

Becoming a Teacher: Master Degree Students Reflecting on Their Learning Experience

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INTRODUCTION

The practicum plays a critical role in preparing future teachers (Zeichner, 2012), providing opportunities to teach and building professional knowledge (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Shi et al., 2025). Research highlights the practicum as a core element of Master's degrees in Teaching in Portugal (Flores et al., 2023), though challenges remain such as the theory-practice gap, the contribution of the different curricular modules to the practicum, the duration and nature of teaching practice, and the role of research (Flores, 2018; Vieira et al., 2019; Vieira et al., 2021). To improve the quality of the practicum, Russel and Martin (2016) argue that it is necessary to question implicit beliefs about the nature of the school-university relationship and the types of professional learning experiences provided to student teachers. This study seeks to critically examine the perceptions and reflections of student teachers concerning their formative experiences during the first year of the Master's in Teaching programme.



FINDINGS (PHASE 2 AND PHASE 3)

Wider study: "Teacher Education in times of change and the role of the practicum in building professional knowledge: a mixed-methods study"

THE STUDY

The **qualitative study** we present here combines data from the exploratory study (Phase 2) and the initial stage of a wider, ongoing longitudinal study (Phase 3), whose aim is to **explore the practicum as a key component of teacher education**, focusing on **its contribution to the development of professional knowledge and skills required for teaching**. This study seeks to explore the perspectives of student teachers regarding their first year in the Master's in Teaching.

11 semi-structured interviews with student teachers from a Portuguese higher education institution (3 male, 8 female; aged 23–44; from different areas, including History, Portuguese, Philosophy and Informatics.)

LEARNING EXPERIENCE

- **Centrality of Methodology** courses: **valuable contributions to pedagogical practice**;
- **Positive feedback** on **General Education** subjects (e.g. curriculum, assessment, psychology, school organisation, etc.): **enhanced understanding of the teaching field**;
- **Redundancy** and **irrelevance** in **Teaching Area** subjects (content already covered in the undergraduate programmes);
- Subjects with **outdated content** and **out of touch with the reality of teaching**;
- The need to **make currently optional units compulsory** due to their recognized educational value (e.g. courses on special educational needs and classroom management).

CHALLENGES

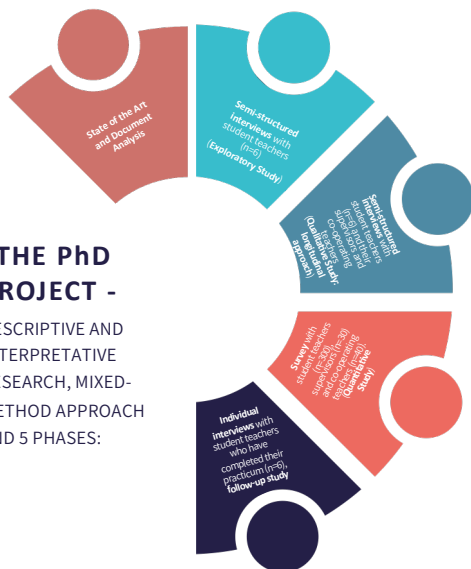
- **Lack of integration** between **theory and practice**;
- Feelings of **overwhelm** due to **heavy workload**;
- **Lack of support**;
- **Lack of time**.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- **More effective time in schools** (e.g. classroom observation in year one);
- **More opportunities for actual teaching practice**;
- **Revise outdated/out of context curricular units**;
- **Review the subjects/topics** that **will be taught**;
- **Improve theory-practice integration** through **more dynamic experiences**;
- **Training in technical and bureaucratic tasks**.

THE PhD PROJECT -

DESCRIPTIVE AND INTERPRETATIVE RESEARCH, MIXED-METHOD APPROACH AND 5 PHASES:



FOCUS & AIM

This study focuses on the perspectives of student teachers regarding their first year in the Master's in Teaching. It aims to understand how they evaluate their learning experience.

It enables critical reflection on how teacher education can be better aligned with their needs and the demands of the profession, providing insights to inform the restructuring of initial teacher education programmes.

METHOD

Data was collected through eleven individual exploratory interviews with future student teachers who had completed their first year in the Master's in Teaching programme. Content analysis was undertaken to look for similarities and differences in student teachers' accounts. Three main themes will be explored: learning experience, challenges faced and suggestions for improvement.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This study contributes to a **critical reflection on the curricular design of initial teacher education (ITE)**, particularly within the process of restructuring of teacher education in Portugal.

By **assessing the quality and effectiveness of ITE and identifying areas for improvement**, the **findings offer relevant insights into how teacher education can be better aligned with the needs of students** and the **evolving demands of the teaching profession**, highlighting the **value of student voices in the redesign of ITE curricula**.

Future work will involve a more systematic analysis of a broader data set collected through the longitudinal study. This ongoing analysis is expected to provide deeper, more comprehensive insights into the development and impact of ITE over time.

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