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The Importance of Community Outreach Practicum: Pre-service EFL Teachers' Identity and Self-Efficacy Development

La importancia de las prácticas de vinculación con la comunidad: desarrollo de la identidad profesional y la autoeficacia en docentes de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) en formación inicial

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze how an early community outreach practicum in teacher education contributes to pre-service teachers' self-efficacy. The study is informed by Kolb's experiential learning cycle, service-learning and community engagement in teacher education, reflective journaling in pre-service EFL teacher training, and professional identity development. Using a mixed-methods approach, data were collected from 21 pre-service EFL teachers through pre- and post-questionnaires, pre- and post-focus groups, and reflective journals completed over three weeks. The findings showed that participants began the practicum with high expectations regarding their preparedness and, by the end, reported feeling more confident in their ability to teach successfully. However, reflective journals and the post-focus group revealed that the practicum exposed them to the realities of teaching, leading some participants to question their readiness, particularly in rural school contexts that differed from their university experiences. Despite these initial challenges, participants concluded that the training received at the university had prepared them to face the demands of the classroom. The findings highlight the value of early

community-based practicum experiences in strengthening professional identity, reflective practice, and teacher self-efficacy.

Keywords: Community outreach practicum, professional identity, self-efficacy, reflection, pre-service teacher training

RESUMEN

Este estudio tiene como objetivo analizar cómo una práctica temprana de vinculación con la comunidad, en el contexto de la formación docente, contribuye al desarrollo de la autoeficacia de los docentes de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) en formación inicial. El estudio se fundamenta en el ciclo de aprendizaje experiencial de Kolb, el aprendizaje-servicio y la vinculación con la comunidad en la formación docente, la escritura reflexiva en la formación inicial de docentes de EFL y el desarrollo de la identidad profesional. Mediante un enfoque de métodos mixtos, se recopilaron datos de 21 docentes de EFL en formación inicial a través de cuestionarios aplicados antes y después de la práctica, grupos focales pre y post, y diarios reflexivos elaborados durante tres semanas. Los resultados mostraron que los participantes iniciaron la práctica con altas expectativas respecto a su preparación y, al finalizar, manifestaron sentirse más seguros de su capacidad para enseñar con éxito. No obstante, los diarios reflexivos y el grupo focal final revelaron que la práctica les permitió enfrentarse a la realidad de la enseñanza, lo que llevó a algunos participantes a cuestionar su nivel de preparación, especialmente en contextos de escuelas rurales diferentes a los vividos durante su formación universitaria. A pesar de estos desafíos iniciales, los participantes concluyeron que la formación recibida en la universidad los había preparado para afrontar las exigencias del aula. Los hallazgos destacan el valor de las experiencias tempranas de prácticas de vinculación con la comunidad para fortalecer la identidad profesional, la práctica reflexiva y la autoeficacia docente.

Palabras clave: prácticas de vinculación con la comunidad, identidad profesional, autoeficacia, reflexión, formación inicial docente

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INTRODUCTION

Students who are studying to be teachers in Ecuador must complete a pre-service teaching practicum in a classroom-based setting. According to the Consejo de Educación Superior (CES, 2024, Art. 42), pre-professional practices are mandatory components of undergraduate programs, and most students must complete 240 hours before graduating. This can be seen by comparing these program hours to those of other countries, such as teacher education programs in the United States, which typically have much higher hour requirements. For example, teacher training programs in the United States have between 500 and 600 hours (Cal State LA, 2024; New York University, n.d), which is much more time than in Ecuador. It has been repeatedly discussed that to learn how to be an effective teacher, a person must have many opportunities and many authentic teaching hours to aid in becoming an effective classroom teacher. It has been established that developing effective teaching practices requires many opportunities for authentic classroom experience, student teaching is consistently identified as the most significant component of teacher preparation programs and a key factor in developing teaching efficacy (Brown et al., 2015, 2021). Therefore, this study goes in depth, describing how early community practicums support teachers' self-efficacy later in the program during teaching practicums and after graduation.

Teaching effectively can be an increasingly complex task, and it is the degree program's role to provide quality education in and outside of the classroom. Suyatno et al. (2023) explain that having a teaching certificate alone does not make a teacher qualified. Without real experiences, self-reflection, and a developed self-efficacy, teachers can be ineffective. One way to improve the quality of an educational program is to provide many opportunities for pre-service teachers to teach in the classroom throughout their degree program at different stages of study. Pazilah et al. (2021) explain how this must be a global priority for teaching majors. These programs must prepare students to be flexible, as students may find jobs in a variety of settings across their country of origins. The more authentic classroom experience incorporated into a degree program, the more developed graduates are when they begin teaching. Therefore, Susilowati et al. (2026) reiterate that coursework alone is insufficient to truly become an effective and functional teacher.

These challenges and successes are somewhat documented in Ecuador as well. Reiban et al. (2024) describe how the pre-service practicum is the basis for student teachers' success after graduation and is perceived by student-teachers as a mostly positive experience in which they put into practice pedagogical skills, connect their knowledge to practice in real-life settings, and improve their professional and self-efficacy. However, studies by Darling-Hammond (2017) show that without the necessary hours and a variety of experiences, student-teachers' readiness could decrease when they graduate from their degree programs. Teaching practicum is recognized as an important part of teacher education, because it allows pre-service teachers opportunities to

apply theoretical knowledge in real classroom settings and develop professional competencies (Zapatero-Ayuso et al., 2026). The research in this paper has shown a consistent gap between theory and practice, which can impede the effectiveness of teacher training programs without increased practicum hours throughout the time of study.

In Ecuador, studies have identified gaps between university training and classroom realities in a variety of areas (Reiban et al., 2024). These challenges are reflected in the emotional experiences of pre-service teachers, who reported feelings of anxiety of not knowing how to deal with certain situations during practicum, as they found that their theoretical knowledge did not always translate into classroom practice, especially in rural contexts (Macías Sánchez & Coutinho, 2025) which was also pointed out with the pre-service student teachers who participated in this community outreach program. There is limited research on the amount of pre-service practicum for EFL teachers in Ecuador and how their participation in other forms of practicum, specifically the allotted sixty hours in community outreach affect their perceptions and reflections support their overall professional development and identity, readiness to be teachers, and self-efficacy to be successful after graduation.

Therefore, the research presented in this paper explores the EFL pre-service context in Ecuador. It focuses on twenty-one student-teachers from the fourth and fifth semesters of their EFL teacher training program. It focuses on their perceptions before and after their three-week immersive volunteer teaching experience in rural community-based schools. The research examined how students' professional identity and perceived readiness throughout the experience through pre- and post-focus groups, guided self-reflection journals during the experience, and pre- and post-structured questionnaires to successfully answer the research question:

How do pre-service EFL teachers' perceptions of classroom teaching change during a community-based practicum experience, as evidenced through reflective journaling?

To answer this question, the study aimed to explore how pre-service EFL teachers' expectations, emotions, and pedagogical beliefs are affected during an early short-term community-based practicum, and how reflective journaling supports emerging professional identity, self-efficacy, and perceptions of teaching.

Literature review

The Experiential Learning Cycle: Kolb's Model

The experiential learning theory developed by David Kolb explains that, to truly learn, people need to experience rather than simply memorize. This idea is connected to Dewey (1933), especially in teacher education contexts (Hekimoglu & Kucukoglu, 2025). This means that knowledge is created through experience; in this regard, learners are actively engaged (Rahmi, 2024). As can be seen, this theory places the learner at the center and gives full agency to them. The main emphasis is on participation, engagement, and involvement in real-life scenarios, since learning occurs when individuals have direct experience. In this sense, real situations are key, as

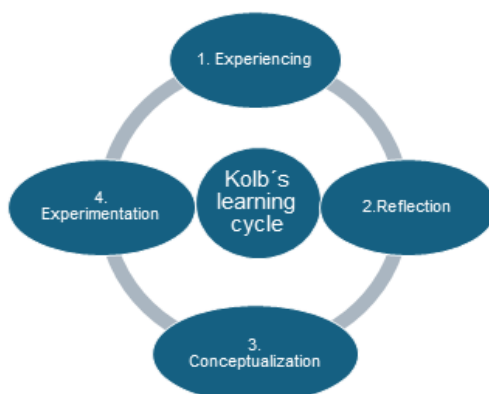
content is transformed into knowledge, and this, in turn, is transformed into skills (Leong & Laik, 2024). These skills prepare learners to face uncertainty and complexity, which are characteristic of real-life challenges today.

Experiential learning prepares students for professional practice and fosters the skills that prospective teachers need for their future. In this regard, it is not only that prospective teachers put theory into practice, but they go beyond this; through reflection and application, content is transformed into meaningful knowledge. For example, in a class, prospective teachers not only understand the lesson but also teach it, reflect on how it went, and, based on that reflection, make decisions to improve it the next time. In this sense, they are actively involved (Hekimoglu & Kucukoglu, 2025). This active role allows prospective teachers to develop practical knowledge, strengthen their teaching skills, and, as a result, support the development of their professional identity.

Leong and Laik (2024), as well as Passarelli and Kolb (2023), explain Kolb's learning cycle, which consists of four stages. First, the learner experiences a concrete situation; this means that the learner is directly involved in a real-life context. Then, reflection occurs; in this second stage, the learner examines the experience from different perspectives; this is a metacognitive process, as reflection involves thinking, inquiry, and awareness. The third stage is conceptualization, which is a key aspect, as the learner connects the experience with concepts, theories, and underlying principles. Finally, experimentation involves the application of what has been learned to new situations; here, learners are able to make decisions, try new strategies, and test ideas. Figure 1 illustrates Kolb's experiential learning cycle.

Figure 1

Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle



Service-Learning and Community Engagement in Teacher Education

Service-learning is widely recognized as an approach that meaningfully connects academic learning with community service. As noted by Mutambara (2023), this model is particularly relevant in initial teacher education because it enables student-teachers to transform theoretical knowledge into situated practice. For this reason, teacher education programs require deliberate strategies that strengthen the link between the university and the community. Community

outreach projects allow university students to respond to real community needs while simultaneously fostering the professional, social, and ethical competencies required of contemporary teachers (Espinosa-González et al., 2026; Ibáñez Muñoz & Vásquez Valenzuela, 2022).

Through these initiatives, a strong bond is created between the university and the community. This connection encourages student-teachers to become more critical, active, responsible, and socially committed to the realities that surround them. The community outreach practicum, therefore, provides prospective teachers with meaningful practical experiences before formally entering the teaching profession, which have a lasting impact on their future careers (Eğimli & Solhi, 2021; Gan, 2013). In language teacher education programs, this type of practicum is especially relevant because it closely resembles the real teaching scenarios student-teachers will later face.

Working directly within the community prepares student-teachers for authentic professional contexts and strengthens the competencies required for graduation. These experiences demand adaptability, contextual decision-making, and the application of pedagogical knowledge in real and often unpredictable situations. At the same time, the community also benefits from the presence of university students through educational support, innovative practices, and increased attention to local needs, reinforcing the reciprocal nature of service-learning.

Beyond skill development, community engagement plays a key role in reshaping pre-service teachers' professional identity. According to Eğimli and Solhi (2021), immersion in this type of practicum positively influences teachers' beliefs about classroom management, teaching strategies, and student engagement. However, Gan (2013) also points out that prospective teachers may face challenges such as a lack of sense of control in the classroom, limited language competence, and reluctance to take risks when introducing innovation. In this sense, service-learning does not only highlight strengths but also reveals areas that require growth.

Finally, Mutambara (2023) emphasizes that participation in service-learning activities promotes both personal and professional development by allowing prospective teachers to assume leadership roles, understand real-life environments, engage in authentic teaching practices, acquire competencies required in the 21st century, and develop the dispositions aligned with service-learning as a pedagogical approach. Through this process, student-teachers begin to understand teaching not merely as classroom instruction, but as a socially situated, ethical, and contextual practice deeply connected to the communities they serve.

Reflective Journaling in Pre-Service EFL Education

Reflective journaling was utilized as a tool to promote professional development and document students' evolving perceptions (Dunlap, 2006) during the pre-service community outreach teaching practicum. This practice is based on the theory explained in *How We Think* by

Dewey (1933), who defines reflective thought as: “Active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends (p. 9)”. Dewey (1933) explains that reflective practice is a deliberate, goal-oriented, and structured action. Based on these ideas, Yinger and Clark (1981) and Li (2025) explain how reflection practices and journaling are important activities students can utilize throughout their educational activities. This action is explained as a reflection after a teaching experience, course, or lesson. The educator can focus on personal emotions and the actual teaching process to identify strengths and weaknesses and learn and improve in the future.

In previous qualitative studies Yinger and Clark (1981), Dumlao and Pinatacan (2019), Harahap and Fithriani (2024) and Li (2025) describe using reflective journaling practice as a tool which does not only allows reflection on specific activities, such as teaching experiences, but also aids in self-improvement, promotes confidence, improves critical thinking, can be used as a pedagogical tool and aids in professional development. This action allows students to bridge the theory and strategies they have learned with authentic practice. To further support these ideas, Machost and Stains (2023) presented a practitioner-oriented theoretical paper, and the participatory action research study by Harahap and Fithriani (2024) found that reflective practice also helped pre-service teachers become more self-aware of teaching challenges in real-life contexts and more pragmatic after they had authentic teaching experiences. Dumlao and Pinatacan (2019) found, through a qualitative study of 13 EFL teachers, that reflective journaling for pre-service teachers affects professional and personal development by enabling them to use this writing activity to improve teaching plans and to manage anxiety via thorough self-reflection on the activities they compiled during pre-service teaching experiences.

Reflective practice and journaling could be an effective tool when properly promoted. As Soodmand Afshar and Farahani (2019) point out, pre-service teachers can struggle to reflect analytically on their own teaching experiences, especially when it is their first authentic teaching experience. While the literature review by Machost and Stains (2023) shows that many practitioners feel it is risky to self-reflect if their reflections may not be positive and therefore minimize the effect their reflections may have on improving their future teaching experiences. The authors all point out that reflective methods can have long-term positive effects on pre-service and in-service teachers when used correctly during and after the teaching process.

Professional Identity Development in Pre-Service Teachers

As mentioned above, reflection not only supports beliefs and practices but can also reinforce and play a critical role in how pre-service teachers view themselves as professionals. Teacher and professional identity are generally conceptualized as ever changing, socially constructed, and continuously negotiated rather than anchored (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009), especially for pre-service teachers during practicum experiences. Building on this perspective, Richards (2025) and Xu (2025) examine English language teachers' identity as part of the broader

teacher self, encompassing beliefs, motivation, self-efficacy, and professional knowledge within classroom contexts. Richards (2025) goes on to describe how a teacher's identity is a multidimensional construct, including the self, beliefs, experiences, motivation, professional knowledge, and personal history, which can develop and change through experiences in the classroom and through self-reflection practice.

Richards (2025), Ardi et al. (2023), and Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) examine how context can shape a teacher's integrity, depending on the types of learners, the institution where they teach, and the classroom context. Richards (2025) stresses how identity emerges through interaction within classroom and institutional spaces. Pre-service teachers' awareness increases through authentic classroom teaching experiences. They begin to understand what it means to be a classroom teacher in a real-life setting and the importance of language proficiency and pedagogical competence for managing a classroom successfully. Community practicum experiences function as critical turning points in forming teacher identity. Ardi et al. (2023), Xu (2025), and Almutawa and Alfahid (2024) go even further, explaining that professional identity development is not a continuous progression but involves negotiation, emotional tension, and agency performance. These arguments strengthen this paper's point about the importance of early practicum experience for pre-service teachers, helping them begin to connect who they are to who they will become as educators and people.

Perceptions & Teacher Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy theory, originally proposed by Bandura (1977), explains how a person's self-regard strongly influences their perceived capabilities in that area. Then, Bandura (1994) expands on this idea to include how self-efficacy refers to individuals' beliefs in their capability to achieve designated levels of performance, which influence events in their lives (Bandura, 1994). Therefore, in terms of pre-service teachers' classroom teaching abilities, this would affect effort, persistence, ability, emotional reactions, and overall attitude towards teaching. Thus, pre-service teachers' ability to succeed or fail during the practicum experience would play a huge role in their future efficacy. In teaching situations, these beliefs shape how teachers approach instructional challenges, regulate emotional responses, and persist in the face of classroom difficulties. (Kim and Cho, 2014)

As Bandura (1977, 1994) noted, efficacy can be developed from initial levels of confidence. Cannon (2022) found that pre-service efficacy levels decreased once they entered authentic teaching encounters, because they come to realize their basic teaching knowledge is not yet at a mastery level. They found a disconnect between theory as well as classroom experience in real-life teaching. Many students entered confidently and later reflected that they were not as prepared as they had thought in classroom discipline and instruction. However, empirical evidence suggests that in some cases, authentic practicum experiences significantly strengthen pre-service confidence. In a mixed-methods study of Jordanian pre-service teachers, Altarawneh et al. (2023)

found statistically significant increases in overall teacher self-efficacy following school-based practicum experiences, particularly in instructional strategies, classroom management, and learner involvement. The level of preparation, support from professors, pre-service teaching environment, and the type of students participating can make a considerable difference.

Other psychological variables that can affect self-efficacy were identified in a quantitative study by Kula (2022). Kula (2022) demonstrated that self-efficacy beliefs are strongly associated with both inherent motivation and attitudes toward the teaching profession among pre-service teachers at the outset of their studies. The results showed that self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation affect shifts in efficacy beliefs during authentic teaching experiences and can simultaneously influence motivation and professional attitudes during teacher formation.

However, much of the recent empirical research on language teacher identity and efficacy development through reflection journaling has been situated in Asian higher education contexts, such as Almutawa and Alfahid (2024), particularly within in-service teacher professional learning programs. There is much less empirical research on how professional identity develops among pre-service EFL teachers engaged in community-based outreach practicums, particularly in Latin American contexts. Therefore, the research completed in this paper, concentrating on community outreach programs in Ecuador, offers insight into how pre-service teachers negotiate self-reflection to establish emerging professional identities in unfamiliar sociocultural and instructional environments.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research followed a mixed-method approach combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative data was collected to analyze the Likert-scale questionnaire and determine students' pre-and post-perceptions about their self-efficacy towards teaching before and after a community outreach practicum. On another note, qualitative inductive thematic analysis was conducted to identify common themes across the pre- and post-focus groups and to analyze participants' six individual reflective journal entries to show student engagement throughout the experience. Students sent in 120 entries which were analyzed, and general themes emerged that shaped participants' professional identity and efficacy development through their perceptions of their teaching experiences during the three-week period in an authentic classroom for the first time.

The community outreach practicum occurred in the Bachelor's Degree in National and Foreign Language Education or the EFL teacher training major. Participants were starting their fifth semester while participating in the practicum part of the project. Students in this major must complete three semesters of a community outreach program of their choice. Each semester, they must complete 48 hours in total. This program allowed them to teach in a classroom where there

were no permanent English-language teachers to support the lack of English-language teachers in the small public community-based school in a rural area. Participants taught two and a half hours a day, five days a week, for three weeks, and were also allotted a few hours for preparation and meeting hours to complete the mandatory forty-eight hours. The previous semester, they prepared through workshops on didactics, classroom management, psychology, ethics, and classroom material design. Students utilize these semesters to give back to their communities and fill gaps in the public education system where English teachers are in short supply.

The participants were 21 fourth and fifth-semester pre-service EFL student-teachers. These students were teaching in pairs from pre-school to high school in classrooms with 3-14 students in multilevel classrooms. This was their first authentic classroom teaching experience in a rural setting, which is where many of them will most likely be working when they graduate from their degree programs.

RESULTS

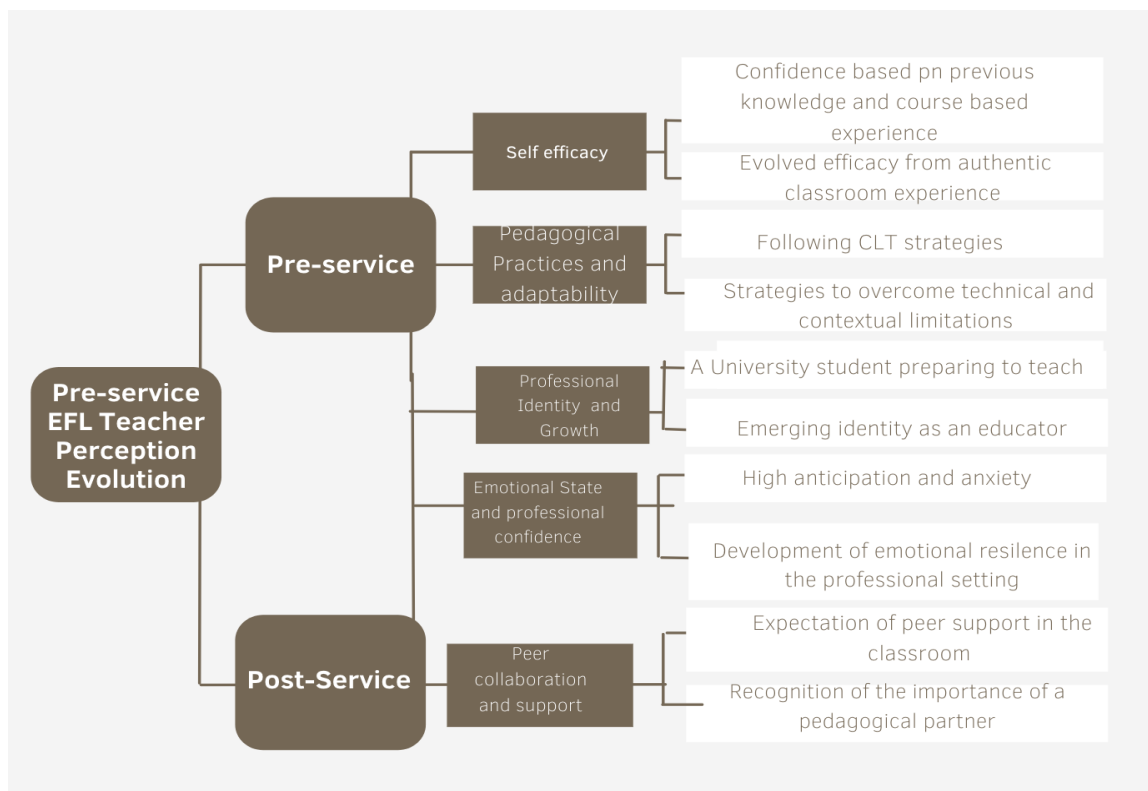
Data were collected through pre- and post-focus groups, reflective journals, and pre- and post-questionnaires. Students completed the reflective journals over a period of three weeks to record their experiences and reflections. These three data sources were triangulated to provide a clearer and more comprehensive understanding of the findings.

Pre-Post practicum focus group

Based on the qualitative analysis of the focus group transcripts and the research paper provided in the sources, below is a mind map representing the key themes and codes from the pre- and post-practicum focus groups. These themes and codes were gathered using a combination of the software MAXQDA and manually through excel.

Figure 2

Pre and post student perceptions from focus group



The figure above compares students' perceptions and ideas about their pre-service community teaching experience before and after they participated in a three-week program in which they taught in a rural community school, working with students ranging from pre-school to high school. Students discussed five main areas and held various perceptions of them, which differed after they gained real-life experience. The main areas that changed were students' self-efficacy before and after the voluntary teaching experience; pedagogical practices that were transferable from theory to classroom practice in a rural setting; their changing professional identity; development and changes in their personal emotional state; and the importance of working in pedagogical pairs.

In the first focus group, many students said they felt ready to enter the classroom because of their prior teaching experience in community outreach programs during previous semesters, they completed didactics classes within the major, and the intensive training workshops during the first half of the project. Students mentioned how;

“the workshops we have had, and the preparation during this cycle we went through.”

“Overall, all the workshops we’ve had, as well as SPELL previous community outreach program) and the demo class, helped me a lot.”

On the other hand, various students also mentioned that they were not completely prepared for the rural classroom setting; they felt their previous experience and training would be enough for them to succeed. The post focus group and reflective journals provided a broader picture.

Students journaled that they were trained to use technology and found that “the biggest challenge here, since we’re already used to using slides and things like that, is there was no access to any technology or materials in the school,” and “what they do in the university is so different than a rural classroom”. Students voiced how the theoretical training and courses they took did not provide them with all the necessary tools for the reality they faced in a rural classroom setting. This was one of their biggest hurdles they needed to overcome. Other factors they needed to overcome and figure out while in the classroom were classroom management aspects. Students explained during the first few days:

“It’s hard to keep their attention” or “adapt the timing to 90 minutes, we realized the class was becoming very tiring.” These were factors they had not considered or understood until they were in the classroom. Many described having to revise their plans and learn to be flexible in the classroom. They overcame these difficulties by using some of the strategies they learned in their major and in the workshops, such as total physical response, use of realia, mingle activities, gamification, competition, and individualized attention. All of these methodologies and strategies proved very useful, and in the end, the students were able to use the theory and practical classes they had learned previously to improve their teaching and students’ learning.

Students’ perceptions changed over time as well. Before they began the practicum, they were a little nervous, but generally prepared. Students said:

“I think I’m ready and I have the tools to teach.”

“All of our workshops and classes have prepared us.”

After their first week, for many, these perceptions changed:

“We realized the first day we were not prepared.... Students didn’t know Spanish very well.... We realized we had to adapt and replan.”

“We had high expectations since it was our first time teaching, and we didn’t have much experience. At first we struggled with managing the class much more than we thought we would.”

The student journals supported the discussions from the focus groups when they described how students went into the teaching experience feeling very confident, but after a few days were not sure how they would succeed; then it showed how they slowly figured out how to utilize and adapt their previously learned knowledge and abilities as teachers to feel successful at the end of the experience. Many students explained;

“I changed my expectations and saw my students learn some vocabulary in English that I taught them. It felt good.”

“I recognized that my students were enjoying my classes and having fun. They liked learning with me.”

“I started learning about my students and creating a relationship with them; by the last week, I felt like I was learning how to get my class to listen and participate.”

Another aspect that the journals all discussed was the positive aspect of co-teaching. They all felt more confident and successful thanks to the constant support from their pedagogical partner. They were able to rely on each other and help each other in difficult situations.

“If I was busy with the class, my partner could work with the one student who needed more help or was not paying attention.”

These comments were supported in the reflection journals the students completed throughout the three weeks for the pre and post focus groups. These reflections allowed students to draw on their own experiences and understand the personal and professional changes occurring to improve themselves. This experience ultimately allowed students to develop self-efficacy in teaching, and their confidence as teachers grew. They learned how to adapt and use the strategies and methodologies, which allowed them to persevere to have a successful classroom-based experience, ultimately improving students' self-efficacy and allowing them to see themselves as teachers in a realistic manner.

Pre and post Questionnaire

The first data collection method employed in this study was a questionnaire administered before the student-teachers began their community outreach practicum. The questionnaire was completed after participants had attended the workshops offered as part of the community project. At this stage, participants completed the Pre-Teaching Linker Scale (Perceived Preparedness), which explored their perceived readiness in six key areas: classroom management, lesson planning, English language teaching, inclusion, assessment, and professional responsibility. These areas had been addressed either during the workshops or throughout the participants' teacher education program. Figure 3 illustrates the six domains included in the questionnaire and presents student-teachers' perceptions of their preparedness prior to engaging in the community outreach practicum.

Figure 3
Pre-Teaching Linker Scale

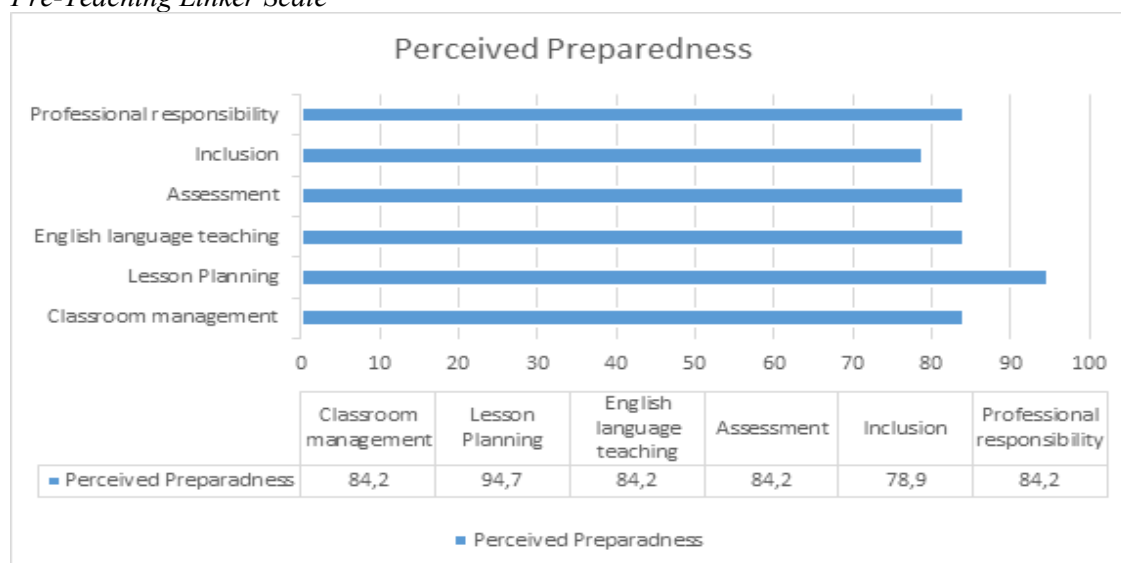


Figure 3 presents participants' perceived preparedness prior to the community outreach practicum across six domains: classroom management, lesson planning, English language teaching, assessment, inclusion, and professional responsibility. Overall, participants reported high levels of perceived readiness to teach in a real educational setting.

The highest level of perceived preparedness was observed in the lesson planning domain, where 94.7% of participants indicated that they felt prepared to design didactic materials aligned with their teaching objectives. High levels of preparedness were also reported in classroom management, English language teaching, assessment, and professional responsibility. In these domains, 84.2% of participants reported feeling prepared to manage group interactions according to their lesson planning, use English effectively to provide instructions and explanations, implement alternative assessment strategies, and fulfill their professional responsibilities within the educational community.

In contrast, inclusion was the domain with the lowest percentage of perceived preparedness. Specifically, 78.9% of participants indicated that they felt prepared to address students' diverse learning needs through inclusive practices. Although this percentage was lower than those reported for the other domains, it still reflects a relatively high level of confidence prior to the community outreach practicum experience. This shows that participants entered the practicum with strong perceptions of readiness across all six domains, with particularly high confidence in lesson planning and comparatively lower confidence in inclusive teaching practices.

After their teaching experience in schools, participants completed the Post-Teaching Linker Scale. This questionnaire examined the same six domains assessed before the practicum: classroom management, lesson planning, English language teaching, inclusion, assessment, and professional responsibility. However, instead of measuring perceived preparedness, it focused on participants' perceived enactment of these competencies during their teaching practice. Figure 4 presents the results for each domain.

Figure 4
Post-Teaching Linker Scale

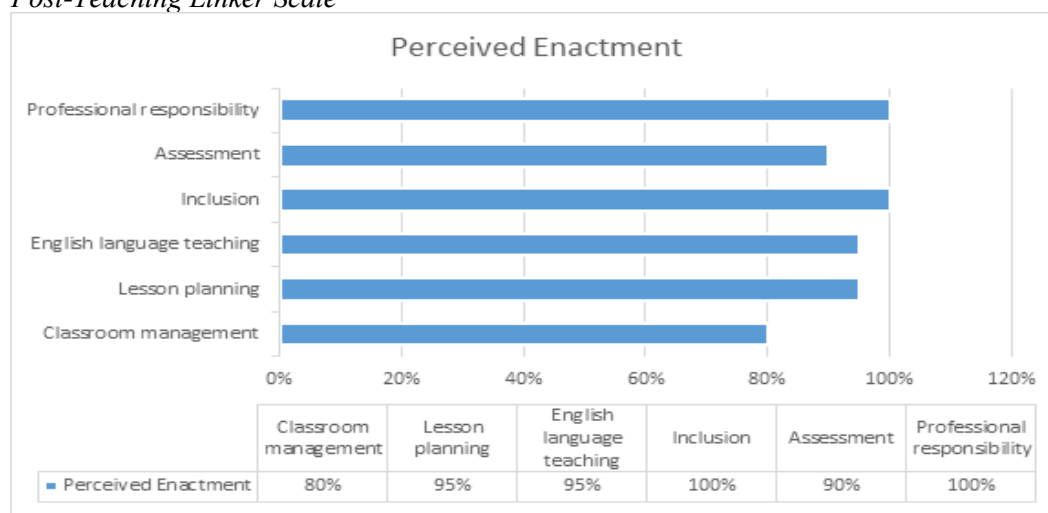


Figure 4 presents participants' perceived enactment of the six domains after completing their teaching experience in schools. The results indicate high levels of perceived implementation across all domains. The highest percentages were observed in inclusion and professional responsibility, both reaching 100%. Participants reported that they were able to address students' diverse learning needs through inclusive practices and fulfill their professional responsibilities within the educational community during their practicum experience.

Assessment, lesson planning, and English language teaching also received high ratings. Approximately 90% of participants reported that they assessed student learning beyond traditional tests. Similarly, participants indicated that they were able to design didactic materials aligned with their teaching objectives and use English effectively to provide instructions and explanations in the classroom.

In contrast, classroom management obtained the lowest percentage among the six domains, 80%. This domain included items related to managing classroom behavior effectively during English lessons. Although the percentage was lower than in the other domains, participants still reported a high level of perceived enactment after experiencing the realities of teaching in a rural school context.

Ethical considerations were considered throughout this study. All participants were informed about the purpose of the research and agreed to take part in the study through the consent statement. Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed throughout the implementation of the research methods. (Mirza, Mirza, & Bellalem, 2023).

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study suggest that pre-service EFL teachers entered the community outreach practicum with high levels of confidence regarding their ability to teach in an authentic educational setting. Data from the pre-focus groups revealed that participants perceived themselves as capable of implementing teaching strategies, adapting instruction to students' needs, and assuming the responsibilities associated with becoming a teacher. These perceptions were also reflected in the results of the pre-teaching Linker Scale, in which all six areas showed high percentages of perceived preparedness. Lesson planning received the highest percentage (94.7%), indicating that participants felt highly prepared to design instructional materials and organize learning experiences before entering the classroom. The findings suggest that participants developed a strong sense of self-efficacy during their teacher education program, which influenced their initial perceptions of their readiness to teach.

The reflective journals and focus group data provided how students' perceptions changed throughout the practicum experience. When students began their practicum, they felt nervous and did not trust their teaching abilities; over time, these emotions shifted toward increased confidence as they interacted with learners and were immersed in teaching responsibilities. Bandura (1977)

argues that self-efficacy can develop through experiences that allow individuals to evaluate their capabilities in real-world contexts. In this study, participants had the opportunity to use their knowledge and skills in real classrooms, thereby strengthening their sense of professional competence.

The post-teaching Likert scale results support this interpretation. Rather than showing a decrease in confidence after experiencing the realities of teaching, participants reported high levels of perceived performance in all six domains. Inclusion and professional responsibility had the highest percentages (100%), indicating that participants believed they could effectively manage the needs of diverse learners and fulfill their professional responsibilities. High percentages were also observed in assessment, lesson planning, and English language teaching, suggesting that participants were able to put university-based learning into practice. These findings are consistent with participants' reflective journals, in which they frequently described adapting lessons, supporting learners, and making in-the-moment instructional decisions based on classroom realities.

Kolb's experiential learning theory proposes that knowledge is constructed through the transformation of experience (Ramli, 2024), a view that supports the findings. The community outreach practicum provided participants with opportunities to engage in real-life experiences, reflect on those experiences through journaling, and apply that knowledge in future teaching sessions. This process allowed participants to connect the theory they learned in the classroom with the realities of a school. The process the students observed, which was outlined in their reflective journals, described how experiential learning contributed to the development of teaching competence and professional confidence.

Service-learning in the community outreach practicum played a significant role in shaping participants' perceptions of teaching. Community-based experiences allow pre-service teachers to understand the social and professional aspects of teaching while simultaneously responding to community needs. eMutambara (2023) emphasizes that these experiences are particularly valuable during initial teacher education because they expose student-teachers to authentic educational challenges and responsibilities. Furthermore, outreach programs create reciprocal benefits for both the university and the community, strengthening the preparation of future educators while supporting local educational needs (Eğimli & Solhi, 2023; Gan, 2013). Participants' reflections suggest that the practicum enabled them to better understand the complexities of teaching and the impact that educators can have on learners and communities.

The post-focus groups found the importance of having a pedagogical partner during the teaching process. Participants frequently described their teaching partner as a source of emotional support, collaboration, and professional growth. Working with another pre-service teacher seemed to reduce anxiety and increase confidence in the classroom. This collaboration may have

contributed to increasing self-efficacy levels throughout the community outreach practicum experience.

Reflective journaling was another tool that allowed students to examine their experiences, identify challenges, and see their progress over time. Harahap and Fithriani (2024) found that reflective journaling aids pre-service teachers in becoming more aware of the realities and complexities of teaching in real educational settings. Similarly, the participants in this study used reflection to help them understand how their experiences and classroom experiences could shape their future professional identities.

A particular finding is that participants' confidence remained high throughout the practicum experience. Previous research has suggested that self-efficacy may decrease when pre-service teachers encounter the realities of classroom teaching (Cannon, 2022). However, the present study did not reveal such a decline. Although participants acknowledged experiencing nervousness and uncertainty at the beginning and during the practicum, their overall perceptions remained positive from the pre-practicum to the post-practicum stages. This suggests that the support structures embedded within the project, including collaborative teaching, reflective journaling, and guided practice, may have helped participants transform initial anxiety into confidence and professional growth.

In conclusion, it can be seen that pre-service EFL teachers' perceptions of classroom teaching underwent a transformational process from the beginning of the program until they finished. Students went from believing they were ready to having a higher level of self-efficacy based on authentic classroom experience. Through teaching, reflection, and community engagement, participants strengthened their self-efficacy, developed their professional identities, and gained a deeper understanding of the realities of teaching. These findings highlight the value of community-based practicum experiences as opportunities for experiential learning, professional growth, and the development of future educators.

CONCLUSIONS

This study found that pre-service EFL teachers' perceptions of classroom teaching became more grounded and confident through participation in a community-based practicum. While participants initially reported feeling nervous about teaching in a real educational setting, they also demonstrated high levels of perceived preparedness, which were maintained throughout the practicum experience.

The findings suggest that authentic teaching opportunities, collaboration with pedagogical partners, and reflective journaling contributed to the development of self-efficacy and professional identity. Overall, the practicum enabled participants to connect theory with practice, strengthen their confidence as future teachers, and gain a deeper understanding of the realities of classroom teaching.

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