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## Reflections on practicum experiences of non-ELT student teachers in Turkey

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### Abstract

In English language teacher education (hereafter ELT) programs of Turkish universities, teaching practicum has a critical value due to its pivotal role in equipping student teachers with the necessary competences and preparing them for the teaching profession. Practicum experience turns out to be of greater importance for the graduates of other English language departments (hereafter non-ELT) such as English Linguistics, English Language and Literature or American Culture and Literature who attend pedagogical formation certificate programs offered by faculties of education. These student teachers do not have as much opportunity to observe teachers and practice teaching as ELT department graduates. Therefore, reflections on the teaching practicum experiences of these student teachers might provide insights into the nature of the aforementioned intensive teacher education programs, and the special needs of non-ELT department graduates who decide to become teachers of English and attend these programs. The present study aims to examine non-ELT student teachers' practicum experiences and put forward some practical suggestions in order to improve their teaching skills. Data were collected from ten randomly selected non-ELT student teachers enrolled in a pedagogical formation certificate program at a state university in Turkey using three major sources: observations of video recordings of student teachers' teaching practices by means of an observation form, the university supervisor's reflections on these teaching practices and the teacher candidates' self-reflections. Initially, the teaching performances were analyzed statistically, and the qualitative data gathered from the remaining two sources were separately subjected to thematic analysis. The results were then integrated. The study revealed that non-ELT student teachers need more practicum opportunities in the classes of truly expert and experienced teachers and supervisors to develop their English language teaching abilities.

**Keywords:** teacher education, non-ELT departments, practicum experience, teaching English

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## **Introduction**

In today's world, education, learning and teaching have gained greater importance than ever before. This is due mainly to the fact that individuals need to attain a larger amount of knowledge to learn what they need and many more skills to survive in the modern world, and that this demand reflects on teacher responsibilities and teacher education goals in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Darling-Hammond, 2006). To meet this need for teacher education, equipping student teachers effectively with both theoretical knowledge about their fields of study and individual experience of teaching by means of teaching practicum has long been the ultimate goal of every pre-service teacher education program in all fields. This is the same for language teacher education programs in which student teachers are given the opportunity to get both academic knowledge on language education and practicum experience in schools.

Teaching practicum has been preserving its importance within the scope of teacher education programs for long. Field-based experiences in real classrooms during the teaching practicum leave their significant traces on student teachers' individual development towards the teaching profession (Farrell, 2008). In this sense, by means of the teaching practicum, student teachers have a chance to personally experience the real classroom atmosphere in which a real curriculum is applied with actual students and teachers (Huling, 1998). Along with providing a framework for linking the theoretical aspects of teacher education with practice opportunities (Allen & Wright, 2014), teaching practicum also helps student teachers to improve their individual teaching competences (Smith & Lev-Ari, 2005). Accordingly, with the help of the teaching practicum experiences, student teachers in language teacher education programs try to put their initial theoretical knowledge on language learning and teaching into practice. The effectiveness of this practicum period is no doubt dependent on the efforts of several parties including not only student teachers but also university supervisors, cooperating / mentor teachers at schools, school administrators, and so on.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Language Teacher Education***

With its focus on the concepts of language and language teaching, language teacher education emphasizes the attainment of both a knowledge base about the language being taught and expertise in language teaching skills. Coining the term 'second language teacher education' for the whole process of preparing student teachers for the teaching profession through teacher training and education, Richards (1990, p. 15) underlines the goal of this process as "to provide opportunities for the novice to acquire the skills and competencies of effective teachers and to discover the working rules that effective teachers use". Thus, language teacher education programs are implemented with this aim in mind.

Language teacher education programs in general comprise courses related with the field of study, didactics and general knowledge, which means student teachers of languages receive education to develop their linguistic, communicative, intercultural and general competences along with their language teaching skills. There are four components of knowledge that form the basis for these programs: content knowledge, pedagogic content knowledge, pedagogic knowledge, and support knowledge (Day, 1993). Besides a well-

developed proficiency in all skills of the target language, the other language capabilities of a good language teacher can be being able to make use of the target language as a tool for communication for different goals in actual life; to understand the media as a product of the target culture, and to communicate effectively with native speakers of the language learned (Peyton, 1997; Phillips, 1991). Research showed that prospective teachers give prominence to different aspects of the foreign language including not just knowledge of language, but the culture reflecting that language and the whole world as well, which is a concrete indicator of the needs for developing their intercultural communicative competence (Arıkan, 2010). All these knowledge, skills and abilities reflected above are categorized under four sections (i.e. Structure, Knowledge and Understanding, Strategies and Skills, and Values) in the European Profile for Language Teacher Education developed by Kelly and Grenfell (2004) on behalf of European Commission.

In the Turkish context, those who have majored in English programs other than English Language Teaching such as graduates of the departments of English or American language and literature, linguistics or translation often seek a pedagogy (language teaching) certificate to be recruited as English language teachers in schools (Mirici & Yangın Ekşi, 2016). In the certificate programs, they receive almost the same courses offered in English Language Teaching Departments of Education Faculties. However, this program is quite intensive, and it has to be completed within a year's period including the teaching practice at schools (practicum).

For such intensive and speedy teacher training programs, there is a special need to provide a fruitful local or international practicum period in order to increase its degree of effectiveness. During the practicum period, student teachers have first-hand experience of being present in a classroom context as a teacher, get acquainted with the actual classroom context as a part of the initial teacher education, and have an opportunity to see their own teaching abilities under the supervision of a mentor teacher at national or local scale, which are highly beneficial for prospective teachers (Atay, 2007; Kabilan, 2013). Within the practicum period, these prospective teachers also learn to ask and answer useful questions and value different perspectives about diverse issues, which points to an intellectual development (Nguyen, 2009).

In many European universities, student teachers are encouraged to keep the European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages (EPOSTL) in order to keep record of their academic achievements through self-assessment, and to set up future goals for their teaching career (Mirici & Demirbaş, 2013; Mirici & Hergüner, 2015; Newby et al., 2007). Such a portfolio may be considered as an important tool to support the practicum period through increasing student teachers' awareness of different components of language teaching activities in and outside of the classroom settings. In addition, keeping a journal can be helpful to record events and ideas for the purpose of later reflection, and to trigger insights about teaching (Richards & Lockhart, 2007).

### ***Teaching Practicum***

In teacher education programs, teaching practicum is the phase in which student teachers find the opportunity to be present at an actual school setting within the scope of their

program and to have their first experiences as teacher candidates after the microteaching sessions they have as part of their previous courses on teacher education. In this sense, student-teaching practicum is no doubt one of the most important stages of initial teacher education. Referring to the uniqueness of the practicum period for student teachers' professional development, Fives, Hamman and Olivarez (2007, pp. 917-918) underscore its prominence as "a prolonged mastery experience, with opportunities for both vicarious experiences and verbal persuasion, which serve to facilitate the development of the pre-service teachers' teaching efficacy beliefs." For an effective integration of theory and practice through practicum experience, Darling-Hammond (2006) recommends extensive teaching practices accompanied by rigorous supervision which give student teachers the chance to benefit from modelling of experts in the school context with various learners as well as suggesting the inclusion of such pedagogies as action research, in-depth analysis of the teaching and learning process and performance assessment.

The importance of the practicum period for student teachers' preparation for the teaching profession is highly emphasized through research results which highlight the positive influence of an effective teaching practicum on student teachers' development towards being a teacher (e.g., Caires & Almeida, 2007; Fives et al., 2007; Hascher, Cocard, & Moser, 2004; Klassen & Durksen, 2014; Smith & Lev-Ari, 2005). For instance, in a study carried out in a teacher education institution in Israel, Smith and Lev-Ari (2005) probed into the teaching practicum experiences of student teachers by means of a questionnaire and asked the participants to evaluate their teacher education program. The results indicated that student teachers attach a high level of importance to the teaching practicum along with theoretical aspects of the program and get supported by their supervisors the most. In a similar vein, Hascher et al. (2004) conducted a study with student teachers and their mentors in Switzerland, and evaluated the learning processes during the practicum period using questionnaires and diaries. The study demonstrated that student teachers significantly improved themselves in terms of lesson preparation, teaching and post processing the lessons. The results were supported by the findings attained through the ratings of student teachers' development by the mentors. Likewise, carrying out a mixed methods study in a Canadian teacher education program, Klassen and Durksen (2014) investigated how pre-service teachers' self-efficacy and work stress changed during the period of their teaching practicum, and found that the participant pre-service teachers' significantly rising self-efficacy was accompanied by a lessened stress in time during the practicum period. The results of the study also underlined the positive role of mentor teachers in the aforementioned positive orientation.

Especially in the last decade, the component of teaching practicum in teacher education programs has also been researched extensively in the Turkish context in terms of both English language teacher education programs (e.g., Başıyurt Tüzel & Akcan, 2009; Coşkun, 2013; Gürsoy, 2013; Paker, 2008; Sarıçoban, 2008) and other fields of teacher education programs such as science teacher education, elementary teacher education and mathematics teacher education (e.g., Baştürk, 2009; Eraslan, 2009; Koç & Yıldız, 2012). An evaluation of the research on the practicum period of Turkish pre-service teachers of English indicated student teachers' positive attitudes towards an intense teaching practicum with

professional development opportunities (Gürsoy, 2013) as well as their anxiety regarding such aspects of teaching practicum as evaluation of their teaching performance, classroom management, instructional strategies, relationships with mentor teachers at practicum schools and coping with disruptive students (Paker, 2011; Yangın Ekşi & Yılmaz Yakışık, 2016). Research also displayed limited teaching practice opportunities for pre-service teachers as well as lack of a strong link between theoretical and practical aspects of teacher education at times (Seferoğlu, 2006).

With its condensed structure and intensive content, the component of teaching practicum in pedagogical formation certificate programs in Turkey seems to be quite welcoming for researchers. Despite not specifically focusing on pre-service English teachers, various studies have been conducted on pedagogical formation programs (e.g., Eraslan & Çakıcı, 2011; Tural & Kabadayı, 2014; Yapıcı & Yapıcı, 2013). Moreover, despite not specifically researching the practicum period, in their study with two groups of prospective English language teachers, Demiroz and Yesilyurt (2015) compared the perceptions of English language teaching students regarding the effective foreign language teacher with those of the English language and literature students. The study found a significant difference in favor of the ELT students. In the light of the discussions above, it is quite apparent that an examination of the teaching practices of non-ELT student teachers during practicum period might offer insights into their developing teaching competences, strengths and weaknesses as prospective English teachers and guide them in terms of the specific aspects that require further development.

## **Method**

### ***Aims of the Study***

This study primarily aimed to investigate non-ELT student teachers' practicum experiences. The study was further concerned with providing some recommendations for the improvement of their teaching skills. To do this, answers were sought for the following research questions:

1. To what extent do the non-ELT student teachers teach effectively during practicum?
2. What are the supervisor's reflections on non-ELT student teachers' teaching practices?
3. What are non-ELT student teachers' self-reflections on their teaching practices?

### ***Setting and Participants***

The current study was conducted at a state university in Ankara, Turkey in 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 academic years. Data were collected from ten randomly selected non-ELT student teachers enrolled in the pedagogical formation certificate program. Demographic characteristics describing the participant student teachers are provided in Table 1.

**Table 1***Demographic Characteristics of Participants*

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>n</i>
<b>Age</b>	
22 years	2
23 years	4
24 years	2
25 years	1
26 years	1
<b>Gender</b>	
Female	6
Male	4
<b>Educational Background (BA)</b>	
English Language and Literature	6
American Culture and Literature	1
Translation and Interpreting Studies	2
English Linguistics	1
<b>Teaching Experience</b>	
Yes	4
No	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>

As can be seen in Table 1, the participants (6 female; 4 male) were at similar ages ranging from 22 to 26 when they started to attend the pedagogical formation certificate program. They were all graduates of other departments such as English Language and Literature ( $n = 6$ ), American Culture and Literature ( $n = 1$ ), Translation and Interpreting Studies ( $n = 2$ ), and English Linguistics ( $n = 1$ ). While 4 of the participant student teachers had experience of teaching in some private language courses before starting this certificate program, 6 had no experience of teaching. Hence, the study involved a harmonious group of participants in terms of previous teaching experience.

***Instruments***

In the study, three major instruments were made use of as follows:

*Video recordings:* The initial source for the investigation of student teachers' teaching practices involved the video recordings. The videos of student teachers during practice teaching were analyzed by means of an observation form involving different criteria for the assessment of student teachers' teaching performances. For this purpose, Brown's (2007, pp.

496-498) teacher self-observation form adapted from Christison and Bassano (1984) was readapted for the current research context of Turkish pre-service teachers of English. To this end, the wording of the items was reformatted to fit evaluation purposes of the researchers. Thus, the self-observation form was turned into an observation form so that the researchers might benefit from its structured layout with various criteria that conform to observation by others as well. Moreover, some of the criteria in the original form were left out of the scope of the present study either due to not being simply observable or due to being inapplicable to the limited class hours of practice teaching. The readapted version of the observation form was finalized through expert opinion. The finalized observation form consisted of three main sections: (1) education environment, (2) the individuals, and (3) the activity. As in the original observation form, these sections were further divided into different categories to assess student teachers' performances. The participant student teachers were evaluated in terms of *relationship to students*, *classroom*, and *presentation* in Section 1. The criteria for the evaluation of teaching performances were *reinforcement* and *development* in Section 2. Lastly, *interaction* and *language* constituted the evaluation criteria in Section 3. In accordance with the original form, pre-service teachers' teaching performances were rated based on the given criteria. Accordingly, as in the original observation form, the teaching performances were evaluated based on a rating scale from 0 to 3 (0: Not applicable; 1: Needs improvement; 2: Good; 3: Excellent). Further in-depth information about the aforementioned criteria in the observation form is provided in research findings related to the observations.

*Supervisor's reflections:* Apart from the observations of teaching practices, the student teachers' supervisor at university was asked for his reflections on these practices. A semi-structured interview was conducted with the supervisor for this purpose. The supervisor was asked to evaluate the student teachers' teaching practices in terms of the main criteria used in the observation form.

*Student teachers' self-reflections:* As a third source for data collection, the reflective journals of the student teachers were utilized in the study. Throughout their teaching practicum, the student teachers were asked to keep a journal about their teaching practices. Their self-reflections about the teaching practicum in general and the specific lessons observed by the researchers in particular were included in the study for data analysis.

### ***Data Collection Procedure and Analysis***

Data were collected from the participants at the end of their teaching practicum. The student teachers kept a journal to evaluate their developing teaching competences and to reflect specifically on the lessons they taught at the practicum schools determined by the faculty. They were also asked to record their lessons and submit the videos along with the journals within a portfolio at the end of the semester. The data gathered through these videos and reflective journals were accompanied with the data collected by means of the interview conducted with the supervisor.

The data gathered from the aforementioned sources were separately analyzed first. The videos were analyzed by means of the observation form by two independent raters specialized in English language teaching. With the help of the rating scale reflecting how well the student teachers performed in each criterion, the raters evaluated the student teachers' performances

during practicum. The two raters then worked on the evaluations together, and the final results were attained using basic descriptive statistics. The qualitative data gathered through supervisors' reflections and the student teachers' self-reflections were examined independently by means of thematic analysis. For this purpose, the qualitative data gathered through these sources were initially organized, examined in depth, coded and organized around the recurring themes by two independent coders. The thematic analysis by these two coders yielded an agreement rate of 87%. The findings attained through the analyses are provided with extracts from the reflections on teaching practices based on the emergent themes in the research findings.

## Findings

### *Students Teachers' Teaching Performances Based on the Observations*

The current study sought to reveal the teaching practices of non-ELT student teachers and to offer recommendations for the improvement of their future teaching performances in turn. Based on this ultimate purpose, the study initially aimed to find out the way the student teachers perform during teaching practices. The results reached through observation forms were subjected to statistical analysis for this purpose. Findings obtained through descriptive statistics can be seen in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Student Teachers' Teaching Performances*

<i>Criteria</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
The classroom	10	2.58	.29
Relationship to students	10	2.38	.34
Reinforcement	10	2.25	.24
Presentation	10	1.74	.35
Language	10	1.67	.32
Interaction	10	1.61	.32
Development	10	1.43	.65

An examination of the table above indicates that non-ELT student teachers performed most effectively in the category of classroom ( $M = 2.58$ ,  $SD = .29$ ) with the highest mean value out of 3. In other words, student teachers were most competent at the practices related to the preparation of classroom materials, the arrangement of seating based on the specific activities, and so on. The second category in which the student teachers displayed a considerably efficient performance was relationship to students ( $M = 2.38$ ,  $SD = .34$ ). This was followed by the category of reinforcement ( $M = 2.25$ ,  $SD = .24$ ) reflecting the student teachers' performances in motivating students during teaching practices, supporting the learning process through reviewing the novel concepts at the end of the lesson and summarizing learning points.

As for the categories in which the student teachers demonstrated a lower level of performance, the participants displayed the lowest performance within the categories of development ( $M = 1.43$ ,  $SD = .65$ ), interaction ( $M = 1.61$ ,  $SD = .32$ ), language ( $M = 1.67$ ,  $SD = .32$ ), and presentation ( $M = 1.74$ ,  $SD = .35$ ) respectively. A closer analysis of these categories shows that student teachers were least competent at the category of development, which pointed to being open to trying new ideas related to language teaching, the use of novel techniques, activities and strategies. This was followed by the category of interaction, which indicated that the participant student teachers performed less effectively in keeping their dominance at the minimum level in the class, increasing student involvement, and creating an interactive atmosphere in the class similar to the real life interaction. The category of language in which the participants exhibited a similarly low performance represented the practices pertaining to preparing and implementing activities appropriate for the proficiency levels of the students, making the class content meaningful and relevant, and creating a language-focused atmosphere. Lastly, the category of presentation reflecting such performances of student teachers as using their voices effectively in the class to be heard by all students, using a clear and readable handwriting on the board, encouraging the implementation of project and group work, giving thinking time and promoting self- and peer-correction appears to be in need of further improvement as well.

### ***Supervisor's Reflections on Student Teachers' Teaching Practices***

Besides the observation-based data attained through the videos of student teachers' teaching practices, a second source of data for the current study involved the supervisor's reflections on these teaching practices. Departing from the criteria utilized in the observation form, the supervisor evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of the participant non-ELT student teachers. Corroborating the results reached by means of the independent observations of student teachers' teaching practices, the supervisor initially underscored their positive attitudes and their efficiency in building a good relationship with students. The following statements extracted from the interview with the supervisor illustrate these strengths.

In general, the student teachers doing their teaching practicum as a part of the pedagogical formation certificate program are actually quite willing to learn. This positive attitude reflects on both the courses they take at university as a part of the program and their teaching practicum. Within a shorter period of time compared to the student teachers enrolled in ELT programs, they strive to improve their teaching competences. They are especially good at building a positive relationship with students.

However, the supervisor also underlined that this positive attitude is unfortunately not adopted by many of the non-ELT student teachers. Contrary to the previous positive perspective, graduates of other departments might also choose to attend the pedagogical formation certificate programs due mainly to concerns related to the future and to have a more secure job. This tendency is apparent from the following extract from the supervisor's reflections.

Many of them expect to receive a teaching certificate hoping to guarantee a position either in the Ministry system or in a private educational institution to secure a job rather than achieving a goal in a career.

Along with the aforementioned strengths such as building a good relationship with students, the supervisor also highlighted the weaknesses of the participant student teachers. According to the supervisor, the student teachers needed further development especially in terms of didactic skills. The following extract from the supervisor's reflections on the student teachers' teaching practices display these weaknesses.

The student teachers from non-ELT English departments are in need of developing certain didactic skills such as presenting, practicing, and assessing. This seems to be possible only through various self-study practices since the pedagogical formation training is too condensed to teach these skills within the classroom periods provided in two semesters.

As is clear from the statements above, according to the supervisor, it is deemed necessary for the non-ELT student teachers to have more teaching practices in order for them to prepare for their future career in a more effective manner. From the supervisor's perspective, although the student teachers are quite competent at such criteria as student-teacher relationships, the main issue in need of further improvement is classroom management.

In most cases they can make use of the theoretical knowledge to be able to teach English effectively. However, when it comes to managing a classroom, this is their main challenge.

To sum up, the thematic analysis of the supervisor's reflections on non-ELT student teachers' teaching practices yielded the themes involving strengths such as a positive attitude to teaching and practicum experiences -though not adopted by all student teachers-, and establishing a good student-teacher rapport during practicum accompanied by weaknesses including an urgent need for developing didactic skills and especially competences related to classroom management. These reflections are further discussed below.

### ***Student Teachers' Self-Reflections on Their Teaching Practices***

Along with the observation of teaching practices and the supervisor's reflections on these practicum experiences, student teachers' self-reflections on their teaching practicum contributed greatly to the results of the research. As a result of the thematic analysis of reflective journals, non-ELT student teachers' self-reflections converged on four major themes: (1) a positive attitude towards teaching practices, (2) a good relationship with the students, (3) the novelty of teaching real students, and (4) language-related and classroom management problems. The emergent themes are elaborated on and accompanied with sample extracts from student teachers' self-reflections below. Actual names of the participants are not given in the extracts due to confidentiality reasons.

The initial finding attained through the analysis of non-ELT student teachers' self-reflections on their teaching practicum was that they had a positive attitude towards teaching

and the teaching practices they do during their internship in particular. The following extracts from the reflective journals of the student teachers reveal this positive attitude.

I thought that I really enjoyed all my lessons. I felt that I really want to be a teacher. It was a marvelous feeling. The lessons made me feel great about myself. I understood how I should behave while teaching at least to some extent. In the end, it was a great teaching experience. (HB)

This program gave me the chance to have my first teaching experience. It was exciting to teach English to students. (MA)

It is exciting to become a teacher and try to teach the others. In this sense, I have understood that being a teacher does not only mean coming into class, explaining the things, and leaving it there. (KK)

This program contributed a lot to me to develop myself in terms of teaching students as a real teacher. At first, I felt myself like a student in the class, but then I started to feel myself like a real teacher during the teaching process rather than the observation period. (MC)

The student teachers' positive attitudes towards teaching and the teaching practicum in particular were also influential in the formation of a good relationship with the students in class. Although many of the student teachers had their first teaching experience during teaching practicum within the scope of the pedagogical formation certificate program, their self-reflections indicated that they were able to build a good rapport with the students. Sample extracts revealing this well-established relationship between the student teachers and the students in class are provided below.

I believe that I have built a good relationship with the students. They tried to understand me, and I tried to do the same with them. I did not have any important problems during my teaching period. (HC)

I built a good relationship with the students within the first three weeks although I wasn't able to teach the topics so effectively. Throughout these three weeks, I had to teach the topics without going into detail. However, I was able to preserve the good relationship I built with the students. (NÇ)

During my teaching practices, I realized that the relationship I built with the students can continue to exist throughout the lessons, and it is quite strong. For instance, I saw that when I enter the class in a calm manner with a smiling face, students also start to smile and the lesson goes on in a positive mood. (UŞ)

Although the student teachers exhibited a considerably positive attitude towards the teaching practices in the pedagogical formation certificate program and were successful in building a good rapport with the students according to their self-reflections, the idea of teaching real students in actual classes was quite novel to them. They expressed this novelty with the following statements by comparing this experience of real teaching with the teaching practices and presentation experiences in university courses.

Although we had spent five weeks with the students, I realized that we could not identify the learning needs of some students. While teaching at university courses to

our own friends, we can teach more superficially because they do not have any difficulty in understanding us. However, this experience is a little bit different with real students. (ME)

I started my teaching practicum with the perception that I would not have difficulties in the internship thanks to the theoretical knowledge we obtained at the university courses. However, the difficulties I had during my teaching at school allowed me to realize my weaknesses. For instance, thanks to a problem I experienced related to time management, I learnt that I should prepare some extra materials for the times when I may need them due to having some extra time. (ŞI)

Before the first lesson I was going to teach as a part of my teaching practicum, I thought that I could manage it easily since I had an experience of giving a private language course before. However, during my teaching practices, I realized that I need to pay close attention to a lot of factors at the same time while teaching a class full of students from different backgrounds. (GD)

While reflecting on the novelty of learning to teach real students, the student teachers also wrote about the language-related and classroom management problems they experienced during their teaching practices. Related sample extracts from the student teachers' self-reflections are presented below.

The activities I used in my lesson were not so appropriate for the students' levels. There were many unknown words in the activities related to superstitions. Therefore, I had some difficulties in eliciting responses from students. (HC)

There was a big problem during the class. Since the class's actual English teachers usually teach the lessons in Turkish, I could not speak English. Whenever I began to speak English, students got bored and were not interested in the class because they did not understand anything. (MC)

When the students started to quarrel, I really had difficulties in managing the class and the students. To prevent these kinds of quarrels and to maintain discipline, I tried to do my best. (ŞI)

During my teaching practices, the first problem I experienced was that the students treated me as if I was their friend, not as their teacher. It was difficult to maintain the authority in the class. (GD)

Self-reflections of the student teachers as a whole demonstrated that they approach the teaching practices carried out as a part of the pedagogical formation certificate program in a positive manner. They also appear to be good at building a well-established relationship with the students according to these self-reflections. However, they also emphasize that teaching at a real classroom is a remarkably new thing for them that is incomparable to the microteaching experiences at the university courses. The lack of experience in this respect also reflects on the problems they come across during teaching practices, as they have different difficulties in keeping a balance in the language use to make it appropriate to the students' language levels as well as in managing the class discipline and preserving the authority.

## **Discussion**

Due to the wide range of knowledge bases, skills and abilities required for providing an effective language education as teachers, language teacher education programs aim to prepare student teachers for their future career in both theoretical and practical aspects. For this purpose, a comprehensive program involving courses related to general knowledge, the field of study and didactics is offered in ELT departments of universities. Therefore, student teachers try to link and keep a balance between theory and practice by taking related courses at university as well as practicing their teaching skills during practicum even though it is not easy to transfer and provide all conditions of actual full time teaching-learning process in practicum context (Grudnoff, 2011). The challenge of preparing student teachers in terms of all these competences appears to be even more demanding in pedagogical formation certificate programs. These certificate programs in Turkey aim to equip graduates of other language-related departments with the necessary intellectual background, skills and abilities by means of an intensive education within a year. Therefore, as a part of this program, the teaching practicum is also carried out intensively within this short period of time.

Non-ELT student teachers have less opportunity of visiting schools, getting in touch with students in actual classes, and experiencing teaching during practicum due to the time limits. Reflections on these student teachers' practicum experiences are of value for the identification of the very nature of these intensive pedagogical programs and the special needs of these student teachers in particular. Hence, the current study aimed to examine the practicum experiences of non-ELT student teachers and to offer recommendations to improve their language teaching skills.

The present study made use of three sources of data to probe into the teaching practices of non-ELT student teachers. As an initial source of data, the researchers analyzed the videos of the student teachers' teaching practices. These data were accompanied by the reflections of the supervisor on these teaching practices. As a third source of data, the student teachers' self-reflections were utilized. The observation results indicated that non-ELT student teachers are quite competent at such classroom-related practices as the preparation of materials and a good classroom atmosphere; building a good rapport with the students, and the reinforcement of learning with such practices as summarizing learning points, reviewing new concepts, and so on. However, based on the observation results, they apparently need to improve themselves in terms of the openness to novel teaching ideas, maximizing the interaction in class and student involvement, the use of suitable language for the specific proficiency levels of the students, as well as presentation-related performances like the use of voice, handwriting on the board, promoting group and project work, self- and peer correction. Reflections of the supervisor are in line with the aforementioned results in that according to these reflections, non-ELT student teachers are good at student-teacher relationships with their positive attitudes towards teaching, but need to improve themselves in terms of didactic skills such as presentation, practice and assessment. Corroborating many of these findings, the third source of data involving student teachers' self-reflections reveals their high level of contentment with having teaching experiences during the practicum period. This reflects well on the relationships they build with the students in class according to their self-reflections. However, these self-reflections also point to the fact that due to lack of adequate teaching

practices, teaching a group of students in real classes is a remarkably novel experience for them. Therefore, they also have some language-related and classroom management problems during their teaching practices.

The results of the present study are considerably in line with the findings of Grudnoff's (2011) study with beginning teachers in that it also found that the participants recognized teaching practicum as a prominent component of initial teacher education and adopted positive views. However, as distinct from the current study, those participants reported not benefitting from practicum experiences at times in terms of preparation for actual teaching. The results of the present study also corroborated various findings of Koç's (2012) research on pre-service science teachers including practicum challenges experienced by student teachers such as classroom management problems and difficulties in time management as well as successes like developing good relationships with students. In a similar vein, the present study was also in line with Gürbüz's (2006) findings involving student teachers' strengths like building rapport and weaknesses like coping with problem students and problems related to the use of language in the class although the results of the aforementioned study also differed from those of the current study at some other strengths and weaknesses of student teachers.

### **Conclusion and Suggestions**

To conclude, the present study shows that while endeavoring to equip themselves with different language teaching competences, skills and abilities, non-ELT student teachers acknowledge the value of the teaching practicum as an important part of the pedagogical formation program. The positive attitude they adopt towards teaching is also evident from their efforts and self-reflections. Although they strive to improve their teaching skills within a quite limited period of time, they have some certain difficulties in their teaching practices. The problems encountered by new teachers generally result from a lack of a smooth continuum and link between teacher preparation stage and actual teaching (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). The results of the current study lead us to the fact that non-ELT student teachers absolutely need to have further teaching practices during their teaching practicum. Although the microteachings carried out at university courses might be quite fruitful for the improvement of teaching competences, the teaching practicum in actual classes with real students is an invaluable opportunity for them when implemented effectively. In order for these student teachers to make the most of this opportunity, it is certainly essential for them to have further teaching experience under the guidance of truly expert, experienced and knowledgeable cooperating teachers and university supervisors. In this regard, one solution might be strengthening the certificate programs via some elective courses such as microteaching, material development, testing, etc. More exposure to language teaching practices might also be possible through self-efforts of student teachers. To this end, student teachers might take active parts in related student clubs at university and form different learning groups such as speaking clubs to improve their own language skills. They might also think of starting volunteer teaching in a school, private tutoring, building partnership with a teacher at a school and participating in social responsibility initiatives such teaching English to disadvantaged students.

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