

Placement-based learning – ITE

Impact on pupils	Impact on teachers	Strength of evidence
Mixed	Mixed	Moderate

What is it?

Placement-based learning (PBL) is the structured part of initial teacher education (ITE) that takes place in schools, where trainee teachers develop their practice through real classroom experience. It is based on the idea that teaching is learned best by doing it, with regular feedback and opportunities to reflect on what is happening and why.

At its core, PBL is practical, relational, and developmental. It enables critical engagement with theory in action and can strengthen pedagogical understanding.

In ITE, PBL gives trainee teachers structured, progressive classroom experience. This normally involves observation, rehearsing or teaching alongside a mentor, leading to assuming full responsibility for lessons or classes.

Key Findings

Impact on trainee teachers

Across reviews, PBL is associated with varied outcomes for trainee teachers. It appears to support the development of classroom skill and professional confidence, although much of the research focuses more on changes in beliefs and attitudes than on measured improvements in teaching practice.

In addition, many studies rely on self-reported data and do not consistently report key contextual information, such as participant demographics or setting. This means the strength of the evidence remains uneven.

Research suggests that impact depends less on time in placement alone and more on how placements are designed and supported, particularly through mentoring, feedback, and guided reflection.

Key patterns in the evidence include:

- **Structured mentoring as a foundation:** When placements are coherently designed and supported through modelling, rehearsal, feedback, and guided reflection, trainee teachers are

more likely to develop technical skill, adaptive judgement, and a stronger sense of professional identity. Where mentoring lacks clarity or training, impact appears less consistent.

- **Development of practical teaching skills:** Planning, classroom management, and assessment often begin to develop through direct work with pupils during placements. However, evidence from PBL suggests that experience alone is not sufficient; improvement is more likely when classroom practice is supported by structured mentoring, feedback, and explicit modelling within the placement context.
- **Growth in adaptive judgement:** Some evidence suggests PBL may support trainees to identify the key features of effective teaching and adapt them to new contexts, particularly when modelling makes principles explicit and is followed by rehearsal and reflection. However, robust evidence of sustained impact remains limited.
- **Development of professional identity:** Confidence, self-efficacy, and reflective capacity may grow during PBL. Evidence suggests this is more likely when reflection moves beyond describing lessons towards examining beliefs and values.

PBL can also act as a bridge between theoretical preparation and classroom practice. Without structured opportunities to apply ideas in real classrooms, trainee teachers' theoretical understanding may not translate into enacted teaching. Where placements involve online or remote elements, the research suggests mentors may need clear guidance and digital training, as communication and feedback processes can become more complex.

The evidence indicates that PBL's impact on trainee teachers is shaped by coherence between settings, the quality of mentoring, and the depth of reflection built into the experience.

Impact on pupils

While PBL is assumed to benefit pupil learning outcomes by improving the quality of teaching, the research on placement experiences rarely measures or reports direct evidence of positive impact on pupil performance or attainment. Where links to pupils are noted, they are usually connected to improvements in teaching quality.

Deeper trainee teacher reflection during PBL may bring downstream benefit to students by producing more resilient, value-driven teachers who can sustain high-quality teaching. To maximise the potential benefit to pupils, the evidence suggests that mentor training should focus on developing skills in providing clear, effective, and frequent communication and feedback in the practical setting, as this is a known facilitator of a stronger learning environment.

How effective is the approach?

The effectiveness of PBL is generally rated as mixed for ITE, reflecting highly variable outcomes that are strongly dependent on the quality of implementation, the coherence of the training programme, and other contextual factors.

Some reviews highlight improvements in instructional skill, including planning, classroom management, assessment, and subject pedagogy through classroom placement.

Confidence and an increased reflective capacity appear to be a result of PBL, marked by growing self-efficacy, metacognitive awareness, and depth of reflection.

Professional identity may also be shaped through PBL, helping trainee teachers develop values, purpose, and a sense of themselves as professionals.

Although PBL is valued in teacher education, the evidence base is uneven, with many studies focusing more on changes in pre-service teachers' beliefs and attitudes than on measurable improvements in their actual teaching skills or student learning outcomes. In other words, while PBL has many benefits, we still need more rigorous research that shows how it directly improves classroom practice and benefits pupils.

How to implement it well

Behaviours

Placement-based learning (PBL) appears most effective when mentors and trainee teachers enact deliberate behaviours that support learning through practice. Reviews point to four recurring patterns:

- **Model practice and make thinking visible:** Effective mentors go beyond demonstration. They explain their reasoning, highlight key decisions, and invite focused observation. Modelling appears strongest when it includes both successful strategies and real challenges, and when links between learning goals and pedagogy are made explicit.
- **Rehearse with structured reflection:** Trainees appear more likely to deepen their learning when rehearsal (e.g. microteaching or walkthroughs) is paired with feedback and guided reflection. Without this scaffolding, reflection often remains at surface level and training ideals may not transfer securely into classroom practice.
- **Provide timely, concrete feedback:** Feedback appears most developmental when it is two-way, specific, and sustained over time. Its value increases when grounded in evidence such as lesson video or pupil work, and when it helps trainees connect their decisions to pupil responses.
- **Engage in joint problem-solving:** When mentors and trainees analyse challenges together rather than exchanging one-way advice, learning appears more collaborative and adaptive. Some studies suggest this can help trainees navigate tensions between training ideals and school realities.

Contextual factors

PBL outcomes appear to be shaped not only by what happens in individual lessons, but by how placements are structured and supported across institutions and schools. Reviews highlight several contextual features that may influence effectiveness.

- **Integration and coherence:** PBL appears more meaningful when placements are fully integrated within the overall training curriculum and assessment framework, rather than

treated as stand-alone experiences. Shared expectations, consistent language, and embedded reflection processes may help reduce fragmentation between university input and classroom practice.

- **Partnership alignment:** Reviews suggest placements may work better when schools and training providers share principles and communicate regularly. Ongoing dialogue between mentors and supervisors may help reduce mixed messages and provide more consistent guidance for trainees.
- **Resourcing and mentor preparation:** Mentoring appears more consistent when time is protected and mentors receive clear guidance and preparation for their role, including expectations around modelling, feedback, and reflection.
- **Variation in placement design:** Models differ in the balance between observation, co-teaching, and independent responsibility. While staged progression is common, the evidence does not identify a single optimal ratio. Impact appears more closely linked to the quality of mentoring and feedback than to structure alone.
- **Length and diversity of placements:** Policy often assumes that longer or contrasting placements strengthen development. However, reviews do not consistently identify placement length alone as decisive. Exposure to different school contexts is widely valued, yet robust evidence directly linking contrasting placements to improved teaching outcomes remains limited.
- **Trainee background and prior experience:** Outcomes may vary depending on trainees' subject knowledge and previous classroom experience. There is limited evidence on whether standard placement models are equally appropriate for trainees with extensive prior experience, such as former teaching assistants, or whether more flexible approaches may be warranted.
- **Role clarity:** Clearly defined responsibilities for mentors, supervisors, and trainees appear to reduce confusion. Where roles are blurred, trainees may receive inconsistent guidance, particularly when school norms differ from university expectations.
- **Keeping pupil learning central:** Some evidence suggests that PBL may be more meaningful when trainees have sustained opportunities to teach and see pupil learning develop over time. However, pupil contact alone does not appear sufficient; structured mentoring and guided reflection remain central to developmental impact.

Structured but flexible

Placement-based learning appears most effective when it follows a clear predictable structure, but it should retain flexibility to respond to individual trainee needs, diverse school contexts, and goals. Reviews highlight five key features:

- **Use a clear developmental trajectory:** Progression from guided observation to independent practice, with scaffolds that adapt to individual needs and settings, supports steady growth.
- **Ensure programme coherence:** Practice periods should be an integrated part of the ITE programme, supported by a coherent structure and organisation of the curriculum to ensure quality and consistent competency development.

- **Focus on core practices:** High-leverage strategies such as modelling, questioning, and checking for understanding should be repeated and refined over time.
- **Adapt to context:** Structures seem to work best when responsive. Mentors and facilitators may need to tailor experiences to phase, subject, or classroom conditions.
- **Rehearsal with feedback:** Repeated opportunities to try a strategy, receive feedback, and try again may help trainee teachers refine practice.
- **Structured reflection:** Guided reflection frameworks may support trainees to move from surface descriptions of lessons to deeper consideration of beliefs, judgement, and professional identity.
- **Gradually release responsibility:** Moving from high guidance to lighter oversight builds teacher independence while protecting pupil learning.

Leaders of professional development may consider how PBL design should balance structure and responsiveness. The evidence suggests that without clear scaffolds, reflection risks staying shallow, and without flexibility, strategies may remain unused in practice.

Barriers to effective implementation

Even well-designed Placement-based learning (PBL) can lose impact if key conditions are missing. Reviews highlight recurring challenges that limit its effectiveness:

- **Passive or unfocused observation:** When observation lacks clear purpose or follow-up practice, trainee teachers miss chances to turn what they see into improved teaching. Without an active involvement (rehearsal, feedback, and application), its impact is minimal.
- **Early challenges in application:** Many trainee teachers may find it hard to manage classrooms, pace lessons, scaffold tasks, or put theoretical knowledge into practice. They may also experience tensions between school-based expectations and the pedagogical ideals emphasised in training.
- **Inconsistent mentor preparation:** Mentors who lack proper training or support may unintentionally provide vague praise, overly critical feedback, or take a hands-off approach to supervision. This can weaken trust and reduce the effectiveness of feedback.
- **Fragmentation between settings:** Misaligned priorities or language between training providers and schools in ITE can confuse trainee teachers. Conflicting expectations about authority and practice between settings can leave trainee teachers uncertain whose guidance to follow.
- **Limited time and resource capacity:** Without protected time for planning, feedback, and reflection, PBL risks becoming a procedural task rather than genuine development. Competing workload demands on mentors often limit the intensity and quality of the practice cycle.
- **Superficial or fragmented reflection:** Many trainee teachers remain at surface levels (environment, behaviour) and rarely reach reflection on beliefs, identity, or mission without structured support. Reflection processes are often fragmented between school and training provider, which can leave trainee teachers receiving mixed messages.

- **Technical and digital barriers:** Insufficient technical skills among trainee teachers or mentors, combined with poor digital infrastructure (e.g., unreliable internet access or hardware) can get in the way of effective observation, and communication.
- **Overemphasis on performance evaluation:** When PBL is framed mainly as pass–fail, trainee teachers may prioritise compliance and safety over experimenting, reflecting, and improving. Assessment-driven risk aversion can limit professional growth.
- **Uneven equity and placement opportunities:** Access to diverse learners and contexts is inconsistent across programmes. Some trainee teachers may only experience narrow school cultures, missing opportunities to develop inclusive practice.

Other considerations

Beyond core design and delivery, reviews suggest several further factors that influence how Placement-based learning is experienced and sustained in schools and trusts:

- **Professional identity:** PBL is closely tied to how trainee teachers see themselves, influencing confidence, self-efficacy, and agency. This identity work is both emotional and instructional, shaped through relationships, feedback, and authentic teaching opportunities. Some reviews caution that without explicit reflection structures, identity may become overly narrow.
- **Shared language:** A consistent pedagogical vocabulary (for example modelling, scaffolding, and core practices) strengthens dialogue between mentors, supervisors, and programme leaders. Shared terms make feedback more precise and sustain learning across settings.
- **Remote teaching:** PBL, particularly during remote learning, may result in teachers gaining mastery and becoming technologically literate educators. This often includes learning various technological platforms to integrate instructional technology into pedagogy. Effective practice requires mentors to overcome challenges in maintaining effective communication and feedback loops when supervision occurs entirely online or remotely. The use of digital evidence is crucial for making feedback specific and developmental in these contexts.
- **Use of virtual tools:** Digital approaches such as video-based feedback, online coaching, and remote observation can extend access and flexibility. They appear most effective when paired with active methodologies or structured tasks, enhancing reflection, autonomy, and motivation. However, their effectiveness can be severely limited by technical barriers (e.g., poor infrastructure or lack of hardware) and challenges in maintaining effective communication and feedback loops when moving practice online. They should be seen as complements to, not replacements for, in-person practice, which continues to provide an effective form of professional learning.
- **Assessment practices:** How PBL is assessed strongly shapes its meaning. Overly standardised or checklist-led approaches may restrict experimentation. By contrast, formative, dialogic assessment, with opportunities for self-evaluation and professional discussion, supports deeper growth and reduces risk aversion.

- **Mentor selection:** The choice of mentor is critical. Effective mentors combine recent classroom experience, subject expertise, and interpersonal skill. These qualities help them model relevant practice, build trust, and provide constructive challenge.
- **Becoming part of the team:** Evidence indicates that trainee teachers develop more confidence when they have chances to contribute to everyday school work, not only observe it. This participation may help them understand expectations, build relationships, and feel more connected to the profession.

Summary

Placement-based learning is a very common component of initial teacher education (ITE). Across reviews, it is associated with a growth in confidence, instructional judgement, reflection, digital literacy, and professional identity.

Evidence remains strongest for extended, in-person PBL in ITE, where staged progression allows teachers to move from guided observation to independent practice. Structured support from mentors, combined with rehearsal, feedback, and opportunities for reflection, reinforces both skills and professional identity.

Effectiveness appears to depend less on duration alone and more on design. Impact may depend on whether the PBL component of ITE includes:

- Skilled and well-prepared mentors who act as facilitators rather than gatekeepers of learning, with explicit training and guidelines to support effective communication and practice in diverse settings, including online.
- Structured opportunities for rehearsal, feedback, and guided reflection, drawing on agreed frameworks.
- Coherent integration between theory and practice, reducing fragmentation between training provider and school or between professional learning and daily classroom demands.
- Authentic, motivating tasks that allow teachers to apply new strategies with pupils and see their impact, fostering adaptive expertise and judgement when facing unexpected contextual challenges.

When citing this strand, please use the following reference:

National Institute of Teaching (2026). NIoT Evidence Toolkit: Placement-based learning – ITE strand

References

	Reference	Years of Research	Focus	# Studies	Countries	Impact on pupils	Impact on teachers	Reporting quality
1	Almuqayteeb & Alzahrani (2023): A Systematic Review of the Literature on the Perceptions of Pre-Service Teachers Towards Field Experience (Practicum)	2015–2022	ITE only	26	Australia, Canada, Chile, England, Israel, Portugal, Turkey, Trinidad & Tobago, USA	Not reported	Mixed	Medium
2	Anderson & Stillman (2013): Student Teaching's Contribution to Preservice Teacher Development: A Review of Research Focused on the Preparation of Teachers for Urban and High-Needs Contexts	1988–2012	ITE only	54	Primarily USA	Not reported	Mixed	Medium
4	García-Lázaro et al. (2022): Integration and Management of Technologies Through Practicum Experiences: A Review in Preservice Teacher Education (2010–2020)	2010–2020	ITE only	37	Multiple countries	Not reported	Mixed	Medium
5	Kızıldağ & Tuncer (2022): A Scoping Review on Practicum of Turkish Pre-Service EFL Teachers During COVID-19	2000–2020	ITE only	7	Turkey	Negative	Mixed	High
NEW	Radović et al. (2021) The challenge of designing 'more' experiential learning in higher education programs in the field of teacher education: A	1984-2019	ITE and CPD	31	Multiple countries	Not reported	Mixed	High

	systematic review study							
8	Şahin (2023): Teaching Practicum in English Language Teaching (ELT): A Systematic Review	2005–2022	ITE only	24	Multiple countries	Positive	Mixed	Medium
9	Szocik et al. (2024): Early Childhood Special Education Teacher Candidates' Field Experiences: A Systematic Review	2013–2022	ITE only	13	Mostly USA	Positive	Positive	High
10	Tas & Karabay (2016): Developing Teaching Skills Through the School Practicum in Turkey: A Metasynthesis Study	2000–2014	ITE only	53	Turkey	Not reported	Mixed	Medium
11	Tekel et al. (2022): Teaching Practicum During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Comparison of the Practices in Different Countries	2020–2021	ITE only	13	Multiple countries	Not reported	Mixed	Medium
NEW	Wiese et al. (2024) How can universities ensure quality of practice in initial teacher education?	2010-2022	ITE only	46	Multiple countries	Not reported	Positive	Medium
12	Woo et al. (2023): Exploring the Evolution of Field Experiences in P–12 Online Settings: A Systematic Review of Studies from 2007–2022	2010–2022	ITE and CPD	25	Multiple countries	Not reported	Mixed	Medium
D	Ou & Mendoza (2024) The impact of training provisions on novice	1980-2023	ITE only	20	Hong Kong	Not reported	Mixed	Medium

	English language teachers in Hong Kong: A systematic review							
F	Zhou & Wong (2025) Student teacher learning in school-university partnerships: A systematic review	2011-2024	ITE only	67	Multiple countries	Not reported	Mixed	Medium

Review citations

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García-Lázaro, I., Conde-Jiménez, J., & Colás-Bravo, M. P. (2022). *Integration and Management of Technologies Through Practicum Experiences: A Review in Preservice Teacher Education (2010–2020)*. *Contemporary Educational Technology*, 14(2), ep352. <https://doi.org/10.30935/cedtech/11540>

Kızıldağ, A. and Tuncer, H., 2022. *A Scoping Review on Practicum of Turkish Pre-Service EFL Teachers during COVID-19*. *OPUS Journal of Society Research*, 19(45), pp.129–142. doi:10.26466/opusjsr.1063236. https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/2213810?utm_source=chatgpt.com

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Tekel, E., Bayır, Ö. Ö. & Dulay, S., 2022. *Teaching Practicum During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Comparison of the Practices in Different Countries*. *International Journal of Progressive Education*, 18(2), pp. 71–86. <https://doi.org/10.29329/ijpe.2022.431.5>

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Ou, J., Mendoza, A. & Li, Y., 2024. *The impact of training provisions on novice English language teachers in Hong Kong: A systematic review*. *Review of Education*, 12(3). [doi:10.1002/rev3.70006](https://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.70006)

Zhou, J. & Wong, J. L. N., 2025. *Student teacher learning in school-university partnerships: A systematic review*. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 133, Article 102692. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2025.102692>