

Research Article

Exploring The Teaching Practices of Preservice Preschool Teachers

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Keywords

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Abstract

Establishing a strong connection between the theory and practice that prospective teachers acquire during their education is one of the most important issues in teacher education. The teaching practice course in teacher education undergraduate programs serves this purpose. It is known that the experiences of pre-service teachers during the practicum process affect them positively or negatively both emotionally and cognitively. This situation plays a role in the quality of teaching and these effects can also be seen when teachers commit to the profession. The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of emotional and cognitive experiences of pre-service preschool teachers during their teaching practice on their professional development. The study was conducted with 16 pre-service preschool teachers who were practicing within the scope of Teaching Practice I course. The data collected using a semi-structured interview form were analyzed by content analysis method. The data obtained showed that while the pre-service teachers had intense stress caused by uncertainty at the beginning of the practice, as their experience increased, their planning skills and communication with children improved, but the most common concern in the process was classroom management skills.

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Öğretmen adayı
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Özet

Öğretmen adaylarının eğitimleri sürecinde edindikleri teori ve uygulama arasında güçlü bir bağlantı kurmak, öğretmen eğitiminin en önemli konularından biridir. Öğretmen yetiştirme lisans programlarında yer alan öğretmenlik uygulaması dersi ise bu amaca hizmet etmektedir. Öğretmen adaylarının uygulama sürecinde yaşadıkları deneyimlerin, öğretmen adaylarını hem duygusal hem de bilişsel olarak olumlu ya da olumsuz şekilde etkilediği bilinmektedir. Bu durum ise öğretimin kalitesi üzerinde rol oynamakta ve bu etkiler öğretmenler mesleğe bağladıklarında da görülebilmektedir. Bu çalışmanın amacı, okul öncesi öğretmen adaylarının öğretmenlik uygulamaları sırasında yaşadıkları duygusal ve bilişsel deneyimlerin, mesleki gelişimleri üzerindeki etkisini incelemektir. Araştırma, Öğretmenlik Uygulaması I dersi kapsamında uygulama yapan 16 okul öncesi öğretmen adayı ile gerçekleştirilmiştir. Yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme formu kullanılarak toplanan veriler içerik analizi yöntemiyle analiz edilmiştir. Elde edilen veriler, öğretmen adaylarının uygulamaya başlarken belirsizlikten kaynaklanan yoğun stres yaşadıklarını ancak deneyimleri arttıkça planlama becerilerinin ve çocuklarla olan iletişimlerinin geliştiğini göstermiştir. Ancak süreçte en yaygın endişe, sınıf yönetimi becerileriyle ilgili olmuştur.

Atf için

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INTRODUCTION

Early childhood is one of the most critical periods of human life. The rapid development that takes place during this period forms the basis of an individual's academic and social success in later years. In this process, the role of teachers is vital to support children's cognitive, emotional and social development. Therefore, the quality of teacher training programs in early childhood education is a determining factor for the overall success of education. For this reason, early childhood education and the training of preschool teachers who will provide this education are areas that need to be kept up-to-date (Abazaoğlu et al., 2015; Ramazan & Yılmaz, 2017).

Bridging theory and practice is a key issue in teacher education (Hascher & Hagenauer, 2016). For this reason, practices have an important place in teacher education programs as much as theoretical knowledge. In Turkey, undergraduate programs that train teachers in the field of early childhood education are designed to develop theoretical knowledge and practical skills of prospective teachers. Updated in 2018, the Teacher Education Undergraduate Program provides the necessary foundation for prospective teachers to consolidate their field knowledge and use this knowledge effectively in classroom practices. According to the Teacher Education Undergraduate Program, the Teaching Practice course is included in all teaching programs as two semester courses, Teaching Practice 1 and Teaching Practice 2 (YÖK, 2018). In addition, although the YÖK has started that faculties can make changes on the program, it may not be possible to make changes in the year in which it is decided for all faculties to make program regulation. In addition to this, the faculty where the pre-service teachers in this study are being taught is already implementing the YÖK program. Teaching practice course is defined as "courses that aim to provide practice students with teaching skills in the field of teaching in which they are trained in the classroom together with management and extracurricular activities, and enable them to teach a certain course or courses in a planned way, and discuss and evaluate the practice activities" (ÖYGM, 2018). Through the practices carried out within the scope of this course, prospective teachers gain many gains such as getting used to the classroom environment, observing an experienced teacher, planning and implementing activities. In this way, it is envisaged that they will graduate with important competencies related to the profession. It is aimed that prospective teachers will be prepared for many situations that they will experience professionally when they start to work by making sufficient and qualified practices before graduation.

One of the most important contributions of the teaching practicum course is to provide pre-service teachers with the opportunity to transfer the theoretical knowledge they have acquired throughout their education to practice in a real classroom setting, and thus to become aware of their strengths and weaknesses. Due to the unique nature of early childhood education, pre-service teachers' classroom experiences are particularly important. These experiences play a critical role in developing pre-service teachers' professional skills, classroom management and interactions with students. Research shows that classroom management and communication skills with students

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is one of the most challenging areas for pre-service teachers. (Azar & Çepni, 1999; Featherstone, 1993; Gorgoretti & Pilli, 2012; Sancar Tokmak & Karakuş, 2011). In fact, these difficulties continue even for teachers who are new to the profession. (Ingersoll & Smith 2003; Wubbels et al., 2015).

Emotional and cognitive factors have an important place in pre-service teachers' professional development processes. How the teaching practice process takes place, the emotional experiences of pre-service teachers in the classroom and during their practice can positively or negatively affect their teaching quality, their interactions with students, and their professional development (Petre et al., 2022). While some studies (Becit et al., 2009; Değirmençay & Kasap, 2013; Memduhoğlu & Tan, 2024; Zeybek & Karataş, 2022) emphasize that teaching practice provides benefits to pre-service teachers in gaining skills for the profession and preparing for the profession, it is seen that the practices are negatively affected especially in cases where qualified cooperation between the practice school and the university is not provided (Akgül et al., 2020; Cohen et al., 2013; Duman, 2013; Fuentes-Abeledo et al. 2020; Seçer et al., 2010; Smith & Lev-Ari, 2005). In addition, the feelings of the educators in the classroom can also affect the teaching process. Studies indicate that positive emotions such as pleasure and enthusiasm support the quality of teaching, while negative emotions such as anger and anxiety can disrupt professional teacher behavior and teaching (Deci & Ryan, 2002; Fredrickson, 2001; Frenzel, 2014; Frenzel, Götz, Stephens, & Jacob, 2011. Cited in: Hascher & Hagenauer 2016). Pre-service teachers' anxieties in this process can also lead to negative emotions that can hinder their learning process by making their attitudes towards students combative (Hascher & Hagenauer 2016). As a result, while positive emotional experiences can enable pre-service teachers to be more effective and creative in the classroom, negative emotions can negatively affect the teaching process and student learning. Therefore, focusing on pre-service teachers' emotional and cognitive development in teacher education programs is critical in enhancing their professional competencies.

Emotions play an important role in the teaching profession. Researchers Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) and Gkonou and Miller (2021) acknowledge the critical role of emotions in teaching. Day and Hong (2016) state that teaching is a profession that requires high emotional energy, including the effort to establish close relationships with students and to ensure their continuous participation. According to Fredrickson's (2001) "Expand and Create Theory", positive emotional experiences can help people expand their awareness and develop new skills and personal resources, even in the face of difficulties and challenges. This encourages innovation in thinking and behavior. Therefore, emotions and the thoughts underlying these emotions should be considered as an important factor in the education of pre-service teachers.

In this context, the emotional experiences of pre-service teachers during their teaching practice can affect their overall achievement and classroom performance. This situation requires pre-service teachers to go beyond simply developing their pedagogical and academic competences and to be aware of their own emotional states

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and to handle them appropriately. Recognising their own emotions and managing them efficiently can help teachers to successfully manage their interactions with students and the learning atmosphere.

Therefore, it should be understood that pre-service teachers' emotional states can quickly affect their own thinking and behaviour, which in turn can affect student performance and the overall atmosphere of the classroom. Teachers' learning how to deal with their emotional states and being able to channel these emotions in a positive way can improve the quality of teaching and contribute to creating a more productive learning environment for students. This should be considered as an important part of pre-service teachers' education and they should be provided with support and guidance in this direction.

This study aims to analyse the emotional and cognitive experiences of pre-service early childhood teachers during the teaching practice process. Pre-service teachers' experiences in this process can have a significant impact on the development of their professional skills and their performance in the classroom. The purpose of this study is to explore the role of emotional and cognitive experiences of pre-service teachers during their teaching practice in shaping their professional development. This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the emotions that pre-service preschool teachers have at the beginning of their teaching practice and how do these emotions affect the practice process?
2. What are the thoughts and expectations of pre-service teachers in their relationships and communication with children?
3. What are pre-service teachers' thoughts about the process of planning the practice and what are the difficulties they face in this process?
4. Which resources do pre-service teachers refer to when creating lesson plans and how do these resources affect their performance in the implementation process?
5. What are the thoughts of pre-service teachers about their general performance in practice and how do these thoughts affect their professional development?

The answers to these questions can provide important information to support pre-service teachers' professional development and make teacher education programmes more effective. In-depth analyses of pre-service teachers' emotional and cognitive experiences can contribute to the development of strategies that will help them better prepare for the profession. This study can play an important role in improving the quality of early childhood education by providing important insights for the development of preschool teacher education programmes in Turkey.

METHOD

Research Design

The study was planned in the phenomenological research type, one of the qualitative research approaches. Phenomenological studies focus on discovering the common meaning of lived experiences related to a phenomenon or concept (Creswell, 2021). In this study, phenomenological approach was used to examine the experiences of pre-service preschool teachers about school practices. The participants were pre-service teachers who had consistent internship groups throughout the academic year and gained field experience over the course of one semester.

Study Group

Purposive sampling method was used in the study. In this type of sampling, the researcher uses his/her own judgement about who will be selected and samples those who are suitable for the purpose of the research (Balci, 2009). In this study, interviews were conducted with pre-service preschool teachers who were practising within the scope of Teaching Practice I course in the autumn semester of 2021-2022. The reason for choosing purposive sampling method is that the researchers recognise the pre-service teachers taking the teaching practice course and can reach them more easily. Accordingly, 16 pre-service teachers who were practising in an official kindergarten within the scope of the teaching practice course were included in the study.

Data Collection Tool

The data of the study were collected with a semi-structured interview form developed by the researchers. Before the interview form was prepared, the literature on the subject was examined and the results of different studies were utilised. After the research questions were prepared, the research form was submitted to two subject matter experts for review to ensure content validity. Two pre-service teachers were interviewed for the pilot application of the form, which was edited in line with the opinions of the field experts, and the interview form was finalised with the arrangements made after the pilot application. At the end of the pilot study, questions initially planned to be asked separately regarding "relationships and communication with children" were combined into a single question due to the similarity of the responses. Additionally, follow-up questions were added to some of the items to allow participants to express their experiences in more detail.

Data Collection

The data of the study were collected using the interview method. Semi-structured interviews allow the participant to express the world perceived by the participant with his/her own thoughts (Merriam, 2018). In this study, semi-structured interviews were planned since it was aimed for the pre-service teachers to express their experiences in the implementation process. Before starting the interviews, the pre-service teachers

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were informed about the study and the day and time of the interviews were decided for each pre-service teacher. The interviews were conducted as individual, face-to-face interviews on the predetermined day and time. All data were collected by the researchers. The interviews lasted approximately 20 minutes and were recorded with a voice recorder to prevent data loss. Ethical approval for the study was obtained, and information regarding this approval has been included at the end of the study. Prior to conducting the interviews, each participant was provided with an informed consent form, given an explanation about the study, and informed that they could withdraw from participation at any stage, even after the interview had begun.

Analysing the Data

The data sets obtained from the interviews were analyzed using descriptive analysis. Each researcher's opinions were individually examined and coded. The inter-rater reliability was calculated according to the formula by Miles and Huberman, 1994 [Agreement / (Agreement + Disagreement)], resulting in a reliability coefficient of 0.84. The findings obtained in the study were supported by quoting the statements of the participants. While quoting, the names of the participants were not used, instead codes were used for each participant as T1, T2, ... T16.

FINDINGS

This section presents the findings obtained in line with the research questions. The findings, which emerged as a result of analyzing the participants' statements, are categorized under codes, categories, and themes to provide a clear and structured understanding of the data.

Findings related to the feelings of pre-service teachers at the beginning of their teaching practice:

Table 1: Pre-service teachers' statements about their feelings at the beginning of their teaching practice

Category	Code	N	%
I Feel I'm Not Ready (Negative Expectations)	Anxiety	4	25
	Stress	4	25
	Hesitation	3	18.75
	Fear	3	18.75
I tried to motivate myself (Positive expectations)	Motivating excitement	2	12.5

Table 1 shows the statements of pre-service teachers about the emotional states they experienced while starting the teaching practice. While anxiety and stress were the

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most common (25%), nervousness and fear (18.75%) also had an important place. On the other hand, some candidates (12.5%) stated that they felt motivating excitement.

Two primary categories related to this theme were identified. These are feeling unprepared (negative expectations) and trying to motivate oneself (positive expectations). The category of feeling unprepared (negative expectations) encompasses a range of emotions, including anxiety, stress, uneasiness, and fear. Many pre-service teachers expressed feelings of inadequacy in their early experiences, often worried about their ability to manage the classroom effectively and communicate with students in a productive manner. This emotional burden weighed heavily on them, exacerbating their sense of uncertainty. In contrast, the category of trying to motivate oneself (positive expectations) highlights the participants' efforts to combat these negative emotions. Despite initial fears, some pre-service teachers found ways to harness their excitement and motivation to overcome the challenges they faced. This optimism fueled their determination to adapt and succeed in their teaching roles.

Participant Statements:

- T1: *“Before I started my teaching practice, I was feeling quite anxious and stressed. I was afraid that I would be crushed under the burden of these new responsibilities, and this situation made me uneasy. I was especially worried about classroom management and effective communication with students.”*

- T2: *“Although I experienced anxiety and stress at the beginning, I was also excited. This excitement motivated me and gave me strength to move forward in my teaching journey. The relationships with the students and the excitement of transferring knowledge to them helped me overcome these difficulties.”*

Findings on pre-service teachers' thoughts about their relationships and communication with children:

Table 2: Pre-service teachers' thoughts about their relationships and communication with children

Category	Code	N	%
Authoritarian figure	Classroom management	6	37.5
Process	Time	5	31.25
Emotional Bond	Bond	2	12.5
	Closeness	3	18.75

The statements of the pre-service teachers about their relationship and communication processes with children were analysed under three main categories: Authoritarian Figure, Process and Emotional Bond. When Table 2 is analysed, it is seen that in the Authoritarian Figure category, the candidates' tendency to dominate in the classroom

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(37.5%) comes to the fore. In the Process category, it was stated that the relationships developed over time (31.25%), while in the Emotional Bond category, the feeling of strong bond (12.5%) and closeness (18.75%) were emphasised.

The being an authority figure category reflects the struggle of pre-service teachers to establish classroom dominance, particularly in the early stages of their internships. Developing a sense of authority and control within the classroom was often a challenge for them, requiring time and experience to fully grasp. The development in the process category illustrates how time and experience gradually enabled pre-service teachers to refine their teaching approaches. Many reported improvements in their ability to manage the classroom and engage with students more effectively as they became more familiar with the dynamics of teaching. The emotional bonding category underscores the importance of forming strong emotional connections with students. Establishing a sense of closeness and trust with children was viewed as critical in fostering a positive and nurturing learning environment.

Participant Statements:

- T5: *“In the beginning, I was distant towards children; I did not know how to approach them. Over time, I changed my approach with what I learned from the classroom teacher and the answers I gave to children's questions. Now I answer their questions more age-appropriate and carefully.”*

- T6: *“In the first semester, we had difficulties in classroom management. There was no established rule order in the classroom. In the second semester, children started to get used to us, and we had more authority. This shows our improvement in classroom management.”*

Findings related to pre-service teachers' thoughts on the process of planning the implementation:

Table 3: *Prospective teachers' thoughts about the process of planning the implementation*

Category	Code	N	%
Strong Plan	More Detailed	6	37.5
	Diversity	2	12.5
Inadequate / Weak Plan	Lack of Experience	8	50

The planning processes of pre-service teachers were evaluated under two main categories: Strong Plan and Inadequate/Weak Plan. When Table 3 is analysed, in the Strong Plan category, it is seen that the candidates have a tendency to make more detailed plans over time (37.5%) and to increase the variety of activities (12.5%). In the Inadequate/Weak Plan category, lack of experience (50%) emerged as an important problem.

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The strong plan category is characterized by detailed planning and an increased variety of activities. Pre-service teachers who fell into this category reported improvements in their planning skills over time, reflecting their ability to design more engaging and diverse activities for their students. The inadequate/weak plan category reflects the struggles of pre-service teachers who felt their initial planning efforts were hindered by their lack of experience. They reported challenges in designing comprehensive activity plans, often relying on feedback and observation to guide their development.

Participant Statements:

- T6: *“At the beginning, my activity patterns were very fixed. With time and feedback, I improved myself in terms of activity diversity.”*

- T4: *“I did not know what to do in the planning process at the beginning. With my observations and experiences, I started to act more consciously in activity transitions and implementation.”*

Findings related to the resources that pre-service teachers consulted while creating activity plans:

Table 4: *The resources that pre-service teachers consulted while creating activity plans*

Category	Code	N	%
Digital	Eba	3	18.75
	Youtube	3	18.75
	Pinterest	3	18.75
	Instagram	2	12.5
Hybrid	Digital and Printed Sources	3	18.75
Printed Sources	Printed Sources	2	12.5

The resources used by pre-service teachers while creating activity plans were categorised under three main categories: Digital, Hybrid and Printed Resources. When Table 4 is analysed, Eba, Youtube, Pinterest and Instagram (18.75% each) are commonly used among digital resources. In the hybrid category, the use of digital and printed resources together (18.75%) is observed. Printed sources are less preferred by pre-service teachers (12.5%).

The digital resources category includes platforms such as EBA, YouTube, Pinterest, and Instagram, which pre-service teachers frequently used to gather ideas and inspiration for their activities. The printed resources category includes traditional media such as books and magazines, which some participants turned to for deeper, more

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structured information. The hybrid resources category represents a combination of both digital and printed resources, reflecting the varied and multi-faceted approach many pre-service teachers adopted in their planning processes.

Participant Statements:

- T1: *"I usually watch videos on YouTube to get ideas about the use of materials and expression techniques. The variety of resources makes the activities more effective and suitable for children's level."*

- T2: *"I search for old plans from my friends and the internet. The EBA platform helps me a lot as a teacher role model."*

Findings related to pre-service teachers' opinions about their general performance in practice:

Table 5: Pre-service teachers' opinions about their general performance in practice

Category	Code	N	%
Sufficient Experience	Classroom management	6	37.5
	Different Materials	5	31.25
	More Preparation	2	12.5
Insufficient Experience	Deficiencies in the Practicum Process	3	18.75

The general performances of the pre-service teachers were analysed in two main categories as Sufficient Experience and Insufficient Experience. When Table 5 is analysed, positive aspects such as classroom management (37.5%), use of different materials (31.25%) and more preparation (12.5%) were mentioned in the Adequate Experience category. In the Inadequate Experience category, deficiencies in the internship process (18.75%) were discussed.

The sufficient experience category encompasses participants who felt they had gained a solid foundation in classroom management, activity preparation, and the use of diverse materials. Their performance, as they reported, improved steadily over time through reflective practices and feedback. Conversely, the insufficient experience category includes participants who struggled to adapt to the practical demands of teaching. Many expressed difficulties in managing the classroom environment and adjusting to the established routines and methods within their placements.

Participant Statements:

- T3: *"I made progress in classroom management. The evaluations at the end of the day guided me in terms of activity variety and volume control."*

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- T7: *“I use in-class examples to get down to their level and to be more understandable. I try to control my excitement, which helps me to better gather the attention of the children.”*

- T8: *“...especially not knowing how to deal with chaotic situations in the classroom and not being able to observe the techniques used by the teacher sufficiently in this regard made me very tired. Because there is always a method that children are used to, and it takes us a lot of time to understand it.”*

DISCUSSION

In this study, it was aimed to examine the emotional and cognitive experiences of pre-service preschool teachers during the teaching practice process. When the research findings are evaluated in general, it can be said that the updates made in the Preschool Teaching Undergraduate Programme in 2018 constitute an important turning point in the field of teacher education. With these updates, it can be stated that the removal of the School Experience course from the third year programme negatively affected the experiences of pre-service teachers who did not take this preparatory course in the practice schools they went to as part of the Teaching Practice I course. It is thought that the fact that they did not take a course such as School Experience before the Teaching Practice course affected the feelings and thoughts of the pre-service teachers towards the practices by experiencing a lack of observation about the educational institutions and the functioning of educational processes. In the light of the findings obtained in this study;

Pre-service Teachers' Practicum Experiences

Research has found that pre-service teachers generally experience negative emotions before the practicum and experience various emotional states such as anxiety, shock, excitement, love and panic during the practicum. These emotional states are due to the unpredictable nature and stressful elements of the practicum process. The pre-service teachers' experiencing these emotional states was also shown in Malderez et al.'s (2007) study and found to be consistent with previous studies (Badali, 2008; Caires et al., 2009; Murray-Harvey, 2001). These findings suggest that the emotional difficulties of pre-service teachers during the implementation process have a significant impact on their professional development.

Classroom Relationship and Classroom Management

In their relationships with children in the classroom, pre-service teachers stated that they firstly focused on classroom dominance. This finding is consistent with the studies conducted by Evertson and Weinstein (2006), Brophy (2006), Oliver and Reschly (2007), Wubbels (2011), Hammerness (2011), Bullough and Richardson (2014), and Emmer and Sabornie (2015). It has been reported that positive teacher-student relationships contribute to pre-service teachers' well-being during the implementation process and pre-service teachers are concerned about managing these relationships

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(den Brok et al., 2010; Pillen et al., 2013; Wubbels et al., 2015). These findings suggest that classroom relationships and effective classroom management play a critical role in the professional development of pre-service teachers.

Lesson Planning and Success

It is known that the planning process plays an important role in the implementation success of pre-service teachers. The pre-service teachers who participated in this study stated that they gained experience in lesson plans during the implementation process. Lesson planning is among the basic skills that pre-service teachers should have in order to be successful (Horn & Vetter, 2020). Studies by Choy et al., (2013) revealed that lesson plans reflect the way teachers adopt educational approaches and teaching materials. Koehler and Mishra (2009) and Tashevskaya (2008) stated that pre-service teachers have difficulties in planning processes and that these skills should be developed. This shows that the development of pre-service teachers' lesson planning skills is of great importance for their professional success. In line with this study, it can be said that pre-service teachers felt successful by improving themselves in planning with the positive effect of the implementation process.

Classroom Management and Anxiety

The pre-service teachers who participated in the research stated that they had difficulties in teacher-student relationship in the classroom. Thus, pre-service teachers' concerns about classroom management and their skill development in this field is another important point to be taken into consideration. Pre-service teachers emphasised the importance of being an authority figure for good classroom management (Brophy, 2006; Evertson & Emmer, 2009; Headden 2014; Kaufman & Moss 2010; McNally et al., 2005; Seidel & Shavelson, 2007). This seems to be in line with the results of research emphasising the role of classroom management in providing appropriate conditions for learning and related to teachers' perceived stress. Developing effective classroom management skills is critical for the professional success of pre-service teachers.

Use of technology-based resources

It was determined that the use of technology-based resources has an important place in the preparation of pre-service teachers in their practice experiences. It can be said that the current finding is similar to the research results (Carpenter et al., 2022; Cervetti et al., 2006; Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; Gee, 2009; Kivunja, 2013; Shapiro & Stolz, 2019; Tosh et al., 2020) indicating that pre-service teachers benefit from technology-based resources during the internship process but need additional training to use these resources efficiently in a professional context. This situation emphasises the increasing role of technology in education and the importance of pre-service teachers to have the necessary skills and knowledge to use these technologies effectively.

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