

# En la Unión Está la Fuerza (In Unity There Is Strength): Perceptions of Pre-service EFL Teachers and Supervisors of Observation Conferences in a Chilean Regional University

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This study explores the perceptions that pre-service English as a Foreign Language teachers and supervisors have of observation conferences and their role in teacher development in a training programme in Chile. A questionnaire and a semi-structured interview were used to collect data from the participants. Analysis of data suggests that most subjects had an optimistic perception of observation conferences, identifying them as highly valuable for teacher development, but lack of training and administrative issues deeply affected the observational process. These findings emphasise the need for training of supervisors and suggest that participants of observation conferences can build a collaborative relationship that allows pre-service teachers to be active agents of change in their teacher training.

## 1. Introduction

Observation is a key component of teacher professional development (Bailey, 2006). Although useful for identifying effective teaching practices (Mujis et al., 2018), it is a process teachers have viewed with certain reluctance due to its appraising nature (Copland & Donaghue, 2021). In higher education teacher training programmes, pre-service teachers (PSTs) regularly experience observation as it is not only used for formative purposes but also for evaluation (Bell et al., 2018). During their practicum, they usually work along a collaborating teacher from a school and are sporadically visited by a university-based supervisor who observes their teaching practices (Richards & Farrell, 2011). To carry out the observations, supervisors (SPs) may take different approaches, clinical supervision (originally from the nursing and medical field) tending to be the most popular, focusing on “the concepts of collegiality, collaboration, skilled service, and ethical conduct” (Chamberlin, 2000, p. 654). In clinical supervision, the role of the SP is to be a trusted guide that aids PSTs to reflect, explore, and change their teaching practices while they actively contribute and question their teaching beliefs to shape their understanding of education (Gebhard, 2009). Although teacher training has largely been a responsibility of higher education, research on the area has remained rather low (Lillejord & Børte, 2016). However, there is a growing interest in the interactions between PSTs and more experienced teachers to aid their professional development (Windsor et al., 2020).

Historically, in Chile, little research has been done regarding English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Teaching and even less in EFL teacher training (Barahona, 2019). This lack of a strong research basis in

the national field requires further exploration. Considering this, the following study explores the perceptions of pre-service EFL teachers and SPs in a training programme in Chile and attempts to address the gap in local EFL teacher training research.

### **1.1. Context**

The EFL training programme in this study is situated in a Chilean university with over a decade of experience in teacher training. The curriculum combines theoretical and practical courses in which PSTs practice teaching in an assigned school. PSTs are observed at least twice by an appointed SP each semester, an event which is followed by a feedback session. SPs, who usually teach on the programme or are part-time teachers, are randomly assigned by a coordinator who allocates them according to their schedule availability. Although the participants in this study understand how the process works, a detailed protocol which specifies roles, duration, and characteristics of the process is not provided. This suggests a need for inquiry in the area, something which is also evidenced in the international and national research (Bailey, 2006; Barahona, 2019; Díaz & Bastías, 2012; Wragg, 2011).

## **2. Literature review**

Broadly, the goal of observation is to develop awareness of effective teaching practices to achieve professional expertise through a constant process of reflection (Maggioli, 2012). The observational procedure is known as an observation conference (OC), and it involves a pre- or in-service teacher “engaged in the practices of their profession, observed by someone with an institutional remit to discuss these practices” (Copland & Donaghue, 2021, p.2). Although this process shares many similarities with observation as a research method - both rely on first-hand recollection of data (Denscombe, 2017) - their purpose differs greatly because OCs are concerned with teacher development. When observing PSTs, observations have a dual role. While the observer's focus is on evaluation to make a judgement as a part of a decision-making process, it also has a formative purpose for teacher development (Bell et al., 2018). In this scenario, OCs are linked to what is traditionally known in the literature as supervision. In language teacher education, supervisions are aimed at continual improvement of teaching practices (Randall, 2015) and are regarded as “a fundamental part of pre-service and in-service professional development experiences for teachers” (Chamberlin, 2000, p.653). However, such developmental practices are, as Bailey (2006) observes in her seminal work, not only concerned with aiding teacher development, but also encompass “unpleasant responsibilities” (p. 5) related to managerial purposes.

### **2.1. The supervisor in observation conferences**

Although a common concept in education, it is rather difficult to find a consensus concerning what approach an SP should take, as several supervisory styles exist (Wragg, 2011). In teacher education, an SP “has the duty of monitoring and improving the quality of teaching done by other colleagues in an educational situation” (Wallace, 1991, p.107). Goldsberry (1988) proposed three models of supervision according to their purpose. Nominal supervision is described as having no real impact on the teaching practices of in-service or PSTs, but is simply seen as a stakeholder requirement for SPs who are usually ill-prepared or have little time allocated for the job. In prescriptive supervision, the SP is viewed as the expert who identifies and helps correct poor teaching practices offering alternatives to the teacher. In the reflective model, the teacher “focuses on the teacher’s thinking about teaching as much as his (sic)

actual teaching behaviour” (Goldsberry, 1988, p.7), the SP being a guide for critical reflection. To successfully contribute to teacher development and build rapport, it has been suggested that a balance between the three supervisory models should be achieved, as PSTs may experience different needs during the process (Ong’ondo & Borg, 2011).

Literature has reported a shift from the SP as an expert possessor of knowledge to that of an advisor who guides teachers in their reflective process (Bailey, 2006). The importance of the construction of relationships between the participants of the supervision has been emphasised for meaningful learning, as well as the social interaction with the SP to foster active reflection (Loughran, 2006). Reflective practice is considered the cornerstone of a successful observation, allowing PSTs to identify appropriate instructional techniques and develop metacognitive tools that have the potential to help them address critical issues within the educational context (Maggioli, 2012). Reflective dialogue, supported by the SP, can strengthen the SP/PST relationship and introduce the PST to a community of continual reflective practice (Windsor et al., 2020). Nevertheless, SPs may still struggle to maintain the dual role of supporter and evaluator, tending to privilege their own views and claim expertise over the PST (Donaghue, 2019).

There is a nascent interest in the psychological wellbeing of PSTs in teacher education, as the perceived demands of adapting to the practicum and lesson observations may be emotionally exhausting (Varol et al., 2023). Research has suggested the need for teacher training programmes to invest in the emotional welfare of PSTs so they can “become more confident and competent in navigating the vital issues with their cooperating teachers and university supervisors” (Deng et al., 2018, p.451).

## **2.2. Clinical supervision in observation conferences**

As noted above, clinical supervision has been cited as the most appropriate for PSTs and as one of the most influential in general education (Bencherabl & Maskari, 2021). Clinical supervision comprises three stages. In the pre-observation conference, SP and teacher set goals for the observation, address teacher concerns, or discuss issues from previous supervisions (Randall, 2015). The classroom observation that follows entails an SP’s systematic and non-judgmental observation of a class to collect data for an upcoming conversation with the PST (Windsor et al., 2020). Finally, a post-observation conference (POC), rich in discussion, is held. This stage is key for teacher development as it offers teachers objective feedback to solve potential instructional issues by developing a plan for improvement (Bencherab & Maskari, 2021). Communicating this feedback successfully is of paramount importance for the quality of an OC. Rather than linear, Bailey (2006) proposed this model to be a cycle where the teacher continues the reflective cycle repeatedly, even “in the absence of an observer” (p. 92) for their own professional growth.

## **2.3. Feedback in observation conferences**

After an OC, a POC is held to provide feedback to the teacher. The feedback that emerges is highly valuable, as it provides space for teacher development (Cinaglia et al., 2023). Feedback may promote positive change through the exchange of ideas between the participants, but it is not an impartial activity. Copland & Donaghue (2021) indicate that the power structures, genre, and evaluative purposes of supervisory feedback affect the talk greatly. Farr (2015) also highlights the fact that genre expectations and power imbalances affect the nature of dialogue. Delivering and receiving criticism has proven to be difficult for the parties involved due to the natural reluctance for face-threatening

situations (Copland & Donaghue, 2021). Face refers to the socially constructed image a person has of the self, and a face-threatening event or utterance occurs when the expectations or desires of the participants are challenged by the other party (Copland & Donaghue, 2021). Though some face-threatening events are required in a POC, some specific acts disrupt the “expectations of the feedback genre” (Copland & Donaghue, 2021, p. 3835), causing SP and PST to have potentially antagonistic roles. In the local context, Barahona (2019) reported that, although Chilean SPs were aware of the reflective purpose of feedback, their work was usually restricted to evaluation. There continues to be research interest in the nature of discourse feedback during the POC (Copland & Donaghue, 2021). This research has shed light on the potential benefits of feedback to improve reflective practice (Copland & Donaghue, 2021; Donaghue, 2019), and has suggested different approaches for improving feedback practices with a focus on observer training and increasing PST awareness and agency (Farr et al., 2021).

#### **2.4. Issues when observing pre-service teachers**

For OCs to be successful, PSTs must be committed to constantly reviewing and improving teaching practices (Rashidi & Forutan, 2015). However, this takes time and resources that are usually not provided by administrators or university training programmes. Goldsberry (1988) observed this back in the last century, Bailey in 2006, and Addleman et al. (2024) much more recently. Nevertheless, despite a lack of investment in what they do, university-based supervisors have a crucial role in supporting PSTs to overcome challenges for teaching development (Varol et al., 2023), but “have little time to devote to individual trainees” (Bailey, 2006, p. 241), as they usually supervise several PSTs.

Cuenca (2012) describes the PST-SP relationship as mostly being dominated by the SP: hierarchical and prescriptive. Negative experiences and apprehensions towards supervision have long been attested in the literature (e.g., Rashidi & Forutan, 2015; Richards & Farrell, 2011), with some PSTs reporting distress or anxiety at the mere thought of being supervised (Kobul, 2012). Concerns for the mental health of PSTs continue to be raised as feedback from the university-based supervisor, if taken negatively, can potentially contribute to emotional exhaustion (Varol et al., 2023). This concern can be understood as part of a range of concerns about wellbeing in contemporary education (Mercer & Puchta, 2023).

In Chile, Barahona (2019) details that SPs reported having a conflicting and rather unrecognised place within the language teaching programme, as they were often “peripheral members” (p. 276) of the community, i.e., part-time teachers. Also, she emphasises the need for SPs to have training in the field as they “rarely undertake professional development related to supervisory practices”. Post-covid concerns in Chile related to teacher education have led to a growing interest in the landscape that PST will go into as the opportunities to practice empathy and reflection were scarce during online practicum experiences (Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison, 2020). This highlights the potential role of SPs as supporting actors in PSTs’ emotional wellbeing during their practicum process, and is aligned with current national concerns for the “socio-emotional development of students and professors [to] be integrated into the educational process in higher education” (Riquelme et al., 2023, p. 17).

### **3. Methodology**

This study follows a qualitative approach in its attempt to describe and understand the actions that occur during OCs. The following research questions underpin it:

1. What perceptions do pre-service EFL teachers and supervisors from a regional university in Chile have of observation conferences and their role in teacher development?
2. How different or similar are the perceptions that pre-service EFL teachers and supervisors have of observation conferences and their role in teacher development?
3. What implications do these perceptions have in teacher development in this context?

### **3.1. Participants and sampling**

This study used non-probability snowball sampling due to its smaller-scale nature. Potential participants were informally approached to check their availability and willingness to participate. They in turn referred other colleagues or classmates to the researcher. This resulted in a total of eight participants, four SPs and four PSTs, all of whom had experience with supervision. All participants were over 18. At the point of data collection, no participating PSTs had been observed by the researcher or the SP participants. This decision was made to avoid sample bias (Denscombe, 2017).

### **3.2. Data collection instruments**

An initial short self-completion web-based questionnaire and a detailed semi-structured interview were employed to generate data. The questionnaire was designed using Microsoft Forms and it included open-response and closed-response questions and was employed as a quick way to contextualise each participant (Brown, 2009). The data obtained was used for cross-reference in order to further validate the thematic analysis. Regarding the semi-structured interview, a set of 11 questions was designed with prompts as probes and checks to elicit the desired information from the interviewees. All questions were reviewed and cross-referenced with relevant literature in the area. A final question was included in both interviews to encourage interviewees to add anything that had not been covered to the agenda (Richards, 2009).

### **3.3. Data analysis**

Once consent was granted, the data was collected and then transcribed with the help of digital tools from Microsoft Teams and Microsoft Word using the "Audio to Text" tool. While this aided the transcription process, each interview was manually revised multiple times to ensure the transcriptions were reliable. To work through data, a thematic analysis was chosen. The transcripts were explored by the lead researcher, and codes were identified by manually sorting and highlighting the data generated in Microsoft Excel. An inductive approach was used as codes emerged while data revision and no prior coding scheme existed (Fugard & Potts, 2019). A second round of analysis was done, where the codes were grouped to develop themes. For reliability purposes, a record of why and how several codes were used or deleted was kept. The codes were discussed with the second researcher and only those which were strictly related to the research aims were maintained. To ensure validity, and, as noted above, cross-checks were made with the questionnaire data; in addition, multiple revisions were made to achieve a clear structure of themes and sub-themes.

#### 4. Findings

Table 1 and Table 2 summarise relevant information of SPs and PSTs. Pseudonyms have been used in both tables to protect the identity of the participants.

Table 1: Autobiographical information of supervisors

	Esteban	Amparo	Manuel	Fernanda
Undergraduate degree	English Teacher	English Teacher	English Teacher	English Teacher
Postgraduate degree	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Years in the program	10+	0-2	0-2	5
Years with OCs	10+	0-2	0-2	5
Duration of OCs	45 minutes	45 minutes	45 minutes	45 minutes
Duration of POCs	20-30 minutes	30-45 minutes	15-20 minutes	20-30 minutes
Prior training on OCs	Yes	No	No	No

Table 2: Autobiographical information of pre-service teachers

	Sofia	Catalina	Darío	Felipe
Semester in the program	8 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup>	8 <sup>th</sup>
Number of OCs experienced	2-3	4-5	6+	4-5
Duration of OCs	45 minutes	45 minutes	45 minutes	45 minutes
Duration of POCs	20-30 minutes	30-45 minutes	30-45 minutes	30-45 minutes

##### 4.1. Thematic analysis

The analysis of data resulted in the construction of three main themes and nine sub-themes illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3: Overview of themes and sub-themes

Process of OCs	Congruence of OCs
	Contribution to Teacher Development
	Administrative issues
SPs and PSTs	Relationship SP-PST
	Characteristics
	Training
Space for feedback	Feedback delivery
	Talking time
	Reflective practice

#### 4.1.1. Process of observation conferences

##### Congruence of observation conferences

Overall, participants described the process as having three stages. In the first stage, SPs arranged a date with the school to carry out the observation. In the second stage, the class observation was done. Finally, a POC was held where feedback was given about the observed class. Also, all participants agreed on the time an observed class lasted, as shown in Table 1 and 2.

##### Contribution to teacher development

While all PSTs strongly agreed that OCs were highly relevant for their teacher development, SPs had mixed views. Darío (PST) and Sofía (PST) commented on the value of having the SPs' perspective of their class as it allowed them to become aware of good practices and aspects to improve, and Felipe (PST) explained that *it definitely helps to be a better teacher* by fostering reflection and self-criticism. Conversely, Esteban (SP) stated that they did not contribute to teacher development: "To be honest with you, they do not change the personality of the trainees. What the trainees expect is to pass the process [...] But there is no process of growth".

##### Administrative issues

The time allocated for the supervision was repeatedly mentioned by both groups. Darío (PST) mentioned that he knew SPs had a heavy workload and that they sometimes had to rush the observation or could not make it. Amparo (SP) backed this up by describing her schedule as *quite demanding* and *having lots of things to do*. Felipe (PST) and Esteban (SP) narrated these problems from a broader perspective, identifying the university and its administration as being responsible for this. Esteban (SP) criticised the vision of the university about OCs, as it did not provide the necessary conditions to carry them out properly: "Having more time for feedback implies more money, more time given [...]. It's more time given to the supervisors, but the times are not given".

The issues reported by the participants relating to lack of time and training for SPs clearly link with the findings of Bailey (2006) and Barahona (2019) related to supervisory practices in higher education and will be further explored in the discussion section.

#### 4.1.2. Supervisors and pre-service teachers

##### Relationship

Most SPs said that they had no prior relationship with the PSTs they would observe. Some participants agreed that having a friendly previous relationship was an advantage as it could lower the anxiety for the OC. Sofía (PST) and Catalina (PST) expressed a similar perception but added that it could also be harmful due to personal bias from the SP towards the PST. Other SPs believed that not having a previous relationship with the PST was beneficial. Amparo (SP) argued: “I think it's quite beneficial because I am not biased by their personality or the other context in which we have met”.

Conversely, Esteban (SP) believed that the non-existent relationship with the PST was *detrimental*: “I don't know whether what I'm going to observe has been studied [...] So just because of ignorance, they don't do things that I expect”.

##### Characteristics

Three out of the four PSTs described the SP as an *advisor*, *observer*, or *guide* while characterizing themselves as active parties in the process. Sofía (PST) explained: “We know we are the protagonists of the process. [...] The supervisor kind of guided me through the process”.

The perceptions of the PST and SP further consolidate the link with clinical supervision, which fosters a democratic and active participation from the PST (Addleman et al., 2024). In addition, these comments resonate with the affordances of reflective models of supervision as discussed above. When asked about the characteristics of a good SP, three SPs used the word *open-minded*, while other participants mentioned *empathy*, *flexibility*, and *good listener*. All these characteristics pointed to the same goal of setting a comfortable environment for the OCs. In the disciplinary aspects, SPs and PSTs had mixed views.

While both agreed that knowledge regarding teaching was important, their perceptions about where this knowledge came from were different. SPs focused on theoretical and methodological mastery, but PSTs highlighted the importance of teaching experience in schools. Sofía (PST) explained the value of the comments made by an SP who had worked in schools for a long period of time in comparison to an SP who had not taught in schools: “She was understanding. Teaching in a university to people who want to learn English is not the same as teaching children [...]. For me, it is key to have a supervisor who knows how things work in schools”.

The perceptions the participants had about SPs hint at the expectations they have of the SP figure, consistent with previous studies that highlight the need for an SP that is not only knowledgeable, but also fosters respect and trust with the PST (Chamberlin, 2000; Varol et al., 2023). Not only that, but the specific characteristics mentioned link to building awareness and agency in the POC, as recommended by Farr et al. (2021) by the SP being an active, empathetic listener.

##### Training



As evidenced in Table 1, SPs claimed they had received no formal training from the programme. During the interview, they referred to emails or informal conversations with their colleagues, but not to training:

Manuel (SP): I haven't received any specific training in terms of sessions.

Amparo (SP): Not formal training, but I remember that I had a short meeting with [a] colleague.

Fernanda (SP): It's just conversations with my colleagues on how to do it.

Esteban (SP): To be honest with you, I haven't. It has been just the conversations that we have had within the group of teachers that supervise.

Furthermore, Fernanda (SP), Amparo (SP), and Esteban (SP) mentioned that they learnt to supervise by doing and repeating others' actions. This was found to be one of the largest issues in the programme, matching the findings from Barahona's (2019) national study. This lack of agreement on what to observe was echoed by the PSTs, who repeatedly mentioned that the differences among SPs directly affected their expectations of the process.

#### 4.1.3. Space for feedback

##### Feedback delivery

The POC was the only identifiable instance where all subjects mentioned that space was provided for feedback. Regarding the style, accounts were mixed. Darío (PST), Sofía (PST) and Catalina (PST) explained that the delivery of feedback during the POC varied depending on the SP. Fernanda (SP) mentioned that she provided a set of questions to PSTs before the POC to aid their reflective practice. In contrast, Manuel (SP) explained that he emailed the rubric with the scoring and the mark to PSTs after the POC, focusing on *discussing notes* during the feedback session. Esteban (SP) explained that POCs were to go through the rubric as a checklist.

##### Talking time

During the POCs, there seems to be a general agreement among the participants that, ideally, PSTs should do more of the talking. However, PSTs explained that, in their experience, the SPs did more of the talking. Nevertheless, they all mention that, although this is a generality, it is not a rule and that it widely depends on the individuals participating in the POC. From the point of view of SPs, they mostly mentioned that they would like PSTs to talk more, but that it seldom happened.

Although PSTs agreed that talking time varied, they viewed the SP as responsible for the differences, and not themselves. Sofía (PST) mentioned different situations with different SPs, as one allowed her to talk more, which she classified as *the ideal case*. Moreover, Felipe (PST) mentioned possible implications of SP talking time: "When you are in a situation where you feel attacked, you want to get out of it, so you exclude yourself from making comments to get out of it quickly".

It is worth noting that these observations link strongly with the work of Copland & Donaghue (2021) and Farr (2015), which highlight the issue of face-threatening situations during POC and how participants deal with them.

## Reflective practice

PSTs mentioned that they could develop reflective practice when they were given the space to justify or explain their teaching choices to the SP so they could potentially understand the rationale behind their actions. This aligns with definitions of reflective practice in literature. As Richards and Farrell (2011) argue, this should be a conscious process in which the SP can help through guided discussions. For Darío (PST) and Catalina (PST), SPs should be open to reach agreements in these conversations. Esteban (SP) explained that PSTs are expected to develop their reflective practice during POCs but that time was too short.

## 5. Discussion

One area that participants perceived similarly was the OC process. These recounts share strong similarities to what several authors have written about clinical supervision (Bailey, 2006; Bencherab & Maskari, 2021; Randall, 2015). Nevertheless, the pre-observation stage deeply differs from what Randall (2015) described as an opportunity for SP and PST to set goals or address teacher concerns. The administrative nature of this stage may overlook the benefits of discussing what to observe or the school context, potentially losing an opportunity for teacher development and easing the nerves of the PST.

The heavy workload of the SPs was not only recognised by SPs, but also by the PSTs, who expressed empathy towards the hectic schedule of the SP. Darío (PST) mentioned that he *felt* for the SPs as they had to teach at the university and go to schools to supervise them. Though tensions between PST-SP have been described in the literature (see Barahona, 2019; Ong'ondo & Borg, 2011), the PSTs' comprehensive attitude shows a glimpse of a collegial relationship rather than a hierarchical, distanced attitude. Time constraints and overworked SPs have been reported in relevant pieces of literature (Bailey, 2006). Both groups deemed the university as responsible for the constraints in management, and not the supervisory group. This view is shared by Barahona (2019), who reported SPs spending double the time given in their schedule to do the OC. What Goldsberry (1988) reported as an issue over three decades ago was reflected in the words of Esteban, an SP with over 10 years of experience, who expressed that time and resources were not granted.

Regarding training, SPs reported receiving no training by the programme. Unfortunately, this seems to be a continuing problem in many supervisory scenarios around the globe, as several authors over the years have commented that SPs seldom receive preparation for their position (Bailey, 2006; Burns et al., 2016; Donaghue, 2019; Goldsberry, 1988; Ong'ondo & Borg; 2011). In Chile, SPs have been reported to fall into the position circumstantially and not because of scholarly interest (Barahona, 2019). The SP's academic backgrounds seem to back up this claim. Although all of them had an EFL teaching background and most hold postgraduate degrees, only Esteban had a master's related to teacher training. His rather critical standpoint towards OCs could be explained as he was the only SP who had prior skills in the area. PSTs reported feeling affected by the lack of training as SPs evaluated differently and provided feedback in diverse ways. Donaghue (2019) emphasises the relevance of providing training not only on how to observe, but also on how to give feedback as observers need to be aware of how their talk can promote teacher development.

Participants agreed that, ideally, the PST should do more talking during POCs. This statement is backed up by Randall (2015), who emphasises that POCs help PSTs identify effective teaching practices while exchanging ideas with the SP. However, the reality described was the opposite: SPs usually lead the POC. Copland and Donaghue (2021) back up this power asymmetry during POC talk, explaining that SP usually "control the floor and have longer turns" (p. 126). It seems that both groups wished the PST

to have a collaborative role, but PSTs ended up in a passive one as they perceived SPs as wanting to take the lead. This only emphasises the hierarchical nature of POCs in the programme, as the PSTs adapted to the style of the SPs. Nevertheless, Donaghue (2019) claims that this power imbalance is only sustained due to the PST compliance. As the participants are optimistic about PSTs taking the lead role, we argue that the group has the potential to break the *status quo* if PSTs are empowered to negotiate, on more equal terms, possible face-threatening situations in the POC. It is important to consider, however, the extent to which SPs are able to support PSTs to disrupt the established power dynamics during POC talk (e.g., by initiating new topics of discussion, taking extended talk turns, or questioning the SP judgment) as suggested by Donaghue (2020). In our analysis, Felipe, one of the PSTs, would rather exclude himself from making comments about his supervisory feedback than engage with what could, in fact, be beneficial to him.

PSTs valued OCs, specifically the perspective of *the outsider*, acknowledging that the SPs identified situations they could have not done on their own. Richards and Farrell (2011) highlight that this is one of the main purposes of observation because it helps PSTs “gain a better understanding of [their] own teaching” (p.97). SPs did not completely agree, saying OCs *did not change PSTs* because they only did it to pass the course. Nevertheless, PSTs who had experienced the most OCs (as illustrated in Table 1) explained that their view had changed throughout the years, attributing higher importance to them as years passed. This confident perspective of PSTs could be evidence of effective reflective practice, chiming with Richards and Farrell (2011) who acknowledge that reflective practice is an ability that can be developed through time.

The characterization of SPs by the participants mirrored what has been written in literature about effective university supervisors being available to construct positive relationships with PSTs (Addleman et al., 2024). The participants’ use of words such as *open-minded*, *empathetic* and *flexible* can be attributed to a sense of collaboration and community, a key practice for successful supervision according to Burns et al. (2019). All in all, it can be argued that these PSTs expected the SP to be a close figure and support their teacher development, allowing them to be the protagonists of their reflective practice process.

## 6. Implications

The data analysis shows that while the training programme had many of the characteristics of clinical supervision, it was inconsistent with their usual practices, which mostly involved directive and passive styles. SPs, having no training to do the job, opted for doing it rather instinctively, which led to several supervisory practices that increased tensions among the group. PSTs, although they knew how the OC process worked, did not have clarity about their role during the POC, so they accommodated to the SP style to avoid face-threatening situations despite desiring a more balanced talk.

Pre-observation conferences were not developed. Not having an opportunity to set goals or contextualise the class prior to the observation made the process more nominal in nature. What is more, it lost a valuable chance to address the concerns of the PSTs, which could potentially bridge the gap in their relationship and foster a more collaborative, non-judgemental environment. We believe that creating spaces that allow PSTs to freely discuss issues of their practicum process can help them become active agents of change, as exploring concerning questions and taking risks to answer them has the potential for deepening learning (Jacoby, 2017). This way, the culture of collegiality and interpersonal relationships between the participants could be strengthened, which Burns et al. (2019) cite as effective to diminish power imbalance and hierarchical practices.

Despite the issues, data analysis evidenced that PSTs had an optimistic attitude towards OCs, especially their contribution to teacher development and of the role SPs played in this. PSTs wanted a

more personal connection with the SP, which has the potential of improving PSTs' mental health and reflective practices (Varol et al., 2023), a fundamental aim of OCs. Likewise, SPs looked forward to building a more collaborative relationship with the PST during the POC. The positive mindsets of the OC participants along with the growing interest in mental wellbeing post-pandemic in higher education in Chile (as reported by Riquelme et al., 2023; Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison, 2020) could indicate an impetus to change the *status-quo* thoroughly reported in supervisory practices. Both parties envisioned the role of the other to be different, providing evidence of their desire for change. University training programmes have been called on to regulate the responsibilities of the parties involved in teacher training as it requires strong institutional commitment (Fuentes-Abeledo et al., 2020). Esteban, the most experienced SP, echoed this statement and conveyed the duty of the university in the regulation of these protocols.

## 7. Conclusion

It should be noted that the present study has its limitations due to the small sample size in a single research site. Yet, it highlights what is a widely reported lack of training of SP in language training programmes (see Bailey, 2006; Barahona, 2019; Burns et al., 2019; Donaghue, 2019). Our data analysis shows that the current supervisory practices were likely informed by the clinical supervision model, but that unmet expectations of both PSTs and SPs resulted in a range of experiences across OCs.

The present study emphasises the need for more resources to be granted in supervisory practices, particularly to provide specialised training to SPs. It also foregrounds an optimistic scenario in terms of the SP and PST relationship, as this research evidenced an impetus to change and work collaboratively. The concern with the socio-emotional wellbeing of PSTs in higher education could allow training programmes to invest resources to design an intervention plan to improve OCs with a focus on building stronger PST-SP interpersonal relationships. Given that the PSTs in this study show an understanding of the difficulties their SPs face, we argue that there is an opportunity here for PSTs to be active agents in the process of change. Such a collaborative approach may well result in greater stakeholder buy-in.

We close by considering the broader implications of this study for teacher education in different contexts. We are optimistic that in many contexts there is a desire for more collaborative discourse between PSTs and SPs despite the fact that administrative processes do not necessarily support it. Although teacher educators often cannot change fixed processes around observation, they do usually have some autonomy over how class time prior to observation is used. Thus, even relatively small steps such as sharing and discussing a variety of carefully chosen anonymised extracts of transcripts from previous years' conferences before TP starts could have beneficial effects, giving PSTs and SPs the chance to explore the discourse of the feedback conference together in a non-threatening way. Handled well, this kind of discussion could give student teachers time to contest what makes feedback discourse successful for learning, to consider what might motivate the participants in the example extracts to say what they say, and to suggest what could have been said differently. In turn, this kind of discussion could encourage both groups to adopt a more mutually agentic position (the unity and strength referred to in the title of this paper) in which to improve the quality of their own contributions to feedback conference discourse.

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