



Research paper

What matters for competent teaching? A multinational comparison of teaching practicum assessment rubrics

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ABSTRACT

Practicum assessment rubrics have a backwash effect on preservice teachers' learning through the criteria they transmit. This article presents a documentary analysis of ten rubrics used across six countries: South Africa, India, England, Singapore, Canada, and Sweden. We compare the dispositions, knowledge, outcomes, and reasoning. We use Legitimation Code Theory (LCT) to show how practicum assessments are legitimated differently. Some rubrics emphasise preservice teachers' dispositions and whether they implement protocols correctly. Others emphasise their capacity for reasoning in context. These positions call for teacher educators and policymakers to interrogate where the emphasis is in their own assessments.

1. Introduction

Assessing students' teaching during the practicum has long been regarded as "complex and contentious" (Reddy et al., 2008, p. 146). Moreover, the "uneven conceptualisation of work-integrated learning" and "poorly conceptualised" practicum assessment instruments have posed a "significant challenge" to the teacher education sector in countries like South Africa (Council for Higher Education, 2010). Unlike knowledge and practice standards, developed nationally, teaching practicum assessment rubrics are commonly created by teacher education institutions for use with their students. They are intended to guide university lecturers and mentor teachers to evaluate preservice teachers' developing classroom practices. However, concerns about a lack of shared understanding of the nature of competent teaching have been raised in comparative studies in Africa (e.g., Deacon, 2016), in Europe (e.g., Caena, 2014; Tillema et al., 2011) and the antipodes (e.g., Haigh et al., 2013). These disparities are especially prevalent where there is a "lack of clear guidelines and grading rules, and the underlying problem of transparency on what to appraise" (Tillema et al., 2011, p. 140). To improve the assessment of teaching in the practicum, the design structures, the criteria and the grading rules must be scrutinised and critiqued.

This article presents a documentary analysis of ten practicum assessment rubrics used in six countries: South Africa, Canada, England, Sweden, India, and Singapore. We use Legitimation Code Theory (LCT)

to reveal the grounds on which a diverse sample of practicum assessment rubrics convey conceptions of competent teaching. Our analysis shows that although there are many broad areas of consensus, significant differences exist in their coherence and focus. We suggest how local histories, contextual priorities, and policy regimes may shape what is assessed and the grounds on which competent teaching is legitimated. The analytic tools can be used by educational policymakers and teacher educators seeking to analyse other practicum assessment rubrics. The findings of this study may help compare what is valued with trends from rubrics elsewhere. In so doing, we seek to contribute to the rigour, transparency and coherence of practicum assessment practices.

2. Background to the study and conceptual framework

Ideally, teaching practicum assessment rubrics provide criteria for competent teaching to be recognised across a wide range of school contexts and understood by a large group of university staff and mentor teachers who assess preservice teachers. These criteria convey messages about how competent teaching should be recognised, such as the dispositions valued and what preservice teachers need to know and do to demonstrate their competence in the classroom (Christiansen et al., 2019; Rusznyak & Bertram, 2021). In numerous countries, including New Zealand, Sweden and South Africa, universities are responsible for attesting that preservice teachers are ready to teach through a summative assessment of their teaching at the end of their initial teacher

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education (Aspden, 2017; Rusznyak, 2012). Once students have passed all modules that make up their teaching qualification and the final teaching practicum, they can register with a professional council and seek employment in public schools. Practicum rubrics have the potential to enhance reliable, transparent, and standardised assessment in different contexts.

Practicum rubrics reflect their designers' conceptions of competent teaching. Rubrics are created within specific contexts and reflect the histories, priorities, and policy regimes. Therefore, teaching practicum assessment rubrics can be regarded as a negotiated artefact that conveys messages about how achievement should be recognised in that context. Both researchers have participated in large-scale regional projects that conducted comparative analyses of a selection of teaching practicum assessment rubrics. The rubrics from six countries were obtained through our involvement in two research projects and are used in this study with permission. In the Initial Teacher Education Research Project (ITERP), the first researcher analysed the knowledge bases that informed how preservice teachers were assessed at five South African universities (see Rusznyak & Bertram, 2015). The second researcher was part of the TRACE project team that analysed images of the desired teacher projected by a selection of practicum assessment rubrics (see Christiansen et al., 2019, pp. 1–22). Using concepts and analytical tools from Legitimation Code Theory (LCT), we can offer new insights into practicum assessment by extending the singular focus on the knowledge base of the assessment (as done in the ITERP study) and the attributes of the desired teacher (as done in the TRACE study). LCT provides a systematic and integrated approach that enables us to move beyond empirical description and explore the generative mechanisms that give rise to fundamentally different approaches to practicum assessment. This study considers both knowledge/procedures in teaching in relation to the attributes of preservice teachers as developing knowers of teaching and how these are emphasised differently in the basis on which teaching competence is legitimated.

In our analysis of the sample of practicum rubrics, we consider the focus of the criteria, or what is assessed. We show convergences and divergences in the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and reasoning capacities expected of preservice teachers. We also consider the basis on which achievement is recognised. For this, we used tools from LCT to reveal the extent to which achievement depends on a mastery of knowledge and skills and/or the dispositions and attributes of preservice teachers.

The following research questions guide our study.

- What messages do teaching practicum assessment rubrics convey about how competent teaching is recognised?
- What similarities and differences are seen across rubrics used in different contexts?

We argue that a critical analysis of teaching practicum assessment rubrics can enable teacher educators and policymakers to strengthen teacher preparation.

2.1. Empirical studies on practicum assessment

Although there is a substantial body of literature about stakeholders' perceptions and experiences of practicum assessment, relatively few studies analyse the development, structure, and criteria of teaching practicum assessment rubrics. We provide a brief discussion of the findings of relevant studies.

There are few accounts of the development, design and subsequent refinement of teaching practicum assessment rubrics. Rusznyak (2008) analysed the practice-based evaluations of a cohort of preservice teachers over a four-year teaching degree. The increasing proficiency of participants over time in different aspects of teaching (such as their knowledge of content and their conceptualisation of lessons) was used to generate a rubric with elaborated descriptors at varying levels of

competence (Rusznyak, 2011). In another study, Bryant et al. (2016) used a statistical method to analyse how teachers used practice standards to assess the competence of practicum teaching. They then used factor loadings to redesign the practicum assessment rubric, reducing the number of criteria to those deemed significant by assessors.

A second cluster of studies focuses on the design structures of practicum assessment rubrics. Rusznyak and Bertram's (2015) study considered the implications of the structure of assessment rubrics in terms of its potential to offer formative feedback to preservice teachers and possibilities for greater standardisation across many assessors. Comparative studies show that some rubrics contain lists of normative criteria that require assessors to verify that preservice teachers comply with expectations. A list of discrete items on a checklist can fragment coherence and obscure the distinction between core and more peripheral aspects of teaching practices (Rusznyak & Bertram, 2015). When criteria are rated against unspecified levels of achievement (such as 'good' or 'very good'), each assessor interprets what this means from their own subjective viewpoint. This makes standardisation of assessment impossible and leaves the grounds of assessment decisions far from transparent. They obscure insight into why teaching rated as "good" might differ from achievement rated as "excellent". Although they may be simple for assessors to complete, unless coupled with an elaborated interpretation, they effectively restrict assessment as a potentially formative learning process (Jönsson and Mattsson, 2011). Conversely, when the distinction between different levels of achievement is elaborated against criteria, they potentially enhance assessment transparency and reliability (Rusznyak, 2011). In contrast, others assess competent teaching more holistically, looking at how competent classroom action is supported by thoughtful design and incisive reflection (e.g., Al-Malki & Weir, 2014; Ergünay & Parsons, 2023; Rusznyak, 2012).

Thirdly, a few studies have analysed what university staff and teacher mentors value when recognising competent teaching. Most of these are small-scale case studies that use interviews or surveys to access stakeholders' perceptions and experiences. A study by Allen and Wright (2014) found that preservice teachers sometimes encounter disparity between the expectations of university staff and supervising teachers. In a comparative study of practicum assessment practices in Israel, Norway and the Netherlands, Tillema et al. (2011) reported many commonalities between the perspectives of university staff, mentor teachers and preservice teachers and some crucial differences in what they value. Teacher mentors tended to base their assessment on "orderly classroom control or performance", whereas university supervisors put more value on preservice teachers' capacity for reflection and reasoning (Tillema et al., 2011, p. 150). Similarly, Hemmi and Ryve (2015) conducted interviews with mentor teachers in two Scandinavian countries. Although some participants valued how preservice teachers plan and present content, others put more value on their interaction with individual students and their skill in probing student thinking. These studies emphasise different perceptions about what matters for achievement held by various stakeholders in other contexts. Our study extends the findings of these comparative analyses by drilling down into the focus of assessment criteria and how the rubrics legitimate achievement.

2.2. Legitimation of teaching practicum assessments

Legitimation Code Theory (LCT) is a realist and relational approach widely used to analyse knowledge practices and how they are enacted (Maton, 2014). The ways people enact a practice convey messages about how they legitimate what they do and how they do it. LCT has three active dimensions that provide concepts that reveal how participation and achievement are recognised in social practices (Maton, 2014). The Specialisation dimension considers what is valued for achievement and has been used to analyse the assessment of practices in various other fields of practice, including music (e.g., Walton, 2020); the natural sciences (e.g., Rootman-le Grange & Blackie, 2018); nursing (e.g., Monbec et al., 2020) and engineering (e.g., Wolff & Hoffman, 2014). It provides

concepts and analytic tools that enable us to analyse how teaching practicum assessment rubrics recognise competent teaching through the messages transmitted by their criteria.

The Specialisation dimension is premised on the notion that knowledge practices are directed towards some part of the world, such as competent teaching practices (setting up *epistemic relations* between a practice and its object). It further asserts that practices are enacted by practitioners (in this case, preservice teachers), thereby setting up *social relations* between the practice and the attributes of those who enact it (Maton, 2014). Epistemic relations and social relations are present in all criteria and manifest along a continuum of strengths. A criterion that measures achievement by specifying a particular kind of knowledge (e.g., that preservice teachers “demonstrate excellent knowledge of the lesson’s content”) is coded as having a stronger epistemic relation than a criterion that requires a range of unspecified skills, such as “participation in sporting activities”. Similarly, criteria that base achievement on personal dispositions, like “being kind” or “having patience”, have stronger social relations than criteria that require no particular attributes, such as implementing a protocol or understanding a concept.

The intersection of four relative strengths of epistemic relations and four strengths of social relations generates sixteen positions on a cartesian plane within four analytically distinct modalities.

Fig. 1 shows how Maton (2014) defined four specialisation codes, each comprising a strength of epistemic relations (ER) and a strength of social relations (SR) that together reveal the *basis of legitimation* of what matters for achievement in a practice. These specialisation codes are:

- *knowledge codes*, where criteria emphasise the mastery of specialised knowledge and/or procedures, and knower attributes are not emphasised;
- *knower codes*, where criteria emphasise the dispositions and behaviours of preservice teachers and mastery of knowledge is not emphasised;

- *élite codes*, where criteria emphasise both mastery of knowledge and preservice teachers’ attributes;
- *relativist codes*, where criteria emphasise neither specialised knowledge/procedures nor particular dispositions.

An assessment rubric’s focus on criteria can be compared thematically. The dominant codes and distribution patterns of criteria across the specialisation plane reveal the basis on which achievement is legitimated.

3. Methodology and methods

This study presents a documentary analysis of the convergences and divergences in the criteria used to assess competent teaching in ten teaching practicum assessment rubrics from six countries. It uses a mixed methods methodology, which begins with a qualitative thematic study of the criteria included in practicum assessment rubrics across contexts. Each criterion is analysed in terms of the *focus* of the assessment, that is, what knowledge, skills, dispositions, and reasoning capacities are considered necessary for competent teaching. Concepts from the Specialisation dimension of LCT are then used to analyse the *basis* of the assessment, that is, the extent to which different assessment rubrics emphasise mastery of knowledge/procedure and/or dispositions/attributes of preservice teachers. A quantitative comparison of the distribution of specialisation codes across the specialisation plane (see Fig. 1) enables a comparison of the *basis* on which each rubric legitimates competent teaching. Combining these two approaches generates insights that advance the current knowledge of teaching practicum assessment practices.

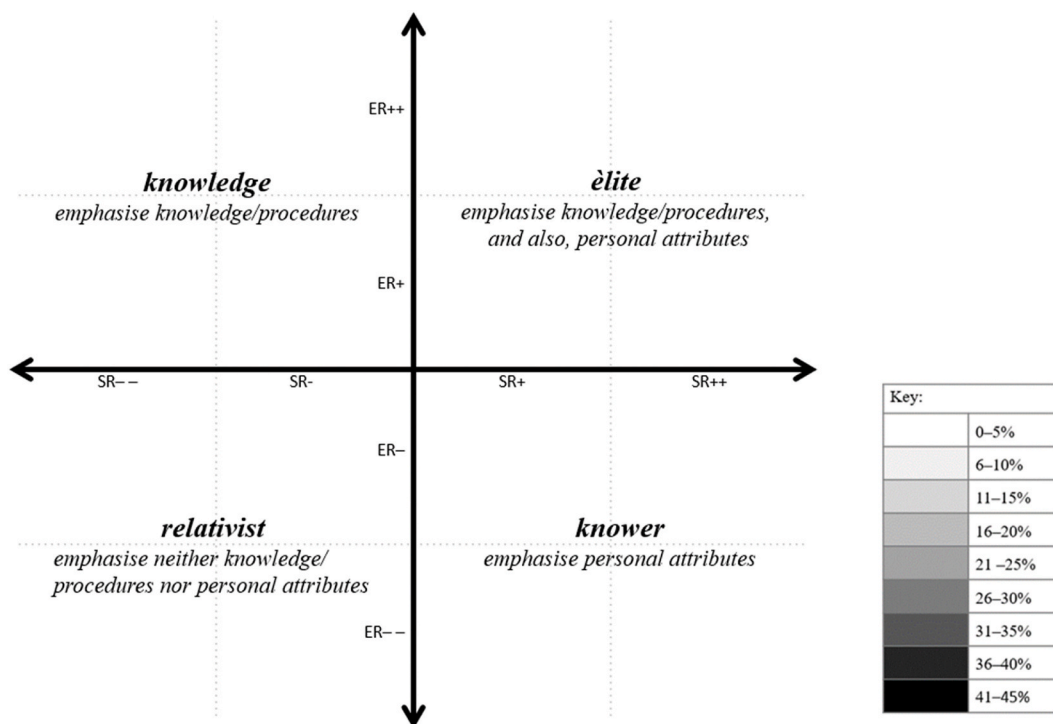


Fig. 1. The specialisation plane shows how different strengths of epistemic relations and social relations generate four quadrants whose codes reveal the basis of legitimation (adapted from Maton, 2016, p. 12).

Table 1
The structure of practicum assessment rubrics and their policy contexts.

Country	Criteria	Description of rubric	Policy context
Canada	49	Preservice teachers, with mentor teachers and university lecturers, use a checklist to rate their own progress. Based on a framework ^a for teaching practices.	Each jurisdiction has its own teacher certification, and institutions design their rubrics.
England	59	A checklist of criteria.	National Teachers' standards ^b are used to evaluate teacher competence for certification.
India	21	A checklist of criteria at four levels.	Institutions align criteria with teaching standards from the National Body of Teacher Education.
Singapore	30	A checklist of criteria intended for feedback.	The teacher education institution partners with the Ministry of Education.
South Africa: University A	35	Formative assessment: criteria with elaborated descriptors at four levels. Summative assessment: grid where levels of insight and reasoning intersect with levels of classroom performances.	The national policy stipulates that knowledge should be incorporated into teacher qualifications.
South Africa: University B	36	Rubrics for mentor teachers assess lesson presentation and conduct against three levels of "sufficient" achievement. University tutors answer a checklist of questions against five achievement levels.	The South African Council of Educators recently developed a set of national professional teaching standards.
South Africa: University C	38	Mentor teachers complete a checklist of criteria against six levels. Grade calculated arithmetically.	Institutions still have the autonomy to design their own rubrics.
South Africa: University D	36	University tutors complete a checklist of criteria against four levels. Grade calculated arithmetically.	
South Africa: University E	40	Mentor teachers use a checklist of weighted criteria with marks added arithmetically, OR they provide a global mark based on their impressions.	
Sweden	25	Elaborated and relational criteria are grouped into eight themes, with three levels of achievement according to whether they meet or exceed targets.	The Department of Education formulates national standards. Institutions design their own rubrics.

^a Danielson, Charlotte (2007). *Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching, 2nd edition*. Alexandria, Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

^b https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/665522/Teachers_standard_information.pdf.

3.1. Data

The teaching practicum assessment rubrics analysed in this study were produced by institutions that offer initial teacher education qualifications. Students' teaching competence is formally assessed as part of curriculum requirements, and the rubrics are completed by university staff and/or mentor teachers during the evaluation. The rubrics were collected as part of two research projects and are used with permission. The five South African teaching practicum assessment rubrics were obtained as part of the *Initial Teacher Education Research Project (ITERP)* led by Jet Education Services in conjunction with the South African Education Deans Forum and the Department of Higher Education (Deacon, 2016). Four assessment rubrics (used by universities in Sweden, Canada, England, and Singapore) were part of the documentary data in the *TRACE project*¹ (Christiansen et al., 2019, pp. 1–22). The rubric from India was accessed through recent collaborations between Österling and colleagues at the Indian university and is used in this study with permission. Although we do not have permission to reproduce them here, they can be found in the studies cited above.

Although some institutions are expected to strictly align their practicum assessment rubrics with national teaching standards, others have more autonomy in selecting criteria and overall design. Table 1 describes the structure of these assessment rubrics and gives a brief account of the policy context affecting the assessment of preservice teachers during the practicum.

3.2. Data analysis

Every criterion in each rubric was subjected to a three-step analysis. First, we undertook a thematic analysis of each criterion's focus on what preservice teachers are expected to know and understand, the protocols or procedures they are expected to apply, the tasks expected of them, and the dispositions, attitudes or behaviours they were expected to demonstrate. Second, we used the Specialisation dimension of LCT to code each criterion's strength of epistemic and social relations. To make the analysis explicit, we developed translation devices

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Table 2

A translation device showing indicators used to assign strengths of epistemic relations to empirical data.

Concept	Categories	Indicators	Examples
stronger epistemic relations	ER++	Criterion requires that preservice teachers understand a specific concept, and/or implement a particular protocol, strategy or policy directive.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Correctly applies the cooperative learning strategy." • "Understands stages of child development." • "Lesson outcome/s should be SMART (i.e. specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and traceable)."
	ER+	Criterion requires that preservice teachers draw on theoretical insights or use a range of strategies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Develops teaching based on knowledge of subject and subject didactics." • "Applies classroom management strategies." • "The preservice teacher motivates their lesson design based on their knowledge of curriculum and education."
	ER-	Criterion requires that preservice teachers meet educational outcomes but does not specify the knowledge or strategies needed to do so.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Maintains appropriate expectations for student achievement." • "Integrates learning materials into a lesson." • "Differentiates lessons to accommodate learners."
	ER--	Criterion does not require educational knowledge or strategies to be fulfilled.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Has a friendly manner." • "Participates in sporting activities." • "Is punctual"
weaker epistemic relations			

(Maton & Chen, 2016) that show how different strengths of the organising principles (*epistemic relations* and *social relations*) manifest empirically in the criteria from the practicum assessment rubrics. Table 2 provides the indicators for four categories of epistemic relations (see) from stronger (ER++) to weaker (ER--), and provides illustrative examples.

Table 3
A translation device showing indicators used to assign strengths of social relations to empirical data.

Concept	Categories	Indicators	Examples
<div style="display: flex; align-items: center;"> <div style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg); margin-right: 10px;">↑</div> <div style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg); margin-right: 10px;">↓</div> </div> stronger epistemic relations	SR++	Criterion specifies personal traits that preservice teachers are required to possess.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Has a sense of humour” • “Is sensitive to sociocultural diversity” • “Conveys enthusiasm for subject area(s)”
	SR+	Criterion specifies the behaviour and/or insight that preservice teachers are expected to demonstrate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Uses praise, sanctions and rewards consistently and fairly.” • “Probes learners’ understanding and acts on feedback to address misunderstandings” • “Reflects during lesson, changes tack when necessary and in-depth reflection follows”
	SR-	Criterion requires the preservice teachers to provide reason/s or justification for what they do and/or how they do it.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Thoughtfully selects appropriate resources” • “Uses appropriate language to explain, instruct and question learners clearly” • “Thoughtfully selects and uses teaching and learning strategies appropriate to the content and students.”
	SR--	Criterion specifies an expectation that does not depend on preservice teachers’ dispositions, behaviours or capacity for reasoning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Understands the importance of assessment” • “Uses some form of media” • “Is aware of the importance of a workable time schedule”
weaker epistemic relations			

Similarly, Table 3 provides indicators and illustrative examples for four categories of social relations, from stronger (SR++) to weaker (SR--) manifestations.

The indicators in the translation devices (shown in Tables 2 and 3) were developed through an iterative process of examining subcategories of criteria, describing indicators for each category, and testing them against other criteria. We refined the indicators until they worked across all rubrics and inter-rater reliability was attained.

Third, once each criterion had been assigned a strength of epistemic relations and a strength of social relations, their positions could be plotted onto a specialisation plane (see Fig. 1), and greyscale was used to show the dominant distribution patterns of criteria (see Fig. 1). The percentage distribution of criteria over the sixteen positions on the specialisation plane ranges from 0% to 42%.

The distribution patterns of criteria reveal the dominant codes for each rubric and compare how competent teaching is legitimated by various universities within and between countries. Fourth, the resulting distribution patterns showed an interesting pattern that prompted us to analyse the strengths of social relations further.

3.3. Scope and limits of the study

The included rubrics are selected from participating universities and cannot be considered representative of the views of all teacher educators within a country. Furthermore, the analysis of criteria is determined by how they are expressed in the assessment rubrics, without inferring what we think the designers may have intended. This study did not consider the curriculum structure or contents of the teacher preparation programmes that use these rubrics. Neither did this study investigate how university staff and mentor teachers understand the criteria or use rubrics to evaluate preservice teachers. However, these would be worthwhile studies that could provide further insights into our findings.

4. Results

This section reports on our analysis of the criteria of ten teaching practicum assessment rubrics. A thematic analysis of the *focus of criteria* suggests considerable consistency between what knowledge, tasks, and dispositions are used for assessing preservice teachers’ teaching competence. However, using LCT analytic tools, we then show significant differences in the *basis of legitimation* of how preservice teachers are expected to enact their teaching practices.

4.1. Focus of the criteria

In this section we present a thematic analysis of what is being assessed in criteria of the ten rubrics in this study.

4.1.1. Demonstrating knowledge and understanding

Although formal testing is not part of the practicum, some rubrics contain criteria for assessing preservice teachers’ knowledge or understanding. Criteria that specify knowledge and understanding are often phrased as “understand ...”, “demonstrate awareness of ...” or “know how to ...”. The rubrics are unclear about how such knowledge is observed during the practicum. Our analysis found three clusters of criteria that emphasise knowledge in assessing preservice teachers’ classroom practices: their understanding of content knowledge, their knowledge of students, and their knowledge of policies. We elaborate on each.

4.1.1.1. Knowledge and understanding of content. Criteria across multiple rubrics expect preservice teachers to demonstrate an “accurate” and “thorough” grasp of their lessons’ content knowledge. For example, in a rubric from England, preservice teachers are expected to “demonstrate strong subject and curriculum knowledge” (ER+, SR-). Presumably, their content knowledge manifests in their explanations and management of students’ questions and answers. Some rubrics require that the content knowledge of lessons must be “well-organised”, “carefully planned”, or “appropriately adapted for learning” (ER+, SR-). All rubrics in our study have a criterion requiring preservice teachers to “link concepts to appropriate examples” or “connect content with the lives and experiences” of their students (ER+, SR-).

4.1.1.2. Knowledge and understanding of students and their learning. All the rubrics in our analysis include criteria emphasising the importance of preservice teachers knowing their students. Criteria focus on assessing their understanding of student diversities, prior knowledge about lesson topics, and awareness of the challenges affecting students’ participation and achievement during lessons. Some criteria specify possession of particular knowledge, such as one that requires preservice teachers to “understand stages of child development” (ER++, SR-). In contrast, others emphasise how that knowledge is recruited for designing appropriate classroom activities or learning support. For example, preservice teachers need to know their students and understand their diverse learning support needs. This enables them to fulfil other criteria such as “adapt their teaching to respond to the strengths and needs of all pupils” (ER+, SR-) and “maintain appropriate expectations for student achievement” (ER-, SR-).

4.1.1.3. Knowledge and understanding of policies. Eight of the rubrics analysed contain criteria assessing preservice teachers’ knowledge of policies, ranging from national curricular and assessment requirements to those at a school level (e.g., policies regarding conduct and dress). A subtle but important difference exists between criteria that require preservice teachers to “know and implement” particular policies (ER++, SR-) and those that require them to “know and interpret” them (ER++, SR-). In the case of “know and implement”, compliance with policy is required from preservice teachers, whereas “interpret” requires

considering what is appropriate within their context. Although both emphasise the importance of knowing policies, the latter expects a measure of reasoning and situational judgement from teachers.

4.1.2. Tasks expected of preservice teachers

All rubrics in our study require preservice teachers to perform a range of similar tasks. They are expected to prepare for the lessons they teach, pace learning appropriately, select and modify resources for their lessons, correct students' misunderstandings, employ appropriate teaching strategies, monitor student understanding, and provide feedback.

Some criteria explicitly emphasise the knowledge and/or procedures by listing different tasks teachers must perform in mediating knowledge and managing learning and classroom environments. For example, a criterion from England requires that preservice teachers "give pupils regular feedback, both orally and through accurate marking, and encourage pupils to respond to the feedback" (ER+, SR-). This depends on them drawing from their knowledge of content and feedback procedures. Similarly, rubrics all have a criterion that expects preservice teachers to manage class behaviour while establishing environments conducive to learning through, for example, in England, preservice teachers are required to use "clear rules and routines".

There are differences in the manner in which the tasks should be performed. For example, although some rubrics require that lesson plans are set out according to given requirements, others recognise achievement when lesson planning is "thoughtful", "coherent" or "thorough". Thus, rubrics differ in their emphasis of lesson planning as the production of technically correct documentation, to planning that embodies reasoned processes.

4.1.3. Dispositions

Our analysis of the rubrics revealed four clusters of preservice teachers' dispositions: those associated with knowing, those characterising professional interactions, those relating to their personal growth and professional learning, and those associated with being an upstanding member of the community.

4.1.3.1. Dispositions associated with knowing. Across numerous countries, rubrics include criteria that value preservice teachers who "promote the value of scholarship" (England) or use "many higher order questions to ensure critical thinking" (India). Some rubrics include qualities that accompany knowing, such as demonstrating curiosity, being "passionate" or "enthusiastic" about their subject, and being "confident" in their subject knowledge. Despite the central role that organising knowledge plays in teachers' classroom practices, none of the rubrics in this study include traits like being "curious" or "inquisitive".

4.1.3.2. Attributes associated with pedagogic interactions. Some rubrics contain criteria that require preservice teachers to interact with students and colleagues in particular ways. Professional conduct sections include dispositions and behaviours (SR++) like being "reliable", "diligent", "collegial", and "cooperative". Rubrics also include desirable attributes such as being a "loyal team player" (University B, South Africa); "showing initiative" (Canada); "being trustworthy", "honest", and "punctual", and demonstrating "consistently the positive attitudes, values and behaviour which are expected of pupils" (England).

When interacting with students, some rubrics require preservice teachers to be "motivating" and "encouraging", with "kind", "patient", or "caring" dispositions. All rubrics in our study include a criterion that values interacting respectfully with all students and respecting their social identities. In the rubric of University D (South Africa), for example, preservice teachers are generally required to "be respectful" and "command respect". Some are quite specific about respecting students, especially those with different social identities from the preservice teachers themselves. Sweden requires that teachers have an

obligation to "counteract discrimination" and "promote equity and equality". Criteria like these point to the ethical orientations that underpin teachers' work.

4.1.3.3. Attributes that foster personal growth and learning. Several of the rubrics contain criteria that value the preservice teacher being "willing to learn", "open to feedback", and able to "respond appropriately to guidance" given by mentor teachers and university assessors. Some value the capacity of preservice teachers to learn through their experiences by being "self-reflective" and "open to challenges" from students. This starkly contrasts with a rubric that expects preservice teachers to be "controlling of students". In the former, the teacher is positioned as a co-enquirer of knowledge. In contrast, in the latter, the teacher is positioned as an authority in the classroom who maintains order.

4.1.3.4. Attributes associated with citizenship. Several rubrics require that preservice teachers be role models for students and respected in the community. Because teaching practicum assessment rubrics are contextually situated documents, looking at the historical and policy contexts in which they emerge is useful. A detailed analysis is beyond this paper's scope, but we can interpret how some contexts have influenced the messages rubrics transmit. For example, the rubric from England derives its criteria from a national policy that requires that preservice teachers "uphold fundamental British values". The imperative to foster a sense of nationalism demands that criteria include a "commitment to democracy", respect for the rule of law, and the protection of individual liberties. Preservice teachers are expected to have "proper and professional regard for the ethos, policies and practices of the school in which they teach". In another example from South Africa, University B's rubric requires that preservice teachers are "loyal", "accepting of authority" and "obedient", suggesting that teachers should embrace their role as model civil servants. This criterion, which is unique across the rubrics in our study, may have emerged from this institution's nationalist legacy. Universities with a historical tradition of political activism include criteria that encourage graduates to resist the marginalising practices they may encounter. Criteria expect that preservice teachers will "counteract discrimination or any other abusive treatment of learners", which may potentially place them at odds with prevalent school practices. Such criteria suggest that preservice teachers are agents of social transformation and educational justice, which is more valued than unquestioning compliance with authority and preserving the status quo.

Our analysis shows that many of the criteria used to assess preservice teachers and their developing teaching practices transcend international borders. Criteria that assess preservice teachers' content knowledge, knowledge about policies, and knowledge about the students they teach appear in rubrics across all countries. Some rubrics require preservice teachers to demonstrate particular attitudes, dispositions, and behaviours. We also saw commonalities across the tasks preservice teachers are expected to do and the outcomes they are expected to achieve.

4.2. Specialisation codes that legitimate competent teaching

Our analysis of the criteria shows many convergences regarding the valued knowledges, skills, and dispositions that practicum assessment rubrics expect of preservice teachers. However, our discussion also reveals important differences in the relative strengths of epistemic relations and strengths of social relations of some criterion across different rubrics. These differences result in each rubric having a particular distribution pattern when the criteria are plotted on a specialisation plane. Using shades of greyscale in increments of 5%, we analyse the distribution patterns across the rubrics and consider the specialisation codes that legitimate the assessment of the practicum. Fig. 2 a - j shows the distribution pattern of each of the ten rubrics analysed.

We now briefly discuss the distribution patterns over the specialisation plane.

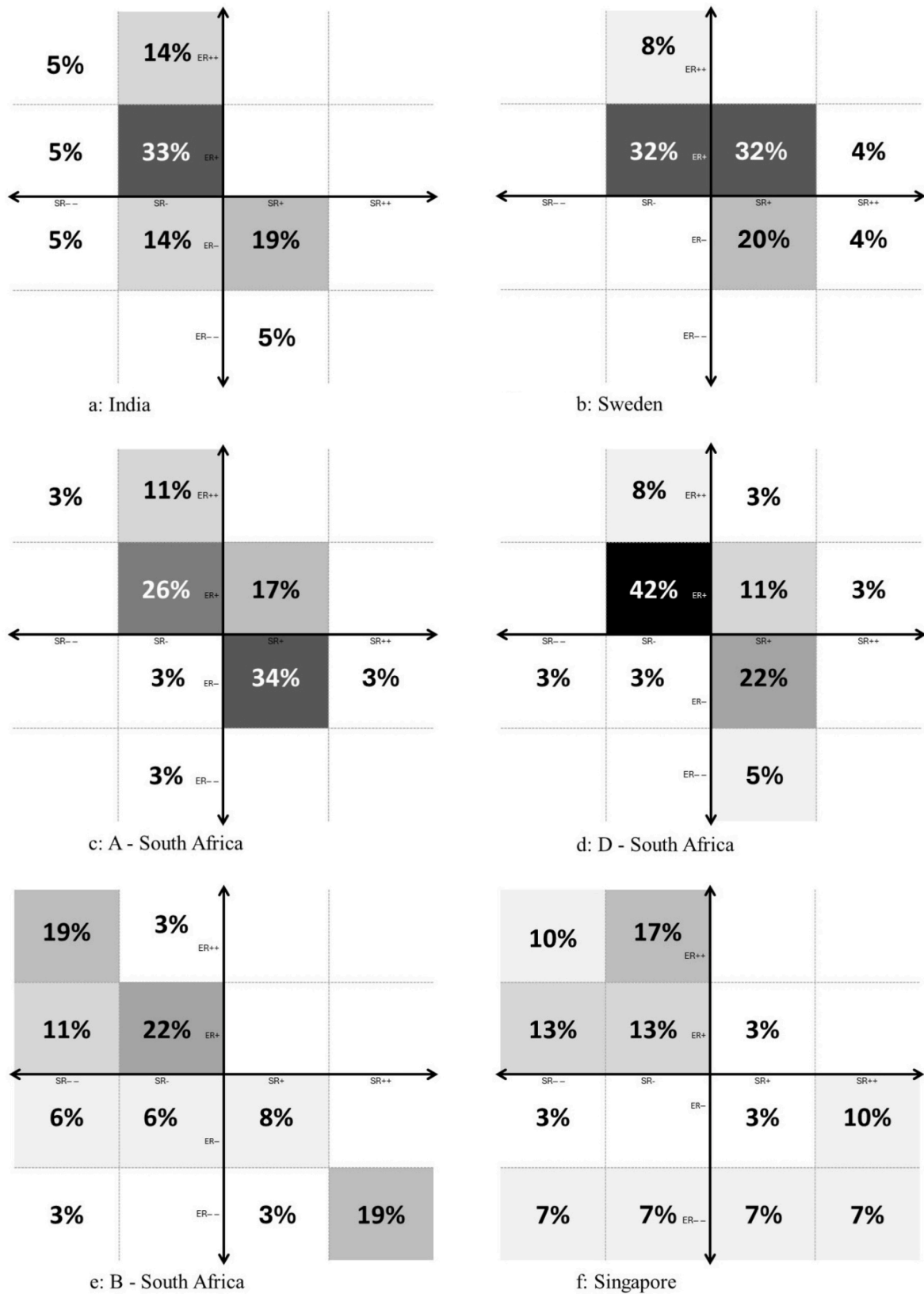


Fig. 2. a-j: Patterns across the specialisation plane showing the distribution (in percentages) of how criteria for competent teaching are legitimated in ten teaching practicum assessment rubrics.

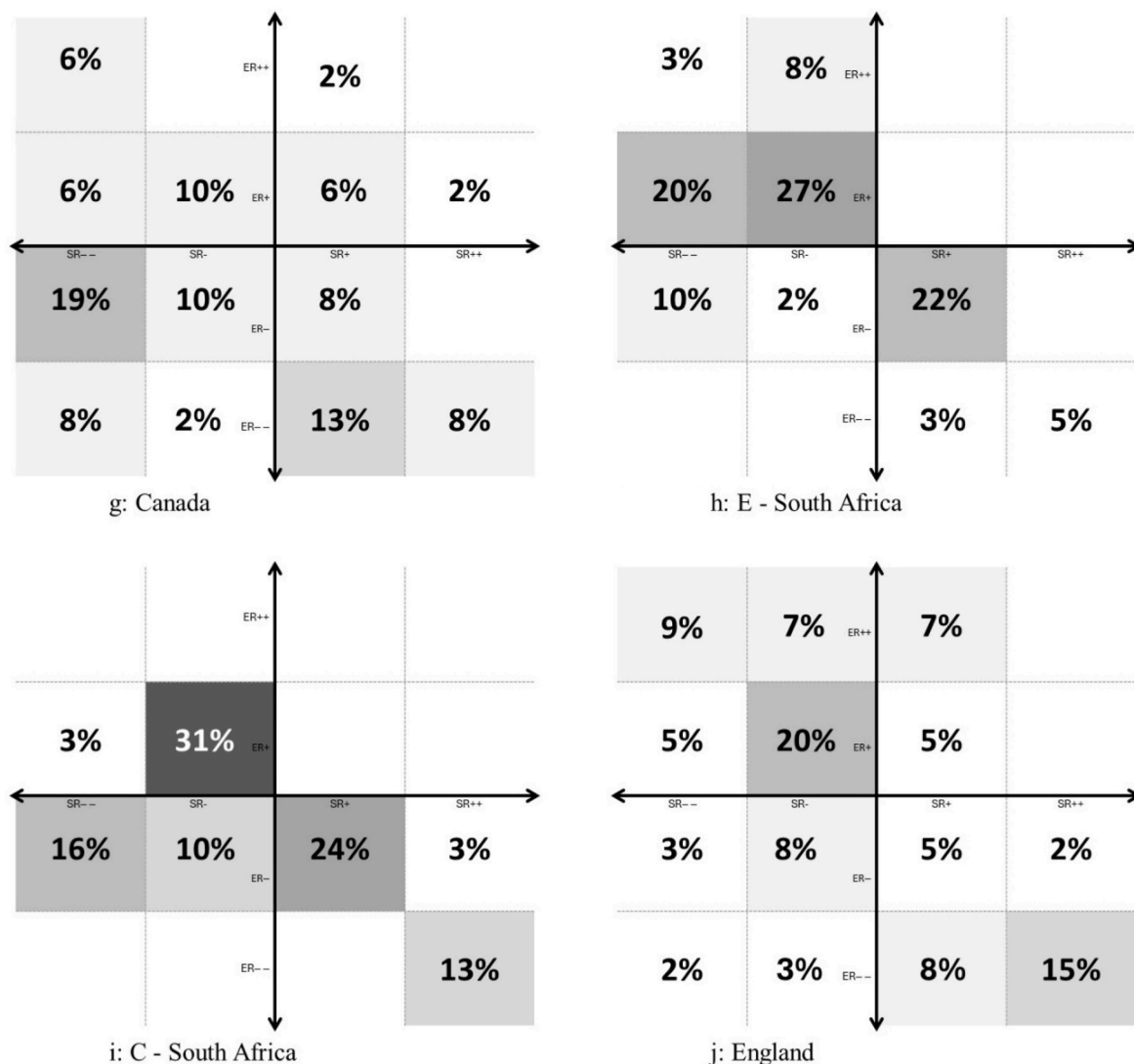


Fig. 2. (continued).

4.2.1. Emphasising knowledge and/or procedure

All rubrics have criteria governed by *knowledge codes* (top left quadrant), where understanding and reasoned application of knowledge and procedures is emphasised for achievement. The proportion of criteria falling in knowledge codes varies from 22% (Canada) to 58% (South Africa’s University E). Five of the rubrics in the study have more than half of their criteria governed by knowledge codes. Two-thirds of the criteria in the rubric from Singapore are phrased as a knowledge-based requirement, such as expectations that preservice teachers “demonstrate understanding of ...”, are “aware of ...” or that they “know the importance of ...”. As no formal testing occurs during the practicum, mentor teachers or university lecturers who assess preservice teachers are expected to infer these understandings from their lesson observations and post-observation discussions.

There are important differences between positions *within* the knowledge code. More than 20% of the criteria in the Singapore, England, and South African University B rubrics are precise about the bodies of knowledge to be understood or approaches to be used (ER++, SR- or ER++, SR-). Some rubrics, like those from South African Universities B and E, have a higher proportion of more normative criteria. They require preservice teachers to know about particular procedures and policies and to implement them “accurately” or “correctly” (ER++, SR-). Criteria phrased as normative requirements

are sometimes phrased as yes/no questions, such as: “Is there ...?”, “Are the ...?” or “Did the ...?”. This structure strengthens the message that teaching has relatively weaker social relations (SR--). Other criteria in this quadrant emphasise the value of knowledge for informing decision-making, selection, and judgement on the part of the preservice teacher (ER++, SR- or ER+, SR-). An expectation that not all choices are equally legitimate is conveyed with words like “appropriate”, “effective”, “worthwhile”, and “meaningful”. In these cases, preservice teachers are required to draw on their knowledge to make choices that align with their learning goals and work within the opportunities in the context. For example, preservice teachers are expected to use “appropriate resources” and design “meaningful learning activities” in their lessons. For example, a criterion that makes general reference to learning resources but requires compliance, not reasoning, asks: “Do lessons contain learning support materials?” (ER+, SR-). This criterion occupies a different position within a knowledge code to another that expects “learning support materials [to be] carefully chosen, enhance the content and are appropriate to the needs of students” (ER+, SR-).

4.2.2. Emphasising knower attributes

Between 24% and 40% of the criteria from the rubrics we analysed are governed by *knower codes* (bottom right quadrant). These criteria emphasise attributes such as dispositions, behaviours, and discretions

required of competent preservice teachers. These include, for example, listed dispositions valued for teachers, such as “show care and concern for pupils” (ER–, SR++, Singapore). This criterion is present in several of the rubrics. Providing care for students is generally expressed as requiring preservice teachers to demonstrate a caring disposition rather than an approach governed by an elite code (such as Noddings’ (1995) notion of a *pedagogy of care*).

Three rubrics – India and South African universities A and D – have no or very few (0–3%) criteria that specify desirable personal attributes of future teachers. In contrast, criteria that list desirable traits make up more than 15% of the assessment in rubrics from South African universities B and C, England, and Singapore. In Sweden, for example, preservice teachers must interact with students “in a compassionate and respectful manner”. Sometimes, the values and dispositions are ideologically related to national imperatives. A criterion used in the English rubric requires that preservice teachers do “not undermine fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect, and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs” (ER–, SR++). Criteria like these expect teachers to align with values expressed in institutional or national policies. They may be difficult to assess meaningfully during the short, intermittent interactions during teaching practicum sessions.

A striking feature of rubrics with a high proportion of criteria in the knower code is their emphasis on preservice teachers’ capacity to be perceptive of the learning dynamics during their lessons and respond discerningly. Rubrics from India, Sweden, and South African universities A, C, D, and E have about 20% or more of their criteria requiring this perception, interpretation, and discretion in practice. For example, Swedish preservice teachers should be “able to discern different alternatives” for their teaching based on the engagement of groups of learners” (ER–, SR+). In a similar example from South African university A, a preservice teacher “reflects during their lessons and changes track when necessary, with in-depth reflection following” (ER–, SR+).

4.2.3. Emphasising both knowledge and knowers

Criteria governed by elite codes require that achievement emphasises both mastery of specific knowledge (ER + or ER ++) and the demonstration of personal dispositions or discretion (SR + or SR++) for the same purpose. Whereas five rubrics in our study have no or very few criteria legitimated by elite codes, four rubrics contain 10% and 20% of such criteria. The Swedish rubric is unusual in that the achievement of over a third of the criteria is based on the enactment of specified bodies of knowledge together with particular personal attribute/s. For example, a criterion that requires preservice teachers to be “independent and responsible in developing teaching based on knowledge in subject and subject didactics” (our italics). Another criterion requires that preservice teachers use their knowledge of human rights as a basis for respectful classroom interactions (ER+, SR+). In examples like these, successful practice requires particular personal attributes when applying specified knowledge.

4.2.4. Emphasising neither knowledge nor knowers

Criteria governed by relativist codes are present in all but two rubrics. In these cases, the criterion requires neither specialised knowledges nor dispositions. The percentage of criteria governed by relativist codes (bottom left) ranges from 0% to 20% in eight rubrics and is most dominant in the rubric from Canada. Typically, these criteria focus on generic, unspecified, or administrative parts of teachers’ work. A typical criterion legitimated by this code requires Canadian students to “perform non-instructional duties” (ER–, SR–).

In summary, although knowledge and knower specialisation codes mainly govern the criteria in each protocol, their distribution patterns are quite different. The distribution shows a pattern that needs further analysis.

4.3. Distribution patterns

The previous section shows that knowledge codes, knower codes, and to a lesser extent, relativist and elite codes predominantly govern our study’s teaching practicum assessment rubrics. However, criteria show different distribution patterns within the knowledge and knower quadrants. Some rubrics (e.g., those from Singapore, England, Canada, and South African Universities B and C) show a more dispersed distribution pattern over the specialisation plane. In contrast, another group of rubrics (e.g., from Sweden, India, and South African Universities A and D) have more tightly grouped criteria that gravitate towards the centre of the specialisation plane. This pattern can be illustrated further by looking at the distribution of criteria in terms of their strengths of social relations. Table 4 shows the percentage of criteria where two strengths of social relations are considered together, combining the relatively weakest and strongest (SR– – and SR++) and comparing it to those that occupy the more central areas of the plane (SR– and SR+). The rubrics with a more tightly grouped distribution pattern had between 85% and 94% of criteria with moderately stronger (SR+) and moderately weaker (SR–) social relations. These rubrics have a far higher percentage of their criteria valuing the capacity of preservice teachers to perceive salient aspects of classroom life (SR+) and make informed, reasoned judgements (SR–). This cluster has significantly fewer criteria with much stronger (SR++) and much weaker (SR–) social relations. The opposite pattern is true for rubrics with dispersed criteria. They tend to have criteria across the different strengths of social relations. These different distribution patterns are revealed by plotting the ranking of rubrics according to their percentage of criteria coded as SR++ and SR– (see left-hand side of Fig. 3) compared to the ranking according to the percentage criteria coded as SR+ and SR– (see right-hand side of Fig. 3).

The positions at the top of the left-hand side of the graph show how some rubrics (e.g., South African Universities B and E, Singapore, Canada, and England) put far more emphasis than others on preservice teachers having particular dispositions (SR++) together with implementing protocols and policies correctly (SR–). In contrast, rubrics from two South African universities (A and D), Sweden, and India, have more than 80% of criteria assessing preservice teachers’ classroom practices as well as their capacity for discernment (SR+), making appropriate choices, and providing informed reasons (SR–) for enacting their classroom practices in one way rather than another. What is especially crucial in is that preservice teachers are expected to perform well in their lessons and give an account of what they do and why. In one such example, preservice teachers are required to provide a rationale for their “longer [term] planning related to theories from education and subject didactics” (Sweden, ER+, SR–). As seen at the bottom of the plots

Table 4

Combined percentages that compare the of extreme positions of social relations (SR– – and SR++) to the moderate positions (SR– and SR+).

Country	SR–	SR++	SR– – and SR++	SR–	SR+	SR– and SR+
B – South Africa	39	19	58	31	11	42
Singapore	33	17	50	37	13	50
Canada	39	10	49	22	29	51
E – South Africa	33	5	38	37	25	62
England	19	17	36	39	25	64
C – South Africa	19	16	35	41	24	65
India	15	0	15	61	24	85
Sweden	0	8	8	40	52	92
A – South Africa	3	3	6	43	51	94
D – South Africa	3	3	6	53	41	94

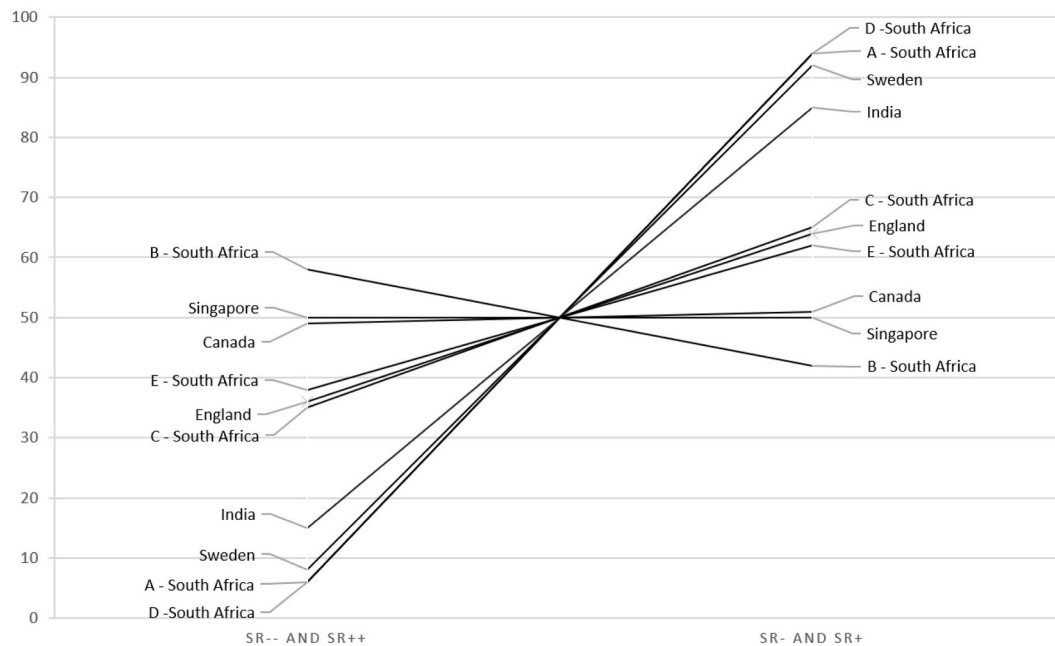


Fig. 3. A representation of how rubrics emphasise different combinations of social relations strengths compared to one another.

on the left-hand side of Fig. 3, these rubrics with the tightly clustered distribution pattern have very few, if any, criteria that require an evaluation of preservice teachers' personal dispositions (SR++) and their correct execution of protocols (SR- -). This suggests a conception of teaching as a social practice that can be learned by a wide range of students but one that requires reasoning and discretion more than particular personality traits.

5. Discussion

The criteria in ten rubrics from diverse contexts were analysed first in terms of their focus and then their basis of legitimation. Like Tillima et al.'s (2011) study of mentors' assessment practices in multinational contexts, we found the rubrics in our study acknowledge the importance of preservice teachers' subject knowledge, their thorough and thoughtful planning of lessons, attending to student learning, and the understanding of curriculum and policy requirements. Our findings offer new insights into practicum assessment practices. In our analysis of the focus of criteria and their basis of achievement, we found significant commonalities between rubrics and importance divergences. In the discussion, we interpret these findings in terms of the messages about the nature of teaching they convey, how they shape practicum assessment practices, and their implications for transfer between institutions and global contexts.

Practicum assessment rubrics transmit messages about how competent teaching positions preservice teachers in relation to required personal attributes and the implementation of teaching tasks. In our study, rubrics with a more dispersed pattern of criteria across the specialisation plane tended to present teaching as a disparate collection of dispositions, behaviour and tasks. These rubrics included many more criteria detailing the expected personality traits of preservice teachers, ranging from being enthusiastic to being open to feedback. On the other end of the spectrum, they put greater value on implementing policies and procedures accurately and correctly. The messages conveyed through the criteria suggest a model of teacher preparation that requires prospective students to possess particular dispositions and be trained to implement policies and protocols correctly. A critique of this way of assessing teaching is foregrounded by Tillima et al. (2011), who suggested that "stringent policy frameworks" tend to promote a more compliant approach to the assessment of teaching practicum. Our study shows how

features of assessment rubrics, some of which are derived from national policy frameworks, tend to set up more fragmented, technically focused approaches to practicum assessment.

Those rubrics with more tightly clustered criteria offer the potential for a more integrated and coherent assessment of the core work of teaching. The criteria in these rubrics focused on preservice teachers' planning and management of learning processes, productive professional interactions, and capacity to give an account of what they were doing and why. Criteria frequently refer to the appropriateness of teaching decisions concerning subject knowledge and pedagogy, the needs of students, and the context. In line with earlier studies (e.g., Ruzsnyak & Bertram, 2015), these rubrics emphasise teachers' situational judgement in context. These rubrics hardly mentioned specific dispositions required of preservice teachers but highly valued their use of theoretical insights to inform their classroom practices, their productive learning-oriented interactions with students, and their responsiveness to learning dynamics in the context.

Differences in how competent teaching is legitimated require that assessors draw on differing evidence to support their evaluations. Where discernment, discretion, and reasoned judgement are highly valued, preservice teachers need opportunities to articulate the reasoning that informs their pedagogic choices. These opportunities could be created by requiring a rationale for the design of their lessons (e.g., Ruzsnyak & Walton, 2011), post-observation discussions about the lesson, and reflective journaling. Assessors would be required to consider the appropriateness of these choices in relation to priorities such as ethical orientations, subject knowledge demands, student needs, and contextual possibilities. In contrast, for rubrics that value the correct implementation of protocols and technical requirements, assessors need only to confirm compliance by observing lessons and supporting documentation. This approach may be more straightforward for assessors, but we see two significant problems with such an approach. First, without a conceptual core, practicum assessment can become a quagmire of technical tasks, personal attributes, discretely listed knowledges and strategies. We are concerned that when teaching is assessed in a technical manner, the potential for the practicum assessment to provide preservice teachers with deeper understandings of their developing practices can be diminished. For example, the grounds on which pedagogic decisions are made are less open to scrutiny and the coherence of teaching around organising knowledge and designing learning

opportunities are easily obscured when criteria are fragmented and focused on technical requirements. Our findings support Al-Malki and Weir's (2014) critique that simply checking for technical compliance does little to support preservice teachers' classroom readiness. Second, a technical approach to competent teaching is more likely to reproduce existing practices regardless of their effectiveness. This might be unproblematic in contexts where the education system is functional, stable, and inclusive of students' diverse learning needs. However, in contexts where prevalent teaching practices are ineffective, rapidly changing, or exclusionary, the reproduction of existing practices critically hinders preservice teachers from engaging in transformation (Walton, 2017). From this, we support including critical sensibilities and opportunities for reasoning as a crucial component of assessing the teaching practicum.

In a globalised world, where preservice teachers increasingly undertake practical teaching outside their institutional or original national settings, Tillema et al. (2011, p. 151) identified a pressing concern: "how to accredit practice teaching outside the national context". Caena (2014) and Tillema et al. (2011) argue that teacher competencies must align with their historical and societal contexts to be meaningful. We add that these contexts also shape assessment rubrics and claim that institutional history and priorities can be reflected in their rubrics. Whereas other studies compare differences in the assessment of teaching practices between countries (e.g., Al-Malki & Weir, 2014; Ergünay & Parsons, 2023), we show that geographic and policy contexts are insufficient for understanding all the differences between rubrics. Our findings show that even when assessment rubrics have criteria that address similar aspects of classroom practices, they can differ fundamentally in the kinds of teachers they seek to produce. Furthermore, they offer fundamentally different conceptions of competent teaching and teacher preparation. These differences between rubrics regionally and nationally may pose challenges for teacher mentors in schools that accept preservice teachers from institutions using rubrics with vastly different expectations and criteria for recognising achievement.

6. Conclusions

Practicum assessment instruments are crucial for promoting the coherence, rigour, and integrity of preparation. The rubrics transmit messages about what is expected of competent teachers and their roles in the education system. These messages play a crucial role in shaping how preservice teachers come to understand the expectations of them as future practitioners and the grounds on which they learn to recognise competent teaching. Our study has analysed the criteria in ten rubrics from diverse contexts and interpreted the messages they relay. Although we found significant convergence in the focus of the knowledges, skills, and dispositions expected from preservice teachers during the practicum, there are also some significant divergences, some of which can be interpreted as arising from local priorities and histories. Others stem from fundamentally different conceptions of teaching and the role of teachers in society.

This study explores their focus on particular aspects of classroom practices and their basis of legitimation regarding what they value for competent teaching. Using analytic tools from Legitimation Code Theory (LCT), we compared how rubrics from different contexts emphasise the mastery of knowledge and/or the dispositions of preservice teachers in their criteria for competent teaching. Our analysis demonstrated that some rubrics emphasise preservice teachers' capacity for discretion and pedagogic reasoning to support their classroom practices. These rubrics focus on the classroom practices of preservice teachers and their ability to draw on theoretical and contextual insights to account for what they are doing. Another cluster of rubrics places considerably more emphasis on the desirable dispositions of preservice teachers, coupled with their ability to meet the technical requirements, and correctly implement policy and procedures. These different conceptions of competent teaching affect the evidence and approaches required to support the

assessment. It also affects the coherence and depth of the evaluation.

Our study offers an invitation, and perhaps a challenge, for teacher educators and policymakers. Teaching practicum assessment rubrics convey both intended and unintended messages about competence in teaching and the kind of teacher who is valued in that context. These messages may align with other components of teacher preparation, or they may convey messages that undermine the kinds of professional learning envisaged. In some cases, we found that that atomistic and technically focused criteria missed opportunities for preservice teachers to develop insights into their classroom practices. In other cases, criteria on some rubrics require dispositions, ethical orientations and knowledge that are not easily evaluated by observation and discussion during the practicum. The findings and analytic approach used in this paper could enable policymakers and teacher educators to interrogate how their institutions' teaching practicum assessment rubrics portray competence in teaching. The analysis has potential to reveal the practicum assessment's scope, depth, and coherence. It would be worthwhile to explore whether criteria in the practicum assessment rubrics align with institutional concepts of competent teaching, and teacher preparation goals. We have argued that well conceptualised assessment rubrics can potentially advance the rigour and transparency of teaching practicum. They therefore have the potential to enhance or undermine the coherence of teacher preparation and the quality of preservice teachers' professional learning.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Lee Rusznyak: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Lisa Österling:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Resources, Methodology, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.

Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

During the preparation of this work, the author(s) did not use Generative AI or AI-assisted technologies.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

Data availability

The authors do not have permission to share data.

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