

PRE-SERVICE AND IN-SERVICE TEACHER TRAINING FOR RURAL SCHOOLS: A DUAL PERSPECTIVE OF RURAL TEACHING

FORMACIÓN INICIAL Y PERMANENTE DEL PROFESORADO DE ESCUELAS RURALES: UNA DOBLE PERSPECTIVA DE LA ENSEÑANZA RURAL

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Abstract:

Teaching in the rural context has its particularities and initial and in-service teacher training is key to providing a response. This study analyses how teacher training for rural education is approached in the two main teacher training institutions, the university and the Teacher Training Centres in a rural region such as the province of Teruel. The research design comprises a quantitative and a documentary analysis. The quantitative analysis uses a survey completed by 182 undergraduate teacher education students from the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities of Teruel (University of Zaragoza). In addition, a documentary analysis of in-service training activities was also carried out in order to gain an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. The results show that there is a need to include more

training on rural education in the trainee teachers' curricula. In addition, a historical lack of activities on rural education in continuing teacher training has been identified, although it has improved in recent years.

Keywords: rural education; pre-service teacher; in-service teacher; teacher training; university.

Resumen:

La enseñanza en el contexto rural tiene sus particularidades y para poder dar respuesta es clave la formación inicial y permanente del profesorado. Este estudio analiza cómo se aborda la formación de maestros para la educación rural en las dos principales instituciones de formación del profesorado, la universidad y los Centros de Profesorado en una región rural como la provincia de Teruel. El diseño de investigación abarca un análisis cuantitativo y otro documental. El cuantitativo utiliza una encuesta que cumplimentaron 182 estudiantes de los Grados de Magisterio de la Facultad de Ciencias Sociales y Humanas de Teruel (Universidad de Zaragoza). También se llevó a cabo un análisis documental de las actividades de formación permanente para obtener una comprensión profunda y global del fenómeno. Los resultados muestran que es necesario incluir más formación sobre enseñanza rural en los planes de estudio de magisterio. Además, se ha identificado una carencia histórica de actividades sobre educación rural en la formación continua del profesorado, aunque esto ha mejorado en los últimos años.

Palabras clave: educación rural; alumnado de magisterio; profesorado en activo; formación de profesorado; universidad.

1. Introduction

For some time, rurality has been an everyday topic in political, social and educational discussion and it is currently being addressed from different perspectives and approaches. In fact, there is no single concept of rurality. Rather, we can speak of multiple ruralities, which is what we see in schools; and consequently, in the need for pre-teacher training and in-service teacher training formats that adapt to social, cultural, territorial and political transformations. The lack of studies which have investigated the correlation among population density and rural education is still emphasised by some experts in the field (Zang & Rozelle., 2022). In any case, rurality and regionality both function within the same context: an empty Spain (Del Molino, 2016) or emptied Spain, as it is colloquially known. The first concept deals with the migratory movements, from rural areas to urban ones. They took place in the 60s regarding industrialization. The second concept is related to the lack of resources given from the government to some remote areas, which are commonly the most depopulated ones. Both terms are connected, but the term which encompasses better the meaning that this article wants to transmit is emptied. It is because of the critical perspective which wants to be drawn.

A particularly varied scope of literature has been published in recent years according to these terms, indeed, looking beyond the recent analyses that have tended to confirm the end of a way of life (Campo, 2020), we must focus on the objective data provided by the migratory movements that have taken place in Spain since the 1950s and that had happened in other European countries even earlier (Collantes y Pinilla, 2011). As a result of these mass exoduses, many rural areas have become "demographic deserts". It is due to these reasons that the

situation in rural areas in a large part of Spain is worrying, if not irreversible (Del Romero, 2018). Inverted population pyramids can be seen in many towns in Spain, but specially in the province of Teruel these localities become secluded areas, which the government tries to address in the best possible way but does not always succeed in doing so. To some extent, it can be said that the decline and inertia are clear and there seems to be no solution for certain population centres (Recaño, 2017), since more focus tends to be put on places with more resources, services and population (Alario et al., 2018).

One of the basic services that the government has to provide for the inhabitants of rural areas is education, which is very sensitive to the recent difficulties and changes that have been taking place. Rural schools face problems associated with population loss, the lack of teaching stability (many teachers are provisional or temporary) and inequality (Lorenzo et al., 2020). As such, rural schools constitute a particular reality within the education structure and have their own organisational-pedagogical model at a spatial, didactic-curricular and personal level (González et al., 2021). In the Teruel region, the presence of these schools is fundamental because, despite the unbalanced distribution of people and resources which we referred to above with respect to the capital city (Zaragoza) and the main towns in the autonomous community and province, for the rest of the territory, public rural schools are the only cultural-educational institution available (Berlanga, 2003).

In general terms, and despite the interest of some academic research and public policies, there is not much knowledge surrounding rural schools. These schools have their own idiosyncrasies, which are mainly characterised by their organisational-pedagogical structure, with many authors (Abós, 2011; Boix, 2004; Bustos, 2013; Domingo-Cebrián, 2013) attesting to their significant educational potential. Regarding this, some authors stand for analysing the concept of rurality from different perspectives (Thier et al, 2021). Aspects such as location, student's ratio, teaching staff, school amenities, sociocultural context, among others, have a crucial impact in the understanding of multiple school ruralities.

This study provides an analysis of Teruel province, where the great majority of rural schools are Grouped Rural Schools (GRSs). These type school centres were a way in which the education authorities responded to the particularities and demands of rural areas. These schools were used for the purpose of achieving objectives as the following (Corchón, 2005; Lorenzo et al., 2020): avoiding the uprooting of pupils by providing them with education in their own environment; combating against the isolation of teachers and favouring the socialisation of students; establishing channels for experimenting with new educational projects and experiences, among others.

There have been many studies (Álvarez et al., 2020; Bustos, 2011; Lorenzo-Lacruz et al., 2019; Ponce De León, 2010) that have noted the pros and cons of GRSs. In general, it has been noted that GRSs are educational centres that are open to the rural context and community. It has also been detailed that GRSs are spaces that actively participate in research and innovation projects (Del Moral et al., 2014), however, on many occasions, these projects remain unfinished and/or are unable to continue due to the instability of teaching staff or other circumstances related to the availability of resources (Ponce De León, 2010; Rundel & Saleminck, 2021). Regarding students, the common characteristic among GRSs is heterogeneity (different ages and levels), which is why it is very common to find mixed-aged classrooms. The main challenge, but also

potentiality, of these centres is the mixed socialisation of the students (Abós et al., 2017). This may occur frequently in mixed-age classrooms as there is a small number of students who all have different ages and levels. To address this, GRSs develop joint activities and workshops and give students the possibility of going, commonly, three times a year to Rural Centres of Educational Innovation where they can be together with students from their own GRS and other GRSs (Domingo & Boix, 2019; Duarte et al., 2015). Regarding families, it has been shown that the relationship between GRSs and families is close and fluid. In general, families very much participate and are satisfied with the education that their children receive. However, they are concerned with the regulations implemented by the authorities in these types of centres as they believe that they should be treated differently and ask for greater sensitivity to rural realities (Matías & Vigo, 2020; Sepúlveda & Gallardo, 2011). Lastly, another problem that GRSs experience can be said to be the lack, or even the absence, of pre-teacher training for it; the educational work that teachers do in GRSs is entirely different to the urban model commonly studied at university (Masinire et al., 2014; Shikalepo, 2020). To be able to carry out this type of work, teachers need to specifically know the following: how to plan a multi-level curriculum; how to organise a mixed-aged classroom; how to select and use resources and materials for multigrade schools; what is the best teaching strategy that favours the effective management of time and space; how to evaluate; and how to maintain relationships with the family and the community, among others (Domingo-Cebrián & Rivera-Rodríguez, 2020; Mulryan-Kyne, 2007).

It is therefore evident that, despite the facilities, qualities and opportunities offered by the GRS model, GRSs need support from the education authorities in terms of legal regulations, the stabilisation of staff, etc., and also from universities, which can adapt their pre-service teacher training to the particularities of rural contexts. It is only in this way that the schools situated in an “emptied Spain” will be able to guarantee a quality educational response that is in line with the territory in which they are located. As a response to this concerning situation, we look to provide an overview of the rural training offered by the main institutions to teachers who work or want to work in rural areas with the goal of checking whether this eminently rural reality is reflected on it. Regarding this, the objective of this research is: (1) to analyse how teacher training for rural education is addressed in the two main teacher educational institutions, university and TCs in a rural region as Teruel is.

To achieve the aforementioned objective, this study starts from a theoretical framework based on rural schools, which mainly focused on the province of Teruel particularities. First, to contextualise the teachers training on rurality, the perspective of pre-service teachers about rural education is gathered; then, the training activities offered by Teacher Centres (TCs) of Teruel province is also analysed. Both perspectives provide a contextualised framework that facilitates a global understanding of the context of this study.

1.1. Pre-service and in-service teacher training in rural schools

In Spain, research on education in rural areas is scarce, especially if we compare it to other contexts and topics. However, the availability of research is even more limited if we search for scientific production on teacher training in this context. Studies about pre-service teacher training show how theory and practice are disassociated, and the urban school model continues to be the main which is studied at university. Consequently, the curricula for teaching training

in many faculties remain insensitive to the specific reality of rural areas (Abós, 2011; Anzano et al., 2020; Azano & Stewart, 2015; Mulryan-Kyne, 2007; Ruiz & Ruiz-Gallardo, 2017).

Research on in-service teacher education reaches similar conclusions despite having different samples and focusing on different territories (Quílez & Vázquez, 2012; Raso, 2012; Santamaría, 2020). Moreover, there is a generalisation that teachers have the same difficulties as other fields and that they are constantly learning in their classrooms through trial and error.

Despite this, teachers in rural schools do a commendable job while receiving limited pre-service and in-service training. As we will see in the following sections, these teachers have been able to maintain school institutions rooted in their territory and have provided teaching quality that is comparable to that found in urban centres (Buscà et al., 2018). The contribution of TCs in Teruel province aims to provide rural training to help teachers to deal with the concrete circumstances of rural schools. However, is this training enough to get competence in rural education?

Teacher Centres (TCs) were established with the objective of serving as centres for continuous and in-service learning, curriculum development and research, and information and guidance, and spread throughout the country. Concretely, during the 80s and 90s in the Autonomous Community of Aragón, 17 TCs were created, some of which were also established in rural areas. This resulted in a greater connection between the TCs and the teaching faculties due to the special characteristics of the territory, which make more continuous and closer communication necessary (Andrés, 2012).

The current educational law, Organic Law 3/2020, of 29 December, which modifies the Organic Law 2/2006, of 3 May, on Education supports the teachers' rights and obligations in its Title III, Chapter III. Moreover, Article 103 established that education authorities had to plan the in-service training activities of teachers, guaranteeing a diverse and free offer and establishing the appropriate measures to encourage participation in them. Subsequently, Organic Law 5/2007, of 20 April, on the reform of the Statute of Autonomy for Aragón, established in Article 73 that the Autonomous Community was to share responsibility for education in all its extension and modalities, which also included the creation of a plan for the training and improvement of teaching staff. As a result, it was only considered necessary to develop a Training Framework Plan that would be the reference point for in-service teacher training in the Autonomous Community of Aragón. The 'II Plan Marco Aragonés de Formación del Profesorado' (2nd Framework Plan for Teacher Training in Aragón), approved by Order ECD/508/2021 of 11 May, and which is still in force today, is the instrument used for planning, developing and evaluating the activities that contribute to the scientific, didactic and professional preparation of teachers.

Regarding the 2nd Framework Plan for Teacher Training in Aragón, it is worth noting that this plan is based on the *Red de Formación Aragonesa* (Aragón Training Network), which is structured as follows (Order ECD/508/2021):

- Teacher training services from the directorate general for personnel and teacher training.
- Advisory committee for in-service teacher training.
- Training consultancy provided by provincial services.
- Training network consisting of TCs in Aragón.
- Educational centres through the school training plans and the training coordinators.

- Universities and organisations collaborating with the education authorities in the field of in-service training.

We are particularly interested in the activity of the Network of Regional TCs in Aragón (item 04 in the Table 2) which has the purpose of structuring training throughout the community and promoting it in rural areas. There are 10 TCs distributed throughout the Autonomous Community of Aragón: Sabiñánigo (1), Alcorisa (1), Ejea de los Caballeros (1), La Almunia de Doña Godina (1), Calatayud (1), Monzón (1), Teruel (1), Zaragoza (2) and Huesca (1).

The 2nd Framework Plan for Teacher Training in Aragón aims to achieve greater training and professional competence as an essential element for better results for both the teachers and students. Ten strategic lines are established and accompanied by their respective training axes (Order ECD/508/2021):

- Line 1. Strategies for the improvement of learning.
- Line 2. Strategies to promote educational innovation and structural changes in educational centres.
- Line 3. Strategies for the improvement of educational digitalisation.
- Line 4. Strategies for the incorporation of the Sustainable Development Goals in the classroom and in schools.
- Line 5. Strategies for positive coexistence, inclusive education and equality.
- Line 6. Strategies for the creation and consolidation of the structure of collaborative networks as a basic strategy of educational organisation.
- Line 7. Strategies for the improvement of employability through vocational training and lifelong learning.
- Line 8. Strategies for the improvement of educational well-being.
- Line 9. Strategies for the knowledge of the cultural and natural environment.
- Line 10. Strategies for the development and improvement of pre-service training and lifelong learning for teachers.

Considering the second aim of our study, it is notable that there is only reference to the rural context in Framework lines 1, 7 and 9. The first of these highlights shows the interest in promoting the participation and collaboration of the educational community in the teaching-learning process in rural areas. Framework line 7 has as one of its objectives to train teachers in the innovative aspects linked to technological changes and to the changing reality, especially in rural areas. Lastly, Framework line 9 emphasises the didactic use of the territory in rural education.

2. Method

This study derives from the following driving question: is rural education a relevant issue in pre- and in-service teacher training? The objective of this study is: to analyse how teacher training for rural education is addressed in the two main teacher educational institutions, university and TCs in a rural region as Teruel is. To achieve the objective, a non-experimental survey design is used to determine how students assess and perceive their training. Moreover, to get a deeper comprehension of the context of the study, qualitative data from a documentary analysis of TCs activities is added.

The sample consisted of 182 students who were enrolled in their third year of studying Infant and Primary Education at the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities of Teruel. 78% were

women and 22% men, aged between 18 and 26. The sample used was a non-probabilistic, convenience sample; concretely, the selection was made trying to represent an area with a large number of rural schools settled on it.

The instrument used in this study is a questionnaire based on Anzano et al. (2021). It is a questionnaire composed of 19 items, all of them with a Likert scale response from 1 to 5 (1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree) and grouped into three dimensions: university training, self-beliefs and perspectives on training. A section on socio-demographic data was also included at the beginning. The questionnaire was created in Google Forms following the instructions of Azofra (1999) and Martín (2011) related to the design of ad-hoc questionnaires. The selection of items from the questionnaire used by Anzano et al. (2021) was evaluated by a group of experts on rural education and university teachers with long-experience on rural training in order to ensure the content validity. Concretely, the group is composed of two education inspectors, two heads of rural schools, two teachers training advisors and four professors of the area of didactics and school organisation. The ten experts analysed the consistency and reliability of the items included in the questionnaire created for the pre-service teachers (Tércia & Sarmento, 2019). Before starting the research process, the research objectives were explained to all the participants in order to get their voluntary participation and collect their written consent to use their data for investigation (Head, 2020).

3. Procedure and analysis of the data

The questionnaire about pre-service training was sent to students via e-mail and the responses were then codified and a statistical analysis was carried out using the SPSS software. In addition, a documentary analysis (Morgan, 2022) was also carried out on the database of the TCs in the province of Teruel. The keywords used to guide the search on the database were “rural school”, “rural education” and “multigrade schools”. A systematic review of all the courses selected according to the keywords, taken by teachers in the province of Teruel in the last 12 years (time period: 2008-2023), provided an amount of 12 courses focused on rural education. Despite the fact that the search made available an extensive sample of courses, the selection of the 12 courses was made by analysing the contents of each one in order to avoid teacher training non-related to the subject matter.

4. Results

The results from the questionnaires completed by pre-service teachers have been organised in accordance with the three dimensions that structured the questionnaire: university training, self-beliefs and perspectives on training.

In the first dimension, university training, very low scores were obtained. This implies that initial university training in rural schools is not well valued and/or is inadequate/insufficient. See Table 1.

Table 1
University Training Dimension. Descriptive data

Range of 1-5	M	SD
1. During my undergraduate degree I received training on rural schools.	2.43	840
2. I consider that I received sufficient training on rural schools during my undergraduate degree.	2.13	712
3. During my undergraduate degree the training I received on rural schools was part of a module.	2.67	1.160
4. During my undergraduate degree the training I received on rural schools was its own specific module.	2.05	735
5. During my undergraduate degree, I received pre-service training that was adapted to the didactic and organisational needs of the rural context.	2.15	720

Source: Data from the questionnaire (Anzano et al., 2021)

In the second dimension, self-belief regarding rural teaching, scores remained low, although with a trend towards 2.5. It is apparent that the students' skills, competences and abilities are not clearly distinguishable and their answers can be very dispersed. See Table 2.

Table 2
Self-beliefs. Descriptive data

Range of 1-5	M	SD
6. I believe that I have sufficient skills to be able to teach students of different ages in a rural school.	2.29	877
7. I am sure that I could manage any situation in a rural school.	2.56	1.010
8. I think that I am someone who is skilled and competent enough to work in a rural school.	2.51	681
9. I think that I am ready and quite capable of managing well as a teacher in a rural school.	2.62	988

Source: Data from the questionnaire (Anzano et al., 2021)

In the third and final dimension, perspectives on training, significantly higher scores than in the previous dimensions can be seen with the trend here being towards 4.3. The participants can be seen to be receptive to all possibilities of extending their training to rural schools (talks, visits, school placements, etc.). See Table 3.

Table 3
Perspectives on training. Descriptive data

Range of 1-5	M	SD
10. To be a teacher in a rural school, I think it's important to do a school placement in a school in a rural area.	4.39	747
11. It would be somewhat inconvenient for me if I were to be placed in a rural school.	3.56	993
12. I think that extra theoretical training is needed for rural schools.	4.31	568
13. I would like to see the university give some practical classes on rural schools to be able to see how they differ from urban schools.	4.5	785
14. I would suggest that the university organise some professional talks about how to work in rural schools.	4.41	563
15. I would suggest that the university give more information about rural schools in the undergraduate degree.	4.44	501
16. I would suggest the possibility of doing a work placement in a rural school.	4.34	689
17. I would suggest that there be work related to rural schools in a module that includes a theoretical component about the centres.	4.48	537
18. I would suggest that there be visits to a rural school to be able to directly understand how they work.	4.58	593
19. I am interested in being trained on rural schools as this would allow me to be able to respond to the pupils and agents involved in the rural context of a school.	4.46	503

Source: Data from the questionnaire (Anzano et al., 2021)

The data confirm that students report a lack of pre-service teacher training on the topic of rural schools. It seems as though the topic has been dealt with somewhat superficially and without much depth, making it irrelevant. This is in line with the findings from other studies (Abós, 2011; Anzano et al., 2020; Boix & Buscà, 2020; Santamaría, 2020). However, teachers in training show that they are open to being trained on the topic of rural education. Moreover, it is suggested that they are interested in working in schools in rural contexts and see it as a challenge.

Regarding the results from the documentary analysis carried out on the TCs training, between the 2008 year and the 2023 year, 12 training activities were carried out with a total of 100 hours of training for teachers working in rural schools. It is interesting to note how these activities were institutional activities commissioned by the *Servicio de Formación del Profesorado de la Dirección General de Personal y Formación del Profesorado* (Teacher Training Services from the Directorate General for Personnel and Teacher Training) and were mainly carried out in small municipalities. See Table 4 for a more detailed description.

Table 4
In-service training activities from 2008 to 2023

Year	Place	Title	Hours
2009	Valderrobres	Physical education and the rural context	20hrs
2016	Utrillas	Workshop: Training for new teachers joining schools with mixed-aged classrooms and GRSs	5hrs
2017	Utrillas	Workshop: Training for new teachers joining schools with mixed-aged classrooms and GRSs	5hrs
2017	Cantavieja	Mindfulness, yoga and brain gym in rural schools	10hrs
2018	Utrillas	Workshop: Training for new teachers joining schools with mixed-aged classrooms and GRSs	5hrs
2018	Teruel	Methodology Saturday: The flipped classroom approach in rural mixed-aged classrooms. Approaches and tools	5hrs
2018	Teruel	Dialogue Monday and Good Practice Thursday: The flipped classroom approach in rural mixed-aged classrooms. Approaches and tools	5hrs
2019	Utrillas	Course: Training for new teachers joining schools with mixed-aged classrooms and GRSs	10hrs
2020	Online	Seminario provincial de escuela rural	10hrs
2021	Alcorisa	Provincial Conference Rural School I Provincial Conference Rural School II	2,30hrs 2,30hrs
2023	Cantavieja Mosqueruela Rubielos de Mora Cedrillas	Intercentre seminar: Multigrade didactics	20hrs

Source: Own contribution. Data from the archives.

It is important to highlight that all the activities were initially developed for rural school teachers, although, in reality, this was not the case. If we look deeper into each of the activities, we note that two of them, “Physical education and the rural context” (2009) and “Mindfulness, yoga and brain gym in rural schools” (2007), were not coherent in terms of the target audience, instructors, objectives and the contents they presented, which, therefore, shows that these activities were not created specifically to support the in-service training of rural school teachers. Evidence of this can be seen in the fact that in each of the above-mentioned activities the following were listed as target audiences: “In-service teachers in the province of Teruel”, “Infant

and Primary school teachers”. Whereas, only in some of the mentioned activities the principal target audience is: “Teachers working in GRSs in the province of Teruel”.

However, the selection of the instructors/speakers for the training activities on rural education is coherent, since they are mainly in-service teachers already working in rural areas. An example of this can be found in the following requirements established by the TCs: “Teachers with extensive training in schools with mixed-aged classrooms and GRSs in the province”, “Professionals with long-experience working in many innovation projects in rural areas”, “Teacher and GRS Management Team in multigrade schools”, etc.

Regarding the objectives and contents of the training activities that were appropriately designed to respond to the in-service training of rural teachers, we find the following in Table 5 and Table 6.

Table 5

Objectives of the training activities aimed at professionals in rural schools

Objectives
To gain an understanding of the methodologies associated with working in mixed-aged classrooms.
To gain an understanding of how to organise work in a GRS.
To learn about experiences with the Flipped Classroom approach that can serve as inspiration for the development of new ideas.
To share experiences and solutions to potential problems once the Flipped Classroom methodology has been introduced in the mixed-aged classroom.
To create a network of rural teachers through which to share educational resources for the multigrade classroom.
To learn specific competences to attend to the diversity of levels in a multigrade classroom, understanding the singularities of the rural environment and developing the relationship with the community.

Source: Own contribution. Data from the documentary analysis.

Table 6

Contents of the training activities aimed at professionals in rural schools

Contents
Recommended methodologies for working in mixed-aged classrooms.
Significant classroom experiences in GRSs.
How to work in a GRS. Organisational aspects.
Elements of mixed-age teaching: personalisation, task design, circulation of knowledge and regional didactics.
New approaches and active methodologies: Flipped Classroom, PBL and Gamification.
Useful strategies and tools for their implementation in rural mixed-aged classrooms.
Design and development of activities for multi-grade classrooms that allow for the curricular integration of the educational opportunities of the environment and collaborative and networked work.
Rural school and territory.
Syllabus design, teaching methodology and assessment in multigrade classrooms.

Source: Own contribution. Data from the documentary analysis.

The data show that there are shortcomings in terms of both the offer and hours dedicated to specific in-service training activities for rural school teachers. Moreover, we can note that on some occasions, the use of “GRS” or “rural school” in the titles of training activities is a mere administrative cliché that justifies the offer of activities aimed at this sector but does not reflect the reality as it tends to be too general and does not have much effect in the rural context.

It is for this reason that we believe that in-service teacher training plans should include specific training on rural schools. This could be complex and difficult to plan for if there is no clear and consistent commitment to a positive rural school experience (Quílez & Vázquez, 2012).

5. Discussion and conclusions

In this study, we have examined pre- and in-service teacher training in terms of how adequate they are to work competently in the rural context. In both training formats, there are serious shortcomings, there is scarcely any mention of education in rural areas in the university curricula, as well as little mention in the training provided by TCs, even in a rural province as Teruel is.

The quantitative analysis of this study reports that undergraduate students emphasise the need to know more about the nuances of small schools given that they have their own particularities, as Taole (2014) indicates. Among these particularities are: classes consisting of students with different ages and levels; different techniques for planning the curriculum; out-of-context materials from publishers; shared resources; greater environmental, cultural and social interaction with the rural community, etc. Pre-service teachers feel that their understanding of rural education is inadequate and that it is not adequately addressed in their university training. Awareness of the specific challenges of rural schools is crucial for effectively carrying out teaching duties in those settings. In agreement with the work of other authors and with similar results keeping in mind the similarities with the sample (Anzano, et al. 2020; Chaparro & Santos, 2018; Dlamini, 2018), teachers should be trained in their degrees on how to adequately develop their work in any educational context; instead of being voluntary training as it happens in the majority of Teaching Degrees.

We must note that training, service orientation and practice in rural education are needed in order to be able to successfully teach in rural areas. According to the evidence provided by some authors (Santamaría, 2020; Tieken & Montgomery, 2021), this research definitely concludes that a teacher must have knowledge about a specific rural context. As it has been mentioned, pre-service teachers are interested in working in schools in rural contexts, but it can be denied that it is challenging; especially because rural schools are one of the initial contexts where inexperienced teachers are sent (Monge-López et al., 2022). Thus, providing them with resources and training support to deal properly with the demands of this type of educational context is essential if we want to ease the workload of these kind of teachers and get more stability in rural schools.

In addition to pre-teacher training, professional competences, and knowledge on how to teach in rural schools being insufficient (Monge-López et al., 2022). The skills and competences that are developed during in-service training are not promising either; although it is being addressed and enhanced in the last years, as it is shown in this paper. The fact that only three out of nine

Framework lines make reference to training for rural teaching shows how there is some kind of inconsistency between in-service training plans and the type of educational centres (in the province of Teruel, mainly rural). Professional development plans, and even a large part of the educational policy approach, are designed for teachers who work in urban schools (Du Plessis, & Mestry, 2019), this is also evinced by this research at a local level through the documentary analysis made on the database of TCs. It can be said that the didactic-training needs of teachers in rural schools are scarcely attended, since instructions, that are designed for mainstream schools, cannot be “adapted” to grouped schools and/or schools with mixed-aged classrooms or multigrade schools. A notable aspect of the training provided for rural schools is the expertise of the trainers. Those who conduct courses in TCs are competent and deeply engaged with rural communities.

Some authors stress that policymakers must make the effort of knowing better the rural education contexts, as well as, spending time in these communities and schools (Bonal, 2012; Tieken & Montgomery, 2021). Getting to know the strengths and weaknesses of these schools is key to the design of educational policies, as well as to meet the challenges arising from the availability of resources in rural schools (Carrete-Marín et al., 2024). Hence, it is necessary to design and implement in-service training plans specifically for teachers in rural schools that are sensitive and appropriate in addressing the particularities of these schools.

In short, pre-service and in-service training is not mainly connected with the educational reality present in the region of Teruel, as it is necessary. Coordinated pre- and in-service teacher training would strengthen and consolidate rural schools as the dynamic and active actors that they are. It would also encourage social and educational endogenous development processes, which are necessary in rural areas, but which are still very much underestimated by educational policies and higher education institutions, as some authors highlight (Boix & Buscà, 2020; Santamaría-Cardaba & Gallego, 2020).

As limitations of this study, the lack of diversity among students in the sample must be considered, as well as the fact that only one university was analysed. Thus, the results cannot be generalised. Other types of statistical analysis could also be conducted. In future research, it would be interesting to increase the sample to include students from other courses, as well as from other universities and teacher training centres. Trying to include more of a male sample in future research could also be an interesting contribution given that teaching degrees are generally feminised (Márquez-Domínguez et al., 2018). Additionally, assessing the impact of teacher training on students' learning and the educational community could be enriching to improve education in rural contexts.

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