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PERCEIVED STUDENT SATISFACTION AND PROFESSIONAL RELEVANCE IN THE PRACTICUM

Percepción de la satisfacción percibida por los estudiantes y relevancia profesional del Practicum



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Abstract

The investigation outlined proposes to discover and explain the degree of satisfaction and professional relevance by students of degrees in infant and primary education from the University of Jaen (Spain) in relation to the Practicum. The participants are 537 students from these degree courses. A scale is used to analyse the dimensions of the Practicum. In the different medians analysis performed, statistically significant differences found between the degree variable (infant vs primary) and type of Practicum ($p < .01$). The regression study results indicate that the model variables (Factor 1 and Factor 2) explain 49.2% of the variance. In light of the results, the following are proposed as improvements: to boost the centres to participate and be involved in the design of the Practicum to achieve greater connection between the university classroom and the reality of schools, to enter the Practicum in the training curriculum of the students, and to review the assessment instruments, improve them and adapt them to new educational realities.

Key Words: *higher education, teacher evaluation, teacher training, tutor training.*

Resumen:

La investigación presentada propone descubrir y explicar el grado de satisfacción y relevancia profesional de los estudiantes de grados en educación infantil y primaria de la Universidad de Jaén (España) en relación con el Practicum. Los participantes son 537 estudiantes de estos grados. Se emplea una escala para analizar las dimensiones del Practicum. En los análisis realizados se encontraron diferencias estadísticamente significativas entre la variable grado (infantil vs primaria) y el tipo de Practicum ($p < .01$). Los resultados del estudio de regresión indican que las variables del modelo (Factor 1 y Factor 2) explican el 49.2% de la varianza. En función de los resultados, se proponen como mejoras: potenciar la labor de los centros para participar e involucrarse en el diseño del Practicum para lograr una mayor conexión entre el aula universitaria y la realidad de los centros educativos, integrar el Practicum en el currículum de los estudiantes, y revisar los instrumentos de evaluación para mejorarlos y adaptarlos a las nuevas realidades educativas.

Palabras clave: *educación superior, evaluación del profesorado, formación del profesorado, supervisión del practicum.*

1. Introduction

The modernisation of universities inevitably leads to a change in the concept of learning. One of these changes is the notion of 'Practicum' as a catalytic issue in the learning acquired throughout a university. If the Practicum used to be an internship in which students were in contact with the labour situation in their field of study, Practicum is now a "significant part in the process of training of students destined to enrich training, complementing academic learning (theoretical and practical) with experience (linked to learning) in the workplace" (Zabalza, 2011, p. 26). It is the bridge that connects training with the world of work (Coleman, 1989; Tejada, 2005), and it requires good management. Massification and diversification of the higher education system, economic globalisation, novel modes of knowledge production, new professional requirements and the establishment of new vocational higher education systems in many countries have challenged higher education institutions to develop new forms of collaboration with working life. The new situation also challenges higher education to develop pedagogical and educational thinking and practices (Tynjälä, Välimaa, & Sarja, 2003).

This training activity requires guidance and advice so that students can successfully acquire learning (Adoniú, 2013; Allen, Ambrosetti & Turner, 2013; Pridhm, Deed & Cox, 2013; Ruiz-Bernardo, Sánchez-Tarazaga & Mateu-Pérez, 2018). Molina, Iranzo Lopez & Molina (2008) see in the Practicum an opportunity to apply the theoretical content learned in the classroom, and an experience where students can reflect on real situations (Martínez & Raposo, 2011).

Korthagen, Loughran & Russel (2006) argue that, to have a quality Practicum, the scenarios in which it operates must encourage reflective learning, adapted to situations that meet the real needs of education. Hascheret, Cocard & Moser (2004)

highlight the importance of the context of the Practicum in the learning process, indicating the need to select centres that provide adequate space in which to develop and acquire skills and experience which are of high quality, offer active apprenticeships, and constructive, cooperative and authentic tasks, similar to the learning to be carried out in their daily work (Allen, Ambrosetti & Turner, 2013; Standal, Moen & Moe, 2014).

Some institutions have not progressed much in the organisational aspects of the Practicum, with negative consequences for students, such as the limited attention given to learning achievements, superficial, even marginal, evaluation systems, monitoring systems, and heterogeneous tutorials which are of no use in guiding the student reflection that is important to good practice (Dalgin, Bruch & Barber, 2010; Meegan, Dunning, Belton & Woods, 2013; Muradas & Prota, 2007; Zabalza, 2011).

Zabalza & Cid (1998) highlighted that the supervisor of the Practicum should be an experienced person who guides and supports learning. The literature on the role of the tutor and supervisor of the Practicum is wide-ranging. Shea (1992) provides some characteristics, such as creating high expectations, offering attractive ideas, teaching by example, explaining aspects of the organisation, and motivating students. Hill, Jennings & Madgwick (1992) point out that the functions of the tutor are to monitor and support the student, give advice, develop the skills associated with professional practice, keep the learning process alive, verify and assess students' work, and deepen their experience. Martínez & Raposo (2011) states that, in addition, the tutor should guide the student's training process, check whether the students have translated theoretical knowledge into practical application, and provide guidelines for improving student learning and evaluation. Similarly, the supervisor of the Practicum interacts with students to analyse situations and develop appropriate guidelines for action.

One of the key points of the Practicum is evaluation. Tejada (2005) says that competency assessment is one of the most important tasks in the learning process, particularly in the Practicum, as it aims to ensure that teaching and evaluation are focused on the required results. It also helps students understand what is expected from them and informs employers about the qualifications of the students (Rorrison, 2010). Melgarejo, Pantoja & Latorre (2014), in a study of the satisfaction levels with a teaching Practicum, conclude that the perception of people involved is good, and the authors highlight the work of the tutors and the students in universities. Other studies have found that some theoretical content is not suitable to apply in the classroom setting (Dalgin, Bruch & Barber, 2010; Standal et al., 2014), not forgetting that the beliefs and prior knowledge that future teachers bring can influence initial training programmes (Latorre-Medina, 2007). Some authors have stressed the importance to ensure continuity in the themes of the studies completed high school and university degree made (Farías & Sevilla, 2015). Without forgetting the importance of integrating the theoretical disciplines with practice in teacher training (Afdal, 2016).

It is expected that the Practicum provides students with experiences that will be useful for them as professionals (Allen & Turner, 2012; Pridham, Deed & Cox, 2013; Sotomayor-Echenique et al., 2013), although we know that not all experiences are good, and some of them can even be obstacles to learning. Marcelo (2011) notes that, for the Practicum to be useful, it must fulfil the principles of continuity, interaction and reflection. In this sense, we are implementing some innovative proposals related to the Practicum in infant and primary education (Rodríguez, Calmaestra & Maestre, 2015), inspired by Problem-Based Learning (Dochy, Segers, Van Den Bossche & Gijbels, 2003; Hmelo-Silver, 2004), and Multidimensional Coaching with, on one hand, asymmetric coaching (academic and professional tutors) and, on the other hand, symmetrical coaching as co-mentoring (Mullen, 2012) and coaching peers with emotional support (Fletcher, 2012).

In general, the goals outlined in the study are: (a) to know the level of student satisfaction with the Practicum in infant and primary education; (b) to check the relationship between the different factors that make up the instrument in question; (c) to establish the significant differences between different demographic variables (gender, grade and type of Practicum) and each of the factors discussed, and (d) to analyse which of the factors considered can further predict overall satisfaction with the Practicum.

2. Method

The stated objectives lead us to propose a quantitative methodology and a descriptive and inferential method, to know what the students think of the design, content and perceived usefulness of the new degrees in primary education in relation to practices engaged in schools in the third and fourth grades.

2.1. Participants

The study involved 537 students, aged between 20 and 43 ($M = 22.16 \pm 2.53$), out of 897 students enrolled in degrees in infant and primary education in the 2016/2017 academic year at the University of Jaen (Spain). This sample is taken from students enrolled in courses three and four, where the Practicum takes place at Levels I and II (Table 1). The distribution of the sample aligns with the reality of education studies at this University, with many more women than men. The centres chosen for the realisation of the Practicum are mostly public. There are 11% more students from infant education than from primary education, while there are similar percentages among students in Practicum I and II.

Table 1.
Sample description

Sample characteristics	
Gender	Male: 117 (21.8%) Female: 420 (79.2%)

Educational Practice Centre	Public: 398 (74.1%) Charterschool: 128 (23.8%) Private: 11 (2%)
Degree	Infant Education: 298 (55.5%) Primary Education: 239 (44.5%)
Practices (Practicum)	Practicum I: 276 (51.4%) Practicum II: 261 (48.6%)

2.2. Instrument

The professional satisfaction and utility scale 'Practicum II: Questionnaire for Students' was taken as the reference point for the collection of information (González & Hevia, 2011). It was decided to adapt this to suit the characteristics of students in infant and primary education degrees. To this end, efforts were made to ensure content validity, through the judgement of experts who were university professors with experience in the Practicum (5), tutors in educational centres (3) and graduate students in teaching infants (27) and primary education (10), who had already completed the Practicum in the new degrees. Having analysed the responses, unanimity was found regarding keeping the same dimensions of the instrument as a reference point, although various corrections are made in some of the content blocks and items (Table 2). The final scale was formed with a total of 75 items, with four response options, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). The tendency to centrality that experts had considered in the instrument (a scale of 1 to 5) is thus eliminated. As there were some items with wording different to the original test, it was decided to conduct a new Exploratory Factor Analysis by extracting the main components and seeing if there was correspondence between items, content blocks and factors. Construct validity is ensured, in the first instance, based on the value obtained in the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin index ($KMO=.908$) and Bartlett's test of sphericity which has a χ^2 for 19413.46 ($p=.00$), indicating that the factor analysis is appropriate. The Varimax rotation revealed the existence of four factors explaining 41.9% of variance: Factor 1 (organisation practices) 11.67%; Factor 2 (stakeholders) 11.64%; Factor 3 (evaluation) 9.85%, and Factor 4 (utility practices) 7.72%.

Table 2
Composition scale

Dimensions of the questionnaire	Variables of each dimension	Nº items
1. Identification data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender • Age • Form Access • Venue practices • Degree • Practicum type (Practicum I/Practicum II) 	6*
2. Organisation of practices (F1)	2.1. Temporal sequencing 2.2. Practical centres 2.3. Preparation of seminars	12 7 3

3. Stakeholders (F2)	3.1. Practicum coordinator	4
	3.2. Tutor of the faculty	8
	3.3. Tutor of centre	10
4. Evaluation criteria (F3)	4.1. Evaluation criteria	14
5. Utility practices (F4)		8
6. Overall assessment of the Practicum		1*
7. Suggestions for including memory practices (open answer)		1*
8. Suggestions for improving the Practicum (open answer)		1*
9. Other comments (open answer)		1*

* Items not subject to Factorial Analysis

Regarding the reliability of the scale, the data are satisfactory for achieving high internal consistency, reaching a value of Cronbach α for the whole test of .936 (higher than the original test, which was .92). It remains high in each of the factors (see Table 3). On the other hand, in the corrected correlation, we can check the item on the scale with the lowest discrimination index is $> .25$, so we can conclude that it is not necessary to remove any of them. Similarly, a study of correlation between factors, as shown in Table 3 is significant enough to confirm the validity of the scale in content and components.

Table 3

Means, standard deviations and correlations between factors (Pearson r)

	Organisation Practices (F1)	Stakeholders (F2)	Evaluation Practices (F3)	Utility Practices (F4)
ORG (F1)	1	.565**	.581**	.335**
STA (F2)	.565**	1	.564**	.370**
EVA (F3)	.581**	.564**	1	.380**
UTI (F4)	.335**	.370**	.380**	1
M	64.34	66.99	43.23	32.52
SD	± 10.22	± 11.73	± 7.42	± 3.92
Cronbach's α	.858	.879	.836	.857

(1) Organisation Practices = ORG, Stakeholders = STA, Evaluation Practices = EVA; Utility Practices = UTI. (2) * = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .01$. (3) M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation. (4) α = Reliability, Cronbach's Alpha.

2.3. Procedure

In the last few months of 2016, during the process of validating the scale, information was requested from the Vice Chancellor of the University of Jaen regarding the number of students in the Practicum I and II in infant and primary education degrees. The Vice Chancellor then contacted the various tutors of the Practicum in order to present the scale to the monitoring meetings in the Practicum.

The distribution of groups according to the degree and semester of the academic year is as follows.

- First semester: Practicum II for infant education and Practicum I for primary education.
- Second semester: Practicum I for infant education and Practicum II for primary education.

Data were collected in January and May 2017, the completion dates of the Practicums, thus ensuring that all student participants had adequate knowledge to answer the items of the scale.

2.4. Data analysis

For the coding and data analysis, the statistical program SPSS version 20 for Mac was used to create a descriptive analysis of the results and calculate correlations (Pearson) among the factors. To find significant differences by gender (men vs women), grade (infant vs primary) and type of Practicum (Practicum I vs Practicum II) in the factors analysed, the Student t-test was used, with mean differences for independent samples, verifying the assumptions of normality and equal variances. Finally, a linear regression study was done by the successive steps method to predict which factor explained further overall satisfaction with the Practicum. In the analysis, a confidence interval of 95% (95%) is used and a significance level of $p < .05$ was used.

3. Results

The results related to each of the objectives are described, although it is noteworthy that the first (partially) and the second were analysed above (see Table 3).

3.1. Assessment of the main issues of each factor

We have not found in any case a mean score of less than 2.0, allowing us to describe the high value of the Practicum in all sections and questions (agree or strongly agree), with standard deviations (SD) less than 1 in all cases.

Organisation of practices (Factor 1)

Table 4.
Descriptive statistics Factor 1: Organisation practices

Item	1		2		3		4		M	Min.	Max.	SD
	f	%	F	%	f	%	F	%				
The realisation of the Practicum in third and fourth grade as appropriate.	21	3.9	62	11.5	199	37.1	255	47.5	3.28	1	4	.18

The movement forward in the course of the Practicum is adjusted to the time available.	17	3.2	111	20.9	256	47.9	151	28.2	3.01	1	4	.78
The allocation process of practice centres is correct.	33	6.1	79	14.7	196	36.5	229	42.6	3.16	1	4	.89
The guardian of the allocation process is impartial.	33	6.1	82	15.3	238	44.3	176	32.8	3.05	1	4	.86
The delivery of practical memory is enough.	28	5.2	108	20.1	235	43.8	165	30.7	3.02	1	4	.97
There is the possibility of increasing activities.	15	2.8	66	12.3	179	33.3	276	51.4	3.34	1	4	.80
Overall, the experience is in line with initial expectations.	16	3.0	67	12.5	203	37.8	250	46.6	3.28	1	4	.79

Descriptive statistics obtained on the first factor tell us that there are seven items with average scores above 3 points. The majority of the answers are located in the response alternatives 'agree' or 'strongly agree' (3 or 4 rating points). We highlight that the average score on the questions means it is possible to raise classroom activities ($M=3.34\pm.80$), that the realisation of the Practicum in the third and fourth grades is adequate ($M=3.28\pm.18$), and overall experience in the centre of practice corresponds with initial expectations ($M=3.28\pm.79$). Table 4 illustrates this.

The second factor (see Table 5) found 10 items with average scores above 3 points, with other issues being valued as follows. The tutor centre hosted properly ($M=3.6\pm.63$); the guardian of the centre fully guided the practices ($M=3.60\pm.74$), and demonstrated a good personal attitude ($M=3.59\pm.75$).

Table 5.
Descriptive statistics Factor 2: Stakeholders

Item	1		2		3		4		M	Min.	Max.	SD
	f	%	F	%	f	%	f	%				
School tutor.												
Compulsory tutorials allow the exchange of information.	35	6.5	97	18.1	188	35.0	213	39.7	3.09	1	4	.91
Tutor centre. There is an adequate reception at the centre.	8	1.5	25	4.7	99	18.4	404	75.2	3.68	1	4	.63
Tutor centre. Explains and describes the operation of the centre.	10	1.9	45	8.4	119	22.2	362	67.4	3.55	1	4	.73
Tutor centre. Explains and describes the programmes developed in the centre.	12	2.2	50	9.3	125	23.3	349	65.0	3.51	1	4	.76
Tutor centre. Advice and guidance provided to students in their	15	2.8	33	6.2	124	23.3	361	67.7	3.56	1	4	.73

activities.

Tutor centre. Provides materials and resources.	13	2.4	37	6.9	108	20.1	374	69.6	3.58	1	4	.73
Tutor centre. Decisively supports the student in problem-solving.	16	3.0	47	8.8	125	23.5	344	64.7	3.50	1	4	.78
Tutor centre. Sufficiently qualified from the professional point of view to meet the trainee.	22	4.1	36	6.8	11	20.9	363	68.2	3.53	1	4	.79
Tutor centre. Demonstrates a good personal attitude towards the student.	18	3.4	31	5.8	102	19.1	382	71.7	3.59	1	4	.75
Tutor centre. In general, the guardian of the centre has success in fully guided practices.	15	2.8	38	7.1	94	17.6	386	71.9	3.60	1	4	.74

As can be seen, the tutors in the schools are the most valued and only one of the tutors in the faculty has an average of more than 3 points; taking all evaluations of those in the responsible University (Vice Chancellor) brings the mean scores below 3 points.

Evaluation (Factor 3)

In this factor (see Table 6) there are 10 questions with an average score of over 3 points, with the most valued as follows.

Table 6.
Descriptive statistics Factor 3: Evaluation

Item	1		2		3		4		M	Min.	Max.	SD
	f	%	f	%	f	%	F	%				
The assessment procedures are clearly defined.	18	3.4	80	15.0	236	43.9	199	37.1	3.16	1	4	.80
Student attendance at the training centre is an important criterion.	12	2.2	46	8.6	184	34.6	288	54.5	3.47	1	4	.79
The assessment of student work through mentoring centre practices are appropriately considered.	17	3.2	63	11.8	213	40.0	239	44.5	3.27	1	4	.79
As a valuable tool for development, organisation and management, Practicum is necessary.	9	1.7	64	12.1	269	50.7	189	35.6	3.20	1	4	.71
The students know the evaluation criteria.	25	4.7	81	15.2	200	37.5	227	42.6	3.18	1	4	.85
Formal presentation conditions are important aspects when evaluating memory.	14	2.6	62	11.6	274	51.4	183	34.3	3.17	1	4	.73

The introduction of personal evaluations, is critical for understanding the role of the student.	13	2.4	59	11.1	247	46.0	214	39.9	3.24	1	4	.74
The establishment of relationships between academic and practical content is an element in verifying learning achievements.	16	3.0	72	13.5	263	49.4	180	33.8	3.20	1	4	.75
The depth of analysis and objectivity of the reflections realises the development of students.	13	2.4	75	14.2	258	48.7	184	34.7	3.16	1	4	.75
In general, the criteria are operating.	18	3.4	80	15.0	287	53.9	147	27.6	3.06	1	4	.75

Student attendance at centre practices is an important criterion ($M=3.47\pm.79$), the assessment of student work through mentoring centre practices is appropriately considered ($M=3.27\pm.79$), and the introduction of personal opinions is fundamental to understanding the role of the student ($M=3.24\pm.74$). The first two are related to evaluation criteria related to the training centre and the third with student input into the assessment process.

Utility practices (F4)

All matters contained in this factor (see Table 7) have an average score above 3 points, the only circumstance in which this occurs.

Table 7.
Descriptive statistics Factor 4: Utility practices

Item	1		2		3		4		M	Min.	Max.	SD
	F	%	f	%	f	%	f	%				
Opportunity to develop knowledge, skills and attitudes acquired during university studies.			35	6.5	139	25.9	363	67.6	3.61	2	4	.61
Formative experience that serves to complement and extend academic learning.	1	.2	16	3.0	111	20.7	409	76.2	3.73	1	4	.52
The Practicum approaches professional settings for students.	4	.7	12	2.2	74	13.8	445	83.2	3.80	1	4	.51
Opportunity for reflection processes theory and practice of their profession.	1	.2	15	2.8	95	17.7	425	79.3	3.76	1	4	.50
The Practicum allows students to design, implement and evaluate activities of the profession.	2	.4	30	5.6	105	19.6	398	74.4	3.70	1	4	.59
The Practicum helps	2	.4	25	4.7	98	18.2	411	99.8	3.71	1	4	.56

develop the activities of the profession.

The Practicum uncovers various career opportunities. 11 2.0 39 7.3 135 28.9 332 61.8 3.50 1 4 .72

The Practicum is a facilitator and instrument for a job. 67 12.5 83 15.5 161 30.0 226 42.1 3.02 1 4 .99

In every item, over 99% of respondents strongly agree with the question that the Practicum helps develop professional practice (f=411, 99.8%). For the other questions, the 'strongly agree' response accounts for around 80% of cases: the Practicum's students professional settings (f=445, 83.2%) and the opportunity for reflection on the theory and practice of their profession (f=425, 79.3%). The three variables listed are the most valued, with an average of over 3.7 in all three cases and their answers (SD<.6), recalling that the maximum rating is 4 points.

In general, the realisation of the Practicum was successful, so, to conclude this section, we report the results of the variable in the global assessment questionnaire, which has served as a criterion in the regression analysis. The overall assessment of the Practicum has been very high (M=3.77) with a low dispersion in scores (SD=±.52), 95.71% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing on this issue.

3.2. Differences in terms of sociodemographic variables

To meet the third objective we will perform different analyses of the median differences for independent samples (Student t-test).

Differences by gender

The results listed in Table 8 illustrate that there are no significant differences in the t-test on any factor with respect to gender ($t_{(533)} < 2.0$, $p > .05$), male (♂) vs women (♀). Although not significant, we note that the results establish that women value organisation more (M♀=64.45 vs M♂=63.94), evaluation less (M♀=43.50 vs M♂=42.29), utility less (M♀=32.73 vs M♂=31.93), and stakeholders less (M♂=67.00 vs M♀=66.93). The effect size (d), according to the criteria of Cohen (1988), is small in all cases.

Table 8.
Analysis of mean differences by gender (Student t-test)

Variable	Men Median (SD)	Women Median (SD)	t (gl)	p	Effect Size (d)
ORG	63.94 (±10.78)	64.45 (±10.05)	t(533)= -.476	.635	.0489
STA	67.00 (±12.35)	66.93 (±11.56)	t(533)= .057	.954	.0058
EVA	42.29 (±8.59)	43.50 (±7.06)	t(533)=-1.552	.121	.1538
UTI	31.93 (±4.12)	32.73 (±3.80)	t(533)= -1.949	.052	.2018

(1) ORG = Organisation Practices, STA = Stakeholders, EVA = Evaluation Practices, UTI = Utility Practices
(2) M = Median, SD = Standard Deviation.

(3) The statistical effect is expressed by the Cohen d value; Small = .20, Moderate = .50, High = .80.

3.3. Differences depending on the degree

With the intention of analysing the existence of differences in assessments depending on the degree studied (infant education vs primary education), the results obtained are shown in Table 9. In the different medians analysis performed, statistically significant differences were only found between the degree variable (infant education vs primary education) and in the evaluation dimension ($t_{(529)}=2.633$, $p=.009$, $p<.01$ effect size $d=.2339$), this one being favourable to infant education ($M=43.99 \pm 6.60$ vs $M=42.24 \pm 8.27$). In all cases the effect size is small ($d = .20$).

Table 9.
Analysis of median differences according to degree (Student t -test)

Variable	Infant Education Median (SD)	Primary Education Median (SD)	t (gI)	p	Effect Size (d)
ORG	65.01 (± 9.94)	63.45 (± 10.50)	$t(533)= 1.749$	.081	.1525
STA	67.21 (± 10.98)	66.62 (± 12.63)	$t(533)= .568$	.570	.0498
EVA	43.99 (± 6.60)	42.24 (± 8.27)	$t(529)=2.633$	.009**	.2339
UTI	32.75 (± 3.70)	32.26 (± 4.18)	$t(533)= -1.436$	.152	.1241

(1) ORG = Organisation Practices, STA = Stakeholders, EVA = Evaluation Practices, UTI = Utility Practices.

(2) M = Median, SD = Standard Deviation.

(3) ** = $p < .01$.

(4) The statistical effect is expressed by the Cohen d value; Small = .20, Moderate = .50, High = .80.

3.4. Differences depending on the type of Practicum

With regard to the type of Practicum (Practicum I vs Practicum II), significant differences were only found ($p < .01$) in the assessments of students in the stakeholders dimension ($t_{(531)}=3.745$, $p=.000$, $p<.01$, $d=.3243$) being favourable to students of Practicum I ($M=68.82 \pm 11.70$ vs $M=65.07 \pm 11.42$). As in previous analyses, the effect size is small in all cases (see Table 10).

Table 10.
Analysis of median differences according to Practicum (Student t -test)

Variable	Practicum I Median (SD)	Practicum II Median (SD)	t (gI)	p	Effect Size (d)
ORG	64.49 (± 9.84)	64.12 (± 10.64)	$t(531)= .426$	.670	.0361
STA	68.82 (± 11.70)	65.07 (± 11.42)	$t(531)= 3.745$	.000**	.3243
EVA	43.65 (± 7.68)	42.74 (± 7.13)	$t(528)=1.400$	.160	.1228
UTI	32.62 (± 3.99)	32.42 (± 3.86)	$t(531)= .595$	.552	.0559

3.5. Regression Study

The last of the objectives suggested proposes analysing which of the factors considered are the most predictive of overall satisfaction with the Practicum. A linear regression (stepwise method) was performed, considering each factor as a predictor variable and the last question of the response scale questionnaire as a criterion variable (in general, the realisation of the Practicum was successful). The summary of Model 1 indicates that the organisation practices factor has been included, excluding all the others; while Model 2 includes organisation practices and stakeholders, excluding evaluation practices and utility practice (see Table 11).

The results indicate that the Model 2 variables explain 49.2% of the variance ($R = .703$; adjusted $R^2 = .492$, $F_{(2,531)} = 258.131$ $p = .000$), taking the biggest part of the prediction, the organisation practices ($Beta = .638$, $p < .01$), followed by stakeholders ($Beta = .140$, $p < .01$), both with a significant t value. The other factors were excluded from the regression in this model.

Table 11.
 Linear regression analysis, criterion variable: Overall satisfaction with the Practicum

Criterion Variable	R	R ²	R ² Adjusted	F	Predictors (included)	Beta	t
Overall Satisfaction (Model 1)	.691	.477	.476	483.331	ORG	.691	21.985**
Overall Satisfaction (Model 2)	.703	.494	.492	258.131	ORG	.638	19.114**
					STA	.140	4.207**

(1) ORG = Organisation Practices, STA = Stakeholders.

(2) * = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .01$

4. Discussion

There are no significant differences in the perception of the Practicum between students of infant education and primary education about its organisation, although students of infant education value it higher than the primary education students. The dimensions of organisation and stakeholders involved in the Practicum are the best predictors of the usefulness of the subject in the curriculum.

The Practicum is one of the most valuable matter for students of infant and primary education, although the gap between theory and practice should be covered by a rapprochement between teachers and students during internships in the centres (Allen & Turner, 2012; Meegan et al., 2013; Melgarejo et al., 2014; Sotomayor-Echenique et al., 2013; Standal et al., 2014). In turn, monitoring in real contexts by tutors would encourage knowledge of the learning environment, and would help in the design of teaching strategies; it would also improve the organisation and the relationships between all those stakeholders involved in the development of the Practicum.

Results from the research show that Practicum students of education degrees at the University of Jaen value the possibility of classroom activities more than other elements, such as time spent during the Practicum or internship centre allocation in Factor 1 (organisation practices). This idea is supported by the investigations of Allen, Ambrosetti, & Turner (2013), which indicate that the effectiveness of the Practicum allows students to integrate into the educational context, and develop the skills they have acquired in their training. Also they outline that, if there are strong links between universities and schools, students may establish relationships between theoretical and practical content, because of the opportunity to closely observe the real context of their future employment (Allen & Turner, 2012).

Another factor to consider would be the role of the tutor at the centre (Factor 2: stakeholders). The students consider that their involvement is essential to quality practice. In this sense, Ferrier (2009) indicates that the relationship established between the student and the tutor at the centre is a crucial aspect of the experience, because essential learning happens in this period. The data obtained in the regression study, and the predictive power of Factor 1 (organisation practices) and Factor 2 (stakeholders), should serve as a basis for considering the priority lines of action in the development of practicum in the educational centers.

The evaluation of the internship is one of the factors that produced less satisfaction among the students. From the assessment instrument (practice report) or the percentage weight of each of the stakeholders involved in the final assessment, it is an issue to discuss and improve. Tejada (2005) indicates that the Practicum assessment tools must provide sufficient evidence of the competencies to be assessed. Perhaps the instruments analysed in this work do not recognise the skills developed by the students in this period and it could be necessary to rethink its use as set out by Rorrison (2010). The observation of the candidates by teachers would provide a critical analysis of their performance in the classroom, and it would allow decision-making based on real educational contexts. The promotion of self-regulating learning in initial formation, especially the proactive role itself, can be a determining factor in their learning and academic success and have an impact on teacher practices (Gutiérrez, Salmerón & Muñoz, 2014). In this sense, it is expected that academic success, in this case the improvement of teaching practice, is related to the learning approaches of the students, both positively with a deep and proactive focus, and negatively with a reactive and superficial focus (Cano, García, Justicia & García, 2014).

Supervisors and tutors have an essential role in the learning process, together with the organisation of the Practicum, and they have an influence on the satisfaction of the students. The supervisor must help students to reflect on their practical exercises, and make decisions about their education (Martínez & Raposo, 2011). It is desirable that this reflection would emerge from the observation of the students in the practice classroom, to provide them information which is aligned with their performance (Rorrison, 2010).

Some of the limitations of the work is the caution with which the results obtained must be treated. In addition, they are unable to generalize to others contexts that are not similar to ours. In future proposals, the findings found should serve to readjust the matter issue of the practicum in the grades of infant and primary education.

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