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When the Invisible Makes Inequity Visible: Chilean Teacher Education in COVID-19 Times

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Abstract: Although there is high inequity in the Chilean education system, the sanitary situation as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic has repositioned the debate about inequity in teacher education. We explored the following two questions: what are the (new) inequities highlighted in teacher education during the pandemic in Chile? What can we learn from teacher educators' responses to these issues? Using content analysis, we analyzed interviews held with 16 teacher educators from four different programs across the country. Findings show that the pandemic makes unequal pre-service teachers' living and studying conditions visible, becoming a source of stress but also an opportunity to rethink program support. Teacher educators' responses to inequity were based on a distributive and/or recognition perspective of justice, mediated by program resources and characteristics. We identified difficulties in achieving justice of participation by teacher educators in this context, influenced by scarce program resources or a sense of urgency. Conclusions highlighted the role of teacher education in addressing students' inequities and the importance of remaining vigilant about these issues in the aftermath of the pandemic, keeping them visible.

Keywords: teacher education; social justice; COVID-19



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1. Introduction

Teacher education is embedded in cultural and socioeconomic reproduction in Chile. While teachers working in private schools attended selective universities and private high schools as students; teachers working in schools with public funding attended less selective universities and came from high schools with public funding [1,2]. The interruption of face-to-face activities as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic placed new challenges on the Chilean educational system, including teacher education. As in other countries, the pandemic put on the spotlight or exacerbated issues of inequity and exclusion in education [3]. For instance, quarantine lockdowns sharpened the inequity and domestic violence against women, which was present in homes, schools, and universities [4]. K-12 schools closed two weeks after the pandemic outbreak in Chile. Teachers had to develop online remote emergency classes, even though 50% of students had occasional or no internet access [5]. The Ministry of Education attempted to guarantee students' access to education, providing guidelines for teachers to prioritize learning goals from the mandatory national curriculum, generating partnerships with television channels to broadcast educational content, facilitating printed worksheets for students lacking internet access, and replacing the national standardized students' tests with a voluntary examination of students' learning and socioemotional conditions [6].

While the Chilean Ministry of Education's concern focused on the continuity of educational activities for K-12 students, teacher preparation programs worked in the pandemic

context without any national guidelines or additional resources. The Ministry of Education only provided voluntary support for teacher education institutions. For example, the Ministry of Education placed moratoriums on teacher education high-stake accountability policies—in place since 2016—including their four articulated mandatory strategies: program accreditation, pre-service teachers' evaluations, standards, and national admission criteria and cut-offs. Additionally, it created a special program called "Network of Tutors for Chile", to facilitate collaboration among universities and schools for the continuity of the pre-service teachers' practicum experiences. Meanwhile, teacher preparation programs implemented curriculum adjustments and provided support for pre-service teachers according to their contexts and resources. This situation could be explained because, since the 1980s, teacher education has been the responsibility of higher education institutions with curricular autonomy.

This paper examines teacher educators' specific responses and adjustments in their practices to the new pandemic scenery and their relation to social justice perspectives. Findings show that the pandemic makes unequal pre-service teachers' living and studying conditions visible, becoming an opportunity and a source of stress to rethink program support. The responses of teacher educators to inequity were based on a distributive and/or recognition perspective of justice, mediated by the resources and characteristics of the programs. We identified difficulties among teacher educators for achieving justice of participation in this context, influenced by scarce institutional resources or a sense of urgency. These findings contribute to understanding how the context of the pandemic puts inequity at the center of the teacher educators' concerns and how their responses to these issues are related to their program resources and characteristics. These local responses could be helpful to analyze specific responses in other countries. Further research could examine the persistence of these responses in the pandemic aftermath.

2. Review of Related Literature

Studies about the work of teacher educators during the pandemic have explored the development of online teaching methodologies and practices [7,8] and their readiness to adapt their practices [9]. These studies have also delved into their reflective processes [10] and narrative inquiries, focusing on challenges, opportunities, and socioemotional aspects impacting their practice [11,12] while giving recommendations for the future of teacher education and the post-pandemic era. Other topics discussed include how teacher educators dealt with burnout [13] and the challenges of supporting in-school teachers [14]. Scant articles addressed issues of inclusion, multiculturalism, and equity while teaching online reporting the use of transformative knowledge, real situations, and practical resources to develop an inclusive curriculum [15].

Inquiries related to pre-service teachers have primarily focused on their experiences and opinions about online education caused by the lockdowns [16–31], as well as the pedagogical and methodological challenges and curricular adaptations they experienced during the pandemic [32–40]. A small number of studies have focused on the material and psychological conditions of pre-service teachers affected their professional preparation during COVID-19 [41–45]. For instance, McKay et al. [45] found diverse levels of pre-service teachers' financial insecurity, which affected their academic and emotional wellbeing in Australia. Furthermore, access to academic support offered by the university during the pandemic was challenging for pre-service teachers.

Studies related to teacher preparation programs in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic have focused on the positive changes in practices and relationships. Research has analyzed the transition from face-to-face education to blended interactions [46] and the use of new technologies (video and online platforms) as support for teaching [47–49]. Authors have identified a revalorization of technology in the process of learning in teacher education [50], and the development of new technological capabilities in pre-service teachers, as well as flexibility and adaptability to new learning environments [51,52]. Studies have also examined changes on the relationship between teacher preparation programs and schools [53], and the

development of new international collaborations in teacher education [54]. Other research has pointed out an improvement in school–university relationships as a result of the need to rethink teaching practices and the ways to develop a sense of community during the pandemic context [55–59].

Other explorations in this area have focused on the new challenges that this context carries for the assessment of pre-service teachers, their collaboration through learning communities, the use of technology for activities related to the practicum, and practicum supervision [60–63]. In these challenges, researchers highlighted the efforts of teacher educators in keeping continuous communication with pre-service teachers despite technological difficulties in different countries [64–66], and their role in emotional care [67,68].

Some authors have pointed out that the sociopolitical conditions related to the pandemic should mobilize teacher educators to take an anti-oppressive perspective to achieve social justice [69]. This is the case for some teacher preparation programs that positioned themselves from a social justice perspective, prioritizing equity and the fight against racism and other discriminatory situations for the post-pandemic scenario [70].

The concept of social justice appears as a way of considering what was once called a socio-reconstructionist, anti-racist, critical, intercultural educational process, among others [71]. In both the Anglo-Saxon world and our Spanish-speaking world, there is extensive literature on teacher education for social justice [72–85]. One of the bases of this perspective is that teacher education programs should prepare pre-service teachers to offer fair learning opportunities [81,86]. One of the most widespread definitions of social justice is based on a distributive perspective of justice [87], promoting a more equitable distribution of goods and services and focusing on material aspects of injustice. From a cultural perspective, aspects of recognition are conceived by taking into account the symbolic, social, and political components contributing to injustices [88,89]. Additionally, Young [90] argues for the importance of participation for social justice. The participation process implies a democratic ethos in the distribution of power. From an educational standpoint, this means eliminating any possibility of coercion from one group over another.

In this article, we will use these three most widespread conceptualizations of social justice (redistribution, recognition, and participation) to explore the following questions: what are the (new) inequities highlighted in teacher education during the pandemic in Chile? What can we learn from the responses of teacher educators to address these issues?

3. Materials and Methods

This work is part of a three-year inquiry about the policy enactment (interpretation and responses) of a new policy for teaching and teacher education (The Teaching Career Law) inside teacher preparation programs. The first year of the study included an analysis of policy documents and individual interviews with 40 teacher education program coordinators, while the second year consisted of a multiple-case study of six teacher education programs. The third phase of this study took place after Chile's national protests starting October 2019, and during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020–2021. Due to this context, only four of the six cases previously studied were followed up. We ensured the heterogeneity of the programs using four criteria: (1) teaching specialization/major; (2) geographical location; (3) type of university administration; and (4) trends in interpretation and responses towards policy characterized during years one and two. A multiple-case study seeks to understand a situation in depth [91,92]. The number of cases selected in this study portrays heterogeneity regarding the teacher education system in Chile.

For this article, we analyzed some emergent themes related to a larger project, which focused on the specific responses and adjustments that teacher preparation programs made to their practices due to the pandemic, and their relation to social justice perspectives. Details about the four cases and the participants included in this study are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of cases and interview data.

| Case Number | Specialization | University Administration | Geographical Location | Participants |
|-------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|---|
| 1 | Primary education | New private | Capital | Four TE with administrative roles |
| 2 | Primary education | Traditional private | Capital | Two TE with administrative roles Two TE without administrative roles |
| 3 | Secondary literacy | Public | Regional | Four TE with administrative roles ¹ |
| 4 | Early childhood education | Public | Regional | Four TE with administrative roles |

¹ Cases n° 3 and 4 belong to the same institution; therefore, they share one interview, which was carried out with a teacher educator whose administrative role applies for both programs.

For these cases, we analyzed institutional documents and conducted interviews with teacher educators. Two experts reviewed the interview protocols, which we piloted with teacher educators from other institutions before their application. Due to mandatory confinement, we collected information using online platforms (Zoom). Although the main purpose of the study was not centered on teacher educators' responses to COVID-19, these topics emerged during the 60 min interviews. Interviews were transcribed and we analyzed them using content analysis [93] through the software Atlas Ti. To ensure intercoder reliability, 10% of the materials were double-coded, ensuring a Holsti agreement of over 75% as recommended by the literature [94].

4. Results

Table 2 presents a synthesis of the main findings.

Table 2. Summary of findings.

| Social Justice Perspectives | Teacher Educators' Responses |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Distribution | Avoiding academic interruptions to guarantee learning processes. Maintaining contact with students and finding ways to overcome contextual difficulties. |
| Recognition | Experiencing emotional toll due to feelings of isolation and lack of contact with students Adapting to schools' technological resources to generate and maintain relationship with their teachers. Strengthening alliances with various institutions to respond to the needs of communities, and reach, orient, and support families, in line with the program's hallmark. Making academic adjustments to accommodate to students' emotional processes (sickness and grieving). Promoting academic flexibility and prioritizing student's emotional support over academic and administrative responsibilities. |
| Participation | Urgent decisions were taken by a few tenured professors. Logistic difficulties for organizing full staff meetings because of large number of tenured professors led to low participation and few opportunities for collaboration. Low participation in decision-making processes and instances of collaboration because of their working conditions, lack of personnel and institutional support. |

4.1. Prioritizing Access to Connection: A Distributive Perspective for Justice during COVID-19

The pandemic outbreak in Chile coincided with the beginning of the academic year in March 2020. This beginning already posed some challenges because of the interruption of academic activities in private and public universities due to national protests and strikes at the end of 2019. In this way, the state of emergency and changes in Chilean universities started before the COVID-19 pandemic.

The interruption of face-to-face activities in universities presented difficulties, generating different responses from teacher education programs in their quest to maintain pre-service teachers' learning processes. The first and most evident challenge was to establish new communication channels with students. Even though almost every university in Chile had access to online administrative and learning platforms before the COVID-19

pandemic, these resources were mainly used for asynchronous exchanges. In the light of the new situation, however, they became the main channel for synchronic interactions.

The predominant use of emergency remote teaching during the 2020–2021 academic year in Chilean universities unveiled the unequal access of students to technology and Internet connection. During the interviews, teacher educators described how their programs sought solutions to support students, whose material conditions hampered their access to education.

We redistributed food and transportation scholarships which were not being used. Those were repurposed to solve difficult situations that students were facing, but the main investment was buying electronic devices for students: tablets, internet sim cards, which were loaned to students in need. At the beginning it wasn't enough so teacher educators and pre-service teachers from the program created solidarity committees to collect donations, which were used to buy more internet sim cards or internet service plans for pre-service teachers. (Accreditation Coordinator, Case 3)

In fact, we could help several students [. . .] we granted scholarships for prepaid phone plans and internet connection, and students could loan laptops from the university to study from home. (Program coordinator, Case 2)

These quotes display the importance of teacher preparation programs in ensuring conditions for equal access to resources among students. We interpreted these intentions and actions as an example of a social justice quest based on a distributive perspective. We highlight these responses because they represent the commitment teacher educators have towards their students, even though the provision of material conditions for learning (e.g., access to internet or technological devices) was not a responsibility historically assumed by Chilean universities. We also identify some differences or nuances in emphasis of educators from different programs towards this commitment. While some interviewees highlighted the relevance of this type of support as a means for keeping learning processes advancing on their usual schedule, avoiding academic interruptions (Case 1 and 2), others also emphasized the importance of remaining in contact with students and overcoming contextual difficulties (Cases 3 and 4). These discrepancies could be mediated by the institutional vision of the programs, because the first two were located in public universities while the last two were located in private ones.

We have been working towards on . . . I mean, the guidelines for teacher educators have been "Let's understand that this is not a normal context and somehow we have to adapt to what we are going through" [. . .]. We have modified our classes to guarantee student access, like uploading recorded classes to the university's online platform, so the students who can't attend at 8.30 a.m. can watch it at 6.00 p.m. with no problem. (Program coordinator, Case 2)

The school allocated more resources of different types [to guarantee teaching and learning continuity]: money, human resources, a center for online teaching support, which has been crucial in this context, that created protocols for online teaching . . . [and] mechanisms for the emotional support of teacher educators and pre-service teacher. We [the faculty] shifted the focus from research and working with external contexts to solely focus on online teaching. (Dean, Cases 3 and 4)

Moreover, teacher educators, especially those from programs that predominantly serve students from low-socioeconomic contexts (Cases 1, 3, and 4), mentioned that the situations generated by the pandemic context made them realize their students lived in more precarious conditions than they expected, or that their students experienced additional unexpected difficulties.

The strike exposed that students had a terribly low socioeconomic status. For example, I had no idea that two of our students live in shantytowns. In shantytowns. This poverty level was exposed after the (2019) social outburst, with all

the economic crisis. And the pandemic has deepened this condition even further [...] We had to go to the university and hand our institutional computers, so the university could loan them to the students [...] we even opened two saving accounts where teacher educators put money every month to give students food baskets. (Program Coordinator, Case 3)

In contrast, for Case 2, a program belonging to a traditional elite university that recently diversified its student body, the emergency remote classes allowed teacher educators to become aware of the heterogeneity of the housing conditions of their students, and their implications for learning. In this way, online interactions transformed the homes of pre-service teachers and teacher educators into a visible and unavoidable mediating aspect for learning.

The pandemic made us realize that [...] I have students from complex socioeconomic contexts. One can see them in their kitchens, and there are many people there, a lot of noise, and their academic performance is still really good [...] other students [join their online classes from] wonderful backyards with all the commodities and have the same performance. This speaks highly of their [the first group] adaptation capacities. (Teacher Educator, Case 2)

We feel we have had a positive response to their needs, [for] each student in their particular contexts. We tried to get information about their living situation [...] Despite what we could have foreseen. We thought that a high percentage of our students would have all the conditions [...] because “well, [the university] won’t have these problems”. This situation, thinking our students belong to a certain category, has changed over time. (Program coordinator, Case 2)

In non-elite universities (Cases 1, 3, and 4), access to internet connection or technological devices were issues for pre-service teachers and teacher educators alike. Private universities (Case 1) provided support for those teacher educators who experienced difficulties, while those located in public universities resolved these issues depending on their budgets (Cases 3 and 4).

The students had a good reception. Obviously, we were faced with situations such as [students with] no internet access, electronic devices, and we provided scholarships [...] even some for teacher educators. Plenty of teacher educators have these benefits, we gave them electronic devices, internet connection, laptops. During the first stages. (Dean, Case 1)

Other teacher educators stated that they noticed some students’ internet connection difficulties went beyond lacking access to computer devices, which the university provided during the pandemic. They realized there was a nationwide internet coverage problem that they could not solve. This problem was influenced by the Chilean neoliberal context, where internet providers guide their decisions based on supply and demand rules, making it more difficult for students from certain neighborhoods to access the internet.

My concern comes from experience, because some students [...] who live in difficult locations, and I mean difficult because [they lack] internet access. The university has taken some measures, providing laptops, tablets, etc. [...] but for some of my students the problem is not the device or the internet provider, [the problem is] there are no cell towers where they live. So, many students lose connection during classes. Sometimes, they can access the uploaded recordings when they have a more stable connection. (Program Coordinator, Case 1)

However, working from home put a physical and emotional distance between teacher educators and students which, in some cases, generated feelings of isolation. These feelings were exacerbated by practices that aimed to safeguard the participation of pre-service teachers, such as keeping webcams off to prevent internet bandwidth problems. In Case 3, these situations impacted the motivation of teacher educators, who felt relief whenever

they had the chance to corroborate their students were actually behind the black boxes on their screens.

Generally speaking, only one student per class shows their camera while the rest works from the shadows [. . .]. It's really complex, extremely demanding and distressing, because our work relies on proxemics, kinesics, and the use of paraverbal language, [and] all that face-to-face feedback that you normally have from classroom interaction, doesn't exist here. You don't know if they are fine, if they are not fine, and because they don't show themselves, which could be of help, we just talk, talk, talk, talk. (Program Coordinator, Case 3)

In this way, the efforts of teacher educators to facilitate student access to learning processes not only implied the need for programs to invest in material resources, but also for an additional emotional effort by teacher educators.

4.2. Keeping the Community Connected and Providing Emotional Support: A Recognition Perspective for Justice during COVID-19

4.2.1. Community Connection

The relationship with local actors and families also presented changes and challenges during the pandemic. In some cases (Case 2), the context of the pandemic exacerbated difficulties in establishing close relationships with schoolteachers, making it more challenging to generate informal encounters with them. Even though interviewees described great efforts to adapt their actions to the technological resources and pedagogical decisions of the schools, they also mentioned some new challenges in constructing a relationship with schoolteachers. From the perspective of these teacher educators, these difficulties were previously influenced by the actions of the school administrations, while the pandemic difficulties arose from the new context, with particular characteristics and problems emerging from online remote interactions.

It's more difficult because you can't go to the schools anymore, visit the classrooms, greet teachers. Obviously, this is much more formal, because you have to schedule zoom interviews, which means most of the times you can't see the teachers' faces [. . .]. Well, this also happens in face-to-face situations, because of administrative procedures in schools [. . .] but truth be told [. . .] there is more distance. You can reach them through email, but there is less contact. (Practicum coordinator, Case 2)

In this way, in Case 2, the concerns of teacher educators regarding their relationship with schools and communities were focused on the difficulties in establishing close relationships and communication with schoolteachers.

This concern was also expressed in other cases, although with some nuances. For example, in Cases 3 and 4, teacher educators expressed concerns regarding the possibility to get in touch with local actors and organizations and consolidate their networks as they usually did because of social distancing. As the practicum coordinator in Case 4 explained: "We have not been able to have meetings, for example, with neighbors' organizations, local leaders or social actors, with whom we had been meeting in person, periodically and permanently" (Case 4). Teacher educators also regretted that the context limited their ability to establish two-ways interactions, restricting them to collect information about the needs of the communities and families.

Additionally, in Case 4, teacher educators were also concerned about how they could create opportunities to contribute to the challenges of the community. This Early Childhood Education Program, located in a public and regional university, had a commitment to the community that was a key aspect of the program's hallmark before the COVID-19 pandemic. The relationship between the program and the community was oriented to "recognize local actors' strengths and not only look at, for example, their disadvantages" (Program Coordinator, Case 4). During the pandemic, the first difficulty they faced was the closure of public early childhood education centers. For this program, not only maintaining pre-

service teachers' learning and communication but also accompanying local actors, social organizations and families was a priority during this period.

I would say that, more than plans and programs, in many cases we need to attend to—because we are talking about early childhood education here—and accompany the families. And, in some cases, beside accompanying the families, also attend to those pedagogical requirements during the design of learning experiences. (Practicum coordinator, Case 4)

The quote above is an example of their goal to account for the social and symbolic context in which they are inserted as part of their formative processes. These teacher educators, located in a regional program, sought to build a relationship with families and communities acknowledging and responding to their needs, prioritizing these aspects over the complete fulfilment of their syllabus or the curriculum formally stated. To achieve this purpose, they contacted different types of early childhood educational centers where pre-service teachers could develop their practicum during the pandemic. Centers located in rural settings of the region were more willing and available to collaborate with them. When the mandatory confinement forced them to explore new strategies, they found new ways to communicate with the families, handle these networks, and work with their communities. Using new technologies, they adapted their goals, emphasizing keeping in touch with children and their families through creative tools and methods.

In this new scenario, with university resources, [we] need to accompany [pre-service teachers] so they can improve their platforms and find creative, more playful, ways to reach [the families] by taking advantage of resources which have already been allocated in these institutions and organizations. [There are] many strategies like storytelling, puppeteering, dialogues, readings, conversation, music, dancing, but we also need to work with the families and the community. (Program Coordinator, Case 4)

In the practicum experience [pre-service teachers] will have to work closer to the families, provide tools, check how they are, what they are doing and provide daily learning with meaning, so it doesn't look like the children's [learning] is on hold just because they are at home. I mean, children have learnt a lot during the pandemic, about selfcare, caring for others, being generous, responsible. Besides, all at-home interactions [. . .] have changed, adapted, some are new. This has undoubtedly generated more learning. (Program Coordinator, Case 4)

To prepare the practicum of pre-service teachers during the first stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, they created networks with early childhood education centers and social organizations which they worked with before the pandemic, to reach, orient, and support children and families. We interpreted these actions as an example of justice of recognition, because they validate and value the needs and experiences of children and families, and the work and knowledge of community organizations, taking into consideration their cultural and social resources.

4.2.2. Emotional Support

The contextual conditions created by the pandemic forced the teacher educators and pre-service teachers to blur the boundaries between the private and public spaces as a way to ensure the continuation of academic responsibilities, bringing into light the living conditions and personal problems of the pre-service teachers in all the cases studied. We identified, in all programs, that teacher educators, acknowledged the importance of the personal and emotional situations of their pre-service teachers in their learning processes. We also recognized different strategies for responding to these situations. In Case 2, teacher educators described making academic adjustments to be mindful of and support students in difficult emotional processes related to the COVID-19 pandemic, such as sickness and grieving.

Yes, we have reached all these difficult cases, we have meet with [the students], we have had COVID cases, family members who had passed away because of COVID [. . .] the school faculty has shown great empathy. They contact [students]: “Don’t worry, we can talk about this again in two months and if you need to retake the course, we can leave your grades as pending”. In many ways, teacher educators and pre-service teachers have shown great flexibility. (Program coordinator, Case 2)

In Cases 3 and 4, where many students lived in precarious conditions, teacher educators not only made evaluation schedules arrangements, but they also had to take on the role of emotional companions and counselors as part of their role as educators, understanding that without this support pre-service teachers would have not been able to fulfill their academic responsibilities. As explained above, this relates to the idea that the emotional wellbeing of pre-service teachers is crucial in ensuring their learning. In some cases with less academic staff available (Case 3), this scenario, added to their daily tasks and navigating the challenges of teaching remotely, led teacher educators to prioritize emotionally supporting their students over carrying out some administrative and/or teaching responsibilities.

We have to provide students with emotional support, even on Sundays, three or four students call me crying. They have problems, they are in distress. So, to [have the time] to support students, I will have to delegate coordinating the accreditation process. I will still collaborate, though. (Program Coordinator, Case 3)

We interpret these actions as examples of justice of recognition, because they are an attempt to understand and respond to diversity within the classroom. These differences are not related to material conditions that hamper the participation of students, but they relate to how students make sense of and experience the pandemic according to their culture, emotional resources, support networks, and social contexts. These strategies emerge as a starting point that brings on a new understanding of diversity inside these teacher preparation programs. Teacher educators acquainted with the diverse experiences of their students regarding how they deal with health problems and social crises, discovering health difficulties, lack of stress support, or strong reactions towards unequal conditions. In other words, the pandemic’s changes and consequences facilitated a path to unveil the diverse processes of pre-service teachers, based on their particular biographies and social contexts. Thus, this situation facilitated reflection of teacher educators about this diversity and its relevance for the learning process, while helping them build spaces of social justice taking this into account. During this period of health crisis, the emotional well-being became a focus of concern for these teacher educators, unveiling an aspect that is usually overlooked by rational thinking and formal instruction in academic settings.

4.3. The Missing Point: Justice of Participation for Teacher Educators during COVID-19

When teacher educators discussed their responses to inequity, they very often did not refer to aspects related to pre-service teachers’ participation; instead, they focused on issues regarding their possibilities as teacher educators to actively participate in the programs’ decision-making processes during the pandemic. Despite the efforts of teacher educators to support students during this period, we also identified these educators had some difficulties in participating in decision-making processes in their programs. These challenges existed before the pandemic but were exacerbated in the context of emergency.

In public universities (Cases 3 and 4), the possibilities for teacher educators to actively participate in the collective processes of decision-making were influenced by their working conditions and professional development opportunities. Teacher educators described their programs as having a small number of tenured professors in charge of administrative and pedagogical processes, while most academic staff only served as lecturers. Moreover, in Case 4, this lack of investment in personnel coupled with a lack of support from their

institutions for teacher educators to progress on their academic careers (master's or doctoral programs) and improve their pedagogical resources.

Twenty years ago, the program's faculty was composed of two full-time and two part-time teacher educators. Today we [only] have three part-time teacher educators, that should tell you all [. . .] We are poor, we don't have the resources to carry out research and can't ensure the job stability needed for people to teach calmly, have time for research, do international internships [. . .] Our educational system is really poor, precarious. There are no real conditions for us to think, I'm talking about the critical component [. . .] There is a lack of resources, vision [. . .] Teacher educators don't get paid [. . .] everything works through project applications [. . .] totally commodified. If you want to invest in something, a multimedia environment for pre-service teacher learning [. . .] you have to apply for a project, so the university invests in the program. (Practicum coordinator, Case 4)

The small number of tenured or full-time teacher educators working in these institutions relates to the high number of hours they must dedicate to teaching in their programs. This generated a feeling of exhaustion, which became more critical during the emergency remote teaching, where this heavy teaching schedule was performed in front of computer screens. Constantly working in front of a computer without breaks and the amount of overwork that emerged from trying to figure out the best ways to safeguard the learning processes of pre-service teachers generated burnout among teacher educators.

It's crazy to work like this. I work 22 h doing classes on Zoom, which means another 20 h to prepare for classes. You can understand what doing 20 h of classes means, there is no time. I consider it absurd to pretend that everything is normal, real, when we are doing a superhuman effort [. . .] I work part-time and do 20 h of classes [. . .] there is a problem there. (Program coordinator, Case 3)

The scarce amount of personnel also impacted the opportunities that teacher educators had to meet with their colleagues to work, reflect, and make decisions about their programs collectively. This situation became more critical during the pandemic and, in some cases, even complicated developing and maintaining an institutional hallmark related to social justice.

Today, the tiredness from working on screens is an obstacle. It's like "another meeting. Please, no". I mean, it's really insane, many times we are sitting in front of a screen from 8 a.m. to 6 or 7 p.m., and it's like "please, I can't take it, this has been an extremely long day". So, [. . .] not being able to see each other, being in front of the screen all day, answering emergencies, creating, how to do better so pre-service teachers understand you better when you can't even see their faces [. . .] It's been tiring. I think it has been the biggest obstacle in moving forward. But I think that any task, big as it gets, there is a team that answers to it. That is invaluable. (Program coordinator, Case 4)

There are two teacher educators who left, and they were the creators, like the forefathers of this perspective [connections with the territory and community] [. . .] There has been a renovation of teacher educators [. . .] and that has made it clear that, maybe that topic is not as strong anymore, with that emphasis, and the topics get blurred [. . .]: "You take care of this topic, you of this topic, and you of this other topic". But then I feel that we don't accomplish an articulation [between topics] [. . .] an umbrella, a vision or clear approach. I mean, it's recognized and valued, but in the end, it's reduced to what one person can do or put forward [. . .] I requested a meeting with all teacher educators to discuss this issue [. . .] finally, only two people attended. (Accreditation coordinator, Case 4)

The pandemic created conditions that exacerbated previous problems inside programs, that preceded the socio-sanitary context. The impossibility of giving continuity to teaching

processes and carrying on constant work, added more stress to the work of pre-service teachers and teacher educators, thus affecting both their practice and mental health.

Everything is done through a screen. [. . .] and we end up really tired . . . Every Friday I end up with a strong headache [. . .] add to that the overload of everything, everything works as if it were normal, meeting there, two meetings, people invite me to meetings and I'm tired [. . .] we are working a lot, there is too much work. (Program Coordinator, Case 3)

Participation also became more difficult in programs with a large number of tenured professors and higher resources (Case 2) due to the fast adaptations that the programs had to put in place as a result of the pandemic. Teacher educators felt that time went faster during emergency remote teaching, affecting the number of encounters that the whole academic staff (including lectures) could have.

It's not easy to find a slot to gather all the teacher educators that we have [. . .] Coordination meetings have been held through Zoom without issues [. . .] [The coordination team] has responded positively, but what usually happens is that the day goes by [. . .] and the day goes. Then, without an intention, a guideline, it's hard to get in touch [. . .] I believe that the amount of meetings has decreased in comparison to last year's calendar, but this also relates to how the first semester went by, it came and went really fast. We had to focus on working on the curriculum prioritization, deciding on classroom rules, that stuff, and now it's like . . . we are in safer lands. (Program Coordinator, Case 2)

The number of whole staff meetings decreased in comparison to previous years; however, urgent decisions were made in small groups and following the organizational chart of the program. In this way, for programs located in large universities, urgent curricular decisions responding to the pandemic challenges were taken with less participation of teacher educators. This is the case for decisions related to the practicum of pre-service teachers, which in most programs presented the most evident challenges during the pandemic due to schools' transition to emergency remote teaching, the heterogeneity of decisions in schools regarding the role of pre-service teachers during the new learning context, and difficulties in identifying and evaluating the practices or behaviors of pre-service teachers in virtual or remote environments.

Yes, we made some adjustments to our internal regulations, for instance. [. . .] because we had to consider which learning objectives would be covered, how we were going to modify the activities to comply with the objectives for each practicum [. . .] We had to analyze [the plans for] each practicum, review which objectives would be met, how they would be met, in which percentage, and modify all things related to their regulations [. . .] these decisions are usually taken by us, the practicum coordinator team. There are various elements, for instance [. . .] we add transitory articles about the lack of face-to-face activities in schools. (Practicum coordinator, Case 2)

In this way, the participation of teacher educators in collective decisions became more difficult across programs despite their resources.

5. Discussion

As previous studies have shown, the work of teacher educators changed during the COVID-19 pandemic, as they were forced to adapt their practices by incorporating online teaching methodologies [7–9]. However, the challenges associated with this new context did not end with the complex process of incorporating pedagogical innovations. The results of this study show that the context of the pandemic caused some inequity issues that were already present in teacher education to become visible, only they were more easily hidden when classes took place inside university campuses.

This study contributes to the expansion of the scant literature that highlighted material and psychological struggles regarding accessing learning among pre-service teachers during COVID-19 [41–45], including the responses of teacher educators towards these challenges using social justice lenses. This paper identifies diverse strategies used by teacher education programs to support student learning during the pandemic, which were associated with two conceptualizations of justice: distribution and recognition [89].

From a distributive perspective, teacher educators made efforts to solve material conditions that negatively impacted the access of students to emergency remote classes, providing equipment and internet access. All these efforts were crucial in maintaining communication with pre-service teachers and allowed the continuity of learning processes, despite material difficulties manifesting not only in Chile but also in countries such as Pakistan, Malaysia, United Arab Emirates, or the US, among others [41,64–66]. Additionally, this support allowed Chilean teacher educators to acknowledge the precarious or heterogeneous living conditions of their pre-service teachers. In this way, students' living conditions and resources became a salient aspect visibly influencing learning.

Additionally, reshaping the relationship between programs and communities as well as emphasizing emotional care were responses towards inequality expressing a recognition perspective. Previous studies also highlighted new challenges for teacher education collaboration through learning communities in this context, especially activities related to practicum experiences [61,62]. Similar to what we observed in Case 4, some studies have described positive consequences for school–university relationships as a result of the need to rethink teacher education practices and community partnerships during the pandemic [53,55–59]. These findings could expand on other research contributions which have taken a different approach to recognizing and valuing communities during this context. For example, Darolia and Kessler [33] reported how pre-service teachers have adopted social justice perspectives to different degrees by interviewing elementary students. However, these aspects were beyond the scope of this inquiry.

Additionally, as in previous studies, this research highlighted the relevance of care practices among teacher educators to respond to the emotional needs of pre-service teachers, strengthening their peer relationships, mental health, and well-being [43,65,66]. As in other parts of the globe, the emotional needs and demands of pre-service teachers were exacerbated during the pandemic. In Cases 3 and 4, we observed the great commitment of teacher educators to providing students with emotional support, even though this generated feelings of exhaustion among themselves due to the multiple demands they had to respond to. Despite difficulties, the pandemic context makes it evident to some teacher educators that their work cannot only focus on academic aspects but instead should put emotional aspects in the center. In educational systems like that in Chile, where there is still a division between the rational and emotional aspects of learning, bringing emotional care to the discussion at the university level is still considered disruptive.

Despite the efforts of teacher educators in this study to address inequality in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, we also observed that justice of participation for teacher educators was usually overlooked in this scenario. Few previous studies also delved into challenges in socioemotional aspects impacting the practice of teacher educators [11,12] or their difficulties in dealing with work overload and burnout during the pandemic [13]. Furthermore, similar to other studies, participants in this study developed practices to 'keep in touch', such as holding recurrent online meetings, phone conversations, and others, which worked as spaces where teacher educators could develop meaningful relationships with pre-service teachers [11]. However, in contrast to studies where this constant communication allowed teacher educators to support themselves while managing and preventing burnout and stress [12], some of our findings suggest this is not always the case, as highly recurrent meetings seemed to increase their feeling of work overload. While impacting their wellbeing, this situation also raised barriers for their participation in decision-making processes during the pandemic. These barriers were related to precarious working conditions

and/or a sense of urgency coupled with feelings of exhaustion as a result of emergency remote teaching.

These findings highlight the relevance of advancing social justice perspectives in teacher education, not only oriented to prepare its graduates to work in inequitable contexts, but also oriented to address inequities among pre-service teachers, their particular needs and characteristics, and decision-making processes inside the programs. The pandemic scenario has presented enormous challenges for education and brought painful losses in communities, but one potentially positive aspect regarding this context has been the possibility to show material impediments for learning access, the role of universities in transforming the precarious conditions in which some teacher educators worked and pre-service teachers studied, and the relevance of emotional support for learning. As we pointed out in the title of this paper, this invisible virus made inequity visible in teacher education. This research raises questions about how to remain vigilant regarding inequity issues in teacher education in the aftermath of the pandemic, despite all students coming back to university campuses, keeping inequalities visible and challenging them. Further research could delve into the sustainability of these responses or changes to teacher education and the new challenges regarding equity in the post-pandemic era.

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