Mobilizing transversal competencies: Insights from initial teacher training

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to understand how department heads, teacher trainers, pedagogy students, school principals, and teachers promote the development of transversal competencies such as leadership, teamwork, and conflict resolution in initial teacher training. From a qualitative perspective with phenomenological design and cross-sectional data collection, twenty-five semi-structured interviews and one focus group were conducted. Based on inductive categories, a qualitative content analysis was carried out. The findings reveal that the mobilization of these competencies depends both on the training pathways promoted in initial teacher training programs and on the perspectives, roles, and discourses that the various stakeholders involved have of them. It is concluded that transversal competencies are relevant not only in teacher training but also in shaping future professional performance in educational contexts.

L'obiettivo di questo studio è stato comprendere in che modo i capi di dipartimento, i formatori di insegnanti, gli studenti di pedagogia, i dirigenti scolastici e gli insegnanti promuovono lo sviluppo di competenze trasversali quali leadership, lavoro di squadra e gestione/risoluzione dei conflitti nella formazione iniziale degli insegnanti. Da una prospettiva qualitativa, con un disegno fenomenologico e una raccolta dati trasversale, sono state realizzate venticinque interviste semi-strutturate e un focus group. Sulla base di categorie induttive è stata effettuata un'analisi qualitativa del contenuto. I risultati evidenziano che la mobilitazione di queste competenze dipende sia dai percorsi formativi promossi nei programmi di formazione iniziale degli insegnanti, sia dalle prospettive, dai ruoli e dai discorsi che i diversi attori coinvolti elaborano su di esse. Si conclude che le competenze trasversali sono rilevanti non solo nella formazione degli insegnanti, ma anche nell'esercizio professionale futuro nei contesti educativi.

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1. Introduction

Higher education institutions are expected to continue fulfilling their mission of providing societies with the highest levels of specific and generic skills required in the knowledge society, as these are critical for access to employment and represent an important mechanism to address skills mismatches in contemporary labor markets (Jayasingam et al., 2016; Zahner et al., 2021). In this context, university systems in different regions have implemented reforms aimed at the development of competencies. In Europe, for example, the Bologna Process and the consolidation of the European Higher Education Area have promoted the adoption of competency-based educational models, while in Latin America regional initiatives such as the Tuning Project have fostered similar processes of curricular redesign (Beneitone et al., 2013). These transformations respond to increasingly complex educational scenarios in which teaching and learning processes require training programs that are relevant and aligned with the social, economic, and cultural demands of contemporary contexts (Álvarez & López, 2018; Bórquez et al., 2023).

Various international organizations have emphasized the importance of developing transversal competencies to address the challenges of the twenty-first century. The World Economic Forum (2022) indicates that graduates require skills such as cognitive flexibility, negotiation, decision-making, coordination with others, and creativity. Similarly, the OECD (2019) highlights the need to educate citizens capable of solving complex problems, thinking critically, working collaboratively, and adapting to changing environments. In the same vein, the European Commission (2018) has urged member states to promote personal, social, and learning-to-learn competencies as key elements for active participation in contemporary life. In Latin America, the Tuning Project has also identified a set of relevant transversal competencies, including conflict resolution, teamwork, and interpersonal skills (Beneitone et al., 2013). In this study, competencies are understood as an integrated framework of knowledge, abilities, and attitudes (European Commission, 2018), complemented by a holistic perspective in which these dimensions form a complex system of actions that interact and respond to specific professional contexts (Rychen & Salganik, 2003).

Within the field of teacher education, the development of transversal competencies is particularly relevant, as teachers are expected not only to master disciplinary knowledge but also to perform effectively in complex, diverse, and constantly changing educational environments. Research has emphasised the importance of equipping future teachers to develop competencies such as leadership, teamwork, and conflict resolution, to meet the demands of contemporary education systems (Beneitone & Yarosh, 2021; Tenorio et al., 2020; Venegas, 2021). In Latin America, and particularly in Chile, initial teacher education programs have progressively incorporated competency-based training models during the last two decades. These reforms have sought to strengthen both disciplinary knowledge and transversal competencies necessary for professional practice in complex school contexts (Leyva et al., 2018). Despite these efforts, several studies indicate that significant gaps remain in the effective development of such competencies during teacher preparation.

In the Chilean case, these challenges are underscored by the TALIS report, which indicates that 11.9% of teachers report needing further professional development to mobilize transversal competencies. Furthermore, 11.6% of educators identify a need for additional preparation in teaching transversal skills included in the curriculum (Ministry of Education of Chile [MINEDUC], 2017). Similarly, Ruffinelli (2013) found that novice teachers rated their preparation as weaker in areas related to working with families and managing student behavior. Gaete et al. (2016) also discerned a lack of comprehensive preparation in aspects such as relationships with parents and classroom management. In addition, Sepúlveda et al. (2018) reported limited intentionality in pedagogical prac-

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tices aimed at developing and assessing competencies such as leadership, social responsibility, or ethical commitment. Although these competencies are often formally included in curricular programs, their effective implementation in teacher education practices remains unclear.

These findings are particularly relevant considering that teachers increasingly work in plural and complex social contexts, where transversal competencies play a crucial role in professional practice (Beneitone & Yarosh, 2021; Tenorio et al., 2020). Consequently, the quality of teacher education programs is a key factor in ensuring that teachers are well prepared to influence students' learning and development (Fabelico & Afalla, 2023).

The literature suggests that professionals in general, and pre-service teachers in particular, should develop a wide range of transversal competencies (Beneitone & Yarosh, 2021; Tapia-Gutiérrez & Cubo-Delgado, 2017). Among them, leadership, teamwork, and conflict resolution are particularly relevant due to their implications for educational practice and the relationships among them. For example, opportunities for collaboration are often associated with leadership within schools, while the absence of collaborative work can increase the likelihood of conflicts in educational contexts (Aravena & Madrid, 2021; Ávalos, 2019). At the same time, several studies highlight the need for further research on how these competencies are actually taught and developed during initial teacher education (Ávalos & Flores, 2022; Sinha & Hanuscin, 2017).

Leadership, understood as the ability to influence others both individually and collectively within educational settings (York-Barr & Duke, 2004), has been identified as the second most influential factor in student learning after classroom teaching, with an estimated impact between 5% and 7% (Leithwood et al., 2020). Despite its importance, there is still limited evidence on how this competency is developed during teacher preparation (Sinha & Hanuscin, 2017). In Chile, studies suggest that assuming leadership roles in schools is among the least preferred career paths for novice teachers (Ministry of Education of Chile [MINEDUC], 2020), which underscores the need to better understand how teacher leadership is promoted during initial training (Ibarrola & Arbués, 2014).

Teamwork, defined as the personal disposition to collaborate with others in order to achieve shared goals (Torrelles et al., 2011), also presents important challenges in teaching practice. According to OECD (2020) data, only 24% of teachers report working collaboratively with colleagues. Although this competency is highly valued during initial teacher education, its development among in-service teachers often remains at an early stage (Ávalos & Bascopé, 2017). Furthermore, collaborative practices can take different forms depending on school cultures, which do not always involve deep or sustained pedagogical reflection (Krichesky & Murillo, 2018).

Conflict resolution, in turn, can be understood as a cognitive-behavioral process aimed at identifying appropriate responses to problematic situations (D'Zurilla et al., 2004). This competency has been singled out as one of the weakest areas in teacher preparation, particularly regarding classroom behavior management and the ability to address social issues that arise in school contexts (Gaete et al., 2016; Villalobos et al., 2017). In this regard, Solís-Zañartu et al. (2016) report that many novice teachers feel unprepared to work with parents, address emerging social issues, or integrate effectively into school institutions.

Considering that competency-based models have been implemented in Chilean teacher education programs for nearly two decades, and that existing evidence still reveals difficulties in addressing key challenges in school contexts—such as collaboration with families, teamwork, and conflict management—it becomes necessary to better understand how these competencies are promoted during teacher preparation. Therefore, the objective of this study is to understand how different actors involved in initial teacher education—program directors, teacher educators, student teachers, school principals, and practicing teachers—promote the mobilization of transversal

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competencies such as leadership, teamwork, and conflict resolution. By examining these processes in the Chilean case, this study contributes to the international discussion on how teacher education programs can foster transversal competencies required for professional practice in contemporary education systems.

2. Methodology and method

The present study was conducted from a qualitative perspective and with a phenomenological design (Flick, 2018; Taylor & Bogdan, 1987). Such approach and design were adopted to allow focusing on the understanding of the experiences and meanings attributed by key university (department heads, teacher trainers and pedagogy students) and school actors (administrators and teachers) in relation to the acquisition and development of the transversal competencies of leadership, teamwork and conflict resolution, within their formative trajectories and their professional work (Van Manen, 2014).

The research was carried out in the region of Valparaíso and focused on the area of primary education, as it presents a high pedagogical coverage from first to eighth grade, with students from approximately 5-6 years old to 13-14 years. Besides this, teachers of these levels are those who feel less prepared to perform in this cycle (Ruffinelli, 2013). Within the university sector, a higher education institution located in the Valparaiso region participated in the study. The institution was selected based on six required criteria: (1) having a minimum accreditation of three years; (2) having high or low selectivity; (3) having a Faculty of Education; (4) having its General Primary Teaching program accredited for three years or more; (5) having an internship program for future teachers; and (6) having declared in its training model and graduation profile a competency-based training. Subsequently, for the selection of the participants interviewed individually or in groups —department heads, supervising teachers and students— the criteria were that they had at least three years of experience in the position, function or studies, respectively. From the *school sphere*, 4 schools in the Valparaíso region were considered, which —regardless of their administration model— met the following inclusion criteria: a) they had formalized internship agreements with the university under study; and b) the school administrators and mentor teachers had a degree in General Primary Teaching.

Table 1

Characterization of the sample

	Roles			Sex	
Institution	Administrators*	Teachers**	Students***	Men	Women
Schools	5	13	—	3	15
University	3	4	5	2	10
Total	8	17	5	5	25

*Note. *University Head: UH; School Administrator: SA; **Internship Supervisor: IS; Mentor Teacher: MT; ***Students: S.*

3. Data collection

Twenty-five individual interviews of the active-reflective type were applied, which allowed a flexible and guided interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee, in a context where the meanings of a phenomenon are constantly generated and developed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). The interviews were adjusted to the schedules and modalities preferred by each interviewee; therefore, they were conducted both face-to-face and online, using platforms such as Teams, Meet or Zoom, and had an approximate duration of 50 to 70 minutes. In addition,

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an online focus group was conducted with fourth-year pedagogy students, with an estimated duration of 45 minutes.

Before starting the interviews and the focus group, the questions were piloted to assess their clarity and relevance, as well as to adjust the format according to the participants' reactions and comments. Based on this, an interview script was designed for each group of participants —adapted to their role, although with a shared structure that included questions oriented to five aspects. First, questions oriented to the meaning of transversal competencies, to understand how participants conceptualize these competencies, revealing their beliefs in relation to teacher training. Secondly, questions focused on the process of acquisition and development of these competencies, which allowed exploring the learning trajectories, identifying the strategies and methods used. Thirdly, questions on evaluation, which facilitated discussion on how these competencies are measured and assessed in practice. Fourth, hypothetical-type questions, in order to stimulate critical thinking and the practical application of the competencies in real situations. Finally, recall-oriented questions provided a reflective approach, allowing participants to share personal anecdotes, enriching the conversation and deepening the emotional aspects that can influence the understanding of transversal competencies. The information provided by participants through the data collection techniques ensured anonymity and confidentiality through informed consent approved by the Ethics Committee of the university to which the principal researcher is affiliated.

4. Data analysis

The information provided with this data production techniques was subjected to the content analysis proposed by Krippendorff (1990). This approach allows the systematic analysis of textual content, identifying patterns and meanings present in the participants' discourses. The analysis was conducted in several stages. In the first instance, categories were developed from the participants' discourses. Subsequently, an initial inductive coding was performed, where the responses were organized into these categories. Then, a more structured and deductive coding was applied, establishing a final set of specific categories, namely: conception, mobilization and articulation.

The processing and analysis of the data were conducted using Atlas.Ti software, which efficiently and rigorously allowed the management and coding of the text data. In addition, the context in which the answers were provided was considered, given that meanings are dynamic and are configured in particular situations. Thus, the analysis allowed the identification of patterns, regularities and recurring themes on how the transversal competencies of leadership, teamwork and conflict resolution are mobilized from the perspectives of department heads, teacher educators, pedagogy students, school principals and teachers (Delamont, 2013).

5. Findings

The qualitative analysis revealed four interrelated categories describing how transversal competencies are mobilized during initial teacher education. These categories emerged from participants' narratives and reflect shared patterns across university staff, mentor teachers, school leaders, and student teachers. The findings are organized around: (1) spaces for the mobilization of transversal competencies, (2) mobilization of leadership competence, (3) mobilization of teamwork competence, and (4) mobilization of conflict resolution competence. Together, these categories show how the development of these competencies is shaped by the interaction between university training processes, school-based experiences, and the professional practice opportunities available to trainee teachers.

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5.1 Spaces for mobilization of transversal competencies

With respect to mobilization spaces, participants from the university recognize the existence of different training routes to acquire and develop leadership, teamwork and conflict resolution competencies. Within them, the instances of progressive practice are more frequently declared. Thus, for instance, a head of department pointed out that:

> "The internship instance is a fundamental milestone for us, because it is the natural scenario in which competences are evidenced." (UH No.1)

Indeed, there is a certain consensus among the participants in pointing out that direct experiences nurture the acquisition and development of transversal competencies, since problems arise in educational spaces that not only allow them to be mobilized in isolation, but also to be articulated, as the following student points out:

> "Inside a working team it is possible to reach a resolution for problems, because bullying does not only affect the physical area, but it also brings other effects that are at a psychological level and many problems in the performance of a human being. So, there would be linked the three, leadership as a teacher, then the team with which you are going to work to reach a problem resolution. There you are developing all the competencies at the same time." (S No. 4)

However, from the point of view of a teacher trainer, it is recognized that practice spaces, although valuable, are often reduced in the face of school contingencies:

> "In the end you spend all your time on the procedural work and not on reflection. So, that is why I tell you, yes there are instances, what happens is that we are not taking advantage of those spaces." (IS No. 1)

For this reason, some university teachers consider it essential to analyse and reflect on the subjects taught at university — specifically those associated with progressive and professional practices — in order to identify competencies that have not been mobilised in practice centres.

> "In the 'Experience Workshop', there are opportunities to create, innovate, lead, generate confidence, solve problems and work in teams, when opportunities have been lacking in schools." (IS No. 2)

Nevertheless, there is also a more critical view from the university, in the sense that

> "through transversal competencies we could achieve a much greater development of skills than by working on them in each one of the subjects." (IS No. 3)

Probably, this lack of articulation between the different components of the curriculum of General Primary Teaching generates in future teachers the following impression about mobilization of competencies:

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> "It has been trial and error, because no one has supervised that these are being acquired, no one has monitored if we have made any mistakes; we've been left to our own. So, if you ask me if the university has intervened in some way, I would say no." (S No. 1)

Added to this is the fact that not all school mentor teachers are willing to allow students to take advantage of the various scenarios that allow them to acquire and develop transversal competencies. In a certain way, there is a fear of delegating too much responsibility, as this may harm the learning of elementary school students:

> "The truth is that I was very imposing, I decided things, I said, 'You have to do this', that is, and he guided the girl, but it was to make sure that she did not make serious mistakes." (MT No. 1)

The above coincides with the perspective of the University's supervising teachers regarding the role of schools in mobilizing transversal competencies in trainee teachers:

> "In some internship centers it has been fabulous; we have been able to do everything that our interns need to do. In other practice centers, a little bit. Perhaps leadership has been developed more. In other internship centers, the focus has been conflict resolution or collaborative work. Because it will also depend on the focus of the center." (IS No. 3)

On the contrary, most of the school principals participating in this study perceive that their schools do favor the acquisition and development of these competencies, although their narratives suggest that this is limited to specific instances where they can assume some roles, mainly linked to leadership:

> "Yes, in all the activities we have, they are presented with certain responsibilities and thus develop all the competencies they need for their teaching work." (SA No. 1)

Something similar occurs with the mentor teachers; although they are often reluctant to provide opportunities in which the interns can mobilize leadership, teamwork and conflict resolution, they do recognize (in theory) that:

> "what makes the person [pre-service teacher] develop these skills, which are rather social or cross-cutting, is practice, contact with the children, at recess, in free activities, more than in the classroom." (MT No. 7)

Unfortunately, teachers in training agree on the fact that internship centers do not always become ideal scenarios where these and other competencies can be mobilized. In this sense, the lack of communication and criteria established between the University and the School, in terms of the frameworks of action of a future teacher in progressive or professional practice, become elements that determine the quality of the experiences in the educational centers.

> "It all depends on the establishment. There are establishments where I have not been able to do anything, I am a piece of furniture, and there have been establishments where I am just another teacher, where I intervene in everything, where I can give support in everything. So, it depends a

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> lot on the context, on what the University supervisors intend and ask the establishment to do, on whether they are committed and driven to talk to the school, to be really concerned about the internship process." (S No. 2)

In summary, the mobilization spaces for the development of transversal competencies in initial teacher training present strengths and challenges. Progressive internships stand out as key scenarios where future teachers face real problems that allow articulating leadership, teamwork and conflict resolution. However, there are limitations associated with the predominance of procedural aspects over reflection, and the insufficient articulation between university curricular components. From the schools, the mentor teachers show reluctance to delegate responsibilities, which restricts the opportunities to mobilize competencies in an integral manner. On the other hand, schools indicate their willingness to favor these competencies, although through experiences limited to specific roles. For their part, pre-service teachers recognize that their learning has been more self-directed than mediated by effective guidance, with heterogeneous experiences that depend on the characteristics of the internship center. For this reason, it is necessary to strengthen coordination between both institutions in order to ensure that initial teacher training promotes the mobilization of the transversal competencies required for professional practice.

5.2 Mobilization of leadership competence

"Inspire others by example" (S No. 3)

With respect to leadership, the participants similarly conceive it as an ability or capacity, except that their context, role, functions and experiences influence their perceptions. This common discourse is oriented beyond acts of authority, administration or management, but, on the contrary, they allude to guidance, influence and, also, an example to follow. Likewise, it is associated with personal characteristics such as empathy, proactivity and communication, but —at the same time— to the possibility of learning with intentional and real opportunities, as pointed out by an internship supervisor:

> "Being a team leader, I have to learn to be able to lead" (IS No. 3).

Moreover, leadership is a quality of the teachers' professional identity, since a teacher is conceived as a leader inside and outside the classroom:

> "Leadership is a skill that one must have, at least to be a teacher, because one is managing a group of people. So, sometimes this group of people goes either way. And you have to try to make these kids, in some way, follow you, listen to you, pay attention to you." (MT No. 7)

Now, regarding how leadership is mobilized, the university has a discourse that needs to be developed. Even when there are instances of active methodologies ("role playing"), it is necessary for future teachers to "have more interaction with the parents, obviously, being accompanied by a tutor" (UH No. 1) or to "participate in a teacher's council" (MT No. 4). On the other hand, the school reports indicate that mobilizing this competence implies promoting opportunities to lead with the purpose of nurturing trust, identifying needs and proposing solutions. For example, a mentor teacher pointed out:

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> "There were extracurricular workshops that had never been done before, such as the K-Pop workshop, dance workshop, so they [the trainees] presented this project that was obviously contributing with the fulfillment of their internship hours and they were able to do it here at school." (MT No. 10)

In line with the above, the students' voices indicate that the opportunities to mobilize this competence depend on the mentor teacher and the establishment of relationships with other teachers:

> "I experienced everything except leadership among colleagues. In fact, I had very little relationship with other colleagues, only with my mentor teacher, so I was not able to cultivate leadership, or I only did it inside the classroom" (S No. 1)

As can be seen, the comment views leadership in its broadest spectrum, therefore, trainees understand that leadership is distributed: "The school today is composed of many people with leadership" (S No. 3). Nonetheless, when looking at how the university has tried to mobilize this competence, students are critical, revealing that "there was no one to give me feedback, and that did not bring me benefits" (S No. 4).
It should be noted that, while there is agreement among the different actors regarding the conception of leadership mobilization among pre-service teachers, there is disagreement regarding its execution. This is because the university highlights the opportunities offered by the schools without delving into the teaching and learning processes that take place within them. Schools, for their part, try to do what they can with the resources available to them, even though trainees require modelled, intentional and guided teaching and learning processes.

5.3 Mobilization of teamwork competencies

"Teamwork creates a bonding, affective factor, for reaching a common goal" (UH No. 2)

To identify the spaces for the acquisition and development of this transversal competency, it is essential to elucidate how the different participants in this study understand it. In general, there is the conception that teamwork is based on the assignment of roles based on the characteristics of each individual. This is what would allow enhancing personal skills and achieving joint purposes, as pointed out by a student and a mentor teacher:

> "It is like making teams, where we all have different skills or different abilities and achieve a final work, which is like the common objective that we all have as members of the group, right, and that each one contributes with his or her skills. I think that's the way I see it." (S No. 3)

> "Teamwork is defining roles, knowing what our skills, strengths, and weaknesses are. That means that everyone has a role [...] Teamwork means that we all work for something specific or for an ultimate goal that has to do not only with me leading, but also with how I get involved in the team." (MT No. 6)

As for the mobilization of teamwork competence, it seems that this is reduced to specific spaces where the future teacher can share with other experienced professionals:

> "Now, working as a team with colleagues and everything, he accompanied me to the teachers' room, there teamwork is freer." (MT No. 8)

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The specificity of these interactions, however, is not entirely clear. The discourses of the interviewees show that they are framed in contexts where the practitioner collaborates with members of the educational community in instances that require more support. Thus, for instance, a mentor teacher states:

> "Yes, in fact, they had an activity working collaboratively, I think it was for the celebration of the Book Week. They were supporting libraries, preparing material, arranging the school library for those instances." (MT No. 11)

This reductionist view of teamwork is of concern to the University, as an entity that trains Primary Education teachers. In this sense, some university teachers warn that this competence is mostly mobilized in Higher Education institutions, as opposed to what happens in internship centers. This is stated by one of the internship supervisors:

> "I think that teamwork is one of the competencies that I pay attention to, because it is the one that is most developed at the University, although it is not that easy, especially after the pandemic. However, in the schools there are not many instances to make them work like that." (MT No. 2)

At the schools, yet, it is perceived that there is not only the will to make future teachers mobilize the teamwork competence, but also the delivery of indispensable resources to do it:

> "I believe that we also provide that space and they feel part of the school, since they can obviously use all the implements and work collaboratively with the mentor." (SA No. 5)

Despite this, once again, the characteristics of teamwork are not evident, because they are exposed in a superficial way, focused on the work that the training students carry out with the mentor teacher.
In conclusion, the mobilization of teamwork competence is a relevant aspect, although with limitations in its development during professional internships. While in the university environment it is fostered through activities that favor collaboration and the assignment of roles, in school contexts this skill is restricted to specific instances. Even though schools are willing to create collaborative spaces, the experiences of trainees tend to focus on working with the mentor teachers, leaving aside a broader and more systematic application of this competence.

5.4 Mobilization of conflict resolution competence

"To confront this conflict with different points of view and reach an agreement or solution" (MT No. 4).

Conflict resolution is generally understood as the ability to face, manage and solve problems effectively, promoting dialogue and consensus to reach solutions. In this aspect, those who participated emphasize that certain soft skills are required, such as assertive communication and the ability to be supportive. This is what one teacher remarked:

> "You have to learn how to speak. The way you speak is extremely important. The tone of voice you give to what you are talking about to solve a problem is extremely important. How you support them is also important." (MT No. 5)

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However, in order to mobilize this competence, it is equally important to develop concrete strategies to deal with these situations. In this sense, a crucial part of this process is the role of universities in providing students with a series of tools and approaches that enable them not only to understand conflicts, but also to analyze them critically and deal with them effectively:

> "I believe that what is important here is to get to know the strategies, to give them a range of options and tools with which they can face these situations that many times torment them and create a blockage, or a resistance to continue advancing." (IS No. 3)

The above quote illustrates how conflicts can emotionally paralyze trainees, making it difficult for them to advance in their academic and professional development, either because they do not have sufficient tools or because they are afraid of making the wrong decisions. To this end, universities should prioritize activities that provide both theory and practice. A clear example of this is the case of analysis workshops, based on students' previous experiences during their internships. This strategy not only allows future teachers to reflect on their experiences but also prepares them to face similar problems in the future. As is the case in the class recounted by an internship supervisor:

> "Many times in the classes we work with case workshops, based on the same experience that the students have had. [...] Then in the next session we worked collaboratively, we read the workshop, we made an analysis, we answered questions, what to do before, during, after, and the idea was that afterwards they would look for a solution and could present, make a small discussion based on what we were analyzing in these two sessions." (IS No. 1)

In this line, the mentor teacher emerges as an important figure at the moment of mobilizing this competence, both as the person who accompanies trainees, but also by trusting them and enabling spaces for them to develop this competence autonomously, although always accompanying and intervening if necessary. For example, in one experience, a teacher relates:

> "So, what I would do with that student would be to give them advice. To try it after class, interfering as little as possible. Now, if the situation gets out of hand, you have to intervene, of course. But afterwards, talk to them, try to guide them with some things." (MT No. 10)

Still, significant challenges persist that hinder the effective mobilization of this competence. One such challenge is institutional restrictions derived from university or school policies that prevent students from intervening directly in conflicts, especially in complex cases such as bullying.

> "There are things that have to be done, in which if you are not the teacher you can't interact directly [...] we often feel like intervening, but we cannot because we are not specialists in dealing with bullying, that is why the school has psychologists, they have a team to deal with the issue of bullying." (S No. 4)

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Likewise, some universities restrict student interns from interacting with parents or attending meetings, despite the fact that the relationship with parents is declared to be a central and often contentious aspect of the teaching role. As mentioned by a school board:

> "[...] Even beyond the parent-teacher meetings, they cannot stay alone with the class, they are always supervised by a teacher who is watching them, but this issue of parent-teacher meetings is very delicate for us, and the universities themselves do not allow them to interact." (SA No. 4)

Another limitation is the tendency of some teachers to assume an authoritarian role in conflict resolution, preventing pre-service teachers from actively participating in this process. Instead of fostering a collaborative and constructive environment, which allows the future teachers to get involved in conflict resolution, a more vertical dynamic is promoted, in which the teacher assumes the responsibility of resolving conflicts unilaterally. This is related by a student:

> "When it comes to conflict resolution, I have seen that teachers always say "no, I will solve it", you walk away, they do not take conflict resolution as a joint effort to reach a mutual agreement. For example, if there is a conflict based on a test or perhaps because something happened to a child, they always attribute it to themselves, they are more like a boss than a leader." (S No. 5)

In sum, both universities and schools play a fundamental role in mobilizing conflict resolution competence. For its part, the university provides tools and strategies for analyzing and addressing conflicts in a reflective and adaptive manner, while schools constitute the actual space for putting this competence into practice. In this respect, trust and the promotion of student autonomy by the mentor teacher is key to the mobilization of this competence, emerging as a figure that supports, guides, advises and, when necessary, intervenes. Despite this, especially from the students' point of view, there are still challenges such as institutional restrictions and the lack of trust of the mentor teachers, which limit the effective mobilization of this competence.

6. Discussion and conclusion

The findings of this study reveal important tensions in the mobilization of leadership, teamwork, and conflict resolution competencies during initial teacher education. Although these competencies are widely recognized as cross-cutting dimensions of teacher preparation, the results suggest a lack of systematicity in their development, characterized by an absence of rigorous criteria and intentional pedagogical design. This confirms previous studies indicating that, despite being formally declared in teacher education programs, transversal competencies are still incipient in practice (Álvarez & López, 2018; Sepúlveda et al., 2018).

Regarding leadership, evidence indicates that participants conceptualize it as an intrinsic element of the teaching profession, fundamentally linked to guidance, influence, and professional modelling. However, the opportunities to develop this competence during teacher preparation appear uneven and largely dependent on contextual factors such as the disposition of mentor teachers or the level of feedback provided by university trainers. This situation reflects a broader challenge identified in the literature, which highlights the need to strengthen leadership development in both those who already display leadership traits and those who require more structured opportunities to develop them (Sinha & Hanuscin, 2017). Considering that leadership is recognized as the second most influential factor in student learning after classroom teaching (Leithwood et al.,

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2020), the findings suggest that its development during initial teacher education remains largely informal and insufficiently integrated into training processes.

Concerning collaborative competence, the findings reveal a consensual recognition among diverse institutional stakeholders of its pivotal role in attaining collective objectives within educational environments. Both university and school-level participants highlight role distribution and collaborative engagement as mechanisms that facilitate the integration of individual expertise into collective work (Olaz, 2016). Nevertheless, notable divergences exist; whereas university actors identify barriers to mobilizing teamwork in practicum settings, their school-based counterparts tend to view these interactions as fundamentally collaborative. At the same time, students report positive perceptions regarding the presence of teamwork during their training (Ruffinelli, 2013; Ministry of Education of Chile [MINEDUC], 2020), although their narratives rarely explain how this competence is intentionally developed beyond interaction with mentor teachers. These contrasting perspectives suggest that teamwork, although valued by all actors, remains conceptually and pedagogically underdeveloped during internship experiences. As previous research has shown, collaboration among teachers often remains limited to sharing experiences or addressing immediate problems rather than engaging in deeper reflective processes (Ávalos & Bascopé, 2017; Krichesky & Murillo, 2018).

Regarding conflict resolution competence, the results highlight the importance of balancing theoretical preparation with practical experiences. Universities contribute by providing conceptual tools and reflective spaces, such as case analysis activities based on situations encountered during internships. Concurrently, the role of mentor teachers emerges as fundamental in supporting students and enabling them to engage with real classroom challenges. However, the findings also reveal significant constraints that limit the mobilization of this competence. In particular, institutional restrictions and limited trust from some teachers often prevent trainees from actively participating in complex situations, especially those involving interactions with parents or sensitive issues such as bullying. These findings are consistent with previous research indicating that working with families and managing conflicts constitute some of the weakest areas of preparation in initial teacher education (Gaete et al., 2016; Ruffinelli, 2013; Solís et al., 2016). Consequently, the mobilization of this competence tends to remain restricted to classroom situations, overlooking the broader relational dimensions of the teaching profession that involve interaction with families, administrators, and colleagues (Aravena & Madrid, 2021).

Overall, the findings suggest that the mobilization of transversal competencies in initial teacher education depends on the interaction between three key dimensions: institutional coordination between universities and schools, pedagogical intentionality in training processes, and the opportunities for participation that trainee teachers encounter during their professional practice. When these elements are weakly articulated, the development of leadership, teamwork, and conflict resolution competencies tends to occur in fragmented and uneven ways.

One limitation of this study relates to the scope of the sample, which was limited to specific university and school contexts. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted cautiously when considering other institutional settings. Nevertheless, the study contributes to the growing body of research on transversal competencies in teacher education by providing insights into how different actors perceive and experience their mobilization during the training process.

6.1 Practical implications and policy recommendations

To address the gaps identified and ensure that universities can best integrate transversal competencies into their curricula (as suggested by the evidence) the following recommendations are proposed:

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1. *Curricular Explicitization and Assessment:* Universities must move beyond the assumption that transversal competencies are acquired by simple exposure during practicum. It is recommended to integrate specific learning outcomes and evaluation rubrics for leadership, teamwork, and conflict resolution within the formal curriculum. This ensures these skills are treated with the same academic rigor as disciplinary knowledge.
2. *Strengthening the University-School Partnership:* Educational policy should promote 'Collaborative Training Triads' (Student-Tutor-Mentor). This involves formalizing the role of the mentor teacher not just as a host, but as a co-educator. Universities should provide mentors with specific training on how to provide feedback and create 'safe spaces' where trainees can develop their leadership, conflict management and teamwork skills.
3. *Intentional Pedagogical Design:* In order to overcome issues such as a 'lack of trust' or 'institutional restrictions' in schools, teacher education programmes should implement simulation-based learning, such as case studies, role-playing or virtual simulations. This enables students to practise resolving high-stakes conflicts (e.g. bullying or meetings with parents) in a controlled environment before encountering them in real-world settings.
4. *Integrated Reflective Practice:* Teacher education programmes should incorporate structured reflective seminars during the internship process. These seminars should intentionally connect the theoretical tools provided by the university with the practical dilemmas encountered in schools, helping interns to transform their "fragmented" experiences into a coherent professional identity.

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