

Individual Conceptions of Teaching of Prospective Pre-primary Teachers in Relation to the Integration of Educational Content

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Abstract

An individual conception of teaching constitutes a system of pedagogical beliefs that shapes teachers' instructional decision-making. This study analyses the individual conceptions of teaching held by prospective pre-primary teachers ($N = 66$) and examines their relationship to the integration of educational content in instructional planning. The research was conducted in Slovakia, a country with a post-socialist educational context whose education system has been undergoing a long-term transformation towards child-centred approaches. Data were collected using the questionnaire My Individual Conception of Teaching, administered in a pre-test–post-test design during a semester of general didactic training. In addition, students' thematic teaching projects, designed as one-day instructional plans for kindergarten, were analysed through qualitative content analysis. The analytical framework developed in the first part of the study served as the basis for evaluating these projects. Descriptive analysis indicated that students' conceptions of teaching were most strongly oriented towards pragmatist ($M_{pre} = 54.0$; $M_{post} = 53.5$) and personalist approaches ($M_{pre} = 41.7$; $M_{post} = 44.7$). A paired samples t-test comparing pre-test and post-test results revealed a statistically significant change only in the personalist conception of teaching ($t(65) = -3.57$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.44$). A relationship between individual conceptions of teaching and the degree of educational content integration in thematic projects was identified only in selected aspects of the pragmatist approach, particularly in conceptions of the child's role in education, the organisation of instruction, and assessment. The findings suggest that prospective teachers' pedagogical beliefs may be associated with how integrated learning is planned in pre-primary education.

Keywords: individual conceptions of teaching, prospective pre-primary teachers, integration of educational content, content analysis

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Introduction

Students preparing for a career in pre-primary education possess a set of beliefs, values, and expectations concerning the teaching and learning of children. In professional practice, their influence on children's development becomes significant. Even during teaching practice, students may view the child either as an object of their educational influence or, conversely, as an autonomous subject engaged in self-development. These may be understood as two contrasting perspectives that frame what is often referred to as the student's conception of teaching – the underlying reasoning through which they justify their actions in the classroom.

Pre-primary education in the context of the research means the last year of kindergarten before entrance to school, which is compulsory in Slovakia. The Slovak curriculum for early childhood education is a document based on constructivist principles of education. In this framework, the child is viewed as an active, self-developing individual who, however, actualises themselves to the extent and by the means permitted within their culture.

A distinctive feature of the Slovak curriculum for early childhood education is the division of educational content into learning areas (Language and Communication, Mathematics and Information Processing, Human and Nature, Human and Society, Human and the World of Work, Arts and Culture, Health and Physical Activity). This may lead teachers to design educational activities focused on a single learning area. However, in line with current educational requirements, it is important to take an integrated approach to educational content.

Literature Review

Research into teachers' subjective conceptions has a long tradition. This phenomenon was first examined by Janowski (1980), who described it as a constellation of knowledge, attitudes towards subject matter and textbooks, perceptions of learners, aspirations, expectations, and self-conceptions. The exploration of teachers' thought processes, conceptions, and interpretations was relatively novel, as educational research had until then concentrated primarily on observing and describing in detail the activities of teachers and learners during lessons. Such research, however, was unable to explain why teachers employed certain strategies rather than others (Gavora, 1990). Nor could it clarify why there was no straightforward relationship between the observable activities of teachers and learners and the learning outcomes achieved. This contributed to the recognition of an additional factor influencing teaching effectiveness – namely, the teacher's *individual conception of teaching* (Calderhead, 1987, 1988; Gavora, 1990; Shavelson & Stern, 1981). According to Mareš (2013), the teacher's conception of teaching functions as a *filter*: from official regulations and directives, teachers extract those elements they accept and further adapt them. Through this *filter*, teachers also evaluate their own pedagogical activity, the activities and outcomes of learners, as well as the practices of colleagues, parents, and even the wider public.

An individual conception of teaching in a student may be expressed as an inclination towards the perspectives of existing pedagogical conceptions, particularly in the areas of objectives, content, methods, forms, the roles of participants in teaching, and the assessment of learning outcomes (Rochovská, 2026; Rochovská & Brozmanová, 2025). The study operates with the perspectives of three pedagogical approaches: conservatism, pragmatism, and personalism.

Conservatism conceptualises education as the transmission of cultural heritage, emphasising the formative role of the social environment, the authority of the teacher, and the development

of discipline and perseverance in the child. *Pragmatism* understands education as a process of learning through interaction and experience, focusing on the acquisition of practical competencies, the integration of learning with real-life contexts, and the development of learners' abilities to construct and apply knowledge. *Personalism* views education as the facilitation of individual development, prioritising the learner's autonomy, personal growth, and self-realisation, with the teacher acting as a guide through non-directive pedagogical approaches (Rochovská, 2026).

According to Kerry (2015), integrated teaching enables content to be linked through the exploration of clear and relevant connections across the curriculum. It encourages the use and application of what has been taught and learned in new and different ways and provides opportunities to deepen learning, for example, through answering big questions, exploring a problem, solving a problem, or completing a final project. Learning beyond subject boundaries provides opportunities for students to experience deep, challenging and relevant learning.

Rakoušová (2008) defines integration as a process in which the content of subjects derived from the sciences is interconnected and combined. This content is designed to create new, functional educational content characterised by stronger interconnections. The goal of integrated educational content is to pursue the objectives of all educational areas involved in this process.

According to the definition provided by Beane (1997), curriculum integration encompasses four main aspects: integration of experiences, social interaction, interaction of knowledge, and integration as curriculum design. By analysing each of these aspects, one can identify the interconnections that together form a comprehensive theory of curricular integration. The author further notes that in curriculum integration, thematic areas are grounded in everyday experiences and real life, thereby enabling young people to critically examine current social issues and engage in social activities according to their needs. This approach aims to make learning more meaningful by focusing on real-world topics that stimulate critical thinking and social engagement (Beane, 1997).

Research Problem and Research Questions

In the context of this research, the integration of educational content refers to the interconnection of various subject areas into a coherent whole, where children learn not only specific facts but also the relationships between them, which helps them understand complex issues and develop holistic thinking. Based on the ideas outlined above, there arose a need to examine how the individual conceptions of teaching held by students—future early childhood educators—relate to their ability to connect and integrate educational content.

The following research questions emerged from the research problem: RQ1: Which aspects of pedagogical conceptions are reflected in the individual conceptions of teaching held by students of pre-primary education? RQ2: Is there a difference between students' conceptions of teaching at the beginning and at the end of the semester? RQ3: Is there a relationship between individual conceptions of teaching (i.e. the inclination towards particular aspects of pedagogical conceptions) and the implementation of integrated educational content in the teaching projects they developed?

Methodology

Research Design

To achieve the research objective—analysing the individual conceptions of teaching held by prospective pre-primary teachers and examining their relationship to the integration of educational content in instructional planning—a combined quantitative and qualitative research design was employed.

Research Sample

The research sample consisted of 66 prospective pre-primary teachers (convenience sample) in the second year of a bachelor's degree programme at the Faculty of Education. The sample also included 66 education projects that they developed during the course Theory of Teaching in Pre-primary Education.

Research Methods and Procedures

The individual conceptions of teaching held by students were assessed using a questionnaire. The foundations for the development of the questionnaire have been published in the author's previous works (Rochovská, 2026; Rochovská & Brozmanová, 2025). Each respondent was assigned a score consisting of a combination of values reflecting their inclination towards the conceptions of conservatism, pragmatism, and personalism.

The questionnaire (Rochovská, 2025), developed in previous research, consisted of 30 items using a Likert scale. For each statement—alternately corresponding to the perspectives of conservatism, personalism, and pragmatism (relating to objectives, content, teaching strategies and methods, the roles of the teacher and the child, the organisation of teaching, and assessment)—respondents indicated their level of agreement on a scale. Points were assigned according to their responses. The scale was as follows: strongly agree (4 points), mostly agree (3 points), mostly disagree (2 points), strongly disagree (1 point), and unable to express an opinion (0 points).

The questionnaire also included an additional 7 items with a single-response format. These addressed the same areas as the Likert-scale items; however, respondents were required to choose one of three options corresponding to the perspectives of conservatism, pragmatism, or personalism. Each selected option was awarded 4 points.

The questionnaire was administered to students at the beginning of the semester (pre-test) and at the end of the semester (post-test).

The internal consistency of the scales was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The conservatism dimension reached a value of $\alpha = 0.650$, the pragmatism dimension $\alpha = 0.501$, and the personalism dimension $\alpha = 0.595$. These values are not high, indicating limited internal consistency of the scales. Therefore, the subscales should not be interpreted as internally consistent reflective measures, but rather as theoretically grounded groupings of indicators capturing broader pedagogical orientations. The subscales were therefore interpreted as composite indicators of broader pedagogical orientations rather than internally consistent scales.

The implementation of integrated educational content in the developed teaching projects was examined through an analysis of these projects based on defined criteria. The analytical framework developed in the first part of the study served as the basis for evaluating these projects. A manual for coding students' work with a focus on the integration of educational content was developed.

During the development of the manual, it became evident that content-integrated teaching also requires a shift in the approach to the child as a subject of learning. This was incorporated into the categories relating to the role of the teacher and the child, as well as teaching methods and forms, the organisation of teaching, and the assessment of learning outcomes. The manual is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

A Manual for Coding Students' Work With a Focus on the Integration of Educational Content

Category	Criterion	Score
1. Integrated Objectives	Objectives integrated from all areas of pre-primary education.	4
	Objectives integrated from six to five areas of pre-primary education.	3
	Objectives integrated from four to three areas of pre-primary education.	2
	Objectives integrated from two areas of pre-primary education.	1
	Objectives from one area of pre-primary education.	0
2. Integrated Content	Content integrated from all areas of pre-primary education.	4
	Content integrated from six to five areas of pre-primary education.	3
	Content integrated from four to three areas of pre-primary education.	2
	Content integrated from two areas of pre-primary education.	1
	Content from one area of pre-primary education.	0
3. Methods and Forms	Activating methods used in all activities.	4
	Predominantly activating methods in most activities.	3
	Balanced application of activating and transmissive activities.	2
	Transmissive methods in almost all activities.	1
	Transmissive methods in all activities.	0
4. Teacher's Role	The teacher acts as a facilitator in all activities.	4
	The teacher is more of a facilitator than an authority.	3
	The teacher is predominantly an authority but allows children to co-decide in at least two activities.	2
	The teacher is predominantly an authority but allows children to co-decide in at least one activity.	1
	The teacher is an authority, assigns tasks and controls.	0
5. Child's Role	The child is an active participant in learning.	4
	The child is predominantly an active participant in learning.	3
	In several activities, the child is more active than passive.	2
	The child is an object of instruction in almost all activities.	1
	The child is an object of instruction in all activities.	0

6.	Individualised tasks and group work in all activities.	4
Organisation of Teaching	Individualised tasks and group work in almost all activities.	3
	Equal representation of whole-class, individual, and group work.	2
	Whole-class teaching in almost all activities.	1
	Whole-class teaching in all activities.	0
7. Assessment	Formative assessment focused on the child's personal development.	4
	Predominantly formative assessment focused on the child's personal development.	3
	Combination of summative and formative assessment.	2
	Predominantly summative assessment.	1
	Summative assessment.	0

Deductive coding, based on the predefined manual, was supported by artificial intelligence (ChatGPT.org tool). For each analysed project, the prompt included a request for the project to be coded according to the manual (Table 1). To enhance reliability, all AI-generated coding outputs were systematically reviewed and, where necessary, corrected by the author. This procedure ensured consistency with the coding manual and reduced potential bias associated with automated analysis.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to evaluate respondents' inclinations towards the perspectives of individual pedagogical conceptions. Differences between the pre-test and post-test were analysed using paired samples t-tests (given the approximately interval nature of aggregated scale scores) and complemented by non-parametric Wilcoxon signed-rank tests at the item level. Correlations between individual conceptions of teaching and the implementation of integrated educational content were analysed using Spearman's rho. Given the ordinal nature of Likert-scale data and the low internal consistency of the scales, non-parametric Wilcoxon signed-rank tests were additionally employed at the item level.

Results

Results of the Questionnaire

Table 2 presents the results of the descriptive statistics for respondents' inclinations towards the perspectives of pedagogical conceptions in the pre-test and post-test.

Table 2

The Respondents' Inclinations Towards the Perspectives of Pedagogical Conceptions in the Pre-test and Post-test

	N	Mean	Median	SD
Perspectives of conservatism (pre-test)	66	30.3	30.0	4.42
Perspectives of conservatism (post-test)	66	31.3	31.0	5.47
Perspectives of pragmatism (pre-test)	66	54.0	55.0	6.44
Perspectives of pragmatism (post-test)	66	53.5	53.0	6.18
Perspectives of personalism (pre-test)	66	41.7	41.0	6.98
Perspectives of personalism (post-test)	66	44.7	44.0	6.87

The results indicate that respondents showed the strongest inclination towards pragmatist and personalist conceptions of teaching, both in the pre-test and post-test. Pragmatism achieved the highest mean scores ($M_{pre} = 54.0$; $M_{post} = 53.5$), suggesting a stable preference for approaches emphasising practical relevance and real-life application.

Personalism showed a noticeable increase ($M_{pre} = 41.7$; $M_{post} = 44.7$), indicating a shift towards more child-centred perspectives. In contrast, conservatism remained the least preferred orientation, although a slight increase was observed ($M_{pre} = 30.3$; $M_{post} = 31.3$).

Table 3

Comparison of Respondents' Answers in the Pre-test and Post-test Using a Paired Samples T-test

			statistic	df	p		Effect Size
Perspectives of conservatism (pre-test)	Perspectives of conservatism (post-test)	Student's t	-1.604	65.0	0.114	Cohen's d	-0.1974
Perspectives of pragmatism (pre-test)	Perspectives of pragmatism (post-test)	Student's t	0.590	65.0	0.557	Cohen's d	0.0727
Perspectives of personalism (pre-test)	Perspectives of personalism (post-test)	Student's t	-3.574	65.0	< .001	Cohen's d	-0.4399

The paired samples t-test revealed a statistically significant difference only for personalism ($t(65) = -3.57$, $p < .001$), with a small-to-moderate effect size ($d = 0.44$). This indicates that the course contributed to a measurable shift towards more child-centred conceptions of teaching. No statistically significant changes were found for conservatism or pragmatism, suggesting that these orientations remained relatively stable over the course of the semester.

Table 4 presents the correlations between inclinations towards the perspectives of pedagogical conceptions in the pre-test and post-test (Pearson correlation analysis).

Table 4

The Correlations Between Inclinations Towards the Perspectives of Pedagogical Conceptions in the Pre-test and Post-test (Pearson Correlation Analysis)

		Conservatism (pretest)	Pragmatism (pretest)	Personalism (pretest)
Pragmatism (pretest)	Pearson's r	0.264	—	
	df	64	—	
	p-value	0.032	—	
Personalism (pretest)	Pearson's r	-0.303	-0.850	—
	df	64	64	—
	p-value	0.013	< .001	—

The correlation analysis shows several statistically significant relationships between the examined conceptions. Notably, negative correlations were identified between personalism and both conservatism and pragmatism, indicating that these perspectives may represent partially contrasting orientations.

The strong negative correlation between pragmatism and personalism suggests that, within this sample, these orientations function as distinct and potentially competing frameworks rather than complementary approaches.

Due to the low internal consistency of the scales, item-level analysis was conducted (Table 5). Statistically significant values are indicated in bold.

Table 5
Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test Results for Individual Items (Paired Samples t-Test)

1. At school, we help children learn about our traditions and what is right and wrong. (pre-test)	1. At school, we help children learn about our traditions and what is right and wrong. (post-test)	Wilcoxon W	187.5 ^a	0.459
2. Learning should be connected to everyday life so children can understand it better. (pre-test)	2. Learning should be connected to everyday life so children can understand it better. (post-test)	Wilcoxon W	45.5 ^b	0.594
3. At school, we should help each child grow and develop in their own way. (pre-test)	3. At school, we should help each child grow and develop in their own way. (post-test)	Wilcoxon W	85.0 ^d	0.143
4. It is important that children learn to respect rules and adults at school. (pre-test)	4. It is important that children learn to respect rules and adults at school. (post-test)	Wilcoxon W	352.5 ^e	0.009
5. School should help children learn how to solve real-life problems. (pre-test)	5. School should help children learn how to solve real-life problems. (post-test)	Wilcoxon W	13.5 ^f	0.530
6. We should take into account each child's needs and interests. (pre-test)	6. We should take into account each child's needs and interests. (post-test)	Wilcoxon W	93.5 ^g	0.385
7. At school, we help children keep good habits and value traditions. (pre-test)	7. At school, we help children keep good habits and value traditions. (post-test)	Wilcoxon W	149.5 ^h	0.708
8. Children should learn how to learn and how to gain new knowledge. (pre-test)	8. Children should learn how to learn and how to gain new knowledge. (post-test)	Wilcoxon W	396.0 ⁱ	0.025
9. An important goal of education is for each child to develop their own potential. (pre-test)	9. An important goal of education is for each child to develop their own potential. (post-test)	Wilcoxon W	55.0 ^j	0.017
10. Teaching should include activities that help children become disciplined and persistent. (pre-test)	10. Teaching should include activities that help children become disciplined and persistent. (post-test)	Wilcoxon W	402.0 ^k	0.049
11. Learning should mainly be based on children's own activities, exploring, discovering, and experimenting. (pre-test)	11. Learning should mainly be based on children's own activities, exploring, discovering, and experimenting. (post-test)	Wilcoxon W	32.0 ^l	0.076
12. In school, children should be given the chance to make their own decisions and take responsibility for their learning. (pre-test)	12. In school, children should be given the chance to make their own decisions and take responsibility for their learning. (post-test)	Wilcoxon W	288.0 ^m	0.628
13. Children should learn to concentrate and work carefully according to given rules. (pre-test)	13. Children should learn to concentrate and work carefully according to given rules. (post-test)	Wilcoxon W	418.0 ⁿ	0.156
14. It is important that children learn how to find and use information. (pre-test)	14. It is important that children learn how to find and use information. (post-test)	Wilcoxon W	141.5 ^d	0.610
15. Teaching should be flexible and adapted to each child's needs. (pre-test)	15. Teaching should be flexible and adapted to each child's needs. (post-test)	Wilcoxon W	162.5 ^o	0.695

16. The teacher's role is to pass on knowledge to children. (pre-test)	16. The teacher's role is to pass on knowledge to children. (post-test)	Wilcoxon W	297.0 ^c	0.148
17. Children learn best when they are active and involved. (pre-test)	17. Children learn best when they are active and involved. (post-test)	Wilcoxon W	14.0 ^p	0.484
18. The teacher should guide children on their learning journey. (pre-test)	18. The teacher should guide children on their learning journey. (post-test)	Wilcoxon W	56.0 ^r	0.835
19. The teacher's role is mainly to help children settle into the school environment. (pre-test)	19. The teacher's role is mainly to help children settle into the school environment. (post-test)	Wilcoxon W	145.5 ^s	0.100
20. Children learn best when they can try things themselves and learn from mistakes. (pre-test)	20. Children learn best when they can try things themselves and learn from mistakes. (post-test)	Wilcoxon W	36.0 ^t	0.802
21. Every child should have the chance to work at their own pace. (pre-test)	21. Every child should have the chance to work at their own pace. (post-test)	Wilcoxon W	84.0 ^d	0.133
22. The teacher's role is to guide children using proven methods. (pre-test)	22. The teacher's role is to guide children using proven methods. (post-test)	Wilcoxon W	253.0 ^s	0.424
23. Children should learn new things that build on what they already know. (pre-test)	23. Children should learn new things that build on what they already know. (post-test)	Wilcoxon W	143.0 ⁿ	0.002
24. The teacher should encourage children to set their own learning goals. (pre-test)	24. The teacher should encourage children to set their own learning goals. (post-test)	Wilcoxon W	246.0 ^m	0.728
25. All children should try to keep up with the pace set by the teacher. (pre-test)	25. All children should try to keep up with the pace set by the teacher. (post-test)	Wilcoxon W	399.0 ⁿ	0.271
26. At school, children should be able to work together when solving tasks. (pre-test)	26. At school, children should be able to work together when solving tasks. (post-test)	Wilcoxon W	92.0 ^d	0.207
27. Each child should have their own learning plan and work at their own pace. (pre-test)	27. Each child should have their own learning plan and work at their own pace. (post-test)	Wilcoxon W	285.0 ^u	0.614
28. The teacher should assess each child's knowledge fairly. (pre-test)	28. The teacher should assess each child's knowledge fairly. (post-test)	Wilcoxon W	170.0 ^v	0.631
29. When assessing, the teacher should focus on children's work, for example their projects. (pre-test)	29. When assessing, the teacher should focus on children's work, for example their projects. (post-test)	Wilcoxon W	246.5 ^k	0.366
30. Assessment should focus on each child's progress and how much they have improved. (pre-test)	30. Assessment should focus on each child's progress and how much they have improved. (post-test)	Wilcoxon W	56.0 ^r	0.428

Given the ordinal nature of Likert-scale data and the low internal consistency of the scales, non-parametric Wilcoxon signed-rank tests were additionally employed at the item level. Statistically significant differences were found only in selected items, particularly those related to: respect for rules and authority (Item 4), learning how to learn (Item 8), development of the child's potential (Item 9), discipline and persistence (Item 10), building on prior knowledge (Item 23).

These results suggest that changes occurred at the level of specific beliefs rather than across entire conceptual frameworks, supporting the earlier finding of partial rather than systemic change.

Results of the Content Analysis

The results of the content analysis of the students' projects are presented in Table 6.

Table 6

Correlation Between Individual Conceptions of Teaching, As Measured by the Questionnaire, and the Teaching Projects Developed by the Students (Spear-Man's Rho)

		1. Integrated Objectives	2. Integrated Content	3. Methods and Forms	4. Teacher's Role	5. Child's Role	6. Organisation of Teaching	7. Assessment
Conservatism (pretest)	Correlation	,074	,049	,180	,049	,024	,089	,116
	Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed)	,556	,694	,148	,694	,846	,475	,352
Pragmatism (pretest)	Correlation	-,131	-,133	-,156	-,133	-,181	-,184	-,172
	Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed)	,294	,286	,211	,286	,145	,138	,167
Personalism (pretest)	Correlation	,101	,114	,104	,114	,096	,075	,061
	Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed)	,418	,364	,405	,364	,441	,547	,625
Conservatism (posttest)	Correlation	-,173	-,174	-,107	-,174	-,230	-,181	-,123
	Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed)	,164	,161	,391	,161	,063	,147	,327
Pragmatism (posttest)	Correlation	-,134	-,132	-,062	-,132	-,328	-,321	-,289
	Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed)	,283	,289	,619	,289	,007	,009	,019
Personalism (posttest)	Correlation	,068	,042	,037	,042	,143	,035	,158
	Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed)	,588	,738	,768	,738	,253	,782	,205

The correlation analysis between questionnaire results and teaching projects revealed mostly weak and non-significant relationships. However, statistically significant correlations were identified for pragmatism in the post-test, specifically in: child's role ($\rho = -.328$, $p = .007$), the organisation of teaching ($\rho = -.321$, $p \approx .012$), and assessment ($\rho = -.289$, $p = .019$).

These negative correlations indicate that higher scores on pragmatist orientations were associated with lower levels of integration in these aspects of instructional design.

No significant relationships were found for conservatism or personalism, indicating that the translation of beliefs into practice may be limited or inconsistent.

Discussion

The findings indicate that the individual conceptions of teaching held by prospective pre-primary teachers are predominantly oriented towards pragmatism and personalism, which aligns with contemporary child-centred and constructivist approaches in early childhood education. This is consistent with the broader curricular transformation in Slovakia towards learner-centred education.

A statistically significant shift was observed only in the personalist dimension, suggesting that the course may have contributed to strengthening beliefs related to the child as an active subject of learning. However, the absence of significant changes in pragmatism and conservatism

indicates that some pedagogical beliefs may be more stable and resistant to short-term intervention.

The relationship between conceptions of teaching and the implementation of integrated educational content was found to be limited and selective. Significant associations were identified only within the pragmatist dimension in the post-test, particularly in areas related to the child's role, organisation, and assessment. Interestingly, these relationships were negative, which may suggest that a stronger focus on practical problem-solving does not necessarily translate into integrated curriculum design.

These findings point to a gap between beliefs and practice, a phenomenon widely discussed in teacher education research. Although students may endorse progressive pedagogical ideas, their ability to operationalise these ideas in instructional planning appears to be constrained.

This finding is consistent with previous research highlighting the discrepancy between teachers' espoused beliefs and their actual classroom practices (e.g. Calderhead, 1988).

Conclusion

This study examined the individual conceptions of teaching held by prospective pre-primary teachers and their relationship to the integration of educational content in instructional planning. The findings indicate that students predominantly favour pragmatist and personalist approaches, with a significant shift observed only in the personalist dimension. Overall, however, pedagogical beliefs remained relatively stable over the course of the semester.

The relationship between beliefs and instructional practice was found to be limited and selective, suggesting that the endorsement of particular pedagogical conceptions does not necessarily translate into their application in teaching design. This highlights the need for teacher education programmes to strengthen the connection between theory and practice, particularly through reflective activities that support the alignment of beliefs and instructional decisions.

The study is limited by the low internal consistency of the scales, the relatively small and context-specific sample, and the use of AI-assisted coding. Future research should focus on improving measurement reliability, employing longitudinal designs, and combining self-report data with observational methods to better capture the relationship between beliefs and practice.

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Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The AI-generation technology (ChatGPT.org tool) was used for the deductive analyses of the students' teaching projects according to the manual, and for improving the language and readability of the paper.

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