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Initial Teacher Education and Teaching Readiness: The Case of Primary Education Prospective Teachers

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Abstract: Initial teacher education plays a decisive role in preparing prospective teachers for the complex demands of today's school environments. Yet, many newly qualified teachers report feeling unprepared for the practical realities of classroom teaching. This study investigates students' perceptions of teaching readiness and satisfaction in the Direction of Primary Education Teachers (PET), Department of Education and Social Work (DE&SW), at the University of Patras, with a particular focus on the impact of their internship experience. The research addresses three key questions: (1) What factors contribute to students' teaching readiness? (2) Does the relationship between the curriculum and the sense of preparedness for the profession affect students' satisfaction? (3) Do students feel ready to enter the classroom after their internship? A mixed-methods design was employed, combining a quantitative survey (n=103) and semi-structured interviews (n=16). Non-descriptive statistics, regression analysis and thematic analysis were used to interpret the data. Results show that while students recognise the high academic quality of their university coursework and acknowledge the value of an internship in bridging theory and practice, they nonetheless express doubts about their full preparedness for real teaching settings. Notably, the only statistically significant predictor of satisfaction with the internship's contribution to teaching readiness was students' post-study satisfaction with the

teaching profession itself. This finding underscores the deep connection between professional identity and perceived readiness. The current study highlights the need to strengthen practice-oriented elements, improve mentoring structures, and better align university curricula with the actual demands of Greek schools. These findings offer direct implications for curriculum design and internship policy in initial teacher education and contribute to ongoing international discussions on bridging the theory–practice divide.

Keywords: initial teacher education, teaching readiness, internship, students' satisfaction.

Introduction

Initial teacher education is increasingly recognised as a decisive factor in ensuring that prospective primary school teachers are adequately prepared to meet the demands of today's rapidly changing educational environments. Recent studies highlight persistent concerns regarding the alignment between university-based training and the realities of classroom practice. For instance, Kenoh (2021) emphasised that despite the expansion of pedagogical coursework, graduates often struggle to translate theory into action during their first teaching appointments. Similarly, Theelen et al. (2020) demonstrated that the transition to real classroom settings continues to generate high levels of anxiety among newly qualified teachers, particularly when teaching diverse and heterogeneous student groups.

Despite these developments, international research continues to point to a recurring “theory–practice gap,” indicating that prospective teachers frequently feel insufficiently prepared for authentic teaching responsibilities. In a comparable vein, Indriani (2022) found that readiness remains uneven across cognitive, emotional and professional domains, suggesting that systematic practical engagement is essential for bridging the gap between learning and practice.

In this context, the internship emerges as a central component of initial teacher education, with recent studies underscoring its role in shaping teaching readiness and professional confidence. As Rao and Wu (2021) observed, well-structured internship experiences, combined with effective mentoring, have the strongest positive impact on prospective teachers' preparedness when compared to coursework or microteaching activities.

These findings underline the importance of examining how internship design influences teaching readiness within specific educational programs.

Taken together, the latest international research reveals a pressing need to re-evaluate the contribution of initial teacher education to the development of teaching readiness, particularly in systems where internship is undergoing reform. This highlights the relevance of the present study, which investigates the perceived preparation and readiness of prospective primary school teachers and explores the extent to which their internship enhances their confidence and professional competence.

The purpose of our research is to investigate students' feelings of satisfaction and preparedness/teaching readiness upon entering the profession, and to examine the contribution of their internship to these.

Based on the analysis of the specialised literature on student satisfaction with their internship and its connection to teaching readiness, we formulated our research questions:

- What factors contribute to students' teaching readiness?
- Does the relationship between the curriculum and the sense of preparedness for the profession affect students' satisfaction?
- Do students feel ready to enter the classroom after their internship?

Literature Review

The preparation of prospective teachers has been widely discussed in international research, particularly in relation to the effectiveness of initial teacher education, the organisation of internship programs and the development of teaching readiness. Recent literature highlights a growing concern regarding the persistent gap between theoretical coursework and practical school-based requirements, a pattern observed across different educational systems (OECD, 2018; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2021). Studies examining teacher education reforms emphasise the need for programs that align more closely with contemporary pedagogical demands, especially in areas such as digital competence, inclusive education and interdisciplinary approaches (Voogt & Roblin, 2012; Kalimova et al., 2022).

A consistent theme in the literature is the mismatch between university-based preparation and the competencies required in real classroom contexts. Research across national settings indicates that while prospective teachers often report strong theoretical foundations, they feel less confident when it comes to applying pedagogical strategies, managing diverse classrooms or assessing learning performance (Tan et al., 2016; Indriani, 2022). These findings suggest that theoretical knowledge alone is insufficient for addressing the complexities of teaching, especially in environments characterised by diverse student needs and evolving instructional demands.

Therefore, internship emerges as a critical component of initial teacher education. Research data consistently highlight the value of experiential learning in bridging the gap between theory and practice. Evidence shows that structured internship experiences support the development of teaching competence by enabling prospective teachers to apply pedagogical concepts, observe experienced educators and interact directly with learners (Furlong & Maynard, 2012; Theelen et al., 2020). The quality of internship is strongly associated with the presence of mentoring, guided reflection and opportunities for meaningful school engagement (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Cesa et al., 2025). When these conditions are met, an internship contributes positively to confidence-building, professional identity formation and a stronger sense of teaching readiness (Agustiani et al., 2025).

At the same time, research identifies persistent challenges in the organisation of internships. Several studies point to insufficient methodological support, limited practical opportunities and variability in the quality of mentoring as barriers to the full development of teaching readiness (Kalimova et al., 2022; Rao & Wu, 2021). Large-scale findings further indicate that among all elements of teacher education programs, internship has the strongest impact on perceived readiness to teach, surpassing theoretical coursework and microteaching activities (Rao & Wu, 2021). However, the effectiveness of an internship depends heavily on coherence, the quality of supervision, and the alignment between university expectations and school realities.

Another prominent strand of research concerns student satisfaction with their studies and their relationship to preparedness for the teaching profession. Satisfaction is influenced by factors such as curriculum relevance, clarity of expectations, quality of instruction and the perceived usefulness of internship experiences (Douglas et al., 2006; Wilkins et al., 2013; Yusof et al., 2014). When programs offer high-quality internship opportunities accompanied by supportive mentoring and reflective feedback, prospective teachers tend to express both higher satisfaction and stronger teaching readiness (Bell & Mladenovic, 2013; Miralles-Quirós & Jerez-Barroso, 2018). Conversely, programs perceived as overly theoretical or insufficiently aligned with classroom realities often lead to lower satisfaction levels and weaker perceptions of readiness (Morton et al., 1997; Papoulia, 2017).

Despite extensive research, significant gaps remain in the literature. Many studies focus on isolated components of teacher preparation rather than adopting holistic frameworks that account for cognitive, emotional and professional dimensions of readiness (Woolfolk Hoy & Burke-Spero, 2005; Shulman, 1987; Zeichner & Liston, 2013). Additionally, the integration of technological and interdisciplinary competencies — areas increasingly crucial in contemporary education — remains uneven (Voogt & Roblin, 2012; Kariuki et al., 2021). In several contexts, internship continues to be limited by structural constraints, inconsistent mentoring practices and insufficient collaboration between universities and schools (Pungur, 2010; Liu, 2020). Finally, although researchers acknowledge the relevance of student satisfaction, its direct relationship with teaching readiness — particularly regarding curriculum design — remains underexplored, indicating a need for further systematic investigation.

Overall, the literature underscores the importance of strengthening the connection between theoretical training and practical experience, enhancing mentoring structures, and designing curricula that effectively respond to emerging educational challenges. These insights provide the conceptual basis for examining teaching readiness and student satisfaction within the Primary Education program investigated in the present study.

Theoretical framework

Initial teacher education is widely conceptualised as the foundation upon which prospective teachers construct their professional identity, pedagogical understanding and readiness for the complexities of school life. Theoretical perspectives increasingly frame teacher preparation not as a discrete stage but as part of a broader continuum of professional learning, in which initial education, practicum experiences and continuing development form interconnected phases shaped by evolving social, demographic and educational demands (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2021; Musset, 2010; The Teaching Council, 2011). Within this conceptualisation, initial teacher education is expected to integrate subject knowledge, pedagogical theory and opportunities for meaningful school engagement, ensuring that prospective teachers acquire both theoretical understanding and the ability to apply it effectively in diverse classroom contexts.

This theoretical positioning aligns with sociocultural, constructivist and experiential learning models. From a sociocultural perspective, learning to teach is a situated and relational process whereby prospective teachers internalise norms, practices and values through participation in school communities (Feiman-Nemser, 2008; Flores & Day, 2006). Constructivist

approaches emphasise the active construction of pedagogical understanding, viewing teacher learning as a process through which individuals interpret and reconstruct experiences. Experiential learning models highlight the cyclical nature of professional growth, which involves observation, guided practice, reflection and adaptation. These models collectively suggest that the effectiveness of initial teacher education depends on the coherence between theoretical coursework and structured opportunities to engage with authentic school environments.

The content and structure of initial teacher education, therefore, play a critical role in shaping teaching competence and professional identity. Theoretical frameworks emphasise that clearly defined learning outcomes, curriculum coherence, and alignment between academic and practical components support prospective teachers in developing essential pedagogical and professional skills (Schwille & Dembélé, 2007). Policy documents and competency frameworks similarly highlight the need for teachers to demonstrate adaptability, effective classroom management, the ability to promote higher-order thinking, and the capacity to respond to diverse students' needs (PPMI, 2017; COM (2017) 248 final). These expectations reflect broader international trends emphasising digital competence, inclusive education and interdisciplinary teaching, which require graduates to integrate theoretical knowledge with flexible and context-sensitive professional judgement (Voogt & Roblin, 2012; Kalimova et al., 2022).

In this theoretical landscape, internship emerges as the principal mechanism linking theory with practice. Conceptualisations of internship view it as an essential pedagogical process through which prospective teachers participate in professional communities, internalise teaching norms and practice classroom decision-making in real contexts (Allen & Wright, 2014; Little & Harvey, 2007; McHugh, 2017). Experiential learning models describe internship as the stage where theoretical knowledge is transformed into practical competence through cycles of observation, micro-teaching, guided participation and reflective engagement (Stamelos & Emvalotis, 2001). Through this process, prospective teachers develop critical awareness of school structures, curriculum expectations and the relational dimensions of teaching (Liu, 2020; Pungur, 2010; Gourgoutou et al., 2018).

The theoretical significance of internship is reinforced by international reflections on the persistent "theory–practice gap", a recurring theme identified in the literature review. Studies consistently show that prospective teachers often complete their studies with strong theoretical foundations but insufficient confidence in applying pedagogical strategies, differentiating instruction or managing classroom environments (Tan et al., 2016; Indriani, 2022). The theoretical framework explains these empirical patterns by highlighting the structural role of practicum in enabling the development of pedagogical reasoning, adaptive expertise and professional judgement. When an internship is coherent, well-supervised and aligned with program goals, it provides the experiential grounding that theory alone cannot offer. Conversely, inconsistent mentoring, limited practical experiences or fragmented school–university partnerships hinder the development of readiness (Rao & Wu, 2021; Kalimova et al., 2022), illustrating how deficiencies in the practicum structure manifest empirically as lower perceived preparedness.

Teaching readiness itself is conceptualised theoretically as a multidimensional construct encompassing cognitive, pedagogical, emotional and professional components. Cognitive and

pedagogical theories emphasise knowledge of subject matter, instructional design and assessment literacy, while psychological approaches highlight the importance of self-efficacy, emotional resilience and reflective capacity (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Shulman, 1987; Zeichner & Liston, 2013; Efthymiou, 2018). Sociocultural perspectives further connect readiness to participation in professional communities and responsiveness to learners' diverse needs. This theoretical framing allows the empirical findings presented in the literature review to be interpreted within a more comprehensive conceptual model: for instance, international evidence showing uneven development in digital competence, inclusive practices or higher-order pedagogical skills (Voogt & Roblin, 2012; Agustiani et al., 2025) aligns directly with theoretical expectations that readiness depends on the interplay between knowledge, identity and experience.

Student satisfaction also plays a theoretically significant role in understanding teacher preparation. Rooted in expectancy-value and service-quality theories, satisfaction is conceptualised as a cognitive and affective judgement that individuals form about the quality, relevance and coherence of their educational experience (Salinda-Weerasinghe et al., 2017). This evaluative process is influenced by personal factors and institutional conditions, including curriculum design, clarity of expectations, instructional quality, learning resources, social interactions and feedback structures (Marzo-Navarro et al., 2005; Petropoulou, 2019; Sojkin et al., 2012). The theoretical relevance of satisfaction to teacher preparation lies in its association with motivation, engagement and professional commitment. When satisfaction is high — particularly with internship experiences — prospective teachers develop stronger professional identity, more positive attitudes toward teaching and greater confidence in their readiness (Douglas et al., 2006; Anastasiadis, 2017; Isani & Virk, 2005). This provides a theoretical explanation for empirical patterns highlighted in the literature review, where high-quality internship and curriculum coherence are consistently associated with stronger perceptions of readiness (Bell & Mladenovic, 2013; Miralles-Quirós & Jerez-Barroso, 2018; Morton et al., 1997; Papoulia, 2017).

Together, these theoretical perspectives provide a coherent lens for interpreting the empirical trends identified in the literature review. The theory not only explains why patterns such as the theory-practice gap, variability in mentoring or uneven readiness emerge, but also clarifies the conceptual mechanisms linking initial teacher education, internship, satisfaction and readiness. By integrating these theoretical models, the framework establishes the conceptual foundation for the present study and guides the interpretation of its findings within the broader international landscape of teacher education.

Materials and Methods

Sample and Participants

The population under study consisted of all final-year students in the Direction of Primary Education Teachers (PET) at the Department of Education and Social Work (DE&SW), University of Patras, who had completed their teaching internship during the 2023–2024 academic year.

A purposive sampling strategy was used. The quantitative sample comprised 103 students, who voluntarily responded to an online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. Most

participants were female (approximately 85%), consistent with the program's gender distribution. The average age was 22.3 years (SD = 1.1). The response rate was estimated at 95% of those contacted.

For the qualitative component, 16 students were selected based on voluntary participation and having completed their internship within the same academic cycle. Recruitment was conducted via email invitations and in-class announcements. Participation in both parts of the study was entirely voluntary. Participants provided informed consent, and anonymity was ensured through pseudonym coding (e.g. "S1", "S2"). No identifying information was recorded. The departmental research ethics committee granted ethical approval before data collection.

Instruments and Procedure

Quantitative Instrument (Questionnaire)

The questionnaire included closed-ended items measured on a five-point Likert scale ("Not at all" to "Very much"). The construction of items was based on validated satisfaction frameworks, including models by Elliot & Healy (2001), Elliot & Shin (2002), Douglas et al. (2006), Wilkins et al. (2013) and Yusoff et al. (2015). Key dimensions included academic satisfaction, perceived preparedness, internship evaluation, and professional identity. Items were adapted to the Greek educational context. No pilot study was formally conducted, but item clarity was pre-tested informally with a group of five students. Completion time ranged between 10 and 15 minutes. Cronbach's alpha for the scale measuring satisfaction with the internship's contribution to teaching readiness was 0.869, indicating high internal consistency.

Qualitative Instrument (Interviews)

A semi-structured interview guide was developed, with questions corresponding directly to the study's three research questions. Interview topics explored students' perceptions of preparedness, satisfaction with the program, and reflections on their internship experience. Interviews lasted 20–25 minutes and were conducted via Zoom. All interviews were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Analysis

Data from the questionnaires were analysed using SPSS-28. Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies) were computed to summarise student responses. A multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to explore predictors of overall satisfaction with the internship. Independent variables included students' enjoyment of the teaching profession and interest in their academic field. Assumptions of linearity, normality of residuals, and absence of multicollinearity were tested and met.

Qualitative Analysis

Interview transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis (Tsoliis, 2014). The process included initial open coding, formation of categories, and development of overarching themes. Thematic coding was conducted using QDA Miner Lite software to facilitate systematic

organisation and retrieval of qualitative data. Coding was initially performed manually by the researcher, and a second coder reviewed a second of transcripts to enhance trustworthiness. Triangulation with the quantitative findings was also applied to increase interpretive depth and internal validity.

Results

The purpose of our research was to investigate students' feelings of satisfaction and preparedness/teaching readiness upon entering the profession, and to examine the contribution of their internship to these.

Regarding the students' demographic characteristics, the majority of those who participated in the questionnaire and interviews were women. Furthermore, the responses of the students, both those who answered the questionnaire and those who answered the interviews, indicate that this particular department is a positive choice for the overwhelming majority of students, with most coming from southern mainland Greece.

As the students mentioned in the interviews, they believe that to feel ready to enter the classroom, they need educational opportunities and up-to-date pedagogical knowledge. According to them, factors that positively contribute to teaching readiness include their contact with children before the internship, their personal motivation and love for the subject, the adequacy of the internship in terms of time, and training beyond the internship. Below are some indicative responses from students.

"...it just helps me that I went to camps, I was around children... it was more familiar to me. Or because I looked after children, I had contact with them" (S2).

"I think that many things worked because I worked on them myself quite a lot... I think that it also has to do with willpower. How much you love and want this subject" (S2).

"... if it had been longer, I think we would have done more things... That would have been ideal" (S6).

"... we still need training, either in a postgraduate program or in a seminar, to become even more familiar with the new developments in education..." (S6).

However, to examine which factors influence student satisfaction with the teaching readiness internship, we performed a regression analysis with the dependent variable "Overall satisfaction with the teaching readiness internship" and the independent variables: "Do you now like the teaching profession?" and "Are you now interested in the scientific subject of your studies?". We chose these variables because statistically significant relationships were found among them.

Table 1

Effects on overall satisfaction with internship for teaching readiness (a)

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate

1 .498^a .248 .232 .50497

a. Predictors: (Constant), 14. Do you like the teaching profession? 12.

Are you interested in the scientific subject you are studying now?

Table 2

Effects on overall satisfaction with internship for teaching readiness (b)

ANOVA ^a					
Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F Sig
1	Regression	7.822	2	3,911	15,338 .000 ^b
	Residual	23,715	93	,255	
	Total	31,537	95		

a. Dependent Variable: **Overall satisfaction with the internship**

b. Predictors: (Constant), 14. Do you currently enjoy the teaching profession? 12. Are you currently interested in the academic subject you are studying?

Table 3

Effects on overall satisfaction with internship for teaching readiness (c)

Coefficients ^a					
Model		Unstandardised Coefficients	Standardised Coefficients	T	Sig
1	(Constant)	1.479		5,334	,000
	12. Are you interested in the scientific subject of your studies now?	,142	,181	1,443	,152
	14. Do you like being a teacher?	,294	,355	2,831	,006

a. Dependent Variable: Overall satisfaction with the internship

As shown in the tables above, the regression model was strong ($R=0.498$) and statistically significant ($Sig=0.00$). The analysis showed that while there are statistically significant relationships between the dependent variable and the independent variables of the regression model, ultimately, the only variable that has a statistically significant effect on student satisfaction with teaching practice for teaching readiness is satisfaction with the teaching profession after completing their studies.

Regarding student satisfaction with the connection between studies and the labour market, as shown in Table 4, students consider that the Study Program offers courses of a high academic standard, prepares prospective teachers for the profession and provides them with the skills they need to enter the classroom.

Table 4*Student satisfaction with their studies and connection to the labour market*

Not at all			A little		Very		Very much		N/A/X.T
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Please indicate how satisfied you are with the Department's Study Program.	6	5.8	3	32	5	48.5	14	13.6	
Please indicate whether you consider that the Department's Study Program offers courses of a high academic standard.	5	4.9	12	11.7	66	64.1	20	19	
Please indicate whether you believe that the Department's curriculum provides the necessary knowledge, abilities and skills that a teacher should have.	4	3.9	36	35	46	44.7	17	16	
Please indicate whether you consider that the Department's Study Program follows contemporary European trends in teacher education.	7	6.8	35	34	39	37.9	19	18.4	3
Indicate whether you consider that the Department's Study Program meets your interests and expectations.	8	7.8	31	30.1	38	36.9	25	24.3	1
Indicate whether you consider that the Department's curriculum meets the specific learning needs or cultural background of each student.	10	9.7	43	41.7	36	35.0	13	12.6	1
Please indicate whether you consider your studies in this department to be excessively demanding.	8	7.8	5	52.4	31	30.1	8	7.8	2

These results are reinforced by students' responses in interviews, who believe that the program prepares prospective teachers and equips them with the knowledge and skills they need to enter the classroom. Below are some indicative responses from students.

"It certainly provides knowledge, yes, to a very large extent" (S8).

"...I think that's how it is, a multidimensional program that helps prepare students to see what the world of teaching is really like and enter the classroom relatively well prepared... They teach more or less all the subjects that a teacher will be called upon to teach in primary education" (S10).

On the other hand, the calculation of the averages (Table 5) showed that students believe they will have "a little" of the necessary skills to work as teachers upon graduation.

Table 5

Averages of students' statements on the connection between studies and the labour market

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Average *	Standard deviation
Indicate whether you believe that your studies in this department contributed to forming a more positive image of the teaching profession.	102	1	4	2,79	,825
Indicate whether you believe that your studies in this department provide you with the skills you need for professional rehabilitation.	103	1	4	2,69	,805
Indicate whether you believe that upon graduation you will have the necessary skills to work as a teacher.	101	1	4	2,68	,871
Indicate whether you think you will know by the end of your scientific field of study (Education Sciences).	100	1	4	2,73	,737
Valid N (listwise)	98				

*1=Not at all, 2=A little, 3=A lot, 4=Very much

In addition, students report in interviews that the courses taught at the University are very general and theoretical, and do not prepare them for the classroom. Here are some examples of student responses.

"I think there is a big lack of internship... it doesn't prepare you as it should" (S7).

"...I think the courses offer you some general knowledge, but in practice, when you enter the department to teach, what you have learned at the University, I think, has nothing to do with what you see in the classroom..." (S12).

Regarding the contribution of an internship to teaching readiness, as shown in Table 6, the percentages are high. The majority of students believe that an internship helped them in their teaching readiness and preparation for entering the profession. They also report that after completing their practical training, they feel ready to enter the classroom.

Table 6

Internship and preparation/teaching readiness for entering the profession (questionnaire)

	Not at all		A little		Very		Too much		N/A/X.T
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
The internship helped you develop teamwork skills.	3	2,9	17	16,5	65	63,1	18	17,5	
The internship helped you in your teaching readiness and preparation for entering the teaching profession.	3	2,9	20	19,4	52	50,5	28	27,2	
The internship helped you connect theory with practice.	6	5,8	17	16,5	59	57,3	21	20,4	
The internship helped you form a more positive image of the teaching profession.	2	1,9	12	11,7	48	46,6	41	39,8	2
The internship helped you shape your "professional identity" as a teacher.	4	3,9	18	17,5	62	60,2	18	17,5	1
Upon completing your internship, to what extent do you feel ready to enter the classroom?	4	3,9	23	22,3	55	53,4	20	19,4	1

The results of the quantitative research are reinforced by students' interview responses, who report that the internship helped them with their teaching readiness and that they now feel ready to enter the classroom.

"I feel ready to enter the classroom. I believe that the internship helped me a lot, because I gained more confidence and courage in how to teach the lesson..." (S6).

"...if they told me in September to go somewhere as a substitute teacher... I feel like I'm ready to do it" (S7).

However, we cannot ignore the smaller percentages, which are nevertheless significant. In particular, as shown in the table above, 2 out of 10 students believe that the internship did not help them with their teaching readiness, their preparation for entering the teaching profession, or their connection of theory with practice. These results are complemented by students' responses in the

interviews, according to which the courses taught at the University were more theoretical and did not help them in practice in the classroom. Below are some indicative responses from the students.

"...in theory we talked about so many things. In practice, when you get in there, everything is different, it's completely unrelated" (S2).

"...I believe that we learn more theoretical things at university, which are not applied so much in the classroom" (S12).

The results of our research enabled us to answer our research questions:

1. What factors contribute to students' teaching readiness?
2. Does the relationship between the curriculum and the sense of preparedness for the profession affect students' satisfaction?
3. Do students feel ready to enter the classroom after their internship?

In response to the first research question, onbased to the qualitative research data, the factors that contribute to students' teaching readiness are individual and social, institutional-administrative, and educational. However, the regression analysis showed that the only factor that has a statistically significant effect on overall satisfaction with the internship in terms of teaching readiness is satisfaction with the teaching profession after completing their studies.

In response to the second research question, the relationship between the "Curriculum-sense of preparation for the profession" and students' satisfaction statements is both positive and negative. On the one hand, students believe that the curriculum offers courses of a high academic standard, prepares prospective teachers for the profession and provides them with the skills they need to enter the classroom. On the other hand, our calculations showed that students believe they will have "a little" of the necessary skills to work as teachers upon graduation. In the interviews, they mention that the courses taught at the University do not prepare them to enter the classroom.

In response to the third research question, our results indicate that the issue of students' preparation and teaching readiness for entering the teaching profession remains unclear, whether students feel prepared to enter a classroom after their internship or not. Specifically, on the one hand, students believe that their internship helped them with their teaching readiness and preparation for entering the teaching profession, and they feel ready to enter the classroom after completing it. On the other hand, although the percentages that make up the concept of teaching readiness are high, students report that, upon completing their internship, they do not feel fully ready to enter the classroom.

Discussion

The findings of this study reinforce key patterns documented in international literature while also contributing new insights into the interplay between satisfaction, readiness, and professional identity in initial teacher education. Structuring the discussion around three analytical layers clarifies its academic and practical contributions.

The results confirm that teaching readiness is a multidimensional construct, shaped by a combination of individual traits, social experiences, and institutional structures — an observation

widely echoed in the literature (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Woolfolk Hoy & Burke-Spero, 2005). Students' reflections on the interplay between motivation, prior contact with children, and internship experiences align with previous findings that readiness is not solely about competence but also about confidence, identity and adaptability.

In line with numerous international studies (Tan et al., 2016; Kalimova et al., 2022), our participants acknowledged a strong theoretical preparation but expressed concerns about the applicability of their knowledge in real classroom settings. This confirms the persistent theory-practice gap highlighted globally, especially in systems where practicum experiences are not deeply embedded in the curriculum (Rao & Wu, 2021).

A key empirical contribution of this study lies in identifying that the only statistically significant predictor of satisfaction with the internship's contribution to readiness was students' post-graduation satisfaction with the teaching profession. This finding advances previous research by showing that teaching readiness is intertwined with professional identity and motivation, not just with pedagogical training or curriculum content. The emotional and attitudinal dimensions of readiness appear to exert a decisive influence, aligning with emerging theories of identity-based teacher development (Cesa et al., 2025).

Furthermore, while many studies address either satisfaction or readiness, few explore how perceived curricular relevance and identity formation intersect. Our findings suggest that even when academic standards are perceived as high, a disconnect between content and practical applicability can reduce both satisfaction and confidence.

At the institutional level, these insights have direct implications for curriculum reform and practicum design at the University of Patras and similar institutions. First, the alignment between coursework and real teaching scenarios needs to be improved. Introducing practice-integrated modules, co-teaching experiences, and longer internship durations could help bridge the theory-practice divide.

Second, the results highlight the need to support professional identity development through mentoring, reflective seminars, and career-oriented guidance, particularly during the practicum. Structured reflection and feedback loops should be systematically embedded to help students process and internalise their field experiences.

Third, program evaluation should consider not only pedagogical outcomes but also students' evolving attitudes toward the profession, as these may ultimately shape their engagement and performance as novice teachers.

Finally, it is important to situate these findings within the specific constraints of the Greek teacher education system. Limited school-university collaboration, inconsistent quality of mentoring, and predominantly theoretical course structures are long-standing features of many Greek programs (Fternati & Frounta, 2018; Chrysafidis, 2013). These contextual challenges likely intensify the perceived gap between academic learning and classroom demands, as our participants described.

Recognising these structural limitations allows for more grounded recommendations. The findings suggest that any reform of initial teacher education in Greece must go beyond surface-

level changes and address systemic issues, such as practicum integration, mentor training, and curriculum redesign, to ensure alignment with 21st-century classroom realities.

Conclusions

The present study examined prospective primary school teachers' perceptions of satisfaction and teaching readiness, as well as the contribution of internship to these perceptions. The findings showed that teaching readiness is influenced by a combination of personal, institutional and experiential factors, confirming its multidimensional nature. Although students recognise the academic quality of the curriculum, they believe that theoretical coursework alone does not fully prepare them for the complexities of classroom teaching. Internship emerged as a critical component of readiness, providing opportunities to connect theory with practice and develop pedagogical confidence.

At the same time, the study revealed that students' satisfaction with the contribution of internship to readiness is significantly shaped by their overall attitude toward the teaching profession. This finding highlights the central role of professional identity in determining how students interpret and evaluate their preparation experiences. Despite acknowledging the value of an internship, many students reported not feeling entirely ready to enter a classroom independently, underscoring the continued need for stronger curriculum–practice alignment.

Overall, the study underscores the importance of enhancing the quality, structure and coherence of internships, strengthening mentoring systems and integrating more practice-oriented learning experiences into the curriculum. These results can inform reforms in initial teacher education and contribute to the broader scientific debate on effective teacher preparation.

Suggestions for Future Research

Building on the findings of this study, future research could explore several promising directions to deepen the understanding of teaching readiness and its development during initial teacher education. First, comparative studies across different universities in Greece or internationally would help identify how institutional variations in curriculum structure, internship organisation or mentoring practices influence readiness outcomes. Such cross-institutional comparisons could offer valuable benchmarks for program improvement.

Second, longitudinal research designs that follow prospective teachers from graduation into their first years of teaching could illuminate how initial perceptions of readiness translate into actual classroom performance, resilience and retention. These studies could assess whether the predictive role of satisfaction with the profession, as identified here, holds over time or interacts with other contextual factors such as school placement and induction support.

Third, future research could employ more complex statistical models, such as structural equation modelling or path analysis, to examine how multiple variables interact in shaping readiness. Potential predictors might include self-efficacy, risk of burnout, emotional resilience, and digital competence — dimensions increasingly recognised as central to contemporary teacher effectiveness.

Finally, qualitative studies with school-based mentors, instructors, and school leaders could complement student perspectives by highlighting institutional blind spots and opportunities for more integrated practicum experiences. Taken together, these lines of inquiry would contribute to a more holistic and evidence-based framework for reforming initial teacher education.

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Conflict of Interest

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