and recommendations to reflect on the achieved competences and the ones that need work. -Stay in the group to observe the S-T and register most important aspects. -Provide feedback at an appropriate time. -Maintain communication with Supervisor. -Discuss with S-T about: a) Working method that in agreement with what the S-T learns at the Normal are recommended for the subject; b) Characteristics of the group(s). c) School teachers appreciation about the progress of the students. d) Topics to be taught by the S-T. e) Criteria of S-T performance evaluation.
<b>Collaborative work from Supervisors and School teachers.</b>	School teachers and supervisors must establish agreements on: -Periods and length of stay during the semester, number of groups they must attend. -Criteria of evaluation for the performance of S-T. -Moments to exchange perceptions about S-T performance between school teacher and supervisor. -Type of topics to assign to S-T, according to the needs from subjects at the Normal.
<b>Authorities' functions in the TP from Normales</b>	-Choose the number of secondary schools where S-T will go. The school is NOT selected by the S-T. -Establish communication with authorities from secondary schools to inform them about the objectives and characteristics of the stay. -Schedule meetings between both institutions.
<b>Authorities' functions in the TP from secondary schools</b>	-Create the appropriate conditions to welcome S-T -Provide S-T and supervisors the resources available at school to carry out their activities. -Establish agreements with the school teachers who will receive S-T in their classrooms. -Inform students from the secondary about the activities S-T will carry out with them. Explain to parents the importance of the S-T presence at the school.
<b>Evaluation of the TP</b>	-Command of the subject matter -Capacity to communicate and establish relationships with students. -Planning -Use of teaching strategies -Use of proceedings and resources to evaluate students learning. -Capacity to perceive and interpret classroom events. -Compliance in time of the activities of observation and practice.

*Table 5.2 Summary of The activities of observation and teaching practice in secondary schools*

As noted above, the document is quite explicit on the characteristics and functions of the main actors involved in the Practicum. There is nothing left but wonder who from the *Normales* is actually aware of the existence of such document. Not to mention, how helpful it could be to offer school teachers and authorities a walk through the document.

In the next Table 5.3, the Practicum is organized and broken down in two sessions, which in turn are divided in 1)Observation and 2)Practice. It is also specified the amount of groups to be attended by a S-T, and the hours required to be in front of the group.

	Grade attended in secondary school.	Activities in the first session		Activities in the second session	
		Observation	Practice	Observation	Practice
<b>Observation and Teaching Practice I</b>	1st grade	One group is observed, during the entire week.	Practice in one group, one class session. Time destined for the activity: 1 hour.	Observation in two groups, one should be the same from the last session. S-T stays a full day in the group she is practicing.	Practice in two groups of 1st grade, when possible, class sequences are applied. Time: 6 or 10 hours (according to specialty).
<b>Observation and Teaching Practice II</b>	1st and 2nd grade	One group of 2nd grade is observed during the entire week.	Practice in one group of 2nd grade, class sequences are applied. Time destined for the activity: 2, 3 or 5 hours (according to specialty)	Observation in two groups, one should be the same from the last session and the other from 1st grade. S-T stays a full day in the group she is practicing.	Practice in two groups from 1st and 2nd grade, when possible, class sequences are applied. Time: 5, 6 or 10 hours (according to specialty)..
<b>Observation and Teaching Practice III</b>	1st, 2nd and 3rd grade	One group of 3rd grade is observed during the entire week.	Practice in one group of 3rd grade, class sequences are applied. Time destined for the activity: 2, 3 or 5 hours (according to specialty).	Observation in three groups, one should be the same from the last session, one from 1st and other from 2nd grade. S-T stays a full day in the group she is practicing.	Practice in three groups from 1st, 2nd and 3rd grade, when possible, class sequences are applied. Time: 8, 9, 10 or 15 hours (according to specialty).
<b>Observation and Teaching Practice IV</b>	1st, 2nd and 3rd grade	Three groups of different grades are observed during the entire week. The S-T stays for a full day in one group.	Practice in three groups of different grades, class sequences are applied. Time destined for the activity: 8, 9, 10 or 15 hours (according to specialty).	Observation in the same groups of practice during the entire week. S-T stays a full day in one group.	Practice in the same groups from last session, class sequences are applied. Time destined for the activity: 8, 9, 10 or 15 hours (according to specialty).

Table 5.3 Summary of The activities of observation and teaching practice in secondary schools

As it is shown, the Practicum is identified by *normalistas* as *Jornadas* (sessions). In this case the model of the Practicum within the context of *normales*, is gradually changing. That is to say, in Observation and Practice I the time spent at school is shorter than the time spent at school in Observation and Practice IV. As suggested by Wallace (1991) the first

Practices could be identified as Serial School Experiences, while the last Observation and Practice is more aligned with the Block School Experience. Where S-T go to the practice at schools but they come back to classes at the *normal* to explore on their experiences. Unfortunately, the last two practices included in 7th and 8th semester were not included in this document, hence there is limited evidence as to how much time, how many groups and in which grades will the S-T be in charge. This should be explored in the following sections with the data obtained from the participants.

### **5.2.2 Description of the Practicum in Public Universities**

There were two different Universities that were considered for this study and they will be referred to as *University A* and *University B*. Both of these institutions offer a BA in English Teaching, although they do not aim at the same level of instruction. In the case of University A, it is specified in their website that S-T will be working in public or private high school or higher education institutions. On the other hand, University B states that S-T at the end of the career could be employed by any level of instruction.

It is worth noting that *University A* provides a greater explanation of both *Perfil de ingreso* (Applicant's Profile) and *Perfil de egreso* (Graduate's Profile) for the prospective students, and it even includes a *Perfil progresivo* (Progressive Profile) which states what students will be able to accomplish after specific semesters of their career (3rd, 5th and 7th semester).

Regarding the Practicum, *University A* establishes only one moment at the end of the career called *Prácticas Profesionales* (Professional Practices). According to the information obtained on documents, it can be concluded that the model of practicum officially established by *University A* is more aligned with Internship. Wallace (1991) described the Internship model as a type of practicum located at the end of preservice programs and involving longer

periods of time. However, as noted in the curriculum, the S-T must comply with a different subject besides Professional Practice. This would mean that Practicum could be also related to Block school experience, but the information provided by the documents is not sufficient to confirm it.

The Practicum in *University A* is regulated by the University's General Management of Social Service and Professional Practices (translation from Spanish), an independent body in charge of all administrative processes concerning Practicum for all BA programs. This organ has a separate website where the regulation, duties and rights are presented to the community. Specifically, the website contains 1) a visual guideline for the entire process of Professional Practices and; 2) the official formats to be delivered by the student-teacher in order to commence and conclude the Professional Practices (Teaching Practicum).

It is important to note that these same documents mention that academic supervision of students is each academic supervisor's responsibility. Unfortunately, information about the pedagogical implications of the Practicum for future English Teachers were not found in the curriculum or the Faculty's website. Since the nature of all these formats is to be generic for the use of the entire community, they are not necessarily concerned about the professional development of S-T in what should be one of the most important moments of their programs (Castañeda-Trujillo & Aguirre-Hernández, 2018; Farrell, 2008; Farrell, 2007; Fajardo & Miranda, 2015; Méndez & Bonilla, 2015; Caires, Almeida & Vieira; Morales-Cortés, 2016; Serdar and Çeçen, 2016; Burns & Richards, 2009; Encinas Prudencio et. al, 2015).

The following table (5.4) summarizes the most relevant aspects of the Teaching Practicum according to institutions. In the case of *normales*, the curriculum is established at a national level, for that reason and to avoid repetition of the information is only mentioned once.

	<b>Normal A &amp; B</b>	<b>University A</b>	<b>University B</b>
<b>Times included in the curriculum</b>	Throughout seven semesters	One time at the end of the BA.	Twice at the end of the BA.
<b>Name</b>	Observación y Práctica Docente I, II, III, IV. Trabajo Docente I, II.	Practicas Profesionales	Experiencia docente. Practica Profesional
<b>Moment of the practicum</b>	3rd Semester	8th Semester	6th Semester
<b>Model of the practicum</b>	Serial school experience and Block school experience	Block school experience	Block school experience & Internship

*Table 5.4 General Features of The Teaching Practicum in Normales and Universities.*

As shown in Table 5.4, *University B* comprehends two moments of Practicum in the curriculum, one called *Experiencia Docente* (Teaching Experience) located at the 6th semester of the career and the other akin to *University A* is called *Practica Profesional* (Professional Practice) and it is located at the end of the career, 8th semester. As noted in the table above, the model of practicum observed in Teaching Experience due to its shortness in time is recognized as Serial School Experience. Whereas the Professional Practices can be identified as Internship, since they are commonly at the end of their studies/formation and it does not officially require to spend time at the University.

Teaching Experience, is a compulsory subject before Professional Practice which requires the student-teacher to carry out 20 hours of teaching. However, before actually going to the school setting, they must attend class in their preservice program where the classes are divided into three units: 1) Educational context; 2) Lesson Planning; and 3) Analysis and evaluation of the Teaching Practice. Within this final unit is where S-T start scheduling their hours of Teaching Experience.

According to the syllabus, the purpose of the Teaching Experience is:

To integrate and use the theoretical and practical knowledge about methodology in English Teaching, in order to design and apply lesson plans for a specific teaching context with official recognition and under the supervision of a professor or mentor. The student-teacher self-evaluates and co-evaluates in a critical manner the teaching practice through reflection (Teaching Experience Syllabus, 2016).

It is important to note the inclusion of a supervision role and the use of reflection as a way to self assess their performance. Although the use of the terms *professor* and *mentor* interchangeably leaves the door open to interpret how the supervisory role is officially executed in practice. It would be useful that the process of supervision or mentoring, along with the tools used for this, is included in the syllabus. This could provide a better idea that this role in particular (mentor, supervisor, teacher) is not meant to be a bureaucratic aspect of the Teaching Experience. Instead, the supervisor or mentor, in conjunction with the tools used and the actions carried out are also important factors in the development of S-T.

In contrast to this first moment of Teaching Practicum within *University B*, the second moment: *Professional Practice* is carried out almost the same way as *University A*. Likewise, there is an independent body in charge of the administrative issues that the Professional Practice involves. Since it is a requirement to graduate from the BA, S-T must comply with a certain amount of hours validated by the school authorities. Additionally, they have to present evidence, portfolios, and reflections within a CD to be able to demonstrate to the Professional Practice Coordination that they have actually met the requirements.

Table *Table 5.5* below compares University A and University B's mandatory documents to officially conclude Professional Practice(s).

<b>Mandatory aspects to conclude the Professional Practices at University A &amp; B</b>					
<b>University A</b>	Online evaluation	<i>Carta de terminación</i> (Completion Letter).	<i>Reporte Global</i> (Global Report).	<i>Evaluación del desempeño del practicante</i> (Evaluation of performance of the practitioner)	Payment Receipt
<b>Description</b>	S-T fill out an online evaluation.	Issued by the Receiving Unit, signed, stamped, hours completed.	Format given by the University, to be filled out by s-t, signed by mentor, supervisor,	Format given by the University, to be filled out, stamped, and signed by the Receiving Unit	Payment on behalf of the University to issue the Professional Practice Certificate.
<b>University B</b>	<i>Hoja de Firmas</i> (Signature sheet)	<i>Carta de término</i> (Completion Letter)	<i>CD de Evidencias</i> (CD of Evidence)	<i>Carta de término</i> (Completion letter)	Completion Letters
<b>Description</b>	Signed by school, and student teacher throughout the Practices	Issued by the school	1)Work plan 2)Attendance log. 3)Daily evidence log (60hrs of class) 4)Lesson plans and reflections (60 hrs of class). 5) Evidence and evaluations 6) Mentor evaluation 7)Final report	Issued by the preservice program, coordination of Practices after reviewing that the CD is complete and contains everything asked for.	Deliver letters to the General Management of Professional Practices.

*Table 5.5 Mandatory aspects to conclude the Professional Practices at University A & B.*

As can be observed, University A provides almost all formats to be filled out, stamped and signed by the student-teacher and supervisors with respect to the guideline for S-T to obtain the PP certificate. It should be said, it is a very visual tool, since it explains every step for S-T, containing the links to access the formats, and stating dates for every faculty to deliver. *University B* on the other side, asks for a similar amount of formats that must also be signed and reviewed by schools, school teachers and supervisors although attention should be noted to the CD of Evidence (see Table 5.4) and the specific features S-T must include apart from the rest of the formats.

<b>CD of evidences for University B</b>	
<b>1) Work plan</b>	Reviewed and signed by tutor and S-T.
<b>2) Attendance log (60hrs of class)</b>	Format given by the University , reviewed and signed by S-T, supervisor, mentor.
<b>3) Daily evidences log</b>	Format given by the University , reviewed and signed by S-T, supervisor, mentor.
<b>4) Lesson plans and reflections (60 hrs of class)</b>	Signed by S-T, supervisor, mentor.  *If the same class was taught in two groups, there must be a different reflection for it and a document that states so.
<b>5) Evidences and evaluations</b>	Photos of the materials created for the PP, pictures of students and facilities of the school. Reflections on the practice per week, signed by the s-t and supervisor.
<b>6) Mentor evaluation</b>	Format given by University, to be filled out and signed by the school teacher.
<b>7) Final Report</b>	Essay answering 4 questions about the practicum. To be signed by s-t, supervisor, and responsible at school. 1) In what way and how has the practicum influenced your professional development?; 2) What have you learnt about the institution, students and teachers that can be helpful for your professional development?; 3) What did you contribute to the institution and in what way?; 4) How do you visualize your future integration to the professional field of education?

*Table 5.6 Content for the CD of Evidence for University B.*

It is evident in Table 5.4 above that the amount of documents to include in the CD of Evidence for University B is surely excessive. S-T must complete 60 hours of class and at the end deliver a reflection for each class in addition to weekly reflections. From this fact, different questions arise. For instance, if supervisors are in charge of 22 to 25 S-T, who has the time to actually read these reflections and maybe even give feedback to S-T to say the least? More importantly, to what extent are these reflections really promoting professional development and at which point do they become automatic, and just a matter of filling in blanks?

As previously stated, the moment(s) of Teaching Practicum specifically in SLTE, should be focused on working towards professional development in all S-T rather than being left to chance or reduced to a completion of hours in order to obtain a degree (Richards & Nunan, 1990). Perhaps the separation of the Practicum from each faculty at Universities makes the administrative processes easier and faster for both the institutions and sometimes

the S-T. However, it appears that Teaching Practicum in *University A* still needs to give further/better consideration to the singularity of the teaching profession in order to enhance the opportunities for professional development. Whereas *University B*, should re-evaluate the amount of requirements for S-T, and consider if there is a balance between what is asked and what actually aids to the development of future teachers in the Professional Practice moment.

### **5.3 Before the practicum**

This section explores S-T and supervisors' perceptions about the processes happening before the Practicum starts. These categories involved the processes before the Practicum, such as liaison with schools, level of preparedness for the Practicum both in English and teachings skills.

#### **5.3.1 Normales**

In order to identify the processes that are involved before the Practicum happens at Normales, questionnaires and focus groups were used with S-T. In the case of teacher educators/coordinators an interview was carried out to obtain their perceptions and thoughts on the matter. In the following section both S-T and teacher educators' experiences and comments about the processes happening Before the Practicum are presented. A Table with a summary of the results Before the Practicum is provided at the end of the section.

##### **5.3.1.1 Liaison with schools: Supervisors**

According to the supervisor in Normal A, liaison with schools is carried out by the principal of the Normal. With the use of a database the principal sorts S-T based on their specialty. The supervisor revealed the absence of any type of agreement, apart from the

administrative, between school teachers and the preservice program for the guidance and supervision of S-T. The supervisor justifies this by saying, they cannot tell school teachers what to do, and that both supervisors and S-T must always adapt to the environment they are sent. This may indicate that school teachers are not necessarily aware of the objectives of the practicum, which can affect their status from assistants to actual practitioners. Not to mention the lack of training that working towards S-T' development requires.

On the other hand, the supervisor in Normal B expressed that liaison with schools has been “unofficially created” throughout the years, based only on schools the supervisor has previously worked with. The supervisor provides a list of schools which S-T can select according to their schedules, since it is common for some of them to be working at the same time. When asked about the agreements that are established with school teachers. The supervisor mentioned that, when the curriculum (*Plan 1999*) was first instituted, administrative and school staff from the area were gathered in a type of forum. Here, they were informed about the characteristics school teachers should have, and the obligations they would acquire if they agreed to work with S-T. Unfortunately, the optional element of working with Normales, drove public basic education schools to simply not accept S-T. As a result, the supervisor had to work with the few schools that agreed to work with them, during the interview she mentions the following:

Even if I do not have the best school teacher, at least I try that, whoever is in charge of my students is not an aggressive person. Also, that they are allowed to innovate, and put their ideas into practice. If they can help, so help, but if not, at least not interfere/block/impede with their work. So, as long as I have those characteristics from school teachers and they are somehow empathetic with them, I give S-T the options (Supervisor, Normal B)

In this case, liaison with schools and school teachers has essentially depended on the years of experience and connections of this specific supervisor. It is left to consider, what will happen when new teacher educators have to lead the Teaching Practicum, or who will maintain these

spoken agreements when people who initiated them have left? As Wallace (1991) points out, more than purely administrative relationships, pre-service programs should guarantee that the person(s) guiding the first encounters of S-T with classrooms are properly trained .

Liaison with schools has repeatedly proven to be of crucial importance in the process of school based experiences (Practicum) (Wallace, 1991 p. 122). Nevertheless, neither Normal A or B possess official liaisons to ensure the development of their S-T while attending schools to practice. In another point, if *Normales* are essentially from the government, by not taking care of this basic issue they are ultimately affecting the preparation of their own prospective human resource.

#### **5.3.1.2. Liaison with schools: Student-teachers**

The responses collected from both focus groups and questionnaires from S-T in Normal A showed a general discontent with the school they were assigned. First, it was found that all seven S-T in the cohort were sent to the same school, which might respond to convenience for the Normal, but not necessarily to the quality of the relationship. However, for some S-T this was problematic, because their economical possibilities or their closeness to school were not taken into consideration. Second, S-T expressed that even though some schools had problems in the past with practitioners, the Normal continues to send them. One student-teacher thought the assignment of schools is bad, by arguing the following:

I think the Normal only looks for an option where they can send *all* their students. It does not look for the *best option* available, neither is based on the problematics of *normalista students* (S-T, Normal A, Focus Group)

Considering there is nothing more than an administrative liaison with this particular school, the results obtained from S-T perceptions as well as their experiences, which will be discussed later, did not come as a surprise.

In contrast, most S-T from *Normal B* expressed their satisfaction with the school where they carried out their Practicum. They understood these were schools where previous generations of *normalistas* had practiced. Most of them appreciated having been able to select the school according to their needs and based on the list the supervisor provided. As discussed earlier, it is throughout time and experience that the supervisor from *Normal B* has been able to create a range of options to offer to S-T. This is not to say, that *Normal A* made a mistake by sending all S-T to the same school, ultimately official documents state that the authorities from Normales are the ones who select where S-T will practice. However, in the case of *Normal A*, this turned out to be less than beneficial for S-T. This confirms the importance of a liaison based on pedagogical arguments and not only on convenience.

### **5.3.1.3 Student-teachers' level of preparedness: Supervisors**

This category examined the English level in S-T perceived by the supervisors. Due to the fact that Normales follow the same curriculum (*Plan 1999*), both supervisors mentioned two main problems they faced with the implementation of the B1 requirement entry level. First, the B1 level would entail that fewer students could enter the BA, thus leading to a decrease in enrollment for Normales. The supervisor in Normal B explained that even though the curriculum established a level, from the past six years and because of the crisis Normales were facing, it was necessary to leave the requirement aside:

We couldn't afford rejecting people because that would imply drowning your own school. (Supervisor, Normal B.)

Second, the curriculum establishes that S-T should have content classes in English. To which both supervisors argue, there are not enough teachers with the appropriate level in English to make this possible. For that reason, they have to work and make the most with the human

resources available for them. These issues have evidenced the distance between who generates curriculums for Normales and who has to abide to them, even if this means not having the staff or resources to do it.

In the case of Normal A, the supervisor mentioned having received four new English teachers sent by SEP by reason of the National Strategy (see Chapter 2 p.\*\*). Nonetheless, these four teachers are meant to contribute to the entire Normal A and not only the specialty in ELT.

#### **5.3.1.4 Student-teachers' level of preparedness: Student-teachers**

In the case of S-T, there were two aspects examined in this category. Their perceptions of their level of English and the preparation provided by the Normal regarding methodologies and teaching skills. S-T in *Normal A*, voiced their concerns about the lag in English instruction:

The problem here is that since they don't have English teachers, they send another teacher who supposedly has a certain English level to teach us. But this instead of helping, it limits us (S-T Normal A, Focus group).

The majority of S-T mentioned having to attend private classes in order to improve their English level. The cohort in general has expressed discontent with the lack of support from the Normal with respect to English, they argue they have only two teachers providing content classes out of seven subjects. In addition, they have asked directly to the coordinator and principal to assign those 4 English teachers sent by SEP. Unfortunately, as mentioned earlier, these teachers are meant to attend the entire student body of this Normal and not only the ELT specialty.

All of the S-T from *Normal B* indicated they felt sufficiently prepared in English because they all attended private English classes outside the Normal. One of the respondents mentioned the shock of having to learn English on their own in the middle of the career:

When I entered the Normal I imagined they were going to teach me English here but no, at the end they tell you that you have to reach certain level so you have to prepare on your own (S-T Normal B, Focus group).

Another S-T agreed on the need for Normales to improve English teaching and prepare S-T better:

I feel that there should be more time destined to prepare us in this aspect [English]. A lot of us enter the Normal with the English we learnt in middle school or high school, and with that...we have to go out and teach! So, obviously you have to prepare on the outside, you have to look how, but you have to achieve it (S-T Normal B, Focus group).

It can be seen that both Normales struggle to provide English classes to S-T, which have led S-T to turn to private instruction to remedy this situation. Fortunately, at least with the participants of this investigation, money did not seem to be an impediment for them, or it was not mentioned by any S-T. Hopefully, this would be the case for all S-T that attend Normales.

Regarding S-T pedagogical skills, in both Normales, the majority of S-T felt sufficiently prepared by their respective institution. In the case of Normal A, one student-teacher rationalized that Normales are essentially more focused on pedagogy than on the aspect of language. S-T in Normal B were interestingly aware of the need to update and contextualize the curriculum. As well as for their own responsibility to be updated and innovate from what is already established. According to the theoretical framework, this would be evidence that S-T from Normal B are being trained in the *Applied Science Model* (Wallace, 1991), where all the theories available in the field are provided and S-T in charge of practicing them. However, as it has been previously discussed this model does not begin to satisfy what a teacher from the 21st century should be able to learn and do. Here is presented an excerpt of a S-T opinion:

All those theories are beautiful, but when we arrive to classrooms and I ask myself: What does Vygotsky tell me about *this monster!*? or what would Vygotsky do with 50 students? If Montessori tells me that classrooms should be equipped with a certain type of

material, but I come to class and I don't even have chairs, tables, electricity or bathrooms... I believe there is a need to redesign completely our programs (...) obviously a lot of theories can be adapted, but conditions are definitely not the same (S-T Normal B, Focus group).

It is in these moments where the *Reflective Model* (ibid.) could have guided this particular student-teacher to the process of reflection, and eventually professional competence. This is not to say he will not achieve it, but if these reflections were supported/encouraged from the beginning, the history of SLTE specifically in the Mexican context could start its own path.

### **5.3.2 Universities**

As discussed in the document analysis the processes of Practicum within Universities are different in several aspects. For instance, the time spent at schools, the moment where Practicum is first established in the curriculum, and the model of practicum carried out. In this section the features happening before the Practicum are reviewed according to S-T, along with Teacher Educators' perceptions and experiences.

#### **5.3.2.1 Liaison with schools: Supervisor**

As reported by the supervisor the entire process of assigning S-T in a school to carry out their Practicum in *University A* is led by the General Management of Professional Practices. S-T must follow the directions provided in the website and select a Receiving Unit according to their average (best averages select first) and their possibilities. The supervisor in charge of Professional Practices at this institution considers this alienation from the process as a limitation to achieve the objective of the practicum. She emphasizes in the absence of communication between the faculty and the General Management about the requirements Receiving Units should meet in order to accept them as viable options. In addition, there are cases where Receiving Units are not even aligned with the graduate's profile the BA explicitly states. Finally and most importantly, there are cases where Receiving Units require

S-T to carry out activities that are not related to what they are studying. The following is an example of these type of situations reported by the coordinator:

We had a student whose job in her Practicum was basically getting copies, and stapling. She said -I don't want to be there, I want to make my Practicum the way it is supposed to be, I'm not doing what I have to do- She dropped the subject, even though we asked her to wait and see if we could speak to the Receiving Unit because dropping it would imply losing six months. She said -It doesn't matter, I'd rather lose it- (Coordinator, University A, Interview).

The coordinator highlighted the need and importance of working towards a clearer communication between General Management, Receiving Units and the Preservice Program.

As a result of these efforts, communication has been successfully established with a few Receiving Units to clarify the desirable conditions in which S-T should carry out their Practicum. The coordination in *University A* was able to gather school teachers to provide them an overview of what is expected from them, the coordinator reported the following:

When we gather them, we propose, and only propose because we can't be too intrusive (...) We recommend that the first part is observation, the second something like teamwork or coaching, and finally let the S-T be in charge of the class. All this under the condition of school teachers staying at all times in the classroom (Coordinator, University A, Interview).

From a cohort of 18, the faculty was able to contact 12 Receiving Units to establish the above mentioned guidelines. The coordinator said that much of this success was due to the connection between faculties and that some school teachers are graduates from the same preservice program. As noted by the coordinator, these are only guidelines to supervise and support S-T, therefore the accompaniment school teachers decide to provide, will depend on their own possibilities, willingness, attitude, and certainly on the approval of Receiving Unit authorities.

It can be concluded that the type of liaison carried out by the General Management of Professional Practices at University A is merely administrative. However, it is important to note that despite not having much to do with the selection of Receiving Units, the Preservice program from *University A* has made an important attempt to create a type of pedagogical liaison that addresses the needs of S-T in the process of Practicum.

On the other hand, *University B* has a similar situation to *University A* in the process called Professional Practice, since S-T are also assigned through an independent Coordination to a school according to their average. In contrast to the *Teaching Experience*, where the responsibility of finding a school to carry out 20 hours belongs to S-T.

When asked about the type of liaison with schools and school teachers for both Teaching Experience and Professional Practice, the supervisor stated that there is not an official document that establishes the type of work or support that is desired from school teachers, in this case called *mentors*. She suggested that if this were to be done, there would not be enough places to send S-T to practice.

To summarize, liaison with schools for SLTE programs offered in Universities may be contingent upon bigger interests. It is possible that the amount of students in both University A and B, marks the difference when carrying out the Practicum process although, it is interesting how *University A* has opted to adapt to their own circumstances and found opportunities to create liaisons that try to go beyond papers, in order to favor the development of their S-T. Perhaps, the importance that is given to liaison within *University B* needs to be reconsidered as one of the pillars for ensuring quality in Practicum, thus S-T professional development.

### **5.3.2.2 Liaison with schools: Student-teachers**

With regard to S-T perspectives and experiences with the liaison with schools, the majority of respondents from *University A* saw this process as acceptable although there were a few comments about the amount of options offered to carry out Practicum.

In the case of S-T from *University B* the responses varied depending on Professional Practice to Teaching Experience. The S-T commented that the process of paperwork in Professional Practice is too slow in both the beginning and the end, in addition S-T reported that communication with schools was confusing at times. Conversely, the S-T from Teaching Experience mentioned receiving help from their supervisor who facilitated options to do their practice.

### **5.3.2.3 Student-teachers' level of preparedness: Supervisors and Student-teachers**

With regards to S-T sense of preparedness in both English and pedagogical skills. The general perception in both institutions about the level of English S-T is to be sufficient to carry out their practicum. From the 14 responses to questionnaires, most S-T expressed to be comfortable with their level of English. Only two S-T (one p/institution) reported to feel insecure at times, thus requiring to review aspects of language before actually teaching it. Related to this aspect, the supervisor from *University B*, pointed out that even though S-T have concluded the mandatory English lessons marked by the curriculum, linguistic competence can become a barrier between S-T development in the Practicum.

In the case of the level of preparedness in teaching skills, most S-T reported to feel satisfied with the preparation provided by their preservice programs in terms of theories and methodologies. Nonetheless, in *University A* S-T mentioned Practice in real contexts as something they need more. They argue that even though they know theory, putting Practicum at the end of the program can be quite a shock for many:

There are students who haven't worked until 8th semester and the Professional Practices are their first encounter with a real classroom. It might not have been my case (...) but I do know of some that it really was their first time and they really suffered, they did not know what to do because all situations arrived all at once, so it was really difficult (S-T, University A, Focus Group).

Similarly, in *University B* two S-T reflected on the type of preparation they received from Universities and the realities of the contexts where they carried out their Practicum. At this point, S-T become aware of the necessity to be exposed to real contexts much earlier than the established in the program.

I think that we do need more practice, definitely. Maybe the thing that Normales do that works for them and we don't, is that they are more exposed to Practices, they are more in contact with their reality. We might study more linguistic aspects, we might have knowledge in English but I believe we are lacking in that aspect [practices] (S-T Normal B, Focus group).

Complementary to this, S-T mentioned moments where the preparation, whether in English or in theories, was simply not enough to understand how to respond or take action in specific situations in their schools:

We go out very confident of our English, and thinking we're going to really teach kids, but kids are not only waiting in their seats for you to come (...) In a way we are still students who don't know what to do in certain situations, kids fight, kids fall, and who do we have to call? mom? dad? principal?... we are not prepared for these type of scenarios and the do come up. We are sent out to the arena without enough practice (S-T University B, Focus group).

These are a few examples of basic problematic situations that could arise when S-T practice at schools. In conclusion, S-T raised their concern about being prepared in English and methodologies but not warned about the other aspects being a teacher entails. For example, the responsibilities you acquire and the measures to be taken as the teacher in charge.

Finally, in both Universities, S-T brought up the use of *micro-teaching* as a form of practice. However, most of the respondents considered micro-teaching to be too far from

reality, since they are “teaching themselves” something they already know, making the process seem more like acting than actual teaching.

To sum up, English proficiency in *University A and B* based on S-T responses did not appear to be an issue for S-T to carry out their Practicum. On the other hand, supervisor in *University B* has reported that from a group of 20 at least eight S-T still struggle with their linguistic competence. Because of this, she has opted to work individually with S-T based on their most urgent needs. In contrast, after the experience of Practicum, S-T are more aware of their strengths as future professionals of ELT, but at the same time they have concerns about being ready for the contextual and sociocultural aspects they will eventually encounter.

#### **5.4 During the practicum**

The following section involves the most salient issues that were obtained from the participants about some of the processes that are carried out during the practicum. Quotes from the participants are included to give voice to their experiences and perceptions during these moments.

##### **5.4.1 Normales**

In the following sections the most salient results regarding the processes during the practicum will be explored. It should be noted that in some cases participants’ perceptions will be integrated, depending on the topic and the depth of the results. As divided in the previous section (Before the Practicum), Normales will be presented first in full, to be followed by Universities.

#### **5.4.1.1 Environment at schools: Student-Teachers**

As reported by S-T from *Normal A*, they experienced some difficulties due to the environment at the place of Practicum. According to the questionnaires respondents qualified the environment from acceptable to very bad. Expanding on this matter during the focus group, the S-T mentioned that due to a misunderstanding and a personal conflict with one school teacher, the rest of the school staff attitudes became hostile. Since the content is dictated by school teachers, some S-T mentioned that their school teachers would suddenly change the content, thus forcing them to change lesson plans in short notice. Others reported being exposed and undermined in front of their students with the excuse of giving S-T feedback. At the end, school teachers retained lesson plans and refused to sign paperwork that was necessary for S-T to conclude their Practicum. It should be emphasized that this situation affected the entire cohort, as they were all at the same school. As for supervisor's responses from *Normal A*, when asked about aspects S-T struggle at schools, she stated that it is still very common to find traditional school teachers who are not willing to let S-T innovate with methodologies or even try different materials.

Similar situations in schools were reported by S-T from *Normal B*, though to a minor degree. The majority of respondents qualified the environment as acceptable with the exception of two S-T who felt limited by each of their school teachers. They maintained that school teachers constantly questioned their methodologies. In addition, school teachers refused to give up control of the class by undermining their work and authority with students at different times during their Practicum. Ultimately, these situations led one S-T to look for a different school as a way out of this circumstance. From the liaison with schools, school teachers acknowledging their role and being aware of the practicum objective, to the way S-T are introduced to their practicum, these factors contribute to the environment S-T will face

during their stay at schools. Thus, reaffirming the importance preservice programs should give to liaison and establishing clear communication with schools.

#### **5.4.1.2 Supervision or Mentoring?: Supervisors**

Even though institutions use the terms mentoring and supervision interchangeably to refer to a hierarchical role in charge of monitoring S-T. As previously stated, throughout this investigation they will be identified based on the type of support provided to S-T and the behaviors presented towards S-T during the process of the Teaching Practicum. This is to say, distinctions will be made to whether the roles are aligned to Mentoring (Malderez & Bodóczyk; Bland et al., 2009) or Supervisory behaviors (Wallace, 1991).

Regarding *Normales*, the person in charge of monitoring a group of S-T during their Teaching Practicum receives the name of *Asesor/a* (advisor) in both *Normales*, but for the purposes of this research they will be referred as supervisors. This role is assigned by the school authorities, and he or she is in charge of the classes that must happen before, during and even after S-T go to practice, as this is part of the evaluation process in the Practicum. Since the model followed by the *Normales* dictates that depending on the semester S-T must spend blocks of time in the Normal, then attend to the practicum at the school assigned and once again go back to the Normal. This type of model was identified by Wallace as Block School Experience (1991). As supervisors confirmed, evaluation in both *Normales*, will take into consideration more than only, presenting lesson plans, attending to the schools assigned, or the evaluation from school teachers among others. But it will also consider S-T complying with the program established by attending to class at the Normal.

According to the supervisor, evaluation in *Normal A* is continuous, besides working in class with readings, exercises, or analyses, S-T must use this time in class to prepare lesson plans and receive feedback from the supervisor. The supervisor describes her role as an *accompaniment*, and she mentioned the use of questions to guide S-T in the development of

lessons. She emphasized that S-T cannot go to Practicum without revising first their lesson plans along with the materials to be used to avoid any errors (referring to grammatical mistakes). Based on the supervisor's responses from *Normal A*, it can be identified that her relation with S-T is more aligned with supervision rather than mentoring, if the term mentoring is taken strictly as described in the theoretical framework as "non-threatening and non-evaluative". Although limited, there is evidence to assert that supervisor from *Normal A* presents more characteristics from a *classic prescriptive approach*. In this case the supervisor is an authority figure, because she is meant to 1) judge the material and approve it before S-T are authorized to go to the Practicum; and 2) provide evaluation at the end of the practicum. However, behaviors such as the guidance of S-T with questions to create their own lesson plans and their own materials, might also relate to the *collaborative approach* (1991, p. 110).

On the other hand, supervisor in *Normal B* described her role as being shared with the school teacher in the best case scenario, although not always possible. She stated that supervisor and school teacher are supposed to guide S-T, while the school teacher is there almost every day to observe their practice, the supervisor goes occasionally to observe and take notes about it. In addition to this, she mentioned that as a supervisor she must look for the school teacher's insight about S-T performance, exploring what do S-T need and what they might be failing at. The purpose of this inquiry, as reported by the supervisor is to take some elements from their practice that might be an issue, bring them to the workshop at the Normal and help S-T analyze their practice in order to change or consolidate knowledge. The supervisor makes the following remark:

This is where you go over their practice, they analyze it and in this exchange (workshop) is not that you can give them a class. You can't. However, you can guide them through instruction or provide them with readings where they can find some support (Supervisor, Normal B, Interview).

In the same way as *Normal A*, evaluation is an important factor involved in the Practicum in *Normal B*. However, based on the supervisor's responses it could be said that her practices are more aligned with the *classic collaborative approach* to supervision. Based on the type of work carried out at the Normal, after the sessions in schools, the supervisor makes efforts to develop autonomy through exercises of reflection and self evaluation. These in turn are mediated through tools such as readings or questioning, as it is further explored in the next section.

#### **5.4.1.3 Observation and Feedback: Supervisors and Student-teachers**

As mentioned in Chapter 3, higher mental functions arise through social interactions and the mediating tools involved in these interactions (Johnson, 2009). Providing feedback to S-T about their practicum is the prelude to mediating their development as professionals. In other words, telling S-T what they did good or bad during a class should only be considered as the beginning of the process of mediation. Based on this, it is important to focus on the quality of activities S-T and teacher educators engage in together, as well as the resources they use to accomplish their goals (Golombek & Johnson, in press, p. 4).

In accordance with supervisor from *Normal A*, most of the feedback provided to S-T happened during the development of lesson plans at the Normal. In this case, the use of language in the form of questions might be considered the *mediating tool* to lead S-T development of their first lesson plans. It should be emphasized that observation and feedback provided by the supervisor were not mentioned during the interview. Rather, observation was only mentioned to refer to the support from school teachers to S-T in their Practicum. Although, evidence provided by the supervisor was not sufficient to explore deeper into this subject, the following responses of S-T might help to enlighten these aspects.

According to S-T responses from *Normal A*, until the moment of the focus group, their supervisor had visited the school to observe their classes once. They expressed their discontent with their supervisor by stating:

This is the first week she observes us. Only because there were problems, and not because she thought to herself -I will go check on them see how they're doing, or give them feedback-. No, she went because we raised our concerns about the issues we were having in the secondary school, and only then she said she was going to observe us (S-T, Normal A, Focus group).

In line with the response above, it is necessary to mention that the entire cohort of S-T reported that the amount of observations from the supervisor was not nearly sufficient to contribute to their professional development. As mentioned in previous sections, S-T experienced a negative environment during their practicum at the secondary school, therefore observations from school teachers were identified as scant and not beneficial to their practice either. In first instance, S-T reported to have frequently been left alone in their classrooms for their *first session*, whereas at the *second session* at school some S-T did receive feedback from school teachers, however this was more about contradicting them and pointing out mistakes in front of students. As reported in the guidelines for the Practicum in Normales (see Chapter 2), school teachers are specifically urged to provide S-T feedback in person and to avoid undermining them in front of their students. Perhaps, this demonstrates the lack of awareness from school teachers about such document, which in turn reflects the type of liaison held with the school selected.

Considering the importance of guidance or support in what is for most S-T, the first time in front of a classroom, the situation of *Normal A* is a matter of concern. One S-T from this cohort estimated that during the time spent at the Normal (2 years) she had been observed once. Despite this, during the focus group, S-T reported to have made arrangements and tried to observe each other's practice in order to address the lack of feedback.

Several questions arose on this type of situation, such as to what extent did the feedback provided by peers (with the same experience) promoted S-T development? More importantly,

who is responsible for this and what are the reasons behind the absence of real support to S-T? Not to mention, how did this situation affect both positively and negatively this specific cohort? Probably, to give an answer to these issues, a more extensive investigation is needed.

In comparison, supervisor from *Normal B* was very explicative of the process of observation and feedback S-T receive. She describes that the moment of observation is carried out with an instrument provided by the Normal. During observations the supervisor highlights that she does not get involved in the practice under any circumstance because solving problems and dealing with conflicts is part of the objective. In addition to the observation format, she reported using a personal logbook to cover aspects that are not addressed in the observation format. Then, depending on the type and the urgency of feedback she would talk to them in private, to try to reflect on what happened in the class while making reference to the lesson plan. However, it is common for S-T to have continuous classes and time is not always sufficient to provide immediate feedback. In these cases, the supervisor keeps registering on the logbook and brings the issues to the workshop at the Normal to discuss in group. During their stay at the *Normal*, the activities in workshop are described as an exchange of experiences and discussions among S-T. The supervisor commented about the workshop:

We make comments, we work together, I ask -Ok, what was the problem here? What do you think? What could you do in a moment like this? Who has readings which might help?- If there is something that is just not clear then I go up to the board, so to speak, and we check some things (...) Most of them coincide in specific problems, and we might reach a point where as an advisor (supervisor) you have to stay back and observe them talking (Supervisor, Normal B, Interview).

As can be noted, the supervisor makes use of different *mediating tools* such as the logbook, the observation format and the lesson plan to guide S-T reflections about their class. Most importantly, the discussions occurring on the workshop were mediated through the use of questions (*dialogic mediation*) directed at all S-T to elicit an exchange of ideas and promote the transformation of knowledge. In other words, the S-T are being moved from their ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978) towards new understandings on their teaching, based on their experiences and prior knowledge, in which *mediation* is key. The coordinator of *Normal B*, proposed feedback and the way feedback is provided, to be the most valuable source for S-T development, since it promotes reflection in the S-T. At the same time the supervisor reflected on his own experience as S-T:

As a *normalista*, I remember when I was observed, my supervisor used to tell me where I was right or wrong. They were more technical back then (...) because besides pointing out your mistakes, they also gave you the solution. That is why I believe that the way feedback is provided is the most rich aspect. The process now is reversed. First, we have to see if the S-T is aware of his own practice, and from this awareness identify their areas of opportunity (Coordinator, Normal B, Interview)

In the same line, he considered the organization of the practicum (*block school experience*) as a great aspect of the curriculum. Since, S-T can benefit from two moments to reflect on their practice: 1) feedback after observations with the supervisor; and 2) discussions in the workshop at the Normal. He states the latter as an opportunity to discuss the issues observed in the first moment, although in a more profound way.

After the month of practice, the next month the issues observed there, are discussed here [the workshop] where they can reflect in a more critical and profound way, by using theory and what they have observed from their own practice (Coordinator, Normal B, Interview).

In like manner, S-T confirmed to have been observed and received feedback from their supervisor. They expressed that after an observation the supervisor, in private, made comments about their practice. They also emphasized that based on the original lesson plan,

they reflected with the help of the supervisor, on what they wanted to do in class and what actually happened.

Regarding the feedback provided by school teachers, S-T reported that this mostly depended on the “type” of school teachers. While some school teachers showed disposition to stay in class and observe S-T, feedback was not guaranteed for everyone. Nevertheless, in the case of *Normal B* the majority of S-T received feedback, whether from the supervisor or the school teachers.

#### **5.4.1.4 Sources of Support: Student-Teachers**

There are different instruments that are used throughout Practicum, whether provided officially by the preservice program or utilized by supervisors’ initiative. In this section, said instruments will be discussed according to S-T experiences and perceptions. As discussed in the previous chapters, one of the most important aspects according to the Sociocultural Theory, is mediation since it is through mediating artifacts how we interact with the world around us (Swain, Kinnear & Steinman, 2011). In this line, it is essential to point out that mediating artifacts should only be considered as such when used with a clear purpose. Otherwise, they should be accounted as mere administrative elements with no other use than assigning a grade to the subject of the Teaching Practicum.

According to S-T in *Normal A*, the most valuable source of support during their Teaching Practicum was the observation and feedback from their colleagues in the same cohort. When asked about who they felt most support from, the majority responded “my colleagues”, thus confirming that despite the difficulties they faced at school, they were able to carry out a type of collaborative work towards their own development in view of the lack of support from their program. Some also reported to have sought help from other teachers at the Normal and one of them from the supervisor.

On the other hand, S-T from *Normal B* qualified the dialogue with their supervisor after each observation as the most valuable source of support. In addition to tips or strategies provided by their supervisor to improve their practice and turning to other S-T who have experienced the same issues and can provide some insight. Finally, some school teachers might be helpful, yet only if they are willing to do so. These, evidenced the attention that should be given to *dialogic mediation* as a formal step in the supervision of S-T, however the lack of support from school teachers denotes the informal links that are held with schools.

#### **5.4.2 Universities**

In this section the main results obtained from Universities are presented. As stated above, this section represents the most salient results obtained from the moment During the Practicum. It seemed suitable for this section to integrate the responses from both S-T and Supervisors in the same category given the length and depth of the information obtained.

##### **5.4.2.1 Environment at schools: Student-Teachers**

With regards to University A, as it was explored in earlier sections S-T perceived the school to carry out their Practicum as acceptable. The majority of S-T reported to have experienced a good environment at the school. This, as reported by some S-T was because all the participants from *University A* were assigned to faculties within the same institution, therefore they were already familiarized with the context.

In contrast, there were S-T who maintained that some school teachers did not fully understand their role as practitioners. Additionally, one S-T commented that communication among faculties, authorities and school teacher had been deficient. In this case, the principal was not aware about the arrival of the S-T nor their role or activities until further on. This situation resulted in the S-T becoming an observer, the S-T recalled this issue:

There was a problem, and the teacher [school teacher] was reprimanded, the principal told her that -a practitioner should not be in charge of a group- (...) and then he told her that from now on -the practitioner has to observe-(S-T, University A, Focus Group).

The S-T reflected about this situation, and went on to say that the problem emerged due to poor communication. Since the authorities from the school were never informed about his arrival, it created a conflict and jeopardized his work as a practitioner.

S-T from *University B* on the other hand reported a variety of situations, due to the different contexts they all attended to. As discussed in the beginning, the BA at this University does not prepare S-T for a specific level of instruction, in the end, the graduate's profile describes the range of employment from basic education to even higher education. According to the majority of responses from questionnaires, the environment at each context was described as good (5), acceptable (2) and even excellent (3). For instance, there were cases of S-T who applied to practice within the same BA in the Target Language subject, though with S-T from lower semesters. This was reported as an excellent environment due to the familiarity and the support they received from the school teachers, as well as the interest of students in the Language.

In the same way, S-T who carried out their Practicum outside the faculty, also reported to have experienced a good environment at school, with the administrative staff as well as the teachers and students. However, one S-T mentioned that the school teacher only allowed her to apply activities after the school teacher had given the class. To clarify, the S-T was never able to plan a class and carry it out from beginning to end, rather she was in charge of creating activities that would suit the methodology and the class taught by the school teacher. Another interesting point made by some S-T, was that the way S-T are introduced to their new and temporary students has a big impact on the environment in the classroom and with the school community. They perceived that being called "the practitioner" sometimes

lessens their credibility with students, although based on different responses, this seemed to have more to do with the personality of the S-T and the dynamic within classrooms.

It can be seen that S-T carrying out the Teaching Practicum within their own contexts is a plausible and positive alternative to S-T professional development, as long as communication with school teachers and authorities about the role and functions of the practitioner are clear from the beginning. Of course, this option reduces to a single University (A) based on the fact that the level of instruction is delimited to intermediate and higher education. It would then be important to analyze if targeting a specific level is a suitable and better option for *University B*.

### **5.3.2.2 Supervision or Mentoring?: Supervisors and Student-teachers**

The roles of supervision in *University A* and *B* are normally assigned by coordinators, and are typically the teachers in charge of the class. When asked about their role of supervision and the form of evaluations, several differences were found in each University.

S-T from *University A* reported to have three different roles during their Practicum: Supervisor, mentor teacher and school teacher. The supervisor, as stated before is the teacher assigned to lead the Professional Practice as a subject at the University. According to the supervisor, part of her responsibilities during the classes is to guide S-T through the Practicum, by providing them with the necessary tools to reflect on their contexts in this case she reported making use of *Postmethod Pedagogy* (Kumaravadivelu, 1994). Additionally, she stated that during the classes, she tries to familiarize S-T with different resources that can help them improve autonomously. Finally, she also mentioned to work with S-T in the first moments of the Professional Development Plan, a document whose purpose is established on the necessities of each S-T after having located areas of improvement in their Practicum.

Mentor teachers on the other side, are roles designated based on availability of full-time teachers at the University as well, each mentor is assigned to two to three mentees.

Their main function is to guide S-T in their *Professional Development Plan* (PDP). Supervisor from *University A*, highlighted the importance of mentors to the development of S-T, even more than her own role. She described that work in the classroom tends to be about general situations and discussions, while the work and feedback from mentors is more personalized. In this case, the activities carried out by mentors have demonstrated to be aligned with the main characteristic of mentoring as “non-evaluative and non-threatening sources of support” (Bailey, Curtis and Nunan, 2001). As for the type of mentoring model, it is identified as the Traditional Mentoring model (*Bland et al., 2009*) where S-T have full time teachers providing guidance based on their own expertise. In this case, the coordinator of the BA which was interviewed, was also a mentor for a few S-T of the cohort.

Based on the responses from this mentor, it was possible to determine her mentoring role as an *educator*. This is described in the Chapter II as a mentor “who listens coaches and creates appropriate opportunities for the mentee’s professional learning” (Malderez & Bodóczy, 1999). The *mentor* (coordinator) reported that the work with mentees usually begins with a video recorded by the S-T of one of their classes. Then, the S-T brings the video to the *mentor* which in turn provides feedback. The objective of this activity is for the S-T to identify what aspect(s) of their practice they would like to work throughout the Teaching Practicum. This was referred above as the Professional Development Plan.

As reported by S-T during the focus group, this cycle was confirmed, although S-T reported different perceptions towards the work with their *mentors*. S-T mentioned that along with the video of their class, the mentor used a rubric to make observations and thus come up with specific objectives for the PDP. However, one S-T reported the following:

I think mentors had the same rubric (...) in my case when my mentor saw my video, he marked on the rubric some things I had to work on. Then I explained why I didn’t do something, after that he sent me PDF’s to work on what I needed, but he kept the rubric and that was it (S-T, University A, Focus Group).

On this matter, according to the Supervisor, mentors are provided with different materials to work with S-T such as the rubric for observing the video. They also count with other formats obtained from the “Resource guide for TEFL Mentors and Supervisors in Mexico” (Brenes et al. 2010). But then she emphasized that mentors are encouraged to include other instruments if the situation and the S-T needed it.

The third role involved in the Practicum is that of the school teacher. Considering the General Management of Professional Practices’ statement that “S-T should receive advice and direct training from their Receiving Units”. The responsibility commonly falls on school teachers who lead the classrooms where S-T are inserted. Despite the fact that the guidelines proposed by the General Management, S-T reported that school teachers did not always provide feedback to their classes. One S-T after describing the positive aspects of working with mentors, the contrast between the work of school teachers was brought up:

The school teachers, because I have two. One only reviews my lesson plans and signs them. I don’t know how well she checks it but they are signed. Similarly, the other school teacher only reads it, makes sure I cover what I put in my lesson plan and that’s it. It’s not like she has told me at any point -You need more work here..- or something, and my mentor has, when I showed him the video he told me where I needed work, gave me bibliography to look for strategies and things like that (S-T, University A, Focus Group).

In the same way, two S-T reported having difficulties with the school teacher at the Practicum:

Curiously, she doesn’t help me [school teacher] in fact she interrupts me in class. It’s annoying, because she is a history teacher and sometimes in the middle of the class, she stands up and asks -give me an example of this- and then she starts talking about history and there I lose half an hour. Suddenly, my class is finished and I couldn’t do what I had planned (S-T, University A, Focus Group).

In contrast to these experiences there were S-T who expressed being satisfied with the collaboration with school teachers. The majority of these respondents claimed that the school teacher always provided feedback to their lessons, and that the way the feedback was

provided was respectful but also involved teaching tips or recommendations to improve. One of these S-T mentioned that the school teacher was a graduate from the same BA:

In my case, she [school teacher] is a graduate from this same BA, so she knows or has a clearer idea of what I'm doing. So she let me work at ease, I did everything, even the exams I made them. I planned all the classes, I gave all the content, and she is there but she doesn't interrupt me at any point, she doesn't say anything. However, when I ask for feedback, and even if I don't ask for it, she gives me feedback gladly. That is why I feel so comfortable because she let me do it (S-T, University A, Focus Group).

According to these responses, it was identified that the majority of S-T experienced support from their school teachers, however there were also S-T who felt more comfortable (for various reasons) with their mentor. In addition, it is important to realize that having school teachers who are aware of the process S-T are going through, gives confidence to S-T of being understood by their immediate boss [school teachers].

Regarding *University B* there are two roles within the Practicum, both in Teaching Experience and Professional Practice. The supervisor, which is assigned by the school, and the school teacher who in this case receives the name of *mentor*. However, it should be noted that this role is sometimes carried out by other person at the schools, in this case the supervisor reported the following:

Sometimes mentors are the same school administrators, let's say they play the role in purely administrative terms, it is not an active role. I would say is just a *paper* role (Supervisor, University B).

As noted above, perhaps the term *mentor* is not the most appropriate term to refer to school teachers, since as the supervisor mentioned this is basically an administrative role.

When S-T were asked about the role of school teachers in their Teaching Practicum, the majority agreed that there are two types of school teachers: 1) Those who provide feedback and support; and 2) Those who do not involve in the Practicum. Regarding this

topic, S-T were aware that school teachers are not officially obliged to provide feedback on the Practicum, thus they appreciated any type of support from them.

According to the supervisor from *University B* when asked about the role in the Practicum, she concluded that her type of supervision was determined by the needs of each of her S-T. She mentioned that even though she would like to be more like a “coach”, S-T sometimes require a more prescriptive role because that is what they need in difficult moments. She refers to the following:

In some cases, they tell me -please tell me what to do, I'm desperate!- Most of the times when they feel like that, they also tend to tell me -I'm not going anymore, the context is too much, the students are too much, I don't know how to control them!!!- in moments like these is when I have to be prescriptive (Supervisor, University B, Interview).

On the contrary, the Supervisor reported to prefer situations where she is able to dialogue with S-T, and instead of telling them what to do she can guide S-T through their previous knowledge in order to arrive to a solution. In the following sections, the work within school and the support provided by school teachers, mentors and supervisors will be further explored.

#### **5.4.2.3 Observation and Feedback: Supervisors and Student-teachers**

As discussed in Chapter 3, artifacts used to mediate S-T experiences and current understandings towards their development as future teachers are crucial for the underlying theory of this investigation. Based on S-T responses from *University A*, feedback on the lesson plans should be provided by the school teachers. However, this was not true for every S-T at University A, since there were cases where school teachers just signed the lesson plan without providing any feedback, as discussed in earlier sections.

In contrast, when S-T were required to video record one of their lessons and show it to each of their mentors, some S-T reported that the mentor used a rubric and in some cases

they made questions for the S-T to reflect on what they had observed. The following comment was made by one S-T about the work with one mentor:

My mentor has a rubric, when we watched the video we discussed about it. She asked things like -why is this situation happening?- She gave me techniques to improve, she told me things that I didn't even see, when I counted two mistakes, she saw more (S-T, University A, Focus Group).

In this case, the video to guide the reflection along with the rubric, are the mediating artifacts used by the mentor. Additionally, the use of questions towards S-T, seemed to be helpful, it could be said that the type of mediation carried out by mentors were mostly dialogic, however the evidence is limited to be able to make such affirmation.

Regarding *University B*, S-T reported that observations from their supervisors were very rare. One S-T mentioned that no one had observed him at any point during Practicum. These S-T considered that the amount of observations were not sufficient to contribute to their development, since even though there was observation from school teachers, feedback was not guaranteed. Finally, S-T from *University B*, reflected on the difference between

#### **5.4.2.4 Sources of Support: Student-Teachers**

This section is concerned with S-T perceptions about the support received throughout the process of Teaching Practicum, involving both human support, or instruments used by their initiative or their supervisor's that helped them. The questions were addressed in both the questionnaire and the Focus Group.

According to some of the of S-T participants from *University A*, one of the most important sources of support during the Practicum was their school teacher, S-T justified this response due to the opportunity of being allowed to experiment, and somehow letting them take care of basically everything during the Practicum. This is not to say they did not receive feedback or that the school teacher left them alone in class, on the contrary, they also reported

to have received feedback from their school teachers after their classes. One S-T reported the following:

Honestly, I generally or pretty much always apply what my school teacher proposes me to do, because she tells me -I think you should do something like this- so I try to do something similar to what she proposed and when I implement it, it works! So I realize that experience is very important, and in her case she has a lot, so every time she tells me -why don't you try this?- I do it. That's why I like working with her (S-T, University A, Focus Group).

In addition to the role of school teachers, another important source of support for S-T in *University A*, was the role of mentors from the preservice program although in a minor degree.

Regarding responses from *University B*, S-T reported that one of the most valuable sources of support came from the dialogue with their supervisor, every time they delivered a lesson plan or had a meeting with the supervisor. The options, suggestions and most importantly the fact of not imposing decisions on them to carry out their Practicum was appreciated by the participants. On another source of support, S-T mentioned that before starting their practice at school, the supervisor asked them to observe twice the group they will be working with. With the aid of an observation format they went and observed a class, preferably English, with the purpose of understand the group dynamic as well as observing the resources available for their class. This observation before the Practicum was considered as well as a very important factor for the majority of S-T attending Teaching Experience.

Finally, S-T recalled the use of voice notes about their reflections every two weeks at the Practicum. They expressed that recording themselves helped them in two aspects of their development, 1) English proficiency and 2) reflection on their practices.

## 5.5 After the practicum

This section explores S-T and supervisors' perceptions about the processes happening after the Practicum has finished. These categories involved how S-T attitudes changed after experiencing the Teaching Practicum. In addition to the participants' suggestions on how to improve this important moment in Preservice Programs.

### 5.5.1 Normales

#### 5.5.1.1 Objective of the practicum: Supervisors and Student-teachers

According to supervisors from *Normal A* the objective of the Practicum is for S-T to experience a real educational context, where they are free to apply methodologies. In addition, these moments of practice allow the S-T to make observations about school dynamics. On the other hand, Supervisor from *Normal B*, suggested that the objective of the practicum is to *gradually* introduce the S-T to real educational contexts. She emphasized on the point:

S-T are not supposed to do things right immediately, but that shock they face at the practicum is necessary to analyse their practice, of course with the support of other subjects at the Normal (Supervisor, Normal B, Interview).

She concluded, that these moments are crucial to observe, and understand school dynamics, such as teacher-student relations, along with colleagues. S-T have to be able to adapt to different circumstances and even make mistakes, because, as she mentioned, they are supposed to have the guidance and accompaniment described in the guidelines for the Practicum according to the 1999 curriculum.

Similarly, when S-T were asked to define the objective of the Practicum in their own words, the majority of responses from both *normales* agreed on a specific aspect: "being exposed to real educational contexts". However, one S-T from *Normal B* argued that

sometimes this introduction to the contexts is affected by the time they actually spend at schools (which at the beginning seems to be insufficient). He expressed the following:

I feel like they are far from being real working conditions, because of the amount of time is not enough. Many times, I feel like I really didn't get to know the students, and now that we work with two groups is also limited, due to suspensions, or other circumstances (S-T, Normal B, Focus Group).

In addition to this, S-T from *Normal B* expressed that the Practicum moments were real situations where they were able to apply all the theoretical knowledge they had learnt at the *normal* and put it into practice at schools. Comparatively, a different S-T reflected on the question and provided three specific stages which, to her consideration were involved in the process:

I think is *growing, developing* and *learning*. Growing, because if you're going to be a teacher you need to understand what is like to be an actual teacher, because is not only standing in front of a class and "teach". It's a series of things involved in your profession. Developing, in the moment you are teaching if you fail you need to try again, and if you fail again you go back and try one more time, until you really learn. I believe that is what is all about, growing, developing and learning about what you are going to do (S-T, Normal B, Focus group).

Under these circumstances, when S-T were asked in the questionnaire if they had achieved the objective or not, three of S-T responses from *Normal A* were negative, to which they argued that it was due to the results their students obtained at the end of the Practicum. Whereas, the rest of the S-T felt that two weeks of Practicum was not sufficient time to evaluate their progress yet. In the same line, when they were asked about their levels of satisfaction towards their performance, most of the S-T felt satisfied with their work at the Practicum, however one of the responses obtained in the questionnaire expressed the following:

A lot of things came up, and I feel very confused (S-T, Normal A, Questionnaire).

The comment above, is somewhat concerning and to a certain point understandable for S-T to feel that way. After all, the circumstances experienced in the practicum, as explored earlier, were not exactly optimal.

In the case of S-T from *Normal B*, the majority of respondents agreed on the perception of having achieved the objective and feeling satisfied with their performance throughout the Practicum. They reported that the Practicum was exactly what they had expected, others commented that they still needed more practice to improve.

### **5.5.1.2 How to improve the process of TP: Student-teachers**

Based on responses from S-T from *Normal A*, one of the things that could help improve the process of the Teaching Practicum is first and most importantly the support provided by the Normal. In order to give emphasis to these suggestions, the excerpts from S-T comments will be presented below:

I think I would suggest...having a little more support. We got to a point where we had to help each other. But there are some times when you do something and the rest say -no-. But you do it, and you don't know if it is a strategy or what? There are also times where you have to figure things out on your own. Because as we said it...there is no one to support us (S-T, Normal A, Focus Group).

She goes on to comment about the one time their supervisor observed a class in their Practicum:

Until the last class our supervisor got involved in our classes. She scolded us for things that had already finished. I mean, when she is supposed to be there, she is not. We had already said goodbye to our students, even got them little presents and she was there, trying to correct things that simply were not important then, because we were only covering hours. I think we do need more support from a teacher, it is unfair that in one class and maybe one mistake you want to justify everything that happened (S-T, Normal A, Focus Group).

Regarding the comments about improving the quality of support in their Program, even though the comment was made by one S-T, the rest of the cohort seemed to agree on the

statement. One S-T commented that being in real situations is when S-T realize the actual support they can have, either from the Normal or as a teacher in a school.

In another aspect, the issue of the English level was brought up by a S-T who thought this is also something to be improved, she even suggested adding a different language besides English. She shared her experience as follows:

I think we all have different levels of English, and I think that's a problem we face when we go to sessions. Or well in my case, in my first session, there were students which I noticed spoke English. I saw that they had attended private classes and I was honestly surprised, because some of them did not only know English but they knew German too. So when my student asked me if I knew German I said -no-. So I honestly felt really low. So, yes in this case I would say we need more support in our English level (S-T, Normal A, Focus Group).

In one of the answers collected from the questionnaire about their perception of their English level, a S-T from this Normal expressed:

There are topics that I still haven't learnt, and sometimes that makes me feel incompetent (S-T, Normal A, Questionnaire).

Finally, a S-T made one more suggestion to improve the Practicum, which involved school teachers empathy towards their work as *Normalistas*:

Once you are a *normalista* student and you go out to do your practices, you realize how is the environment at school. So later, when you are working at a school and students come to practice, you already know how it works because you went through this before! You are the one who is supposed to give support to that student. But if you didn't (weren't a *normalista*) you need to create awareness, because that is why we had problems with the teacher. She even told us -I'm not a *normalista*, I come from a university, I studied English and I'm teaching here- So she obviously didn't have that previous knowledge about what a *normalista* does (S-T, Normal A, Focus Group).

These suggestion seems rather interesting for this research, since it is exactly the difference in experiences within both institutions, the one which eventually affected the Practicum in this specific cohort.

In the case of the Supervisor from *Normal A*, one suggestion was made to improve the Practicum. She stated that one of the issues she perceived was the difficulty of “breaking with the traditional model”. She reported that even though S-Ts have new ideas of classes and they try to include innovative materials, at the end of the day if the school teacher did not agree with the lesson plan or did not approve of the material, then the S-Ts had to adapt.

This issue perhaps could be tackled from the moment of liaison, if the S-Ts are in a crucial stage of their education, *Normales* should pay closer attention to the schools where they are sending S-Ts, even more if an entire cohort is going to be at the same school.

Regarding S-Ts responses from *Normal B*, three suggestions were made in order to improve the quality of the Practicum. First, they stated that the Practicum should involve more time and start sooner, to this they argued that sometimes the jump from being only an observer or practitioner for a few hours during the week, to being in charge of four groups during four weeks is just too big. Second, as they reflected on their levels of English they suggest that *normales* require a higher level of English, or if that is not possible, to provide English classes at school for those S-Ts whose level still needs improvement.

Finally, there was a general consensus on improving the quality of monitoring, to this they pointed out, having the sufficient supervisors to do the appropriate amount of observations, since there are times where some S-Ts are simply not observed. In addition to supervisors being really prepared to provide them with effective support during the Practicum.

The suggestion provided by the supervisor in *Normal B*, agreed with the one made by S-Ts, that is the English level required from S-Ts in order to be accepted in the *normal*. Additionally, the supervisor pointed out the necessity of federal authorities to be coherent in the creation of curriculums and the human resources available to successfully implement such

curriculum. Finally she emphasized on the essential characteristics school teachers must have in order to properly support S-Ts.

## **5.5.2 Universities**

### **5.5.2.1 Objective of the practicum**

Based on S-T perceptions about the objective of the Practicum, the majority of respondents agreed on the following: “to apply what we have learnt in the program in real contexts and situations, and help us improve our teaching abilities ”. When asked about how satisfied they felt with their performance during this process, all the S-T participants from *University A*, reported to have felt satisfied with their work, and answered affirmatively when asked if they had achieved the objective. Regarding the supervisor’s responses along with the coordinator of *University A*, they commented that the objective of the Practicum was mainly “giving S-T the opportunity to practice without feeling alone” thus, the two different roles provided for them (mentor, supervisor) along with the school teacher. In the case of the coordinator, she emphasized, in line with the objectives of the General Management, that the Practicum is also an opportunity to insert S-T in the working field.

On the other hand, for both S-T and supervisor in *University B*, the objective of the practicum was to apply the knowledge acquired during the preservice programs, and improve their teaching skills in real contexts for their future as English teachers. Most of the participants affirmed to be satisfied with their performance and reported to have achieved such objective.

### **5.5.2.2 How to improve the process of TP**

According to participants’ responses from *University A*, suggestions to improve the Teaching Practicum converged in one aspect. That is, ensuring communication among

Receiving Units on the opinion of S-Ts whereas supervisors and coordinators agree that the alignment of objectives between the General Management of Professional Practices and the Preservice Program is a matter of urgency this means being able to specify to RU the characteristics and the necessary conditions for S-Ts to carry out successfully their Practicum. In a different aspect, S-Ts from this same University, concluded that the time of Practicum available throughout the curriculum is not sufficient to be familiar with real contexts.

In the case of *University B*, the supervisor mentioned the need to attend those S-Ts who have poor linguistic competence at the moment of carrying out their Practicum, since it has an impact and delays their progress which should be focused on improving their teaching skills and reflecting on their practice. She mentions that the institution could locate those S-Ts and provide workshops to try to remedy the aspects they do not understand.

On the other hand, S-Ts suggestions to improve both their Teaching Experience and the Practicum included expanding the amount of time they spend at schools. To this they argue that it would be a good idea to be exposed to contexts sooner in their programs. An important remark made by one S-T:

In this case I think that we are filled with theory and we might practice in micro-teaching sessions, but it is completely different than teaching live. Because, suddenly you might have doubts that you don't know how to act. For example, no one tells you that in the event of a catastrophe, the teacher is the last one to go out (S-T, University B, Focus Group).

The S-T who made this contribution had in mind the creation of a handbook where all those non-pedagogical issues to which S-Ts might be oblivious, could be addressed and at least make S-Ts aware of them. Finally, they suggested improving the organization of the Practicum at the university, in order to ensure observations to every S-Ts. One S-T suggested sending a group of S-Ts to the same school so the supervisors do not have problems in moving from school to school.

## **5.6 Conclusion**

The purpose of this Chapter was to provide the main results obtained from interviews, questionnaires and focus groups carried out with S-Ts, supervisors and in some cases with coordinators. The triangulation of responses allowed to enhance the understanding of the differences among institutions. As noted above, there are several aspects to be reflected upon by both Normales and Universities. In the following section, conclusions drawn from the previous findings will be presented, as well as the limitations and directions/advice/options for further research.

## **CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSIONS**

### **6.0 Introduction**

The present research had as a main objective to explore the entire process of the Teaching Practicum in two Normales and two Public Universities, which was in turn divided into three main stages: Before, During and After the Practicum. The conclusions presented here will address the research questions that guided this investigation. Thereupon, the limitations of the study are described and suggestions for further research are explored.

### **6.1 Significance of the findings**

Carrying out research within two contexts that have historically been alienated from each other to the point of being considered as “enemies” is not an easy task, as it is usually all research done in Mexico in the field of Education. However, being Higher Education Institutions in charge of remedying the shortage of English Teachers in Mexico (Ramírez-Romero & Sayer, 2016), compelled the author of this research to try to provide evidence that show “they both suffer from many of the same stresses, unsolved problematics (...) with differentiations in nuances only” (Fortoul, 2018, p.12). If the purpose can be achieved, hopefully these institutions will turn to each other with one single objective, learn and perhaps even support each other.

The findings of this research are considered of importance since there are no studies in the Mexican SLTE research field that involve two of the most important public institutions in charge of preparing English Teachers, as well as the focus on the Teaching Practicum, considering that this moment (s) has a great impact on S-Ts, since it promotes the awareness of the effect that their own life and educational experiences, along with their assumptions,

values and beliefs have on their philosophy of learning and teaching (Crookes, 2003, as cited in Burns & Richards, 2009).

Moreover, it is important not to lose sight of the theoretical framework that underlies this investigation: The Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978), which states that higher mental functions occur in the engagement of social activities which are in turn mediated by culturally constructed materials. Finally, it is the reconstruction and transformation of knowledge what characterizes cognitive development (Swain, Kinnear & Steinman, 2011). Based on these principles it is asserted that the process of learning to teach, is socially negotiated (Johnson, 2009) and mediation is a key factor in this process.

As reported above, the key findings of the research will be explored according to the research questions attempting to answer each of these questions with the most salient issues obtained from the data.

## **6.2 How is the Practicum officially established in Normales and Public Universities?**

It has been shown that the Practicum in Normales is thought to be a gradual process. This is identified by Wallace (1991) as the cline of learning contexts where Practicum begins with minimum risk and cost practices, in this case observations; to move later to maximum risk and cost practices, which include more hours and more groups. In addition, the official structure of the Practicum establishes how many groups should the S-Ts be in charge of, and for how long. Likewise, the existence of formal guidelines generated by SEP (1999), which indicate the purpose of this process, the characteristics and functions of every person involved in the Practicum towards S-Ts development are important findings emerged from this research. However, as useful as this document might be, none of the normales involved in this study reported to use it, this in comparison with two universities implementing Block school experiences and Internship types of Practicum (Wallace, 1991). Nonetheless, as suggested by the researcher, universities commonly leave aside the particularities of the ELT

field, perhaps due to number of S-Ts, or homogeneity in administrative processes. Practicum in this case is outshined by bureaucracy. Crucial moments that could have enhanced S-Ts development are mostly about paper signing and format filling. Finally, Teaching Experience from *University B* as a type of Practicum, is a different attempt to include school based experiences, though the number of hours (20) and the location in the curriculum do not seem to be preparing S-Ts for the next Practicum, since the latter is three times longer and monitoring is not guaranteed.

### **6.3 What are the practices being carried out by both Normales and Public Universities regarding the process of the Teaching Practicum?**

The present question was in turn divided into three sub-questions, these involved the characteristics of the practices, the factors that enhanced or in some cases limited the development of S-Ts, to finalize with the impact that mentoring or supervision processes had in the Teaching Practicum. The conclusions will be integrated while at the same time providing a comparison among institutions.

### **6.4 Before the Practicum**

The most salient issues regarding the moment before the Practicum, enlightened the basic differences among institutions, not only from normales to universities but differences even between *normales* which are supposed to follow the same curriculum. While one of the *normales* is in a way complying with what is established in the documents by selecting a school and sending the entire cohort to the same school, the other provides a list of schools previously filtered by the supervisor and S-Ts select according to their needs. Results showed that liaison in *Normal A* was not beneficial for S-Ts since it was entirely administrative. Whereas S-Ts in *Normal B* expressed to have been satisfied with the selection of the schools even though they were from a reduced list of options. They understood they had been filtered

according to the supervisor's previous experiences with school teachers. Surely, more formality in the way school teachers are carrying out their role, and the assurance that they are actually in classes with S-Ts is needed to avoid sending substitutes for school teachers instead of students in formation which need observation and feedback to develop as teachers.

In contrast, Universities have less control, or none at all, over the places S-T choose to carry out their Practicum. The liaison is strictly administrative, no communication can be established with school teachers, and observation of the practicum is almost impossible for supervisors. These findings concurred with Richards and Nunan's (1990) affirmation that support and feedback to S-Ts during Practicum is almost "left to chance". However, it is important to note the efforts made by *University A*, to begin establishing liaisons in favor of their S-Ts. Perhaps, an analysis of the contexts and the feasibility to implement this in *University B* would be valuable.

Finally, important differences were found in these institutions, that is the level of English S-Ts attain before their first Practicum. Both normales have left English aside in the curriculum, or made S-Ts responsible for acquiring it. Additionally, S-Ts were sometimes not aware of their level until the time to actually start teaching it. Feelings of incompetence or disappointment towards the preparation (regarding the English language) within *normales* are definitely concerning issues. Conversely, in the case of universities, S-Ts perceive their linguistic bases as enough, but knowledge about school dynamics and more exposure to contexts where they will be immersed was reported as a necessity.

## **6.5 During the Practicum**

It is understood that the type of environment experienced by S-T during their Practicum in both *normales* and universities is directly related to the quality of the liaison. When school teachers are not aware of the purpose of S-Ts being in their classroom, the type of support that should be given is compromised; From perceiving S-Ts as substitutes to cover

school teachers' hours, to undermining S-Ts by giving them negative feedback in front of students. There is not a clear line when it comes to school teachers role. These findings are consistent with Farrell's research on support in the practicum (2008), where school teachers are generally appointed by authorities, but not necessarily possess the training needed to become a mentor or in other words one of the main sources of support for S-T.

In reference to feedback to S-Ts, the results suggest that in the case of *Normal B* the supervisor is generating *structured mediational spaces* (Golombek & Johnson, 2019) thanks to the model of the practicum, which brings the S-Ts back to normales after their sessions in order to discuss and reflect on their experience. Through the use of mediating artifacts such as language as one of the most important ones, S-Ts knowledge of theories or methodologies are being transformed into current understandings, and in a most important way, they are being brought back for S-Ts process of *internalization* (Vygotsky, 1978).

### **6.5.1 Supervision or mentoring?**

In the case of *Normal A*, evidence was limited to establish the type of supervision carried out. It was found that supervisor gave the Practicum class at the normal, but outside the classroom supervision on the S-T practices was almost null. When S-Ts reported not being observed by the supervisor they had to take matters into their own hands and start observing each other's classes. In the case of *Normal B*, although the practicum receives a grade at the end of the process, the practices carried out by the supervisor were, in comparison, aligned more with the collaborative approach to supervision (Wallace, 1991). On the other hand, *University A* involves both mentoring and supervision types of roles. Although mentors are in some cases the main source of support for S-Ts at the University, the process of mentoring seemed to be superficial. Mentoring, is not simply being called a *mentor*, rather is a set of different sources of support, from the affective to educative. Finally,

for *University B*, supervisor's acknowledgment of the needs and requirements of her S-Ts, characterized her job as adapting to sociocultural and contextual aspects of the Practicum, in agreement with Copeland's assertions about beginning teachers, some of them will feel safer when being told what to do (1982 as cited in Wallace,1991).

## **6.6 After the Practicum**

In regards with the next step after the practicum, this is normally the conclusion of paperwork, signatures collected in lesson plans, reflections worth sixty hours of teaching both daily and weekly in the case of *University B*. As stated earlier in the investigation, to what extent are all these valuable for the development of S-Ts? If they are already going through their first attempts at teaching, probably facing difficulties, should not this moment be promoting reflection from all those shocking and crucial experiences towards self improvement and professional development?

Finally, suggestions made by both supervisors and S-Ts on how to improve the Teaching Practicum are aligned with the majority of the researcher's main conclusions. Clearly, all kinds of deficiencies in initial preparation become more noticeable during real contact with the professional act of teaching.

## **6.7 Limitations of the study**

Conducting this research entailed various limitations; from gaining entry to the institutions, accessing official documents and carrying out focus groups and interviews according to the participants' possibilities. In the case of accessing institutions, it must be emphasized that accessing to *normales* required a lot more work and communications with authorities while accessing to universities was accomplished somewhat easier, thanks to the connections of the advisor of the researcher and personal communications.

Another important limitation of the study is the change of the curriculum for *normales* during the data collection stage. The implementation of the 2018 curriculum, could have dismissed some or most of the findings of this investigation regarding *normales*. However, when analysing the 2018 curriculum it was found that the Practicum proposed in 1999 had prevailed in the 2018 plan (DGESPE, 2018).

Further on, as a first time researcher the process of interviewing participants is presented as a limitation, as Krueger & Casey (2000) pointed out, when carrying out a semi-structured interview the lack of experience from the interviewer, could result in unasked questions to different participants, an absence of rapport, or poor skills in follow up questions and therefore to insufficient data.

## **6.8 Suggestions for further research**

The insights obtained from the present research have given light to further aspects in need of attention. First, the researcher suggests the use of studies which analyse in depth the process of mediation among S-Ts and supervisors, as well as school teachers and S-Ts. This might provide a better idea of the benefits of creating structured mediational spaces (Golombek & Johnson, 2019), and bearing in mind that every mediating action and artifacts must be goal oriented and not only concerned with complying with administrative requirements.

Second, while it might be difficult, due to a wide variety of aspects, carrying out research that involves school teachers who receive S-Ts in their Practicum could represent an important insight to an equally important role during the Practicum.

The third and final suggestion is concerned with the new curriculum established for the *normales*, and if the changes affect the preparation of future English teachers, whether in a positive or a negative way.

## **6.9 Conclusion**

There are a number of discrepancies between what official documents report the Practicum should be and what is actually happening at every institution. One of the most important is that S-Ts are in most cases left alone to figure things out on their own, and school teachers are lacking empathy towards those who have been brave enough to pursue this career in a country like Mexico. The shortage of English teachers in Mexico, should be reason enough for schools to provide the facilities to S-Ts who in a not so distant future will be their own workforce.

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## Appendix 1

### Teaching practicum Questionnaire

The following questionnaire is to be used as a part of a MA thesis research project which aims at collecting information from pre-service student-teachers regarding the teaching practicum in Central Mexico. The information gathered in this questionnaire will be kept confidential.

Take the time you need to carefully read each question and answer in the Likert scale and as fully as you can in English or Spanish. We appreciate your participation and your honest contributions.

#### Previous to the practicum

1. How would you describe the process of school placement to carry out your practicum?

Excellent     Good     Acceptable     Bad     Very Bad   
Why? \_\_\_\_\_

1. Describe the steps of the process in 1?

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
Other: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Who is in charge of assigning schools?

Director/coordinators of the program     my supervisor/mentor     myself     other     Who?

1. Who is in charge of assigning the supervisor/mentor?

The director/coordinator of the program     myself     other   
who? \_\_\_\_\_

1. What of the following is part of your supervision agenda during your practicum?  
(you can mark more than one)

1. Pre-observation sessions (revision of lesson plan, materials, etc.)
2. Observation in situ
3. Post observation dialogues/feedback
4. Reflective material/tools (journals, recording, etc.)
5. Other(s): Describe: \_\_\_\_\_

1. How is the practicum evaluated?

1. Observations
2. Journal
3. Action research

4. Portfolio and 1 and 2
5. Other (describe) \_\_\_\_\_

1. How well prepared do you consider yourself regarding the **language proficiency** for the practicum at this stage?

Very much prepared  Adequately prepared  Somewhat prepared  Not prepared   
Why?

1. How well prepared do you consider yourself regarding the pedagogical and teaching skills for the practicum at this stage?

Very much prepared  Adequately prepared  Somewhat prepared  Not prepared   
Why?

### During the Practicum

1. How were you introduced to your students and the school community?

1. How would you describe the school environment considering teachers or staff's attitudes?

Excellent  Good  Acceptable  Bad  Very Bad   
Why? \_\_\_\_\_

1. How would you describe your relationship with students?

Excellent  Good  Acceptable  Bad  Very Bad   
Why? \_\_\_\_\_

1. How would you describe the student's attitudes towards English?

Excellent  Good  Acceptable  Bad  Very Bad   
Why? \_\_\_\_\_

1. How would you describe your relationship with teachers and the administrative staff at school?

Excellent  Good  Acceptable  Bad  Very Bad   
Why? \_\_\_\_\_

1. Who is in charge of reviewing and giving feedback on your lesson plans?

Supervisor  school teacher  classmates  other: \_\_\_\_\_

1. When in doubt about planning, classroom management who do you share your concerns or questions with?

Supervisor  school teacher  classmates  other: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What methodology do you use for your teaching?

Grammar-translation  Communicative  Task based learning  Lexical approach

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Who was most helpful to you during your practicum?  
Supervisor  school teacher  classmates  other: \_\_\_\_\_
1. Describe one of the most rewarding moments you experienced during your practicum:  
\_\_\_\_\_
1. Describe one of the most difficult moments you experienced during your practicum:  
\_\_\_\_\_

**After the practicum**

1. When the practicum is completed what of the following happens?
  1. You go back to the formal and regular session
  2. You continue paper work
  3. You look for a job
  4. Other (describe): \_\_\_\_\_
1. In your own words what is the main objective of the practicum?
1. Do you think you accomplished the objective?  
Yes  No   
Why? \_\_\_\_\_
1. Have your attitudes towards teaching changed after or during your practicum?  
Yes  No   
How?

## Appendix 2

### Cuestionario de Práctica Docente

El siguiente cuestionario será utilizado como parte de un proyecto de investigación de Maestría, que busca recolectar información de estudiantes de programas dirigidos a la Enseñanza del Inglés, sobre la Práctica/Experiencia docente. La información reunida en este cuestionario se mantendrá confidencial. Tómame el tiempo necesario para leer cuidadosamente cada pregunta y contestar lo más honesta y completamente posible. En algunos casos puedes elegir más de una opción.

Si estás interesado en leer los resultados de la investigación, agrega tu correo electrónico en la parte final del cuestionario. Agradecemos tu participación y tu valiosa opinión.

¿A qué nivel diste clases durante tu práctica/experiencia docente?

---

¿Qué tipo de institución era?

Pública  Privada

#### Previo a la práctica

1. ¿Cómo describirías el proceso de asignación de escuelas para llevar a cabo tu práctica?

Excelente  Buena  Aceptable  Mala  Muy mala

¿Por qué lo consideras así? \_\_\_\_\_

1. Enumera y describe los pasos de este proceso (asignación de escuelas)

1. ¿Quién está a cargo de asignar escuelas?

Director/Coordinadores del programa  Mi supervisor/mentor  Yo la elijo

Otro

¿Quién? \_\_\_\_\_

1. ¿Quién se encarga de asignar al supervisor de tus prácticas?

Director/coordinadores del programa  Yo lo elijo  Otro

¿Quién? \_\_\_\_\_

1. De las siguientes opciones ¿Cuáles forman parte del proceso de supervisión en tus Prácticas? Puedes elegir más de una.

1. Sesiones pre-observación (revisión de planeaciones, materiales, etc.)

2. Observaciones en la escuela donde hago mi práctica.

3. Sesiones después de las observaciones para darme feedback.

4. Materiales/herramientas de reflexión (journals, grabaciones, etc.)

5. Otros

(Describe):

1. ¿Cómo es evaluada la práctica? Si usan una combinación de varias de estas opciones, por favor escríbelas todas en "Otro"

- 1. Observaciones en mi escuela
- 2. Journal/diario
- 3. Investigación acción/action research
- 4. Portafolio
- 5. Otro (describe) \_\_\_\_\_

1. ¿Qué tan bien preparada/o te consideras en cuanto a tu nivel de Inglés para llevar a cabo tu Práctica?

- Muy bien preparada/o  Suficientemente preparada/o  Un poco preparada/o   
 No me siento preparada/o   
¿Por qué lo consideras así?

1. ¿Qué tan bien preparada/o te sientes en cuanto a tus habilidades de enseñanza para llevar a cabo tu práctica?

- Muy bien preparada/o  Suficientemente preparada/o  Un poco preparada/o   
 No me siento preparada/o   
¿Por qué lo consideras así? \_\_\_\_\_

**Durante la Práctica**

1. ¿Cómo describirías el ambiente en la escuela donde realizas/te tu práctica?

- Excelente  Buena  Aceptable  Mala  Muy mala   
¿Por qué?

1. ¿Cómo describirías tu relación con los estudiantes?

- Excelente  Buena  Aceptable  Mala  Muy mala   
¿Por qué?

1. ¿Cómo describirías la actitud de los estudiantes hacia el idioma Inglés?

- Excelente  Buena  Aceptable  Mala  Muy mala   
 ¿Por qué? \_\_\_\_\_

1. ¿Cómo describirías tu relación con los maestros y el personal de la escuela donde realizas/te tus prácticas?

- Excelente  Buena  Aceptable  Mala  Muy mal   
¿Por qué? \_\_\_\_\_

1. Cuando tienes dudas sobre planeaciones/manejo del aula/estrategias ¿Con quién resuelves tus dudas? Si son una combinación de estas opciones escríbelos en "otro"

Supervisor  Maestro titular  Compañeros de práctica

Otro: \_\_\_\_\_

1. ¿Qué metodología utilizas para la enseñanza del Inglés?

Grammar-translation  Communicative  Task-based learning  Eclectic

Otra:

1. ¿Quién está a cargo de revisar y dar retroalimentación a tus planeaciones?

Supervisor  Maestro titular  Compañeros de práctica

Otro: \_\_\_\_\_

1. A lo largo de tu práctica, ¿qué tan seguido tenías observaciones?

Siempre  Algunas veces  Rara vez  Nunca

1. ¿De quién? \_\_\_\_\_

1. ¿Consideras que el número de veces que fuiste observado fue suficiente como para contribuir a tu desarrollo como maestro? ¿Si, no, por qué?

\_\_\_\_\_

1. ¿Cómo te sientes cuando te observan en clase?

\_\_\_\_\_

1. ¿Qué tan seguido recibías retroalimentación sobre tus prácticas?

Siempre  Algunas veces  Rara vez  Nunca

1. ¿Qué tan útil es esta retroalimentación para ti?

Muy útil  Útil  No muy útil  Inútil

¿Por qué lo consideras

así? \_\_\_\_\_

1. ¿Quién consideras que fue de mucha ayuda para ti durante tus prácticas?

Supervisor  Maestro titular  Compañeros de práctica

Otro: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Describe uno de los momentos más gratificantes o enriquecedores durante tu práctica:

1. Describe uno de los momentos más difíciles que experimentaste durante tu práctica:

### Después de la práctica

1. Entre las siguientes opciones ¿cuáles ocurren después de concluir tu práctica?

1. Regresas a clases regulares en tu escuela.
2. Necesito hacer papeleo para concluir la práctica.
3. Busco un trabajo.
4. Otro (describe):

\_\_\_\_\_

1. En tus propias palabras, ¿cuál es el objetivo principal de la Práctica?

---

1. ¿Consideras que alcanzaste el objetivo?

Sí  No

¿Por qué lo consideras así?:

1. ¿Qué tan satisfecho te sientes con tu desempeño en la práctica?

Muy satisfecha/o  Satisfecha/o  No estoy segura/o  Insatisfecho  Muy  
insatisfecha/o

¿Por qué lo consideras así?

1. ¿Ha cambiado tu opinión o tu actitud hacia la enseñanza del inglés después de  
concluir tu práctica? Sí  No

¿Cómo cambió o por qué no  
cambió?: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 3

### Interview

¿Por qué cree que los estudiantes eligen esta carrera? ¿Por qué en la universidad y no una Normal?

¿En su experiencia, cuál es el objetivo de las prácticas docentes? ¿ Los practicantes logran ese objetivo?

¿Cómo define su rol en este procesos de las prácticas docentes? Guía, supervisor, mentor

¿Cómo se lleva a cabo el procesos de las prácticas docentes?

- Requisitos previos (materas, nivel de inglés, habilidades docentes, metodologías, conocimiento del Sistema Educativo Mexicano)
- Accesos a las escuelas (convenios)
- ¿Qué herramientas o prácticas considera que son de ayuda para el buen desempeño o crecimiento profesional de los practicantes?
  - Planeación de clases y su revisión
  - Observaciones
  - Diálogo previo y/o después de la clase con su supervisora o con los maestros de grupo o compañeros.
  - Reflexiones (*journals, audio recordings*)
- ¿Cómo evalúa a los practicantes?
- ¿Qué sugerirían para una mejor práctica docente?
- Tomando en cuenta todos los factores que intervienen, preparación previa o escuelas a donde practican.

## Appendix 4

### Focus Group

1. Información demográfica: Nombre, edad y semestre
2. ¿Por qué eligieron esta carrera? ¿Por qué en la universidad y no una Normal?
3. ¿Qué han aprendieron de las práctica docente? Aspectos positivos y no positivos
  - a. ¿Fue fácil encontrar escuela?
    - Acceso a las escuelas, trámites, horas-práctica son suficientes
  - b. ¿Fue suficiente la preparación previa a las prácticas?
    - Nivel de inglés, materias, habilidades docentes, metodologías, conocimiento del Sistema Educativo Mexicano, etc.
  - c. ¿Qué herramientas o prácticas fueron de ayuda para su buen desempeño o crecimiento profesional?
    - Planeación de clases y su revisión
    - Observaciones
    - Diálogo previo y/o después de la clase con su supervisora o con los maestros de grupo o compañeros.
    - Reflexiones (*journals, audio recordings*)
  - d. ¿Cómo eran las escuelas y sus maestros? ¿Cómo se sintieron estando en esa escuela durante su práctica? ¿En caso de alguna duda a quién recurrían?
4. ¿En sus propias palabras cuál es el objetivo de las prácticas docentes?
5. ¿Sienten que lo alcanzaron? ¿Por qué si o por qué no?
6. ¿Qué sugerirían para una mejor práctica docente?
  - Tomando en cuenta todos los factores que intervienen, preparación previa o escuelas a donde practican.
7. ¿Cambió su actitud (positiva o negativamente) hacia la enseñanza del inglés? ¿Cómo?