



PEDAGOGICAL COUPLES IN THE PRACTICUM OF A BACHELOR DEGREE IN PRIMARY EDUCATION: EDUCATIONAL INNOVATION IN THE UNIVERSITY OF BALEARIC ISLANDS

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Abstract

Background/Objective: The education system in Spanish universities evolves continuously, especially since 2010, when the Bologna Plan was incorporated. Some changes were needed in order to improve the quality of the practicum, which is a crucial subject on the academic program for the primary education bachelor. This investigation shows a pilot experience, and the aim of this study is to design a new approach of the practicum in the Primary Education Bachelor's Degree in the University of the Balearic Islands (UIB).

Methods: 8 university teachers from the department of physical education (PE), 22 school PE teachers from 17 different schools and 44 students participated in this project. The practicum had a duration of 8 weeks, and the whole project a duration of 1 year. The innovation aspects are the pedagogical couple methodology, the participation of the students in the evaluation process and the type of homework students did.

During the whole period there were internal and external evaluations to detect which measures worked and which did not.

Results: The use of pedagogical couples, with a combined auto-evaluation, co-evaluation and hetero-evaluation, and the type of documents students had to produce as homework are the three pillars of the project, which has had good results in satisfaction and learning according to university teachers, school teachers and students.

Conclusions: The results from this pilot project were positive, with a high level of satisfaction from the students, school teachers and university teachers. Students improved their knowledge working with the pedagogical couple system, and the homeworks students did were more motivating than in the past.

Key words: Practicum, pedagogical couples, competences, Autonomy, Bologna Plan.

Introduction

This paper presents a pilot project concerning a new concept of practicum, which was based on pedagogical couples as an innovative pedagogic strategy.

With the incorporation of the Bologna Plan, aspects such as meaningful learning, the importance of relating the academic sphere to the workplace [11] and learning by competences have acquired great importance [2,6,7,9]. Taking that into account, the ultimate goal of the practicum in a bachelor's degree is to form excellent professionals for the future [4].

Careers are increasingly complex, so the training of university students must be multidisciplinary [11], which makes the practicum much more important. Also, this

system of learning benefits teachers because they remain in touch with students with updated knowledge, initiative, and creativity.

The practicum could be understood as a pre-work experience, where students could put into practice the knowledge they have acquired earlier and, at the same time, learn from other professionals and while gaining experience [7]. Students must observe, make decisions, reflect and plan various educational situations.

The pedagogical couples is a strategy that has been carried out to improve the quality of the practicum. This system helps to analyse different education strategies, improve team work skills and the ability to analyse complex situations [3, 9].

Additionally, only well-established programs are able to focus on curricular aspects. Focusing on organizational aspects alone is a frequent mistake, which affects the quality of the practicum, and a failure to focus on learning content, adequate evaluation systems and tutoring systems [11]. As a result, and in order to have a high quality of education in our university, we have carried out this pilot project to improve curricular aspects of the practicum.

Aim

The aim of the project is to improve the quality of the practicum, focusing on learning by competences, through the pedagogical couples system.

Materials and methods

The present pilot project took place at the Education School of the University of the

Balearic Islands (UIB), specifically in the physical education Department, with 8 university teachers, 22 school teachers in 17 different primary schools in Mallorca and 44 students.

During this practicum, bachelor degree students of primary education taught physical education (PE), to children aged 6-12 years. Students from this practicum had done two practicums before, of 450 hours each, the first one with children aged 6-9 and the second one with children aged 9-12.

The objective is to design, implant and analyse a new practicum system, which increases the quality of the subject and improves our students' training, using the methodology of pedagogical couples.

The final objective is to apply this new system to all practicums of the bachelor's degree in primary education at the University of the Balearic Islands (UIB).

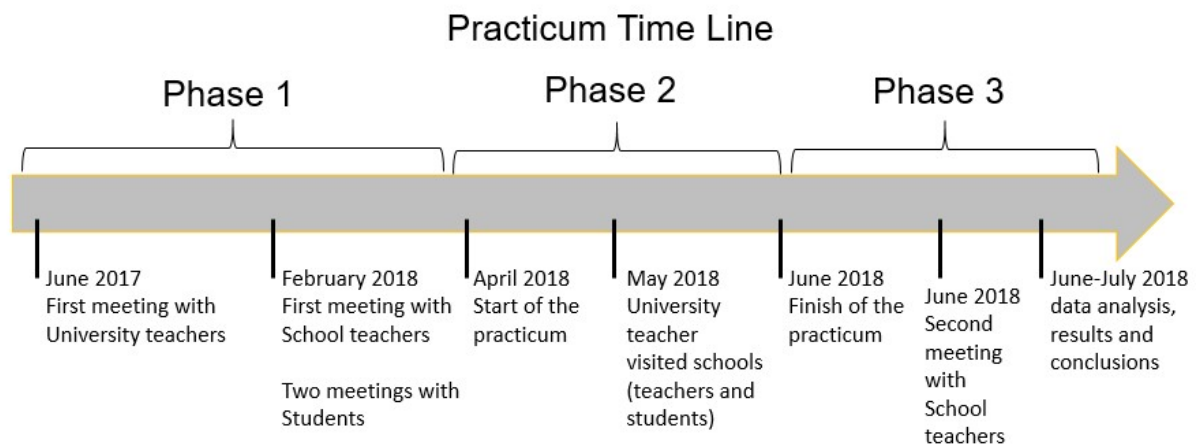


Figure 1. Practicum Time Line

For the organization and coordination of this project, the organization team met with all parties before and after the practicum. At the outset, in phase 1, three meetings took place. The first one was with all university and school teachers. In this meeting, university teachers explained the aims, and designed the strategy of the practicum with school teachers. The second one took place with all university teachers and students, and the third one was between each university teacher and his/her students.

During the practicum, university teachers were in touch with school teachers and students via phone calls and emails, and visited

the schools one or more times. If there were doubts or problems, university teachers had meetings with students, school teachers or both.

The school teachers evaluated the practice part of the practicum, giving 50% of the grade, and the university teachers evaluated the theory part, giving the other 50% of the grade. To favour the evaluation process, teachers from schools and university stayed in touch during the whole practicum. During phase 2, the university teacher visited the school to see the students give a full lesson, and take part in the feedback dynamic with the observer student and the school teacher.

Pedagogical couples, the most innovative aspect of this practicum, is a methodology characterised by putting the students in pairs during the whole practicum. Every school teacher worked with two students at the same time. The PE teacher classes were distributed to students, having the same number of classes each, and having classes in the two educational cycles (6-9 years, and 9-12 years) according to Spanish educational law (LOMCE, 2013 for more information visit <https://www.mecd.gob.es/educacion/mc/lomce/lomce/presentacion.html>). During the lessons, one of the pedagogical partners delivered the class as a teacher, and the other observed and completed an observational document to give feedback at the end of the lesson. The school teacher guided the observation and took notes to give feedback at the end of the class as well. To guarantee an adequate evaluation system the university teachers had designed an observational document to guide the observation and evaluation of the pedagogical couple during the practicum. The aim of this document was to give useful feedback to help learning and improve teaching skills.

For the evaluation of the practice part of the practicum, there was an innovation aspect of auto-evaluation, co-evaluation and hetero-evaluation combination, with the aim of using the evaluation as part of the learning content based on competences [1, 10]. This was performed with the consideration that students will be future teachers, and that the scope of the evaluation, as well as the autonomous learning, are very important aspects in their university education [8]. Every student had to carry out self-assessment and co-evaluate his/her pedagogical couple. Students made these evaluations every day during the sessions, and also they did this at the end of the practicum, offering an overall evaluation of the practicum. After these evaluations, the school teacher would assess the participants, taking into account the students' evaluations.

In relation to the homework, the documents that students created consisted of three parts. In the first of these, students were required to explain their work plan for the 8 weeks of their practicum, specifying objectives, methodologies, contents, courses and

competences. In the second part, they had to explain the three best classes and the three worst classes they had done and make a thoughtful comment. The third part consisted in making a poster about an important aspect of PE in the school they had done the practicum, present it in a poster session, and make a thoughtful comment on what in their opinion were the two best posters. This last part was designed as a motivational project to introduce the students to the range and focus of the research. Preparing these documents took time and effort and improved the students' skills [5].

As a pilot project, the evaluation aspect was very important. For that reason, an internal and an external evaluation were made. For the internal evaluation, the questionnaire used had a scale between 1 and 5, and an open-ended question, in order to evaluate all roles: university teacher-student and vice versa, school teacher-student and vice versa, school teacher-university teacher and vice versa, all at the beginning, during and at the end of the process. An external commission did an overall, continued evaluation of the practicum project. On one side, the University evaluated the design phase, and on the other side, professors from other departments evaluated the project during the process and at the end.

As data collection document for the project, we used the documents students made as homework, the meetings between university teachers and school teachers to give feedback to each other, tutoring sessions between university teachers and students, a visit from the university teacher to the school, and the satisfaction questionnaires.

In the present study we used excel to determine the mean and standard deviation, and the graphic design.

Results

The geographical distribution of the schools was carried out taking into account the quality of the PE department/teacher in each school, with schools distributed in 9 municipalities of Mallorca, Spain. For the research group it was very important to choose the schools for their quality, not for their location or other aspects unrelated to education.

The students and teachers were asked to evaluate the first meeting, with 35 students out of 44 and 11 teachers out of 22 responding to the questionnaire. As Figure 2 shows, the

results were positive: 8 students and 4 teachers classified the meeting as good, and 27 students and 7 teachers classified the meeting as very good.

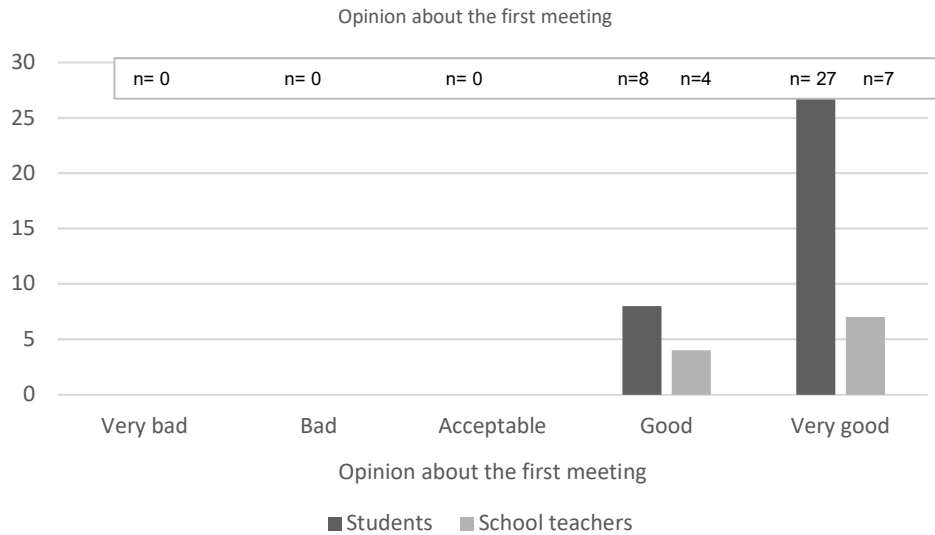


Figure 2. Students and school teachers satisfaction questionnaire of the first meeting.

At the end of the practicum, a satisfaction questionnaire was carried out for the university teachers, school teachers and students evaluating the practicum system. Students (n=44) evaluated the practicum with a mark (mean) of 8.53/10 and a standard deviation (SD) of 1.7. School teachers (n=16) evaluated the practicum with 8.54/10 and SD 1.34. University teachers (n=6) evaluated the practicum with 9.83/10 and a SD of 0.41.

Figure 3 shows the mark that each group gave to each part of the practicum, differentiating between evaluation system, university organization, school organization and overall assessment.

Results from the internal evaluation were positive; however, it is necessary to highlight that the 3 agents: students, school teachers and university teachers emphasized the brevity of the practicum (250 hours) as a negative aspect.

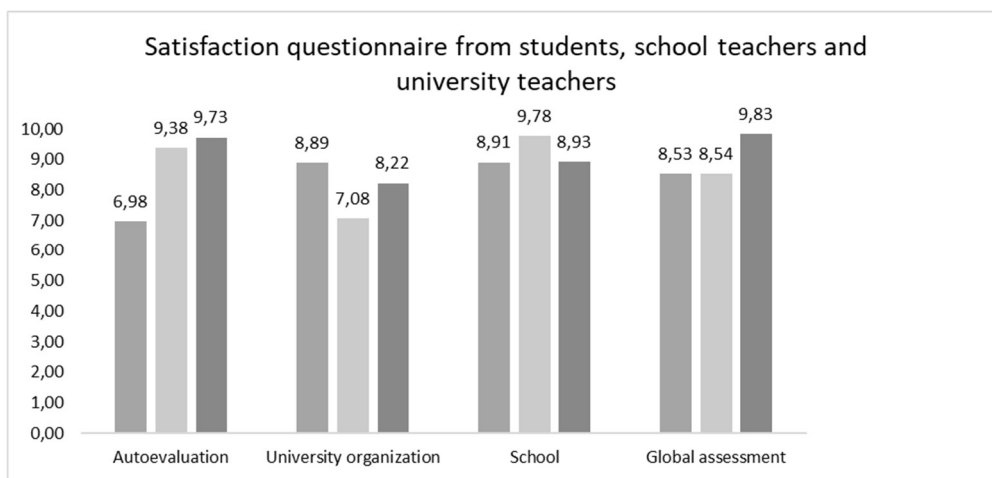


Figure 3. Satisfaction questionnaire from students, school teachers and university teachers at the end of the practicum

Discussion

The methodology of the pedagogical couples was new in the practicum of the UIB, and the results are positive in terms of both opinion and learning. Other studies had reported positive results on pedagogical couples in practicums, with a positive opinion from the students and a greater level of learning [3]. During the academic year 2018-19 the practicum of PE will incorporate pedagogical couples again, with the intention of implanting it progressively to all the practicums of the bachelor's degree in primary education.

The homework of the previous two practicums had required students to evaluate the theoretical aspect of the work practice. Students had reported this to be a boring and uneducational task. For this reason, in the present pilot project we decided to incorporate the new format, with 3 homework tasks as commented before. Students reported that this system was more exciting, and they realised that the level of learning was better. Furthermore, in our opinion, these tasks are more related to their professional future and contributes more to the acquisition of the competences that the Bologna plan promotes.

In spite of students evaluating the self-assessment with the worst mark compared to the other aspects of the practicum, school teachers and university teachers agreed with the use of the auto-evaluation and co-evaluation as an important aspect that contributes to the learning of the students, making them more competent for their future work.

Putting to one side the aspects commented before, an important issue on

which students, school teachers and university teachers agree is the duration of the practicum. In this bachelor's degree, the duration of the specialty practicum is just 250 hours, in comparison with the two general practicums of 450 hours. We know that it was difficult to find a solution to this, but the practicum period should be longer for a better preparation of the students.

A marked strength of this study was the innovation of the methodology and the design of the practicum. Also, it is important to note that we will continue to analyze this project for years, to guarantee the quality of the practicum. As far as the limitations are concerned, the size of the sample is limited, and the objectively measured data is also limited.

Conclusion

The present pilot project has served as a precedent to improve the quality of the practicum, but more actions are necessary to guarantee the maximum learning of the students.

The pedagogical couples, the type of homework and the evaluation were changes that helped to improve the learning of the students. Furthermore, the duration of the practicum should be longer to guaranty our students get enough expertise.

This pilot study was considered necessary by University teachers and school teachers, and both parties agreed that the protocol designed to improve the quality of the practicum and to encourage learning from our students is appropriate. Also, students were satisfied with the practicum programme.

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