



## English Pre-Service Teachers' Impressions in Relation to Their Teaching Practice: The Case of "Aleksander Moisiu" University

PhD. Anisa Trifoni

PhD. Florinda Borici

University "Aleksandër Moisiu" Durrës,  
Durrës, Albania

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### Abstract

Teaching practice, also known as *practicum*, is a very important step in the formation of future teachers. It is the stage when pre-service teachers become aware of their potentials, increase their knowledge, acquire new skills, become more practical in respect to applying various techniques and approaches, gain expertise in teaching, in other words, they view the class from a different perspective; not from that of the student anymore. Successful teacher training leads towards warm and welcoming learning environments and this leads to pupils who are keen to come to school and to learn English. It is a path which every pre-service teacher experiences in various ways and allows him or her to create one's own impressions on the way things really work within the classroom context. These impressions are very important because they give a hint on what goes well and what needs to be remedied in the future. In this context, the study in question aims to shed light on English pre-service teachers' general impressions of *practicum* as well as to investigate on their impressions in relation to teachers and students' motivation, without leaving behind the difficulties encountered in class along with the management problems that have been noticed. More specifically, this study is conducted with English language students, at the end of their third semester of teaching practice. The data is collected by means of focus groups and is analysed by using the qualitative method. The results have indicated that the participants have a positive attitude towards the teaching practice. They pay attention to students' motivation and are aware of its importance in students' progress. Furthermore, they pointed out various challenges they faced in class and the way teachers usually solved them.

**Keywords:** Pre-service teachers, *practicum* impressions, English language teaching

### 1. Introduction

Teaching practice is an integral part in the way towards becoming a teacher. The teaching practice as a process increases pre-service teachers' knowledge, perfectionates their teaching skills, and provides new experiences from which to reflect and to learn. Microteaching sessions that pre-service teachers present in class as projects or special assignments are very different from the classroom context in which they find themselves during the *practicum*. We find this in Gebhard (2009) who emphasizes that during *practicum*, teacher-interns obtain relevant classroom experience, translate theory to practice, expand their awareness about goal setting and reflect on teaching and learning philosophies. The main goals of *practicum* are best specified in Unesco (2002) as follows: 1) to improve the general educational background of student teachers; 2) to increase their knowledge and understanding of the subjects they are to teach, 3) to understand the pedagogy of children, 4) and to learn and develop practical skills and competencies.

However, the way pre-service teachers perceive this process and react to it is different, based on the experience

they have in the classroom. This experience is not related only to the students or pupils and the communication they establish with them, but it also has to do with the way they plan their lessons, check students' assignments, adhere to the time at their disposal, interact with their tutor teachers at school and with practice supervisors at university. It is a whole process the pre-service teachers have to get used to, contrary to the beliefs of some of them who think that practicum has to do only with teaching. In relation to this aspect, Velasco (2019, p. 118) adds that *"While it is vital in mainstream educational research to look into teachers' beliefs generally, it is equally important to explore the instructional circumstances with which second language teachers are situated to provide insight into how these teachers make instructional decisions and essentially explore how English language interns make of their practicum experience as a whole."* Spooner-Lane et al. (2009) is more concise in their perception of the importance of practicum, when they point out that teaching practice helps interns learn the rigors of teaching and teaches them to manage the demands associated with it.

Caires and Almeida (2005) emphasize the complex nature of learning to teach, mainly influenced by the interaction between individuals and contexts. A typical example of this type of interaction is the one between the pre-service teacher and the school teacher who is assigned with tutoring, another example is the interaction between the pre-service teacher and the supervisor of teaching practice at university. During the practicum, it is of great importance for the pre-service teacher to be in touch and to receive continuous feedback from both of them, as this is essential in constructing better lessons, finding solutions for inconsistencies, managing behaviour problems and dealing with many other issues that may arise. In the same line of thought are even the researchers Nolan and Hoover (2008), cited in Range et al (2013, p. 46) who define this supervisory model as *"a triad, in which faculty supervisors, mentor teachers, and student teachers work together to share decision making about student teachers' field experiences."* Furthermore, Velasco (2019, p.119) highlights that *"By engaging in dialogues with their supervisors, interns are able to arrive at a contextualized understanding of the complexities of teaching."*

The present study is focused on English pre-service teachers' general impressions of their practicum. Furthermore, they are asked to express their opinion and talk about their observations in relation to English teachers' and students' motivation in class. This is a crucial element in having successful foreign language classes. What is more, through the focus groups, the pre-service teachers discuss about the difficulties they have encountered during their teaching practice in various schools and grades, including here even behavioral problems they may have faced.

## 2. Literature Review

Becoming a teacher is not an easy undertaking. It requires a lot of study during the Bachelor years, dedication, time and it is still not enough. Teaching practice is what confronts the pre-service teachers with the reality of the classroom. According to Armutcu and Yaman (2010, p. 29) *"Practicum is regarded as the milestone of the four-year teacher education program because it gives pre-service teachers the opportunity to gain real teaching experiences and seize the chance to experience classroom atmosphere."* Despite the fact that teacher education programs today (including English Language program) have a duration of three years (in accordance with Bologna Charter), the viewpoint expressed by the above-mentioned researchers still holds true. This view is also supported by Bruinsma and Jansen, (2010) who believe that pre-service teachers' training serves as a bridge that connects effective teaching with the teacher and the student. Furthermore, *"besides building a theoretical base for the would-be teacher, the pre-service programs afford the teacher interns a range of teaching experiences they can acculturate into their profession, Velasco (2019, p. 117)."*

Teaching practice enables pre-service students to gain insight on the teaching profession and to enrich it as well. Many of them reflect in class the model of their favorite teacher, their preferred learning styles, strategies that have resulted successful for them, techniques they have used frequently etc. In this respect, Palmér (2016) as cited in Prabjandee (2019, p. 1279) explains that *"Student teachers do not enter the teacher education programs like an empty vessel to absorb knowledge and skills; rather they bring their life histories with them into teacher education such as memories of themselves as students, beliefs about teaching, years of informal learning about being a teacher, and image of an ideal teacher."* For this reason, the practicum experience is different for each pre-service teacher and consequently their impressions vary considerably from one pre-service teacher to the other.

In this perspective, there is a lot of research conducted on the same topic that will help to shed light in the present study. For this purpose, we will initially classify the research studies we are based upon, in two main categories: studies on pre-service teachers' impressions and perceptions on their practicum and studies on pre-service teachers' difficulties encountered during their practicum. Following the research on practicum in various countries, we will provide a clear picture of the way practicum is organized in "Aleksandër Moisiu" University, English branch. This will help to create a

clear idea of the similarities, differences and expectations for the future.

### **3. Studies on Pre-Service Teachers' Impressions and Perceptions on their Practicum**

Johnson (1994) in his research aimed at finding the connection between pre-service EFL teachers' beliefs and the perception they had about the teaching practice. The results indicated that their experiences during the practicum period had a great impact on the pre-service EFL teachers' image of themselves as teachers as well as in their perception of instructional practices in the class.

Busher et al., (2015) conducted research in 3 universities, with three main goals: namely investigating to what degree these universities prepared pre-service teachers for the practicum, what made practicums successful and in what way practicums promoted pre-service teachers' professional development. The data analysis indicated that practicum was effective in developing pre-service teachers' skills, especially in class management, in coping with the individual differences in terms of diverse learning needs as well as familiarizing with students' perspectives and in appreciating what it meant to be a teacher.

Another interesting study is that of Yildiz et al., (2016) who analysed the reflections of pre-service English teachers on practicum in relation to their experiences and perceptions. The results revealed that pre-service teachers believed that practicum contributed to self-confidence and competency in teaching and coping up with the difficulties of the teaching profession. Furthermore, just as we mentioned in the previous study, pre-service English teachers started to see themselves as real teachers.

The study of Gan and Lee (2015) analysed the reflective journals of EFL pre-service teachers focusing on activity theory in the quality of theoretical lens. The results of the study pointed out that pre-service teachers managed to transform successfully their learning to teaching practices. In this respect, the researchers explained that the whole process was realized in three phases. Initially, the pre-service teachers practiced teaching in the classrooms. Secondly, they reflected on the difficulties and dilemmas by means of collaborative dialog with their university supervisors, mentoring teachers and peers. Thirdly, they developed alternative practices and implemented them in their classes. The researchers emphasized particularly the essential role played by the supportive practices of university supervisors and mentoring teachers.

Mak (2004), as cited in Othman and Kiely (2016) studied Hong Kong pre-service teachers' beliefs about communicative language teaching and their classroom language choices. The results of the research revealed that pre-service teachers' pre-existing beliefs based on their learning experiences and cultural backgrounds had a great impact in shaping their perceptions of CLT. The researcher pointed out that pre-service teachers agreed that English should be the language of instruction, but also admitted that most of them used their mother tongue with the weak students during the English class.

Pennington and Richards (1997) studied the degree to which pre-service English teachers implemented the principles they were exposed to during their teacher education at university. The results of the study indicated that teachers coped with their instructional challenges by shifting to a more traditional approach or model of teaching during their practicum, forgetting much of what they were taught previously in their courses at university.

In his study, Farrell (2008) administered questionnaires to 60 pre-service teachers and made use of follow up interviews with eight of them with the aim to look into their practicum experiences. The results revealed that pre-service teachers considered lesson planning and following the lesson plan during the lesson very important. However, in spite of being conscious of student needs, they did not manage to address them mainly due to the large number of students per class. Nevertheless, the pre-service teachers mentioned that their supervisor were more helpful than the cooperating teachers and other experienced teachers at school.

### **4. Studies on Pre-Service Teachers' Difficulties Encountered during their Practicum.**

Coffey and Lavery (2015) investigated into the way in which being part of a service-learning experience could contribute to the preparation of pre-service teachers for their first teaching practicum. The findings of the study revealed that taking part in a service-learning program resulted beneficial in coping with the obstacles of the first practicum.

Çelik (2008) study on pre-service teachers' difficulties encountered during the practicum was realized with the participation of 133 pre-service teachers. For the study purposes, the researcher administered a 40-item questionnaire which measured potential stress areas for pre-service teachers. The findings from the questionnaire pointed out the following categories: personal, communication-centred, evaluation-based, external, lesson preparation, and teaching

related. These aspects were considered by the researcher challenges to the teaching practice.

Riesky (2013) investigated on the challenges of pre-service teachers during their teaching practice. The research was realized by means of interviews with pre-service teachers and found out that there were three types of problems encountered by the participants during their teaching practice. The problems were related to students at the schools where the teaching practice was held, to the supervising teachers at these schools, and to the pre-service teachers themselves. Furthermore, this study indicated that pre-service teachers should prepare themselves in facing various types of challenges when they enter the teaching practice program.

Macias and Sánchez (2015) study was two-folded. The researchers looked into the difficulties faced by pre-service teachers during their teaching practicum and the decisions made by them to maintain the control and organization of the class. What was recommended by the researchers included strengthening the partnership between university and schools in preparing pre-service teachers and adjusting the curriculum so that pre-service teachers are acquainted with school contexts at an earlier stage during their university studies.

The study of Yunus et al. (2010) cited in Alamri (2018) focused on Teaching English as Second Language pre-service teachers' teaching experiences and challenges with school administrators, mentor, supervisor, as well as teaching and learning process. 38 pre-service teachers responded to a set of open-ended questions after having completed their two months teaching practice in different schools. The results indicated that the challenges were related to the students' attitudes towards the pre-service teachers, students' motivation, students' discipline, and support system.

Gan (2013) study investigated on the experiences of 16 pre-service ESL teachers after an eight-week practicum. Data analysis was collected by means of interviews with pre-service teachers and the analysis of their reflective journals. The researcher concluded that despite pre-service teachers reported strong beliefs in innovative pedagogical practices, contextual factors (such as lack of time, pupils' low language proficiency) deterred them from using them. The pre-service teachers were preoccupied with classroom teaching. They also expressed concern in relation to their lack of language proficiency to give clear instructions during lessons probably partly because they were assessed for their language use during the practicum. Another difficulty reported by them had to do with the limited socialization with other school staff, which they considered a discomfort.

## 5. English Language Practicum in the Context of "Aleksandër Moisiu" University

Teaching practice is an important component in the formation of teachers. Initially, we find it mentioned in section 2.4, on Formative activities and teaching components of the study program, point (v) of Decision no. 41 of the Council of Ministers, dated 24.1.2018, "On the elements of study programs offered by higher education institutions", where it is listed alongside other formative activities and specified "as professional practice, field practice or internship at public or private entities."

In "Aleksandër Moisiu" University, the English language study program is offered by the Department of Foreign Languages, part of the Faculty of Education. What is stated in the decision no. 41, above, is explained in more detail in the Regulation of the Faculty of Education (2019), article 78, on Professional practice, which specifies as follows:

1. *Students who continue the first, second or third cycle attend professional practice in accordance with the curriculum.*
2. *Professional practices take place in institutions, state or private enterprises, in accordance with the student's preparation profile, under the guidance of the university supervisor assigned by the relevant department. The student has to respect the rules of the institution where he attends the professional practice.*
3. *The way of designing and evaluating the professional practice is determined in the regulation of each study program.*

By referring to the curriculum of English language 2023-2026, it becomes evident that English language students have to attend 3 teaching practices until the end of their university studies, namely:

1. Teaching practice (Observation), in the second semester of the second year, (4 credits)
2. Integrated practice, in the first semester of the third year, (4 credits)
3. Teaching practice, in the second semester of the third year, (4 credits)

In order to understand how students get in contact with the school for their teaching practice it is important to cite here Regulation of the Organization and Progress of Teaching Practices (2019), a document of the Department of Foreign Languages. Article 5, on Attending teaching practice, specifies as follows:

*"School practices (integrated practice and teaching practice) for the study programs "English Language" and "German and English languages" take place in the schools determined by the Educational Directorate, Durrës. Integrated practice*

*and teaching practice can also be attended near the districts of residence of the students. In case the students choose to attend the integrated practice and teaching practice near their districts of residence, they must first deposit a request at the secretary office."*

By referring to Article 10 of the Regulation of the Organization and Progress of Teaching Practices (2019), which has to do with the duration of teaching practice, we find specified as follows:

*"Students' teaching practice begins officially the first week of the semester at the University. The total number of teaching practice classes in each semester is 100 classes, out of which 25 classes are attended at the respective schools and 75 classes in the auditorium with the supervising lecturer."*

From the above information it is clear that for the three teaching practices English language students have to attend 300 classes in total (either on the assigned school or in the auditorium at university). During the classes with the supervising lecturer they discuss various situations, consult each-other and the lecturer on ways to structure the lesson and on possible solutions on pupils' behaviour problems during the lesson.

## 6. Methodology

### 6.1 Instruments of the Study

After shedding light on the way teaching practice is programmed and implemented in the Foreign Language Department of "Aleksandër Moisiu" University we used the qualitative research to investigate on English students (actually English pre-service teachers) impressions in relation to their teaching practice. For this purpose, we used the technique of focus groups. Krueger and Casey (2009, p. 2) view focus groups as "a carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment." The reason why we chose to use this technique is summarized in Smithson (2007) when she states that "one often-stated advantage of using focus groups lies in the fact that they permit researchers to observe a large amount of interaction on a specific topic in a short time."

In relation to the protocol draft used in the focus groups with the English pre-service teachers, (the full version is attached at the appendix) we considered the idea of categorizing the data into three main blocks, which are as follows:

- a. Pre-service students' general impressions concerning the teaching practice
- b. Pre-service students' impressions on teacher and students' motivation
- c. Pre-service students' difficulties encountered during the practicum

Block I consists of three questions and mainly aims at gathering information about English pre-service teachers general impressions of practicum in various schools, what it helped them the most and what had they learned to do during their practicum.

Block II consists of two questions, which aim at collecting information on the different forms of teacher and students' motivation and the way it was realized based on English pre-service teachers' observations in class.

Block III consists of two questions which summarize difficulties of various natures that English pre-service teachers have encountered during their practicum, including even the management problems as well as the ways in which the tutor teacher solved them (based on their observations).

### 6.2 Sample of the Study

In order to look into the way English pre-service teachers perceived their experience as future teachers, four focus groups were organized. The participants of the focus groups were all students of the English branch who had completed the practicum, spread over three semesters. As a result, they were at the end of the last year of their studies. The participants for the study were chosen at random, a process that was done as follows: we took a list of pre-service teachers' names and saw that there were 68 in total, thus we decided to choose 35 of them (nearly half of the population of the study). We choose 1 in every 2 students using the list where the names were ranked alphabetically. Following, we asked via e-mail the students of the third year to participate in the study by sharing their opinions and perceptions of the teaching practice and explained them the procedure and the outcome expected. Since they were chosen at random it is understandable that some did not agree to be part of the study. Only 31 students agreed to participate and we divided them into four focus groups that were organized in four different days. Three focus groups had 8 participants and one of

them had 7 participants. The four focus groups were held during June, 2023. All of them were organized in the library of the Faculty of Education. For us it was a good spot, neutral, in this way the participants would not be affected when discussing with us about the topic in question.

## 7. Data Collection

For every focus group organized, we made audio recordings of the discussions with the pre-service teachers. This element was communicated to the participants in advance and none of them expressed disagreement in this respect. We also explained to them that the data recorded would be used only for study purposes and would not identify them in person. They were also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time if they did not wish to continue being part of it, thus making sure that the study in question was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles for scientific research. We ensured that each one of the participants had his time to talk and to discuss. The progress of all the focus groups was good. All questions left room for expressing different opinions and ideas and the discussion proceeded naturally.

## 8. Data Analysis

Since the focus group is mainly a method used to collect qualitative data, it helps collect a large amount of information and as such it is the researcher's challenge and responsibility to analyse this information properly. In our study, we started the analysis process with the transcription of focus group recordings, in this way it would be easier for us to classify the data. Since we were dealing with qualitative data, thematic analysis was used. Initially we had to label the data by placing numbers on the transcript pages and across the lines, in order to refer to the different ideas expressed by the participants.

Following that, we created pointers for the different types of data, which made it possible to find easily the information of the same type provided by each of the participants. In our case, since we were dealing with transcribed material, we used markers and highlighters of different colours. Whereas for some specific terms we made use of special symbols.

In the third stage of the data analysis, we created a system of codes for each topic, but this was a process which we had to return to several times, as there were data that did not match the code under which they were placed. In the final stage of organization of the data we created tables where the data of the focus group were reflected in a structured form, where for each of the initial categories corresponding subcategories were created with the inclusion of all the recorded cases. This led us to the finding of the study presented below.

## 9. The Findings of the Study

### 9.1 Block I. Pre-service teachers' general impressions concerning the teaching practice

Concerning the question related to students' overall impressions during their teaching practice, based on their answers we can conclude that the impressions were positive and some of the participants had created a certain connection to the classes they taught during the practicum. Some of the students point out their difficult start but with some help managed to surpass the difficulties and obstacles. Something else that comes out of their answers is the strengthening of their desire to become teachers, after their first contact with the way the school is organized, with their tutor teacher and with teaching in general. Very frequently, the participants express their appreciation for the tutor teacher, school staff but even for the university lecturers that have paved the way for them toward becoming future teachers. Furthermore, from the discussion in the focus groups it is also evident English pre-service teachers' enthusiasm for this new experience and their expectations for what comes next. Here are some of the opinions expressed by the students:

*"During the practicum, for the first time in my life, I found myself before the pupils as a teacher. It was an educational experience." (student 26)*

*"I had a great time during the teaching practice; it was a little tough but well worth it." (student 28)*

*"This year the practice was different from last year because last year we just listened to the teacher and the way he managed everything in the class." (student 14)*

*"The impressions that school practice had on me were positive, beginning with the communication with the teacher and ending with the students. This made me realize the importance and seriousness that a teacher should have in front of the students. And it made me appreciate the teachers and their job even more and it made me remember why I chose to study English" (student 2)*

*"I must admit that my first experience teaching was difficult and enjoyable in the same time." (student 19)*

*"Now that we've reached the end, I'm really sorry to see this incredible experience come to an end and the most wonderful years of university come to an end because I really loved them. I'm only grateful to all of my teachers for their support, and I'm really happy that I've reached this point where I'm going to follow my lifelong dream of becoming a teacher." (student 8)*

*"My general impression of the teaching practice as a whole was that it was a valuable and rewarding experience." (student 29)*

*"The teacher and staff of the school 'Eftali Koci' were very welcoming and supportive. They provided me with a lot of guidance and feedback through the internship." (student 11)*

*"I am very grateful to all my professors at my university that taught me to become a better teacher for my students. They taught us that first of all we have to be humans and then to be their teachers. I learnt that we have to treat all our students the same without judging them but always helping them. I will always try to do my best to understand my students needs and to fulfil their needs and requires. Never give up, just keep trying and work hard and you can reach everything that you want. This is what I always repeat to myself." (student 24)*

*"It was not only an observational practice, but also active, where I had the chance to teach the class one of the lessons. To be honest. It was not that hard as I had imagined." (student 16)*

Concerning the second question of Block I, "What helped you the most?" the answers are various. The participants mention that the practicum helped them in modifying their language and lexicon, to get acquainted with new teaching techniques, understanding that students learn in different ways, to be punctual, to respect instructions, to treat everyone equally, to be self-confident, to correct students without making them feel bad, to have a deeper understanding of one's own deficiencies, etc. From the pre-service teachers' perspective, the benefits of teaching practice are multifaceted as they touch each of the participants in different ways by complementing them and adding considerably to their teaching experiences. Here are some of the opinions expressed by the students, as it is impossible to include everything that they said:

*"Initially, I discovered that you should learn to modify your language level and vocabulary in order to be more understandable." (student 27)*

*"Practice is really important for every student as it helps to improve and get familiar with teaching techniques. Personally, the practice has helped me and left me with good impressions in general." (student 13)*

*"During the practice I have notice everything we have learn at university, starting from the way how the teacher explains the lesson the methods they are using and how to manage everything. I have seen that different student have different way of studying. For example, students with visual preference work better in activities such as creating a personal life timeline. A student with auditory preference will likely be more productive in a story retelling or rewriting activity." (student 3)*

*"Moving forward, the practice helped me gain a variety of skills, to be punctual, to respect the instructions given to me, to try and step out of my zone of comfort especially when it was my turn to speak in front of the whole class, which was very important given the fact that I am a future teacher." (student 22)*

*"In conclusion, that's all I can say about this experience I had that I will never forget. I learned a lot during those 30 days. I learned how a teacher should behave with her students, I learned how to treat everyone equally, how to make things easier for the students, different effective leaning methods, how to correct them without making them feel bad for something they said that was not right, to make them feel comfortable to say their thoughts and their opinions and a lot more. I'm really glad we had to do this, it is an experience I will always remember." (student 5)*

*"The biggest and most important thing I learned during student teaching is to be confident. In the beginning of the semester, I was a little timid with my students, even while presenting them information that I know backwards and*

forwards. After a couple weeks, however, I was more comfortable in front of the class." (student 31)

"I think that practice has a much more important role than just reading books, because you are in a position that you are face to face with students. My first teaching experience taught me a lot about what it means to be a teacher and a lot about myself, as a future educator." (student 27)

"The internship is an opportunity to feel the environment with my own eyes and ears. Through this teaching practice, I have benefited a lot and have a more detailed and deep understanding of the role of the teacher, recognizing that many students can't learn at school. Things are not limited to books but have a more comprehensive understanding. Therefore, I have a deeper understanding of my own deficiencies, and in which direction I should work hard, these are things that I did not know before." (student 9)

"This phase of the practice is so good for us because it is a great help to overcome all the emotions, fear and stress that everyone feels while staying in front of the class." (student 1)

In relation to the third question of Block I, "What have you learned to do?" it results that the teaching practice has made the students more practical in various aspects. Among the elements they mention during the discussions are: they have learned to apply practically the knowledge from the university courses, they learned a lot from their students, they have found it easier to use different methods of teaching, they learned how to explain in a better way, how to manage the time better, how to use an easy language for being more understandable, they have learned how to help students with their assignments, how to grade them, how to make them follow the rules of the class. Here are some of the opinions expressed by the pre-service teachers:

"During the active practicum, which was essential, I was able to apply what I had learned in class at university, clarify my comprehension, and learn more." (student 12)

"Moreover, not only did I teach them but also learned from them because children show me their infinite imagination and thirst for knowledge and new experiences." (student 30)

"After I got to know the different classes better, I started to explain the lesson myself, normally with more emotion as a start. But with a little help from the teacher, I started to have it easier and continued to use different methods of teaching so that it was easy for the students too. Of course, the uses of these different methods I had learned at university and from the English teacher at school." (student 15)

"About my general impressions on practice, it was a good time, a new experience which helped me a lot. During the time of practice, I learned a lot. I learned how to be a good teacher, how to explain in a better way, how to use an easy language for being more understandable, how to help students with their assignments, how to grade them, how to make them follow the rules of their class etc." (student 16)

"During my practice I learned a lot of things. Being a teacher was really hard but amazing! I was in every day contact with students and also I learned a lot of things from them, especially with the little kids. My practice taught me how to be a good teacher and how to speak confidently with students." (student 28)

"I was able to put into practice a lot of what I had learned during my Bachelor studies." (student 6)

"Also, during the practice, I tried to manage my time well and make every minute worthy. The tutor teacher was there to guide and advise me and I am really satisfied with the help she offered me throughout the practice." (student 2)

"During my teaching practice, my students taught me that each one learns differently and has a different capacity to process and apply information." (student 21)

"What the mentor teacher taught us, is that you are not obligated to follow step by step the lesson plan. I really liked the way the mentor teacher organized the lesson, even though I didn't like the fact that the school did not give the opportunity to use many technological tools but what I taught by her is that you can provide one by yourself." (student 17)

## 9.2 Block II. Pre-service teachers' impressions on teacher and students' motivation

Block II consists of two questions. The questions of Block II are related specifically to the aspect of motivation: students' motivation and teachers' motivation. In this context the pre-service teachers are asked to talk about their impressions on



students and teachers' motivation in the schools where they did their practice in terms of ways and forms of realizing it, based on their observations. Concerning the first question of Block II about students' motivation, from their answers it is evident that the participants are more than conscious of the importance of this component in students' progress as they mention it time after time. Moreover, their answers point out that they pay attention to students motivation in class and along with their tutor teacher try to stimulate them and increase students' motivation in various forms such as: rewarding, organization of the lesson, the way students are assessed, praising them on the good work, complementing the students, the application of a variety of methods in teaching, the handling of emotional students, using different types of motivations based on students' age, individualized support etc. Following are some of the opinions expressed by the participants in the focus groups:

*"The majority of the students were more than motivated to come to the English class, mostly due to the organization of the lesson." (student 12)*

*"I also want to emphasize student motivation. As we all know, motivation is very important in the classroom for the teacher and students alike. A motivated student has a higher chance of progressing. The tutor teacher and I used a variety of methods to motivate students including competition among them, which in her opinion, encourages them to learn more. Rewarding was another factor of motivation." (student 4)*

*"While there are nuances that vary from student to student, there are also motivation models that serve as tools to think and increase motivation in the classes where I did the teaching practice." (student 20)*

*"Assessment can have a great impact on students' progress and can be a big part of motivation." (student 21)*

*"As a method of emphasizing the value of students' involvement and motivating them, the students were rewarded for their accomplishments. For example, the student with the best weekly attendance would not have to do any homework." (student 8)*

*"In addition, it is important to complement young students more frequently when they provide the right answer because it inspired them to keep learning. With the use of this technique, I was able to motivate my students to engage in and actively engage in their study." (student 27)*

*"Improved motivation result from assigning a task based on teacher's expectations."*

*"I understood that motivation is one of the main points of teaching, this starts from the right to express an opinion and the ability for everyone to be active because the grade is not the only evaluation." (student 19)*

*"The teacher motivated the pupils a lot; for example, by saying to them good words or putting a good mark to them who deserve it." (student 15)*

*"It also depends a lot on the age of the pupils; different ages may have different types of motivation, sometimes stronger, sometimes weaker." (student 4)*

*"I also appreciated how the teacher handled some of the more delicate students. In one class where an exam would be given, there was a very delicate girl, who according to the teacher, was one of the best students and very attentive in class. However, she had stress and anxiety issues. She was therefore well-prepared, but she became anxious throughout the tests, failing to receive the grade she deserved and sometimes losing consciousness. I observed the way the teacher treated her and I have to say that the teacher was very lovely and kind to her and at the same time she was trying to motivate her with great words." (student 6)*

*"The teacher used a variety of teaching methods to keep the students motivated, such as hands-on activities, group work etc. She also helped struggling students with individualized support." (student 14)*

*"During my practice I also learned that praise is a very effective way to motivate students to continue with good behavior, such as active participation calmness when working in groups as well as bringing appropriate examples to stimulate class discussion." (student 29)*

*"Making eye contact with the students makes them more interested, motivated and involved into the lesson." (student 11)*

In relation to the second question of Block II, about teacher's motivation, the participants are not very specific.

From their answers it is obvious that they know the importance of motivation and recognise motivated teachers when they see them. They consider motivation as a crucial characteristic that every teacher should have when they come to the classroom. Despite the researchers' effort to encourage the participant to highlight what might contribute to the motivation of the teacher they could not give a specific answer but the majority were of the opinion that it is easier to talk about students' motivation rather than teacher' motivation. However, one of the participants said that having a good teacher model motivates her to become like them (students 16), thus shedding light on the importance of a good, correct, punctual, well-prepared and communicative tutor teacher. Following are some of the opinions expressed by the participants in the focus groups:

*"Also, at one point my mentor teacher told me that if you want to be a good teacher you have to come with a lot of motivation in class and you should share this motivation with your students." (student 7)*

*"As teachers we have to find the motivation even in our bad days and in the little things that are around us." (student 19)*

*The majority of the students seemed eager to study. Other students, on the other hand, demonstrated low motivation to learn. Nevertheless, despite the challenging circumstances, the teacher remained highly motivated and made an effort to inspire them." (student 2)*

*"One of the most impressive aspects of the internship was the motivation of both the teacher and the students. The teacher at the school was highly motivated and passionate about teaching. She worked hard to create a positive learning environment for her students." (student 25)*

*"My experience throughout this practice was very helpful and advantageous, the fact that the teachers are very understanding and patient not only helps me as a pre-service teacher but also gives me motivation to become like them when I graduate and start practicing as an official teacher, and so this developed in me new skills to perform better and to create a new purpose of mine." (student 16)*

### 9.3 Block III. Pre-service teachers' difficulties encountered during the practicum

Block III is the last one. It also includes two questions. The first one summarizes pre-service teachers accounts of the difficulties encountered during the teaching practice. From their answers it became clear that the majority of the pre-service teachers did not have any specific problems during their teaching practice. However, a part of them pointed out some obstacles and challenges which were mostly related to the students, to behaviour problems, to the use of cell phones in class, to the use of earpieces to listen to music, to bullying toward their friends etc. One of the pre-service teachers who had attended (by her choice) her practice in a high school reported that she found it difficult to teach 12<sup>th</sup> graders compared to 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> graders. However, there were even cases when the challenge was not related to any of the above-mentioned factors but to the pre-service teachers and to the fact that they felt nervous and not comfortable to talk in front of the class or to difficulties in explaining specific elements of the lesson, which took its time to be solved. Here are some of the opinions expressed by the pre-service teachers:

*"It makes me afraid to speak in front of many people. What makes me nervous is that I am not good at speaking using English language. But I have found out that if I am prepared, I can speak in front of people more comfortably." (student 1)*

*"The most challenging thing for me, was explaining the grammar, because of the fact that the students considered it the most difficult part of the English language. For that reason, I felt a bit anxious when explaining it because I wanted to be clear so they could understand me. Sometimes when they asked me to explain something once again, I was thinking maybe I did something wrong and they could not understand me. Despite that I was confident and I knew I was doing my best." (student 16)*

*"Now students are used to have everything and this is effecting them very bad, as they think that they can have everything that they want and they don't have to pay attention to the lessons. One of the main problems is that all the students come to school with cell phones and most of them use the phone during class. It is a very difficult competition between the teacher and the phone. The teacher has to be more interesting than the phone for the students. The teacher has to manage a class of 30 students and at the same time explain the new lesson or check their exercises; the ones who want to stay in their phones will find the opportunity to use it." (student 12)*

*"During my practice were two cases where a student was playing with his phone and when the teacher told him to put the phone in his bag he said 'I don't want to'. And in another case two girls sitting in the last bench were listening to music with earpiece. The voice was too loud the whole class could listen to them. The teacher as a result yelled at them and took their phones. The lesson was disturbed again. In both cases the teacher said to them that if they repeat the action, she will take them out and notify the parents. She did not like breaking the rules that she has set in the class. She was disciplined in the classroom and this is what she wanted from her students."* (student 6)

*"Students frequently criticized professors' communication methods, but I have discovered that the communication tone should change in response to the behaviour of the students."* (student 8)

*"In general, the students and their teacher had a good relationship. Still, it seemed highly improbable not to have any disturbances and inappropriate behavior. Actually, because of how disruptive they can be, dealing with teenagers is tougher. For instance, I often struggled to manage the 12<sup>th</sup> graders because they were a bit rowdy and barely paid attention to the lesson, especially when my mentor teacher was not present. In particular it was harder than I thought to deal with boys, whereas girls tended to be more calm and polite. I can say that with the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade it was kind of easier just because they listened to me when I explained and they were more attentive than 12<sup>th</sup> graders. Nevertheless, I managed to get along with the students."* (student 23)

*"Although the teachers make an effort to help students with their behavior, this does not always work; in some cases the problems worsen and rebellious pupils bully others in class."* (student 26)

*"Once, things got so severe that the teacher had no choice but to get in touch with the parents."* (student 4)

In relation to the second question of Block III, more specifically to the question "How did teachers manage the problems that arose in class?" almost all the participants expressed their appreciation of the way the tutor teachers intervened in this respect. The majority of them brought forward the fact that teachers solved the problems without being too strict or harsh with the students, some others pointed out that the teacher kept a balance and one of the participants emphasized that discipline was not related to staying quiet or having students who do their work with no noise around, which was a viewpoint liked by many pre-service teachers of the focus-group. Here are some of the opinions expressed by the pre-service teachers in this regard:

*"What I also appreciated is the encouragement and support of teachers by suggesting various ways to correct certain behaviors, instead of being too strict or harsh on their students."* (student 9)

*"The teacher and the pupils had a friendly relationship between them. Mostly of the pupils were calm and didn't talk to each other and make noise during the lesson time. I didn't hear the teacher shouting aloud to the pupils except to some mischiefs. She was quite calm and patient with the pupils. If there was any problem, she tried to talk quietly, politely and patiently to solve the problem. But she was strict enough, if there was a serious situation."* (student 10)

*"In terms of discipline, the teacher had to keep a balance, which means not to leave the class, to interrupt the lesson and be distracted by dealing with other things."* (student 3)

*"The way the teacher handles the problem is very important."* (student 21)

*"There were a lot of things to learn but another thing I wanted to know was how to manage a class when things didn't go the way I expected them to be and those classes where you find students that are problematic. I thought that it was going to be easier with high school students compared to elementary school children, but in fact it wasn't."* (student 27)

*"The teacher used polite language and maintained eye contact. Also, the teacher didn't tell them 'Stop talking' and 'You are disrupting other students' but instead said 'Do you have a question?' / 'Do you need help focusing?' Also, the teacher did not let her mutually-respected guidelines go forgotten."* (student 13)

*"One thing that I have noticed about the students during the practice is that when the students are asked to be quiet, they usually take this as instruction to just be 'quieter' rather than completely silent."* (student 18)

*"I have seen how teachers discipline their students and it was not at all about staying quiet and doing their work with no noise around."* (student 29)

*"It was very interesting to see the way my tutor teacher managed all those students and could do things like: learning,*

*games, exercises etc" (student 5)*

## 10. Discussions

From the analysis of the data, it becomes clear that pre-service teachers in this study generally have a positive attitude towards the teaching practice as a process. This finding is in the same line with the study of Johnson (1994) who concludes that the practicum had a great impact on the pre-service EFL teachers' beliefs and the perception about the teaching practice.

Furthermore, we found out that the practicum helped pre-service teachers to be self-confident and to understand better the school context, which we also found in Yıldız et al., (2016) who concluded in their study that pre-service teachers believed that practicum contributed to self-confidence and competency in teaching and coping up with the difficulties of the teaching profession.

However, our results did not match those of Pennington and Richards (1997) who pointed out that teachers coped with their instructional challenges by shifting to a more traditional approach or model of teaching during their practicum, forgetting much of what they were taught previously in their courses at university. What the participants of our study revealed is that they became more practical in various aspects of the teaching process and learned to apply practically the knowledge from the university courses.

We also found similarities between our findings and those of Riesky (2013) related to the problems faced by the pre-service teachers during their practicum, namely problems with students at the schools where the teaching practice was held and problems of pre-service teachers themselves (in our study were mentioned difficulties in explaining specific elements of the lesson or feeling nervous during the explanation). However, contrary to Riesky's (2013) study in our study were not reported problems related to the supervising teachers at these schools.

Another study which had reached similar conclusion was that of Yunus et al. (2010) cited in Alamri (2018) who focused on Teaching English as Second Language pre-service teachers' teaching experiences and challenges with school administrators, mentor, supervisor, as well as teaching and learning process. The results of their study indicated that the challenges were related to the students' attitudes towards the pre-service teachers, students' motivation, students' discipline, and support system. In our study the challenges were related to the first three elements but not to the last one (the support system).

## 11. Implications for Future Studies

In the area of teaching practice, it would be a good idea for a future study to collect pre-service teachers' impressions not only in the three aspects analysed in this study (impressions in general, impressions of students and teachers' motivation as well as on the difficulties encountered during the process) but also in other aspects of teaching such as: teaching techniques, feedback, students' assessment, the inclusion of technology in teaching etc. This would help considerably to understand how students' attitude and understanding of the school context have evolved from the start of the first practice to the third one.

Furthermore, it would be interesting to compare the way teaching practice is conducted in different institutions of higher education in Albania because in this way a summary of strong and weak points can be compiled and various amendments can be proposed and recommended for the specific program of study in relation to the teaching practice.

Moreover, in the same context, I would recommend a longitudinal study on English pre-service teacher's learning. By documenting their journey from one phase of teacher preparation to the other can shed light on the respective aspects of learning how to teach English in a real class. The whole process may enable them to reflect on different experiential learning activities leading to more consolidated and developed knowledge and beliefs.

## 12. Conclusions

The aim of this study was to look into English pre-service teachers' impressions on their teaching practice, their impressions on teachers and students' motivation as well as the difficulties and challenges of various natures that they encountered during their practicum.

In relation to pre-service teachers' overall impressions during their teaching practice, we can conclude that they were positive. English pre-service teachers were enthusiast about this new experience. Furthermore, they admitted that the teaching practice had helped them in various aspects such as: modifying their language and vocabulary, getting

acquainted with new teaching techniques, understanding that students learn in different ways, being punctual, respecting instructions, treating everyone equally, being self-confident, correcting students without making them feel bad, having a deeper understanding of one's own deficiencies, etc. From the discussions in the focus groups it resulted that pre-service teachers became more practical in various aspects of the teaching process and learned to apply practically the knowledge from the university courses, learned a lot from their students, learned how to explain in a better way, how to manage the time better, how to use an easy language for being more understandable, learned how to help students with their assignments, how to grade them, how to make them follow the rules of the class etc.

Concerning pre-service teachers' impressions on students' motivation and teachers' motivation the participants found it easier to talk about students' motivation and were aware of its importance in students' progress. Moreover, they paid attention to students' motivation in class and along with their tutor teacher tried to stimulate them in various forms such as: through rewarding, organization of the lesson, the way students are assessed, praising them on the good work, complementing the students, the application of a variety of methods in teaching, the handling of emotional students, using different types of motivations based on students' age, through individualized support etc. Whereas in relation to teachers' motivation the participants could not give a specific answer though it was obvious that they knew the importance of teacher's motivation and recognised motivated teachers when they saw them.

In relation to pre-service teachers' difficulties encountered during the practicum, we can conclude that most of the participants did not report any specific problems during the teaching practice. However, some of the obstacles and challenges which came out were mostly related to the students, to behaviour problems, to the use of cell phones in class, to the use of earpieces, to bullying etc. Other challenges reported had to do with the pre-service teachers and to the fact that they felt nervous or had difficulties in explaining specific elements of the lesson. Concerning the way in which teachers managed problems the participants expressed their appreciation of the way tutor teachers intervened and solved the problems. Among the forms mentioned were: that teachers solved the problems without being too strict or harsh with the students, some others pointed out that the teacher kept a balance and one of the participants emphasized that discipline was not simply related to staying quiet.

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#### **APPENDIX: The protocol draft of the focus groups**

- I. Pre-service teachers' general impressions concerning the teaching practice.
  - a. What were your impressions concerning the teaching practice?
  - b. What helped you the most during the teaching practice?
  - c. What did you learn during the teaching practice?
- II. Pre-service teachers' impressions on teacher and students' motivation.
  - a. What are your impressions on students' motivation during teaching practice?
  - b. What are your impressions on teacher' motivation during teaching practice?
- III. Pre-service teachers' difficulties encountered during the practicum
  - a. What kind of difficulties did you encounter during the practicum?
  - b. How did teachers manage the problems that arose in class?