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Vásquez Carrosa, Claudio; Rosas-Maldonado, Maritza; Martin, Annjeanette

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Novice EFL Teacher Perceptions on their Past Mentoring Experience

Percepciones de profesores novatos de inglés como segundo idioma sobre sus procesos de mentoría

Claudio Vásquez Carrosa
Universidad Viña del Mar, Chile
claudio.vasquez.c@gmail.com

 <http://orcid.org/orcid.org/0000-0002-3943-1559>

Maritza Rosas-Maldonado
Universidad Andrés Bello, Chile
maritza.rosas@unab.cl

 <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4652-3600>

Annjeanette Martin
Universidad de Los Andes, Chile
amartin@uandes.cl

 <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3083-5319>

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ABSTRACT:

This qualitative case study examines the perceptions of three novice EFL teachers regarding their past mentoring experiences in school settings. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to elicit their overall views as well as obtain insight to specific aspects of this process according to the *Five Factor Model on Mentoring* (Hudson, 2007). Findings indicate that the personal attributes of mentors were perceived as being most relevant. However, based on the perception of the teachers, aspects such as school requirements and feedback are not widely considered by their mentors despite the fact that these elements impact the mentoring process. It is expected that by analyzing teacher perceptions, more knowledge will be gained about future EFL student teacher preparation so that programs will be able to better address the specific needs of mentees during their practicum period.

KEYWORDS: School mentors, Mentees, EFL novice teachers, Hudson's Five Factor Model on Mentoring

RESUMEN:

Este es un estudio de caso cualitativo que analiza las percepciones de tres profesores novatos del inglés con respecto a su experiencia como mentores en el contexto del aula. Se realizaron entrevistas semi-estructuradas para obtener la perspectiva general de los docentes y otros aspectos más específicos del proceso según el *Modelo de cinco factores de mentoría* de Hudson (2007). Según los hallazgos, los profesores percibieron los atributos personales del mentor como lo más relevante. Sin embargo, desde la perspectiva de los docentes, los mentores enfatizaron menos los requisitos escolares y la retroalimentación, aunque impactan el proceso de mentoría. Mediante este análisis de las percepciones de los profesores, se espera obtener mayor conocimiento para apoyar los programas universitarios de formación de futuros docentes del inglés como segundo idioma, y así, poder mejor abordar sus necesidades específicas durante su período de práctica.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Profesores mentores, profesores aprendices, profesores novatos de inglés, Modelo de Mentoría de Hudson.

1. INTRODUCTION

Transitioning from university to the workforce is not an easy task for most graduates. Novice teachers, for example, are commonly neglected and left on their own by their institutions once they start working. Such unfortunate experiences may even propel new teachers to abandon their careers (Farrell, 2012). English as a Foreign Language (EFL) preservice teachers (PST) also encounter situations during their final

practicum that may either hinder or facilitate their induction into their new community, making them more susceptible to mistakes given their lack of experience in real-life educational contexts (Wang & Odell, 2007). Hence, for an enriching and helpful mentoring experience, preservice and cooperating teachers must work collaboratively to ensure that their transition from university courses to the workplace is as seamless and anxiety-free as possible. This study focuses on EFL novice teacher perceptions about their past mentoring experiences during their final practicum. It is expected that the emerging needs of these teachers during this experience may serve to improve Second Language Teacher Education (SLTE) programs.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Second Language Teacher Education in Chile

Approximately 33 universities in Chile currently offer forty-nine (49) EFL teacher training programs. These ESL programs comprise 9-10 semesters with a final semester devoted to their final teaching practicum (Martin, 2016) which include class observation to teaching an entire class for a full semester. However, a key issue regarding teacher preparation is the vague structure of teaching practices and the little consensus and collaboration that seem to exist between schools and universities (Barahona, 2016) on how to successfully mentor preservice teachers.

Inostroza de Celis, Jara, and Tagle (2010) argue that many cooperating teachers do not possess specific mentoring skills which are essential for its success, a factor that may actually impede the professional development of future novice teachers.

2.2 Mentoring

This concept, first coined by Megginson and Clutterback (1995), refers to the way in which more knowledgeable professionals – mentor teachers – can help mentees to become acquainted with school organization and procedures. An effective mentor can help mentees overcome initial obstacles that could hinder their abilities and overall performance (Wang & Odell, 2007). They can also help shape mentee attitudes towards the community and teaching in general, which could significantly contribute to strengthen the identity of the teacher as an educator (Fong, Mansor, Zakaria, Sharif, & Nordin, 2012). Furthermore, mentors can also guide the mentee through the administrative duties related to teaching (planning, class books, records, etc). However, there seems to be a lack of formal training in mentoring, which has led some mentors to misunderstand the aim and fall into what has been categorized as *judgementoring* (Hobson & Malderez, 2013), which occurs when a mentor teacher shames or denigrates a mentee using subjective comments. In fact, many mentors “seem to be more interested in having a substitute teacher and new material than really caring about their mentees’ learning” (Barahona, 2015, p. 95). A negative experience with a mentor during the critical stage of the practicum could produce anxiety and reduce the student teacher’s self-esteem levels to such an extent as to cause them to withdraw from their program altogether (Beck & Kosnick, 2000).

Hudson states that “a new approach to mentoring will require rethinking mentoring theories” (Hudson, 2004, p. 140). Mentoring should be a collaborative process involving interaction and socialization with more experienced peers to help mentees develop their teaching practices. In this sense, constructivist theory becomes fundamental in guiding how mentees learn to teach, since it views learning as “joint participation in authentic activity; the novice’s learning results from his or her participation with the mentor in this activity” (Feiman-Nemser & Beasley, 1997, p.109).

Thus, the socio-emotional relationship built between mentor and mentee is key to shaping the mentees' experience and is mainly influenced by the mentors (Hascher, Cocard & Moser, 2004, p.634).

2.3 Hudson's Five-Factor Model on Mentoring

A successful mentoring process is based on five characteristics (Hudson, 2007), the first one being *Personal Attributes*, such as personality, tone of voice, support, etc., which ensures an anxiety-free environment. This is why mentoring provides various benefits for preservice teachers, among them, increasing self-esteem and reducing anxiety (Hobson, Ashby, Malderez & Tomlinson, 2009).

The second feature is called *System Requirements* and refers to information about school goals and how they relate to the classroom; school grades and behavior and other elements unrelated to teaching, such as filling out the class book and taking attendance. The mentor is expected to be knowledgeable about the vicissitudes of that particular school to contribute to the PST's learning and adjustment process (Maphalala, 2013).

The third feature, *Pedagogical Knowledge*, includes a variety of strategies and elements such as effective lesson planning, preparing challenging but achievable assessment instruments and differentiating instruction to teach students at their own pace. Pedagogical knowledge provided by mentors helps strengthen preservice teachers capabilities, most notably, their ability to manage the classroom, student behaviors, time, and workloads successfully (Hobson et al, 2009).

The fourth characteristic is *modeling*. This element is critical for teacher training since mentor teachers show mentees about best practices. As such, mentors can help future teachers gather a variety of techniques and student coping strategies in different scenarios (Corcoran & Andrew, 1988).

The last of these features, *Feedback*, has a noteworthy effect on mentee career development (Bishop, 2001) by "communicating the type of feedback that is needed in a sensible way" (Daresh, 2003, p. 26). This requires skills and abilities of ideal mentors. The appropriateness and objectivity of the selected words are key elements since they help strengthen mentee confidence and remedy areas that need improvement (Le & Vásquez, 2011). This is why detailed constructive feedback and emotional support by school mentors is crucial for student teachers to understand how they can improve and become more effective teachers (Martínez, 2016).

2.4 Teacher Perceptions about Mentoring

There is little evidence in Chile that directly addresses preservice and novice teacher perceptions of their mentoring experiences. In a country-wide study, however, Inostroza de Celis, Jara, and Tagle (2010) attempted to construct a profile of mentor teacher competencies. This profile was based on data from a mentor training project proposed by the Ministry of Education and included novice teacher opinions to provide a broader view of effective mentoring. Competencies readily mentioned by participants include the mentor's role as facilitator in mediating their professional process. Mentors were also considered to be communicators of ideas in the diverse settings where mediation occurred. Participants expressed that teachers who are mentors should be committed to the profession, be experts in their subject area, as well as possess communication, critical thinking, and leadership skills. They highlighted the collaborative role of mentors and emphasized that "mentor support is decisive to make a positive change on [mentee'] teaching practice since it helps them analyze and understand their own immersion into the workforce and, ultimately, help improve their professional development" (p. 126).

Barahona's (2015) case study examined how a group of EFL preservice teachers learned how to teach as part of a SLTE program in Chile. Among various findings, Barahona observed that tensions emerged between the expectations of preservice teachers and their mentors regarding views about teaching. Such tensions

were resolved after preservice teachers adopted the teaching style of their mentor, adapted their own style to appease the mentors or opposed the opinion of the mentor and did what they thought was right. The latter option inevitably led to a breakdown in their relationship (p. 85). Hence, instead of the mentoring process being a pleasant learning experience, preservice teachers found it difficult to address contradictions between their own views of teaching (what they had learned in college) and what was asked of them by their school mentors.

Perceptions about mentoring practices are not substantially different in international contexts. Hudson, Usak, and Savran-Gencer (2009) asked 211 Turkish university students respond to the instrument which was designed to elicit participant perceptions on mentoring (*5-factor Model for Mentoring*). They observed that mentors provided assistance for most of the aspects surveyed, yet mentees considered there were many gaps not covered by their mentors. They identified mentor weaknesses in discussing content knowledge and policies, modeling well-designed lessons, assisting reflection, attentive listening and facilitating timetabling.

Zanting, Verloop, and Vermunt (2001) were also interested in student teachers beliefs regarding good mentoring. Interviews were used to learn mentee expectations about their mentors and the roles of the latter. Most participants believed their mentors should be coaches in that they need to be supportive and able to establish a good relationship with their mentees. They also expressed that the evaluative role of their mentors should come with appropriate guidance. Finally, they mentioned the importance of their mentors in informing them about classroom life and school routines by modeling teaching and advising their mentees.

Hudson (2005) investigated preservice teacher perceptions about the personal attributes of their mentors with regards to teaching Primary Science. Through a survey administered to 331 teachers, Hudson discovered that a significant number of mentees did not feel supported by their mentors; this could be due to mentors not feeling confident or lacking sufficient knowledge of teaching. Also, the preservice teachers did not perceive their mentors to be attentive enough in communicating, which is an attribute “considered part of relationship building and an essential aspect of a collaborative partnership” (p.4). In addition, mentees did not consider that their mentors instilled positive attitudes for teaching science with consequences for mentee commitment and motivation. Finally, the lowest rating was given to assisted reflection on teaching, which has been observed as directly affecting student teaching practice.

The aforementioned empirical evidence emphasizes the relevant role of mentors in shaping mentee teaching experience. This study attempts to expand on this issue by examining, in detail, the way three EFL teachers felt during their school mentoring process.

3. THE STUDY

3.1 Setting of the Study and Research Questions

This study was the result of a minor thesis project conducted at a university in central Chile. It is a qualitative case study that focuses on analyzing the perceptions of three EFL novice teachers regarding their past mentoring experiences during their final practicums. Hudson’s *Five-Factor Model on Mentoring* (2007) was used to analyze some of the data obtained. The research question which guided this study was the following:

What are the perceptions of novice EFL teachers regarding their past school mentoring experience?

3.2 Research Design

A qualitative case study was adopted to better examine and understand teacher perceptions of their mentoring experiences. Qualitative methods of enquiry are necessary for a deeper analysis of participant perception within a specific context (Creswell, 2013). Case studies are also beneficial in examining issues

for which a particular case may help provide a general understanding (Stake, 1995). For this purpose, semi-structured interviews were conducted to elicit participant perception about issues under study.

3.3 Participants

Three novice EFL teachers from the same university volunteered to participate in the study. The sample group included two female and one male student, between the ages of 23 and 35. They concluded their final practicum during the first semester of 2016 and were already working when the interviews were conducted. Two of the students, Juana and José (pseudonyms) conducted their final practicum at a private school, while Susana (pseudonym), the third student conducted hers at a public school.

3.4 Data Collection Instrument

A semi-structured interview was selected for the study. Multiple methods of inquiry were not required since the focus was on “[participant] experience and the meaning drawn from that experience” (Seidman, 1998, p.11). For this purpose, “interviewing provides a necessary, if not always completely sufficient, avenue of inquiry” (Seidman, 1998, p.11). The interview was mostly based on the *5-Factor Model on Mentoring* proposed by Hudson (2007) with additional questions to gather general information about their past mentoring experiences. The interview was divided into two main sections. The first section was aimed at gathering general information from participants about their mentoring process. During this stage of the interview, researchers were able to approach the subject matter of the study in a more subtle manner where participants recalled certain aspects of their mentoring experiences. The second section addressed more specific questions aimed at sharing their experiences with *Hudson’s Five-Factor Model on Mentoring* (2007) (Refer to interview in the Appendix). Once the instrument was piloted and subsequently validated by three EFL teachers, the participants were interviewed in their mother tongue.

3.5 Data Analysis

The collected data was transcribed and after various readings, analyzed according to a thematic analysis in order to identify common recurring elements expressed by the participants. This method was useful for reporting data patterns, organize and describe information obtained in more detail. It also provided flexibility, allowing a large amount of data to be classified according to different themes or categories either from the analysis or predetermined by the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The data analysis was divided in two parts, each addressing both sections of the interview. Thus, the first part of analysis involved examining the general questions posed in the first section of the interview and analyzing the data based on recurrent categories. Stage two involved the second part of the interview and was also analyzed according to a category based on predetermined codes or themes that had been previously established in the aforementioned Mentoring Model. The analyses were conducted by two researchers to prevent reliability issues.

4. FINDINGS

Table 1 summarizes the study findings about student teacher perceptions regarding their mentoring experiences as per the interviews. As mentioned above, the findings emerged from the participants’ accounts and were classified into recurrent themes. The symbols show which of the participant perceptions was true (tick #) for each novice teacher, which were false (x) or not applicable (-). It should be noted that the first

categories observed (*Community Welcome and Mentor Support*) emerged from the first part of the interview (general questions). The remaining categories were pre-established as they addressed Hudson's Mentoring Model. Also, for the category 'Mentor Modeling', the last two comments, as perceived by the mentees, have been marked in italics since they refer to perceived benefits of modeling done by their mentors, as opposed to the other perceptions presented above which refer to the kinds of modeling used by the trainees' mentors. Hence, findings are discussed based on the thematic categories presented below.

4.1 Community Welcome

As shown in Table 1, all three participants were warmly welcomed, not only by their mentors, but also by the school staff, but also included in school activities. Juana and Susana stated that the English Department at their schools made them feel part of their team. According to Juana, "When I first arrived, I was well received. There was an environment of friendliness since the school had a partnership with my university" (Juana, personal communications, 2016) and acknowledged their good relationship with their mentors. However, Susana stated that she had a relatively cold start with her mentor who "would only talk to me about the students and my expectations as a preservice teacher. It was very difficult to approach her on a personal level at first" (Susana, personal communications, 2016). Susana's relationship with her mentor improved over time. They became close and shared personal experiences that would help her overcome the challenge of teaching elementary school students: "She was very professional, so she wouldn't talk to me unless it was related to teaching. Over time she opened up and gave me plenty of helpful advice" (Susana, personal communications, 2016).

The scenario was different for José, who despite having been well-received by the school, explained that he did not feel welcomed by his mentor: "The other teachers were nice, I didn't have problems with anyone but my mentor teacher. From the very first moment, he let me know that he did not want me there and did not want to continue being a teacher" (José, personal communication, 2016). According to José, his mentor was disrespectful towards him and even made hurtful comments at times. Such negative attitudes perceived by José were the result of his mentor's discontent with the profession:

I had a terrible relationship with my mentor teacher. Over time, things got worse. He was tired and no longer wanted to be a teacher. This was evident. He was very strict and harsh whenever he spoke to the students. He wasn't very nice to me either (José, personal communication, 2016).

4.2 Mentor's Support

Unfortunately, José did not feel any support from his mentor throughout his entire mentoring experience. In fact, this mentor did not show any positive attitudes towards teaching, let alone towards the mentee's performance or presence in the classroom and school. Juana and Susana's experiences varied in this respect, given that they felt much support during the entire process. Juana, for example, mentioned that her mentor teacher introduced her as a peer to the rest of the community, which helped her build a more confident and outspoken teaching persona: "My mentor teacher was very happy to have me there. He was part of a mentoring program, so he was excited to apply what he had learned" ^[1] (Juana, personal communication, 2016). The support that Susana received from her mentor increased over time. Nevertheless, she acknowledged that her mentor was quite reserved, at the beginning, separating her professional life from her personal life. During this time, Susana thought that her mentor was not interested in helping her, but over time she noticed a change. Whenever she struggled, her mentor teacher would talk to her and emphasize that it was a process and that she could tell that Susana was trying: "She not only became a very helpful

mentor, but also, a sort of vocational coach, since she was always telling me how much I was improving, and encouraged me to keep being a teacher” (Susana, personal communication, 2019)

4.3 Feedback

This element was highlighted as a key aspect of the mentoring process by all three participants. Juana and Susana valued the feedback provided by their mentors whereas José always felt judged by his mentor.

Juana remarked that her mentor constantly provided formal and informal feedback. Whenever she completed an activity or finished a lesson, he would comment and suggest corrections or improvements. She also said that her mentor was very aware of the negative effects of his word choice when providing feedback, so he was careful about how he expressed himself and constantly verified with her about whether he was being too harsh. One of the situations that she remembered was the moment when she was about to obtain the results of her summative assessment and where the mentor was required to grade her performance. He mentioned that regardless of the grade, Juana should not be worried because his suggestions and feedback reflected the comments he had provided during her practicum: “We trusted each other so I was not upset when suggested changes or activities because I knew he was doing it to help, not hurt me” (Juana, personal communication, 2016).

Susana also highlighted that her experience with the feedback she received was very beneficial and helped her become the teacher she is today. From the beginning, she received comments and suggestions that helped her overcome difficulties encountered in the classroom. The most meaningful feedback she received from her mentor was to “let go of some of the theory and instruction from university” and just stay open to the school context (Susana, personal communication, 2019). Additionally, she felt that her mentor teacher empowered her by stating that she trusted her alone with the class because she had become a strong teacher throughout the practicum.

As a student, we fear being questioned; but she made me feel much better about my teaching and gave me the confidence a novice teacher lacks. She kept motivating me as she told me how much I was improving throughout the process (Susana, personal communication, 2016).

As previously stated, José’s mentoring experience was not a positive one and any formal feedback provided by his mentor was always negative, such as making snide remarks in class about what he didn’t like about José’s lesson and never focusing on how students could benefit. His mentor even interrupted a classroom activity José had prepared and asked him to stop because it was too noisy. According to José, his mentor teacher made positive remarks only if another teacher was present or prior to meetings with the university supervisor. Those comments, however, were mostly related to personal attributes about organization and personality, but never about his pedagogical skills or development: “The only feedback I received was negative, he would only focus on what I did wrong. My teacher even said he didn’t like the way I conducted my lessons because I was encouraging my students to speak” (José, personal communication, 2016).

TABLE 1
Teacher Views about School Mentoring

Topic	Perceptions	Juana	José	Susana
Community Welcome	- Felt welcomed by the staff	✓	✓	✓
	- Felt supported by colleagues	✓	-	✓
	- Felt like part of a team	✓	X	✓
	- Included in school activities	✓	X	-
	- Welcomed by mentor	✓	X	✓
	- Good relationship with mentor	✓	X	✓
Mentor Support	- Relationship with mentor improved	-	X	✓
	- Felt supported throughout the practicum	✓	X	✓
	- Felt emotionally supported	✓	X	✓
	- Felt respected by the mentor	✓	X	✓
	- Felt empowered by the mentor	✓	X	✓
Mentor Feedback	- Mentor support increased through time	-	X	✓
	- Often provided informally	✓	-	✓
	- Respectfully and constructively provided	✓	X	✓
Mentor Modeling	- Consistent with mentor's comments.	✓	✓	-
	- Directed at communicative activities	✓	X	✓
	- Integration of other content areas	✓	-	-
	- Use of strategies (for lexis)	✓	-	-
	- Grammar-based	X	✓	X
	- Use of oral English in class	X	X	✓
	- Lesson stages were clearly marked	✓	X	✓
	- Lessons mostly textbook-based	-	✓	✓
	- Motivating for students	✓	X	✓
	- Beneficial for their practice	✓	X	✓
System Requirements	- Suitable to mentee expectations	✓	X	✓
	- Assisted and guided by mentor	✓	X	✓
	- Assisted with classbook completion	-	✓	✓
	- Assisted with general school requirements	✓	X	✓
Pedagogical Knowledge	- Assisted with teaching strategies	✓	X	✓
	- Assisted with material design for specific students' needs	✓	-	-
	- Assisted with sequencing lessons	✓	X	✓
	- Assisted with assessment	-	X	-
	- Assisted with class management	-	X	-

Source: Self-prepared

4.4 Modeling

Juana and Susana perceived their mentor teacher modeling as more positive and beneficial. Juana emphasized that there were several elements taken from her mentor's modelling that have influenced her current teaching style. One of those elements was how he stepped away from heavily grammatically-oriented lessons to more communicative classes, allowing the students to use the language in more meaningful ways. Her mentor also

showed her how to select content from different subject areas and integrate it in the English class. However, there was one element Juana said she would not include in her current teaching practice. She argued that her mentor did not encourage the students to speak much in English as they mostly engaged in writing. Juana stated that this was probably due to the large size of the class and how the desks were organized in the classroom. For that reason, she now encourages her students to speak English in class and includes activities that promote peer-to-peer interaction.

He was a communicative teacher who didn't base his instruction on grammar. He was able to show me creative activities that I now use in my classroom. However, he didn't strengthen the students' oral English which is something I changed during my lessons (Juana, personal communication, 2016).

Susana had a similar experience, stating that she learned much from observing her mentor during her lessons. Her mentor encouraged students to use as much English as they could by providing fun activities at the beginning and end of class despite possible differences among student proficiency levels. By doing this, her mentor expected that in time students would be motivated to use the language. Susana's mentor teacher planned her lessons based mostly on the textbook used by the school and made little variations. She did, however, stop to discuss relevant topics related to student interests.

I liked the way she would play games in the class so that students could use the language in a fun way. She also adapted language structures for the different student levels, ensuring that every student she talked to understood what was being said (Susana, personal communication, 2016).

Unlike his peers, José did not benefit from mentor modeling since his mentor did not provide any classroom strategies that he could use. Although his mentor's English proficiency was adequate, he did not speak in English during the lesson and taught class only in Spanish. He argued that the students would never learn English, so there was no point in exposing them to a language they did not understand. The activities his mentor teacher provided were mostly individual and grammar-based, which is something that José decided not to follow. "I tried to walk away from everything he would do in the class. He taught me what a good teacher should not do since his performance as a teacher did not make me or the students feel engaged or comfortable" (José, personal communication, 2016).

4.5 System Requirements

Administrative elements were not always approached the same way by mentor teachers. Yet, all participants agreed that they were necessary to fully comprehend how each community and education system worked.

Juana stated that, overall, most of the administrative aspects she needed to learn were related to the textbook, class objectives, and the protocol for calling a parent for a conference when a student was being disruptive. "My mentor explained the use of the class book, the way it was aligned with the objectives of the Ministry of Education, and how these were related to the activities the students did in class" (Juana, personal communication, 2016). In addition, she mentioned there were several requirements about how the school's learning objectives reflected the requirements of the Ministry of Education. However, she realized that some of those administrative requirements needed extra organization and order, something her mentor teacher was not a role model for: "My (mentor) teacher was very good but very messy. His Class Record Book was impossible to understand, so I had to ask another EFL teacher for clarification" (Juana, personal communication, 2016).

José appreciated the way his mentor teacher showed him how to complete the Class Record Book (though he did this only once) in order to record grades and class objectives. However, Jose was never guided about other school requirements. Furthermore, he mentioned that there were some protocols his mentor teacher was not even aware of, for example when José needed to have a student retake a test.

I remember he only showed me how to register attendance once. He taught me how to write students up. I thought I was going to learn, for example, how to complete the class book, but if you give me one now, I wouldn't know how to do it (José, personal communication, 2019).

This is why, José felt that he was still not ready to deal with the system requirements of any educational institution on his own.

Susana expressed that the school where she did her practicum had requirements and procedures for the simplest things, from lesson plans to grades. In this respect, she was relieved to realize that her mentor teacher was very knowledgeable and willing to share this information with her. In fact, she was able to explain the criteria behind how classes were divided and procedures for informing the parents whether a student was to pass to the next grade or be held back, and so on. Her mentor teacher also informed her about the school authorities and the role each one played. The only thing Susana did not learn was how to upload grades to the school's platform, which as she said was perhaps due to confidential information.

She didn't teach me how to use the platform to upload the students' grades, and we never actually discussed the Ministry guidelines for EFL teaching. However, she did teach me how to approach all the technicalities of the school, and the people I needed to talk to whenever I had a problem (Susana, personal communication, 2016)

4.6 Pedagogical Knowledge

Juana mentioned that her mentor provided pedagogical techniques that helped her deal with less advanced students. This kind of knowledge is something she still applies today. She learned that most students do not share the same level of English nor the same speed when it comes to learning. She in fact realized that some students did not respond to her activities and the way she tried to teach certain content. In this respect, her mentor showed her how to efficiently differentiate her lessons to meet all of her students' needs. She highlighted that the mentor's didactic sequence was always in function of his students, which made his lessons effective and meaningful. "My mentor teacher showed me that some students might take longer than others. He supported the whole process of creating material and setting the right pace for the class to be successful" (Juana, personal communication, 2016). In addition, Juana's mentor helped her to find a way to strengthen the student vocabulary without having to use their native language by using circumlocution and describing the concept until the students discovered the meaning of the word.

José emphasized that that he gained hardly any pedagogical insight from his mentor which impacted his overall experience. Regarding classroom management, he said that his mentor teacher was very aggressive and cold with his students, which led them to fear the English class and consequently, poor results. In terms of planning, José's mentor would plan his lessons a few minutes before the class based on the textbook. This mentor teacher did not differentiate his instruction, but José understood that it was a consequence of the large size of the class. "He would not follow any set structure. I understand that, though, since there was an average of 45 students per class" (José, personal communication, 2016). This lack of differentiation also led this mentor teacher to create assessments that were inappropriate for his students' needs, which the mentor considered good based on the number of pages and how difficult it was.

For Susana, the pedagogical knowledge she gained from her mentor was quite useful. She realized that, most of the times, the experience of teaching is more beneficial than the theoretical instruction that is offered by the university. She mentioned that she had thought that teaching in a school that already provided differentiated groups (beginner, intermediate, and advanced) was going to make this process impossible to implement; however, her mentor teacher showed her that differentiation is necessary in every group of students because not all activities meet all of the students' needs. One of the elements Susana mentioned she needed to work on during her final practicum was the way she structured her classes. Sometimes, she did not have enough time to finish her class properly or spent too much time presenting content but very little on

student production. This is another benefit Susana received from her mentor teacher who clearly marked each stage of her lesson by providing different activities to ensure that the class flowed seamlessly.

I too dispersed with regards to the different class levels. I didn't have enough time for my activities. She helped me mark the parts of my class successfully from the beginning. She suggested that I break up the sections with activities to determine how much time is left (Susana, personal communication, 2016).

4.7 Personal Attributes

It seems that part of the participants' experience in the way they were 'welcomed by the new community' and 'supported by their mentors', as presented at the beginning of this section, corresponds with some of the personal attributes desirable for effective mentors. As already mentioned in those two categories, when all three teachers were first welcomed into the community, that had an important impact, considering it signaled the way they interacted with their peers and, more importantly, their mentor teacher. That initial conference with the mentor teacher not only meant becoming acquainted with the teacher but also facing that mentor's personality traits for the first time. Those first encounters were described by all three teachers as a significant event in their relationship and an important sign of how the relationship would evolve. Although each participant's experience was different, they all mentioned this connection with their mentor and the support given by their mentors when evaluating how successful those experiences were.

5. DISCUSSION

From the findings presented above, it seems that the participants perceived their mentors' personal attributes as the most important factor in their mentoring experiences. This was reflected in the support and encouragement they received from their mentors and the way they felt welcomed, or not, by their mentors and the school communities. The relevance of this element has indeed been demonstrated in the literature. Day (1999), for example, mentioned that personal support is of primary importance in a situation of trial and error; practicums are examples of this kind of situation where psychological and professional support are fundamental. Hudson et al (2009) also found that mentoring practices such as "listening attentively to the mentee" (p. 70) was seen as an effective – personal – strategy for the mentee to feel more welcomed and understood. These positive traits were observed in this study by Juana and Susana, in particular, as they felt respected, motivated, and even empowered in the classroom setting.

For José, on the other hand, this element was not present in his mostly negative mentoring experience marked by a lack of respect, support, and enthusiasm on the part of his mentor. In this particular case, the mentor's dispositional traits reflected the opposite of those characteristics that have been identified as ideal and desirable for mentors, such as gentleness, consistency, and a positive attitude in general (Daresh, 2003). In fact, lack of support and poor interpersonal skills – as evidenced in José's mentoring experience – are seen as obstacles to successful mentoring relationships (Hudson, 2013), and may even be included within the concept of judgementoring (Hobson & Malderez, 2013). This is why teachers who are mentors, must to go beyond the learning-to-teach context and help create a learning environment based on a pleasant relationship (Clarke, Triggs & Nielsen, 2014, p. 181).

Participants also referred to the pedagogical knowledge of their mentors and teaching skills planning, classroom management, and differentiation. Some of their mentors, for example, were good at sequencing their lessons to meet the class objective with their entire group; however, one participant struggled to see how effective planning takes place in a classroom because sequences were absent and planning was based entirely on the course book provided by the Ministry. It is fundamental that mentor teachers transfer such knowledge to preservice teachers; by managing such information, student teachers may be able to better gauge student

levels and attain particular student learning goals (Hudson et al, 2009). In fact, a knowledgeable teacher not only helps mentees with lesson sequencing but also with assessment and evaluation procedures to ensure that learning objectives are met successfully (Corcoran & Andrew, 1988).

Modeling – that is providing and demonstrating pedagogical knowledge - was also highlighted by the participants. Two of the teachers said to value the insights learned, Although one teacher said that he could not embrace his modeling experience, his negative experience serves as an example of what not to do in the future. The relevance of modeling in the mentoring process is based on the fact that it is also embedded in other elements of this process (Bird, 2012). As an example, modelling occurs through strategies (pedagogical knowledge), administrative duties (system requirements) as well as enthusiastic and positive attitudes of mentor teachers (personal attributes). This is why it is an element which has been considered key for future teachers to succeed during their first years of practice (Carroll, 2005) as was evidenced in this study in the case of two of the mentees – who felt motivated to improve their practice.

System requirements and feedback were elements of the mentoring experience where the participants did not receive much guidance (see Table 1). This may indicate that mentor teachers are only partially concerned with these aspects of the mentor teacher role. With regard to the system requirements factor, Bird (2012) also found that her participating mentor teachers did not prioritize these aspects as much as the other mentoring factors. Bird concluded that mentors may consider that this knowledge is more relevant for employed teachers than for student teachers' success. Hudson et al (2009) also observed that only 24% of the mentor teachers participating in his study shared knowledge with mentees on policies, aims, and requirements stated by the government. This kind of knowledge should indeed be part of mentees' practical preparation at schools (Riggs & Sandlin, 2002); the evidence for this need was illustrated by one of the participating mentees (José) who did not feel ready to deal with the administrative duties that he would need to face at any future teaching position.

Feedback was another factor not well-developed by the participants' mentor teachers as reflected in the few comments provided. This element within the mentoring process refers to the way mentors communicate their ideas and opinions regarding their mentees' practice. Mentees in the current study referred to specific instances of feedback provided by their mentors, which in most cases corresponded to informal oral feedback, as opposed to structured, systematic, or written feedback. In this respect, mentors' communication strategies and awareness of effective language use have been found to have a positive impact on student teachers (Le & Vásquez, 2011). Hence, the relevance of this element is related to the "supportive and affective nature" (Martínez, 2016, pp.47-48) of the way it is communicated as well as on the details given on a sustained basis. It should be noted that written feedback is considered more lasting as the "student teachers can reflect in the future, further enhancing their subsequent lesson preparation without having to recall new applications from memory alone" (Bird, 2012, p.61). This explains why student teachers value and expect constructive feedback from their school mentors in terms of detailed input and emotional support to understand what/how they can improve to become effective teachers (Martínez, 2016). As evidenced in this study, the above-mentioned aspects regarding effective feedback were in fact reflected in two mentee experiences in that they seemed to be quite positive. However, in José's experience, the only feedback received did not meet his expectations nor the expectations of what a supportive, affective and constructive type of feedback.

6. CONCLUSION

This case study investigated the perceptions of three EFL novice teachers regarding their past mentoring experiences at the school setting during their final practicum. Overall findings confirm the importance of mentoring (Bird, 2012; Heeralal, 2014; Glenn, 2006; Bird & Hudson, 2015) since participating teachers referred to all the elements in Hudson's *Five-Factor Model on Mentoring*, which served as the basis

for analyzing mentee perceptions about their mentoring experiences. However, there was one element in particular which seemed to be more relevant to mentee experiences: the personal attributes of the mentor (Hudson, 2005). This element is essential for the mentoring process since “it can influence mentee development as a teacher and has a bearing on the effectiveness of the mentoring offered” (Hudson, 2005, p.6), hence “it can impact the execution of other mentoring factors” (Bird, 2012, p.63). Indeed, if student teachers feel motivated and encouraged to learn as part of a pleasant mentor-mentee relationship, those teachers will be more likely to feel confident to enquire and reflect about their practice and to make the most of the feedback provided. While these personal attributes were perceived as present by two of the participating novice teachers, a third teacher felt the opposite. Even though this latter experience may fall under the term judgementoring, the mentee’s attitude of taking all the bad qualities displayed by his mentor as an example of what not to do can still be considered as part of the mentoring process. Based on what he observed and experienced, this teacher was able to reflect and discern what was best for his own practice.

From the comments provided by these teachers it can also be concluded that there seem to be some factors that are not fully addressed by mentors, namely, system requirements and sufficient and appropriate feedback; this corresponds to findings in previous research (Bird & Hudson, 2015). Bird (2012), for example, argued that school administrative requirements may be considered more important to full time teachers who are formally required to meet these types of obligations in their everyday work. Feedback, on the other hand, is also important since it not only serves to guide student teacher practice but also enhances their awareness and reflections regarding different teaching activities (Bird, 2012). This type of feedback, however, as explained by Clarke et al (2014), is scarce. Mentees do expect mentors to provide detailed and constructive feedback and to be advised about the school administrative demands, hence “to be guided to act as future colleagues and professionals in the school environment” (Rakicioglu-Soylemez & Eroz-Tuga, 2014, p.152).

One limitation of this case study is that it included just three teachers, hence findings cannot be generalized; however, the collected data helps distinguish elements within the school mentorship that seem to be more relevant to mentee needs. A second limitation of the study is the use of only one instrument in data collection. However, given the time constraints of teachers, in-depth interviews were deemed the most appropriate method for gathering teacher perceptions for this complex personal experience. A final limitation is that the only actors who were involved in this study were the mentees. This restricted the analysis to only their views about the mentoring process. Adding the perspectives of the mentor teachers and the university supervisors would have enriched the data obtained. Further research in this topic should incorporate the views of all the actors involved in the mentoring process. By analyzing the way mentor and supervising teachers - their expectations and beliefs of the mentoring process - can work in triads with preservice teachers so that they may better understand how to help the latter thrive in their first school experiences as teachers. This is particularly necessary in local contexts where there seems to be a lack of guidelines for school mentors on how to approach the mentoring experience in a way that can support mentees and provide an enriching learning experience.

The purpose of examining teacher perceptions was not to identify or classify mentoring practices, but to determine elements which may impact future practice sessions for student teachers. Teacher training programs, in collaboration with school mentors, can also benefit from evidence found in this study by reflecting on the different aspects of mentoring for mentors and mentees so that they can experience a fruitful and anxiety-free transition from the university to school classrooms.

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Appendix

Semi-structured Interview

1. Tell me a little bit about your school mentoring experience during your last practicum (the school environment, the teaching itself, etc.).
2. What was the relationship with your mentor like?
3. Do you feel that you learned more or less from that teaching practice?
4. Do you think the mentoring process you went through has helped you be a better-prepared teacher now that you are in charge of your own classroom?
5. What do you think of your mentor teacher's personal attributes (personality, tone of voice, emotional support, etc.)? Do you think those factors were relevant to your mentoring experience?
6. Do you think your mentor helped you understand the educational system's requirements at the school where you did that last practicum (class books, planning templates, grade system)?
7. Do you think your mentor teacher was a role model in terms of his/her pedagogical knowledge (activities, language use, differentiation, etc.)? Have you applied anything s/he did in your current teaching practice?

8. Was the way in which your mentor teacher modelled his/her lessons beneficial for your own learning process? In which ways, if it wasn't, why not?
9. What type of feedback did you usually receive from your mentor? (oral/written feedback, evaluations, comments, suggestions)? Did that help you? Did it help you in your current teaching practice?

NOTES

- [1] The fact that this mentor teacher was being trained as mentor may have played a role in this participant's mentoring experience; however, such factor was not considered in this study.

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