

How are we preparing future English teachers?: A study of the curricular variations among selected EFL undergraduate programs

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ABSTRACT In order to improve the pre-service formation in Ecuador, the government created an education standardized curriculum to be used for all Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) offering education undergraduate programs. Unfortunately, when designing this curriculum, curriculum developers did not consider the particularities of all different pre-service programs existing in the country, for instance, English language teaching and focused more on primary education. This lack of consideration for different education undergraduate programs resulted in difficulties in adopting the standardized curriculum in other specializations. This research presents the different variations existing among the English language teaching curricula which resulted from the attempts to adopt the standardized curriculum in English language teaching pre-service formation; as well as the challenges and difficulties that curriculum developers faced during this process. Using a mixed-methods research methodology, results showed that curriculum variations revolve around the total number of practicum hours, low percentage of the use of English as a means of instruction, scarce common academic subjects despite the existence of common professional competencies, and differences in the total number of instruction hours.

KEY WORDS Curriculum, Curriculum design, English teacher preparation, ELT, professional competences of teachers.

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¿Cómo estamos preparando a los futuros profesores de inglés?: Un estudio de las variaciones curriculares entre carreras que preparan profesores de inglés

RESUMEN Para mejorar la formación de los profesores en el Ecuador, el gobierno diseñó el currículo genérico de carreras de educación para que sea usado por todas las universidades que ofrecen carreras de educación. Desafortunadamente, cuando se diseñó este currículo, las personas a cargo no consideraron las particularidades de todas las carreras en educación existentes en el país, por ejemplo, la carrera de Pedagogía de los Idiomas Nacionales y Extranjeros, y se centraron más en la carrera de Educación Básica. Esta falta de visión relacionada con las diferentes carreras generó dificultades en la adopción del currículo genérico. Este estudio presenta las diferentes variaciones existentes entre los currículos de la carrera de Pedagogía de los Idiomas Nacionales y Extranjeros en diferentes universidades, los efectos que esto causó en la formación de profesores de inglés, y las dificultades y retos que tuvieron las personas encargadas del desarrollo del currículo durante este proceso. Usando una metodología de investigación mixta, los resultados muestran que las variaciones curriculares giran alrededor el número total de horas de práctica preprofesional, un bajo porcentaje del uso del idioma inglés como medio de instrucción, pocas asignaturas comunes entre universidades a pesar de la existencia de competencias profesionales, más o menos estandarizadas, y diferencias en el total de la malla curricular.

PALABRAS CLAVE Currículo, diseño curricular, preparación de docentes de inglés, ELT, competencias profesionales del profesor..

INTRODUCTION

THE SITUATION OF ENGLISH TEACHING IN ECUADOR

In 2008 the ministry of Education created a project called “Project for Improving English”. The objective of this project was to improve English Language Teaching (ELT) in the country and comprised four main components. One, the creation a new English as a Foreign Language (EFL) curriculum for primary and secondary education. Two, the use of the Common European Framework language indicators as the learning outcomes for primary and secondary years. In correspondence with this, the government also stated that students leaving secondary education need to have a B1 level of English. Three, free distribution of EFL textbooks among primary and secondary public-school students. And four, the requisite of a B2 level of English for all in-service teachers (fortalecimiento del inglés, nd).

In 2016 via a Ministerial Order, “Acuerdo Nro. MINEDUC-ME-2016-00020-A”, the Ministry of Education stated that English as a foreign language (EFL) must be taught in the primary and secondary public education systems. For primary education EFL has to be taught from 3 to 5 hours per week and for secondary education 5 hours, except for the last year of secondary education where 3 hours were allotted (Ministerio de Educación, 2016). Through this Ministerial Order the government manifested its interest in improving the quality of ELT in the public education sector. Regrettably, public policymakers did not consider the future problems that would result during the implementation of this policy, for instance, a shortage of English teachers as well as the current in-service teachers’ qualifications.

According to Directors in some schools, the shortage of English teachers resulted in demanding teachers from other subjects for example, ICT teachers or administrative staff such as secretaries to teach EFL in their respective schools. Regarding the in-service English teachers’ qualifications, there were two main problems: first, a low level of English proficiency and second, a limited knowledge of ELT methodology.

In respect of the English proficiency level among in-service EFL teachers, a representative from the Ministry of Education stated that in 2014 only 10% of these teachers had a B2 level of English; and added that this percentage has improved in recent years due to language training courses offered by the Ministry of Education (“Suficiencia en inglés”, 2018). In the same vein, the Deputy Secretary of Professional Development, an office which is part of the Ministry of Education, highlighted that 34% of in-service teachers had a B2 level of English in the year 2018 and urged universities to form English teachers with the appropriate competencies to effectively teach this language in public schools. She also stated that, although there were 9,737 English teachers in the public education system at that time, there was still a need of 4,273 teachers to meet public demand (“Solo 34% de maestros con suficiencia para el inglés”, 2018). To date, the government has not made public the exact number of EFL teachers needed to cover the students’ demand. Yet, it can be assumed that the number of EFL teachers needed may remain the same or higher than in 2018 since the government has not officially hired permanent teachers for the public sector.

Regarding the B2 level of English proficiency requirement for in-service EFL teachers, it is important to mention that this level needs to be validated via an international test, for example: TOEFL or First Certificate of English. Yet, attaining this level of English seems to be difficult among pre and in-service teachers.

There is no doubt that there has been an improvement of the level of English proficiency among in-service English teachers in the last years. Unfortunately, the overall level is still problematic, as mentioned before, only 34% of the current in-service teachers have a B2 level of English. This hinders the teacher’s class performance since it may be difficult

for them to properly carry out instructional class activities where they have to model the language to their students.

Language proficiency among the majority of recent graduates seeking a permanent EFL teaching position in public schools is also problematic, as the results of the English tests administered to these group of teachers showed. In order to have a permanent position in the public education sector, teachers need to participate in a hiring process called “Quiero Ser Maestro” (“I Want to be a Teacher”). This process is comprised of a psychometric test, an English test (candidates need to demonstrate a B2 level) and a demo class. Candidates who successfully pass all these tests will be offered a permanent position by the Ministry of Education. In the case of EFL, out of 2336 candidates who initially participated in this process in 2017, only 117 teachers passed the English test. In other words, only 5% of the candidates demonstrated a B2 level of English (Información Ecuador.com, n. d.).

In 2010, the Ecuadorian government stated that the Ecuadorian education was not a quality education and legally addressed this problem via the Higher Education Law declaring all education undergraduate programs to be in the national interest. In accordance with this declaration, Article 104 of the Higher Education Law stated that the basic curriculum contents and the criteria for the duration of the pre-professional practicum of undergraduate programs in the national interest will be established by the Board of Higher Education (LOES, 2010).

Following the legal demands and in accordance with Article 104, the Board of Higher Education, together with some HEIS, developed a national standardized curriculum for education undergraduate programs. The development of this curriculum and the implications for English teachers’ formation in Ecuador is described below.

THE ECUADORIAN STANDARDIZED CURRICULUM FOR EDUCATION UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMS

In order to understand the reasons that propelled the creation of the Standardized Curriculum for Education Undergraduate Programs, it is important to refer to the changes that the Ecuadorian higher education system has experienced in the last decade. In 2010, following a rigorous process of evaluation and accreditation of HEIS which took place in 2008, the National Assembly (formerly known as National Congress) enacted a new Higher Education Law. This law aimed to improve the Ecuadorian higher education system via specific legal demands, for example: the inclusion of further academic qualifications for the teaching personnel in HEIS, such as a Master’s or a Ph. D. title, a demand to improve teaching and research in HEIS, and a more effective connection between the HEIS and the community through community outreach projects, among others.

With the aim of improving teaching and the quality of the undergraduate programs in the tertiary education sector in Ecuador, HEIS were required to modify their curricula. To meet this requirement, HEIS started working individually or with other HEI, for instance, universities offering engineering undergraduate programs grouped with other HEIS offering the same programs. Although there was support and advice from the Higher Education Board (Consejo de Educación Superior-CES) throughout this process, HEIS’ curriculum developers had the prerogative to decide on the type of curriculum modifications they would make in their programs. This, however, was not the case of HEIS offering education undergraduate programs where CES took the lead in the design of a new standardized curriculum together with 33 HEIS’ representatives.

The standardized curriculum for education, according to CES (2015), was an innovative curriculum proposal, based on the following characteristics: a) pertinence to the teachers’ formation, b) curriculum flexibility, c) the practice of action research as the main mechanism

to structure the curriculum, d) a primary focus on students via an academic and personal tutoring system, e) emphasis on research and f) the use of innovative teaching methodologies as well as ICT integration in education. Furthermore, this curriculum comprises 41 academic subjects to be taught in 9 semesters. According to the creators of this curriculum, one of the most evident innovations was the duration of the pre-service teaching practicum which amounted to 1800 hours progressively distributed along the 9 semesters.

Although the design and the principles of this standardized curriculum may have been helpful and innovative for primary education undergraduate programs, it posed serious problems for other specializations, for instance, teaching English as a foreign language. Conversely, to the government idea of curriculum standardization for pre-service formation, the existing literature in the area of ELT curriculum development provides different models to facilitate the design of a curriculum that can help the formation of effective English teachers.

However, what is shared by different authors is that there is not a specific curriculum developing model considered to be perfect for ELT. Finney (2002, p. 77) emphasizes that “there is a need [...] for much more discussion and research before it can be said that there is a coherent model of ELT curriculum planning and development”. Thus, the importance of avoiding adhering to a single model for curriculum development. Instead, curriculum planners need take advantage of the different models in order to facilitate the development of students’ professional competencies.

In the case of English teaching pre-service formation, the curriculum needs to respond to the current situation of English teaching in the country as well as the reality that future teachers will face once they finish university and insert in the national education sector.

The need of developing an Innovative Curriculum for English Teaching Undergraduate Programs

In the country, there are 60 HEIS. This includes public, private and co-funded institutions (Co-funded HEIS are institutions partially funded by the government and students’ fees). Out of this number, 17 HEIS offer English language teaching undergraduate programs, 15 on a face-to-face mode and 2 online. This number represents the 28% of Ecuadorian universities. Moreover, this percentage also shows the students’ interest in English language teaching pre-service formation.

A high student interest in pursuing an English teaching degree poses a huge responsibility for HEIS; especially under the current in-service situation in the country where English proficiency and ELT methodology is problematic. In order to address these problems, curriculum planners in HEIS need to innovate their pre-service curriculum. Innovation, however, is not always an easy task, according to Humphries and Burns (2015, p 293), innovation “often ends in failure due to educational policies that are incompatible with the realities of the teaching context, insufficient levels of professional support, and inadequate teaching materials”. For this reason, curriculum innovation cannot be seen as an isolated process; it is rather a cooperative act in which national education authorities, HEI authorities, teachers and students need to be involved. Policies, on the other hand, have a prime role since they need to pave the way for facilitating innovation and avoiding prescriptions.

To facilitate innovation, according to Humphries and Burns (2015, p 239-240), there are three aspects that need to be considered, for instance “Teachers’ expectations” which relates to teachers’ beliefs and practice, “External constraints” such as “government policies, mandated materials, teacher performance evaluations... stakeholders” and “Internal constraints” like “working conditions and the institutional culture”. Out of these three aspects important consideration needs to be paid to teachers since an effective curriculum implementation and innovation lies in their hands. Hence, the need to incorporate their voices in “curriculum development” (Rahman, Pandian and Kaur, 2018, p. 121).

In order to effect change in English language teaching pre-service formation, curriculum innovation cannot be seen as a series of general steps that need to be mechanically

followed and without proper reflection. First, it needs to respond to the HEI's ethos and second "be underpinned by a clear educational philosophy" (McKimm and Jones 2017, 2015, p 520). These two aspects become the heart of the pre-service formation curriculum since they form the values and attitudes of future English teachers.

In addition, McKimm and Jones (2017) present 12 tips for curriculum development and considering the national conditions; the following suggestions can be considered for creating a pertinent pre-service curriculum: 1. "Analyze the internal environment and culture", 2. "Develop a strategy for change involving key stakeholders", 3. "Choose the right combination of approaches to change", 4. "Plan for transition and loss of competence" and 5. "Don't underestimate the complexity".

In relation to the formation of English teachers, Kuhlman and Knežević (2014, p. 7) suggest the use of standards; and based on the work of other authors, they mention 3 types, for instance, a) "Content standards" which comprises "linguistics, language acquisition and development, and culture". b) "Pedagogical standards", which refers to the development of students' English teaching competency and "assessment", and c) "Performance standards" which help check whether the previous standards have been met or not. The use of these standards can be helpful for curriculum planners to check the extent of completion of English proficiency acquisition and teaching competency. However, standards need to remain general to avoid prescriptions.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology used for this study was a mixed-methods design. The core of this method is "the combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches" with an aim of providing "a more complex understanding of a research problem" (Creswell, 2014, p. 4). Thus, in order to identify the challenges that language planners experienced during the process of developing their curricula for the English teaching undergraduate programs, this study employed a quantitative part which was followed by a qualitative part. In the quantitative part, there was an analysis of the existing English language teaching curriculum of the participating HEIs aiming to provide an overview of the current status of these undergraduate programs in the country. In the qualitative part, interviews were conducted to 4 Directors belonging to the participating universities. This with the aim to explore further the results obtained from the quantitative part. For the quantitative data analysis, descriptive statistics were used and for the qualitative data, a thematic analysis.

The research question that this study aimed to answer was: what are the challenges that HEIs' curriculum planners experienced in adapting the national standardized curriculum for education undergraduate programs in developing their English language teaching curriculum?

PARTICIPANTS

An invitation to participate in this study was sent to 15 different Directors of English language teaching pre-service programs. Directors from the two HEIs that offer online English Teaching undergraduate programs were not invited. This because due to their online nature, these undergraduate programs use a different curriculum and content organization. After sending the invitations, 8 Directors accepted to participate in this research and provided their curricula for this study; and 4 program Directors were later interviewed.

The criteria for selecting the 4 Directors for the interview were: a) have actively participated in the development of the current curriculum and b) have been a program Director under the new curriculum for at least 2 years.

In order to maintain the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, the name of the HEIS and Directors will not be mentioned. Hereafter, HEIS will simply be identified as HEI1, HEI2, HEI3, HEI4, HEI5, HEI6, HEI7 and HEI8, and program Directors from these HEIS as Directors.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In Ecuador, CES is the government office in charge of legally authorize the opening of any new programs offered by public and private HEIS, as well as allowing any existing curriculum modifications. In this sense, HEIS seeking to offer new undergraduate programs to students need to send a curriculum proposal to CES for revision and official approval. In this office, there are different specialists whose task is to oversee whether proposals meet the minimum requirements needed for the legal approval and subsequent official authorization. HEIS cannot offer any undergraduate program which has not been officially authorized by CES. The same process applies for intended modification to existing curricula.

Once HEIS send their curriculum proposal to CES, one specialist is assigned for overseeing the whole process until its final approval. The main roles of the CES specialist are first, to check the proposal's technical aspects; for instance, minimum number of hours, institutional infrastructure, teachers' qualifications, etc. Second, the CES specialist must send the proposal to an academic specialist to review its academic content. The academic specialist is usually a university professor who works for an HEI in the same undergraduate program and has enough experience and knowledge to validate it. If the academic specialists deem pertinent, they will suggest corrections to the curriculum proposals. These changes, in turn, need to be addressed by HEIS in order to continue with the approval of the curriculum proposals. Third, the CES specialist must make a report recommending official approval of the undergraduate program, once all technical and academic changes have been made. This report may not be the same for all HEIS since the specialists are different and have different views.

The initial intention of the Board of Higher Education (CES) which was to standardize the pre-service formation through the insertion of a new curriculum, seemed not to be very effective for English language teaching undergraduate programs. Hence, by following its structure and demands, curriculum planners faced certain challenges, namely: a) development of English language proficiency, b) difficulties in combining the standardized curriculum content and subjects pertinent to the ELT pre-service formation and c) adapting the prescribed structure of the teaching practicum to the English language teaching curriculum.

A) DEVELOPMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

The development of language proficiency among pre- and in-service EFL teachers is a need that HEIS have to address, particularly when only 34% of current in-service EFL teachers and only 5% of applicants to the public education system have a B2 level ("Solo 34% de maestros con suficiencia para el inglés", 2018, Información Ecuador.com, n. d.). Regrettably, by promoting the standardization of a common curriculum, this particular aspect of language proficiency development has been difficult to address and resulted in serious challenges to HEIS' curriculum planners. Who, because of the official demand to adhere to the standardized curriculum, had to juggle between reinforcing their students' English language proficiency and including the subjects mandated in the standardized curriculum. A Director referred to this challenge in the following terms:

The standardized curriculum focuses only on general education and does not provide a guide for English language teaching programs. Preparing English teachers is different; they need to learn the language and the standardized curriculum does not consider this aspect.

Out of the 8 participating HEIS, 7 had established a B2 level in English as their overall English language proficiency goal for their pre-service students and one university a C1 level. The selection of a B2 level in almost all HEIS is aligned to the language requirements for EFL teachers established by the Ministry of Education. Though, there is an apparent common language competency goal, HEIS have a diverse organization of language input in their curricula, mostly in terms of number of instruction hours. This is shown on table 1 (see Table 1).

Table 1 shows the variation in the number of instruction hours for developing English language proficiency among pre-service EFL teachers. The HEI that has the highest number of English language input hours (HEI 1) is the institution whose aim is to form EFL teachers with a C1 level, whereas in the other HEIS the maximum number of hours is 1,720 and the minimum (720). It is necessary to emphasize that with this marked difference in the number of English language input hours; it will be difficult for HEIS achieve the goal of having graduates with a B2 level of English.

This language input differences may also lead to the students' acquisition of diverse language proficiency levels which, in turn, may influence student's selections of HEIS. Resulting in having high demand for a few HEIS and, opposite to this, a low demand for the majority of HEIS offering English language teaching undergraduate programs.

Directors of English teaching undergraduate programs are conscious that their students need to have at least a B2 level of English and fear that their existing curricula may not be able to facilitate the acquisition of this level. Unfortunately, due to the normative orientation of the standardized curriculum, most of them feel powerless to improve pre-service students' language proficiency by introducing innovation in their curricula and have ended up reducing to the minimum the English language input to their students in order to cope with the government's demands. A director referred to this in the following terms:

According to the Ministry of Education, when students finish their secondary school, they need to have a B2 level of English. We all know that it is not the case. Some students finish with an A2 level and, in some cases, they even have an A1 level. These are the type of students who come to the university pursuing a career in English language teaching. Regrettably, we cannot deviate much from the standardized curriculum requirements and increase the number of English proficiency teaching hours to improve language proficiency among our students.

B) DIFFICULTIES IN COMBINING THE STANDARDIZED CURRICULUM CONTENT AND SUBJECTS PERTINENT TO THE ELT PRE-SERVICE FORMATION

In 2015, CES presented the standardized curriculum as an innovative proposal comprised of 41 academic subjects characterized, according to its creators, by: a) pertinence to the teacher's formation, b) flexibility, c) the practice of action research as the main mechanism to structure the pre-service formation, d) a primary focus on students via an academic and personal tutoring system, e) emphasis on action research and f) the use of innovative teaching methodologies as well as ICT integration. This whole curriculum was conceptualized to be taught in 9 semesters.

This structure, however, complicated matters for English language teaching curriculum planners since the standardized curriculum targeted primary education and did not include any subject which could promote English proficiency development nor ELT in general. A director referred to this in the following terms:

Table 1. Number of hours for developing English language proficiency

HEIs	Number of instruction hours to develop English language proficiency
HEI 1	2304
HEI 2	960
HEI 3	1440
HEI 4	1720
HEI 5	1160
HEI 6	1600
HEI 7	1600
HEI 8	720

The standardized curriculum had a predetermined set of subjects which are mandatory to include in our curriculum and due to the low entry English language proficiency level among our students, it is difficult to use English as the means of instruction for these predetermined subjects. Thus, we decided to teach these subjects in Spanish and reduce the subjects related to English proficiency.

The above excerpt shows that curriculum planners found themselves in a dilemma where they had two options; 1) change the subjects included in the standardized curriculum by those which are more pertinent to English Language Teaching or English Language proficiency and 2) use English as the means of instruction for the predetermined subjects from the standardized curriculum in order to develop academic content and students' English proficiency at the same time. Majority of HEIs opted for the first option which resulted in having a different number and type of subjects in their curricula limiting English language input as presented below on table 2 (see Table 2).

Table 2 shows that despite the official requirement of having 41 academic subjects for pre-service formation, curriculum planners have not strictly followed it and, instead, they have included additional subjects. Generally, the additional subjects are those related to linguistics and ELT. By adhering to this practice, the percentage of the use of English as a means of instruction among HEIs presents a vast discrepancy; for instance, pre-service EFL teachers in HEI 1 receive their pedagogical formation almost completely in English (93.6%) whereas in HEI 5 the use of English is very limited (17%).

What it is important to emphasize is that the 7 participating HEIs have stated that their students will graduate with a B2 level of English. This, however, seems difficult to achieve since not all of these HEIs have the same language input. HEI 1, on the other hand, has an appropriate connection with the amount of English input and the overall language proficiency level (C1).

C) ADAPTING THE PRESCRIBED STRUCTURE OF THE TEACHING PRACTICUM TO THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING CURRICULUM

Teaching practicum in ELT pre-service formation has become, according to the participants, the most problematic aspect in developing the curriculum of the English language teaching undergraduate programs due to the high number of hours mandated by CES. The standardized curriculum states that pre-service students need to complete a total of 1,800

Table 2. Number of academic subjects and percentage of the use of English as means of instruction per HEI

HEIs	Number of academic subjects	% of the use of English as the means of instruction*
HEI 1	47	93.6
HEI 2	59	37.3
HEI 3	52	57.7
HEI 4	42	66.7
HEI 5	53	17
HEI 6	50	66
HEI 7	53	52.8
HEI 8	52	78.8

* % of the use of English as the means of instruction also includes academic subjects related to English proficiency acquisition.

hours of teaching practicum in local schools. This requirement, however, was not strictly followed by all HEIs (see Table 3).

Table 3 shows that there is a marked difference in the total number of hours assigned to teaching practicum among HEIs. Three HEIs strictly comply with the requirement of having 1,800 hours for teaching practicum whereas the rest of the HEIs have assigned between 344 to 1,640 hours to this aspect.

One of the reasons for this variation in the number of teaching practicum hours, according to a Director, is that Article 89 of the Academic Regimen Regulation (a legal document that helps HEIs operationalize the higher education law) states that the number of hours allocated to teaching practicum for undergraduate programs is 400 hours in general. It does not clearly state that education undergraduate programs need to have a different teaching practicum arrangement. Thus, some curriculum planners followed what was required by the standardized curriculum and others, what was stated in the law. In other words, curriculum planes assigned a number of practicum hours that they considered was appropriate for their students' formation. A Director illustrated it as follows:

In order to select the number of hours for practicum, we based our decision on the higher education law. We did not follow the standardized curriculum because it has too many hours for teaching practicum. When we submitted our proposal to CES for approval, the people in charge of checking our curriculum design never questioned this type of organization.

As it was explained in the beginning of this analysis, CES assigns a specialist for the process of official approval of undergraduate programs. This type of organization has resulted in idiosyncratic curriculum changes and, therefore, curriculum variations among the different English language teaching undergraduate programs, as it is the case of teaching practicum.

When HEIs put into practice their curricula, they faced a serious problem in facilitating the teaching practicum of their pre-service students due to the lack of in-service EFL teachers in the public education system. A director described this problem in the following excerpt,

One of the biggest problems we have is that there are not enough EFL teachers in the schools where our students do their teaching practicum. In some schools there is only one teacher with a university degree in English teaching. For example, in one school where our students go, there is only one EFL teacher with a university degree in this area; the other two are the school secretaries. Our students have to complete 1,800 hours but if there are no EFL teachers in the schools who can guide and support them, what can our students learn from someone who does not have the academic preparation to teach English?

Table 3. Number of hours assigned for pre-professional practicum per HEI

HEIs	Number of hours for assigned for preprofesional practicum
HEI 1	1,800
HEI 2	1,200
HEI 3	1,800
HEI 4	1,640
HEI 5	344
HEI 6	840
HEI 7	840
HEI 8	1,800

The lack of qualified EFL teachers is a problem that all HEIs face, yet it becomes more intense for HEIs with 1,800 teaching practicum hours. In these institutions, students start their practicum in the first semester and the number of hours increase as they advance in their formation. The worry that directors have revolves around the amount of time that their students have to spend in schools with non-qualified EFL teachers who may not add much to their professional formation. A director expressed her concerns in the following lines:

Personally, I believe that 1,800 hours is too much for a pre-professional practicum. Our students complain because they say that they are not learning anything from the schoolteacher. She is an ICT teacher and she can barely speak English. I am not criticizing the teacher: she is also forced by the school director to teach English. But our students cannot spend long hours in school without learning anything. I feel powerless because I cannot do anything to change this situation.

CONCLUSION

This research focused on the variations that English language teaching undergraduate programs have and the challenges that HEI's curriculum planners faced in designing their curricula. Results showed that despite the existence of a standardized curriculum for education undergraduate programs, pre-service English language formation in the country is varied in terms of academic subjects, language proficiency development, English language input and the pre-professional practicum.

What is common in almost all HEIs offering ELT undergraduate programs is the exit profile established for their graduates. Almost all HEIs stated that their graduates will have a B2 level of English and a strong knowledge of teaching methodology. However, given the current characteristics of their curricula, achieving this profile seems to be elusive for the majority of these HEIs.

Despite the government's intention to improve pre-service formation via a standardized curriculum, its structure has caused the opposite effect in English language teaching undergraduate programs. Where, in an attempt to adapt the educational standardized curriculum to ELT pre-service formation, curriculum planners ended up designing different types of curricula, leaving apart the essential aspects that characterize EFL teachers' formation; for instance, a proper level of English language proficiency and a strong knowledge of ELT methodology. Thus, attempts to standardize pre-service formation through an official curriculum need to be prevented since it limits curriculum innovation, academic

development and the inclusion of the particularities that characterize each of the different education undergraduate programs.

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