

Teaching English to Very Young Learners: Insights from Pre-Service Teachers in Ecuador

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INTRODUCTION & AIM

Practicum has been highlighted as of paramount importance and mandatory in teacher education, as well as pre-service teachers' readiness before involvement in a real teaching context. It provides a strong base for developing practical and reflective skills for a successful teaching career (Reiban et al., 2024). This research exploration aims to explore the emotional, pedagogical, and professional experiences of pre-service teachers during their practicum teaching very young learners.

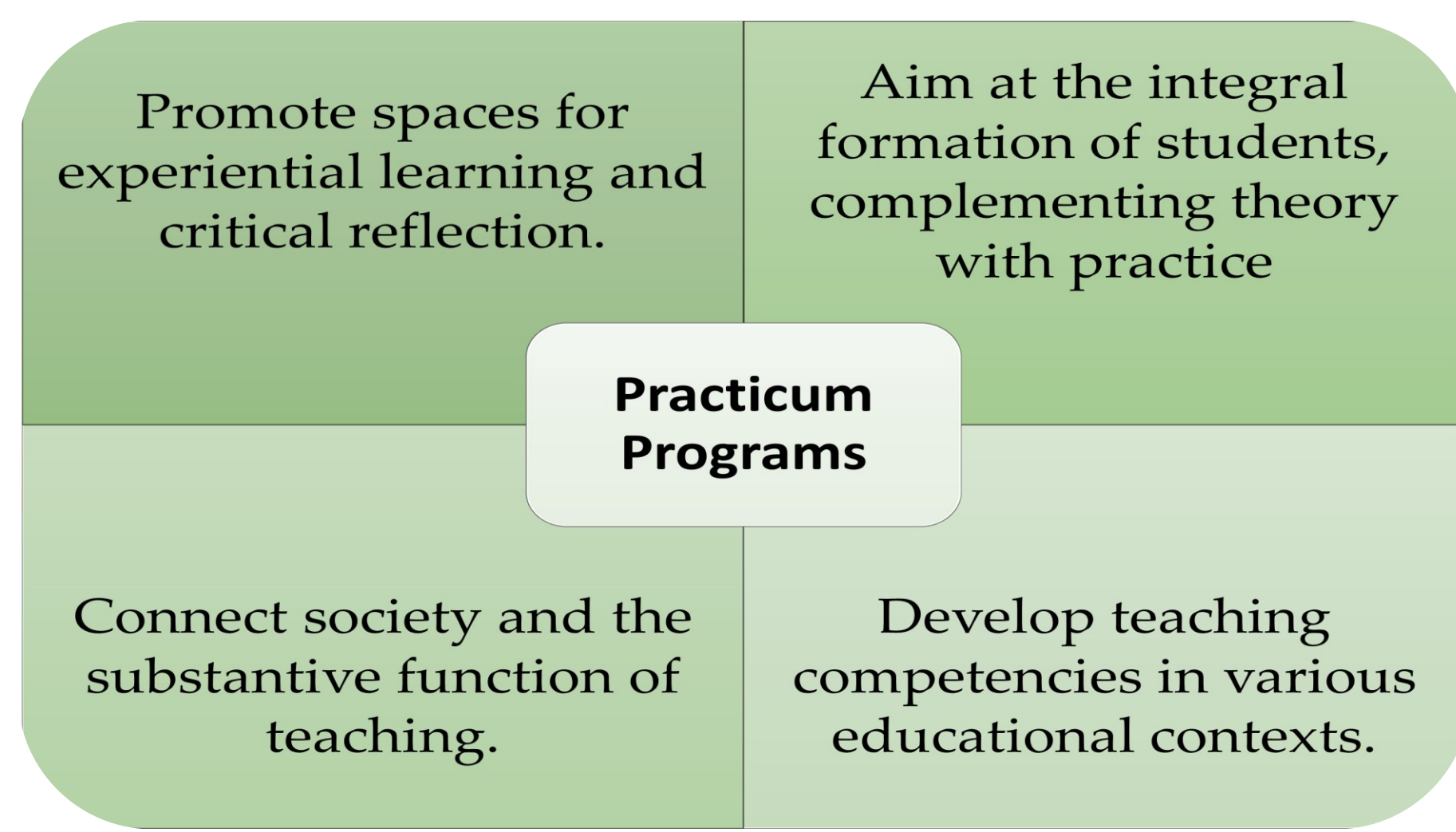


Figure 1. Aims of Practicum in Ecuadorian universities

METHOD

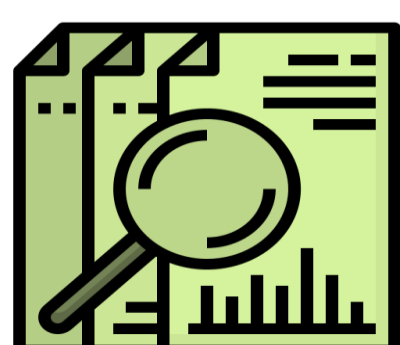
This case study was conducted as part of a practicum program organized by an Ecuadorian public university to teach English in public kindergartens in Ecuador. Three sixth-semester pre-service teachers with no prior experience teaching young learners voluntarily participated in the study. to gain in-depth insights into their experiences during the practicum. All were Ecuadorian and had B2-level English proficiency.



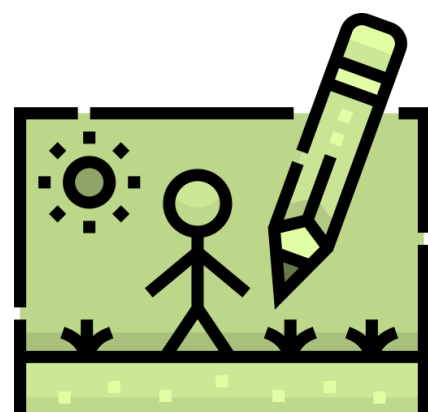
A multi-method design was adopted to provide rich and triangulated data.



Written narratives to reflect on perceptions throughout the practicum.



Lesson plans and journals of activities were collected at the end of the practicum.



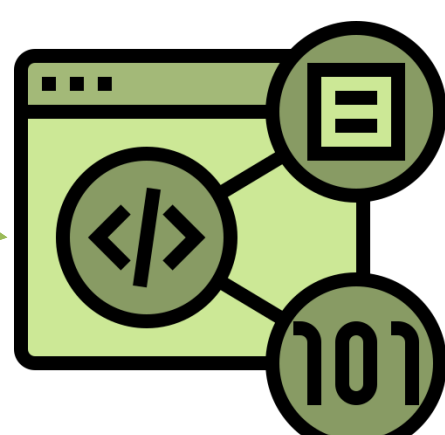
Visual narratives to externalize significant experience.



Semi-structured interviews to explore participants' challenges and reflections.

Data were analyzed using

- Thematic coding
- Visual narratives were examined through visual content analysis.



RESULTS & DISCUSSION



Figure 2. The 6-stage Cyclical Transformation Model

- Pre-service teachers entered the practicum with anxieties and beliefs that shaped their teaching (Reynolds et al., 2021). Limited classroom exposure also increased insecurity and influenced pedagogical decisions,
- Participants faced challenges related to classroom management and responding to learners' emotional and academic needs, revealing a gap between theoretical preparation and authentic teaching demands.
- Teachers shifted from rigid lesson delivery to more flexible and child-centered practices, which reflected a deeper understanding of young learners' developmental needs and the value of experiential learning.
- Emotional connections play a crucial role in fostering meaningful learning environments, as supportive classroom relationships not only enhance student engagement but also strengthen teacher confidence.
- Overcoming early struggles allowed novice teachers to reconstruct their professional identities and strengthen their commitment to teaching, highlighting the positive impact of successful teaching experiences on teachers' emotions and professional growth.

CONCLUSION

This case study reports how emotional intelligence & psychological readiness training affect initial experiences in real classroom environments. However, resilient students overcome challenges and transform practice at the same time they grow confidently in their profession (Barcelos & Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2018). Although content knowledge addresses superficial needs, there is an urgent need for stronger school orientation, mentoring, and theory-practice connections that foster confidence, preparedness, and commitment to self-directed professional development.

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