



## Prospective English Language Teachers' Opinions About Community Service Practices

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## İngilizce Öğretmen Adaylarının Topluma Hizmet Uygulamaları Hakkındaki Görüşleri

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### Abstract

Community service applications is a course provided by faculties of education in order to give the prospective teachers the chance to identify social problems related their field, develop project focused on social problems, analyze general needs of the society, become acquainted with public institutions, debate social problems, and develop positive attitude towards participating to community service practices. The aim of this study is to find out prospective language teachers' teaching experiences and opinions about their community service applications. 20 prospective teachers from an English language teaching department of a state university participated in this qualitative study. The participants were given a semi-structured questionnaire with questions related to their teaching experience at a kindergarten. After 10 weeks and 10 hours of teaching experience the participants' reports were analyzed according to content analysis approach. The results indicated that most of the participants developed positive attitudes towards teaching in such a public service and reported this activity as inspiring for their future teaching. The study concluded that more importance should be given to community service appliances since it is much helpful for prospective teachers' teaching experiences and at the same time it provides opportunity for students to identify social related issues and hence develop a bridge between the university and the society.

### Article Info

**Keywords:** Community service practices, Foreign language teacher education, Prospective language teachers.

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## İngilizce Öğretmen Adaylarının Topluma Hizmet Uygulamaları Hakkındaki Görüşleri

### Öz

Topluma hizmet uygulamaları dersi eğitim fakültelerindeki öğretmen adaylarına toplumdaki sosyal sorunları tanıma, sosyal projeler geliştirme, toplumun genel ihtiyaçlarını analiz etme, kamu kuruluşlarını tanıma, sosyal sorunları tartışma ve topluma hizmet uygulamalarına karşı olumlu tutum geliştirme imkânı sunan bir derstir. Bu çalışmanın amacı öğretmen adaylarının topluma hizmet dersi için gerçekleştirdikleri öğretmenlik deneyimlerini ve görüşlerini ortaya çıkarmaktır. Bu nitel çalışmaya, bir devlet üniversitesinin İngiliz dili eğitimi bölümünden 20 öğrenci katılmıştır. Katılımcılardan, bir devlet anaokulundaki öğretmenlik deneyimleriyle ilgili yarı yapılandırılmış sorular içeren bir dönem sonu raporu yazmaları istenmiştir. 10 haftalık ve 10 saatlik öğretmenlik deneyim ve gözlemlerini paylaştıkları bu rapordaki veriler, içerik analizi yöntemine göre değerlendirilmiştir. Sonuçlar, katılımcılarının büyük çoğunluğunun topluma hizmet uygulamaları kapsamında İngilizce öğretmeye karşı olumlu tutum geliştirdiklerini ve böylesine bir etkinliğin gelecekteki kariyerleri için ilham verici olduğunu göstermiştir. Çalışma sonucunda, topluma hizmet uygulamalarına, öğretmen adaylarına öğretmenlik deneyimi kazandırması ve onların toplumla ilgili sosyal konularda farkındalık yaratması ve böylece üniversite ile toplum arasında bir bağ kurulması açısından daha fazla önem verilmesi gerekliliği ortaya çıkmıştır.

### Makale Bilgisi

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Aday öğretmenler, Topluma hizmet uygulamaları, Yabancı dil öğretmen eğitimi.

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## **Background**

Education is often defined as a process of enabling learning, or the acquisition of knowledge, academic skills, social values, beliefs, and habits. However, in most of the educational settings, education is considered as a collection of knowledge only in academic skills, hence, its social and emotional aspect is often ignored (Schunk, 2012).

Universities have long been considered as educational establishments which are dedicated to the learning and personal development by providing new knowledge and required training for any field. However, as the world has become a more global place, the universities have started to make significant contributions to civil society. Along with creating knowledge and doing scientific research, the higher education institutions started to emphasize the importance of preparing their graduates for their contribution to society (Appe & Barragán, 2017).

The idea of community service learning is basically based on Dewey's ideal of experiential education model (Dewey, 1933). The theory involved integration of community service with the teaching programs and curricula. After the passage of the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993, the notion of service-learning drew a worldwide interest (Wilczensky & Coomey, 2007). The terms community service and service-learning are confused in many contexts, however both of them refer to a relationship between the school and the community. Constant with Dewey's educational approach which emphasizes the importance of experiential education, the constituents of service-learning create connections between school and the real world. The present study is based on prospective language teachers' perceptions on a Community Service Practices (CSP) course, so the participants were teachers as they were teaching at the service and learners as they were discussing their experiences at the faculty. Hence, this study will use the terms community service and service-learning interchangeably in the following sections.

Kolb (1984) used the initial studies of John Dewey to validate his own model which he defined as Experiential Learning. The experiential learning theory is based on a four-stage cycle: Concrete experience, Reflective Observation of the new experience, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. He considers any learning activity as effective when a person progresses through these four stage cycle. The theory is concerned with the learner's internal cognitive processes, and the impetus for the development of new concepts is provided by new experiences. "Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (Kolb, 1984, p. 38). Much of Kolb's theory is concerned with the learner's internal cognitive processes. Kolb postulated that learning involves the acquisition of abstract concepts that can be applied flexibly in a range of situations. In Kolb's theory, the impetus for the development of new concepts is provided by new experiences (McLeod, 2017).

Kolb's basic understanding of learning can also be defined as learning through reflection on doing. Kolb's philosophy is based on the process of learning through experience. The fundamental view of experiential learning relies on the role of emotions and feelings as a crucial part of the learning process. Hence, the main focus in experiential learning is on the process rather than the product. Thus, making discoveries and carrying out experiments with knowledge firsthand is more valuable than hearing or reading about others' experiences. As a result of the firsthand knowledge in a student's field of interest will in turn contributes significantly to the student's overall understanding of the relationship between the school and the real life. So, providing a bridge between the public has become a crucial issue for the future vision of the universities. In this sense, many countries who are in an effort for educational reform for more effective and efficient learning discuss this issue at the firsthand. Rather than implementing conventional type of teaching which only focuses on the attainment of academic knowledge, educational institutions, researchers, and teacher educators are now in an attempt to insert new values into their educational programs. As a part of these reforms, many educational institutions have started educational reforms in their teacher education programs by integrating public service courses that will enable the prospective teachers develop the sense of citizenship to encourage collaborative partnership between the university and the society (Serdyukov, 2017).

The link between the higher education and the society is crucial since the social interactional aspect of both teaching and learning is another key factor for social development not only for learners but also for teachers. The quality of education rely both on the competence of teachers and on their value orientations (Cohen et al., 2013). In other words, besides production of highly skilled manpower and research findings, universities should play a role in the building of new institutions of civil society, in developing new cultural values, and in training and socializing people of new social era (Sharma, 2015). Sharma defined universities as key institutions in processes of social change and development. Focusing be on the role of universities in bringing out economic, political, social and cultural

transformation in the society they concluded that, universities should play the role of building of new institutions of civil society, developing new cultural values, and training and socializing people of new social era.

In order to understand the effect of this cooperation both on society and on the higher education institutions, this paper reviewed empirical studies. For example, Astin and Sax (1998) investigated how undergraduate freshmen students (N=3450) are affected by service participation and its influence on student's academic development. The study concluded that participating in community service activities during the undergraduate years significantly increases the student's academic development, life skill development, and sense of civic responsibility. They postulated that community service learning is a powerful vehicle for improving student development during the undergraduate years. Another study by Moely et al. (2002) investigated the change in the views of college students (N=541) regarding civic and interpersonal skills and attitudes by using a pre- and post-service self-report questionnaires. The results revealed that students who participated in service-learning showed expected changes in civic attitudes and rating their own skills for community engagement. They also expressed their plans to be involved in civic activities in the future. However, the group of students who did not involve in service-learning during the semester, showed little change in scores on any of these scales. Their findings showed that service-learning had positive effects on personal conceptualizations of self, others, and societal issues.

Practical applications of campus-community partnership and examination of existing models of service-learning have also been investigated in various research. For example, Hildenbrand and Schultz (2015) investigated the effects of service-learning experiences on teacher candidates' classroom studies. After participating in the service-learning project, each teacher candidate (N=140) completed pre- and post-questionnaires and reflection assignments to report their perceptions about service-learning. The analysis of the data showed that the teacher candidates were very positive about their service-learning experiences, and their reports revealed pleasure with the incorporation of service-learning into their course work. In the light of the review of these studies, which were carried out under campus-community partnerships suggest that, this interaction between the community and the university have resulted in positive attainments for the participants, for the educational institutions, and for the society. As a result of this productive relationship, many educational programs have started to consider social aspect of learning as a part of achieving high quality teaching and learning standards. More specifically, education faculties constantly adapt their teaching programs to meet the need for bridging the gap between the university and the society (Hildenbrand & Schultz, 2015).

As a developing country, Turkey has also put an attempt on inserting the community service into teaching programs of educational faculties as a compulsory course. Since teachers are considered as social leaders for the society, the importance of their engagement in social activities even during their pre-service teaching has become the main motivation by Higher Education Council [YÖK], in 2006. The basic idea underpinning the idea of student teachers' active involvement in such social teaching activities was due to an understanding of prospective teachers about the needs and dynamics of the society that they belong to. In this respect, in 2006, in collaboration with Ministry of National Education, YÖK offered a compulsory course namely Community Service Practices (CSP), for teacher education programs including 2 hours of practice and 1 hour of theoretical course credits (YÖK, 2011). The aims and outcomes of the course were explained by YÖK in detail as follows:

The students who receive this course will;

1. Be sensitive to local problems and produce solutions.
2. Be an active participant in solving local and universal problems.
3. Create new projects for local and universal problems.
4. Play an active role in local and universal projects by cooperating with others.
5. Maintain effective communication skills while carrying out projects
6. Participate in panels, conferences, congresses, and symposiums as a participator, speaker or organizer.
7. Improve their self-evaluation skills.
8. Use their creative skills in all these activities

Basically, the course aims to help prospective teachers to recognize the importance of community service programs, to prepare projects for integration between the community and the university, and to take part in projects

voluntarily for an awareness of social responsibility. By engaging the prospective teachers with the society, they communicate effectively while carrying out projects. As the students carry out projects, they have the chance to identify current problems of society both in occupational and social terms. Also, by being a part of a project, they have the opportunity to collaborate with group members, hence become more social by sharing their hands on experiences. More specifically, in a one-semester course, groups of prospective teachers decide on a community project with their course lecturer and make a schedule for each of the group member's activity. After two hours of practice, group members share their observations and feelings in a one hour classroom gathering. In this way, students benefit from each other's experiences which in turn make this a reflective activity.

Since the proposal of the course by YÖK in 2006 for undergraduate teacher education programs, there has been a considerable interest on understanding prospective teachers' views and opinions about the CSP course from a variety of departments of teacher education faculties. In general, studies that focused on teacher candidates' opinions and perceptions on CSP course reported positive attitudes of students after a semester of service experience. Almost all these studies concluded that this course provided the prospective teachers the opportunity to apply their experiences in their future teaching careers. Besides, the student teachers' awareness of social responsibility improved and they became more social after they participated in CSP course. (Department of Science Education Teaching (Keleş & Aydın, 2011), Department of Social Sciences Teaching (Çetin & Sönmez, 2009; Gökçe, 2011; Topkaya, Tangülü, Coskun, 2018; Tuncel, Kop & Katılmış, 2011), Department of Primary School Teacher Education (Arcagök & Şahin, 2013), Department of Pre-school Teacher Education (Kılınç & Dere, 2014; Küçükoğlu & Koçyiğit, 2015), Department of Computer Education and Instructional Technologies (Kocadere & Seferoğlu, 2013; Tosun, 2014), Department of Physical Education Teaching (Mirzeoğlu, Özcan, Aktaş, & Çoknaz, 2011; Tilki, Hergüner, & Yaman, 2011), Department of Turkish Education (Sevim, 2011), Department of Music Teaching (Can, 2012), Department of Visual Arts Teaching (Aydın & Dilmaç, 2018).

Although the literature on CSP have presented considerable evidence for the effectiveness of the course from different educational disciplines, studies investigating prospective language teachers' opinions and experiences on the course is sparse.

Hallman and Burdick (2011) investigated the potential of the service-learning in fostering pre-service English teachers' understanding of their role and identity as future teachers. The data including pre-service English teachers' (N=19) experiences with service-learning were gathered by the help of reflective journals and focus group interviews. The analysis of the data involving the teacher identity revealed that service-learning has the potential to prompt pre-service English teachers to not only understand students as literacy learners but to also understand themselves as future teachers of English. Also, service-learning has the potential to be a pivotal experience for pre-service teachers early in their teaching careers. Finally, they concluded the study by proposing that service-learning can encourage prospective English teachers to complicate notions of teacher/student, official/unofficial language, singular authority/pluralistic power, and server/served. Although this study possesses a similar design of the present paper, the participants were not teaching English as a foreign language but as their mother tongue and a mean for literature teaching in the USA. Another difference of the two studies was their focus. While Hallman and Burdick tried to find out the ways in which the role of teacher must shift within the new English education, the present study was interested in finding out a possible change in the participants' understandings about their own conceptualization of teaching profession. However, although sparse, only a number of studies have previously been found in a context where English was taught as a foreign language. Al-Barwani, Al-Mekhlafi, and Nagaratnam (2013) carried out a research with pre-service teachers of English as a Foreign Language (N=65) by focusing on the problems and challenges faced when implementing service-learning. Their study also investigated the strategies used by the student teachers to overcome the challenges of public service. To find out the challenges and the Strategies in service-learning, the study made use of a survey by Anderson and Pickeral (1999). Statistical analysis of the data revealed the appreciation of the value of service-learning as a necessary and influential method of learning and that it could be a practical solution for the progress of skills and attitudes for citizenship and engagement in the society. The study concludes by suggesting an urgent need for integrating service-learning into pre-service teacher education in order to attain maximum effect on prospective language teachers, in order to develop citizenship, responsibility and many other positive attributes.

Tülüce (2014) investigated the attainment of prospective English language teachers (N=28) in a CSP delivered at a foundation university in Turkey. Data was gathered by the use of weekly reports which involved details about student teachers' practices and their personal views on their own performances during the public service. The results

of content analysis revealed four categories of attainment reported by student teachers as; personal, professional, emotional and social. The study concluded as emphasizing the importance of the CSP course by stating its contributions to the participants. According to the researcher, the service practice helped them in learning how to cope with problems, learning about the real life and developing their problem solving skills, along with recognizing the theory and practice relationship, having professional experience, developing a professional identity, and experiencing the student-teacher relationship.

In an unpublished master thesis Korkmaz (2015) investigated the opinions of prospective teachers (N=158) from an English Language Teaching Department (ELT) of a state university in Turkey. The main concern of the study was to examine the implementation process and the outcomes of the CSP course. By using both qualitative and quantitative methods, the study also focused on prospective language teachers' opinions for the aim of increasing the efficiency of the CSP course in the ELT department. The analysis of the data from a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews revealed that the CSP course enabled prospective teachers to identify the needs of the society and to improve their self-confidence significantly. The study concluded that the CSP course provided the prospective language teachers the opportunity to use their experiences in their future English teaching profession. Besides, the project that they participated in the framework of CSP course drove them to be more sensitive to social problems.

Boran and Karakuş (2017) Investigated perceptions of teacher candidates (N=7) about CSP at an English Language Teaching Department of a state university in Turkey. They aimed at examining the opinions of the teacher candidates about the goals, implementation and outcomes of the CSP course by using a form consisting of nine open ended questions. The analysis of the qualitative data showed that teacher candidates had the chance to get to know the society better and to integrate with it. Also, by cooperating with different institutions, the participants strengthened the emotional dimension and spirituality of the teaching profession by developing self-confidence and social skills. They concluded that teacher candidates found the course very useful, and that some suggestions about the issues should be taken into account so that the course could be implemented more productively.

This paper presents a study conducted by the course instructor with prospective language teachers enrolled at a CSP course involving 10 hours of teaching and 20 hours of reflective discussion on teaching experiences. The aim of this study is to find out pre-service language teachers' teaching experiences and opinions about their community service practices.

## **Methodology**

### **Aim of the study**

The aim of this study is to find out prospective service language teachers' teaching experiences and opinions about their community service practices. Additionally, this paper investigates attainments of the participants from their teaching practices, specific challenges encountered by prospective teachers, and the effects of the practice on their perceptions about teaching. The following research questions are addressed:

1. What are the prospective teachers' attainments from the CSP course?
2. What challenges did prospective teachers' have during the CSP?
3. How did prospective language teachers' CSP experience affect their opinions about teaching profession?

### **Participants and setting**

20 (F=12, M=8) 3rd year student teachers from an English language teaching department of a state university participated in the study. Their ages ranged between 20 and 23. All the participants were enrolled in a compulsory course namely "Community Service Practices". As already mentioned in the introduction part of this paper, CSP includes 2 hours of practice and 1 hour of theoretical course credits. As already described in detail in the literature part, the aim of the course is to help prospective teachers to recognize the importance of community service programs, to prepare projects for integration between the community and the university, and to take part in projects voluntarily for an awareness of social responsibility. The planning and the implementation of the course were as follows: Students were randomly divided into groups including 10 students each. They took part in a pre-offered and officially accepted project. For this study, student teachers participated in a 10 week (1 hour a week course) language teaching program for preschoolers at a state kindergarten. The reason why this context was chosen as the venue for application was

partially due to the social structure of the local community and the language teaching regulations of the national ministry of education. Despite the fact that the majority of the CSP studies were organized for disadvantaged groups in various social contexts. However, due to the social structure of the local community, no disadvantaged groups of learners were found. On the other hand, the decision for choosing the study group was due to the starting age of language education in Turkey. According to the regulations of the ministry of education, language courses are offered starting from 2<sup>nd</sup> grades. Hence, providing a basic language education for the preschoolers by the help of games and funny activities would help them develop positive attitudes to foreign language learning along with providing them fundamental background knowledge for their further language learning experiences. Following each teaching experience, the student teachers had the opportunity to realize the reflective observation of their new experiences during the discussion sessions organized by the course instructor with the participation of all the students involved in the project. Through feedback both from the instructor and other group members enabled them create abstract conceptualization of their previous experience of teaching.

As a result, the prospective teachers were given opportunity to use their knowledge and skills in a real life educational context by helping the community at the same time. The target population was composed of children at the age of 6. The program was implemented as an additional volunteer activity. The course content was developed by the cooperation of the project lecturer and the teacher students. A ten week English teaching program was designed by considering background, needs, and age of the children. The program included teaching of basic concepts such as colors, numbers, classroom objects etc. by using games and visual materials. For each teaching session, two student teachers were involved in teaching activities at the same time. Finally, at the end of the program involving 10 hours of teaching and 20 hours of reflective discussion, the participants presented their reports including 3 open ended questions.

### **The instrument**

Prospective teachers' reports including responds to three open-ended questions constituted the data for the study. The open-ended questions were developed with respect to existing literature, course content and aims and outcomes of the CSP course (Al-Barwani, Al-Mekhlafi, & Nagaratnam, 2013; Anderson & Pickeral, 1999; Hallman & Burdick, 2011; Korkmaz, 2015; Tülüce, 2014). The focus of the questions was on prospective teachers' challenges and attainments during teaching, and their opinions about the effect of the project on their perceptions about teaching profession. The questions were checked by an expert from the English language teaching department. The responses underwent content analysis. Categories and themes were specified separately by the comparison of the content analysis by two experts. Team coding not only aids definitional clarity but also is a good reliability check when it is carried out by two coders separately (Miles, Huberman and Saldana, 1994). This procedure enables the calculation of inter-rater reliability scores. The use of inter-rater reliability scores is supported by the assumption that there is a precise reality in the data that can be captured through coding. The reliability was calculated with reference to the formula: (Number of agreements/Total number of agreements and disagreement) x 100" (Altman, 1991). Based on the formula, the reliability coefficient was calculated as .89., which revealed a reasonable agreement among the two raters and was regarded as valid to make decisions and to consider the assessment process reliable since benchmarks for high agreement were defined between 0.80 -1.00 (Altman, 1991; Landis & Koch, 1977).

As a result of review literature and considering the aims and outcomes of the CSP course, the following questions were included in the open ended questionnaire:

1. What are your attainments from the community service practice?
2. What challenges did you have during the community service practice?
3. How did your community service practice experience affect your opinion about teaching profession?

### **Procedures for data analysis**

This study is based on a qualitative research design in order to investigate prospective language teachers' opinions about their community service practices since qualitative research is in-depth research and aims to understand why people think, feel, react and behave in the way that they do. When the emphasis is on a specific case, the influences of the local context should be taken into account. Hence, there is a strong possibility for understanding hidden, underlying or nonobvious issues. In other words, with its emphasis on people's lived experiences, qualitative data enables the researchers to find out the meanings people place on the events, processes, and structures of their lives and for connecting these meanings to the social world around them (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). As a widely used qualitative research technique, content analysis was implemented to interpret meaning from the content of the

data from the students' reports. Content analysis is frequently employed in qualitative research where the issue is one of counting the frequency and sequencing of particular words, phrases, or concepts found in the data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Content analysis enables the researchers, to filter words and/or phrases into fewer content related categories by classifying them into the same categories (Cavanagh, 1997). This study made use of inductive approach of content analysis since the structure of analysis is not operationalized on the basis of testing a theory. Since there is not enough former knowledge about the phenomena under investigation the inductive approach is used to specify the categories (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). To analyze the data, the researcher used the open coding technique to create categories and abstraction (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014).

### Findings

In this section, findings of the study will be presented in accordance with each question from student reports. To constitute the reliability of the study, we will demonstrate the existing links between the results and the literature in order to make defensible inferences based on the collection of valid and reliable data (Weber, 1990). Following that, sample participant responses will be quoted for each category and theme accordingly.

#### **Question 1: What are your attainments from the community service practice?**

The results of the content analysis with reference to the first question revealed 13 different themes in four main categories (Table 1). These categories are personal attainments, occupational attainments, emotional attainments, and social attainments. The categories found for the attainment from CSP course are in line with the literature. Tülüce (2014) reported four similar categories in her study as; personal, professional, emotional, and social attainments. Also, Wilczensky and Coomey (2007) postulated four similar aspects by defining them as disconnected pieces of a puzzle. They presented these features as; social, emotional, academic, and career.

**Table 1.** Categories and themes for responses to question 1

	<b>Personal Attainments</b>	<i>f</i>	<b>Occupational Attainments</b>	<i>f</i>	<b>Emotional Attainments</b>	<i>f</i>	<b>Social Attainments</b>	<i>f</i>
<b>1</b>	Self-confidence	15	Practice vs. theory	17	Pleasure of teaching	11	Communicating with others	14
<b>2</b>	Sense of responsibility	12	Classroom management	15	Pleasure of helping others	16	Cooperating with group members	9
<b>3</b>	Sense of competency	9	Importance of planning and using materials	9			Awareness of other people's problems	4
<b>4</b>	Self-reflection	3	Importance of experience	5				

The first category, "*personal attainments*" includes four main themes namely, self-confidence, sense of responsibility, sense of competency, and self-reflection. Remarkable number of the participants provided responses that included expressions stating that CSP provided self-confidence for teaching English in the classroom ( $f=15$ ).

**S9:** "This experience helped me to think about my future teaching career and to realize that I had a lot to change. In a few couple of weeks, I had difficulty in terms of what to do in the classroom or how to warn the children about their misbehaviors. However, in the following weeks, I started to figure out how to keep the whole class silent, how to make the classes funny, and how to be more creative in the classroom. I think that, there is a huge difference between my first and the last teaching session. I believe that I became very close to being a teacher and made sure that I could be a good teacher who loves his profession very much."

**S11:** "At the beginning of the practice, I was scared because I was going to teach for the first time. I did not have any idea about what to do in front of the students. But, this practice helped me to gain my self-confidence about teaching and enabled me to teach effectively with pleasure."

Additionally, ( $f=12$ ) students also reported that they benefited from the practice in terms of attaining self-responsibility as a teacher.



**S8:** “As a teacher candidate, CSP helped me to develop the sense of responsibility for my students and the teaching occupation. Besides, I felt like a part of the classroom and developed a kind of ownership towards teaching and towards my students.”

Furthermore, other participants (f=9) reported that this experience helped to improve their sense of competence, while only a few participants (f=3) mentioned the self-reflection aspect of the project as an attainment.

**S15:** “This was the first time I experienced teaching in a real class. I thought that teaching children would be challenging. However, this experience let me realize that, with appropriate preparation, things would be more easy and enjoyable. Now, I believe that I am competent of teaching English to any level of learners.”

**S20:** “I benefited a lot from this experience as a prospective teacher. During the weeks of teaching, I had the opportunity to become aware of my own weaknesses and strengths as a future teacher.”

The second category includes four main themes for the “*occupational attainments*”. These themes are; practice vs. theory, classroom management, importance of experience, planning and using suitable materials. Overwhelming number of participants (f=17) provided responses related with the difference between the theory they learned at the faculty, and the actual practice of teaching.

**S10:** “This practice provided much contribution to me as a prospective teacher. The most important attainment of me is to understand the difference between the theory and practice of teaching English. What we learned at school is important of course. But, the awareness of what was happening in the classroom was sometimes more important.”

On the other hand, majority of the participants (f=15) claimed that another most important attainment was realizing the importance of classroom management.

**S5:** “Thanks to CSP, I managed to defeat my fear of classroom management. Before the practice, I had no idea about how to motivate a class of learners or attract their attentions. However, at the end of the teaching practice, I felt myself as an experienced in conducting classroom behavior as a future teacher.”

Moreover, importance of planning and using suitable materials (f=9) and importance of experience (f=5) were two other themes under the category of occupational attainments.

**S7:** “This course enabled me to put into practice the knowledge which I was aware of but had not practically used before. I had experiences about the importance of a detailed lesson plan. Because during some lessons, I had problems about some activities and I overcame troubles by the help of my lesson plan. Also, now I have a deeper understanding of the importance of materials used in the activities. I learned that if you have well prepared materials, you should feel comfortable about the implementation of any activity.”

The third category includes two themes for the “*emotional attainments*”. These themes are; pleasure of teaching (f=11) and pleasure of helping others (f=16). The majority of the participants emphasized the sense of helping others voluntarily.

**S1:** “The course showed us that we gain a lot when we are in the effort of teaching without being paid. For the first time in my life, I felt so happy by being a part of a volunteer project. Thanks to this course, I realized that the smiles on children’s face were more important than being paid.”

The third category includes three themes for the “*social attainments*”. These themes are; communicating with others (f=14), cooperating with group members (f=9), and awareness of other people’s problems (f=4). Participants’ opinions about social aspect of the project are quoted as follows.

**S2:** “Before starting the project, I used to believe that being a teacher is to do with teaching activities. However, as the weeks passed, I started to realize that teachers might help their students by communicating with them in a friendly manner. Also, I had to ask for help from other group members about some problems. The ideas they provided was very helpful to me.”

### ***Question 2: What challenges that did you have during the community service practice?***

The results of the content analysis with reference to the second question revealed 6 different themes under three main categories (Table 2). These categories are, curricular issues, learner issues, and student teacher issues.

**Table 2.** Categories and themes for responses to question 2

	<b>Curricular issues</b>	<i>f</i>	<b>Learner issues</b>	<i>f</i>	<b>Student teacher issues</b>	<i>f</i>
<b>1</b>	Lack of a course curriculum	14	Unmotivated learners	12	Establishing authority	18
<b>2</b>	Finding suitable activities	11	Lack of literacy skills	10	Lack of experience	11

These three categories of challenges resemble with the findings of Al-Barwani, Al-Mekhlafi, and Nagaratnam (2013). They investigated the problems and challenges faced during public service by focusing on five categories, namely; institutional issues, curricular issues, community issues, faculty issues, and student issues.

The first category, “*curricular issues*” comprises two themes as, lack of a course curriculum, and finding suitable activities. Remarkable number of the participants ( $f=14$ ) stated the major difficulty as the lack of a curriculum or a course content for their CSP project. Also, in relation with the first theme, student teachers had difficulty in finding suitable activities and materials for kindergarten students.

**S 20:** “Prior to the practice, we had a brain storming with group members in order to constitute a 10 week teaching program. However, designing a course in this level was very hard for us since our learners were preschoolers and they had no literacy skills. Hence, deciding on what to teach and how to teach was very problematic at the early weeks of the teaching practice”

The second category, “*learner issues*” includes two remarkable themes as, unmotivated learners and lack of literacy skills which are related to the age of the learners. Since the target teaching population was preschoolers, the prospective teachers had challenged difficulties in attention control ( $f=12$ ). Besides, owing to the fact that preschoolers did not have any literacy skills, the student teachers in finding suitable activities and materials for kindergarten students which do not require development of reading or writing skills ( $f=10$ ).

**S15:** “The most remarkable problem was that the students did not have any literacy skills. So, we tried hard to find activities and materials that did not involve reading or writing. This was not easy because I did not have such a teaching experience. Although we have courses in which we have to perform microteaching practices, teaching without writing or reading was a big challenge for us.”

**S6:** “The learner group was extremely energetic. They were walking around as I was teaching. So, I had to find more funny and interesting activities to draw their attentions. Otherwise they did not seem to participate in the activities. Many times, I felt exhausted at the end of the lesson.”

For the third category, student teacher issues, the two remarkable themes are related to the occupational challenges for student teachers since the course was their first time real life teaching experience. Nearly all of the participants reported that they had difficulty in maintaining the authority during the lessons ( $f=15$ ). Lack of teaching experience ( $f=11$ ) and the age level of their learners resulted in challenges in terms of classroom management.

**S5:** “During the first a few weeks we had to deal with behavioral problems rather than involving in teaching activities. Most of the time, during almost the whole lesson, I had to warn the students to be quiet or stop. Honestly, I could not figure out how to react in such a situation because it was my first time of teaching in a real context.”

### **Question 3: How did your CSP experience affect your opinions about teaching profession?**

The content analysis with reference to the third question revealed three categories (Table 3). These categories are, awareness of difficulties, pleasure of teaching, realization of own weaknesses. The personal changes in terms teaching occupation was also reported by Tülüce (2014).

**Table 3.** Categories for responses to question 3

		<i>f</i>
<b>1</b>	Awareness of difficulties	16
<b>2</b>	Pleasure of teaching	13
<b>3</b>	Realization of own weaknesses	9

Almost all of the participants' approach to teaching occupation changed both in negative and positive ways. Awareness of difficulties (f=16) and pleasure of teaching (f=13) were the major categories in participants' reports.

**S5:** "I realized that teaching occupation is really a hard job since it requires patience and self-confidence. Despite all the challenges, I was very happy with students' feedback. Happily, I can say that I will do the right job."

**S13:** "I have always wanted to become a teacher since my childhood. So, there is no change in my future plans. On the other hand, I realized that being a teacher is much more challenging than I used to think. I can now say that patience is the keyword in this occupation. Although I was exhausted even after a single lesson, the smiles on my students' faces made me forget about all the difficulties."

**S16:** "After starting the practice, I realized that teaching occupation is harder than I expected. I think I have to be very energetic and patient so that I can have a better teaching performance. Although it is a tiring job, I had the joy of teaching something to someone, and I still want to become a teacher."

Also a considerable number of responses were about student teachers' self-reflection on their weaknesses in terms of teaching skills (f=9). They stated that thanks to this teaching experience, they feel more confident about how to behave and what to do in the classroom when they become teachers of their own classes.

**S9:** "I am happy with the CSP course because, although I had hard times in the classroom, the project helped me to realize my weaknesses as a prospective teacher and I tried to change myself in a positive way. I believe that this practice gave me the opportunity to see myself as a teacher before becoming a teacher. I feel myself more experienced now and I will be more confident in the early days of my career."

### Discussion

This study focused on student teachers' reports submitted after 10 weeks and 10 hours of teaching experience at a kindergarten as a part of a course offering a project that involves community service practices. Based on the experiential education model of Dewey (1933), the CSP course provided an opportunity for prospective teachers of English to be a part of a social project, and to reflect on their teaching experiences as future teachers at the same time. A number of studies emphasized the importance of CSP courses by offering service teachers the opportunity to learn by doing and experiencing (Arcagök, 2011; Korkmaz, 2015). During the course, the student teachers had the chance to implement their theoretical knowledge into practice and experience teaching profession at the first hand. Teaching experience and reflective observation of this new experience helped the student teachers to re-conceptualize their understanding of teaching and let them realize their own potentials (Kolb, 1984).

Being a part of the project, the participants of this study had personal, occupational, emotional, and social attainments. They also gained self-confidence, sense of responsibility, sense of competency, and self-reflection which in turn improved their personal development (Akçay & Ensar, 2014; Tülüçe, 2014). By involving actively in a public service practice, the participants had opportunities to communicate with other group members and with other stakeholders of the project which helped them develop their interpersonal skills and sense of cooperating with others. Also, by being involved in such a project, they figured out other people's problems (Wilczensky & Coomey, 2007).

Besides, by doing volunteer teaching, they gained some emotional attainments such as the joy of teaching and the pleasure of helping others. As prospective teachers, they also had the opportunity to realize the difference between what they had learned at their departments and the actual practice in the classroom. Remarkable number of participants reported that this project helped them to develop better skills in terms of classroom management. They also figured out the importance of planning lessons and using appropriate materials while teaching. Consequently, they had a clear understanding of the importance of experience for teaching occupation (Korkmaz, 2015).

On the other hand, while the student teachers were teaching in a real classroom setting, they challenged some difficulties in terms of curricular and learner issues. Since they were teaching preschoolers who had no literacy skills yet, they had to motivate the learners with such activities which should not have involved any reading or writing. By having this relatively early teaching practice, the student teachers had the chance of having experience about various aspects of teaching such as establishing authority in the classroom (Al-Barwani, Al-Mekhlafi, & Nagaratnam, 2013).

During the teaching practice, the participants experienced some changes in their understanding of the teaching occupation. The reports clearly indicated that, this experience enabled the participants to realize the difficulties of being a teacher by first-hand experience. Despite all challenges they had during the project, they questioned their own teaching skills and managed to recognize their own weaknesses and strengths as a future teacher. This self-reflection helped the participants by providing opportunity to question themselves and their attitudes towards the teaching occupation. The implementation of this project, contributed greatly to the development of the future teachers' critical thinking skills. The experience they gained was really precious by offering them teaching practice which would be much help for their practicum when they become pre-service teachers (McClam, Diambra, Burton, Fuss & Fudge, 2008). Despite all the challenges, the most remarkable attainment for the participants was experiencing the pleasure of helping someone voluntarily and the sense of being an important part of the society (Tülüce, 2014).

### **Conclusions and Implications**

This study is partially based on Dewey's argument that learning is a process and must begin with experience and relate to the student's interest. In this sense, by participating in a community service practice project, prospective language teachers had the opportunity to realize the actual context of teaching English along with experiencing the sense of helping others voluntarily. Overwhelming number of participants of this study realized that this project helped them develop positive motivation not only for their studies, but also for their future career as a language teacher. In many educational contexts, including developed countries such as the United States, Japan, and Germany, more importance is given to practices of public service due to the fact that students who participate in community service practices are more serious and attentive about their academic performances when compared to others who are not involved in such practices (Hatcher & Erasmus, 2008). Today, in many western teaching programs, collaborative studies and social skills of the students are valued as much as their academic skills. Hence, participating in social projects should also be encouraged in tertiary education in Turkey by putting more emphasis on volunteer social activities. All things considered, community service involvement should be an integral part of teacher education programs since it is an effective way for student teachers to help others by devoting their time, effort, and skills without compensation (Preece, 2017).

As already stated in the literature review section, this study is based on the basic premises of Experiential Learning Model by Kolb (1984), which is based on a four-stage cycle. First of all, the participants' teaching practices provided them concrete experience. Following that stage they had the opportunity to realize the reflective observation of the new experience during the discussion sessions organized by the course instructor. By the help of feedback both from the instructor and other group members, they created abstract conceptualization of their previous experience which they could use for further active experimentation of their own personal theories about teaching a language. Hence, the overlap between stages of Kolb's cycle and the design of the course enabled the researcher to be able to draw a direct link between the theory and the practice of teaching.

This study also has some implications for CSP course designers. Faculty members who are responsible for the implementation of community service projects should take the needs of the society into account. Also, the whole process of implementation should be carefully planned and monitored by the educators. The collaboration and communication between the stake holders of the programs should be well established in order to provide a link between the classroom training and practical applications of theoretical knowledge. The course should also include meeting and discussion sessions in which the practitioners share their opinions related to their teaching experience and their emotional attainments.

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