

PRE-SERVICE ENGLISH TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES IN RURAL CONTEXTS

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study reflects on what experiences pre-service teachers live when doing the practicum in rural contexts. Hence, the main objective of this paper is to describe the experiences of English pre-service teachers from *Universidad Católica de Oriente*, (from now on UCO) doing the practicum in public rural schools, through the implementation of the systematization of experiences method. The intention was to know the different situations that pre-service teachers face in a rural classroom while teaching English. In the same way, the purpose was to know the pre-service teachers' perceptions about rural context, the learnings that they acquired during the process and what contributions the lived experience caused in their personal and professional training.

The information was gathered through three data collection methods, they were: semi-structured interviews, focus group and logs from some students of eighth and seventh semester from UCO who were doing their practicum in rural context. Subsequently a process of triangulation was developed to analyze the data. This was made according to the results obtained from the data collection methods used, also the codification and categorization process, moreover it was taken the common points between them to get the data analysis.

The results from this study showed aspects and characteristics about the rural context education, such as the flexible model, accessibility, and resources of those institutions; pre-service teachers' perceptions about English teaching and perceptions about learnings. Furthermore, it was possible to be informed about students' positive or negative attitudes that influenced pre-service English teachers' experiences, and challenges that were presented during the practicum process, like understanding the students' real life, the relationship with the cooperative teacher, and students' special needs.

Key words: Rural education, teaching practicum, experiences.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Considering the particular purpose of this research project, which is to describe English pre-service teachers' experiences in rural contexts, it was looked for some studies which had connection with the focus of this research paper. In regard to this topic, three studies were selected and described below.

The first study was carried out by Bonilla and Cruz (2014). It was a qualitative study that took place in Colombia. Its main purpose was to characterize the socio-cultural intricate aspects of the teaching process of a foreign language in rural context. The data collected were centered on the participants' views about the researched event. Furthermore, the results were achieved obeying an interpretative process, where there were five English language teachers.

Moreover, data was collected through questionnaires, audio recordings, also semi-structured interviews. During the development of this study, the researchers found some items that become relevant in the language teaching as well as learning of English in rural sectors. This discovery led the researchers to cover four categories: matches or mismatches of realities presented in the classroom; learning English between global and local influences; a socio-cultural and socio-economic dimensions giving support to English teachers' professional growth in rural areas.

Furthermore, they found some factors that were discovered in community and have influence in the teaching English as the economic realities, it has to do with the money-making development each of these cultures embraces; the formal and functional constructs, for instance the use of words, expressions, gestures and so on in certain society; and the historical heritages that embeds the traditions that are part of the rituals of the community. Eventually, the research

has as purpose to describe the ways in which the foreign language teaching profession is considered by teachers who work in the challenging circumstances of rural contexts, whose effort does not seem to be appreciated in the national plans. In this project, they found out how diverse socio-cultural features make language teaching in rural areas an intricate pathway in which professor have to intervene local particularities and global requirements.

The second study was done by González, Gómez, and Hernández (2015). It took place at *Centro Educativo Rural San Luis* (now called *Sede San Luis*), located in a region of *Antioquia* around 40 minutes away from the urban area of *Rionegro*, it was a qualitative study. The purpose of this project was to analyze different contextual factors that appeared in second grade students' learning process in English classes, where the *Escuela Nueva* model was implemented.

The information was gathered through four data collection methods: participant and non-participant observation, focus group and interviews. The second grade students around 6 and 9 years old were the participants. The learning styles and abilities were identified through games and activities that involved movements developed by the students to discover the language. Finally, another factor evidenced was motivation in terms of parents, who said that English is important and usefulness for their children. Some of the results were centered on the concept of the rural area which has changed during the last years.

The third study was accomplished by Cruz (2018); it is centered on providing a grounded account of how active ELT policy works in the country, and how social issues affecting rural contexts, on the other hand could come to shape both teaching practices and teachers' professional identities.

The interest of this paper came from the need to bring teachers' voices, which are hardly heard in the national ELT field. Ten teachers participated in this research, all of them with

different profiles. They were located in seven different schools and municipalities of four different regions in Colombia. Teaching biographies, two semi-structured interviews, and field examinations were the sources of information; observation served to get an idea of what teaching and learning English in Colombian rural schools were like.

Also, this proposal sets the fact that teachers need to take advantage of what they know improving and adapting their own teaching practices in a sociocultural manner. The findings of this study provided evidence about the contextual factors such as rural school characteristics, resources, maximizing them by hand, and perception towards learning and teaching of English and rural schools, and the role of the teachers, who has to combine their expertise as teachers and their capacity to read and act in different circumstances mediating their teaching, for example facing the lack of teaching materials; parents not always have the economic facilities to provide their children all the academic supplies they need; and the English teaching and learning process in which teachers have to do a great effort to make it valuable, taken in English classes of a second grade in a rural school of Rionegro Antioquia

All in all, it was possible to read these studies and acquired from them some basic knowledge associated with the intention of this project. They permitted know the diverse teachers' experiences when they taught English in rural contexts, describing the characteristics of the educative dynamics and the social factors that intervened in the process. In addition, it was possible to discern points of views, feelings and assumptions that other pre-service teachers and workmates lived and acquired from teaching English in rural areas.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The *Ley General de Educación* that has in its first article: “Education is a permanent formation process, it is personal, cultural and social grounded on a comprehensive conception of the human being, his dignity, his rights and duties” (1994), this allows to see the importance of the education to the integral development of every person, without caring their geographical location, even in the faraway or closed places.

Some contexts, specifically the rural area presents a variety of challenges concerning quality, accompaniment and access to education. English teaching is not a disconnected case to this reality. For this reason, the *Ministerio de Educación Nacional* (From now on MEN) has been developing strategies for training English teachers for rural contexts in Colombia. One of these strategies is known as *English for Colombia* (2014) (From now on ECO); a program proposed by *Colombia Bilingüe* (2004-2019) to implement training strategies for teachers and students from rural schools to teach and learn English in an autonomous way. In addition, those programs deliver pedagogical packs that contain guides for teachers, audiovisual material and interactive radio.

Escuelas Normales Superiores, which are specialized in the training of primary school’s teachers, and teachers in the service use those *Colombia Bilingüe* procedures, in order to acquire a language level B2 (Intermediate-high according to the Common European Framework of Reference for language).

One of the strategies allows to teachers have a solid training in English where *Secretaría de Educación* gives an accompaniment in the institutions to teachers and students ¹(Colombia Bilingüe, 2019, par. 1) In this sense, Colombian teachers have the possibility to foster the

¹ Colombia Bilingüe ha diseñado e implementado estrategias de formación y desarrollo profesional para docentes en formación (Escuelas Normales Superiores) y docentes en el servicio, con el fin de ayudar a un nivel de lengua B2 (Intermedio-alto según el Marco Común Europeo de Referencia). (Translated by the researchers).

teaching and learning process of English in the education system through the access to this kind of programs. Is the purpose of this program becoming into a reality?

As Lakin and Gasperini (2004, cited by Bonilla & Cruz, 2014) say, the rural-urban gap is caused by diverse reasons, for instance, the difficult access and the lack of resources in the rural schools, the student population has a distinct life style, by way of illustration, the children from rural area not only study, they also have to do farm duties in order to help in their homes and the girls have to take care of their siblings and sometimes working for an income. Another reason of the rural-urban gap is the lack of teacher training in English.

Despite all the above “in some circumstances, children can attend school, but usually rural schools [particularly the ones in remote areas]” (Guerrero, 2008, p. 36), assigned by the government. That means that the teacher is in charge of the whole school, teaching all the students of the different academic degrees and therefore, the teaching of all the subjects known as Multi-grade. The teachers have to teach Math, Science, Spanish and English too but the question is, are teachers prepared to face those challenges?

Based on the aforementioned statements, the intention with this proposal is to focus on the way as pre-service teachers are having experiences from their teaching in rural areas that allow to understand the context and thus, making positive contributions; to promote the skills in the context, to show different teaching approaches, and taking advantage of the experience that the rural context grants pre-service teachers to live being aware of the didactic, social and cultural learnings and reflecting on some relevant questions as what are the attributes that a teacher needs to face the rural context? and, concerning the curricular design, class management and pedagogical support, what are the experiences and challenges that pre-service teachers deal with in the context? To sum up, what kind of teacher does the rural context deserve?

RESEARCH QUESTION

What are the experiences of English pre-service teachers from UCO doing the practicum in rural schools?

JUSTIFICATION

This proposal is focused on pre-service teachers' experiences teaching English in rural contexts, since it is essential to know the diverse processes that they need to confront when doing their professional practicum in the rural area. For this reason, the study is developed and its methodology would help to reflect on the pre-service teachers' reality to transform their practice.

It intends to make a positive contribution in rurality by teaching English where pre-service teachers want to share strategies to teachers that are inside a rural context and methods that they can use to get the student's attention, bringing to the students English didactics, which changes the English teaching dynamics by involving students in an English environment, where children can open their minds and be aware of the possibilities the world out of the rural context offers to them through the English knowledge, kids can obtain cognitive abilities as cultural sensibility and thinking strategies.

There are distinct institutions that are not indifferent to these realities, among them is *Universidad Católica de Oriente* (From now on UCO), which is a pioneering institution in the formation of students at Oriente Antioqueño, this university has a goal to train teachers that can go to different context where they can face new challenges. In the same way, they could reinforce their own identity, moreover, UCO has focused its attention on the needs existing in the eastern municipalities in Antioquia, where the foreign language program has done some studies in relation to English teaching in rural context, but this research want to boost the discussion and reflection upon the pre-service teachers' experiences, challenges inside rural contexts classrooms, keeping in mind the theory that the university has given to us.

This project is relevant to foreign language field since *Ministerio de Educación Nacional* wants Colombia to become bilingual, it includes all contexts such as private, public, urban and rural; therefore, English pre-service teachers are called to bring all that knowledge to those

scenarios, it also permits to the academic field and systematization of experiences from future teachers on their rural context practicum; it is contributing to the English teaching knowledge, also it makes the challenges, needs and demands visible, all this allows to the academic field to go forward, training better and more professional teachers for the rural contexts as well.

To wrap up, the study has the intention to be meaningful for three different fields. The first one is the rural education, specifically in the English teaching, giving quality to the process through solid knowledge and bases of English. The second one is the contribution to the training of future teachers from pre-service teachers' reflections about their experiences teaching English in the rural context, the learning and teaching process would change in a positive way the teaching practice. Finally, it is a contribution to the program *Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras* regarding the teachers training in order to improve the curriculum and, in this way graduate teachers better prepared to face different contexts such as the rural one.

GENERAL OBJECTIVE

To describe the experiences of English pre-service teachers from UCO doing the practicum in public rural schools.

Specific Objectives

- To analyze the English pre-service teachers perceptions about their practicum in 7th and 8th semester.
- To reflect on the challenges that English pre-service teachers assume during their practicum in rural context.
- To identify rural students' attitudes that influence pre-service English teachers' experiences.

CONCEPTUAL REFERENCES

Taking into account the purpose of this project, which is to describe pre-service teachers' experiences in rural contexts, it was necessary to investigate and study some important aspects to conceptualize the research and clarify some perspectives, as rural education, teaching practicum, and experience.

Rural Education

In this paper, it is relevant to set 'rurality' as a key concept developing this study, considering that, its main purpose is to describe the experiences of foreign language pre-service teachers from UCO when doing the practicum in rural schools. Hence, it is necessary to define in a general way what rurality is, describing its conceptualization, likewise the society perception about it and its educational field conditions, that is to say, the education that its population receives.

According to Pérez (2001) the rural environment is understood as "The set of regions or zones with diverse activities (agriculture, small and medium industries, commerce, services) in which settle farmhouses, villages, small towns, regional centers, natural and cultivated areas" ²(p. 17). So, rural zones are important to support urban sectors and tourism actions, where agriculture or natural sectors help to foster economic growth in small cities.

It is good to make clear that "The rural population is composed in its social base by the peasants, including in this term, small producers, indigenous people, Afro-Colombians and peasants without land",³ (*Colombia Territorio rural: apuesta por un política educativa para el campo*, p. 11, 2015). However, this is not an exact description from the rural context, there are

² El conjunto de regiones o zonas con diversas actividades (agricultura, pequeñas y medianas industrias, comercio, servicios) en las que se asientan pueblos, aldeas, pequeñas ciudades, centros regionales, áreas naturales y cultivadas. (Translated by the researchers)

³ La población rural está compuesta en su base social por los campesinos, incluyendo en este término, pequeños productores, indígenas, afrocolombianos y campesinos sin tierra (Translated by the researchers).

not standardized characteristics, first pre-service teachers need to figure out that the rural population are not small producers, sometimes they have big areas where they cultivate products to fulfill big cities natural food needs; another aspect, is the agricultural activities that represent one of the main economic support for this context, it is valuable to give the farmers the role they deserve as culture guardians which comes from generation to generation and respect them for their cultural richness.

It is important to know a little bit about what rural areas are and therefore what rural education is. “In Colombia the rural and urban concepts have been traditionally related to a geographical perspective” (Bonilla & Cruz, 2014, p. 119). Therefore, geography plays an important role here, where it is possible to identify rural areas thanks to mountains, faraway places, the way people speak or act and urban areas such as buildings, wider streets, clothes that people wear etc. Rural education is an important concept in this project although the other aspects as economic, social and cultural situations affect it either directly or indirectly.

In Colombia, there are big differences between rural and urban educational systems. “Lakin and Gasperini explained that exists a rural-urban gap in developing countries caused by several reasons such as lack of schools, overcrowded classrooms, underequipped schools, children required to work, and teachers being under-qualified as well as not supported and poorly remunerated”. (2004, cited in Bonilla & Cruz, 2014, p. 118) Then, rural education is commonly the most disadvantaged and affected by these factors. Rural schools are forgotten by the state, their buildings are not the best, their resources are scarce and their access is limited. However, *El Ministerio de Educación Nacional (MEN) in El Plan Nacional Decenal de Educación (PNDE) 2016-2026* has as purpose to decrease the gap between rural and urban areas providing them the same resources and opportunities; for this reason in this Plan, strategies are proposed to

guarantee the access, permanence and quality education in rural contexts. The idea in the PNDE is to strengthen flexible educative models and training the teacher to perform well in rural schools.

As reported by *Foro Educativo Nacional, educación rural, nuestro desafío para la excelencia* (2018), “there are some issues to take into account that are the population, territorial, gender equality and inclusive education” (p. 9).⁴

Into the rural population are included several communities recognized as it due to their culture and ethnicity (Indígenas, Mestizos, pequeños productores, Afrocolombianos, Palenqueros, Raizales y Rom). Territorially speaking, those spaces cannot be understood just by their geography but with the relationship among them and its population itself, in order to potentiate people and make them to appropriate its regions. Then, it comes the school, which is called to work on gender equality, offering the same opportunities to girls and boys in order to make them improve their development and exert their rights.

Also rural schools have the goal to give an inclusive education, answering to girls and boys diversity, interests, possibilities, expectations, without discrimination by their gender, ethnicity, culture, disability, among others. Perez (2001) says, rural communities, as they were understood before, are being undermined and weakened in their collective solidarities. All this due to factors of territorial and social disintegration. Phenomena such as forced displacement due to problems of violence or natural phenomena, in several Latin American countries, are just a sample of this⁵ (p. 22).

⁴ Hay algunos temas a tener en cuenta que son la población, el territorio, la igualdad de género y la educación inclusiva (Translated by the researchers).

⁵ Las comunidades rurales, como se entendían antes, están siendo socavadas y debilitadas en sus solidaridades colectivas. Todo ello debido a factores de desintegración territorial y de desintegración social. Fenómenos como los desplazamientos forzosos por problemas de violencia o fenómenos naturales, en varios países latinoamericanos, son sólo una muestra de esto. (Translated by the researchers)

For these and other factors, students are of low resources and must perform other tasks to help economically in their homes. As for teachers, it is said that they are not well prepared to deal with this type of situations. So, rural education faces a reality different from the one faced by urban education.

The MEN (2019), with the purpose of guaranteeing the fundamental right of education to the diverse population or in a situation of vulnerability and who has difficulty accessing the regular classroom, that for different reasons is outside the educational system, proposes a flexible education through diverse educational models. These last are pedagogical and methodological proposals. They make reference to different strategies of access and permanence, as well as quality, equity to achieve an inclusive education for all. “The flexible models have educational baskets shaped with pedagogical and playful elements that seek to motivate the students to enjoy their learning processes” (Illera, Pinto & Fernández, 2006). Within these models, the role of the teacher, the students and resources, changes to give greater prominence to the students’ autonomy.

Among those flexible educational models proposed by the MEN can be mentioned the following; Aceleración del Aprendizaje (AA), Telesecundaria (TS), Servicio de Educación Rural (SER), Programa de Educación Continuada (CAFAM), Sistema de Aprendizaje Tutorial (SAT), Postprimaria (PP), Escuela Nueva (EN) among others.

Based on the objective and to fulfill the goal of this paper, they were chosen the following two models, since they are closer to the rural context: *Postprimaria* (PP), and *Escuela Nueva* (EN) Hence, they are described in the following paragraphs.

According to MEN (2010),

Postprimaria Rural is “a flexible educational model that offers the possibility of looking after young people from rural areas, who have completed primary school, to attend secondary basic education, generating educational strategies for their permanence in the school system and in rural areas, seeking curriculum relevance in accordance with the expectations and needs of rural life [flexibilization and diversification]” ⁶(p. 6).

There were more loads to students to complete all grades at rural schools when they finish primary school to carry on secondary school and achieve to obtain the degree.

Postprimaria: “it is a model which allows children and young learners from rural sectors rich the basic secondary school with programs relevant to their context”⁷ (MEN, 2014). This program attends population between twelve and seventeen years old and develops mandatory areas as well as projects and productive projects. There is a teacher who guides those subjects. This model promotes rural education by serving this population and its education process by optimizing all the resources, and in order to fulfill the needs of the rural sector.

There exists also, some guide books from all the subjects they must study, for students and for the teachers too, this information is available on *Ministerio de Educación Nacional* (MEN) webpage.

Escuela Nueva: “it is a formal, structured education option with conceptual basis so well defined and related that can be considered as a relevant pedagogical alternative to offer the complete primary school in order to improve the human formation, it focused on children from

⁶ Postprimaria rural es un modelo educativo flexible que brinda la posibilidad de atender a jóvenes de áreas rurales, que han terminado la básica primaria, para que cursen la educación básica secundaria, generando estrategias educativas para su permanencia en el sistema escolar y en las zonas rurales, procurando la pertinencia curricular de acuerdo con las expectativas y necesidades de la vida rural (flexibilización y diversificación). (Translated by the researchers).

⁷ *Postprimaria*: Modelo que permite que los niños, niñas y jóvenes del sector rural puedan acceder al ciclo de educación básica secundaria con programas pertinentes a su contexto. (Translated by the researchers).

rural areas”⁸ (Escuela Nueva, 2010. p. 8). *Escuela Nueva* is recognized as a flexible model that responds to multigrades. It offers five grades of primary, where grades are integrated in the same classroom, for example grades 2 and 3 share the same classroom while having the same teacher, it is possible to choose only one, two or three teachers in a school. Another important aspect related to new school is the use of booklets for subjects like Math, Spanish, Social and Natural sciences.

MEN has developed educational projects and strategies that respond to social and cultural dynamics. One of these projects is recognized as *Proyecto Educativo Rural* (now P.E.R). It provides relevant educational attention to children and young people in rural areas. On the other hand, it offers an educational adaptation that responds to the needs of the context through flexible teaching alternatives, where the relevance of the topics allow children and young people from the rural sector find a connection and sense of belonging to their context. At the same time, it aims to achieve access and permanence of the educational process in a relevant and quality way.

Bunny Bonita: It is also a project developed by MEN as a bilingual program, with the aim of advancing in the foreign language skills giving an accompaniment to teachers and students on the teaching - learning process; it focuses on vocabulary, communicative competences in both English and Spanish in order to give them a comfortable environment. This is implemented through materials as booklets, posters, teacher’s guides, flash cards, and audiovisual tools as short videos; all these materials are related to the context, including their cultural aspects and school characteristics generating a significant learning, the final objective is that students reach

⁸ *Escuela nueva*: “Es una opción educativa formal, estructurada; con bases conceptuales tan bien definidas y relacionadas que puede considerarse como una alternativa pedagógica pertinente para ofrecer la primaria completa a favor del mejoramiento cualitativo de la formación humana que se brinda a los niños y las niñas en las zonas rurales del país”. (Translated by the researchers).

A1 level of English according to *Guía 22: Estándares básicos de competencias en lenguas extranjeras, Inglés, 2006*. In the same way ECO (2014) is a strategy that contributes to the training of English teachers in the rural area, with the intention of strengthening foreign language skills for both teachers and primary school students. ECO facilitates the learning and teaching of English through innovative materials and strategies that allow teachers to use them as a guide on their teaching practices in the English subject that give students the possibility to build their own knowledge in English.

The materials as a guide for teachers, audiovisual material, interactive radio and booklets for students are closely related to the rural context.

Teaching Practicum

Before starting with the teaching practicum definition, it is necessary to approach to the definition of teaching from *Reglamento Estudiantil*. So, in this way it is mentioned *Reglamento Estudiantil* (2015) that says “Teaching is understood as the basis for the training of an integral professional, committed to his profession and to the community in which is enrolled; The service as a main factor for the extension to the community and participating in its promotion and development, without pretending to be a total solution, but a very important part in improving the quality of life of the COLOMBIANS”⁹ (p. 18). Where pre-service teachers as future teachers help a specific community and have an experience before becoming graduated. Thus, they learn to create new methodologies and strategies to implement in their jobs as future teachers.

Practicum is another key concept in order to develop this study, for this reason is important to define what it is about. According to *Reglamento Estudiantil de Pregrado (2015)*,

⁹ La Docencia entendida como la base para la formación de un profesional íntegro, comprometido con su profesión y con la comunidad en que está inscrito; el servicio como factor primordial para la extensión a la comunidad y participar así en su promoción y desarrollo, sin pretender ser una solución total, pero sí parte muy importante en el mejoramiento de la CALIDAD DE VIDA DE LOS COLOMBIANOS. (Translated by the researchers)

practicum is “a training activity of the student, through its insertion to a specific reality or work environment, which allows the implementation of the integrated knowledge that he or she has acquired during his or her process of academic training”¹⁰ (p. 77). The practicum is a process where students have the opportunity to put into practice what they have learnt during their training. They have the chance to confront or face the reality that they will be exposed when they graduate.

As it is mentioned in the *Proyecto Educativo de Facultad* (2018) it is “an approach to the working life through practicum, designed so that in each academic period students understand and participate in different matters of the pedagogical, academic and institutional life”¹¹ (p. 121), providing them a series of tools, experiences and confidence to later professional practices with greater proficiency and performance.

In this way, the practicum that students have to do provides them the opportunity to put into practice what they have learnt and, in this process, they learnt even more than they learnt at the university, as Kenneth Zeichner (1986) who conceives practicum as a process in which teachers can enhance their learnings about teaching during significant experiences lived in classrooms. In some cases, it can take weeks, months and even semesters. Also practicum can take place in any different educational institution, depending on the purposes. The student who is performing the practicum needs to be observed by a more experienced teacher which is the advisor, who can give some suggestions about the practicum development.

¹⁰ La práctica es una actividad formativa del estudiante, a través de su inserción a una realidad o ambiente laboral específico, que le posibilita la aplicación integrada de los conocimientos que ha adquirido durante su proceso de formación académica. (Translated by the researchers)

¹¹ Una aproximación a la vida laboral por medio de las prácticas, diseñadas para que en cada período académico entiendan y participen de distintos asuntos de la vida pedagógica, académica e institucional. (Translated by the researchers)

In conclusion, practicum is an activity that allows pre-service teachers to live the experience of teaching in a classroom, at the same time it prepares them to later work. Likewise, they enter into confidence with that context or reality that as a graduate in foreign languages must assume.

Experiences

In agreement with Oxford dictionary the term experience is “The knowledge or skill acquired by a period of practical experience of something especially that gained in a particular profession” (Oxford, 2019). It makes a lot of sense since it speaks about field experiences, as well it includes a period of time and the results will enrich the future teaching practices because when a person has the opportunity to have some extra experience, it can help them to reflect on their process and what they need to raise or change regarding their own teaching style.

With the Greeks, signified a store of practical wisdom, a fund of insights useful in conducting the affairs of life. Sensation and perception were its occasion and supplied it with pertinent materials, but did not of themselves constitute it. They generated experience when retention was added and when a common factor in the multitude of felt and perceived cases to detached itself so as to become available in judgment and exertion (Dewey, 2008, p. 226).

Based on the aforementioned facts, it is possible to relate an experience with memories, feelings and actions. These are present in the life of each person. Furthermore, the experiences allow people to have a reflection about the past events. On the other hand, they offer the possibility to obtain new learning, knowledge and abilities that are constructed through daily activities, socialization and interaction with others and the real world. For instance, the rural practices offer the possibility to pre- service English teachers to have a better appropriation of the academic concepts applied in a real word. At the same time, these practices allow them to

become good teachers, because they could identify through the log for example, a positive or negative event in order to modify or continue implementing the same methodology, action or strategies to improve in their academic process and personal growing as English teachers.

METHODOLOGY

Taking into account the purpose of this research project as a descriptive study, it is focused on describing the experiences of English pre-service teachers from UCO doing the practicum in rural schools assuming the challenges and learnings during their participation. “Qualitative research is both exciting and challenging. In recent years it has become the focus of some fascinating debates including the ability of research to discover truths or to represent the realities of others” (Mason, 2002 p. 1). In this sense, this method allows to explore the multiple realities and subjective perceptions according to the participants. In this study, they lived situations, and the experiences were described through reflexive logs; where the data collected were not numerical, but the information was about the emotions, opinions, behaviors, and challenges that pre-service teachers lived during their teaching English practicum in rural schools.

The method implemented is systematization of experiences, since it can be a very valuable way to describe teaching practices and increase more understanding of themselves as teachers, their lessons and to their students, concerning to the rural context.

According to Jara (2012) a short definition about the systematization of experience: “as an exercise for the production of critical knowledge through practice is the intentional action, is the action with explicit purpose” (p. 71). Through that contact, it can create and change previous teaching models improving new knowledge inside classrooms and students’ lives. In fact, the reality could change in a good way; the most important part here is to announce the experience

lived during the practicum. Furthermore, the idea was to explore and get to know the rural context, in order to assume new challenges and try to make some contributions.

In addition, different data collection methods granted to the focal point of the study, such as journals, interviews, and focus group that validates a triangulation of the data. The first data collection method was the journal or as is called, the log. According to Moon (2003, p. 2) cited by Litzler & Bakieva (2017) “learning journals are for “making explicit and recording the learning that occurs”, reflective diaries are related to “reflection on an experience”, and logs are “a record of events that have happened” (p. 67). In that way, logs are used as a reflection exercise, teacher - students must do it weekly regarding what they learn on their practicum from their students and also from their cooperating teacher; additionally they need to write what would they do different next time and what has been the feedback they have received from teachers, classmates, students and their own experience reflection as well.

Interviews are an excellent tool which is a predominant method in qualitative research. Schostak (2006) cited in Alshenqeeti (2014) says that “an interview is an extendable conversation between partners that aims at having an ‘in-depth information’ about a certain topic or subject, and through which a phenomenon could be interpreted in terms of the meanings interviewees bring to it” (p. 40). Interviews licensed us to know different perspectives from people in several aspects, so gaining greater understanding of a situation and an easy method to gather information reflecting upon the previous teaching experience.

The last data collection method used was a “focus group”. It can be defined as “a small group made up of perhaps six to ten individuals with certain common features or characteristics, with whom a discussion can be focused onto a given issue or topic.” (Wellington, 2015 pp. 241-242). It can seem similar to interview method but it is different, since “The focus group sets up a

situation where the synergy of the group, the interaction of its members, adds value over and above the depth or insight of either an interview or a survey.” (Wellington, 2015 p. 242). In this way, a focus group allows a wide interaction providing the participants the opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings about the given topic due to the fact that they will feel comfortable and understood by homogenous people.

After collecting the data, the information was analyzed for which was relevant to establish certain steps to follow. The first step to follow was to obtain the data, then it was captured, sorted and transcribed in a Matrix Document; after that, the information was codified, that is, it was categorized into categories. Finally, the information was integrated to identify the links that could exist between it.

It is necessary to mention how the categories emerged, they came up from the answers given by the participants. Each researcher, in an individual way, suggested some possible categories names, after they had listened to the participants responses. Then, knowing the information obtained, the researchers discussed and proposed the categories knowing already that there was data regarding each one.

Regarding the participants, the study could count on the researchers' experience as a source of information. They could share what they felt about the received knowledge. At the same time, the information was gathered from the experiences of seventh and eighth semester classmates who were doing their practicum in rural and public institutions belonging to eastern Antioquia region; as they were just having this participation, they could give us recent information about the previous events presented at schools and with new generations.

The information participants provided were handled with professionalism, considering the ethical considerations that invite to preserve and respect participants' identity. Furthermore, it

is very important to make proper use of the information without modifying the collected data and sharing the analysis found with total clarity and honesty.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Taking into consideration that the purpose of this study is to describe the experiences of English pre-service teachers from UCO doing their practicum in rural schools, some data collection methods were implemented that led to some findings that are connected to previous studies and concepts.

In this sense, the findings provided data related to aspects as rural context education, perceptions about English teaching and perceptions about learnings. Furthermore, information was obtained about students' attitudes, and challenges that were presented during the practicum process.

Education in the Rural Context

Some pre-service teachers deal with some circumstances proper of the rural context, as participant 3 (log 2, 2019) says about the accessibility "Sometimes coming to class in the school is hard, when it rains the road gets very slippery and slow, so the students and teachers get a little late and sopping wet" all those aspects give a sensation of isolation as Aguirre & Ramos (2015) affirmed about the rural working place "isolation in social and professional context, plays an important role when choosing a place to work. Most teachers come from urban areas and it is difficult for them to adapt to the isolated environment of rural areas" (p. 213).

On the other hand, two participants from log 6 and focus group, agree when they say that there are significant transformations in the rural context, as "access to the internet, the appropriate infrastructure, classroom with T.V, and radio incorporated in others"; likewise they

consider that these changes influence the way the rural institutions are teaching right now since these tools are used in the English classes.

About the rural context Aguirre and Ramos (2015) think that “the fact that in some rural communities teachers have to teach multi-level classes, it is not attractive to the prospective teacher, not even mentioning salaries”. Contrary to that, two participants of the focus group, agree about the future as a teacher that they would like to work in a rural context, since people there are more thankful and those places have different dynamics that could not be seen on the urban context.

Perceptions about English Teaching

Teaching is “a set of events, outside the learners which are designed to support internal process of learning” (Sequeira, 2017). Therefore these reflections intend to approach thoughts and ideas that pre-service teachers have related to English teaching that were acquired or developed during the practicum process.

Taking into account the answers offered by participants from interviews and focus groups (2019) it is possible to say that the role of English pre- service teachers to teach English go beyond, because teachers need to be sensible people, since they must have the ability to understand the realities and context of their students in order to help, protect and accompany them during the growth of academic and personal process. Additionally, teachers need to have a big responsibility and personal commitment because they need to take care of many lives. In that way they can assume their experience as a meaningful learning through constant reflections in terms of giving to their students appropriated formative bases.

Another important factor was shown by participants from interviews and focus group (2019) that say that English helps students to expand their boundaries, to have new opportunities

for the future because one day, they will need to speak in English to communicate something to someone. In that way, it is necessary to show students that English is practical and enjoyable through distinct activities.

Pre-service teachers have reflected about the advantages in terms of curricular design when teaching English. A participant from the focus group (2019) and another from the interview 1 (2019) expressed that English in that context allows that the teacher can teach contents but in a transversal way, that means that teachers no necessarily need to center on teaching vocabulary, they can expand the subject and teach different topics through the language. In the same line of importance, they recognize the relevance of teaching themes but with a purpose, always taking into account the context and necessities of the students, having the idea that the pupils will use acquired knowledge in their day to day life.

Several participants dissent when speaking about working in the rural context in their future, for example one of them thinks that the university needs to teach their future teachers in training more about that context, in order to be prepared to face all the conditions it can offer, instead of always focusing on the urban one, since there are already a lot of English teachers in urban institutions; on the other hand, another participant does not feel like working in a rural institution, expecting to be able to work at a university with adults, thinking it would be more comfortable for him; he also sets that it is not because of rurality, but for his own preference to work with adults instead of children due to the attention and cares that they need.

Perceptions about Learnings

In this research *learning* is conceived as an apprenticeship which pre-service teachers face different factors to learn from them and thus help pre-service teachers to grow in their process of practicum. According to Holmqvist (2010) “learning as a new way to experience the

environment, which means the learners need to discern new aspects of the phenomenon that will be learned” (P. 498).

Participants from logs and focus group have mentioned that teachers always need an extra plan as to avoid improvisations because students can notice when the teacher did not prepare for the class. Also, teachers do not know when they could use them, plans A, B, C as an important learning of the development of English classes and finally, when teachers arrive to class with complete lesson plans, sometimes it is necessary to change an activity that did not work.

Another important aspect is related to the cooperative teacher where participants from focus group and interviews mentioned that cooperative teachers provided an excellent accompaniment during the practicum process as the love for teaching children. Moreover, cooperative teachers have been a role model for them, since they love what they do and they teach in a positive attitude to students. Finally, all those things that pre-service teachers see through the cooperative teacher helps them to have a successful process in practicum.

The final aspect that was possible to identify was about teaching without enough resources as participants from interviews and focus group expressed. They mentioned that a learning acquired during the practicum process had to do with the resources used to teach the class. They meant that although the lack of resources, the development of the classes was in a dynamic way, using authentic material and contextualizing the students, where they could enjoy English classes in the best way.

Students' Attitudes that Influenced Pre-service English Teachers' Experiences

This category emerged from the answer that the majority of participants offered during data collection methods, one reason could be teaching cannot be conceived without students,

because thanks to them the act of teaching takes meaning and value. In this sense, students' attitudes influenced pre service English teachers' experiences.

In this category was possible to recognize that some of the participants from focus group and logs coincided that students felt motivated to learn English when the teachers use Total Physical Response (TPR) as a method to develop the class, attractive material and activities that require cooperative work and competition.

Another students' attitudes identified by the participants from logs has to do with the academic performance. It refers to the cognitive abilities acquired by students during their learning process due to participant. To support this idea, participant 4 (log # 7, 2019) stated that "they are more comfortable with the English classes, since they are accustomed to English language, they are familiarized with some expressions, vocabulary, and commands".

Students attitude allow pre-service teachers to know what the English activities or situations are that generate a positive or negative result regarding motivation or demotivation in students. In this sense, pre-service teachers have the possibility to take advantage of this attitude and propitiate more opportunities to students feel comfortable and interested to learn English language. According to Theory of second language acquisition proposed by Krashen (1988) (cited by Schütz, 2019), the affective variables such as motivation, self- confidence, anxiety and personality characteristics influence the acquisition of a foreign language.

Pre-service Teachers' Challenges

This paper conceives a *challenge* as a new or difficult situation that a person needs to face in order to give a solution and feel the satisfaction of fulfilled duty. In this way, this category has to do with the unusual and complex situations that English pre-service teachers

lived during their practicum process in rural schools and represented to them the necessity to develop new skills to be able to face the circumstances in the best way.

According to participant 1 and 2 (Interview 1 and 2, 2019) understanding students outside school situations and necessities becomes a challenge. Participant 2 (Interview 2, 2019) lets know that, when he said that the most difficult situation was to confront all the students realities, since they have their own histories, family and personal problems; his challenge was to try to connect and understand all those situations in order to offer them a personalized training. In the same way, participant 1 (Interview 1, 2019) expressed that one of the biggest challenge that he faced was to understand the reality that children lived. In that way, he could prepare classes that allow students to internalize and could be useful for their rural context. Same as the Sharplin's (2002) study that found the perceptions of socio-cultural challenges to be faced were centered on lack of awareness of the cultural backgrounds and socio-economic status of rural and remote students; in this research, understanding and be aware of these factors was crucial to the teaching process be meaningful.

Another challenge that English pre-service teachers faced during their practicum has to do with the cooperating and advisor teachers' collaboration. Participant 1 (Interview 1, 2019) stated that the advisor was a little bit standoffish and he did not have much contact with him, likewise participant 3 (log #1, 2019) said "My CT gave me total autonomy to work, I found it good and bad at a time because sometimes I get lost and confused [...]" In this way, the relationship between English pre-service teachers and their advisor and cooperating teacher was a challenge that students from UCO had to confront.

During the practicum process, pre-service teachers had to face the challenge of carrying out an appropriate inclusion process, since in their classrooms they met vulnerable population

and children with diverse educational needs. Some participants expressed this type of challenge, for instance participant 4 said that she had sometimes excluded several of her students with special educational needs since she concentrated on giving instructions to the rest of the group and forgot these students who needed more of her. However, when she realized it, she reflected on how to include them.

On the other hand, participant 5 (Focus group, 2019) stated that she had to interrupt some classes because of particular situations presented in the classroom such as fights among children or because of some pupils slept in classes, due to they were medicate, since students came from a clinic and they had special educational needs. In this way, English pre-service teachers encountered various situations within the classroom that they had to face in order to give their classes an adequate development, without neglecting that they were dealing with human beings.

As Callado, Molina and Rodríguez (2015) expressed “Inclusive Education must be understood as a process which increases students’ participation in curricula, in culture and in their academic future, whilst simultaneously producing a reduction in exclusion” (p. 107) Something similar to this postulate yields the results of this research, since the pre-service teachers through the living experience faced cases of diverse special educational needs and that deserved that the teacher develop an appropriate process of inclusion.

CONCLUSIONS

Considering the objective of this study which is to describe the English pre-service teachers’ experiences during their practicum in rural contexts, it was possible to get some conclusions oriented to the accomplishment of the research question and the objectives of this project.

Referring specifically to the English teaching, this study allowed understanding that English language does not have to be a far reality to the rural context, since it can expand borders, allowing the approach to other environments. At the same time, English opens the mind to see possibilities of learning about cultures that can help and benefit students in their future academic processes and lives.

Pre-service teachers make contributions to the educative rural context, likewise, the rural context tells pre-service teachers that in order to the formative processes could be successful; first, it is necessary that they learn and have an integral training. They should learn how to be perseverant and do not be overcome by the challenges that are presented, for instance with the access and resources, considering that the context is rich in multiple factors that could be used in their teaching process to develop their classes.

Teachers have learnt to implement a plan A, B or C as an important learning to develop English classes since sometimes they need to change one activity for another because it did not work. Cooperative teachers have a relevant role in terms of giving a feedback that helps teachers to go beyond in the process of learning during their practicum.

Pre-service teachers' experiences were influenced by the students at schools in a good way because pupils also teach them how to do things, when they showed preferences for teamwork activities, competences and games, they enrich their teaching practices; likewise students bring self-confidence to the pre-service teacher when they look comfortable and familiarized with the language, it can be evidenced in the understanding of the topics as well. Pre - service teachers under training learn on their practicum, and from their students that the motivation and the learners' engagement involve several students' attitudes and aptitudes.

The educative rural context has been conceived as a challenge to face, because of its different characteristics regarding access, resources, educational quality and teachers training. However, throughout this study, it was possible to know that significant changes in the rural context have occurred. They have to do with technological advances, infrastructure and even in the curriculum. This aspect can be considered as an evolution in this context and as a motivation for the teachers to improve and make positive contributions in order to engage students with their learning process.

Finally, it was possible to identify that the university needs to include on training teachers how to teach English in the rural context since in this environment, pre-service teachers faced challenges which they were not prepared, in terms of *Escuela Nueva* approach or predominant teaching methods in the rural context, such as multigrade classrooms. However, the challenges assumed by pre-service teachers during their practicum in the rural context, became an opportunity to learn and improve as teachers.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix A. Semi-Structured Interview

Sistematización de Experiencias: Experiencias de profesores en formación de inglés en el contexto rural	
Objetivo de la entrevista Semiestructurada: Obtener información que nos permita comprender las experiencias que tienen los maestros en formación que se encuentran realizando sus prácticas educativas.	
Nombre del entrevistado/a: Participant 1	
Nombre del entrevistador/a: Lina Marcela Orozco Soto	
Fecha: Jueves 12 de Septiembre/ 2019	Lugar: Universidad Católica de Oriente
Tema	Preguntas
Situación Inicial	<p>¿Tuvo algún acercamiento en el contexto educativo rural antes de sus prácticas?</p> <p>¿Cómo concebía el contexto rural antes de iniciar su práctica?</p>
Proceso de Intervención	<p>¿Cuáles fueron los retos más importantes cuando usted comenzó su práctica en ese contexto rural?</p> <p>¿Qué tipo de actividades implementó para motivar a sus estudiantes respecto a la importancia del inglés dentro del contexto rural? ¿Qué experiencia le dejó este ejercicio?</p> <p>¿Que aprendió de su cooperador, su asesor y sus estudiantes durante esta experiencia en el contexto rural?</p>
Situación Final	<p>¿Cómo ha cambiado su percepción del contexto rural desde que empezó sus prácticas hasta este momento?</p>
Lecciones aprendidas	<p>¿Cuáles son las lecciones aprendidas de esta experiencia en el contexto rural? ¿Qué se lleva de esta experiencia para su desarrollo profesional y personal?</p>

	<p>¿Tras la experiencia vivida en las prácticas le gustaría trabajar en un contexto rural?</p> <p>¿Si en el futuro tuviera la oportunidad de laborar en un contexto rural que haría diferente?</p> <p>¿Vivió alguna situación que lo marcó como docente y que le dejó algún aprendizaje a futuro? ¿Cuál fue la situación que más lo marcó?</p>
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Appendix B. Focus Group – Guiding Questions

Sistematización de Experiencias: Experiencias de profesores en formación de inglés en el contexto rural	
Objetivo del grupo focal: Obtener información que nos permita comprender las experiencias que tienen los maestros en formación que se encuentran realizando sus prácticas educativas.	
Nombre de los participantes:	
Nombre del moderador:	
Fecha: 24 de septiembre	Lugar: Universidad Católica de Oriente
Tema	Preguntas
Situación Inicial	<p>¿Tuvo algún acercamiento en el contexto educativo rural antes de sus prácticas?</p> <p>¿Cómo concebía el contexto rural antes de iniciar su práctica?</p>
Proceso de Intervención	<p>¿Cuáles fueron los retos más importantes cuando usted comenzó su práctica en ese contexto rural?</p> <p>¿Qué tipo de actividades implementó para motivar a sus estudiantes respecto a la importancia del inglés dentro del contexto rural? ¿Qué experiencia le dejó este ejercicio?</p> <p>¿Que aprendió de su cooperador, su asesor y sus estudiantes durante esta experiencia en el contexto rural?</p>
Situación Final	<p>¿Cómo ha cambiado su percepción del contexto rural desde que empezó sus prácticas hasta este momento?</p>
Lecciones aprendidas	<p>¿Cuáles son las lecciones aprendidas de esta experiencia en el contexto rural? ¿Qué se lleva de esta experiencia para su desarrollo profesional y personal?</p>

	<p>¿Tras la experiencia vivida en las prácticas le gustaría trabajar en un contexto rural?</p> <p>¿Si en el futuro tuviera la oportunidad de laborar en un contexto rural que haría diferente?</p> <p>¿Vivió alguna situación que lo marcó como docente y que le dejó algún aprendizaje a futuro? ¿Cuál fue la situación que más lo marcó?</p>
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7. ¿Tiene algún comentario adicional para agregar, a parte de lo mencionado?

Muchas gracias.

Appendix C. Pre-service teachers self-reflection (log format)



Week #

Date:

<p>What did I learn during this week in my practicum?</p> <p>What challenges and difficulties did I face during this week? (in & out the class)</p> <p>(Write minimum 120 words) Minimum 1 minute</p>	
<p>Feedback from others Announce the comments and recommendations I received (Cooperating teachers, advisor, class time –teacher, classmates and discussions-)</p> <p>(Write minimum 120 words)</p>	
<p>What will I do differently? What activities did I enjoy the most? Was my lesson plan effective) Why? Why not?</p> <p>(Write minimum 120 words)</p>	

Appendix D. Consent form

Focus group

CONSENTIMIENTO INFORMADO*Pre-service English Teachers Experiences in Rural Context*

El propósito de esta comunicación, es proveer una clara explicación a los participantes de este grupo focal acerca de la naturaleza de la misma, los objetivos y su rol como participantes.

La presente investigación tiene como objetivo “*Describir las experiencias de los docentes en servicio de la UCO haciendo la práctica en escuelas públicas rurales en el Oriente antioqueño*”. Este ejercicio investigativo es conducido por Luisa Gómez Ramírez, Natalia Betancur, Nataly García y Marcela Orozco, estudiantes de la Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras de la Universidad Católica de Oriente. El objetivo de este grupo focal es conocer la opinión de los estudiantes de séptimo y octavo semestre que se encuentren realizando sus prácticas en contextos rurales, para lo cual se procederá a grabar en audio sus opiniones y respuestas, con su previo consentimiento. La grabación de dicho ejercicio será con el fin de transcribir la información para luego ser analizada.

La participación es voluntaria y la información recogida es de carácter confidencial y no se utilizará para ningún otro propósito fuera de la presente investigación.

Acepto participar voluntariamente de este grupo focal, teniendo en cuenta que no representa ningún riesgo a mi integridad personal y buen nombre. Firmo en Rionegro el 24 de Septiembre de 2019.

Nombre del participante que acuerda:
Caterine Herrera Rendón

Firma del participante que acuerda:
acuerdo:

Firma del investigador que recibe el

Interviews

**CONSENTIMIENTO INFORMADO***Experiencias de profesores en formación de inglés en el contexto rural*

El propósito de esta comunicación, es proveer una clara explicación de los objetivos y su rol como participantes de este proceso de investigación que por medio de una entrevista brindarán información que ayudará al desarrollo del mismo.

La presente investigación tiene como objetivo “*Describir las experiencias de los docentes en servicio de la UCO haciendo la práctica en escuelas públicas rurales en el Oriente antioqueño*”. Este ejercicio investigativo es conducido por Luisa Gómez Ramirez, Natalia Betancur, Nataly García y Marcela Orozco, estudiantes de la Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras de la Universidad Católica de Oriente. El objetivo de la entrevista es conocer la opinión de los estudiantes de séptimo y octavo semestre que se encuentren realizando sus prácticas en contextos rurales, para lo cual se procederá a grabar en audio sus opiniones y respuestas, con su previo consentimiento. La grabación de dicho ejercicio será con el fin de transcribir la información para luego ser analizada.

La participación es voluntaria y la información recogida es de carácter confidencial y no se utilizará para ningún otro propósito fuera de la presente investigación.

Acepto participar voluntariamente, teniendo en cuenta que no representa ningún riesgo a mi integridad personal y buen nombre. Firmo en Rionegro el 10 de Septiembre de 2019.

Nombre del participante que acuerda:



CONSENTIMIENTO INFORMADO

Pre-service English Teachers Experiences in Rural Context

El propósito de esta comunicación, es proveer una clara explicación a los participantes de esta investigación acerca de la naturaleza de la misma, los objetivos y su rol como participantes.

La presente investigación tiene como objetivo “*Describir las experiencias de los docentes en servicio de la UCO haciendo la práctica en escuelas públicas rurales en el Oriente antioqueño*”. Este ejercicio investigativo es conducido por Luisa Gómez Ramírez, Natalia Betancur, Nataly García y Marcela Orozco, estudiantes de la Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras de la Universidad Católica de Oriente. El participante elegido proporcionará a los investigadores sus logs construidos o en construcción durante el séptimo y/o octavo semestre mientras realizan sus prácticas en contextos rurales. Con su previo consentimiento, los logs serán leídos para extraer y analizar la información.

La participación es voluntaria y la información recogida es de carácter confidencial y no se utilizará para ningún otro propósito fuera de la presente investigación.

Acepto participar voluntariamente, teniendo en cuenta que no representa ningún riesgo a mi integridad personal y buen nombre. Firmo en Rionegro el 15 de septiembre de 2019.

Nombre del participante que acuerda:

Natalia Betancur Alzate

Firma del participante que acuerda:

Firma del investigador que recibe el acuerdo: