
Student's Pedagogical Practicum: Reflection on the Profile of the Inclusive Teacher During the Covid-19 Isolation

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Abstract

The efficiency of pedagogical practicum in the professional development of Pre-service Teachers has been and remains one of the most debated issues among education specialists over the past two decades. Inclusive education is a relatively new educational policy, which has countless challenges. One of them being the implementation of the profile of inclusive teachers during pedagogical practicum in their initial education. Conducting online pedagogical practices as a result of isolation due to Covid-19 pandemic was a completely unpredictable practice, however, forced by the conditions.

This Action Research, of a qualitative nature, aims to shed light on the efficiency of the implementation of students' online practice, considering in particular the implementation of their profile of inclusive teachers in practice. The study involved senior students of the Primary Education BA program (N = 34), their mentoring teachers (N = 9), and faculty advisor. The data were collected through two focus groups with the mentor teachers and the students, as well as observation, analysis and evaluation based on a control list of daily planning and videos created and presented by Pre-service Teachers to carry out the learning process with students throughout three phases of pedagogical practice. The action, reflection, and revision processes during the three phases of the practice provided an in-depth understanding of the connection between theory on practice and professional growth for Pre-service teachers as inclusive educators in exceptional circumstances. As a result, it became possible to create a new form of pedagogical practicum that benefited all participants in the study.

Key words: action research; inclusive education, initial teacher education; practicum; professional development

Introduction

Albania, like all other countries, faced the sudden closure of schools and universities in March 2020 due to the outbreak of the Covid 19 pandemic, which caused a real crisis in education (Education International 2020) as well as also in health, economy and beyond (Quezada, Talbot, & Quezada-Parker, 2020). The closure of schools worldwide affected 1.725 billion pre-university students

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and 290 million students in 193 countries of the world (UNESCO 2020), who switched to homeschooling, attended by teachers and parents simultaneously. The only solution to get out of the crisis in higher education, as well as in other levels of education, was to move online teaching (Quezada et al, 2020). The situation was difficult at all levels of education, but in a special way it was very challenging for the initial education of teachers, especially in the cases of the realization of pedagogical practicum in the defined standards (Annamalai, Ab Rashid, Harb Alqaryouti, Eddin Sadeq, Al-Smadi, & Kumar, 2022; Kadir, F. A., & Aziz, 2021; Kalloo, Mitchell, & Kamalodeen, 2020; Sasaki, et al, 2020).

There are nine universities in Albania that offer BA programs for primary education teachers. In all universities two professional practices take place. The first one has 3 credits and the second 6 credits. The first internship takes place in the second semester of the second year and is passive (the student only observes) and has as a precondition that the student has passed the course of the teaching methodology. In the second internship that takes place in the second semester of the third year and has the precondition of the first internship, the pre-service teacher is an active participant and has the right to teach while supervised by the mentor teacher. In the third year in the first semester the practicum takes place over 15 weeks, where the pre-service teacher must be present 5 hours per week in class.

In the Faculty of Education of the University of Durrës in normal conditions, the evaluation for this practice is done through two measuring instruments (the tool of the mentor teacher and the faculty adviser which are based on the field observation of the lessons) and the work with dossiers. The dossier contains 45 daily preparations, and a reflective essay. During the lockdown situation, FE at A. Moisiu University held a meeting with all faculty advisers and decided to carry out the online practice of Pre-service teachers by changing the evaluation variables for this practice. Conducting online pedagogical practices as a result of isolation due to Covid-19 pandemic was a completely unpredictable practice, but it is not that another solution could be found.

Theoretical framework of the study

This study is based on Donald Schon's theory (1983; 1987; 1991). The basis of this theory is based on the concept of John Dewey, who emphasizes: "*Active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and further conclusions to which it leads... it includes conscious and voluntary effort to establish belief upon a firm basis of evidence and rationality*" (Dewey, 1933:118). Schon presented the concept based on two levels: "*reflection in action*" and "*reflection on action*" (Schon, 1983; 1987;

1991). With *reflection in action* we will understand that actions are taken while the event is happening by passing through: 1) Experiencing; 2) Thinking on your feet; 3) Thinking about what to do next; and 4) Acting straight away. With *reflection on action* we will understand that actions are taken after the event has occurred: 1) Thinking about something that has happened; 2) Thinking what you would do differently next time; and 3) Taking your time.

Moon, (1999) defines reflective practice as an opportunity to face difficult and complex situations, which test the professional and ethical skills of the teacher, while Zeichner, (2010) and Allen & Wright, (2014) consider practice as the moment of reflection on theoretical ideas reflected in practical situations. The study Darling-Hammond, (2017) evaluates the practicum as the most important stage for initial teacher education as it considers it as a key component of being an effective teacher. She argues that during the internship, teacher candidates have the opportunity to improve their skills before entering the classroom as professionals..

In the conditions created by the Covid 19 crisis, many studies expressed concern about the effectiveness of online practicum, raising doubts about how this type of practice would fulfill the needs of students to qualify based on the standards of teachers according to the respective states (Flores & Gago, 2020; Kallou et al, 2020; Kidd, & Murray, 2020; Moyo, 2020). This dilemma caused universities that prepare teachers to apply different paradigms for the realization of pedagogical practicum such as Model-based Inquiry, Action Research, etc. Thus, for example, in Portugal there is scientific evidence of the use of the 'an ideal(ised) practice' approach, which has resulted in a positive approach for the time of lockdown, but also promising to be used as a form of re-dimensioning the model of pedagogical practices as well in classroom teaching conditions (Flores, & Gago, 2020).

According to the report of teachers in Albania, one of the factors that worried teachers during the period March-June 2020, was the inequality created in education by the pandemic and especially the difficulty to respond properly to students with special needs (Kashahu-Xhelilaj, & Tartari, 2021). This is due to the fact that inclusive education in Albania is an extraordinary challenge (Kashahu-Xhelilaj & Zenelaga 2019), although the Ministry of Education has since 2016 approved a document for the education and formation of the profile of the inclusive teacher (MASR, 2016) to orientate all interest groups. In response to this reality, the universities that prepare teachers paid increased attention to the application of the inclusive teacher profile in pedagogical practices. Exactly for the reasons mentioned above, the purpose of the study is: 1) to shed light on the efficiency of the implementation of pre-service teachers online practicum, considering in particular the implementation of their profile of inclusive teachers in practice (based on the perceptions of students, mentor teachers and university

instructors); and 2) to understand the changes that occur in the professional development of the pre-service teacher as a result of reflective practice (based on the perceptions of students, mentor teachers and university instructors).

Methodology

This is an action research case approach. This method was used because *action research is designed to bridge the gap between research and practice* (Somekh, 1995:340). For more, according to Craig, (2009) the ultimate goal of action research is to address a practical problem and improve professional practice. One of the problems identified in the practicum of a year ago was the rigidity of the Pre-service teacher to demonstrate in practice the profile of the inclusive teacher, which was also the essence of the research planned before the Covid 19 crisis appeared.

The participants

The sample was selected by the convenience technique both for Senior students of the Primary Education BA program (N = 34) and for mentor teachers (N = 9). In the studies carried out on online pedagogical practices during the Covid 19 crisis, cases are known when it was necessary to create improvised groups with children of young school age (Kim, 2020) or even to create simulations for the effect of carrying out the practices (Sasaki, 2020). In this case, connections with mentor teachers from previous internships were used, as well as the help of aluminum students who had been working as teachers for some time was sought and it was achieved that the internships took place with their classes. However, being in very challenging conditions, criteria were set in the selection of mentor teachers. First, it was requested that they have at least 10 years of teaching experience and 2 years of mentoring experience and that they have at least one child with special needs in their classroom, declared as a student with special needs or suspected as such. Being in the same city with Pre-service Teachers was an added advantage. All the work was coordinated by the Faculty advisor (N = 1).

Study instruments.

To realize the goals of the study, a list of semi-structured questions was drawn up for the focus group with the mentor teachers. The questions were related to teaching competencies and teaching practice as an inclusive teacher

like: 1) How do you think you helped the pre-services teacher to value learning diversity and identifying learning differences between students?; 2) In which ways were you able to develop the confidence of pre-services teachers as inclusive teachers?; 3) In what aspect of inclusive teaching do you think your interns have improved during all phases of the project?; 4) What do you think has been the biggest benefit (value) for you mentoring pre-service teachers in this difficult period?; and 5) How do you think the students benefited from action research during the practicum?

A set of questions was designed to collect data on student interns' perceptions. Focus group questions were related to teaching competence and teaching confidence as an inclusive teacher as well as to understand the professional change that has happened to them as a result of using the online action research approach through the questions: 1) How does your mentor help you identify learning diversity in the classroom during the practicum?; 2) How did your mentor help you discover your teaching problems?; 3) How did your mentor help you to develop practical skills as inclusive teacher? ; 4) How have you been able to improve your ability to work with students' parents?; 5) In which areas did you feel most competent?; 6) Where do you feel you need to improve in the future?; 7) What difficulties did you face during this practicum developed in extraordinary conditions?; as well as 8) How did you feel during the practicum carried out using the action research method? How did you achieve your teaching goals and especially the objective of being an inclusive teacher?

A checklist based on state standards for primary education teachers (IZHA (2016)) as well as a checklist based on the comprehensive teacher profile was used for the assessment of student files by the university instructor (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education , 2012).

Data Collection and processing

This action research project was implemented through four phases (0 to 3 check Tab. 1) which lasted 15 weeks, where the leadership of the students was realized through synchronous and asynchronous learning. The data were collected during the time frame of March-June 2020. They were collected from: 1) Two focus groups with the mentor teachers and the students; 2) Observation of daily planning prepared by Pre-service Teachers; 3) Analysis and evaluation based on a control list of daily planning and videos created and presented by Pre-service teachers and 4) Analysis and evaluation of Pre-service Teachers of reflective essays. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data of both focus groups. Both focus groups were conducted with Zoom meetings and lasted about an hour and a half each. All teachers took part in the focus group

of mentor teachers, while 7 students out of 34 were randomly selected for the focus group of students.

For the analysis of observation of daily planning and Videos and voices messages prepared by Pre-service Teachers, the checklists of meeting the standards of the primary education teacher (IZHA (2016), and of the comprehensive teacher profile MASR, (2016) were used) and Content analyzes were used to analyze the reflective essays of Pre-service Teachers. In order to avoid ethical issues, the participants in the study were informed about the purpose of the study at the beginning of it and asked for their approval for their participation in this research by guaranteed them anonymity as well.

Table 1

Phase of Research	Participants	Actions	Action focus
Phase 0 March 11 th -18 th	Researcher (faculty advisor) / mentoring teachers/ Pre-service Teachers	Recruitment of 9 mentoring teachers (according to the set criteria) and creating 9 groups of practice. (7 teacher each of them 4 students +2 teachers each of them 3 students) Creating contact between mentoring teachers and Pre-service Teachers and assigning expectations. Getting to know the individual characteristics of students	Plan
Phase 1 March 23 rd -April 17 th	Researcher (faculty advisor)/ mentoring teachers/ Pre-service Teachers	Daily planning of Pre-service Teachers and creating videos and voice messages to explain concepts and teach. Accomplishing teaching and the control of students in cooperation with mentoring teachers.	Act, Observe
Phase 2 April 20 th April 21 th -May 19 th May 18 th May 19 th	Researcher (faculty advisor) / mentoring teachers/ Pre-service Teachers	Group presentation (zoom classroom) of materials prepared during phase 1, and analyzing them based on the checklist of the profile of inclusive teachers. (9 presentations/random selection one for each group) Re-planning based on reflecting and the creating of practicum dossiers. Focus group with mentoring teachers Focus group with Pre-service Teachers	Observe, Reflect, Plan

Phase 3	Researcher (faculty advisor)	Handing in the dossiers including:	Observe and reflect
May 22 nd	/mentoring teachers/ Pre-service Teachers	1) The daily planning of Pre-service Teachers and the creation of videos and voice messages to explain concepts and teach. (individual work)	
May 25 th - June 12 th		2) Reflecting on the accomplishment of the teaching process and the control of the knowledge of students in cooperation with mentoring teachers. (individual work)	
June 15 th -19 th		3) Creating essays of a reflective nature on the practicum based on the profile of inclusive teachers. Analysis, evaluation grading of the dossiers. Argumentation of the evaluation and individual feedback and advice for each student	

The limitation of the study

First, the sample of the study was taken at one university out of nine universities that offer teaching programs. Secondly, the qualitative nature of the study does not aim to generalize the findings, but to deepen the understanding and reflection on the accomplishment of the practicum in initial teacher education in exceptional conditions to prepare future teachers for Inclusive education. On the other hand, the researcher is also a participant.

Results and discussion

Phase 0

At this stage, it was not yet clear how long the isolation would last. In addition, health and safety were discussed because the health system was not prepared for such a situation, so the university staff was oriented to support students psychologically in addition to professional support. During the pandemic, the stress was the same in other countries, where education leaders at all levels, in addition to health-related concerns, were focused on the forms and ways they should follow to continue the education process with as little interruption as possible (Hale et al. 2020). The teachers used every possible way to achieve contact and learning with the students. In Albania, among the most used forms of communication were Whatsapp for Zoom (ASCAP & MAS,

2020), but also around the world the use of WhatsApp was considered a very accessible platform due to the low cost (Nel & Marais 2020).

Phase 0 was the first step to create connections between student intern teachers and their classes, but also with the university instructor. Synchronous formats were used for meetings once a week with the university instructor and teaching sessions in online and asynchronous learning classes through google-classroom where students used weekly reflections but also teaching material prepared for students, which they shared with the group. During this week, the students got to know the characteristics of all the students (pupils) in the class and in even more detail with the students (pupils) with special needs (see appendix 1). During the first week, the mentor teachers shared with the practicum students all the prepared teaching materials (videos, voice messages, ppt presentations, concept tables and diagrams, etc.). Students also participated in online tutoring in their respective classrooms where they had the opportunity to interact with students (pupils) and their parents.

One of the main problems faced by teachers in inclusive education in Albania is the resistance of parents to accept children as they are (their special needs) and their difference from ordinary children (Duka, 2015). This is a difficulty for the teacher since if the child is not diagnosed (which cannot be done without the parent's approval) the teacher does not have the right to ask for a support teacher. This not only makes the teacher's job very difficult, but also the child remains untreated. But it is just as difficult when you have a gifted child in the class, as they also require an individual educational plan to advance with their personal growth. The educational environment in Albania has very little awareness to understand and treat this category of students with special needs (Kashahu & Zenelaga, 2019).

Phase 1

This phase of the project lasted about four weeks and the students were actively involved in teaching by creating learning content according to the planning of different subjects in the daily and weekly schedule. The students planned differentiated teaching for students with special needs, but also for some other students who, due to various reasons, found it difficult to be in the same step as the students of the class. In addition to the difficulties they had in working with students with special needs, especially in communicating with them, the students during the internships reported facing a number of difficulties that came as a result of the students' family problems (problems of relationships within families, economic and health problems of various kinds various reasons caused by the lockdown), but also technical problems for the implementation of online teaching (which was mainly carried out through

WhatsApp, Zoom and Google Classroom), such as the lack of connection to the Internet, the problem of accessing electronic devices, problems also reported by other researchers (Annamalai, et al., 2022; Sepulveda-Escobar, & Morrison 2020). It should be mentioned that the majority of students and teachers mainly used mobile devices and very rarely laptops or desktops. Parents had difficulties to create to provide electronic devices especially when they had more than two children (ASCAP & MAS, 2020).

During the first phase, in addition to the help they received from the mentor teachers, the students also benefited from the lesson models at RTSH School (special channel of the Albanian Public Television) to improve their work in the preparation of teaching materials. As in many other countries where governments can help online learning, among others, by creating television channels in support of schools (Flores, 2020; Özkanal, Yüksel & Uysal 2020), also in Albania RTSH School was created. MASR and ASCAP, in collaboration with other organizations, offered the presentation of many educational videos.

Phase 2

One of the requirements for new teachers is for them to be able to apply inclusiveness in education. Inclusive education is now a widespread educational policy in many countries of the world. In inclusive classes, students are very different from each other. Students today come from different life contexts (Kashahu-Xhelilaj, 2015), have different health and physical needs, different skills and talents (Foster et al., 2010; Kashahu-Xhelilaj, & Zenelaga-Shehu, 2019). For this reason, in a pandemic period where it is extremely difficult to maintain equality and equity in education, the profile of inclusive teachers was used as a reference point for reflection on professional practicum. This profile is based on four core values: 1) Valuing learner diversity; 2) Supporting all learners; 3) Working with others; and 4) Continuing personal professional development (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2012:11), these values also included in decree 195 (MASR, 2016).

Phase 2 of the project started with the Zoom meeting presentation of the students' daily preparations, where for each mentor teacher, a student intern was randomly selected to present his best work. During the nine presentations were identified: 1) Lack of application of teaching methods that create the possibility of inclusion (participation of all students); 2) Assessing the teacher's communication with parents as a parental and bilateral responsibility; 3) Lack of identification of student specifics before grading; as well as 4) Frequent use of summative assessment in relation to formative assessment. The findings were discussed with the Pre-service teacher in the form of feedback on group work and turned into reference points for future work improvement.

Impressions of Pre-service teachers on the practicum

The study pointed out that one of the ways which see ms to have helped the most Pre-service teachers to identify learning diversity is the help given by mentors to discover the combination of students' personal characteristics with the results achieved during the formative assessment.

No matter how much the mentor teacher helped me by listing all the characteristics of the students, I couldn't remember... it took me time... However, preparing for lesson planning always brought me the need to recall. Correcting students' assignments made me very sensitive to their characteristics and the work I would do with them to improve their knowledge.

E. M. Pre-service teachers

To find out their teaching problems, mentors used three main methods: 1) Request for analysis immediately after teaching online using questions a) What went right? B) What could go better?; 2) Asking Pre-service teachers to discover the connection between pupils achievement and teaching activities; and 3) Suggesting analysing the compatibility between learning outcomes and student achievement

Pre-service teachers proved that have felt that they have significantly improved two-way communication with pupils and their parents, especially with parents of children with special needs. As well as have explored the most efficient ways of communication according to the possibilities of the pupils and their families.

"Some parents in the class I teach didn't know how to use WhatsApp to download the materials I sent them and I had to teach them how to do it. This helped me a lot to make them feel more relaxed with me and I used this to ask for their help to supervise the children more in doing the tasks and especially to bring them to the end. There are times when they also have difficulty understanding the requirements, but I have created opportunities for them to call me on the phone and ask me about any ambiguity".

G. L. Pre-service teachers

"I have a daughter in my class who has ADHD and communication with her mother has saved me. I get information about her condition before I go online with the other kids, and when mom tells me she hasn't had enough sleep at night, the assistant teacher and I take great care to highlight the details, and help her narrow it down. possible mistakes in the tasks by helping her to organize the task. In these cases, I don't insist that she finish the task, because she gets even more irritated and can't contain her anger and disrupts the whole lesson or goes out of line..."

D. M. Pre-service teachers

Imitation of individual pupils' plans used by mentor teachers have increased the Pre-service teacher's belief that inclusion is feasible in practice and is not simply a theory.

“When we studied the inclusive education module, it seemed to me that the claim that all children could learn in a classroom despite the changes, especially for children with learning disabilities, seemed like a fairy tale. Now I see that if you are trying and collaborating with the group, you can see changes in the child”

+ L. Z. Pre-service teachers

However, they feel the need to work as teams on these plans and not just imitate them. Among the difficulties faced during this practicum developed in extraordinary conditions Pre-service teachers list: 1) Lack of their electronic equipment and pupils for conducting on-line learning; 2) Large load for daily preparation; 3) Confusion caused by sending student assignments from different platforms and applications; and 4) Lack of internet both for themselves and for pupils. Similar findings have been identified by other researchers in relation to the challenges for the realization of online practicums (Ormeño, & Rosas, 2023; Sepulveda-Escobar, 2020).

Pre-service teacher's perception of the values obtained from action research

Based on the statements of Pre-service teachers, action research encouraged them to focus more on the profile of the inclusive teacher. This is not only considering the findings of the studies and the theoretical aspects learned in the university, but giving meaning to them through the deliberate practice of all the characteristics of the comprehensive teacher.

“This research we did this year for practice made me feel curious and eager to understand how I can have all students involved in a fair and equal way. We shared endless ideas with each other, and every day we found new forms... What I am very proud of are the skills I have acquired to use technology as a form of pedagogy to include all children in learning according to the opportunities and needs that they have”

B. S. Pre-service teachers

Also in other studies, it has been proven that action research has provided positive experience and professional growth for internship students. For example, Arslan (2019) in a case study where they used reflection-on-action to implement pedagogical practices, found that action research served many

students to grow them professionally. In terms of professional development, the students realized that Action research projects help them to better know their skills and to set priorities for continued education, but also to get to know the students and their colleagues in depth with whom they shared rest thoughts and ideas. Students proved that through Action research projects they noticed an increase in the ability to think and act in order to improve their work by reflecting on personal practices in a structured way. They researched the effects of their teaching on students with a critical eye, to see how various aspects of teaching could be improved, ranging from electronic materials, audio and video instruction formats to clarify concepts, types of classroom or home assignments and aspects of continuous and summative assessment and their effects on students.

In addition, the team work for the realization of the practical research project made the students aware of the importance of interaction with colleagues (students, mentor teachers) in sharing professional opinions. All the students highlighted the importance of constructive communication with faculty advisors and mentor teachers.

“At first I felt an insecurity that I don’t know how to explain...I thought to myself, how can the practice work like this? But then, I adjusted and started to get used to the new reality and this practice seemed so beneficial to me. Communication at any time and for any need with the faculty advisor and mentoring teachers, but also with the pre-service teachers I had in the group, has helped me immensely. This has been a great strength that I managed until the end to be able to include every student in the lesson...”

K. V. Pre-service teachers

During the group work, they applied different strategies and teaching styles according to the students’ needs and had the opportunity to share their ideas with others, which they found very beneficial. Contrary to these findings is the researcher Kosar, (2021), who also qualitatively investigated the perception of 25 interns on the effectiveness of online practice. She found that they evaluated the internship they did as ineffective to prepare them for the first year of work, although there are studies where the online internship was evaluated as a positive experience (Annamalai et al.,2022; Ersin, Atay, & Mede; 2020; Kidd, & Murray, 2020)

The students of this sample not only positively evaluated the practicum for their preparation, but they gave their opinion that if Action research becomes part of the work culture in schools and teachers will cooperate according to the grade levels, this would help them a lot as young teachers when they will be in their first year of work to benefit from a professional perspective. The students felt improved communication skills both with colleagues and with students and

parents. Working with groups enabled them to be more flexible and open to new ideas about ways to improve teaching and the whole educational process.

Impressions of mentor teachers on practicum

The findings showed that mostly mentoring teachers think the observations during the first weeks have helped the pre-services teacher a lot to value learning diversity and identifying learning differences between pupils.

“In my group of students, in the first week they were like in the air. I don’t blame them that I was also very stressed because I was not able to create all the materials in time, and the problem was also the internet connection with all the students. During the second week, they entered the google meeting in the lessons I was developing online and followed very attentively. Then... the chat didn’t stop... They started asking a lot of questions about the organization of the content and especially about the PEI I was using for Anna (the student who came from Greece a year ago) and about Ron’s plan (student with autism), although for him, they communicated more with the assistant teacher...”

Mentor teacher 4

The continuous and very constructive relationship between the faculty advisor, mentoring teachers and Pre-service Teachers is mentioned by every mentoring teacher. The issue of collaboration between actors involved in professional practice has been considered both a strong point and a weak point during the pandemic period by researchers (Ormeño, & Rosas, 2023).

“In seconds we connected with each other (faculty advisor, mentor teacher, Pre-service Teachers) for any dilemma or even idea... This was our strong point. It was also very beneficial for us as mentor teachers, the meeting where we analyzed in detail the work they had done when making the presentations...”

Mentor teacher 7

Preparation of teaching materials (daily planning and creation of videos, voice messages) and immediate analysis after teaching or even correction of student work have developed the confidence of pre-services teachers as inclusive teachers.

“After each of their lessons, which they carried out with the materials they had prepared themselves, we held an online meeting to see the results and focus specifically on the students who needed the most support... Checking

the students' tasks in many cases served them more than my suggestions to understand their shortcomings in teaching".

Mentor teacher 1

Mentor Teachers list two main aspects of Pre-service teachers training: 1) Recognizing and identifying the needs of students even for children who were not diagnosed; 2) work to build the PEI plan according to the specifications of the students' special needs.

All the mentor teachers testified that they initially felt very burdened and stressed because in addition to the work of creating explanatory materials and communicating with the class, they needed a lot of work and time to help the practice students. But after the discussion phase of the presentations with the university instructor, they noticed an increase in the quality of the preparation of teaching materials, which the teachers used without having to create material as before for the class.

"Their materials kept getting better and better, especially after reflecting on the 9 presentations that took place online. The girls kept the conclusions in front of them and reflected on every step of the preparation and planning of the teaching. Their materials became so accurate after 4 weeks that it was no longer necessary for me to create materials to explain the content. Without even thinking about the ease I felt when checking the tasks, which the teacher sends to the students via WhatsApp and the girls immediately correct them and send them suggestions for improving the work."

Mentor teacher 4

Another aspect that the mentor teachers valued was the help given to the students in correcting the students' tasks and especially the connection with the students who did not have the right equipment to be online and to send photos of completed tasks, where different types of solutions have been found.

"In my class, I have two students who do not have the opportunity to go online to study and to send me assignments either by email or with photos because they do not have smartphones and other devices. Two of the internship students took over these two students in a special way. Orientations were given through phone calls, and assignments were corrected in notebooks. A solution was found, which you won't believe, the student's parents go to the Spar supermarket, because we are allowed to go shopping... and leave the notebooks. The students go get them and correct them and leave them there. We are lucky that the saleswomen were also good... that they keep our notebooks, because now we are all afraid of everything..."

Mentor teacher 5

Another benefit identified by the mentor teachers was their continuous awareness of the need for reflection after each teaching hour, like never before..

I have been teaching for 32 years, certainly not in these absurd conditions like now, but I have never been more reflective about my teaching than now... It has been worth it to me too...

Mentor teacher 3

The teachers emphasized that the use of action research had brought great changes in the benefit of the practicum students' competencies from stage to stage. According to them, students started planning by thinking first about the characteristics of students and cooperation with parents. They then determined the methodology they should use on a case-by-case basis. In addition, there was an increase in empathy to understand the needs and feelings of the students. This made the students to strengthen the relationships with the students but also between them and the mentor teachers and assistant teachers, as they felt a constant need to discuss their ideas to improve the work with the students. Although the students had good theoretical preparation on the concept of inclusiveness and the special needs of students, continuous reflection increased their skills to realize the participation of all children in learning.

Phase 3

Impressions of University instructor practicum

At the end of all phases of the project led by the university instructor, after the submission of the dossiers as well as the reflective essays was noticed:

1. At the end of all phases of the project led by the university instructor, after the submission of the dossiers as well as the reflective essays was noticed:
2. Leveraging new skills in using technology to create learning content;
3. Awareness of the differences that exist between students, both in the social-cultural aspect that surrounds them and in their personal characteristics and abilities;
4. Increasing students' understanding and developing empathy for them;
5. Connecting theories with practice and learning from real situations;
6. Full reflection on their beliefs, attitudes and values on inclusiveness;
7. Improvement of teaching planning forms and methodological aspects;
8. Logical use of different types of assessment;
9. Improving constructive two-way communication with both parents and internship students and mentor teachers and university instructors

10. Increasing professional awareness of strengths and needs for professional improvement in the future;
11. Increase in self-motivation and self-direction driven by curiosity and the desire to learn new knowledge, not only practical, but also theoretical;
12. Generating ideas to solve concrete problematic situations.

The study highlighted that action research is perceived as a form of results by both, pre-service teachers as well as mentor teachers and faculty advisors for emergency situations such as the Covid 19 pandemic. I emphasize this because the practicum took place precisely in the conditions of emergency. This was not a planned distance teaching, nor any other combined form, but as researchers Kashahu-Xhelilaj & Tartari (2021) explain, it was a shift of teaching and learning from educational institutions to home conditions due to emergency. The development of online practicums has not been in the aims of education programs before the outbreak of the Covid 19 pandemic (Burns et al, 2020), as face-to-face teaching experience in real classrooms has been valued as an extremely important aspect of preparation of teachers to qualify as a teacher who meets the criteria to enter the teaching profession. For this reason there were no studies of online practicum before March 2020 (Burns et al, 2020). After this period, many universities, in an effort to adapt to the conditions, experimented with different forms of online internships (Kadir, 2021; Kim, 2020; Kosar, 2021; Quezada, et al., 2020; Sasaki, 2020). However, in order to truly understand the effect of online internships in the preparation of this generation of students who developed the internship in the conditions of the pandemic, it is necessary to carry out long-term studies.

The immediate transition from classroom teaching to online teaching was a very big challenge as there was no university in Albania that offered distance learning programs to provide them with an experience. The Covid 19 crisis found education unprepared both structurally and in the preparation of human resources for such a situation (Kashahu-Xhelilaj, & Tartari, 2021). Everything in the implementation of the practicum of this study was developed through the Internet, through which the systematic interaction of different Agents of the Practicum was enabled, who interacted not only to carry out the teaching in the practicum classes, but also to discuss real events and situations, which the students evaluated as very important for the formation of their competences as teachers. McLellan (2004) points out that if learning is based on tasks of real situations, learning through the internet enables meaningful learning experiences, as was also revealed in this study by the students' perceptions of the practicum. In addition, in this study, mentoring teachers and pre-service teachers testified during the practicum that there was a very positive relationship between the faculty advisor, mentoring teachers and pre-service teachers.

Positive and continuous communication for the successful implementation of the practicum has been identified as an important factor in other studies as well. (Ormeño & Rosas, 2023).

The study showed that both synchronous and asynchronous communication gave their positive effects in the practicum in question and served the students to achieve the goals of the practicum. Researcher Watts (2016) also reached this conclusion, after reviewing 24 studies to understand the effectiveness of synchronous and asynchronous teaching. However, Watts (2016) emphasized that before designing the online course, instructors must consider the content of the course and its expected results, as well as the needs of the students for how the students will interact with the instructor or even between them, but also what opportunities they have in the use of technology and then decide how the process will be carried out.

Conclusions

The action, reflection, and revision processes during the four phases of the practice provided an in-depth understanding of the connection between theory on practice and professional growth for Pre-service teachers as inclusive educators in exceptional circumstances. As a result, it became possible to create a new form of pedagogical practicum that benefited all participants in the study. Studies have proven that the pandemic period produced new forms of pedagogical practices as the need for adaptation (Kidd, & Murray, 2020), and already the pedagogical aspects that proved to be efficient should make instructors and leaders of teacher education programs re-dimension pedagogical practices. On the other hand, it is the first time the research actions were taken in Albania about practicum in emergency conditions. The results of this study would help mentoring teachers and faculty advisors for better planning of practicum indicators, and to think more deeply about the processes and philosophy of education when it comes to the education of teachers, as the researcher Kalloo and her colleagues (2020) also say, we live in a century full of uncertainty and with the possibility that crises such as Covid 19 to repeat. For this reason, it is necessary for students who are preparing to become teachers to be provided with the opportunity to develop digital skills and to practice these skills through online teaching practice. (La Velle, et al., 2020; Xu & Zou, 2023).

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Appendix 1

Characteristics of students with special needs according to division into groups and respective classes

Pupils (Pseudonym)	Special need	The main characteristics of the child	Diagnosed	Assistant Teacher
Group 1 3d Grade				
Sandri	Child returned from emigration	He returned from Greece less than a year ago. Understands language, but has no initiative to speak. There are many difficulties in reading and writing. This makes it difficult to progress in other subjects as well. Shows little interest in learning. He seems stressed and nervous all the time	-	No
Group 2 4th Grade				
Alisa	Anxiety problems	It is unfocused and tenses up very easily. She often cries when faced with difficulties. It draws very nicely.	Yes	No
Group 3 2nd Grade				
Melisa	talent in the field of language and communication	She reads like he is in the 6th grade. She has a very rich vocabulary. She writes his thoughts very structured. No patience. Gets bored easily in class. It needs constant attention from teachers.	-	No
Group 4 4th Grade				
Roni	Autistic Asperg syndrome	There is no eye contact. There is a problem with executive functions. He cannot express his feelings. It shows difficulties in speaking and writing. We did well in math, but you can't tear him away if he starts working. There is great difficulty in moving from one learning activity to another...	Yes	Yes

Ana	Child returned from emigration	It has been 1 year since she returned from Greece and she still has many difficulties with spoken and written language. Has a lot of interest in learning, but does not take criticism well.	-	No
Group 5 4th Grade				
Mira	Autism is suspected	No communication with children and very little with teachers. There are gross and fine motor difficulties. She speaks very rarely and like a 5-year-old child. Great difficulties in writing.	No	No
Group 6 3d Grade				
Helios	ADHD suspected	He has an exaggerated sense of humor and is very energetic. Very unfocused and mobile. Can't complete any tasks. Can't remember directions. He often gives up on duty.	No	No
Group 7 2nd Grade				
Elona	ADHD	At first glance, she seems calm. The parents report that she has disturbed sleep. Makes a lot of careless mistakes. She can't catch the details. It is very difficult to organize tasks. She can't manage her emotions and often has outbursts of anger.	Yes	Yes

STUDENSKI PEDAGOŠKI PRAKTIKUM: OSVRT NA PROFIL INKLUZIVNOG UČITELJA TIJEKOM COVID-19 IZOLACIJE

Sažetak

Učinkovitost pedagoškog praktikuma u profesionalnom razvoju inicijalnih učitelja bilo je i još je uvijek jedno od pitanja o kojima se najviše raspravlja među pedagoškim stručnjacima u posljednja dva desetljeća. Inkluzivno obrazovanje relativno je nova obrazovna politika koja ima bezbroj izazova. Jedan od njih je implementacija profila inkluzivnih učitelja tijekom pedagoškog praktikuma u njihovom inicijalnom obrazovanju. Provođenje online pedagoških vježbi kao posljedica izolacije zbog pandemije Covida-19 bila je potpuno nepredvidiva praksa, ali iznuđena uvjetima.

Ovo akcijsko istraživanje, kvalitativnog karaktera, ima za cilj rasvijetliti učinkovitost provedbe online prakse, posebno s obzirom na implementaciju njihovog profila inkluzivnih učitelja u praksi. U istraživanju su sudjelovali studenti preddiplomskog studija Primarnog obrazovanja (N = 34), njihovi nastavnici mentori (N = 9) i njihovi mentori na fakultetu. Podaci su prikupljeni kroz dvije fokus grupe s učiteljima, mentorima i studentima, kao i promatranjem, analizom i evaluacijom na temelju kontrolne liste dnevnog planiranja i videozapisa koje su izradili i predstavili učitelji kako bi proveli studente kroz tri faze pedagoške prakse. Procesi djelovanja, razmišljanja i revidiranja tijekom tri faze prakse omogućili su dubinsko razumijevanje veze između teorije i prakse i profesionalnog razvoja za učitelje kao inkluzivne edukatore u iznimnim okolnostima. Kao rezultat toga, postalo je moguće stvoriti novi oblik pedagoškog praktikuma koji će koristiti svim sudionicima.

Ključne riječi: akcijsko istraživanje, inkluzivno obrazovanje, primarno obrazovanje učitelja, praktikum, profesionalni razvoj