

PRACTICE ORIENTED TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAM IN HUNGARY – RESULTS OF THE PILOT YEAR

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Abstract

One of the most significant determinants of educational quality is the professional preparedness of teachers; therefore, ensuring a steady supply of well-qualified educators is a priority in every country's education policy. Since 2019, our university has been engaged in a long-term development process aimed at modernising teacher education and strengthening a practice-oriented, competence-based approach. As a result of these efforts, a new practice-focused concept of teacher education was introduced in Hungary in 2024, supported by Government Decree 255/2024 (VIII.22.). Another international program at our university fits well with this concept: "Educational Cosmopolitans, International Perspective in Teacher Training," supported by the Tempus Public Foundation as the "learning in technology and society" approach reinforces the principle that teacher training can be most effective if we integrate the opportunity for reflection in a practical school environment into the training and prepare our students for international cooperation and participation in international competitions. The present study outlines the structure of the pilot programme, summarises experiences from its first academic year and impact of international academic course. The impact assessment followed a mixed-methods research design (quantitative and qualitative). The longitudinal framework comprised four measurement points (baseline, end of first year, mid-programme, final assessment), enabling temporal tracking of changes and developmental patterns. Quantitative instruments included validated psychological scales, and institutionally developed tools assessing career-choice motivations, professional competences and expectations. Qualitative data were collected through focus-group interviews, as well as students' reflective journals. The research targeted three groups: students, teacher educators, and school-practice mentors, supplemented by insights from programme coordinators and institute directors. Among students, the analysis focused on psychological need satisfaction, learning motivation, preconceptions about teaching, and the development of transversal competences. Results indicate that students' autonomy, competence and relatedness needs were strongly supported, intrinsic motivation increased, and early school-based experiences played a crucial role in shaping teacher identity. Data from teacher educators revealed role changes associated with the shift towards practice-orientation, including a rebalancing of disciplinary and pedagogical knowledge and an intensification of collaboration with partner schools. For mentors, the study examined their contributions to students' professional development, shifts in motivation and commitment, perceptions of workload, and the functioning of university – school cooperation. Overall, first-year findings show that the practice-oriented, value-centred model has brought positive changes across all target groups. The results suggest that this model offers a promising long-term framework for preparing future generations of competent, reflective and committed teachers. The presentation was funded by the Tempus Public Foundation (2024-1-HU01-KA220-HED-000248326).

Keywords: *Practice-oriented teacher training, teacher competences, mixed method research, career socialization, first pilot year results.*

1. Introduction

In December 2023, at the request of the Ministry of Culture and Innovations, the staff of the University of Debrecen, the University of Nyíregyháza and the Eszterházy Károly Catholic University were asked to develop a new teacher training model. The focus of the development of the training was value- and practice-centeredness. In the first round, we formulated a proposal for amending Annexes 1-2 of Decree 8/2013 of the Ministry of Education and Science on the system of teacher training and the output requirements of teacher professions.

In the case of teacher training, the training output requirements were adjusted to the National Core Curriculum and the framework curricula in a value- and practice-oriented manner. Value-centeredness

meant the inclusion of the basic principles, goals and image of the child appearing in the National Core Curriculum into teacher training, while in the case of practice-centeredness, the aim was to present a greater proportion of practices and practical training. This included increasing the proportion of teachers from public education who were involved in teacher education.

Due to the increase in the number of internships and in order to increase the regional role of universities, a network of partner schools was established. Partner institutions play a major role in strengthening the practice-oriented nature of teacher training and in strengthening the connection between theory and practice.

The task of Teacher Training Centers at the universities is to build a network between the participants in the training and thus support quality teacher training. The growing role of the centers extends to the entire process of becoming a teacher - from application and career orientation, through the organization of internships to obtaining a diploma.

Ensuring high-quality teacher training is a goal of national strategic importance. We are convinced that we can also contribute to the future by training value-oriented, open and creative professionals with appropriate theoretical and practical preparation.

The milestones of the implementation were the following:

1. Revision of the output requirements of teacher profession according to National core curriculum and its frame curricula.
2. Development of teacher training curriculum networks (sample curricula, training programs) and subject descriptions.
3. Renewal of the content of the disciplinary courses, expanding them with special methodological knowledge.
4. Development of teacher competences – transformation of the pedagogical-psychological module.
5. Increasing the proportion of school practices.
6. Differentiated education of teacher training and undergraduate students.
7. Increasing the proportion of public education teachers in the teacher training process.
8. Strengthening the regional role of teacher training universities.

The Tempus 2024-1-HU01-KA220-HED-000248326 program was also part of the renewal of teacher education. The 27-month project entitled “Educational Global Citizens: An International Perspective in Teacher Education” aims to create a flexible course in teacher education that will prepare teacher candidates to take advantage of the internationalization opportunities of public education and vocational training as early as their careers. They will learn about the steps of strategy building, the available programs, application and funding opportunities, the tools for successful project implementation and dissemination, and expand their related (pedagogical, psychological) methodological tools.

2. Description of the Hungarian teacher training education system

In Hungary, teacher training takes place in the form of a 10-semester, unified, undivided master's degree. Upon application, students choose two specializations, which are regulated by the Higher Education Act (Act CCIV of 2011). Students are free to choose the specializations from the options offered by the higher education institutions. The knowledge acquired during the training covers the scientific knowledge of the two chosen specializations, the competences necessary for a teaching career, the subject pedagogical knowledge of the chosen majors, and school practices. The master's degree entitles students to teach school subjects corresponding to the chosen specialization in grades 5-12 of public education, and to apply for doctoral training corresponding to the given majors. Those who already have a degree have the opportunity to obtain a master's degree in teaching in short-cycle supplementary training (depending on the level of the existing degree and the student's professional background) in single- and double-major training (2-6 semesters). This form of training provides an opportunity to quickly alleviate the teacher shortage that is also emerging in our country. During the 10 semesters of the full, dual-major teacher training program, students must acquire 300 credits. In our practice-oriented system they are divided as follows.

Theoretical preparation:

- specialized scientific preparation 95-95 credits per specialization;
- 10 credits of free choice courses;
- development of teacher competences: 20 credits;
- thesis: 5 credits;

Practical preparation:

- school career knowledge and career socialization practice: 10 credits;
- methodological practice: 20 credits;
- school teaching practice: 20 credits;
- consistent individual teaching practice (1 semester): 20 credits
- teacher portfolio: 5 credits.

In the newly introduced practice-oriented training, this means that practical preparation accounts for 25% of the credits to be obtained. In this process, starting from the first semester, students have school practice every semester, during which they are gradually introduced to the mysteries of the teaching profession. The practices of the first 5 semesters aim at career orientation and career socialization, regardless of the major. From the sixth semester onwards, the focus of the practices is on teaching the chosen subjects. During the practices, they can experience the process of becoming a teacher in a real school environment, about which they prepare a report every semester, with self-reflection.

The increased number of school internships has presented universities with new challenges. On the one hand, the number of public education teachers in higher education has increased, and on the other hand, more internship spaces are needed to organize students' school practices.

3. Research – questions, methods and target groups

The impact assessment of the pilot programme was conducted within a longitudinal mixed-methods research design. Data collection involved three key target groups—students, university instructors, and school-based mentors/practice teachers—and was carried out at multiple measurement points (entry, interim, and exit), allowing for a comprehensive analysis of developmental processes and perceived programme effects. At the beginning and end of the 2024/25 pilot academic year, we conducted measurements in the three target groups: students, internship mentor teachers, and university lecturers (teacher educators) as follows.

3.1. Students as a target group

In the case of the student target group, we examined through a questionnaire survey what experiences they have after the 1st pilot year, when they have already gained insight into the world of schools. The study aimed to provide a comprehensive overview of initial teacher education by examining changes in students' motivation and career commitment, the alignment of practical training with prior expectations, and perceived ways of enhancing the attractiveness of the teaching profession. It explored students' professional and competence development, with particular attention to the role of practice-oriented activities and professional socialization opportunities in shaping pedagogical competences and career identity. In addition, the research analyzed students' perceptions of workload, academic, instructional, and digital support, as well as the effectiveness of school-based practice, including the role of mentor teachers and institutional leadership. The study also addressed instructor cooperation and institutional climate, identified development needs in the organization of professional practice and support structures, and examined social, psychological, and dropout-related factors influencing student progression and retention.

Data collection is carried out among first-year students studying at universities, in the form of an online questionnaire. Regarding Eszterházy Károly Catholic University, the population volume and the sample characteristic of students participating in the pilot program is as follows:

Correspondence course	Full-time course	International course
96 full-time teachers' students	63 full-time teachers' students	111 full-time teachers' students
129 elementary teachers' students	9 elementary teachers' students	
N=225 people	N= 72 people	N=111 people

The data collection was carried out through the Unipoll system. The completion of the questionnaires ended on July 7, 2025. 79 people started responding, while 75 people agreed to have their data published in the research report, so the number of elements in this analysis is: (N=75). It often happens that fewer people answered certain questions, which is indicated in each case by the element numbers.

The gender distribution of the research participants was: 80% women, 20% man – the vast majority of respondents were women, which is a general trend in teacher education. The age of the respondents is spread over a wide spectrum. The youngest respondent was 19, while the oldest was 62. This is explained by the fact that both full-time and part-time students participated in the research. The students' majors covered all areas of education.

3.2. Findings from student research

3.2.1. Satisfaction of basic psychological needs. Entry-level results indicate that students entering teacher education display a generally favourable psychological profile. Analysis based on the Basic Psychological Needs Scale (BPNS) revealed high levels of satisfaction across the autonomy, competence, and relatedness dimensions, with positive response rates typically ranging between 60% and 85%.

In the autonomy dimension, more than 80% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with statements indicating that their studies align with their genuine interests. Agreement rates for decision-making freedom and self-congruence also exceeded 70%, suggesting that students' educational choices are largely internally motivated and self-endorsed.

Relatedness emerged as a particularly strong dimension: items referring to supportive interpersonal relationships and a sense of being cared for received positive responses from 75–85% of participants. This stable social embeddedness represents a significant protective factor in teacher education, where emotional demands and professional stress are well documented.

In the competence dimension, over 70% of students reported feeling capable of coping with academic challenges, achieving their goals, and perceiving their activities as meaningful. At the same time, this dimension showed a comparatively higher proportion of ambivalent (“partly true”) responses, indicating potential room for further strengthening students' perceived competence through targeted pedagogical interventions.

3.2.2. Academic motivation and negative affective states. Results from the Academic Motivation Scale (AMS-HUN) show that students' learning motivation is predominantly intrinsic and learning-oriented. Items related to the joy of acquiring new knowledge received positive endorsement rates between 70% and 80%, indicating that learning is valued as an activity in its own right.

Extrinsic and pragmatic motives appear secondary. Career orientation and labour-market considerations were endorsed by 37–45% of respondents, while financial rewards were identified as a primary motivating factor by only 25%. Controlled forms of motivation (e.g. studying due to external pressure or obligation) played a marginal role.

Indicators of demotivation and negative affect were consistently low. The statement “I do not understand why I am at university” was rejected by 77% of respondents, while 83% disagreed with “I do not know why I attend university.” Thoughts of abandoning university studies were reported only by a small minority, suggesting a low initial risk of attrition.

3.2.3. Competences, professional image, and exit-level changes. Self-reported transversal competences showed relatively homogeneous profiles across most domains, with average levels between 70% and 82%. Part-time students reported higher competence levels in several areas, particularly self-regulation (85%), problem-solving (81%), and digital competences (82%), likely reflecting prior work and life experience. In contrast, foreign language competences appeared weaker, especially among part-time students (48%), pointing to a potential area for targeted development.

Metaphor analysis and associative tasks revealed a predominantly value-based and positive professional image of teaching. Frequently occurring concepts included patience, knowledge, empathy, responsibility, and education, indicating that students perceive teaching as a morally and socially complex profession rather than a purely technical occupation.

Exit-level measurements show clear signs of positive change. 58% of students reported a clear increase in professional motivation, while an additional 28% indicated stable, balanced motivation. Satisfaction with practice-based components was high, with 80% of students reporting being mostly or fully satisfied. Qualitative feedback consistently highlighted early school exposure, classroom observations, and micro-teaching activities as key contributors to professional identity development.

3.2.4. Results of international course. Language and mobility background: B2 is the most common, but a significant proportion are only at a basic level; 87.1% have not yet participated in mobility. Barriers to mobility include lack of time, financial reasons, lack of information, lack of language skills, and family factors; the main motivations are foreign language development and cultural experience, with 43.8% planning future mobility. Students rely mainly on general internet searches and teachers as sources of information, while the use of official scholarship websites is low; Erasmus is the best known of the programs. There has been a noticeable increase in the desire for mobility by the end of the course, with a slight decrease in anxiety. Satisfaction with the course is high, and instructors have given very positive evaluations of the training and instruction.

3.3. University instructor sample

The instructor-level investigation followed a mixed-methods approach with a qualitative emphasis, combining structured questionnaires with focus-group interviews conducted among different instructor subgroups (curriculum developers, subject-methodology instructors, and disciplinary instructors; 3–3 focus groups).

At entry, instructors overwhelmingly perceived the practice-oriented teacher education model as superior to traditional theory-driven structures. Strengthening collaboration between higher education and

public education institutions was repeatedly identified as a critical factor in improving students' professional preparedness.

Focus-group findings highlighted early school practice, structured competence development, and authentic teaching experiences as central mechanisms supporting students' professional socialisation. Curriculum developers reported that approximately 80% of students enter teacher education with a conscious career choice and stable motivation, which is further reinforced through practice-based learning.

Exit-level results provide quantitative support for these perceptions. 77% of instructors considered the new programme structure more advantageous for students, 84.6% emphasised the importance of early school practice and mentoring, and 66–67% evaluated both the institutional support system and cooperation with partner schools as effective. Importantly, instructors also reported shifts in their own professional roles towards more reflective, student-centred, and collaborative approaches.

3.4. School-based mentors and practice teachers

Mentors and practice teachers were surveyed using a self-developed 27-item questionnaire within a longitudinal framework. According to exit-level results, 76.9% of mentors observed an increase in students' professional commitment, which they primarily attributed to early school presence and engagement in authentic pedagogical tasks.

Student activity at practice sites was rated as adequate by 53.3% and outstanding by 33.3% of mentors, indicating that most students actively participate in pedagogical processes rather than remaining passive observers. Student workload was considered "appropriate" by 73.7%, suggesting a generally balanced programme structure, albeit one requiring continuous fine-tuning.

Programme expectations were fully met according to 56% of mentors. Cooperation between the university and practice institutions was evaluated positively overall, although mentors clearly articulated the need for stronger institutional support, particularly regarding time investment, role clarification, professional feedback, and continuing professional development.

4. Conclusion

The findings of the present study provide strong evidence that the practice-oriented teacher education pilot programme has generated meaningful and positive effects across all three target groups examined: students, university instructors, and school-based mentors. The longitudinal mixed-methods design enabled a comprehensive understanding of how the programme contributes to the quality of preparation for the teaching profession.

Student-level results indicate that entrants to teacher education display high levels of intrinsic motivation, well-satisfied psychological needs, and a positive professional self-concept. These initial strengths are further reinforced by structured practice-based components, particularly in relation to professional identity development, commitment to the teaching profession, and perceived self-efficacy. The consistently low levels of negative affect and demotivation suggest that the programme may function as a protective factor against dropout and early career attrition.

At the instructor level, the results highlight that practice-oriented teacher education affects not only student development but also instructors' professional roles and pedagogical thinking. Strong professional support for the new model and intensified collaboration between higher education institutions and public education settings create structural conditions that enhance the long-term sustainability of the programme.

Feedback from school-based mentors confirms that early and authentic teaching experiences play a crucial role in students' professional socialisation. At the same time, the findings emphasise that the sustainability of mentoring arrangements depends on adequate institutional and professional support, particularly with regard to time allocation, role clarity, and professional recognition.

Taken together, the results suggest that the renewal of teacher education is most effective when student motivation, instructional practice, and mentoring structures are addressed within an integrated system. The experiences of the pilot programme therefore offer not only institution-level insights but also valuable implications for educational policy and the long-term development of teacher education.

References

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