

Insights into an Action Research for Pre-service Teachers Engaged into Social Action with Two Underrepresented Communities

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Background

In today's complex socio-environmental context, universities are increasingly expected to equip future professionals—especially pre-service teachers—with the skills to become catalysts of citizen engagement and empowerment in society. Thus, one approach is to distil real-life learning opportunities in university curricula, fostering social awareness and responsibility. This study explores two social actions with pre-service teachers at two Greek universities. The aim was twofold: first, active engagement (*savoir s'engager*) in culturally and linguistically diverse contexts. Second, development of skills for socially engaged citizenship and community-driven agency. The paper discusses results of pre- and post-implementation surveys of pre-service teachers engaged in social actions, in a qualitative, interpretative framework valorising users' perceptions of the experience.

Scope, Framework, and Methodology

The paper presents action research (Burns, 2010) to deploy a teacher education intervention to foster agency and professional identity through real-life situations for pre-service teachers (Barrett & Liu, 2020).

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Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in scholarship on pre-service teacher education, with a focus on how real-life, socially oriented experiences shape professional development. It draws on literature that highlights the importance of experiential learning and engagement with authentic challenges in preparing socially responsive educators (author 1 & author 2, 2025). Thus, the study adopts the concept of “social action” that refers to “the proactive engagement in efforts aimed at reshaping and improving various facets of society” (BOLD consortium).

Hence, reflective and action-based practices (Yuan & Lee, 2022; [author 1], Potolia, & Zourou, 2017) are central to this process, enabling pre-service teachers to face real-world challenges and articulate their professional roles. This perspective shows how action and technology-enhanced practice are central to socially engaged educators.

Methodology

From March to May 2025, two social actions with two different cohorts of Greek pre-service teachers have been deployed. The study adopts qualitative thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of replies to two questionnaires provided by pre-service teachers who participated in the two social actions, at pre- and post-implementation stages. A total of 42 replies (23 pre- and 19 post-implementation) from questionnaires were analysed. A pre-survey has been distributed (LINK) two weeks before the launch of the actions, and a post-survey two weeks after completion (LINK).

Results

The BOLD Social Action in Athens

Thirteen students from [anonymised Faculty, University A] worked together with 18 post-secondary students of migrant and refugee backgrounds in four face-to-face workshops. Working in mixed groups, they co-created a comic booklet addressing social themes relevant to the lived experiences of these marginalised communities.

The BOLD Social Action in Thessaloniki

Eight students from [anonymised Faculty, University B] and seven Deaf adults took part in four workshops to raise awareness about equal access to health-care. They co-created scenarios and scripts, resulting in three short videos.

Discussion

This section presents a thematic analysis focused on two dimensions: #1: skills (and the upskilling potential for the teachers), and #2: attitudes, linked to active citizenship.

Dimension #1: Skills (and Upskilling Potential)

Pre-implementation

Regarding the question “Which teaching skills do you expect to develop thanks to the action?” of the pre-implementation survey, the thematic analysis brings to the fore 3 major skills: communication, leadership and organisation (Table 1). This expectation is grounded in the challenges pre-service teachers anticipated, such as communicating with Deaf adults, leading intercultural groups, or organising team presentations.

Post-implementation

Interestingly, following the social actions, pre-service teachers offered a more nuanced understanding of the teaching skills they had developed. First, the majority linked their communication skills to a heightened awareness of inclusion and accessibility. Second, they moved beyond generic notions of leadership, investing effort into adapting to their context. They also linked organisational skills to professional competencies. Thus, a shift emerged from general to context-specific skill development.

Dimension #2: Attitudes (to Active Citizenship)

Pre-implementation

Moreover, the study aims to explore the degree to which participation in the social actions influenced active citizenship attitudes of pre-service teachers, namely the importance of social action: a) for future educators, b) for university

Table 1. Pre vs post-implementation teaching skills developed through social action

Pre-implementation skills	Post-implementation skills
Communication	Communication & Inclusivity
Leadership	Creativity & Adaptability
Organisation	Organisation & Professional skills

studies, and c) for cross-sectoral collaboration. Respondents provided a 5-scale rating in each item (1 = not important at all, 5 = extremely important).

At the beginning, 96% of pre-service teachers rated social action as “extremely important” for them as future educators, manifesting an enhanced perception of the value of their engagement as future educators. On the other hand, cross-sectoral collaboration received a broader distribution of ratings that can be justified as their university studies’ trajectory involved very limited or no kind of multistakeholder collaboration before.

Post-implementation

Although positive attitudes towards social action remained solid in the post-implementation stage, a slight diversification is observed (see Figure 1 below). Specifically, ratings shifted from “5” towards “4”, while collaboration with non-academic stakeholders scored “3”.

This visible alteration can be justified following a two-factor analysis:

- personal experiences throughout the social actions; and
- the degree of familiarisation of pre-service teachers with the concept of social action, thus leading to a more reflective stand towards it.

Conclusions

This paper demonstrates that engaging pre-service teachers in social action fosters both skill development and reflective attitudes towards active citizenship. By situating learning in culturally and linguistically diverse contexts, the actions embodied the first guiding principle of *savoir s’engager*.

At the same time, the collaborative design and implementation nurtured the second principle, namely skills for socially engaged citizenship and

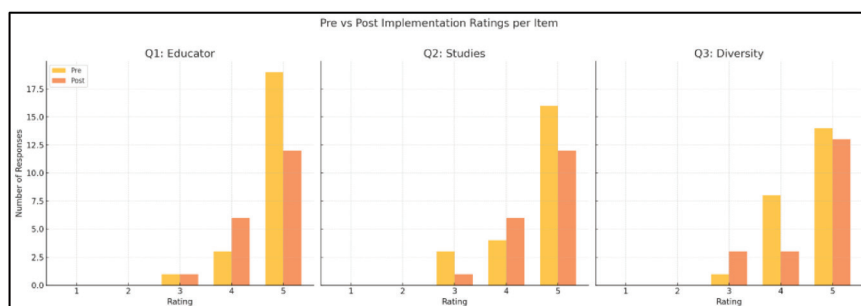


Figure 1. Pre- and post-implementation attitudes of pre-service teachers engaged in social action

community-driven agency. These outcomes suggest that real-life experiences can bridge teacher education with citizen engagement. Though limited in scale, the findings highlight the potential of such initiatives to prepare inclusive and socially responsible educators.

Limitations and Biases

As a qualitative study, the findings are not generalisable but offer context-specific insights into action-oriented research and reflective practice. Two limitations are noted: the unmatched participant responses between pre- and post-stages due to anonymity, and the variation in the social actions, which may have influenced how attitudes and skills were perceived.

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