Practical Skills in Pre-University Education in Albania: The Challenge for an Effective and Contemporary Education

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ABSTRACT

Aim. This article aims to examine the importance of including practical skills in the pre-university curriculum and their impact on individual and social development. Pre-university education in Albania has been and continues to be mainly focused on theoretical subjects, overshadowing the acquisition of practical skills that are necessary for a pupil's personal and professional development, especially nowadays. The article analyses the current challenges that prevent practical skills integration, such as the lack of adequate infrastructure, insufficient training of teachers about the integration of practice during the learning process and the disconnection of the educational system from the real-professional world and the rapid pace of social change.

Methods. To achieve the goal, the article raises 3 research questions, which are answered by combining the review of contemporary literature, the quantitative and qualitative methods, and by combining primary and secondary data, obtained from the analysis of the questionnaires, and the comparison with the positive examples in the region and beyond. The questionnaires distributed electronically were completed by pupils and teachers of 161 schools in 4 Regional Directorates of Pre-University Education.

Results. Results emphasise that the inclusion of these skills has the great potential to significantly improve the better preparation of pupils for the labour market and to contribute to the improvement of quality education in Albania.

Conclusion. In the end, the article highlights the importance of this integration in building a more united and stronger society for the future.

Keywords: pre-university education, practical skills, educational curriculum, social development, labour market

Introduction

Today's society is continuously characterised by intertwined professions, which make the career steps even more complex. At the same time, youth emigration has increased, and their employment requires deep practical skills. Simultaneously, the increase in unemployment and the ageing of the population place our society in front of a large gap, which makes the practical skills for fast and adequate employment even more important. The pupils must engage in activities that encourage critical and creative thinking through innovative educational approaches. They are better prepared for their career by demonstrating abilities to solve complex problems and to apply their knowledge in different real-life contexts. Pupils must show strong social and emotional skills, including sensitivity, cooperation, flexibility, and self-regulation, to better navigate academic and social challenges, preparing them for future professional roles (Fila et al, 2024).

Literature Review

The Importance of Practical Skills in Pupils' Personal and Professional Development

Practical skills are essential in the individual's general development and in one's preparation for the challenges of a rapidly evolving society, ensuring their ability to contribute effectively in the future. Practical skills such as technical, interpersonal, social, and critical thinking, as well as problem-solving, affect the pupil's cognitive, social, and emotional development. Bui Phuong Uyen et al. (2021) discovered that the pupils who participated in practical mathematics activities showed improved skills for problem-solving and a deeper understanding of mathematical concepts. In the same way, Jean Piaget's constructivist theory emphasises the importance of active learning through experience (Piaget, 2018).

Projects that are organised in groups require practical skills. They encourage and improve interpersonal relationships between peers (Johnson et al., 2020). Projects, group work, or similar activities not only create a collaborative class or school environment but also increase social skills and encourage the feeling of belonging and the community inside the class or school. By getting involved in practical activities, pupils get more satisfaction and can increase their levels of self-confidence, self-efficiency, and autonomy, while step by step enjoying the results of their work. Albert Bandura (2020) emphasises the importance of self-efficiency in motivation and achievement, suggesting that pupils who engage in the development of practical skills have more chances to develop a positive self-image and flexibility when coping with challenges. Research findings indicate that working on projects has a positive impact on affective, cognitive, and psycho-motor learning, especially in the aspect of learning experiences and social skills (Yusof et al., 2022).

To optimise the benefits of practical skills, teachers must efficiently incorporate them into the curricula. Programs prioritising project-based learning and professional training have demonstrated encouraging results in equipping pupils with appropriate skills for their future careers (Zhang & Ma, 2023). Furthermore, integrating technology in the development of practical skills boosts pupil engagement and prepares pupils for a rapidly evolving labour market (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2021). Many studies taken into consideration by Leticja Gusho et al. (2023) highlight that the inclusion of technology in education improves pupils' performance by promoting interactive and collaborative learning and is based on research and projects. Learning based on projects should be initiated at the pre-university level to increase practical and scientific writing skills (Yusof et al., 2022). At the same time, the authors believe that the activity is widely applicable in all curriculum subjects. Also, gamification and interactive platforms enhance the effectiveness of language acquisition and foster learner motivation (Roseni & Muho, 2024).

While education paradigms continue to develop, the development of practical skills must remain a central focus inside the curricula to prepare pupils more adequately for the complexity of modern life (Garcia et al., 2025; Petrovic et al., 2024).

The Current Situation in Pre-University Education

Hugo Oliveira and Jorge Bonito (2023), in their article on practical work in education, take into consideration 56 other international scientific publications, and in their conclusions, they state that the execution of practical work frequently does not align with the methods and techniques utilised by scientists and researchers. The majority of authors believe that the primary concept, the unifying concept of practical work, should involve the manipulation of materials in hands-on activities. The primary benefit of this approach arises from the combination of practical skills with conceptual comprehension (minds-on).

In Albania, as well as in other European countries, the main and most important document that guides and instructs the work of teachers in the teaching process is the curriculum, which includes the main objective of education, primary learning skills, educational results, level of learning, student-focused pedagogy, etc. (Ministria e Arsimit dhe Sportit, 2014). The primary aim of the curriculum is to create a knowledgeable Albanian society, to assimilate it into the digital era, to enhance the mobility and interconnectivity of communication, culture, and emerging social trends, to establish a new perspective of the learning process, to emphasise the significance of the community, and to enhance sustainable social and cultural progress, among other aims (Kiri & Osmani, 2024; Xhaferri & Tase, 2024).

Although the curriculum has constantly been part of the reforms in the education system, theoretical teaching still dominates in our schools, where the main source of knowledge about the subject or topic being explained is the teacher, and the practical skills and the encouragement of pupils towards them are little incorporated and very little implemented. High-quality curriculum implementation is essential to ensure that all pupils receive a comprehensive, engaging, and effective education. The curriculum covers a wide range of subjects, including the core areas of language and communication, mathematics, natural sciences, social sciences, technology and innovation, arts, and physical education, as well as a range of cross-curricular issues (Agjencia e Sigurimit të Cilësisë së Arsimit Parauniversitar, [ASCAP], 2024).

Nowadays, practical skills are becoming necessary to prepare pupils as well and as quickly as possible for the labour market. This growing need arises from several factors, the most important of which we can mention is the economy and social cohesion. This is a necessity, not only in Albania but in all EU countries, and while the curricula of the EU countries are developed following the requirements of the time, the Albanian curriculum does not adequately respond to these requirements. There

is a lack of practical modules in the existing programmes and a lack of equipment and technological tools in schools that enable the development of practical skills (Tkacova & Pavlikova, 2024).

Teachers use those technologies that they are most familiar with and generally have a positive attitude towards them (Gusho et al., 2023). Technology in education is used by teachers to develop different types of learning, improve the content of teaching methods, promote pupils' motivation to learn, apply in the assessment process, and assist in the learning of pupils with special abilities (Gusho et al., 2023). Teachers struggle with grading challenges like undeserved grades and inflation, affecting their emotions (Muho et al., 2024). Schools are disconnected from real and professional life, which limits the possibilities of real practice for pupils. To improve their skills and grow professionally, teachers should be the primary focus of professional development programs that emphasise goal setting, feedback interpretation, and reflective practices (Leka & Beshiri, 2024).

The Impact of Lack of Practical Skills on Pupils

The lack of practical skills during the teaching process leads to a theoretical understanding not applied in the real world. Pupils who apply practical skills during learning show higher levels of critical thinking and adaptability compared to those who are included in traditional learning (OECD, 2020). Project-based learning helps pupils to communicate effectively, manage conflict, and work towards common goals. The lack of practical skills may cause pupils to struggle with interpersonal dynamics in future professional settings. Countries with strong practical skills programmes have pupils with higher levels of teamwork skills (Einarsdottir, Kettunen et al., 2023).

Pupils not only know the theory but can apply it in different situations of real life, in those countries where the educational system places a lot of importance on practical skills (Mahrik et al., 2025). Countries such as Finland and Denmark have widely included practical skills in the educational curricula, resulting in pupils who finish school being better prepared for their technical careers (Kettunen et al., 2023). Meanwhile, countries that lack such a curriculum often encounter a discrepancy between market demands and the acquired skills of individuals.

The curricula of countries like Finland and Denmark should serve as models for our country in the integration of practical skills in educational curricula. In the Finnish curriculum, career education is both a specific subject and interwoven between subjects, ensuring a broad inclusion of career-related skills (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2016). Denmark offers practical work laboratories, allowing pupils to apply theoretical knowledge in real-life contexts (Einarsdottir, Thomsen et al., 2023).

Austria attaches great importance to the introduction of music and movement disciplines into the professional training processes of future primary school teachers,

emphasising the effectiveness of their use in the education of emotional competences (Chernous et al., 2024; Kondrla et al., 2024).

The successful introduction of practical skills in schools has marked positive results, such as higher levels of employment (OECD, 2020), increased motivation and involvement of pupils, improved academic performance, stronger links with industry, and creating a stronger economy (Einarsdottir, Kettunen et al., 2023).

Methodology

This article aims to emphasise the great importance of practical skills today, following the time requirements, to reflect the current state of these skills today in Albanian schools, as well as the impact that their lack has on the future of individuals, also to reflect on the challenges and give recommendations for improvements in school curricula, aiming to increase the quality of teaching and approach EU standards and the requirements of the National Education Strategy (2021–2026).

The work methodology for this article is based on the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, specifically looking through current and contemporary literature and gathering data via surveys. The article is based on the collection of primary and secondary data, where the primary data was collected through questionnaire surveys of teachers and pupils in the pre-university system and the secondary data was collected by examining 15 scientific articles as literature in electronic libraries and their official websites, focusing on Scopus, Frontiers, Google Scholar, etc., as well as by examining five official OECD documents.

Instrument description: Two questionnaires were created, respectively, for teachers and pupils. The questionnaire for teachers consists of 16 questions, while that for pupils consists of 18. The questionnaire is divided into five sections: section I collects demographic data for teachers and pupils; section II collects data on the importance that teachers and pupils give to skills practice during teaching; section III collects information on the current state of implementation of practical skills in our schools; section IV aims to gather data about the challenges and lack of these skills in teaching; and section V collects the opinions and recommendations of pupils and teachers to improve the implementation of these skills. Sections II, III, and IV answer the research questions of this article.

Sample description: Questionnaires were distributed in 161 9-year and secondary schools (only in state schools, not private) in 4 Regional Directorates of Pre-University Education (Lezhë, Durrës, Fier, Korçë), which cover the whole country, based on the regional division. The questionnaires were completed by 647 teachers, of whom 53.7% teach in high schools and the rest in 9-year schools. 14.2% of them have 6 to 10 years of work experience in education, 33% of them have up to 20 years of experience in education, and 34% of respondents have more than 20 years of work experience.

59.4% of them, or 384 teachers, teach in urban schools, and the rest in rural schools. 40.2% of the respondents answered from DRAP Durrës, as the region with the largest concentration of population and therefore schools; from DRAP Lezhë are included 22.2% of teachers; from DRAP Fier 26.5%; and from DRAP Korçë are included 21.1%.

Questionnaires were also completed by 1259 pupils, 61% of whom, or 770 of them, are female. The included pupils are from the 6th to the 12th grade. On average, the same percentage includes the pupils of the 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th grades, which varies in 15.3% for the 6th grades, and for the 7th and 8th grades, 15.6 are included. % for each of 197 pupils; for the 9th grade, 14.8% or 186 pupils are included; the 10th grade has the largest number of pupils, 233 or 18.5%; the 11th grade has the lowest percentage, 8.6%; and the 12th grade has 11.6 participation%. 60% of the included pupils attend secondary schools or high schools, and 40% of them attend 9-year schools. 70%, or 843 of them, attend schools in the city and 30% in the village; this is because the city schools have more access to the Internet and technological equipment than the village schools.

Data Analysis

The questionnaires were distributed electronically through Google Forms, while the collected data were processed through Google Forms and Excel.

The Importance of Practical Skills in the Personal and Professional Development of Pupils

95.9% of pupils and 100% of teachers consider practical skills important and very important for their personal and professional development as well as to prepare for the future.

The Current Situation in the Pre-University Curricula

Only 30% of pupils and 32% of teachers see the school programme as being very good at addressing challenges in everyday life. Meanwhile, 28.4%, or 358 of the pupils, and 16%, or 104 teachers, see the programme being as minimally effective or completely ineffective in preparing them for everyday life, and 41.6%, or 524 pupils, and 55%, or 356 teachers consider the program adequate. While only 16% of the teachers involved think that practical skills are very present in the current school curriculum, the rest of them share the percentages as follows: 48%, or 312 teachers, consider them

present; 36%, or 234 teachers, consider them as little or not at all present in the current school curriculum.

The use of technology increases pupils' motivation, as well as their interest and curiosity (Gusho et al., 2023), but technology and technological devices in the service of developing practical skills are used very often only by 17% or 215 of pupil respondents and 14.1% or by 91 teachers; it is often used by 32.6% or by 410 pupils and 33.5% or by 217 teachers, and sometimes, rarely and never by 50.4% or by 634 pupils and 52.4% or by 339 teachers.

The following table provides information on the practical activities that can be developed in the teaching process and how often they are used according to the pupils' and teachers' perceptions.

Table 1

Frequency of Use of Practical Activities during the Learning Process

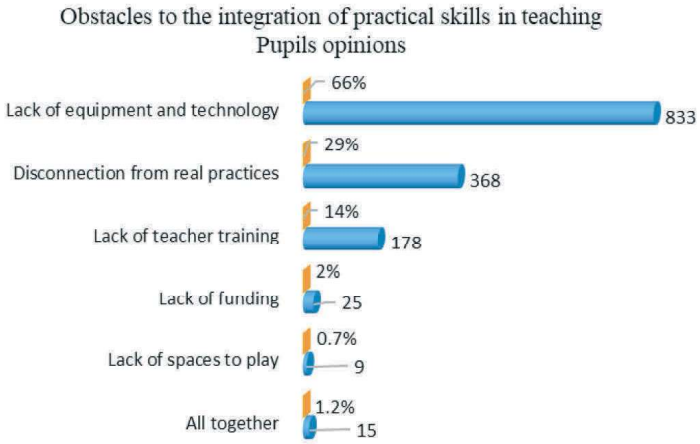
Practical activity	Always/Often		Sometimes/Rarely/Never	
	Pupils %	Teachers %	Pupils %	Teachers %
Project-based learning	*65.6*	*53.6*	34.4	46.4
Practical experiments	10.9	48.2	*89.1*	*51.8*
Learning in nature	8.2	24.1	*91.8*	*75.9*
Simulations and roles	29.1	58.9	70.9	41.1
Discussions and debates	*67.6*	*81.6*	32.4	18.4
Learning through play	31.1	67.9	68.9	32.1
Time management skills	*65.1*	*81.8*	34.9	18.2
Interpersonal skills	26.9	77.6	73.1	22.4
Reflection on the lesson	*73.0*	*89.8*	27.0	10.4
The real demo	29.9	81.3	70.1	18.7
Real practice hours	19.4	65.8	80.6	34.2
Adapting to learning styles: eg, visual, auditory, kinesthetic	18.3	74.3	81.7	25.7
Reaction mechanisms	20.7	65.8	79.3	34.2
Inclusion of real-life issues	17.4	4.9	*82.6*	*95.2*
Emotional intelligence	8.5	10.2	*77.6*	*89.8*
Artificial intelligence	26.1	20.7	*73.9*	*79.3*

Source. Own research.

The data show that the most frequently used practical activities, agreed upon by both pupils and teachers, are reflection on learning, discussions and debates, time management, and project-based learning. Those that are used less often are the inclusion of real-life issues; learning in nature; emotional intelligence; practical experiments; and artificial intelligence.

Figure 1

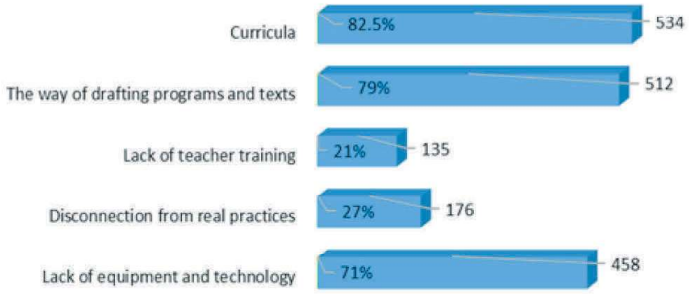
Obstacles to the Integration of Practical Skills in Teaching – Pupils' Opinions



Source. Own research.

Figure 2

Obstacles to the Integration of Practical Skills in Teaching – Teacher's Opinions



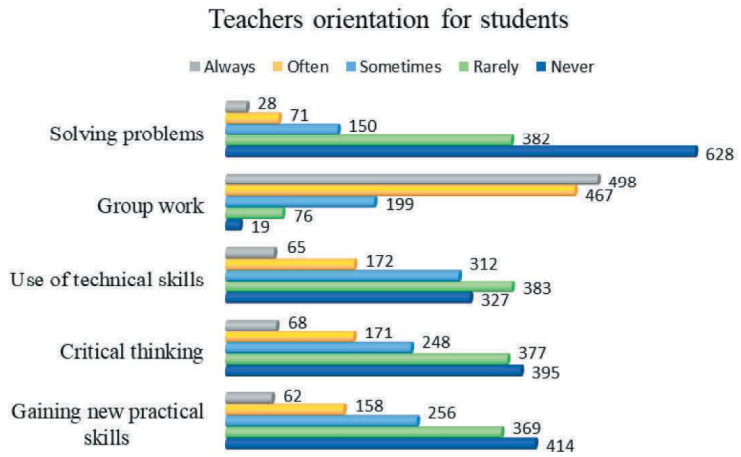
Source. Own research.

The two graphs above illustrate the challenges faced in integrating practical skills into teaching, as perceived by both pupils and teachers. More than 82% of the teachers see the curriculum as the main obstacle, and 79% of them consider the way of drafting school programmes and textbooks. 71% of teachers and 66% of pupils see the lack of equipment and technology as an obstacle. 27% of teachers and 29% of pupils see the separation of school from real life as an obstacle, and 21% of teachers and 14% of pupils consider the lack of teacher training for practical skills as an obstacle.

The Impact of Lack of Practical Skills on Pupils

Figure 3

Teachers Orientation for Students



Source. Own research.

The lack of practical skills taught in schools significantly impacts students' ability to solve real-life problems and their inclusion in work groups, as reported by 87.6% of student respondents. Additionally, 50% of these students indicate that their teachers never guide them in problem-solving, while 30% report that guidance is offered only rarely. On the other hand, 40% and 37% of students claim that their teachers always and often provide support for group work, respectively. However, 26%, 30%, and 25% of students assert that teachers either never guide them or provide only rare or occasional assistance in developing technical skills. Furthermore, 61% of students state that teachers never or rarely encourage critical thinking, while 33% and 29% report that they are never or rarely directed toward acquiring new practical skills, as illustrated in the accompanying graph.

53.9% of teachers say that the lack of practical skills greatly affects the development of other skills such as problem-solving and inclusion in work groups. Likewise, 41.3% (or 267) of teachers think that its absence affects the self-confidence and motivation of pupils. Acquiring practical skills helps pupils feel more confident and motivated, better preparing them for life's challenges and the labour market. Practical tasks given by teachers help pupils to reflect on their work, identify strengths and weaknesses, use critical thinking, and improve their self-analysis, as well as motivate them to engage more (Muho & Leka, 2021).

40.2% (or 260) of teachers believe that it impacts critical thinking, while 30.8% (or 199) of teachers feel that it influences social and emotional skills. Practical skills,

such as teamwork, project management, and effective communication, contribute to the development of students' social and emotional competencies. Engaging in practical tasks has transformed problem-solving approaches and fostered independence among students (Muho & Leka, 2021).

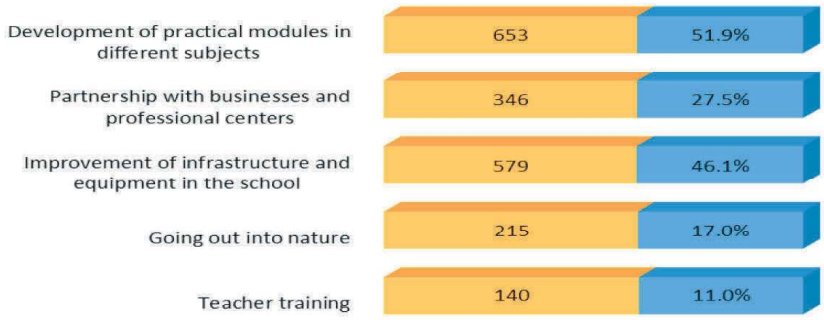
In a percentage ranging from 21% to 26% of teachers, the lack of practical skills in schools negatively impacts effective communication, peer relationships, community participation, and project management. Practical skills such as managing community projects, developing initiatives, and organising activities enable students to engage more actively in social activities and projects.

Between 15% and 18% of individuals believe that practical skills have a significant impact on social cohesion, equality, and opportunity. The inclusion of practical skills fosters stronger connections among individuals and groups within society, thereby enhancing social cohesion and cooperation. Furthermore, practical skills offer development opportunities for individuals from diverse social backgrounds, which helps to improve equality and diminish social disparities.

To enhance the effectiveness of school curricula and foster the development of practical skills, which in turn would improve the quality of teaching, a majority of respondents in the questionnaire—52% of students and 54% of teachers—indicated that the curriculum should be revised. They emphasised the need for a teaching programme that incorporates practical modules across various subjects.

Figure 4

Recommendations for Increasing Effectiveness and Developing Practical Skills



Source. Own research.

Additionally, 46.1% of students and 58% of teachers believe that the school's infrastructure and equipment should be upgraded, including laboratories and resources for different subjects as well as technological tools. Furthermore, technology can assist children with disabilities in building and enhancing social relationships, as well as promoting their independence and performance (Gusho et al., 2023).

An almost equal percentage of pupils (27.5%) and teachers (27.4%) believe that partnerships with businesses and professional centres should be developed.

The professional training of teachers is recognised by both pupils and teachers as a crucial factor in enhancing effectiveness and developing practical skills. Teacher training plays a vital role in guiding the practice of working with pupils with disabilities by integrating theoretical knowledge with practical application (Gega & Petro, 2023).

Conclusions and Recommendations

It is impossible for a teacher to effectively explain a lesson and assess each pupil's knowledge in various ways within a 45-minute classroom period, especially when considering the diverse learning styles of each pupil. This challenge becomes more manageable when the teaching and learning process is centred around the pupil, allowing them to construct their understanding based on their individual learning preferences. To implement the curriculum effectively, teachers should employ teaching methods that are grounded in real-world application, research, and practice. Additionally, they should utilise strategies that promote differentiated instruction to meet the diverse needs and learning styles of all pupils (Zenelaga et al., 2024).

Therefore, emphasis is placed on the inclusion and development of practical skills in schools. This focus is essential because practical skills enhance students' problem-solving abilities, connect them to real-life situations, foster commitment and sustainability, and prepare them for the job market and its associated challenges, as well as other personal and professional obstacles they may encounter in the future. Furthermore, these factors contribute to the overall improvement of teaching quality.

While the importance of developing practical skills is significant, current school curricula tend to emphasise theoretical knowledge, primarily focusing on rote learning and memorisation. This approach is marked by a noticeable absence of practical modules, which contradicts the demands of modern industry, where practical experience and technical skills are crucial. As a result, students often find themselves at odds with their capabilities and unprepared for real-world challenges.

At the same time, the absence of digitalisation in schools and the limited use of technology within the educational system have been noted. These elements can significantly enhance instruction and support the development of practical skills in the classroom. Furthermore, it is believed that teachers' professional development is crucial for effectively integrating practical activities and skills into the teaching process.

In order to enhance the situation, strategies for improving curricula must be developed and rigorously implemented. These strategies should include elements, activities, and practical modules across various learning areas that foster the development of social and emotional skills, as well as community engagement.

Schools and their principals should adopt creative strategies and actively pursue partnerships with businesses and professional centres to provide practical opportunities for their pupils.

Improving school infrastructure by adding laboratories, practical training rooms, and advanced technological equipment is essential for the development and implementation of these skills.

The training of teachers for their continuous professional development in a practical manner — specifically, how to cultivate and enhance student skills through the teaching process and their daily activities at school — is essential in light of the current societal and generational developments. These training sessions should be complemented by the exchange of experiences and internal training within educational institutions. It is important to srecognise that practices such as mentoring, peer observation, and collaborative discussions can foster a culture of trust, teamwork, and ongoing development among teachers (Leka & Beshiri, 2024).

Reforming the curricula of teacher preparation institutions is essential to ensure that teachers are equipped with the necessary competencies to deliver lessons that effectively integrate theory with practice. Such reforms will equip new teachers with practical skills and concrete methods for applying theoretical knowledge to pupils' daily lives, thereby enhancing the lasting impact of their teaching.

All of the aforementioned analyses and recommendations will assist pupils in developing essential practical skills, even beyond the classroom. Additionally, they will enable teachers to enhance the quality of instruction and better adapt to the diverse needs of society.

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