

Researching Educational Practices, Teacher Education and Professional Development for Early Language Learning

Examples from Europe

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Chapter 12

Professional learning competences and tasks in primary English teacher education curricula in Portugal

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12 Professional learning competences and tasks in primary English teacher education curricula in Portugal

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Context

Basic Education in Portugal spans nine years and is divided into three cycles. Primary education is referred to as the 1st Cycle of Basic Education and runs from Grades 1 to 4. Children usually begin Grade 1 in September of the year they turn six years old. English became part of the 1st Cycle curriculum in September 2015 for Grades 3 and 4, where it is taught for approximately two hours a week.

Portugal is one of 14 European countries with centralised recommendations for a specialist teacher of English in primary education (European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2023), and master's programmes in teaching primary English (TPE) have been running in higher education institutions (HEIs) since 2015/16, when English became a compulsory subject in primary education. Candidates for these master's programmes must hold an undergraduate degree and at least 80 ECTS in the area of English. The programmes are three semesters long (90 ECTS) and follow national regulations for all master's in teaching, namely regarding the integration of four teacher education areas: Teaching Subject, General Education (sociology of education, psychology of education, etc.), Didactics and Initiation to Professional Practice/Practicum. The practicum is about one-third of the total ECTS. It takes place in schools and is accompanied by a faculty supervisor and a school-based mentor designated as a cooperating teacher. Student teachers produce a practicum report that is defended before an examining board, and their final mark for the practicum includes the assessment of both the report and their teaching practice in schools.

Introduction

The need to investigate pre-service teacher education programmes is especially evident in teacher education fields that are not yet consolidated, as is the case of teaching English in primary education (Enever, 2014). Despite its growth over the last two decades, studies indicate that there is a wide variation in teacher preparation policies and practices, and that more attention should be

given to guidance and professional development to meet current demands, especially as regards pre-service programmes for primary English (Rich, 2019).

Following the rapid expansion of English around the world, the starting age of English as a compulsory subject in the Portuguese curriculum was lowered from Grade 5 (10 years old) to Grade 3 (8 years old) in September 2015. To accompany this curricular change, alongside requalification courses for teachers of English to older learners, HEIs around the country opened pre-service master's programmes in TPE to prepare specialist teachers.¹ This chapter presents part of the findings from a nationwide descriptive multi-site case study, the goal of which was to investigate these programmes with a view to mapping curricula (see Vieira et al., 2021, 2022). Additionally, by providing a locally situated account of what happens in Portugal, the objective was to highlight the interplay between the macro realities, which likely inform practices, and the micro realities of the institutions and their teaching staff. The findings help us, as teacher educators, understand the extent to which our curricula are aligned with current approaches to teacher education for TPE, and recommendations can be delineated regarding their improvement.

Teacher education for primary English

Across Europe, there are a variety of teacher models for introducing English into primary education, the most common being a combination of the generalist with specialist model (European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2023). Enever (2018) reiterates that the generalist model is recommended, due to the greater knowledge these teachers have of their learners and scope for integrating English into the children's overall learning. Nevertheless, owing to the three vital areas of expertise required for teachers of English in primary education – “advanced proficiency in English for the classroom”, a “strong emphasis on oracy skills” as well as “a sound knowledge of child development, including language development; knowledge of age-appropriate pedagogical skills for primary language teaching” (p. 166) – a specialist teacher is either a co-teacher, alongside the generalist teacher, or the only teacher responsible for TPE. The provision of teacher education will depend upon the teacher model adopted in each national context, although in any pre-service teacher education, practical experience in schools with supervision from a mentor teacher is considered essential (Enever, 2018).

Teacher competences and areas of expertise can be broken down into three areas: Knowledge and understanding, skills and dispositions (European Commission, 2013); however, research has shown general competence models fail to cater for the specificities of TPE (Dausend, 2017; Uztosun, 2018). Uztosun (2018), after undertaking a Delphi study to reach a consensus amongst experts in Turkey, highlights the practice-oriented knowledge and skills needed for TPE and identifies five categories for primary teachers of English, “a) theoretical and practical knowledge, b) knowing the young learner, c) planning and organising teaching, d) managing teaching, and

e) competence in English” (p. 13). Dausend (2017), analysing German standards, also lists additional competences associated with age-appropriate teaching methodologies and specific approaches to using English with primary children. Dagarin-Fojkar et al. (2022), in their investigation into Slovenian teachers’ attitudes towards subject-specific competences, consider three main areas of competences in TPE – linguistic, intercultural and subject didactics. Results indicated that teachers valued a highly developed subject didactic competence, reinforcing the importance of competences associated with the specificities of teaching children in this age group. Pre-service TPE programmes need to provide the theoretical underpinnings of learner-centred, age-appropriate teaching and learning approaches.

On the other hand, it is our belief that if we are to view early language learning as critical in its enhancement of a democratic culture and intercultural dialogue, teacher education should contribute to lifelong learning competences outlined by the European Union (2019), which include, but are not limited to, literacy competence, multilingual competence, cultural awareness and expression competence, citizenship competence and personal, social and learning to learn competence. Teacher education should therefore take a broader view of language education and move beyond a focus on teaching the language to creating the developmentally appropriate conditions for meaningful, significant language learning which fosters a growing sense of identity, critical thinking, openness to diversity, intercultural dialogue and global citizenship (Enever, 2018; Pinho & Moreira, 2012; Simões, 2018).

Additionally, pre-service TPE programmes should provide opportunities for student teachers to carefully analyse local policies and contexts and become reflective educators as they probe the theories and construct their own personal visions of education (Dausend, 2017; Korthagen, 2017). This supports the expanded notion of future teachers as critical thinkers, decision-makers and curriculum managers (Dausend, 2017; Karatsiori, 2016; Rich, 2019). Finally, programmes should enable reflection on the interface of theory and its practical realisations. Rich (2019) highlights the importance of the core component of teacher education for TPE being “reflection, experimentation and dialogue” (p. 55); as such, pre-service TPE programmes can include pedagogical inquiry in practicum settings (Banegas, 2019). Inquiry-based teaching is pertinent for its capacity to promote reflection on the theory-practice nexus and further the understanding of teaching as an “epistemic engine,” i.e., an activity that generates professional knowledge (Loughran 2009, p. 200). It may also contribute to enhancing teachers’ agency in managing constraints and innovating practice to foster the development of humanistic, learner-centred pedagogies (Vaughan & Burnaford, 2016; Vieira et al., 2019).

The study

Higher education institutions in Portugal have a considerable degree of autonomy regarding their study plans, but all programmes need to be accredited

by a national agency, which ensures their quality across several levels, e.g., organisation and adequacy of study plans and syllabi, staff, institutional infrastructures and quality assurance systems, and protocols with schools for the practicum. Master's programmes in TPE initiated a new field in pre-service teacher education in Portugal, and to our knowledge this is the first study, with a national scope, to have been carried out in Portugal. The need to map curricula and understand the kind of work carried out in the practicum was the main drive for conducting an exploratory, descriptive multi-site case study which ran from February 2018 to February 2021. The study was undertaken by a national network of teacher educators created in 2017 to enhance the field of TPE – PEEP: *Primary English Education in Portugal*.² Its objectives were to produce and disseminate knowledge on supervisory and teaching approaches developed in TPE master's programmes in Portugal, so as to understand similarities and differences among practicum models, as well as their impact on learner and teacher development (see Vieira et al., 2021, 2022).

The multi-site case study involved 17 faculty members from 10 Portuguese HEIs (4 polytechnic institutes and 6 universities), located across the country. Following a replication logic (Yin, 1984), a multi-method approach was used for all 10 TPE master's programmes, involving the collection of data through the content analysis of the officially approved study plans, the content analysis of a sample of 22 student teachers' practicum reports, an online survey of former student teachers ($n = 91$) and a collection of reflective records from a group of former student teachers ($n = 9$), faculty supervisors ($n = 8$) and cooperating teachers ($n = 14$). Researchers were responsible for collecting data from their own institutions, and team meetings were crucial to ensure the content validity of data collection instruments and the interpretative validity of results (Martella et al., 1999). The triangulation of methods and data sources further reduced potential bias and enhanced the trustworthiness of results.

The present chapter focuses only on the analysis of study plans, seeking to answer three research questions: *What is the overall organisation and content of the study plans? What professional learning competences do they intend to promote? What professional learning tasks related to teaching practice do they propose?*

An interpretative analysis of the study plans was carried out in a total of 134 course units (CUs). Official study plans present the CUs' syllabi, which include a description of learning outcomes, main contents, teaching and assessment strategies and core bibliography, as well as statements about the articulation between outcomes, contents and methodologies. Content analysis was based on a set of guidelines designed by the team, allowing for the collection of qualitative and quantitative data. Table 12.1 summarises data collection and analysis procedures.

The following findings refer to the last column in Table 12.1, although a few results from other sources will also be presented to complement them. Variations among programmes were found, but only cross-institutional results are presented to preserve the confidentiality of institutional information.

Table 12.1 Curriculum analysis

<i>Focus</i>	<i>Data collection</i>	<i>Data analysis</i>
Overall organisation and content of study plans	Listing all the CUs from each programme, in each teacher education area: Designation, semester, number of ECTS, main content	Characterising the overall organisation of study plans across programmes Identifying main contents and mapping their distribution across teacher education areas and CUs
	Analysing practicum arrangements as described in the corresponding CUs: Duration, teacher education tasks, roles of participants	Characterising practicum arrangements across programmes
Intended professional learning competences	Analysing the learning outcomes of each CU and identifying the professional learning competences students are expected to develop	Categorising professional learning competences using a framework adapted from Mohamed et al. (2017), and mapping their distribution across teacher education areas and CUs
Proposed professional learning tasks	Analysing the teaching and assessment methodologies of each CU and identifying the practice-related learning tasks students are expected to develop	Categorising practice-related learning tasks using a framework proposed by Vieira et al. (2019), mapping their distribution across teacher education areas and CUs and summarising main tasks

Findings

The findings are organised according to the research questions: Overall organisation and content of curricula, intended professional learning competences and intended professional learning tasks.

Overall organisation and content of curricula

The programmes comply with national regulations regarding the minimum number of ECTS in the four teacher education areas: Teaching Subject (18 ECTS), General Education (12 ECTS), Didactics (21 ECTS) and Initiation to Professional Practice/Practicum (32 ECTS). However, study plans vary across the ten HEIs regarding the total number of CUs in each programme (between 10 and 19), the number of CUs for each teacher education area and the contents covered. Table 12.2 presents the main contents in the areas of Teaching Subject (36 CUs), General Education (35 CUs) and Didactics (37 CUs). These contents were identified from the titles and main foci of CUs, and their distribution across teacher education areas is in accordance with how CUs are allocated to those areas in the study plans.

Table 12.2 Content fields in the areas of Teaching Subject, General Education and Didactics

<i>Teacher education areas</i>	<i>Main contents</i>	<i>No. of CUs</i>
<i>Teaching Subject (36 CUs)</i>	Language and communication	15
	Culture (and language)	10
	Literature (and culture)	6
	Childhood literature and/or culture	5
<i>General Education (35 CUs)</i>	Sociology of education	7
	Language development (in childhood)	6
	Educational policy and curriculum	5
	Research in education (and in language education)	5
	Educational psychology	4
	Child development and learning	3
	Inclusion and special educational needs	3
	Theory of education	1
	Ethics and professional deontology	1
	<i>Didactics (37 UCs)</i>	Languages/English didactics for children
Evaluation/production of English teaching materials for children		5
Plurilingualism and intercultural approaches		4
ICT in language education		2
Language acquisition and learning		2
Literature and languages		1
English linguistics applied to teaching		1
Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)		1
Project development in teaching English to children		1

Overall, curricula integrate a wide range of contents, both cross-disciplinary and those directly related to TPE, although study plans vary considerably as to which contents are prioritised and how they are sequenced and distributed within semesters. This reflects the autonomy HEIs have in designing their programmes, which tend to be related to local understandings of teacher education and TPE, and to teacher educators' research backgrounds. Some contents are especially dominant given the number of CUs that explore them. This is the case of *Language and communication*, *Culture (and language)* and *Languages/English didactics for children*, which appear to be core components of these curricula.

The Teaching Subject CUs focus on English language, culture and literature, which are not necessarily related to TPE or the practicum experience. In some cases, these CUs are common to other programmes and are not overtly relevant to this master's degree. Only five CUs explore *Childhood literature and/or culture* extensively, and even though the use of children's literature might be

part of CUs on *English didactics for children*, not all programmes give the same importance to this topic. Due to the fact that “children’s literature [provides] high-quality input and strong roots for children’s emerging language learning” (Bland, 2019, p. 91), recommendations are that teacher education includes access to children’s literature in three ways: Through (i) experiencing a wide range of children’s literary texts; (ii) encountering the theory of children’s literature and (iii) engaging with children’s literature through the evaluation and creation of teaching materials (Narančić Kovač, 2016).

The area of General Education is the most diverse across curricula. CUs include a variety of contents, mostly related to educational policies, curricula, language development issues and educational research. Again, not all CUs are related to TPE or the practicum experience. This is, for example, the case of educational research, which indicates that the development of student teachers’ research literacy may become too theoretical and disconnected from their needs. This is especially important given that masters in teaching are supposed to foster the articulation between teaching and research. This articulation is accomplished in some programmes in the area of Initiation to Professional Practice, namely through campus-based seminars that support the development of classroom-based projects. Nevertheless, greater attention should be paid to intra-curricular coherence as regards the preparation for inquiry-based teaching. Another aspect worth mentioning is that only three CUs explore *Inclusion and special educational needs*. Although this appears as a topic of other CUs in the area of psychology, its relevance for dealing with diversity in the classroom may require that it assumes a more central role in curricula.

As for the Didactics area, most CUs focus on *Languages/English didactics for children* and include a variety of topics, seeking to promote learner-centred pedagogies and current TPE strategies such as gamification, storytelling, task-based learning and teaching, CLIL and approaches to classroom-based assessment. Some CUs focus more extensively on particular issues and approaches, for example *Evaluation/production of English teaching materials*, *Plurilingualism and intercultural approaches* and *ICT in language education*, and even though these and other topics are usually part of CUs on *Languages/English didactics for children*, not all programmes give them the same prominence.

Initiation to Professional Practice/Practicum (26 CUs) is the most complex teacher education area, integrating and expanding knowledge acquired in the other areas, and also promoting the development of teaching competences. This area is operationalised in diverse ways across programmes. Table 12.3 summarises main commonalities and differences.

The findings show that HEIs hold different conceptions of school-based professional learning, and there is no consensus regarding practicum arrangements. This has implications for the nature of supervision, teaching practice and final reports. For example, in the cases where student teachers design and conduct action research projects, supervision typically integrates more specialised support, namely on the part of faculty supervisors, and more

Table 12.3 Initiation to Professional Practice: Commonalities and differences across programmes

<i>Commonalities</i>
regular meetings with faculty supervisors and cooperating teachers
lesson observation and analysis
planning and teaching activities
reflective writing (portfolios, teaching journals or other reflective documents)
report writing (compulsory)
<i>Differences</i>
number of CUs (1-4, including campus-based seminars)
extension of the practicum (two semesters in eight HEIs and three semesters in two HEIs)
length of lesson observation periods (one or two semesters)
elaboration of reports on context analysis (four HEIs)
elaboration of theoretical essays (two HEIs)
teaching time (variable; between 10h and 24h)
design and development of classroom-based action research projects (seven HEIs)
design and development of projects not directly related to teaching practice (two HEIs)
participation in activities beyond the classroom (three HEIs)

collaboration with cooperating teachers to negotiate the focus and nature of projects; part of student teachers' teaching practice is inquiry-based, involving the collection and analysis of classroom evidence as a basis for reflection on practice; and reports document the development, interpretation and evaluation of inquiry-based teaching.

Despite this diversity, all programmes seem to conceive the practicum as a potentially transformative learning space, an assumption which is supported by the data collected from the student teachers' survey, reflective records and report analysis. A concern with promoting innovation and developing a reflective attitude towards the profession appears to be common to all programmes.

Intended professional learning competences

The determination of what competences should be promoted in teacher education programmes is a central component of curriculum design as it indicates particular conceptions of quality educators and quality teaching. A broad notion of competence is adopted here, covering knowledge and understanding, skills and dispositions (European Commission, 2013).

The intended professional learning competences were identified in the rubric "learning outcomes" from the 134 CUs' syllabi. A total of 421 competences were registered and categorised on the basis of a framework of teacher competences adapted from Mohamed et al. (2017), who carried out a study of frameworks used around the world. A set of 13 categories were considered (see Vieira et al., 2021), and Table 12.4 presents their distribution across programmes (f) and CUs (f and %).

Table 12.4 Intended professional competences in curricula

Teacher competence framework	Teacher competence distribution		
	Ps n = 10		CUs n = 134
<i>Knowledge and understanding of...</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
content (language, culture, literature)	10	47	35.1
educational theories and pedagogical approaches	9	36	26.9
social, cultural and political aspects of contexts	9	32	23.9
curriculum	10	25	18.7
students (background, diversity, ways of learning)	9	22	16.4
educational purposes of TPE	6	10	7.5
<i>Skills in...</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
analysing and producing teaching strategies and materials	10	48	35.8
planning, organising and evaluating learning	10	48	35.8
interacting with students and creating learning environments	9	22	16.4
<i>Dispositions to...</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
carry out (further) professional development	9	46	34.3
commit to professional responsibilities	9	31	23.1
commit to educational assessment and inquiry	9	31	23.1
collaborate with colleagues, parents and the community	8	23	17.2

Ps: Programmes; CUs: Course Units

The number of competences varies considerably among programmes (from 22 to 73) due to different degrees of detail in the definition of learning outcomes, which limits the interpretation of quantitative results. Even so, it is evident that most categories are present in the majority of the programmes, reflecting a concern with promoting a broad professional profile that integrates the development of student teachers' language proficiency and cultural knowledge; their understanding of language policies, educational contexts and teaching methodologies; their ability to plan and conduct teaching; and their commitment to inquiry, collaboration and continuous professional development.

Only four categories appear in all programmes: *Knowledge of content*, which refers to English language, culture and literature; *Knowledge of curriculum*, namely the national guidelines for TPE; *Ability to analyse and produce teaching strategies and materials*; and *Ability to plan, organise and evaluate learning*. These seem to form the core of the intended teacher profile, which is in tune with the findings on major content areas related to the fields of English and TPE.

The category *Knowledge of the educational purposes of TPE* is least represented across the programmes (f = 6). Although it can be subsumed in *Knowledge of curriculum*, which integrates a definition of those purposes, it

should perhaps be more explicit in the learning outcomes given the importance of understanding and exploring the linguistic, cultural, cognitive and socio-affective purposes of teaching English to children. Nevertheless, practicum reports illustrate student teacher’s awareness of the multi-dimensional nature of TPE and document pedagogical approaches that go beyond “teaching the language” (see Vieira et al., 2021, 2022).

Intended professional learning tasks

Professional learning tasks as described in the syllabi were identified in the rubrics “teaching methodologies” and “evidence of coherence between teaching methodologies and intended learning outcomes.” The focus was on tasks that are directly or indirectly linked to practice, assuming that these are especially important to promote a connection between theory, practice and the person of the (future) teacher (Korthagen, 2017), since they entail a personal engagement in building a critical understanding of the world(s) of practice. A broad concept of practice is adopted, covering four types of tasks: *Analysis of Educational Documents*, *Analysis of School Contexts*, *Analysis of Teaching Practice* and *Teaching Practice* (Vieira et al., 2019). Table 12.5 presents examples for each task category.

A total of 174 practice-related tasks were identified in the 134 CUs. Tasks that were not clearly described were not considered, neither was the practicum report, because it is a compulsory assignment across all HEIs. Table 12.6 presents the distribution of task types across teacher education areas.

Although most programmes cover the four types of tasks, the areas of Didactics and Initiation to Professional Practice account for most of them with 88 and 57 occurrences respectively. The four types of tasks are less present in the General Education area with 20 occurrences and even less so in the Teaching Subject area with 9 occurrences. This would suggest that a closer articulation between theoretical and practical knowledge across the curriculum is needed. A more collaborative approach to curriculum design and implementation, namely among the departments that participate in these programmes, would enhance their overall coherence and professional orientation (Vieira et al., 2019).

Table 12.5 Practice-related tasks

<i>Types of tasks</i>	<i>Examples</i>
Analysis of Educational Documents	Analysing educational and language policies, language curricula, etc.
Analysis of School Contexts	Analysing school organisation and regulations, school projects, etc.
Analysis of Teaching Practice	Analysing lesson plans, teaching strategies, teaching cases, etc.
Teaching Practice	Designing and/or implementing lesson plans, teaching projects, etc.

Table 12.6 Distribution of practice-related tasks across teacher education areas in 134 Course Units

Practice-related tasks	Teacher education areas				TOTAL
	TS	GE	D	IPP	
Analysis of Educational Documents	4	4	21	2	f= 31 (17,8%)
Analysis of School Context	0	10	3	5	f= 18 (10,3%)
Analysis of Teaching Practice	3	2	27	24	f= 56 (32,2%)
Teaching Practice	2	4	37	26	f= 69 (39,7%)
TOTAL	f=9 (5,2%)	f=20 (11,4%)	f=88 (50,6%)	f=57 (32,8)	T=174 (100%)

TS: Teaching Subject; GE: General Education; D: Didactics; IPP: Initiation to Professional Practice.

Table 12.7 summarises the practice-related tasks found across the ten programmes and indicates their presence in the four teacher education areas. Overall, these tasks are intended to promote students' understanding of educational policies and guidelines, and of situational variables that affect teaching and learning in school contexts, as well as their ability to analyse and implement teaching, and to inquire into teaching and learning processes.

The findings regarding practice-related tasks appear to be aligned with the types of competences curricula intend to promote and indicate a view of professionalism that values the integration of theory and practice, as well as prospective teachers' agency as reflective practitioners. The survey to former student teachers (n = 91) revealed that the practicum experience plays a significant role in this regard. Most agreed that they learnt to understand and conduct teaching as a reflective practice (96 percent), to integrate theory and practice (89 percent), to adapt their teaching to the context of practice (91 percent) and to try out various teaching approaches (92 percent). These learnings were especially evident in the analysis of their action research reports, which illustrate the role of inquiry-based teaching for developing a critical view of TPE, making informed decisions, and exploring learner-centred pedagogies focused on the development of language skills and lifelong learning competences like cooperation, ability to learn, (inter)cultural awareness and citizenship values. Action research projects represent cases of teaching *for* and *with* children, and the fact that not all programmes integrate inquiry-based teaching can be seen as a shortcoming to the development of context-sensitive, dialogical pedagogies.

Table 12.7 Summary description of practice-related tasks in curricula

<i>Analysis of Educational Documents</i> [7 programmes] Analysing educational and language policies, TPE curriculum.	TS	GE	D	IPP
		√	√	√
Analysing coursebooks and other resources.	√		√	√
<i>Analysis of School Contexts</i> [6 programmes] Analysing school organisation and regulations, educational projects and case studies, learner/teacher characteristics.	TS	GE	D	IPP
		√	√	√
<i>Analysis of Teaching Practice</i> [10 programmes] Analysing classroom-based research reports	TS	GE	D	IPP
		√		
Analysing TPE plans, activities, resources, projects, teaching narratives; Observing and analysing lessons (in schools, videotaped); Reflective writing (e.g., journals, portfolios).			√	
Analysing TPE resources; Observing and analysing lesson video clips; Building a portfolio on intercultural competence.	√			
Analysing TPE projects, activities, resources; Observing and analysing lessons; Sharing and discussing practicum experiences; Reflective writing (e.g., journals, portfolios); Writing the final practicum report.				√
<i>Teaching Practice</i> [10 programmes] Designing an integrated curriculum project, a classroom-based project	TS	GE	D	IPP
		√		
Designing a classroom-based project (plans, materials, research tools); Planning TPE lessons and designing activities/materials; Micro-teaching and simulations; Teaching lessons, trying out activities/materials.			√	
Planning activities and lessons.	√			
Designing and developing a research project (action research/other); Designing/adapting teaching materials; Planning and teaching lessons.				√

TS: Teaching Subject; GE: General Education; D: Didactics; IPP: Initiation to Professional Practice

Final remarks

Pre-service teacher education curricula are based on assumptions regarding the goals and nature of professional learning. Although TPE frameworks may tend to focus on specific age-appropriate teaching skills (e.g., Uztosun 2018), our findings regarding programme content, competences and practice-related tasks suggest a more holistic understanding of professional profiles that integrates a notion of the teacher as a critical thinker, a decision-maker, a curriculum manager and a pedagogical inquirer (Banegas, 2019; Karatsiori, 2016; Loughran, 2009; Vieira et al., 2019). Study plans anticipate the creation of opportunities for reflective professional development and the exploration of learner-centred pedagogies, which is aligned with current trends in TPE. Additionally, respecting early language learning as critical in its enhancement of a democratic culture and intercultural dialogue, the lifelong learning

competences targeted in these learner-centred pedagogies contribute, to some extent, to moving away from a focus on teaching language only.

However, some shortcomings were identified and point to the need to foster coherence and a more explicit professional orientation in curricula through intra-institutional collaboration in curriculum design, along with the expansion of inquiry-based teaching to all programmes. Furthermore, variations among programmes – regarding the intended contents, competences, tasks and the type of work to be carried out in the practicum – suggest the need to develop inter-institutional dialogue to achieve greater understanding regarding core and peripheric elements in curricula. Even though some priorities were observed, the study also identified marginal components that could become more central or evident, for example, the exploration of children's literature in the Teaching Subject area, or of special educational needs in the General Education area, and also the development of student teachers' research literacy in close connection with TPE and the practicum experience, both in General Education and Didactics. Despite the evidence across the programmes of a respect for and a desire to develop the lifelong learning competences, this was not consistent across programmes. For example, the emphasis on a citizenship competence, resulting from global citizenship education being integrated more explicitly in multiple course units, appears to be limited (see Lourenço, Chapter 8).

Initiation to Professional Practice is perhaps the area that needs most attention, given its complexity, its central place in curricula (one third of the total ECTS) and its critical relevance for professional learning. The diversity of practicum models signals the existence of different visions of professional learning, with implications for the nature of learning paths and outcomes. The fact that not all programmes integrate inquiry-based teaching may limit the development of student teachers' critical abilities to analyse and transform practice.

The study did not focus on teacher education practices; therefore, further research is needed to investigate the alignment between formal curricula and curricula-in-action, as well as the impact of a teacher education curriculum on student teachers' competences. A more ethnographic approach, preferably conducted in the form of multi-site case studies, would be useful to reach a more informed understanding of the benefits and shortcomings of certain curriculum decisions and enhance a more consensual view of professional development for TPE.

In 2022 these master's programmes went through a re-accreditation process, which was an opportunity to introduce changes in curricula and overcome some of the shortcomings identified in the study. Nevertheless, not all team members were positioned to impact on institutional decision-making, and institutional mechanisms may also have impaired implementing some of the recommendations. A second review of the renewed programmes, now six in all, would be of value to all involved, further engaging colleagues in the reflection process that has resulted from collaborative research on this scale. It is of credit to PEEP, the national network of teacher educators in Portugal,

which initiated and undertook this research, that they persist in their quest for quality in both teacher education and primary English classroom practices. They continue to engage in early language learning research, disseminate quality research in the field of primary English education in Portugal, as well as support and promote practitioner-based classroom research and inquiry in their present and forthcoming activities.

Notes

- 1 Masters in Teaching (90 or 120 ECTS) were first created in Portugal in 2007 within the Bologna Reform, in universities and polytechnic institutes, replacing previous undergraduate teaching degrees. Candidates must hold an undergraduate degree and former training in the field they intend to qualify for as teachers.
- 2 The PEEP network (<https://www.cetaps.com/peep/>) is coordinated by Sandie Mourão, who also co-coordinated the study with Flávia Vieira.

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