



TEACHING PRACTICUM: AN INTERPLAY BETWEEN IDEAL AND REAL IN PRE-SERVICE TEACHER'S TRAINING

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Abstract: Teaching practicum has an essential contribution to the professional development of pre-service teachers. This study aimed to identify how the students enrolled in the Pedagogy of Preschool and Primary Education experienced the role of teaching practicum from the perspective of the theory learned during the courses and the reality in the educational institutions where they carried out the teaching practicum. Qualitative methodology was the choice to fit the purpose of the study with an embedded single case study research design, thus type 2 of a case study. The case was the teaching practicum, consisting of three groups of students in the PPPE academic program, second and third years, thus employing multiple units of analysis. The participants were 12 pre-service teachers chosen through purposive sampling from 53 students registered in the second and third academic years. Data collection methods comprised three FGDs and document analysis (16 pedagogical practice notebooks). Thematic coding was the option for data analysis after data was transcribed verbatim, conducted member checking, coded, grouped the codes into categories, and organized under themes. The themes revealed an interplay between theory and practice, ideal and real, regarding teaching practices.

Key words: teaching practicum, pre-service teachers, case study, Romania.

1. Introduction

The Pedagogy of preschool and primary education (PPPE) program aims to prepare students to become qualified preschool and primary education teachers. In Romania, the academic program aligns with the Bologna declaration and the National Education Law 1/2011. During PPPE educational program, students learn how to develop their professional skills regarding curriculum planning, instructional teaching, and evaluation methodology. This academic program emphasizes the importance of two components. First is educational development, which is essential in building the theoretical preparation of the students. Second is the professional development that creates the environment wherein students practice teaching methods, strategies, and techniques learned in theory under the mentors' guidance and receive feedback for improvement.

Teaching practicum is an essential academic requirement for future educators. By observing how other, more experienced teachers teach, planning the lessons, and receiving feedback to master teaching skills, pre-service teachers may develop the necessary competencies in teaching. Therefore, how teaching practicum occurs may positively or negatively affect pre-service teachers' professional development. In the PPPE curriculum or educational plan, the teaching practicum for preschool and primary school has an allocated number of ECTS (transferable study credits) each semester. Universities may opt for different versions, from having pedagogical practice for preschool as a separate course from the one for primary school or placing them together. The number of ECTS varies according to this option from 2 to 5 ECTS. For instance, in the university where the present study was conducted in the PPPE first year, students accomplish the preschool and primary school teaching practicum in both semesters but together as one class, each semester the class having allocated 2 ECTS. In the second and third academic years, students have the preschool and primary school teaching practicum as separate classes each semester, with the courses allocated 2 ECTS each semester.

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Universities are interested in signing collaboration protocols with preschools and primary schools, first interested and second willing to accept education students for teaching practicum, both for class observations and teaching. The universities must provide at least 30% of teaching practicum institutions for students' practice, and half must be outside the university (National Education Law, 1/2011). The requirement for these schools is to have preschool and primary school teachers as mentors for the pre-service teachers.

Teaching practicum course challenges pre-service teachers to apply to teach what they have learned during the academic training. Studies showed that some pre-service teachers experience anxiety regarding insufficient preparation for teaching, especially at the beginning of their teaching practicum (Novitasari & Murtafi'ah, 2022). Moreover, they faced difficulties employing teaching practicum during the COVID-19 pandemic (Alan & Sinoğlu-Günden, 2022; Tunçeli & Bayındır, 2022). Others reacted to how they perceived the effort and possible success regarding using technology in teaching (Ranellucci et al., 2020). The various situations influenced their motivation for learning and teaching (Jähne et al., 2022). Nevertheless, irrespective of the challenges, they were still willing to accomplish teaching practicum requirements (Margiyanti, 2022). One of the final goals of teaching practicum is to connect theory with practice to help pre-service teachers develop those teaching skills that place them in the role of successfully teaching a diversity of students (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Hascher & Hagenauer, 2016). In this process, the teachers selected to be role models positively influence this development when carefully chosen (Ronfeldt et al., 2020). Therefore, recruiting the best schools and mentors is essential (Clarke & Mena, 2020).

The present study aims to identify how the students enrolled in the PPPE academic program experienced the role of teaching practicum from the perspective of the theory learned in the courses and the reality in the educational institutions where they carried out the pedagogical practice. Education students form the target group in their second and third-year studies. From this group, 66% of students started their academic studies in October 2020 and remained in online learning until June 2021. They experience two semesters of teaching practicum in an online environment. The study has three main objectives. The first is identifying good classroom practices in theory taught in academic courses. The second is identifying and presenting innovative practices in classrooms that need exploration in future courses. Third, improving the teaching contents based on the participants' recommendations following the completion of the teaching practicum.

The research questions that guided this study are the following:

1. What are the good practices identified in the pedagogical practice, also found in the contents of the courses?
2. What are the good practices identified in pedagogical practice but unknown from the courses' contents?
3. What are the necessary improvements to correlate the theoretical contents with the practical ones within the Pedagogy of primary and preschool education academic programs?

2. Methodology

In the present study, qualitative research methodology was the choice to fit the purpose of the study with an embedded single case study research design, thus type 2 of a case study (Yin, 2018). The case was the teaching practicum, consisting of three groups of students in the PPPE academic program, second and third years, thus employing multiple units of analysis. The purpose of a case study is to respond to the how questions regarding the topic under investigation. The data, participants, and time are limited (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), thus creating the study's boundaries. The philosophical approach is Constructivism, which permits multiple interpretations of the phenomenon investigated during the study (Lincoln & Guba, 2013).

2. 1. Sampling and participants

The participants of this study were pre-service teachers from the Pedagogy of preschool and primary school education academic program from the second (PPPE II) and third (PPPE III) years of studies at a Southern Romanian university. The PPPE III class has 24 registered students, and the PPPE II class has 29 students. The Focus group discussion (FGD) 1 comprises four students in the third year of PPPE who attend the classes daily. The FGD2 consist of four students from PPPE third year who work as preschool and primary school teachers. Four students create the FGD3 in their second year in the PPPE academic program who are not working but attending classes daily. Purposeful sampling was the choice in selecting the participants, as the objective was to collect data from those able and willing to provide information regarding their teaching practicum experiences. Table 1 contains the profile of the participants. Noteworthy is the mention that the participants shared their experiences gained during the pedagogical practicum based on the previous school year (2021-2022). Therefore, their pedagogical practice occurred in their first respective second academic year.

Table 1. *Profile of the participants*

No.	Pseudonym	School year	Status	Age	FGD
1.	Miruna	3rd	Student/Unemployed	21	FGD1
2.	Carolina	3rd	Student/Unemployed	20	FGD1
3.	Sarah	3rd	Student/Unemployed	21	FGD1
4.	Kate	3rd	Student/Unemployed	21	FGD1
5.	Anastasia	3rd	Student/Primary school teacher	33	FGD2
6.	Loren	3rd	Student/Primary school teacher	39	FGD2
7.	Clarice	3rd	Student/Preschool teacher	34	FGD2
8.	Sefora	3rd	Student/Preschool teacher	25	FGD2
9.	Katy	2nd	Student/Unemployed	19	FGD3
10.	Silvia	2nd	Student/Unemployed	20	FGD3
11.	Heidi	2nd	Student/Unemployed	20	FGD3
12.	Irene	2nd	Student/Unemployed	20	FGD3

2. 2. Data collection

Data collection methods consisted of three FGDs conducted with the three groups of participants. The second data collection was document analysis, with researchers analyzing 16 pedagogical practice notebooks of students from the second and third years of PPPE for both preschool and primary school practice. In Table 2, we present a matrix to show how the research questions led to deciding on data collection methods so the question to receive an informed response.

Table 2. *Triangulation matrix for data collection*

Research questions	Focus group	Documents	Literature review
1. What are the good practices identified in the pedagogical practice, also found in the contents of the courses?	✓	✓	✓
2. What are the good practices identified in pedagogical practice but unknown from the courses' contents?	✓	✓	✓
3. What are the necessary improvements to correlate the theoretical contents with the practical ones within the Pedagogy of primary and preschool education academic programs?	✓	✓	✓

The six FGDs questions are developed based on research questions. Table 3 illustrates the two types of questions to understand better how the research questions received answers during FGDs.

Table 3. *Focus group questions*

Research questions	Focus group
1. What are the good practices identified in the pedagogical practice, also found in the contents of the courses?	1. From your experience during teaching practice, what are the practices encountered in classrooms/groups that you classify as good practices and that you knew from what you learned in the courses? 2. How are these similar or different from what you knew? Were they applied, as you know them?
2. What are the good practices identified in pedagogical practice but unknown from the courses' contents?	3. What classroom/group practices do you classify as good that you did NOT know from what you learned in the courses? 4. How did you perceive these practices? Will you apply them in your profession? Why yes or why not?
3. What are the necessary improvements to correlate the theoretical contents with the practical ones within the Pedagogy of primary and preschool education academic programs?	5. What are those aspects that you would have liked to know and that you recommend introducing in specific courses? Give examples. 6. What other recommendations do you have to improve our training as educators/teachers from the perspective of pedagogical practice and the contents taught in the courses?

2. 3. Data analysis

After collecting data, the researchers transcribed the data verbatim and sent the documents to the participants for member checking. After the participants confirmed the accuracy of the transcription, the researchers coded the FGDs. Finally, they grouped the codes into categories and organized them under themes. Therefore, thematic coding was the option for data analysis (Saldaña, 2016). The aim was to identify the main recurring themes from the participants' experiences.

2. 4. Trustworthiness and ethical considerations

To ensure the study's trustworthiness, the researchers involved triangulation of data and researchers, along with member-checking, providing a thick and rich description of the study process and results (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). For ethical considerations, first, the researchers informed the participants about the purpose of the study and provided the necessary details about the study. Then, they found that they were free to decide whether to participate and received a pseudonym to hide their identity during the presentation of the findings. Finally, the participants signed an informed consent form regarding their participation.

3. Findings of the study

Following thematic coding (Saldaña, 2016), the findings of this research are presented based on the research questions. Comments from FGDs, from all three groups (FGD1, FGD2, FGD3) and verbatim quotations from participants accompany the results. Each participant received a pseudonym to ensure anonymity. Information from document analysis is inserted along the findings' sections.

For research question 1, *What are the good practices identified in the pedagogical practice, also found in the contents of the courses?* the themes are (a) values leading to inclusion and (b) to do or not to do. The findings for all three FGDs are similar, thus, presented together.

3. 1. Theme 1: Values leading to inclusion

The participants of this study accomplished their teaching practicum in private and public educational institutions. In private institutions, they noticed as a good practice the lesson for character development which included a particular value each week, taught through a story, a song, and an interactive activity. In all three FGDs, this moment of the day was emphasized. "Values were transmitted, other stories were used or more through the teacher's model, and children helped each

other; it depends a lot on the atmosphere created by the teaching staff during the lesson" (FGD3, Silvia). Clarice and Loren did their teaching practicum in two different schools, one public school and one private school. Still, both observed similar practices.

What impressed me was the personal development activities in the morning meeting. First, although it was a public school, the children had morning prayer and said the Our Father together, which was interesting. Then, repeating it together, they mastered it. (FGD2, Clarice)

In primary education, I met a character education class. It is a whole hour dedicated to integrating values through a story. Then, there are discussions, and after that, they have a *Did you know?* activity; follows a song on the chosen theme. And finally, physical activity with a few minutes of physical education and prayer. (FGD2, Loren)

In this teaching model, children were in the center of teaching, developing good relationships, using appreciative words at the beginning of activities, and being active in an inclusive environment wherein pupils with diverse family, ethnic, and religious backgrounds felt accepted and valued. "I liked that there was no difference between the children, regardless of whether they came from different families or religions; they were all, how can I tell you? They treated all children the same way" (FGD1, Sarah). Katy noticed a similar attitude regarding inclusive education: "At the kindergarten, I went to, there was a child from Ukraine who was integrated among the children, and they even teamed up with him" (FGD3, Katy). The participants could see that what they have learned during their classes is in the reality of the schools: "In one way or another, in our classes, teachers emphasize the relationship between students" (FGD1, Kate). The conclusion made them feel that the interplay between ideal and reality is balanced.

3. 2. Theme 2: To do or not to do

Some participants emphasized the application of lesson phases, positive interactions, and morning meetings in primary school as being in line with what they have learned during the courses, as well as the lessons for character development and the values transmitted. "I have seen in practice that the professor follows the stages of the lesson very well, the morning meeting for the preparatory and first class, and uses various methods: both traditional and modern, on all the occasions I attended" (FGD2, Anastasia). For kindergarten, the routines, transitions, centers, and freely chosen activities took place as they expected, which encouraged them that what they have learned is found in practice. These mentions are also in the pedagogical practice notebooks or portfolios.

Other participants experienced, in different class observations, a need for more application of what they have learned during their classes regarding the lesson stages. Nevertheless, it was also a straightforward application of them and applying activities by groups too.

There were also schools where I found myself with the observation sheet in front of me and nothing to write. Somehow there was an activity, but not what we learned. It was different, and it was hard for me. Sometimes I even wanted to invent myself or what I would have thought of doing. Seeing both good practice and differences helped me realize how important it is to stick to the stages, and each one is important. (FGD1, Miruna)

I was attending a communication class in Romanian, and it was the reading lesson of a narrative text. So I was listening and observing, and in my mind, I was saying, wow, this is what I did last week in class, step by step. Furthermore, it helped me a lot because I could see a clear example of what the teacher presented to us. (FGD1, Sarah)

Most of the learned stages of the activities were followed entirely in preschools, and the participants from all three FGDs appreciated these aspects. However, the dominant teaching style in primary school was the traditional one. Nevertheless, modern teaching strategies and working by groups were applied in some schools:

I liked that they often worked in groups. When I went to practice, I noticed they already knew how to work in groups. They did not learn then because we came. So when they heard that they would work in groups immediately grouped and did what they had to do. (FGD3, Heidi)

For research question 2, *What are the good practices identified in pedagogical practice but unknown from the courses' contents?* two themes emerged: (a) unknown good practices and (b) applied good practices. The findings from all the FGDs are presented together; still, the participants who work as preschool or primary school teachers' responses are grouped for the second part of theme 4, as they applied some good practices learned during their practice.

3. 3. Theme 3: Unknown good practices

The participants appreciated some activities observed during their practice and were unknown from their classes. Regarding their responses was noticed that the participants of the FGD 3, students in the PPPE second year (2022-2023 school year) during data collection, shared their practice experience from the first academic year (2021-2022 school year). Therefore, some classes still needed to be taken. As a result, we could identify differences in their responses regarding unknown good teaching practices. For instance, the participants noticed that in one class, the teacher daily prepared a special working sheet for a pupil with special education needs. Therefore, for them was an unknown practice as they will have the Inclusive education class in the second semester of the second school year.

One teacher had a child with special needs in her class, and the lady made separate sheets for him daily. He was also in the 4th grade but did not keep up with the other students. She always worked with him, having separate working sheets, and the psychologist also came to assist him. I liked that he was involved in different activities with his colleagues, but he also had individual sheets for his level. (FGD3, Silvia)

Some participants could not resist and emphasize the different approaches of the educators in the classes they went to for observations. Some teachers showed them how to complete each activity's pedagogical practice notebook rubrics. Others rejected their request mentioning that they should know from the school all these aspects. Students learned the lesson of how to do and how not to do when they are teachers accepting for class observations other beginners: "We can learn that when we will be educators or teachers to give a helping hand to the student or anyone who needs it, to guide them, because it is not known what is behind the experience" (FGD3, Heidi).

Regarding documents, a teacher must fill in or use some other unknown good practices in their profession. For example, the questionnaire to know pupils from the class was applied to parents at the beginning of the school year (FGD2, Sefora). Another area for improvement was how to fill in the grade book. Anastasia shared her experience:

I discovered only in practice how to complete a grade book. First, the teacher showed me what color they complement and explained that it differs from one school to another, something I did not get to see at college. Then, she showed me how to note grades and calculate the final average. (FGD2, Anastasia)

As the pre-service teachers attended the pedagogical practicum in different schools, some did not meet unknown teaching practices, as Sarah mentioned: "I did not meet other practices not experimented during our classes" (FGD1, Sarah). Nevertheless, on the other hand, Miruna saw a class practice learned during the courses extended to the school level when she went to teaching practicum:

As we also have a social person in our class, it was so at a school level. A student made sure that all his colleagues were in the classroom for the lessons, but he also had to list his colleagues' complaints when needed. Pupils learned they are responsible for their actions and that how they behave during breaks, in class, and even when they leave will influence their learning and that of their peers. (FGD1, Miruna)

3. 4. Theme 4: Applied good practices

From all the good practices met during their teaching practicum, the participants mentioned the desire to apply those with a positive influence on pupils' learning and active engagement in their future teaching. For example, taking attendance using cards and not reading the pupils' names is more creative and time-saving. In addition, organizing a space where the unfinished worksheets are to be placed in order and completed at another time may help pupils understand the second chance option. Choosing a theme song for each week was another good practice to take in their profession, together

with teaching pupils that when a specific song is playing, the procedure is that they have to put the toys and other materials in their place.

The participants who already work as preschool and primary school teachers (FGD 2) applied in their classes the questionnaire to learn more about their pupils and the behavioral evaluation form to inform the parent about pupils' behavior weekly. Some implemented a few classroom management procedures identified in practice and during the classes regarding verbal encouragement of positive behavior. Others implemented the story box—to motivate pupils to read and the forgiveness corner—where pupils go to discuss issues; they discuss, clarify the problems, and ask for forgiveness. Teachers do not intervene as they learn how to manage conflictual situations. One participant mentioned the 100 exemplary work activity implementation—having 100 hearts on the wall, and whenever pupils do good work, they go to the wall and paint a heart. It is a motivating activity for pupils, and the teacher that implemented it is grateful for this idea learned during her practice.

For research question 3, *What are the necessary improvements to correlate the theoretical contents with the practical ones within the Pedagogy of primary and preschool education academic programs?* emerging theme was dreaming of achieving a higher potential.

3. 5. Theme 5: Dreaming of achieving a higher potential

The first improvement mentioned by the participants was the character development lesson that should be implemented in all classes. When the class starts by presenting a value, students prepare for the content organized for learning.

A second recommendation was to include more required hours for practice in the first academic year and a pedagogical practicum in special schools so that students would learn how to work with pupils with special needs. In theory, what should be done looks acceptable, but in practice, there is a fear of students not knowing what to do. As Katy mentioned, “I have learned many theories on children with special educational needs or other disabilities. First, however, the university should introduce a course or practice in some special schools” (FGD3, Katy). Carolina emphasized that students are afraid of not knowing how to teach pupils with special needs.

I am afraid that my actions will hurt or confuse him. Moreover, we should do at least a few hours of practice at a special school to see concretely, on the ground, how those children behave. In theory, it is easy to say, but it is different when we go there and are in front of them. (FGD1, Carolina)

Students' orientation regarding teaching practicum needs careful attention. The more detailed the orientation, the best results and less stress pre-service teachers will face. There is no substantial theoretical foundation in the first year of the studies; students struggle to understand what they should observe, write in their observation sheets, or even identify the lesson's phases. Their pedagogical practice notebooks emphasized this lack of sufficient knowledge regarding what to expect from teaching practicum. In their first year of practicum, the participants missed filling in some rubrics, filled them superficially, or even mistaken the rubrics regarding lesson phases. “At a moment, it was difficult to identify the type of activity the teacher did” (FGD3, Irene). The same challenge was for those from the second year as they completed the first year of studies in an online environment.

In the first year, we received practice notebooks to fill in, but we needed to know what a lesson or activity project was. Only in the second year did we find out what they were, and I realized that certain things I wrote in the first year in the practice notebook were inappropriate. (FGD3, Silvia)

The practice notebooks were presented, and we were told we would have to attend the classes. However, I expected something more. Some elements that we need to pay more attention to should be emphasized. In the practice notebook, they are more generic and not specific. So, what exactly should I be looking for when attending classes during pedagogical practice? (FGD1, Kate)

For those already working in education, the preoccupation was about the documents they must draw up, the reports, and the individual sheets. They would have liked to meet them more often during the

courses and were also interested in organizing a meeting or even events such as Christmas cantata, mother's day celebrations, and others not often discussed in the classes. Participants mentioned the administrative aspects related to their job description. Anastasia recommended:

I want to know more about the teachers' council because I am working now. I came across this job and am trying to figure out the duties. I had to read many documents. In addition, I had to learn from my colleagues what the commissions are named because they come with abbreviated names, and I had to learn more about each commission's duties. (FGD2, Anastasia)

Knowing more about how to plan for the small group during the accommodation period in kindergarten is essential; student participants would like to learn more about this. Another aspect of being improved is knowing more about parental counseling. It is an area in which students would have liked to learn more from teachers with more experience. Some questions surfaced. What should I do when I meet the parents? What should I talk to them about? How should be our attitude and presence? "It was difficult for me at the first consultation when I did not know the parent or child. So, what to say? Instead, I asked, I asked for more details about the child" (FGD2, Loren).

More micro-teaching sessions for each course would help. Participants from FGD1 and FGD3 mentioned the need to include micro-teaching sessions for each course. Irene shared her experience: "In the second year, we have many micro-teachings at school, but they seem more beneficial to me in class" (FGD3, Irene). As some theoretical aspects are not yet assimilated in the first year was recommended to introduce not micro-teaching sessions but character development lessons which are "almost like a micro-teaching, you think about and use a method, interactive activities" (FGD1, Miruna). Carolina confessed her past comment about micro-teaching:

Just on the practice side, even more micro-teaching in classes would help. The first time I heard about them, I grumbled a lot, but I realized that they help because we get used to them. First to teach in front of colleagues and then in class. It is easier for us to use certain words and expressions. It is much more manageable. (FGD1, Carolina)

Interesting to note that participants from the second FGD did not mention micro-teaching as a need. As they were already working as preschool and primary school teachers, teaching daily, their focus was more on other aspects related to documents, commissions, and professional responsibilities from their job description. They also emphasized the importance of sharing good practices from their schools with other educators regarding how to prepare teaching and administrative documents and decide on textbooks when the schools do not impose them. They recommended the inclusion of some requirements during their classes that help them put together portfolio documents that may help them in their profession.

As final recommendations, the participants included the need to learn how to teach geography and history as they have to teach in the schools they do teaching practicum during the second year of their studies. However, the didactics for geography and history come in the third year of their studies. Again, the FGD 1 and FGD3 participants had this recommendation. Those participants from FGD2 who are already teachers do not feel this need.

4. Discussion

This study showed that connecting theory with practice in the PPPE academic program is a desideratum of teaching practicum. In line with these findings, studies emphasized the importance of this connection for pre-service professional preparation (Darling-Hammond, 2017) and practical training of pre-service teachers for diverse teaching situations (Petre, 2022c). Furthermore, the theory learned during the classes represents the bank account from where teachers supplement their teaching resources. Therefore, taking care of this database, pre-service teachers will have resources for their daily teaching regarding needed knowledge (Hascher & Hagenauer, 2016) and teaching professional skills (Knight, 2016; Petre, 2021b).

One significant result of this study highlighted the theoretical and practical influence of implementing values in teaching for pupils' character development. As a result, pre-service teachers prepare for a

balanced social and professional life (Petre, 2022a) and can transmit values to their pupils (Harvey, 2019; Petre, 2017; Petre & Puiu, 2021), thus renewing the teaching experiences for ennobling people (Cucuș, 2014). Furthermore, when values are part of teaching, an inclusive learning environment develops and a feeling of togetherness in a supportive learning environment (Petre, 2021a; 2021b; Taylor, 2017).

Learning about new teaching practices during teaching practicum showed pre-service teachers that their academic program is sequential in adding new learning content and teaching methods every year. The desire to transfer to their classrooms some of the teaching practices met during their academic training is in line with research that emphasizes the influence of the training during classes (Petre & Puiu, 2021) or teaching practicum as a factor in developing pre-service teachers' autonomy (Jähne et al., 2022). As a result, transferring knowledge and skills in professional activity occurs. When observing other teachers' teaching methods, pre-service teachers may identify what they would like to transfer to their teaching and what not. This process involves critical thinking and decision-making, competencies intended to develop during their academic training (Petre, 2021b; Senn et al., 2015).

When motivated adequately during academic training and teaching practicum, pre-service teachers develop the desire for more knowledge and better teaching skills so that pupils, irrespective of their physical, emotional, behavioral, or psychical state, will achieve their highest potential. Thus, special training on approaching pupils with different needs will be beneficial (Bochiș et al., 2021; Petre et al., 2019). Therefore, teaching practicum in schools for pupils with special educational needs will be necessary even though pre-service teachers do not prepare professionally for special schools. Another desire of the participants is related to better training on approaching teaching practicum from observation, filling in the documents, organizing Christmas or mothers' celebrations, or understanding the job description requirements, thus preparing for administrative aspects of their profession. The expectations in the teaching profession must be understood and fulfilled (Clarke & Mena, 2020). Nevertheless, personal openness has an essential role in the overall approach during teaching practicum (Jähne et al., 2022) and the training that takes place during the courses (Petre, 2022a). An essential aspect is to continue evaluating what and how it is taught to continuously improve teaching practices and student learning (Petre, 2022b).

5. Conclusions

Teaching practicum has an essential contribution to the professional development of pre-service teachers. How knowledge and skills developed during the courses are linked to the practice is essential. When pre-service teachers know what is expected from them from the start, they are open and motivated to accomplish the teaching practicum requirements on high standards. However, they feel overwhelmed when the orientation for teaching practicum does not respond to their questions. This study aimed to identify how the students enrolled in the PPPE academic program experienced the role of teaching practicum from the perspective of the theory learned in the courses and the reality in the educational institutions where they carried out the pedagogical practice. They identified an interplay between theory and practice, ideal and real, regarding teaching practices. However, they understood that their experiences during the teaching practicum relate to their involvement and effort for understanding, applying, and evaluating what is done in teaching from the courses to the teaching practicum and then transferring it to the classrooms.

The study used a qualitative research methodology that did not aim to generalize the findings. However, the study may be replicated in different contexts with the necessary contextual adaptation, knowing that the transferability is in the reader's hands in qualitative research. For further studies, we recommend implementing the participants' recommendations and testing the perceptions of pre-service teachers on teaching practicum effectiveness on their academic and professional preparation through quantitative research.

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