

TEACHER TRAINING POLICIES IN COLOMBIA (1994 - 2014) . THE CASE OF MONTERIA

Políticas de formación docente en Colombia (1994 - 2014). El caso de Montería
Políticas de formação de professores na Colômbia (1994 - 2014). o caso de Montería



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ABSTRACT

The objective of this research is to analyze the contributions of teacher training policies developed at the national and territorial levels between 1994 and 2015 in the pedagogical practices of teachers in the case of Montería, in order to propose guidelines for their strengthening. In order to achieve the above objective, a qualitative methodology based on content analysis is used, making use of the structured interview as a data collection instrument. As for the theoretical part, the concept of Teacher Training Policies is deepened, taking into account the categories of dissemination, knowledge, Relevance, Quality and Equity; as well as the concept of Pedagogical Practices, taking into account Disciplinary Training, Didactics, Training in Evaluation and Training in Research. Based on the results of this research, it can therefore be stated that teacher training must be a fundamental factor in the country's education policies, since it is directly related to the factor of educational quality, which today is promoted so much in the educational sphere. In spite of this, in Colombia, and in the particular case of Montería, there is a lack of a contextualized and updated teacher training system that evidences contributions to teachers' pedagogical practices.

Keywords: Policies; Teacher training; Pedagogical practices

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RESUMEN

La presente investigación tiene como objetivo analizar los aportes de las políticas de formación docente desarrolladas a nivel nacional y territorial, en el período de 1994 a 2015, en las prácticas pedagógicas de los maestros en el caso de Montería, con el fin de proponer lineamientos para su fortalecimiento. Para lograr el objetivo anterior se utiliza una metodología cualitativa basada en el análisis de contenido, haciendo uso de la entrevista estructurada como instrumento de recolección de la información. En cuanto a la parte teórica, se profundiza el concepto de políticas de formación docente, teniendo en cuenta las categorías de divulgación, conocimiento, pertinencia, calidad y equidad, así como el concepto de prácticas pedagógicas, teniendo en cuenta la formación disciplinar, la didáctica, la formación en evaluación y la formación en investigación. Partiendo de los resultados arrojados por la presente investigación se puede afirmar, entonces, que la formación docente debe ser un factor fundamental en las políticas educativas del país, pues se encuentra relacionado directamente con el factor de calidad educativa, que hoy en día tanto se promueve en el ámbito educativo. Pese a esto, en Colombia, y en el caso particular de Montería, se manifiesta la inexistencia de un sistema de formación de docentes contextualizado y actualizado que evidencie aportes a las prácticas pedagógicas de los maestros.

Palabras clave: Políticas; formación docente; prácticas pedagógicas.

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RESUMO

O objetivo desta pesquisa é analisar as contribuições das políticas de formação de professores desenvolvidas a nível nacional e territorial entre 1994 e 2015 nas práticas pedagógicas dos professores no caso de Montería, a fim de propor orientações para o seu reforço. Para alcançar este objetivo, utiliza-se uma metodologia qualitativa baseada na análise de conteúdo, utilizando a entrevista estruturada como instrumento de recolha de dados. No que diz respeito à parte teórica, aprofunda-se o conceito de políticas de formação de docentes, tendo em conta as categorias de difusão, conhecimento, Relevância, Qualidade e Equidade; bem como o conceito de Práticas Pedagógicas, tendo em conta a Formação Disciplinar, Didáctica, Formação em Avaliação e Formação em Investigação. Com base nos resultados desta pesquisa, pode-se afirmar que a formação de professores deve ser um fator fundamental nas políticas de educação do país, uma vez que está diretamente relacionada com o fator de qualidade educacional, que hoje é promovido tanto na esfera educacional. Apesar disso, na Colômbia, e no caso particular de Montería, há uma falta de um sistema contextualizado e atualizado de formação de professores que demonstre contribuições para as práticas pedagógicas dos professores.

Palavras chave: Políticas; formação de professores; práticas pedagógicas.

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INTRODUCTION

In terms of education, it can be said that the factors that affect a country's educational quality are plenty, e.g., educational materials, use of new technologies, hour intensity, physical space and school environment, among others. A crucial factor to attain educational quality has to do with teacher training, it is undeniable that a teacher in constant training will achieve better results in terms of performance, since it enables him/her to provide in-depth conceptual accompaniment given his/her knowledge robustness, to appropriate resources (since technologies aid the task) in the best way possible, since his/her training provides tools to consider different learning rhythms and styles and group differences. Hence, teacher training must be a fundamental factor in every nation's educational policy.

This article will analyze the contributions of teacher training policies in teachers' educational practices; to do so, a problem description will be initially proposed, including the identification of difficulties that have affected teacher training in Colombia from the moment it was contemplated in the country's policies until today, which has significantly impacted the contributions of these pedagogical practices to teachers.

Afterwards, the methodology will be explained, the study followed a qualitative approach, using the content analysis of official documents in this matter. Lastly, the results obtained by the research will be presented to draw the conclusions, which were obtained on the basis of the study's objectives.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Matter of Teacher Training

From the dawn of humanity and until these days, people have been in constant training, whether consciously or unconsciously, as unfinished beings. The idea of training -in the broadest sense- is inherent to the human being; as long as humans have the possibility of courageously perfecting themselves in some dimension, education will not cease (Bernal, 1988). In this regard, it is necessary for teacher training to aim towards the integration of new learning, considering that training is an individual development process aimed at acquiring or perfecting capacities, as explained by Ferry (1991). These capacities

being "feeling, acting, imagining, understanding, learning and using the body" (Ferry, 1991, p. 52). Hence, this definition implies that training is an instance of acquiring knowledge at professional and emotional level, as in an integrated process.

In that regard, Marcelo mentions: "the definitions of the author on training show that it can be referred to as an institution, referring to the organizational institution that plans and develops these training activities" (cited by Ferry, 1999, p. 20). Moreover, the same author identifies two ways of understanding training: first, as a social function of knowledge transmission, as in knowing to do and knowing to know; and secondly, as a development and structuring process of the person that has the double effect of internal growth and of learning possibilities of subjects' experiences.

Taking the aforementioned into account and considering the increasing need to support teachers' professional development, training proposals have been adjusted to current requirements and set principles and characteristics that make possible teachers' acquisition of knowledge. Some overall principles of teacher training procedures presented by Escudero (2006, p.32) reference that, above all, a good training policy must be based on a strong curriculum in terms of teachers' learning content; also, it must be an integrating curriculum in terms of making theory and practice noticeable to provide comprehensive training; similarly, it is extremely important to contextualize information, equating the teachers' voice with the students' needs and learning; he adds the importance of taking diversity into account, including diverse moments, places and modalities. Finally, there is an emphasis on negotiating its place within the teaching profession's rights and obligations.

From the aforementioned aspects, it is important to highlight that training may enable change or enhance beliefs, ideas and capacities of the faculty. In addition to the relevance of these principles, it is key to review the characteristics required by teachers' frequent training as proposed by Imbernon (2007, pp. 38-39) to better adapt to changes and achieve innovation in practices, as a resistance-free collaboration climate with a minimum stable organization in the centers to help training, and an acceptance of contextualization and diversity among the teachers that leads to different ways of thinking and acting.

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Imbernon (2007, pp. 41-42) considers the following as organizational requisites for fruitful permanent training: firstly, schools must have a set of collegial and practical rules; secondly, administration representatives working with the faculty must clarify objectives intended with the training and support teachers' efforts to change their practice; thirdly, efforts in curricular changes, teaching and class management must contribute to the improvement of student learning; finally, more adequate continuous training supported throughout the necessary time, contributing new educational actions to be incorporated in the practice.

According to the same author, it is essential for teachers to be involved and participate in the process when planning and executing training and assessing it, and for their opinions to be considered:

“ Only when the faculty sees the new training program or possible changes to the practice will resonate in students' learning, will they significantly change their beliefs and attitudes, entailing a benefit for students and for teaching. It is then when training is perceived as an individual and collective benefit, and not as an external “aggression” or a superfluous attitude.” (Imbernon, 2007, p. 39)

Thus, taking into account training relevance, teacher training policies become one of the two main categories present in this study; this research will analyze the interpretation of several authors and its interference.

Considering that the idea that teacher training is one of the main factors of educational quality, consequently becoming a fundamental part of national and international educational policies and plans in the document PSCFDP (2004), will lead to understanding its significance as fundamental pillar of the intention to improve education, coherence and pertinence of all processes, implicitly resulting in educational quality.

On the other hand, the fact that different authors highlight the importance of teacher training by emphasizing the legitimation of occupational guidelines reaffirms the undeniable value of the study of these policies and its historical interest by different areas connected with the topic, as Popkewitz (1987, p. 3) affirms:

“Teacher training exists and is historically linked with the institutional development of teaching. While teaching evolved as a social form to prepare children for their adult lives, an occupational group specialized in elaborating a daily life plan developed as well,

this group developed certain specialized groups of images, allegories and rituals that explain the “nature” of teaching and work division. Teacher training may be understood as a mechanism to set and legitimate the work's occupational guidelines for future teachers.”

With this, Popkewitz reaffirms the conviction and belief expressed concerning the relevance of studying and knowing the guidelines on teacher training policies, understood as an analysis of its social repercussion.

About the Difficulties of Teacher Training in Colombia

Training has to be a fundamental factor in teacher training policies due to the fact that it is directly connected with educational quality, which has been largely promoted in the educational sphere. Despite the existence of documents that provide an overall outline of this aspect in our country, there is a lack of consolidation of more robust guidelines for teacher training, or alternatively, an update on the training plans.

To that regard, Prats and Reventos (as cited in the Colombian System of Teacher Training and Policy Guidelines document, 2013) state that:

“ The way in which the teacher is trained and what it means for his/her relationship with students on the field makes a true difference in how an educational system works. Therefore, some countries in northern Europe, such as Norway or Finland, believe the way in which the faculty interacts with their students to communicate, structure, encourage, lead, support, etc. is decisive for their performance.” (p.27)

France, Germany, New Zealand, Spain, United Kingdom, Finland, United States, Canada, Mexico, Cuba, Argentina, Chile and Brazil are countries that have invested in the development of consolidated policies regarding teacher training. In the case of Colombia, although the country's first normal school opened in Bogota in 1822, the Constitution of 1991 and Law 115 of 1994 strengthened the regulation of teacher training. For Zuluaga (1996) normal schools “originated as an institution to disseminate mutual learning, considered the best method to bring uniformity to the Nation's teaching system and to expand education at low cost given economic precariousness”.

Only in 2006 the preliminary document “Towards a Teacher Training National

System” was drafted, although it was not published, it proposed the first indications of a guideline; yet, despite accomplishing the inception of a guideline, it never became public. Then in 2008, another document was produced “Teacher Training Policies and Colombian System of Teacher Training (2008)”, which was not published. In 2012, there was another effort to consolidate teacher training with the document “Colombian Policy and System of Teacher Training and Professional Development”, which became the third failed attempt and failed to be published as well. Another attempt was the document “Colombian System of Teacher Training Policy Guidelines” published in 2013, although it established general guidelines for the training system, it failed to become a referent in territorial policies, so much that the Colombian guide “Building the Teacher Training Territorial Plan” produced in 2011, failed to reference the aforementioned document because it is posterior and there are no updates at all (which should have been considered necessary). Currently, a fifth document is in the works, as explained by the Ministry of National Education .

As explained before, although Colombia has documents that outline teacher training, there is a lack of consolidation of more robust guidelines, especially in the city of Monteria, which has enforced a Teacher Training Territorial Plan completed in 2010 that was valid until 2014, and that up to 2017 did not have an updated document to address teacher demand in this regard. It is worth mentioning that the existing document Teacher Training Territorial Plan summarizes the characterization of teacher training needs, strategies and lines in the territorial entity until 2010, but fails to formulate a plan that contemplates its 2014 validity. Law 115 , Article 113, refers to teacher training programs as follows:

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With the objective of maintaining continuous improvement in teacher quality, every training program must be previously credited, as per the provisions established by Consejo Nacional de Educación Superior, CESU, or the Ministry of National Education, in the case of superior normal schools.

Though the presence of teacher training in recent educational policies can be proved, guaranteeing the quality that is being promoted calls for a lot more than mere presence. More attention by the State is needed in order for these policies to become public to guarantee its direct implementation

using mechanisms to support it. In this regard, Lacarriere (2008) states:

“ If there is concern by governments to improve schools and teacher training systems, then we may rely on the fact that this concern will drive the need to train teachers and students in the new world scheme of competences, of educational quality, of teachers committed with their task and of students eager to attain critical and reflexive development and that may fit the labor market and a new knowledge and human growth society.” (p. 229)

The background of teacher training in the Colombian context manifests the absence of a system and the discontinuity deriving from educational policies that fail to transcend each government’s term, which prevent the systematic and coherent operation of teacher training plans at national and regional levels. Parallel to this situation, there is another related problem: there have been many attempts at establishing an educational policy to favor teacher training, but lack of continuity has turned them weak (Teacher Training Policies and Colombian System of Teacher Training, 2008). The pathway of teacher training in Colombia that has been presented in this work shows that rules, laws, decrees, institutional documents and plans, among others, on the subject matter appear to be on paper yet incipient on the practice. The Colombian Policy and System of Teacher Training and Professional Development (2012) suggests the absence of a teacher training system and the discontinuity deriving from educational policies that do not go beyond each government’s term, impairing the systematic and coherent operation of teacher training plans at national and regional levels

In our country as long as policies are governmental, there are no guarantees of continuity, and if those do become state policies, the government’s will is needed to enforce them, cross-cutting areas and regular assessment that result in continuity can hardly occur in a country in which educational policies move forward at the pace of the government’s interests, as it is palpable in this study’s background review. Niño and Borbon (s.f.) have stated:

“In those “efforts”, as per an analysis of the history of education in Colombia, the ruling perception if that the effort has never been accomplished, and when it has been slightly accomplished, another set of measures and compliances is already misaligned from a newly issued joint manifest of demands and critiques to apply new adjustments. A simple glance at the government plans developed in each presidential term since 1960 would evidence this fact.” (p.2)

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Over ten years have gone by since the first document that covers specific guidelines for teacher training in Colombia was drafted in 2006, it may be highlighted that although the government has produced several documents since -almost none of which have been made public- resuming some aspects of the ones prior, there is a lack of much needed alignment. Niño and Borbon (s.f.) add:

“ In each of those plans, both in the diagnosis of the previous situation and in the propositions to remedy deficiencies, there are errors and shortfalls in teacher training and in the ideal education quality which has not been met; then, pages ahead, solutions are proposed to be implemented by the government holding office. Therefore, this is commonplace in these plans.” (p.2)

On the other hand, we may not forget that teacher training policies must come from a real need of the context. How the Colombian teacher context is read will finally impose coherence to a policy based on quality premises aimed by the government. As mentioned by Lacarriere, who believes it is pertinent to:

“ Conduct a diagnostic assessment of teachers' improvement needs as a starting point in a process such as this one... Only by following this condition may a teacher improvement program be consequent to real needs and provide certainty as to the fact that it will be beneficial to education.” (p.28)

Meaning that an active and direct participation of teachers is strictly necessary, using instruments assessed by experts and applied in the teaching field, not from an “office” or a “desk” that collects perceptions that are distant from the local and regional context in which the teaching practice takes place.

METHODOLOGY

According to Barrios and Vives (1996) qualitative research is always complex, even more so if it focuses on education, and if permanent training and professional development of teachers are within its extensive action scope. Therefore, it was considered that the best approach for this research towards its object of study was a qualitative paradigm with a content analysis model, given its text interpretation nature, which, according to Abela (2009, p.2) is based on reading (textual or visual) as an information collection instrument; unlike common reading, this type must follow the scientific method, thus it must be systematic, objective, valid and must be debatable.

Thereby, methodological decisions are connected with this research's objectives and questions, which fit into the categories of Teacher Training Policies and Pedagogical Practices.

Likewise and consequently with the study's nature, the Atlas.Ti software was used in order to analyze the data resulting from the interviews; the software is validated and acknowledged in social sciences research, and it is also more useful as aid to qualitative analysis.

This analysis was based on three official documents (supported by the Atlas.Ti software): the General Education Law of 1994, the Teacher Training Territorial Plan of the municipality of Monteria and the Colombian System of Teacher Training and Professional Development. Moreover, structured interviews were used to collect information from thirty-six teachers at twelve municipal institutions, taking into account representativity and intentionality criteria.

RESULTS

The results of this research lead to asserting that teacher training must be a fundamental factor in teacher training policies since it is directly connected with quality (nowadays highly promoted in the educational sphere). Despite this, Colombia and Monteria in particular, lack a teacher training system and have an evident discontinuity in terms of regulation which don't seem to be projected beyond the government's term, hindering the systematic and coherent operation of teacher training at national and regional levels. Likewise, lack of continuity between policies is also evident, undermining said policies. Yet, despite the existence of documents that outline the teacher training aspect, more robust guidelines need to be consolidated, or conducting updates on teacher training plans, alternatively. Therefore, the documents evinced no significant contribution to teachers' pedagogical practices based on the lack of awareness and on plans being out-of-date and out of context.

DISCUSSION

In our country as long as policies are governmental, there are no guarantees of

continuity, and if those do become state policies, the government's will is needed to enforce them, cross-cutting area and regular assessments that result in continuity can hardly occur in a country in which educational policies move forward at the pace of the government's interests.

Most of the interviewed teachers were unaware of teacher training plans at territorial and national level. Accordingly, it can be said that there is an overall lack of awareness on the topic. Although this topic has been present in educational policies for a while, it is not enough to guarantee the quality that is so intensely promoted these days. The State needs to pay more attention in order for these policies to become public and to directly assure its implementation with supporting mechanisms.

Despite the existence of documents that overall outline the aspect of teacher training in our country, there is a lack of consolidation of more robust guidelines for teacher training, or alternatively, an update on the training plans.

The Teacher Training National Plan has not been updated or received feedback about educational trends and legislation since 2013. In Monteria, the teacher training plan has not been updated either since 2010 -its year of inception-. It is worth clarifying that an updated version of both is pending, as per what has been announced by the MEN and the Secretary of Education, respectively. The changes have been reported from the moment this research began, but these have yet to become a reality, which in itself exemplifies the slow nature of these processes, detrimental to the training actions because by the time these are applied it is likely for the needs and realities to have changed.

As of 2015, teachers in Monteria have not had contributions to their pedagogical practices in teacher training policies since 1994.

An active and direct participation of teachers is strictly necessary to draft teacher training guidelines in Monteria, as well as the consideration of each institution and the region's needs.

Teacher training plans must be followed-up during the implementation stage and afterwards, until there is total certainty that they have become part of the culture. Likewise, the contribution of these plans to teachers'

pedagogical practices must be assessed in order to adjust the plans depending on the results of the assessment mechanism. This follow-up has to take place at national, territorial and institutional levels

Training proposed in these plans must aim at deepening theoretical aspects and to practice and experience said content.

Territorial entities need an updated training plan at the beginning of each academic year, and from that moment on, teachers must be aware and habituated to them in order to program accordingly.

Training programmed in these plans must be mandatory for teachers without neglecting the motivational aspect, which is represented in incentives and recognition for their task.

The training offer in these plans has to be varied, keeping in mind educational levels, different areas of knowledge and types of positions within an educational institution.

It is important for training to address group work at institutional level, recording general reflections and aiming at complying with the goals set in terms of training. Updates in pedagogical strategies and actions within teacher training plans must stem from these groups. Some of the interviewed teachers, especially those in the elementary level, mentioned learning communities, which are contemplated in the Ministry of Education's program Todos a Aprender as a space of valuable learning to strengthen the country's political practices.

On the other hand, teacher training processes must consider curricular references at national level, as well aspects of legislative, pedagogical, didactic, research nature and specific knowledge in each area and educational level, coexistence factors and knowledge that is considered relevant in the educational sphere.

Moreover, it is necessary for the offered training to guarantee quality, suitability of trainers and adequate spaces and materials in order to achieve its objective.

Finally, it has to be said that, in general, very few studies have addressed the contribution of teacher training policies to the teachers themselves. In the specific case of Colombia, only three studies of this type were found, and

only one was directly related to the object of the study of the research herein. For the particular case of the city of Montería, none were found.

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