



The Relationship Between Pre-Professional Practicums and the Development of Pedagogical Performance Among University Students in Teacher Education Programs

Relación entre las prácticas preprofesionales y el desarrollo del desempeño pedagógico en estudiantes universitarios de formación docente

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ABSTRACT

Pre-professional practicum is a structural component of initial teacher education because it articulates university knowledge with the situated complexity of classrooms, school culture, and the ethical demands of the teaching profession. In Latin America, this link is especially relevant due to persistent gaps in educational quality, equity, and

pertinence that require teachers capable of planning, mediating, assessing, researching, and critically reflecting on their own pedagogical intervention. This article aimed to critically analyze the relationship between pre-professional practicum and the development of pedagogical performance in university students enrolled in teacher education programs, within the context of Latin American higher education. Methodologically, a documentary literature review was carried out with emphasis on scientific literature published during the last five years, prioritizing indexed articles, empirical studies, systematic reviews, academic books, reports from international organizations, and verifiable institutional documents. The findings suggest that the relationship between practicum and pedagogical performance is neither automatic nor merely cumulative, but depends on the quality of tutorial support, curricular coherence between universities and schools, opportunities for collaborative reflection, formative assessment, situated research, and institutional conditions that enable professional learning. It is concluded that pre-professional practicum strengthens pedagogical performance when it is no longer conceived as an administrative requirement and is structured as an integral, reflective, and contextualized formative device.

RESUMEN

Las prácticas preprofesionales constituyen un componente estructural de la formación inicial docente porque permiten articular los saberes universitarios con la complejidad situada del aula, la cultura escolar y las demandas éticas de la profesión. En América Latina, este vínculo adquiere especial relevancia debido a las persistentes brechas de calidad, equidad y pertinencia que atraviesan los sistemas educativos y que exigen docentes capaces de planificar, mediar, evaluar, investigar y reflexionar críticamente sobre su propia intervención pedagógica. El presente artículo tuvo como objetivo analizar críticamente la relación entre las prácticas preprofesionales y el desarrollo del desempeño pedagógico en estudiantes universitarios de formación docente, en el contexto de la educación superior latinoamericana. Metodológicamente, se desarrolló una revisión bibliográfica documental con énfasis en literatura científica publicada durante los últimos cinco años, priorizando artículos indexados, estudios empíricos, revisiones sistemáticas, libros académicos, informes de organismos internacionales y documentos institucionales verificables. Los hallazgos permiten sostener que la relación entre

práctica preprofesional y desempeño pedagógico no es automática ni meramente acumulativa, sino que depende de la calidad del acompañamiento tutorial, la coherencia curricular entre universidad y escuela, la disponibilidad de espacios de reflexión colaborativa, la evaluación formativa, la investigación situada y las condiciones institucionales que posibilitan el aprendizaje profesional. Se concluye que las prácticas preprofesionales fortalecen el desempeño pedagógico cuando dejan de concebirse como requisito administrativo y se estructuran como dispositivos formativos integrales, reflexivos y contextualizados.

Keywords / Palabras clave

pre-professional practicum; pedagogical performance; teacher education; higher education; Latin America

prácticas preprofesionales; desempeño pedagógico; formación docente; educación superior; América Latina.

Introduction

Initial teacher education has become a strategic issue for Latin American higher education because the ability to address school systems marked by persistent inequalities, rapid sociocultural changes, demands for inclusion, the expansion of digital technologies, and the need to improve learning in line with principles of educational justice depends largely on it. Recent reports on the regional educational situation indicate that the quality of learning continues to be shaped by socioeconomic gaps, unequal access to resources, and institutional weaknesses that affect students and school communities in different ways; Consequently, teacher education cannot be limited to the transmission of subject-specific content but must develop pedagogical skills to interpret contexts, make informed instructional decisions, and sustain relevant teaching processes (Arias Ortiz et al., 2024; UNESCO IESALC, 2024).

In this context, pre-professional practicums take on decisive importance because they constitute the space where the university student in teacher education confronts their academic knowledge with the situated reality of the school, observes institutional dynamics, interacts with real students, recognizes classroom heterogeneity, and experiences the challenges of planning, pedagogical mediation,

assessment, managing classroom dynamics, and communicating with educational stakeholders. Recent literature agrees that pedagogical practice should not be conceived as a terminal or complementary stage of the curriculum, but rather as a central pillar of teacher professionalization, insofar as it facilitates the transition from declarative knowledge to reflective, ethical, adaptive, and investigative pedagogical performance (Müller & Gaete, 2024; Saldaña Gómez & González González, 2022; Tacuri Albarracín & Vega Alonso, 2024).

The relationship between pre-professional practice and pedagogical performance, however, requires critical examination. A superficial approach might suggest that all practice in educational institutions automatically produces better teachers, but contemporary studies show that the formative effect of practice depends on the conditions under which it is organized, supported, and evaluated. Field experiences can strengthen competencies when they link theory and practice, provide systematic feedback, promote collaborative reflection, and are integrated into a coherent curriculum; but they can also reproduce uncritical routines, institutional fragmentation, or limited learning when they are carried out merely to fulfill required hours, with little tutorial guidance or without clear criteria for professional performance (Fajardo-Pacheco et al., 2025; Flores Gómez et al., 2023; Ullauri-Ullauri & Mauri-Majós, 2022).

In Latin America, the discussion on pre-professional practicums in higher education programs has gained prominence due to the need to bridge the historical gap between universities and schools. Research conducted in Ecuador, Chile, Mexico, Colombia, and other countries in the region shows that the quality of professional learning is shaped by the interaction among student practicum participants, academic mentors, collaborating teachers, school administrators, and educational communities, making the practicum a social and institutional construct rather than an individual student activity (Flores Gómez et al., 2023; Rodríguez Lozano et al., 2024; Saldaña Gómez & González González, 2022). This perspective helps us understand that pedagogical performance does not emerge solely from personal vocation or the accumulation of university courses, but rather from situated formative experiences that transform the way teaching is understood.

For the purposes of this analysis, pedagogical performance is understood as a complex configuration of knowledge, skills, dispositions, ethical criteria, and reflective capacities that enable the

future teacher to design learning experiences, facilitate processes of understanding, manage classroom diversity, assess with a formative focus, adapt strategies to unforeseen situations, and justify their pedagogical decisions. This understanding goes beyond the instrumental notion of “knowing how to teach” and approaches an integrated, situated, and progressive professional competence. From this perspective, pre-professional practice can be considered a privileged mechanism for the development of pedagogical performance, provided that it is not reduced to passive observation or the mechanical execution of prescribed tasks, but rather oriented toward the problematization of educational reality and the reflective construction of professional judgment (González Beade et al., 2023; Hoyos Doria & Pacheco Tamayo, 2025; OECD, 2025).

69 The objective of this article is to critically analyze the relationship between pre-professional practicums and the development of pedagogical performance among university students in teacher education, considering the context of Latin American higher education and recent scholarly literature. The relevance of the study lies in its ability to identify conditions, mediating factors, and tensions that influence the educational effectiveness of these practices, as well as to provide an academic interpretation of the institutional challenges universities face in consolidating practice models consistent with the current demands of the teaching profession.

Material and Methods

This article was developed through a critical and interpretive literature review aimed at analyzing recent scholarly work on pre-professional practices, initial teacher education, and pedagogical performance in higher education. This approach is relevant because the purpose was not to empirically measure a statistical relationship in a specific population, but rather to systematize, compare, and discuss the conceptual, methodological, and institutional contributions of the current literature to construct a reasoned understanding of the phenomenon. The review was organized according to criteria of thematic relevance, recency, academic traceability, and regional relevance, with priority given to studies published within the last five years.

The literature search considered scientific and institutional literature primarily from 2021 to 2026, with an emphasis on articles indexed in academic journals, systematic reviews, empirical studies with

qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods approaches, specialized chapters and books, as well as technical reports from international organizations related to higher education, teacher education, and educational quality in Latin America. Priority was given to sources that explicitly addressed pre-professional practices, practicums, teaching practice, academic tutoring, the collaborating teacher, reflection on practice, formative research, and the development of competencies or pedagogical performance in students in teacher training programs. Policy documents and regional analyses that helped contextualize the challenges of Latin American higher education and teacher professionalization were also considered (Arias Ortiz et al., 2024; OECD, 2025; UNESCO, 2026; UNESCO IESALC, 2024).

The analysis followed a documentary-hermeneutic approach focused on identifying recurring thematic clusters, conceptual tensions, and institutional conditions associated with the relationship between pre-professional practice and pedagogical performance. In particular, the review examined studies on the perceptions of educational stakeholders, correlational research on competencies and practices, systematic reviews of pedagogical work practices, studies on tutoring and mentoring, research on collaborative reflection, and regional documents on teacher education. The texts were interpreted through critical reading, conceptual comparison, and argumentative synthesis, seeking to distinguish between empirical evidence, normative prescriptions, and theoretical assumptions.

The review was not designed as a systematic review following the PRISMA protocol, as its purpose was not to quantify the bibliographic output or estimate aggregate effects, but rather to construct a well-founded academic analysis of the mediating factors that explain how and under what conditions pre-professional practices contribute to the development of pedagogical performance. Nevertheless, criteria of documentary rigor were maintained: selection of verifiable sources, correspondence between citations and references, use of recent literature, and a predominance of relevant academic publications. The sources were cross-checked to avoid a merely descriptive reading and to promote a critical interpretation of the problem.

Results

Recent literature agrees that pre-professional practice constitutes one of the most significant components of initial teacher education because it allows university students to transition from an abstract

understanding of pedagogy to a situated experience of teaching. This transition should not be interpreted as a simple application of theory in an external setting, but rather as a process of reconstructing professional knowledge under real conditions of pedagogical interaction. In this sense, practicum does not function solely as a setting for observation, but as a formative mechanism where disciplinary, didactic, curricular, ethical, and contextual knowledge are linked, and where students begin to develop criteria for professional practice (Pacheco Armijos et al., 2021; Saldaña Gómez & González González, 2022).

Regional evidence shows that pre-professional practicums are strengthened when they are conceived as a structural part of the curriculum and not as an administrative requirement placed at the end of the university track. Saldaña Gómez and González González (2022) argue that pedagogical practice in higher education involves a network of actors who contribute to the educational process from distinct roles, which demonstrates that professional learning occurs within a relational framework. This perspective is relevant because it shifts the individualistic idea that the student “learns to teach” through direct exposure to the classroom and emphasizes that the quality of learning depends on institutional, academic, and school mediations.

The relationship between practicums and pedagogical performance is expressed, first and foremost, in the possibility of transforming knowledge acquired at the university into situated pedagogical decisions. During the practicum, the future teacher faces situations that require intentional planning, selecting relevant teaching strategies, adapting activities to varying paces, interpreting student responses, and sustaining appropriate communicative interactions. This experience challenges theoretical training because it forces one to recognize that teaching is not a linear sequence of techniques, but a professional practice characterized by uncertainty, diversity, and real-time decision-making. Therefore, pedagogical performance develops when the student succeeds in linking pedagogical principles with contextual analysis and reflective action (Müller & Gaete, 2024; Reiban et al., 2024).

In the Latin American context, this integration is particularly relevant due to the social, cultural, and territorial diversity of the schools where practicums take place. Teacher education cannot be limited to universal models of planning or intervention, because the Latin American classroom often reflects socioeconomic inequalities,

technological gaps, linguistic heterogeneity, demands for inclusion, and diverse institutional conditions. Hence, pre-professional practice must enable students to understand teaching as a situated activity rather than as the homogeneous reproduction of models. On this point, the regional literature on teacher education emphasizes that professionalization requires progressive engagement with real-world problems, formative support, and the capacity to reflect on one's own practice (Rodríguez Lozano et al., 2024; UNESCO, 2026).

Pedagogical Performance and the Development of Professional Competencies in Teacher Education

The pedagogical performance of teacher education students can be understood as the progressive result of professional competencies expressed in action. Recent literature has linked pre-professional practice to the strengthening of pedagogical competencies, understood as integrated abilities to plan, teach, assess, manage classroom dynamics, communicate with various stakeholders, and critically reflect on the outcomes of the intervention. González Beade et al. (2023) found a significant relationship between teaching competencies and pre-professional practices among elementary education students, which supports the hypothesis that the practice setting helps to make visible and strengthen competencies that may remain at a declarative level in the university classroom.

However, the notion of pedagogical competence requires critical analysis. If understood solely as mastery of procedures, it risks instrumentalizing teacher training and reducing performance to observable short-term standards. Conversely, if conceived as a situated capacity to interpret pedagogical problems and act with sound judgment, competence acquires a reflective, ethical, and investigative dimension. From this second perspective, pedagogical performance is not a sum of isolated skills, but a form of professional judgment that is constructed through guided experiences, analysis of practice, and feedback. The systematic review by Hoyos Doria and Pacheco Tamayo (2025) reinforces this idea by noting that research-based pedagogical practice fosters professional identity, autonomy, and critical thinking when it integrates teaching, research, and social engagement.

Recent Latin American studies show that pre-professional practices strengthen competencies when they allow students to gradually experience different levels of pedagogical responsibility. In the early stages, observation and diagnosis of the context can foster an

understanding of school culture; subsequently, the planning and execution of activities allow for the consolidation of teaching skills; finally, reflection, evaluation, and situated research enable students to analyze the impact of their decisions. This gradual process is consistent with the idea of pedagogies of practice, according to which teacher training must represent, deconstruct, approximate, and reconstruct the complex practices of teaching so that future teachers can learn them deliberately rather than through simple immersion (Müller & Gaete, 2024).

Santos Jerez and Holguin Bastidas (2024) argue that pre-professional practicums strengthen pedagogical competencies because they allow for the application of theoretical knowledge in real-world settings, enhance adaptation to the classroom, and build students' self-confidence. This finding is consistent with research highlighting the effect of practice on the construction of professional identity and pedagogical confidence. However, it is necessary to note that self-confidence does not necessarily equate to quality of performance if it is not accompanied by critical analysis, evaluation criteria, and expert feedback. A practicum can foster familiarity with the classroom without profoundly altering the student's pedagogical frameworks; therefore, training must prevent the experience from becoming an uncritical repetition of school routines.

Tutoring, mentoring, and support as central mediators of professional learning

Tutorial mediation appears in the literature as one of the decisive factors in explaining the relationship between pre-professional practicums and the development of pedagogical performance. The presence of academic tutors, collaborating teachers, and school mentors allows the classroom experience to be interpreted, problematized, and transformed into professional learning. Without this mediation, the student may experience the classroom as a fragmented, emotionally intense, or technically limited experience. Practice, therefore, does not educate on its own; it educates when accompanied by pedagogical guidance, reflective dialogue, systematic feedback, and shared criteria for professional development (Fajardo-Pacheco et al., 2025; Flores Gómez et al., 2023).

Fajardo-Pacheco et al. (2025) demonstrate that the academic mentor plays a key role as a pedagogical mediator, reflective guide, and link between the university and the school, but they also identify critical

areas related to role clarification and communication among stakeholders. This tension is central to the analysis, because a pre-professional practice may be formally supported but weakly mediated if tutors lack common pedagogical criteria, institutional time, or specific training to guide student reflection. In this regard, tutorial support should not be reduced to administrative supervision, report review, or attendance monitoring, but should function as epistemological and professional mediation.

The role of the collaborating teacher or professional tutor is also decisive. Flores Gómez et al. (2023), in a Chilean study on collaborating teachers, show that there is a persistent disconnect between university and school, as well as training needs for those who accompany future teachers in practice settings. This evidence suggests that students' pedagogical performance depends not only on the university curriculum but also on the quality of the professional models they encounter in schools. If the collaborating teacher does not understand their formative role or does not receive institutional support, the practicum may reproduce traditional pedagogical models, limit reflection, or focus on operational tasks rather than professional development.

Quality mentoring involves providing scaffolding so that the student can interpret what is happening in the classroom, understand the pedagogical reasons behind teaching decisions, and develop their own responses. In this sense, mentors not only support the execution of activities but also help build a professional language to identify problems, formulate pedagogical hypotheses, and evaluate alternatives. Ullauri-Ullauri and Mauri-Majós (2022) highlight the importance of spaces for collaborative reflection on situations in pre-professional practice, as well as the need to train mentors to teach reflection in a more structured manner. This perspective reveals that reflection does not arise spontaneously from experience, but must be taught, guided, and institutionally supported.

Critical reflection, situated research, and the development of pedagogical judgment

Critical reflection constitutes a fundamental mediation between practical experience and the development of pedagogical performance. Classroom experience can be intense and meaningful, but it only becomes professional knowledge when the student analyzes what happened, identifies problems, contrasts their decisions with

theoretical foundations, interprets evidence of learning, and reformulates their actions. Reflective practice is not a subsequent or ancillary activity, but a constitutive dimension of teacher learning, because it allows the future teacher to develop pedagogical judgment and not depend exclusively on methodological formulas (Pacheco Armijos et al., 2021; Ullauri-Ullauri & Mauri-Majós, 2022).

Recent literature on research-based pedagogical practice provides a particularly relevant framework for understanding this relationship. Hoyos Doria and Pacheco Tamayo (2025) identify the integration of theory, practice, and research as a central trend in university teacher education, but they also note gaps linked to curricular fragmentation and weak methodological training. This finding has direct implications for pedagogical performance: a student may undertake practicums in real-world contexts, but if they lack the tools to investigate their own interventions, record evidence, formulate questions, and analyze results, their professional learning will be limited. Situated research allows practice to be not merely execution, but the production of pedagogical knowledge.

In the context of Latin American higher education, research on practice also has political and social significance, as it helps future teachers understand educational inequalities and prevents them from attributing classroom problems to individual student deficits. Analyzing practice involves recognizing institutional, cultural, family, and community factors that influence learning. Therefore, pedagogical performance is strengthened when students learn to critically interpret the context and design relevant responses, rather than applying strategies out of context. Practice-based training thus requires integrating observation, intervention, research, and reflection as inseparable processes (Rodríguez Lozano et al., 2024; Tacuri Albarracín & Vega Alonso, 2024).

Situated research also helps bridge the gap between academic knowledge and practical know-how. The OECD (2025) emphasizes the importance of initial teacher education institutions strengthening future teachers' capacities to use evidence and research, given that pedagogical decision-making requires linking scientific knowledge and professional practice. This approach is consistent with Latin America's need to train teachers capable of grounding their decisions, critically evaluating pedagogical innovations, and participating in professional learning communities. Consequently, pre-professional

practice has a greater impact on performance when integrated with processes of formative inquiry and the reflective use of evidence.

Institutional conditions, curricular coherence, and the university-school link

The relationship between pre-professional practicums and pedagogical performance is strongly conditioned by the institutional architecture that underpins the university-school link. The reviewed studies show that practicums are more formative when there is coherence between the university's pedagogical model, the objectives of the graduate profile, assessment criteria, tutor training, and the actual needs of educational institutions. When these elements appear disconnected, practicum runs the risk of becoming an ambiguous space where students receive contradictory messages about what it means to teach well (Fajardo-Pacheco et al., 2025; Reiban et al., 2024; Saldaña Gómez & González González, 2022).

Reiban et al. (2024), in analyzing teacher training practicums in Ecuador from the perspective of educational stakeholders, highlight generally positive perceptions regarding their contribution to the educational experience, but also point out areas for improvement to strengthen pedagogical competencies in the face of specific contextual challenges. This evidence is important because it helps us understand that pre-professional practicums should not be evaluated solely based on student satisfaction or attendance in schools, but rather on their ability to develop professional skills linked to real-world problems. In other words, practicums must be based on an intentional training design and evaluation mechanisms that allow for the identification of progress, difficulties, and support needs.

Curricular coherence implies that practicums are not separate from theoretical courses but engage with them progressively. If theory is taught without connection to school reality and practice is carried out without conceptual foundations, fragmentation occurs that weakens pedagogical performance. Tacuri Albarracín and Vega Alonso (2024) argue that pedagogical work practice in higher education must be analyzed from theoretical and legal foundations and key actions, which demonstrates that practice requires complex institutional support. From a critical perspective, this means that the development of pedagogical performance cannot rest exclusively on the individual disposition of the practicum student, but rather on university models

that integrate training, monitoring, evaluation, and continuous improvement.

A comparative regional analysis reveals that pedagogical practices in teacher training challenge the theoretical-technical tradition that conceives of practice as subsidiary to theory. Rodríguez Lozano et al. (2024) argue that the practice of teachers in training is key to educational improvement and that this practice must be analyzed in dialogue with the realities of different Latin American countries. This perspective allows us to assert that the university should not send students to “apply” knowledge in schools conceived as external laboratories, but rather to build educational partnerships where the university and the school produce shared pedagogical knowledge. Such a link is indispensable for pedagogical performance to develop under authentic conditions and not within curricular simulations.

Recent Transformations: Virtual Learning, Hybrid Training, and Challenges in Pedagogical Performance

The pandemic and the expansion of hybrid modalities substantially altered the ways in which pre-professional practicums are conducted and demanded new pedagogical skills from teacher education students. Pacheco Armijos et al. (2021) analyzed experiences with virtual pre-professional practicums and concluded that learning to teach, knowing how to be, and knowing how to do can be developed through adaptive models that activate theory, energize teaching, and strengthen knowledge. This finding is relevant because it shows that contemporary pedagogical performance can no longer be understood exclusively within the face-to-face classroom, but rather within hybrid settings where technological mediation, digital communication, and didactic flexibility are part of teaching professionalism.

Hybrid training does not eliminate the need for situated practice, but it expands its requirements. A future teacher must be able to design in-person, virtual, and blended learning experiences, interpret participation data, maintain pedagogical connections in digital environments, and adapt resources to varying connectivity conditions. UNESCO (2023) notes that initial teacher education programs must prepare teachers to work in in-person, remote, and hybrid settings, which requires rethinking curricula, practicums, and mentoring. In Latin America, this requirement is compounded by technological access gaps and socioeconomic inequalities that affect both schools and student teachers (Arias Ortiz et al., 2024).

The incorporation of technology into pre-professional practice must be critically analyzed. It is not enough to digitize activities or use platforms; what matters is developing pedagogical competence to select media, design meaningful interactions, assess learning using formative criteria, and prevent technology from exacerbating exclusion. Therefore, pre-professional practicums in the hybrid era must integrate digital competencies with pedagogical judgment, ethical understanding, and contextual sensitivity. If technology is incorporated without reflection, it can reinforce transmissive approaches; if it is integrated through research and reflective practice, it can expand opportunities for mediation, collaboration, and learning monitoring (OECD, 2025; UNESCO, 2023).

Specific Challenges for Latin America in Practical Teacher Training

A review of the literature identifies specific challenges for practical teacher training in Latin America. The first relates to institutional inequality between universities and practice sites. Not all higher education institutions have stable school networks, trained mentors, consistent assessment tools, or the capacity for ongoing monitoring. This inequality directly affects the development of pedagogical performance because it generates heterogeneous practicum experiences, some highly formative and others focused on meeting requirements. UNESCO's regional teacher strategy (2026) underscores the need to strengthen support, mentoring, and professionalization policies, which is consistent with the findings of the literature on pre-professional practicums.

The second challenge concerns the evaluation of pedagogical performance. Often, the evaluation of teaching practice is reduced to reports, general rubrics, or tutor assessments, without integrating complex evidence from the training process. Evaluating pedagogical performance requires observing planning, interaction, adaptability, assessment criteria, communication, reflection, and continuous improvement. The culture of educational evaluation in the region has made progress in using evidence for public policy, but still faces challenges in translating that logic to higher education training processes and the evaluation of professional teacher learning (Arias Ortiz et al., 2024; OECD, 2025).

The third challenge relates to the need to train supervisors and collaborating faculty as agents of professionalization. Evidence shows

that classroom teachers play a crucial role in supporting student teachers, but they do not always receive training to perform mentoring, feedback, or reflective modeling functions (Flores Gómez et al., 2023). This creates an institutional paradox: universities depend on schools to train teachers, but often do not invest sufficiently in training those who serve as co-trainers. Overcoming this tension requires sustained partnerships, professional recognition, and incentives for school tutors.

The fourth challenge is to prevent the practicum from uncritically reproducing traditional pedagogical models. If the student enters school contexts where transmissive teaching, punitive assessment, or authoritarian classroom management predominate, the practicum may reinforce attitudes contrary to pedagogical innovation. Therefore, university supervision must help students critically interpret their observations, distinguish between contextual adaptation and the reproduction of irrelevant practices, and develop viable alternatives. In this sense, pedagogies of practice offer a framework for modeling, analyzing, and testing teaching methods that enable future teachers to develop adaptive capacities in the face of classroom complexity (Müller & Gaete, 2024).

The findings of the review support the claim that the relationship between pre-professional practices and pedagogical performance is significant, but it is mediated by pedagogical and institutional conditions that determine its educational depth. Empirical studies show positive correlations, favorable perceptions, and evidence of strengthened professional competencies; however, they also caution that practice may lose its potential if organized in a fragmented manner, with weak support, or without opportunities for reflection. Consequently, the central question is not whether placements are important, but what type of placements actually develop pedagogical performance and under what institutional conditions (González Beade et al., 2023; Pinto Ayala & Saldaña Gómez, 2025; Reiban et al., 2024).

A first identified tension is the persistent separation between theory and practice. Although curricular discourses often affirm their articulation, the literature shows that this relationship remains problematic in Latin American teacher education. Practice cannot be understood as the “application” of theory, because pedagogical knowledge is transformed through contact with real-world situations; nor can it be reduced to unfounded empirical experience, because this impoverishes teaching professionalism. The contribution of practice to

pedagogical performance occurs precisely when theory and experience engage with one another through reflection, research, and feedback (Hoyos Doria & Pacheco Tamayo, 2025; Saldaña Gómez & González González, 2022; Ullauri-Ullauri & Mauri-Majós, 2022).

A second tension relates to the role of the actors involved in the practice. The reviewed studies show that students, academic tutors, collaborating teachers, and school administrators have educational responsibilities, but they do not always share criteria, pedagogical language, or expectations. This lack of coherence affects performance development because the student may receive contradictory guidance or guidance focused on administrative tasks rather than pedagogical analysis. The literature on tutoring and collaborative teaching suggests that improving practices requires professionalizing mediators, clarifying roles, and building co-formation communities between universities and schools (Fajardo-Pacheco et al., 2025; Flores Gómez et al., 2023).

A third tension relates to evaluation. Pedagogical performance is a complex construct that cannot be measured solely by satisfaction, attendance, or adherence to lesson plans. It requires evidence of progression, observation of interactions, analysis of decisions, adaptability, and reflection on outcomes. Latin American higher education faces the challenge of designing formative practice evaluations that support professional learning without reducing it to bureaucratic indicators. On this point, the literature on the use of evidence and research in initial teacher education provides important guidance: the future teacher must learn to ground their decisions and generate knowledge about their own teaching (OECD, 2025).

A fourth tension relates to regional inequality. Although the reviewed studies show promising experiences, many of them are concentrated in institutions with structured practice models, such as the National University of Education in Ecuador or Chilean universities with research on mentoring. The region exhibits heterogeneity in regulations, resources, school-university linkages, and practice conditions. Therefore, it is not appropriate to automatically extrapolate positive results to the entire Latin American system. Rather, the evidence suggests that the effect of these practices on performance depends on sustained institutional policies, networks of educational institutions, mentor training, and systematic evaluation (Rodríguez Lozano et al., 2024; UNESCO, 2026; UNESCO IESALC, 2024).

A significant research gap is also evident: much of the available research is based on the perceptions of students, mentors, or school stakeholders, which provides valuable information on subjective assessments but does not always allow for an analysis of the longitudinal development of pedagogical performance. Research is needed that follows students through various stages of practicum, observes classroom performance, compares evidence of planning, interaction, and assessment, and examines how pre-professional experiences impact the early years of entering the workforce. Without this type of research, the field runs the risk of affirming the importance of practicum without sufficiently understanding its formative mechanisms.

From a critical perspective, it can be argued that pre-professional practicums are a space of contention between two conceptions of teacher education. The first views them as an operational requirement for students to “get to know” the school and fulfill hours of experience. The second conceives of them as the epistemological core of professionalization, where pedagogical knowledge is produced, teaching identity is constructed, and performance is developed through guided reflection. Recent evidence clearly favors the second conception, but its implementation requires profound institutional changes: integrated curricula, trained mentors, co-responsible practice sites, authentic assessment, and a culture of research on teaching.

Conclusions

The literature review leads to the conclusion that pre-professional practicums are closely linked to the development of pedagogical performance among university students in teacher education programs; however, this relationship is not automatic nor does it depend solely on classroom exposure. Practicums enhance performance when they are organized as intentional, situated, progressive, and mediated learning experiences capable of integrating theory, action, reflection, research, and evaluation. Conversely, their potential is diminished when they are conceived as an administrative requirement, the fulfillment of hours, or an isolated experience without systematic support.

The review shows that pedagogical performance develops through the integration of professional competencies that include instructional

planning, learning mediation, diversity management, formative assessment, pedagogical communication, contextualized decision-making, and critical reflection. These competencies are strengthened in practice because students face real teaching challenges and learn to interpret the complexity of the classroom. However, for this experience to yield deep professional learning, academic tutors and collaborating teachers capable of guiding, providing feedback, and critically examining pedagogical practice are required.

Tutoring and mentoring are central mediations. The reviewed studies show that tutors are key actors in transforming the experience into professional knowledge, but they also reveal weaknesses in role clarification, the training of collaborating teachers, and coordination between universities and schools. Therefore, a relevant institutional implication is that universities must recognize the practice as a system of co-formation and not as an activity delegated to schools. This requires stable agreements, shared criteria, tutor training, academic monitoring, and formative assessment.

Critical reflection and situated research emerge as essential conditions for pre-professional practice to contribute to pedagogical performance. The future teacher must not only carry out classroom activities but also learn to observe, ask questions, document, analyze evidence, justify decisions, and reformulate their intervention. In this sense, research-based pedagogical practice represents a significant pathway to overcoming the separation between theory and practice, strengthening professional identity, and promoting teaching grounded in evidence, contextual sensitivity, and ethical responsibility.

In Latin America, pre-professional practices face challenges associated with institutional inequality, heterogeneity of training models, resource gaps, weaknesses in evaluation, and the need to strengthen university-school links. These challenges become more complex in hybrid and digital contexts, where pedagogical performance demands new skills for teaching, mentoring, and assessing in both in-person and virtual settings. Therefore, teacher education in higher education must update its practice models to address diversity, inclusion, technological transformation, and the social demands of the teaching profession.

Finally, it is concluded that strengthening pre-professional practices must be a priority for university policy, educational research, and curriculum management in teacher education programs. Improving

these practices requires shifting from a compliance-based approach to one of comprehensive professionalization, in which each practical experience contributes to training teachers capable of critically understanding school realities, designing relevant pedagogical interventions, and sustaining processes of continuous improvement. In terms of research, it is recommended to expand longitudinal, observational, and comparative studies that allow for a more precise understanding of how pedagogical performance develops throughout the practical training trajectory and how it impacts the professional integration of future teachers.

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