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## Pre-service Teaching Practicum in Ecuador: An Assessment from the Educational Actors' Perspective

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**Abstract.** This study examines the implementation and evaluation of the new pre-service teachers' teaching practicum in Ecuador at the National University of Education (UNAE). The primary objective was to investigate the perceptions of students, teachers, and administrators from host schools regarding the impact of the teaching practicum in these institutions. Quantitative and qualitative analyses were integrated through surveys and focus groups using a mixed-methods approach. This allowed the researchers to cover a broad spectrum of perceptions from different stakeholders. The collected data included responses from 245 teachers and 2,605 students, which allowed researchers to assess both the work practices and the interaction with the pre-service teachers. Focus groups with 45 teachers facilitated an in-depth analysis of the impact and areas that needed improvement. Additionally, survey results from 2020 to 2022 were reviewed to determine the benefits and overall effect of the teaching practicum. The results generally highlight a positive perception of the teaching practicum, emphasizing their importance in enriching the educational experience and pointing out areas for improvement to strengthen the pre-service teachers' pedagogical competencies so that they can face specific contextual challenges. The study underscores the relevance of these practices in developing teaching skills and their essential contribution to continuous school improvement.

**Keywords:** professional development; pre-service teachers; teaching practicum; theory – practice; university and society

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## 1. Introduction

The insertion of teaching practicum in the curriculum of undergraduate education programs is fundamental since it allows for the practical articulation of theoretical knowledge acquired at university and its execution in real educational environments. This strategic fusion enables pre-service teachers to have a critical and informed reflection on educational paradigms. It also allows them to apply educational theories to the intricate realities and challenges that characterize educational institutions (Davini, 2015; Latorre, 2006; Pruzzo, 2013). This integrative approach is essential to the training process, expanding the students' academic horizons and enhancing their ability to adapt and navigate complex educational contexts. By fostering an interaction between theory and practice, a solid foundation is established for the cultivation of a teaching practicum which is both reflective and adaptive (Fullan et al., 2015). This process is crucial for future teachers who need to be equipped with the necessary tools to respond dynamically to the different demands and constant changes that characterize the education sector.

In this connection, the flow of reciprocity between universities and society is stimulated by the establishment of teaching practicum. This bidirectional relationship gives higher education institutions a crucial role in the dynamics of social redistribution, considering them as an essential public good for promoting development (Olsson et al., 2021; Ramírez Gallegos, 2010). Through a reflective praxis that integrates teaching, research, and community engagement, universities can induce a significant transformation in social spheres, advocating for a constant enrichment of educational quality and, consequently, in the social context. This praxeological perspective features the significance of a university education committed to the prevailing social reality and dedicated to establishing positive changes within the community (Tilbury, 2012).

In Ecuador, the teaching practicum constitutes an essential component of the curriculum, stipulating a minimum of 240 hours of practical experience as an integral part of their academic training, as mandated by state regulatory bodies (CES, 2022). Particularly in undergraduate education programs, universities design and coordinate the teaching practicum in various socio-educational contexts. These programs are implemented in public, private and co-funded institutions and cover pre-primary, primary, and secondary education. It also includes non-formal education environments. The primary purpose of these practices in the educational sector is to form highly qualified teachers, who, through the recognition and direct interaction with the specific needs and challenges of the host institutions, develop competencies and relevant skills for their future teaching performance (Sanjurjo, 2002).

In the Ecuadorian context, the National University of Education (UNAE) emerges with the mission of revitalizing the National Education System by forming professionals capable of instilling significant transformations. This university offers different undergraduate programs with distinctive characteristics and curricular structures adapted to their respective professional areas. However, and

despite these differences, all programs include teaching practicum and community service.

Additionally, UNAE promotes a transformative educational paradigm aiming to enrich the knowledge and competencies of teachers of public educational institutions of the country. This commitment is operationalized through a model of teaching practicum that allows pre-service teachers to engage actively in real educational contexts. By integrating in the school's day-to-day life, future teachers apply and contextualize their theoretical knowledge and at the same time, promote their continuous professional development through the implementation of innovative pedagogical strategies and research (Creamer, 2010; Reiban, 2023).

The teaching practicum establishes a link between theory and praxis, in which pre-service teachers benefit from an authentic immersion in real socio-educational contexts. It also allows host educational institutions to become agents of change. In the host institutions, UNAE students provide practical solutions and improvement strategies that promote collaborative learning environments, benefiting pre-service and in-service teachers (UNAE, 2016). In this way, the university consolidates its role as an incubator of a new generation of educators ready to face the challenges of the educational system.

In this vein, this study aims to assess and to deepen the understanding of the teaching practicum implemented by UNAE in different educational institutions. The main objective of this study is to examine how stakeholders value the teaching practicum. On the other hand, assessing teaching practicum seeks to strengthen the initial teacher formation and measure its impact on the educational ecosystem. This study also aims to identify areas of improvement and opportunities for pedagogical innovation that are aligned with the current needs and challenges of Ecuadorian education, which this approach will provide.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 University and Society: A Bidirectional Contribution**

In the contemporary context, where social and economic challenges demand innovative solutions, universities play a crucial role in promoting progress through their dual role as formers of future professionals and epicenters of innovation (Tilbury, 2012). The capacity of these institutions to generate applied research extends their influence beyond university campuses, directly impacting the community and promoting more inclusive development (Alonso et al., 2022; Olsson et al., 2021).

In this sense, research emerges as a fundamental engine for developing knowledge-based societies, promoting innovation, economic growth and resolving social problems. Additionally, the university contributes to the training of critical individuals and plays a key role in creating and disseminating knowledge that benefits society (Reiban & Jiménez, 2023; Rojas, 2011; Strauf & Scherer, 2008). Also, through community outreach programs, Latin American universities fulfill their social commitment and promote an education that

integrates society's needs and form active citizens in their socioeconomic development (Suárez & Tellez, 2021).

In Ecuador, the bidirectional interaction between universities and society is crucial to improve their quality and ensure that higher education responds to the community's real needs, enhancing social development through knowledge exchange (Moscoso et al., 2023). This dynamic collaboration is the cornerstone in constructing fairer, more resilient and sustainable societies (ECLAC, 2022; Ortiz-Riaga & Morales-Rubiano, 2011).

## **2.2. The Teaching Practicum in Pre-Service Education**

The practicum in pre-service teacher education is a component that links the theoretical foundations of education and its application in the pedagogical reality. It also emphasizes the importance of experiential-reflective learning. The teaching practicum challenges students to navigate complex situations and fosters proactive learning, preparing them to face the educational challenges of the 21st century. For Pérez (2010), it is imperative to go beyond the traditional division between theory and practice, promoting a pre-service teacher education that prioritizes reflection and criticism over the repetition of established techniques. This holistic approach ensures that teaching competencies are built on a solid foundation of theoretical knowledge that is innovatively integrated and applied in the practical context.

In this sense, teaching practicum experience allows future educators to immerse themselves in natural teaching environments, offering them an invaluable platform to develop critical professional competencies and reflective skills (González Sanmamed & Fuentes Abeledo, 2011; Latorre, 2006). This immersion process facilitates the acquisition of professional knowledge and socialization in the teaching culture. It also promotes the integration of personal experiences with academic formation. This contributes significantly to the pre-service teachers' professional growth. It also highlights the importance of an education that harmonizes prior knowledge with new theoretical and practical learning during their teaching practicum.

The integration of the teaching practicum into the university curriculum and the promotion of the development of practical competencies are fundamental for pre-service teachers' formation (Zabalza, 2011). This curricular cohesion allows future teachers to learn how to apply educational theories in authentic contexts and to be prepared to face constant challenges. Furthermore, creating networks and learning communities is a crucial component that promotes collaboration and enriches the educational process.

Finally, it is essential to highlight that teaching practicum emphasizes the significance of systematizing practices in pre-service education by adopting an emancipatory approach. In this sense, it is necessary to create guidelines like participatory action research to promote a critical and transformative education (Bonafé, 2010; Muhammad et al., 2024). This process facilitates the collective generation of knowledge, and educators and students are empowered to question

and transcend oppressive structures, allowing pre-service teachers to propose profound and substantial changes within the educational system. The teaching practicum, also, redefines the learning process and places the academic community at the center of a movement towards transformative education.

### **2.3 Functions of Host Schools in Teaching Practicum**

In pre-service education, collaboration between schools and universities creates environments that foster experiential learning, highlighted in the literature (Tejada & Ruiz, 2013). This integration seeks students' exposure to educational experiences that promote a critical attitude toward professional uncertainty. Furthermore, the personalized tutorial guidance, which involves shared mentoring between the school teachers at the host institution and the teaching practicum professor from the university, is crucial for the practical-theoretical development of future teachers, emphasizing research, action, and reflection as critical components of learning (Pérez, 2010).

The roles assigned to the people involved during the practicum require a collaborative effort that enriches learning, transcends deontological limits, and promotes a joint construction of knowledge (Mendoza-Lira & Covarrubias-Apablaza, 2014). The university professors in charge of guiding and supervising the educational process, and the staff in the host schools offer direct guidance to pre-service teachers. This guidance plays a central function in the academic process. Thus, pre-service teachers overcome conflicts and achieve educational progress in academic, professional, and personal aspects.

In this line, tutoring during the practicum plays a fundamental role, where the university professor stimulates students' reflection around practice and learning, facilitating the connection between research theories and practical experiences (Pérez, 2010). On the other hand, meaningful learning experiences are created by the schoolteachers in the host schools, demonstrating methodological alternatives and encouraging reflection on teaching (Melgarejo et al., 2014). This duality of roles guarantees that students acquire skills and develop professional maturity.

Students at the host schools, are responsible for linking theory with practice and facing real challenges, which allows them to critically evaluate and develop their teaching competencies (Barceló & Ruiz-Corbella, 2015). Assuming responsibilities in the host schools prepares pre-service teachers to manage and execute educational programs autonomously, emphasizing the importance of a personal commitment in their professional formation.

## **3. Research Design and Methodology**

The study focuses on deepening the understanding and evaluating the teaching practicum implemented by UNAE. It also aims to analyze how teaching practicum is viewed from the perspectives of various stakeholders, including students and directors from the host schools and practicum teachers (professors and school teachers). To achieve this, a mixed-methods approach was adopted, combining quantitative and qualitative methods to capture the heterogeneity of the experiences and perceptions of the actors involved (Creswell, 2009).

Using a structured questionnaire with three questions, data was collected from teachers who worked with the pre-service students in the host schools. This questionnaire included closed-ended items and Likert scales and was administered to 275 teachers. Furthermore, 45 teachers participated in focus group discussions. These teachers were divided into seven groups based on the undergraduate programs offered by UNAE. This arrangement facilitated a detailed exploration of the perceptions, impact, and areas for improvement.

Two questionnaires adapted to two different age ranges were designed and administered to students from the host schools. The first group was comprised of children from 3 to 7 years old. These students answered the three questions using emoticons. These questions aimed to evaluate their level of satisfaction with the classes taught by the pre-service teachers. The second group comprised students from 8 to 17 years old. They answered three questions to evaluate their interactions with the pre-service students, the quality of the pedagogical support received, and the educational resources' effectiveness. A total of 2,605 valid responses were collected, with 1,831 corresponding to the younger age group and 774 to the older age group. It is crucial to emphasize that the study strictly adhered to the ethical principles of research, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity for all participants. The participating schoolteachers voluntarily provided their informed consent, while for underage students, assents were duly obtained and approved by their legal guardians.

Additionally, an analysis of the existing data from the host school directors was carried out. This data corresponded to the academic period from 2020 to 2022. It specifically included the directors' perceptions of the benefits and the overall impact of the teaching practicum carried out at their respective schools. The quantitative was analyzed using descriptive statistics and the statistical software Statgraphics 19. Content analysis techniques were employed to analyze the qualitative data obtained from the focus groups, and the researchers used the Maxqda 24 software.

### **3.1 Population and Sample**

The study included three main groups:

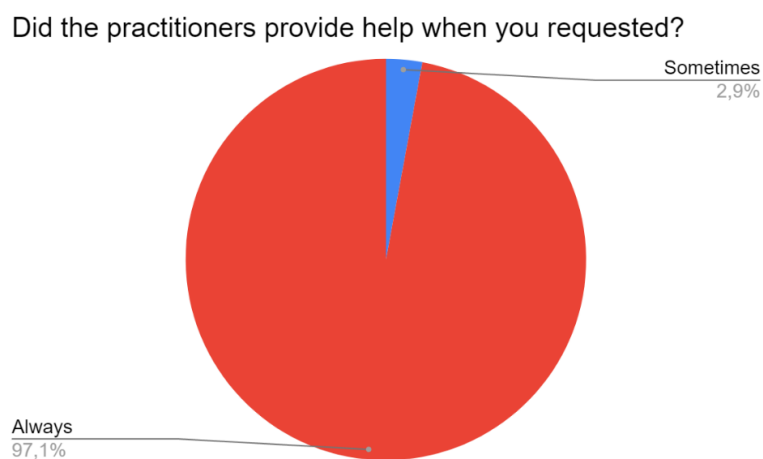
1. School teachers, known as professional tutors: 275 teachers who work in the host schools and actively participate in the co-forming of the pre-service teachers.
2. Students from the host schools: 2605 students who interact directly with the pre-service teachers at two different educational levels:
  - 1,831 students in initial education and first grades of General Basic Education (from 3 to 7 years old).
  - 774 students of higher primary education and high school (from 8 to 17 years old).
3. Host school administrators: 04 surveys of educational authorities and leaders during 2020-2022.

## 4. Findings of the Study

### 4.1 In-Service Teachers

- Did the pre-service teachers help when you requested it?

The question focused on determining the host-schoolteachers' perception of the responsiveness and support provided by the pre-service teachers. In this regard, a high percentage (97.1%) of teachers indicated that pre-service teachers "always" helped them when requested. This reflects the remarkable ability of students to be proactive and responsive in their supporting roles. It is also a clear indicator of the effectiveness of pre-service teachers when integrating their interpersonal and professional skills. These skills are necessary to function in real educational environments. Likewise, the absence of negative responses ("never help") and the very low incidence of "Sometimes" responses (2.9%) suggests that preservice teachers are well-prepared and committed to carry out their responsibilities (See Figure 1).



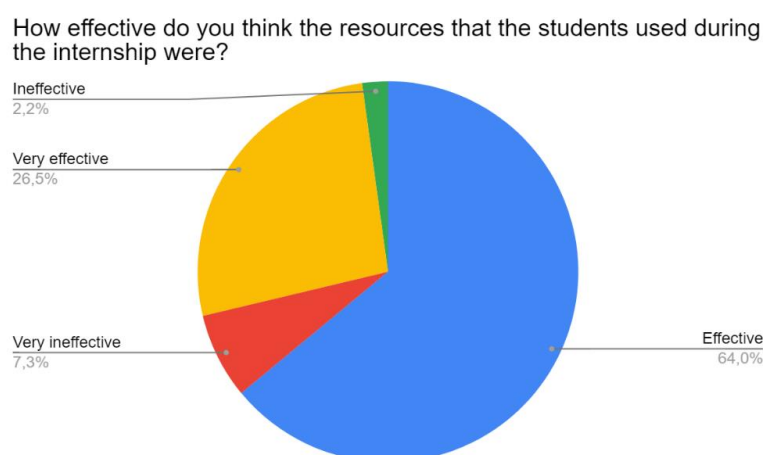
**Figure 1: Students' support to host schoolteachers**

The host schoolteachers highlighted that the pre-service teachers demonstrated proactivity and offered support whenever required. The discussion shows that generally, pre-service teachers provided help and applied innovative methods to optimize the learning process. However, some host schoolteachers noted that pre-service teachers frequently faced difficulties properly integrating in the classroom. This problem was the result of overcrowded classes. In fact, many teachers indicated that excessive pre-service teachers can make classroom management difficult and impact its overall functioning.

- How effective do you think the resources used by the pre-service teachers during the teaching practicum were?

This element of the study focused on assessing host schoolteachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of the resources used by the pre-service teachers during their practicum period at the host institutions. The majority of teachers (90.5%) rated the resources as "Effective" or "Very effective". This high percentage indicates a favorable perception of pre-service teachers' materials and strategies in the classroom. Specifically, 64% of respondents who chose the option "Effective" suggested that, although the resources are adequate, there may be room for

improvement or adjustment to maximize their potential. On the other hand, 7.3% considered the resources “Very ineffective”, which highlights certain critical areas that require attention to improve the integration and application of these resources in the teaching practice. The presence of 2.2% “Ineffective” perceptions also reinforces the need to review and potential improvement in the selection or implementation of educational resources used by pre-service teachers (See Figure 2).



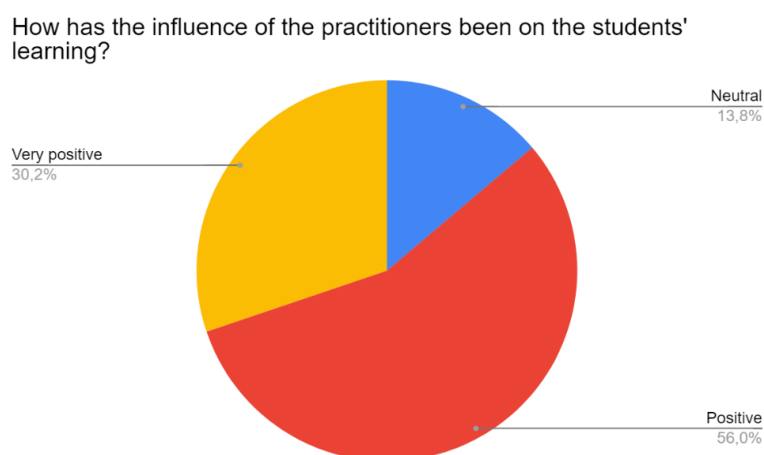
**Figure 2: Effectiveness of the resources used by pre-service teachers**

Data from the focus group showed that students receive the pre-service teachers' resources well. It also showed that the resources engaged students in the learning process. However, several host schoolteachers noted the limitations in the effectiveness of the resources due to the pre-service teachers' lack of preparation and planning skills. For example, it was repeatedly mentioned that, although pre-service teachers employed a variety of teaching resources, some teachers expressed concerns about whether these resources matched specific classroom needs and learning objectives. Additionally, when pre-service teachers attempted to implement innovative activities, they often lacked a logical sequence or integration with the curricular plan, suggesting that, while the resources were potentially valuable, their implementation was not always effective.

- How have pre-service teachers influenced students' learning?

This question examines in-service teachers' perceptions of the impact that pre-service teachers have on students' learning in educational institutions. The majority of teachers (86.2%) rated the influence of practicumers on students' learning as “Positive” (56%) or “Very Positive” (30.2%). These figures indicate a favorable perception of the pre-service teachers' role in promoting students' learning. The fact that more than 30% of teachers perceive this influence as “Very Positive” is particularly encouraging. It also underlines the ability of some pre-service teachers to implement teaching strategies that have a significant impact on students. However, 13.8% of teachers considered the pre-service teachers' influence as “Neutral”. This suggests that, in some cases, practicumers may not impact students' learning, which could be due to a variety of factors (See Figure 3).





**Figure 3: Pre-service teachers' influence on students' learning**

Data from the focus group discussions shows that pre-service teachers are enthusiastic, creative, and responsible. For example, it was pointed out that pre-service teachers increase the amount of individual attention to students, especially in overcrowded classes. However, several aspects require improvement. For example, some pre-service teachers lack initiative and preparation, negatively influencing students' learning. Furthermore, according to the evaluation results, some pre-service teachers arrive to the schools without the necessary skills to design relevant educational activities.

## 4.2 Students from Practice Educational Institutions

### 4.2.1 Pre-primary and primary students

- How much did you like the class?

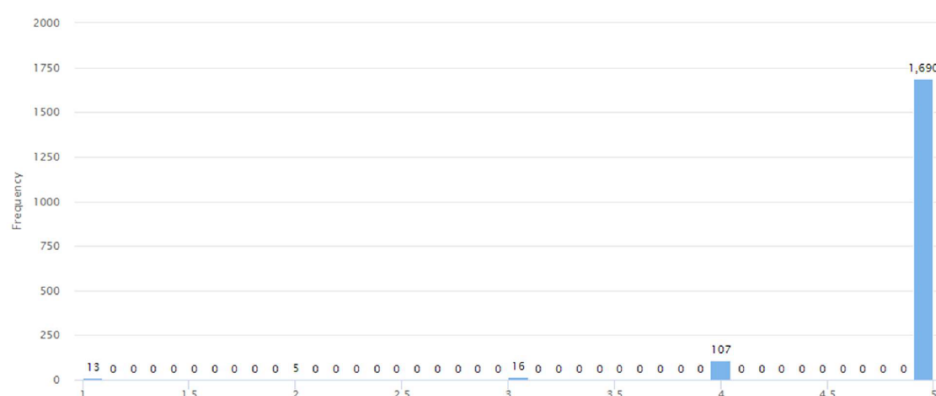
Table 1 shows student's satisfaction with the classes taught by UNAE pre-service teachers, with responses collected from 1,831 students. The specific question "How much did you like the class?" It was rated on a scale of 1 to 5, using emoticons. The statistical results of this question reveal a mean of 4.89, indicating a high level of general satisfaction with the classes taught by the pre-service teachers. The standard deviation is relatively low, at 0.47, suggesting that most scores are clustered near the mean, indicating consistency in positive perceptions of classes.

The distribution of responses is notably biased towards positive evaluations, with the first quartile (25%) already reaching the maximum value of 5. This implies that at least 75% of students gave the highest possible grade. Additionally, the minimum recorded was 1, which is atypical, given that only 0.98% of the responses were three or fewer, considered neutral or negative evaluations.

**Table 1: Descriptive statistics: satisfaction with classes taught**

Count	1831.000000
Mean	4.887493
Std	0.468006
Min	1.000000
25%	5.000000
50%	5.000000
75%	5.000000
Max	5.000000

The associated histogram shows a marked concentration of responses at the upper end of the scale. This corroborates the general trend of satisfaction with the teaching practicum. Therefore, these data suggest that students responded very favorably to the classes led by the pre-service teachers, with a clear predominance of positive evaluations. This trend is a promising indicator of the positive impact of pre-professional practices on the quality of teaching perceived by students (See Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Students' satisfaction to the classes taught by pre-service teachers**

- How did you feel about the presence of the pre-service teachers?

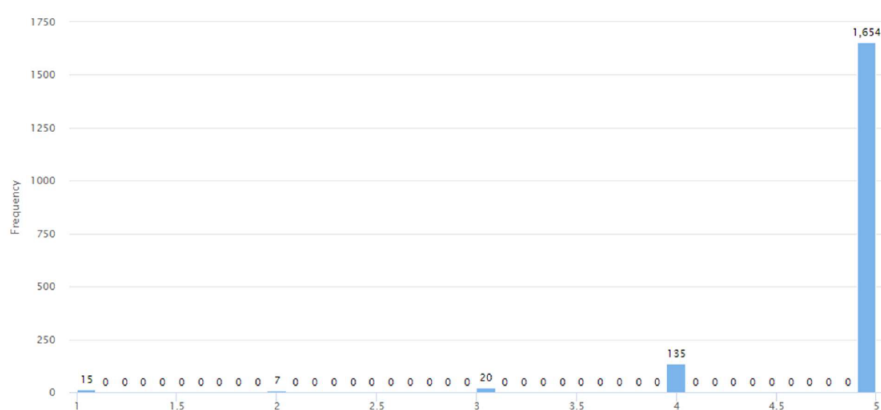
The second question of the study sought to evaluate students' perceptions of the presence of the pre-service teachers in their classrooms (See Table 2). Like the previous one, emoticons were used so that students could express themselves intuitively. 1,831 responses were analyzed, yielding a mean of 4.86 on a 5-point scale. This high average score suggests that the students generally received the presence of UNAE practicumers with positive feelings. The standard deviation of 0.51 indicates moderate variability in the responses, although the distribution of scores shows a clear trend toward high evaluations.

Regarding response distribution, 75% of students chose (5), reflecting highly positive feelings towards the pre-service teachers. On the other hand, the minimum value was 1, highlighting some negative experiences, although these are exceptional. Data also shows that responses with scores of 3 or less, which could be interpreted as neutral or negative, constitute only a tiny fraction of the total, specifically less than 1%.

**Table 2: Descriptive statistics: perception of the presence of pre-service teachers**

Count	1831.000000
Mean	4.860186
Std	0.513324
Min	1.000000
25%	5.000000
50%	5.000000
75%	5.000000
Max	5.000000

The corresponding histogram shows a predominant concentration of responses at the upper end of the scale, corroborating a positive students' perception. In that sense, the results of this question reinforce the evidence that pre-service teachers are perceived positively in the educational environment, which may indicate the practice program's effectiveness in promoting a favorable and constructive integration of practicumers in the classrooms. These positive perceptions suggest that pre-service teachers contribute significantly to a welcoming and stimulating learning environment (See Figure 5).

**Figure 5: Students' perception of the pre-service teacher's presence**

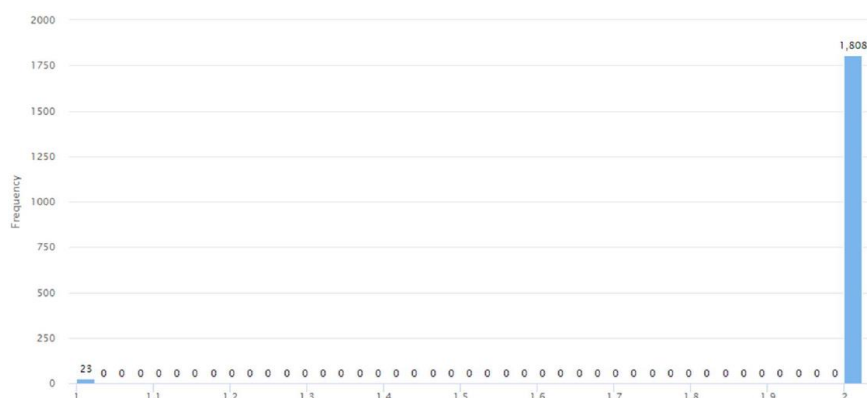
- Do you want the teachers to return?

This question was designed to assess students' perceptions to the continuity of UNAE pre-service teachers in their educational environment (See Table 3). Using a binary scale represented by emoticons (1 for "like", 2 for "dislike"), responses were collected from 1,831 students to directly measure their preference regarding the return of pre-service teachers to the classrooms. In that sense, the average close to the minimum (1.987 out of 2) suggests that an overwhelming majority of students expressed a desire ("like") for the practicumers to return. This preference is reinforced by the median and quartiles at 2, indicating that most of the data are clustered around the most favorable response. Likewise, the consistency of the responses (evidenced by a low standard deviation of 0.111) indicates that almost all students are satisfied with the pre-service teachers to the point of wishing for their return. Only 1.26% of the students responded with "dislike", representing only 23 students of the total sample.

**Table 3: Descriptive statistics: continuity of pre-service teachers**

Count	1831.000000
Mean	1.987439
Std	0.111402
Min	1.000000
25%	2.000000
50%	2.000000
75%	2.000000
Max	2.000000

The histogram shows the distribution of responses, highlighting the predominance of “like” and a scarce presence of “dislike”. This shows that pre-service teachers are well received and their work is highly appreciated. This result is significantly positive and reflects a high level of student acceptance and appreciation of the pre-service teachers. The desire to keep practicumers returning implies their success in creating an engaging learning environment and their ability to make meaningful connections with students (See Figure 6).

**Figure 6: Receptivity of students towards the pre-service teachers' continuity**

#### 4.2.2 Students of higher basic education and high school

- Do you feel comfortable asking pre-service teachers for help?

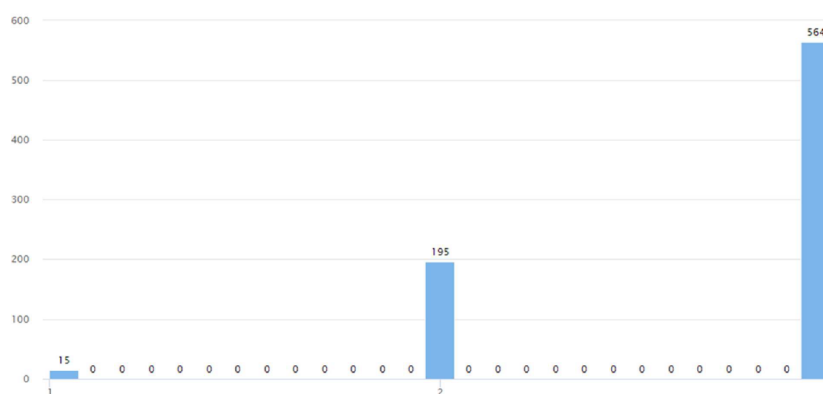
This question aims to evaluate students' perception of their comfort in asking UNAE pre-service teachers for help, using a three-point scale: 1 for “never”, 2 for “sometimes”, and 3 for “always”. A total of 774 student responses were collected, presented in Table 4. The mean of 2.709 suggests that, on average, students tend more towards the response “sometimes” than “always,” indicating that they generally feel comfortable asking pre-service teachers for help. The median and third quartile at 3 reinforce the interpretation that most students are comfortable asking for help “always.” The low standard deviation of 0.495 reveals that responses do not vary widely, indicating consistency in students' perceptions of accessibility and pre-service teachers' receptivity.

**Table 4: Descriptive statistics: comfort in requesting support**

Count	774.000000
Mean	2.709302
Std	0.495247
Min	1.000000

25%	2.000000
50%	3.000000
75%	3.000000
Max	3.000000

The histogram clearly shows that the majority of responses are grouped around the categories “sometimes” and “always”, with a visible majority in “always”. Although a small percentage of students (1.94%, representing 15 students) indicated that they “never” feel comfortable asking for help, this number is relatively low, which is positive (See Figure 7).



**Figure 7: Students' perception of comfort when requesting pre-service teachers for help**

- How effective do you think the resources provided in the classes are for your learning?

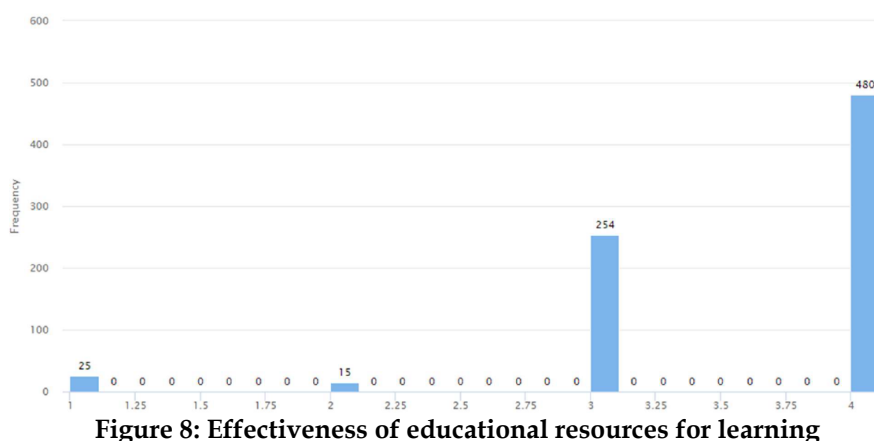
The question intended to measure the perception of the effectiveness of educational resources used by pre-service teachers in the classrooms used a scale from 1 to 4, where one represents “Very ineffective”, 2 “Ineffective”, 3 “Effective”, and 4 “Very effective”. A total of 774 student responses were analyzed (See Table 5). The mean of 3.536 indicates that the ratings lean towards the upper end of the scale, ranging between “Effective” and “Very Effective”. The median and third quartile established at 4 corroborate a general trend towards the maximum perceived effectiveness of the resources. The relatively low standard deviation of 0.694 reflects moderate response variability. Still, the median and third quartile data concentration at the upper end suggests that most students find the resources provided very effective. This implies a significant positive response towards the quality and usefulness of the pedagogical materials and methods pre-service teachers implement. A small percentage of responses indicated less favorable perceptions (“Very ineffective” or “Ineffective”), representing only 5.17% of responses.

**Table 5: Descriptive statistics: effectiveness of educational resources**

Count	774.000000
Mean	3.536176
Std	0.694170
Min	1.000000
25%	3.000000

50%	4.000000
75%	4.000000
Max	4.000000

The histogram clearly illustrates the predominance of responses in the “Effective” and “Very Effective” categories, with a notable majority in the highest rating, providing a visual representation of the high level of satisfaction with the resources used. The high degree of perceived effectiveness of educational resources indicates adequate pedagogical preparation and execution by pre-service teachers. The results support their ability to select and use resources that effectively facilitate students’ learning (See Figure 8).



**Figure 8: Effectiveness of educational resources for learning**

- How do you evaluate the influence of pre-service teachers on your learning?

The question was formulated to measure students’ direct perception of the impact that UNAE pre-service teachers have had on their educational process, with these data presented in Table 6. A scale of 1 to 5 was used, where one is “Very negative”, two is “Negative”, three is “Neutral”, four is “Positive”, and 5 is “Very positive”. In this sense, the average of 4,439 indicates a positive evaluation trend, with the median and the third quartile at the scale’s maximum (5). This suggests that most students perceive the influence of the pre-service teachers as “very positive”. The low value of the standard deviation (0.780) indicates a relatively high homogeneity in the responses, with most students reporting positive or very positive experiences. Out of the 774 responses, 709, representing 91.60%, rated the influence of the pre-service teachers as “Positive” or “Very positive”. On the other hand, a few students evaluated the influence as neutral or negative, reflecting specific areas where some pre-service teachers could improve in methodology, personal interaction, or adaptability to individual learning needs.

**Table 6: Descriptive statistics: influence of pre-service teachers on learning**

Count	774.000000
Mean	4.439276
Std	0.780293
Min	1.000000
25%	4.000000
50%	5.000000

75%	5.000000
Max	5.000000

The histogram shows a predominant accumulation of responses in the “Positive” and “Very Positive” categories, effectively visualizing the students’ overall positive evaluation of the trainees. The results indicate that pre-service teachers play a significant and genuine role in the students’ learning (See Figure 9).

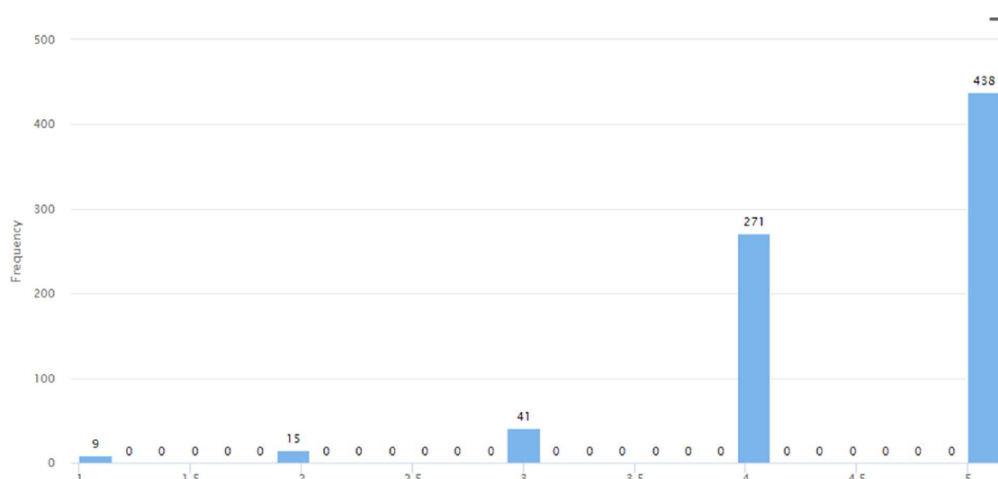


Figure 9: The influence of pre-service teachers on learning

#### 4.3 Directors of the Host Educational Institutions

- Benefits provided by the host educational institution to UNAE trainees

Based on the existing data from 2020-2022, host schools have provided some benefits to pre-service teachers. These benefits are categorized into three key areas: resources and spaces, pedagogical and professional support, and authentic learning and interaction opportunities. First, host institutions offer access to essential resources such as physical spaces and curricular and technological tools necessary for the teaching practicum. Pre-service teachers gain direct experience in teaching, becoming familiar with the actual educational environment and challenges, which enriches their practical and theoretical formation.

In terms of pedagogical and professional support, guidance and advice should be provided by experienced schoolteachers. This support allows the opportunity to observe and participate in the educational process, which is crucial for pre-service teachers to develop professionally. In addition, the teaching vocation is encouraged, and valuable experiences are shared to prepare pre-service teachers for their future professional careers. Likewise, pre-professional work practices allow for a rich interaction between practicumers and the educational stakeholders. This facilitates an exchange of experiences and participatory dialogues, which improves their pedagogical skills and strengthens their ability to work as a team.

- Benefits of UNAE’s Teaching Practicum for Host Institutions

This analysis revealed multiple benefits derived from students’ teaching practicum. Notably, considerable enrichment in didactic resources was observed since the pre-service teachers incorporated innovative material such as games,

slides, videos, and links, improving students' learning experience and complementing the educational methodologies used in the host schools.

Additionally, the professional practice provided significant technological support, essential during the transition to virtual learning driven by the COVID-19 pandemic. Pre-service teachers assisted in content preparation and management of virtual classes and improved teachers' ability to use technological tools, which was invaluable for those less familiar with these platforms. The interaction between Pre-service teachers and teachers fostered a creative and dynamic approach to teaching, which was essential for adapting educational strategies to the virtual modality and meeting students' particular needs during the challenging pandemic.

Regarding pedagogical innovation, for institutional leaders, UNAE students played a crucial role in introducing and applying new pedagogical strategies that strengthened the skills of the teachers in the institutions, promoting interactive and participatory learning environments. The pre-service teachers acted as bridges for updating knowledge and training in new educational methodologies and technologies. These contributions have raised the academic quality of the host institutions, preparing teachers and students to face future challenges.

## 5. Discussion

The assessment of pre-professional work practices at UNAE has revealed a variety of perceptions among the educational actors involved, showing that both teachers and directors of the host institutions and students highly value the capacity of UNAE Pre-service teachers to support the educational process. This finding aligns with the literature highlighting the importance of adequate preparation in interpersonal and professional skills, which is crucial for the success of educational practices (Clapp-Smith et al., 2019; Ngang et al., 2015). These studies indicate that competent preparation significantly improves Pre-service teachers' practical teaching ability, as reflected in high student evaluations.

Research such as that of Macioszek and Kurek (2022) points out that, although students generally respond well to enthusiastic and engaged Pre-service teachers, the perception of their effectiveness can vary considerably depending on individual practitioner characteristics and the specific educational context. The present study confirms that most students have a favorable view of the classes taught by Pre-service teachers. Still, it also highlights the need to explore student response variations further to understand better the factors influencing less favorable perceptions.

In addition, Ado (2016) highlights the importance of the interaction between students and pre-service teachers, identifying a significant impact on the learning environment. This work corroborates that pre-service teachers' active and positive role in the host schools enhances students' learning experience and influences their preference for pre-service teachers' continuity in the classroom (Furrer et al., 2014; Matronillo, 2024). This desire for continuity may be moderated by external



factors, such as the pre-service teachers' teaching styles and classroom dynamics (Chaaban et al., 2019).

Students' perception of the effectiveness of the resources used in the classes taught by pre-service teachers is also positive, indicating an appropriate selection of materials that enhance learning (Kola & Abdulwasiu, 2023; Wang et al., 2024). However, evaluating these resources as ineffective for some students highlights the need to review and adapt these materials to meet the needs of the students or the school context, which aligns with recommendations for the personalization of learning (Hughey, 2020).

On the other hand, host schools have provided essential resources and adequate spaces to effectively implement the teaching practicum (Cheng & Zhao, 2023). These elements facilitate the practical and theoretical formation, enriching the direct teaching experience gained by pre-service teachers. This formation is aligned with the research, action, and reflection approach, highlighting the importance of the practicum in learning, as emphasized by Pérez (2010). Integrating appropriate resources and spaces with a reflective and practical approach contributes significantly to the professional development of pre-service teachers.

Finally, continuous guidance and counseling from experienced faculty are crucial for the professional development of pre-service teachers. (Melgarejo et al., 2014; Ullauri-Ullauri & Mauri-Majós, 2022). This structured support from pre-professional work practice allows pre-service teachers to observe and participate directly in the educational process, facilitating meaningful learning and preparing them for future challenges in their professional careers, thereby enhancing effective learning in the classroom through constant personalized mentoring of experienced teachers.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study has provided a detailed analysis of the perceptions and valuation of the teaching practicum. The results highlight the high recognition of these practices, underlining their significant contribution to developing teaching competencies in various educational contexts. Integrating pre-service teachers in the classroom facilitates the practical application of theoretical knowledge and introduces pedagogical innovations that enrich students' academic experiences. This interaction is crucial for strengthening initial teacher formation. It promotes a bidirectional exchange between higher education institutions and host schools, creating a collaborative learning environment that benefits pre-service and in-service teachers. Thus, this process equips future educators with a robust platform for developing practical and reflective skills that are fundamental in the teaching profession.

The analysis shows that specific areas in the teaching practicum need improvement. For instance, customize teaching resources and adapt teaching methodologies to the unique contexts of each classroom in the host schools. This

highlights a significant opportunity to enrich practical formation by integrating theoretical perspectives acquired in university classrooms.

The study emphasizes the importance of strengthening collaboration between universities and host institutions to ensure a more effective alignment with the needs and challenges of education in Ecuador. In this context, teaching practicum acknowledges the stakeholders as essential co-trainers in the student trajectory and the development of the pre-service teachers. Therefore, the formation of effective alliances and a commitment to contributing to quality education must be fundamental.

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