

The Opinions of Prospective Teachers on Practicum Course

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to specify the perceptions of teacher candidates on Practicum course. The subjects of this study were chosen among prospective English teachers who have just graduated from Faculty of Education in Pamukkale University by means of Random Sampling Method. In this study, Qualitative Method was used. The qualitative data were gathered via semi-structured interview method which was supported by the school practicum papers the students handed in at the end of the term. The collected data were analyzed by content analyses teaching. As a result, it was found that although prospective teachers sometimes have problems related to classroom management and practice, they get benefit from Practicum course in terms of experiencing teaching-learning environment, creating self-awareness and improving their personal skills.

Key words: Practicum, Prospective teachers, Perceptions, Experience

1. Introduction

In Turkey, teaching profession is taught via educational faculties. In these faculties, there are different courses given related to teaching profession and the field. These courses are crucial for the prospective teachers to prepare for the application of their professions. Theoretical knowledge can be forgotten in time if it is not supported with practice. Practicum courses are important because permanent knowledge is only possible through practice and turn into a habit (Yılmaz, 2011).

Practicum course is one of the most indispensable experiences and a kind of a pre study for the prospective teachers on the way of becoming teachers. For this reason, it became a part of educational curriculum as part of faculty and school collaboration after School Experience course I and II when educational faculties were reconstructed in 1998 (Paker, 2008:133).

Practicum course taking place in the eighth term of restructured teacher training program enables theoretical knowledge turn into a practice. This course aims for prospective teachers to improve their teaching skills by teaching different classes in practice schools, understand lesson

curriculum in the field, evaluate the coursebooks, test and assess, share their experiences gained during practice with their peers and the practice instructors (YÖK, 1998). To achieve this, the prospective teachers should go to their practice schools 6 hours in a week, 3 hours of which they should teach the student actively under the observation of practice teachers, and 3 hours of which they should observe their peers and practice teachers. Their success in Teaching Practice courses will help them to be successful in their teaching career.

The aim of this study was to specify the opinions of teacher candidates who are in the department of English language teaching about the Practicum course. Around this general purpose the following questions were asked:

1. What are the problems you face with during the Practicum course?
2. What are the contributions of Practicum course into your teaching career?

2. Literature Review

There are different national and international studies on the effectiveness of Practicum course in literature. Kiraz (2002) has concluded that responsible Practicum teachers do not communicate efficiently with their teacher candidates, do not guide them properly and do not help them in such issues as material choice, lesson plan and classroom management.

According to Sarıçoban (2008), there were statistically significant differences between the groups in (a) the practicum teacher is a good guide, leader, and model for the student-teachers; (b) being a practicum teacher also requires different skills besides professional experience; (c) the practicum teachers should have the necessary qualifications to systematically observe the student-teacher; (d) the school experience courses and the practicum teaching course provide the student-teachers with the necessary professional point of view as an educator; and (e) the school experience courses and the practicum teaching course help student-teachers to better understand the educational system.

Bilgin, Kartal and Özkılıç's study (2008) has also been based on Practicum course. The most important result of the study pointed out that the teacher candidates were perceived themselves as sufficient and well in many aspects of instructional process. Similarly, it was determined that the scoring of teacher candidates as under achievers were very low by the instructors and practice teachers. According to another finding, teacher candidates found themselves as not sufficient in dealing with individual differences of the students and using mother language efficiently.

In their study, Yılmaz and Özçakmak (2015) have indicated that more than half of the prospective teachers (53%) had negative opinion on Practicum course; 22,9% of the prospective teachers having negative opinion stated that their practice teachers did not care about them; and 19,7% of them indicated that they could not get enough output in the practice process. On the other hand, 46,3% of the prospective teachers having positive opinion stated that practice process provided them professional experience. Moreover, almost half of the prospective teachers (49,5%) wished for professional guidance from practice teachers. About the qualifications that practice teachers should have 27,3% of the prospective teachers expressed that they should have the content and professional knowledge; and 23,8% of them stated that they should be tolerant.

In Ramazan and Yılmaz (2017) study, based on the data collected through the survey, it has been found that even though most of the prospective pre-service teachers have high enthusiasm for their future occupation corroborated by the positive experiences at their pre-school internships, they suffer from inefficient advisory services at their individual universities.

3. Method

The single-case design, which is a qualitative research method was used in the research. A qualitative research is an approach which aims at taking the priority of searching and understanding social facts in their related surroundings with the understanding of structuring a theory (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2016: 41).

3.1 Study Group

The participants were selected through purposive sampling method. The study was conducted on 11 female and 2 male volunteered teacher candidates who have just graduated from the ELT department of Pamukkale University during academic year 2016-2017.

3.2 Data Collection

Semi-structured open-ended questions were asked in order to explore the students' perceptions extensively. Since the interviews were conducted with several participants, the phrasing and sequence of these open-ended questions was determined in advance to reduce bias. The questions were loosely structured to allow participants to express their opinions and experiences freely. The related literature was reviewed to examine the present studies addressing the efficiency of Practicum course from candidates' perspectives. In the light of related research results, 2 questions were prepared and two field experts gave their opinions on this interview sheet. In this scope, the following open-ended questions were asked to the teacher candidates:

1. What are the problems you face with during Practicum course?
2. What are the contributions of Practicum course into your teaching career?

The qualitative data has been gathered through e-mail. There are some advantages of collecting qualitative data through e-mail: cost, practicality, productivity. First of all, the data can be collected with little cost. Secondly, the interview questions can be shared with a lot of people simultaneously. Thirdly, it gives chances to access some lower socio-economical groups easily. Finally, it saves time for the researchers who have to turn the recorded material into a written data (Meho, 2006:1285-1291).

3.3 Data Analysis

The qualitative data has been analyzed through content analysis. The main goal of using content analysis is to reach concepts and relationships that can explain the data gathered. Thus, qualitative phase of the study was designed to generate in-depth and rich descriptions about teacher candidates' perceptions toward the efficacy of Practicum course. According to Corbin and Strauss, 2007, the data obtained in the study were analyzed with the categorical analysis technique, which is a type of content analysis. In the categorical analysis process, the steps of (1) encoding the data, (2) creating the categories, (3) organizing the categories, and (4) defining and interpreting the findings were followed

(Akt, Ata, 2017:94). To ensure the content validity of the instrument, two researchers who had expertise in interviewing reviewed the process.

As a result of the data analysis, the following three were determined to be main themes: (1) problems in Practicum course and (2) contributions of Practicum course.

4. Findings

4.1 Problems in Practicum Course

More than half (8/13) of the teacher candidates who participated in the research emphasized that they did not have any problems during Practicum course. Three out of ten participants claimed that they had problems related to the practice. Likewise, two candidates indicated that they had classroom management problems.

“Some students did not show any respect as we were prospective teachers and I did not like these behaviours, so I had difficulty in classroom management (S 11, F)”

“ I understood that we could not really practice everything we learnt in courses at university. I thought that we should perform different activities, methods and techniques for lower level or mixed level classes(S6, M)”

“We had to share the same class hour with my friends, so I do not think that our practice was efficient (S10, F)”

4.2 Contributions of Practicum Course

All the candidates claimed that Practicum course have positive contributions on their teaching career. More than half (10/13) of the teacher candidates who participated in the research emphasized that Practicum provided them great experience by practising a lot in real teaching atmosphere. Three out of ten participants stated that it increased their self awareness about their profession.

“ I practised how to transmit my knowledge to the students. I took my colleagues’ positive and negative comments seriously. I noticed how to teach English efficiently by applying appropriate methods and techniques (S1, F)”

“ Teaching Practicum provided us to see the real atmosphere of teaching. We experienced the correct teacher-student relationship. We also discovered how to take attention of different students and make them participate in lesson(S2, M)”

“ I had a chance to breathe the real classroom atmosphere. I learned how to control my excitement. It was a great chance for us to gain experience before facing our own classes. I thought that it was the most beneficial lesson of the last year of the school (S12, F)”

“ I realized that it was the job of my life(S5, F)”

“ It provided us to understand that we were real teachers. I became aware of the importance of my profession (S9, F)”

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

5.1 Conclusion

This research examined English teacher candidates' opinions on Practicum teaching course. It is clear that Practicum course provides the students to create their own bridges between the theoretical knowledge and real life practice of their profession. So, all the students in this study stated that Practicum course is very beneficial and they wished they could get this practice earlier and longer. This finding shows similarity with that of Oral's study. In his study, Oral found that %74 of teacher candidates complained about the short length of the Teaching Practicum period (Oral, 1997:12). They also pointed out that they had some problems related to the practice and classroom management, but they handled them successfully with the help of their practicum teachers in schools and practicum instructors. In his research, Bizati(2001) has found that inexperienced teachers have some difficulty in classroom management and discipline in class, but later when they get experience, they master it.

Moreover, they all thought that Practicum course contributed them a lot in terms of teaching practice and experience. They explained that they became familiar with school environment thanks to this course and they improved themselves in terms of use of different materials and techniques, classroom management and teaching to mixed level classes. Furthermore, Practicum course increased their self-awareness about their profession. They got rid of their worries related to initiating communication with the students.

As a result it is clear that Practicum course is a must for teacher candidates to gain experience in teaching-learning environment, create self-awareness and improve their personal skills.

5.2 Recommendations

1. In educational faculties, some extra courses or practices can be provided in order to make teacher candidates gain more classroom management skills.
2. In further studies not only the prospective teachers' opinions related to Practicum course but also those of instructors, teachers and administrators can be analyzed.

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