

## TEACHING PRACTICE FROM STUDENT TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVE

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### ÖZET

Bu çalışmada, fakülte son sınıf öğrencilerinin öğretmenlik uygulaması için gittikleri uygulama okullarında karşılaştıkları ikilemler ele alınmıştır. Bu amaçla, 1997-1998 akademik yılında Çukurova Üniversitesi, Eğitim Fakültesi, İngilizce Anabilim Dalında öğrenim gören 60 öğretmen adayı denek olarak seçilmiştir. Veriler deneklere verilen anket, onların uygulama sırasında tuttıkları günlük ve yine onların uygulama sırasındaki deneyimlerini aktardıkları raporlardan toplanmıştır. Elde edilen veriler analiz edilmiş ve ortaya çıkan sorunlar ve öğretmen adaylarının karşılaştığı ikilemler içerikleri bakımından sınıflandırılmış ve dile getirilen bu sorunlara çözüm yolları önerilmiştir.

### ABSTRACT

In this study, the dilemma that the Student Teachers have encountered during their school experience in various secondary schools have been studied. For this purpose, in 1997-1998 academic year, 60 Student Teachers in the ELT Department of Çukurova University were asked to keep a diary on daily basis and reflect what they had gained through their Teaching Practice experience. At the end of the academic year, they were also given a questionnaire to evaluate the Teaching Practice experience from various aspects. As a result of the analysis of their reports and responses given in the questionnaire, the problems that they pointed out have been categorized from various aspects, and possible solutions to these problems have been sought and presented.

### Background of the Study

Teaching Practice is commonly believed to be an indispensable component of teacher education programs. According to McIntyre and Hagger (1993), whatever other kinds of learning are involved in initial teacher education, few would question the necessary centrality of learning through practice. They also maintain that however clear, however thorough, however sophisticated or simple the learner-teacher's understanding of classroom teaching, it is only by putting these understandings into practice, by putting them to the test of practice, and by developing them through practice that he or she can become a competent classroom teacher.

Maynard and Furlong (1993:71) emphasize that "trainees need systematic preparation in that practical classroom knowledge and by definition that aspect of training can only be provided by teachers working in their own classrooms and schools." For that reason, the trainees must be exposed to school and classroom environment and real classroom teaching while they are being trained. In order to attain this purpose, both school and training institution must have distinct but interrelated and coordinated responsibilities if the curriculum of training is to be covered and if that training is to be coherent for the student (Wilkin, 1992).

It is a fact that there are organizations for the purpose of having students go through Teaching Practice in secondary schools in Turkey. Nevertheless the efficiency of these organizations is open to question. All parties involved come across various problems related to Teaching Practice in terms of "interrelated and coordinated responsibilities." Some of these problems have been identified and others are just ignored but there has been little effort to improve the situation or to solve problems encountered. Although there have been some studies or efforts to improve Teaching Practice, all these efforts have not been institutionalized all over the country. For the first time, the YÖK/World Bank National Education Development Project handled the issue and published a book titled as *Work in Schools (Okullarda uygulama çalışmaları: Ortaöğretim.)* in 1997. Thanks to this project, there are a lot of studies and efforts contributing to the initial teacher training in Turkey.

### **The Aim**

The aim of the present study is to identify the various problems that the student teachers have encountered during their school experience in various secondary schools as the Teaching Practice component of the pre-service teacher training program at Çukurova University, ELT Department, and to seek possible solutions to these problems.

### **Subjects**

The participants of our study consisted of a total number of 60 randomly selected student teachers attending the ELT Department at Çukurova University in Turkey. Data were obtained from 60 student teachers in 1997-1998 academic year.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected from the participants by means of a questionnaire given to evaluate the Teaching Practice experience from various aspects, keeping a diary on daily basis and reflecting what they have gained through their Teaching Practice experience.

### **Program Structure**

This research has been conducted in the ELT Department, Faculty of Education at Çukurova University. The ELT Department has a (preparatory plus) four year training program consisting of eight semesters of fourteen weeks. It provides initial training in the teaching of English as a Foreign Language to pupils in secondary level education (and now primary level as well). The teacher trainees are expected to pass mid-term and final exams for all the courses offered in eight semesters and carry out projects for each course, and fulfill the requirements for the teaching practice in the last semester of training to qualify as a teacher.

### **Teaching Practice**

The teaching practice (TP) takes place as one block within the last semester of training, and lasts ten weeks, totally 120 hours. In each of these weeks, teacher trainees spend three days in the university, and two days in TP schools, which is usually one of the

secondary schools in Adana, where they observe and teach classes in small groups under the supervision of a mentor, a guiding teacher, assigned by each school, and a visiting university supervisor. Teacher trainees are given weekly observation and journal writing tasks during their TP and have the opportunity to discuss their observation and teaching experience in their ELT Methodology course, a seminar class running concurrently with the TP.

During their stay in teaching practice schools, student teachers are guided by a mentor, who is an experienced classroom teacher in the school and a university supervisor, who is a teaching staff in the ELT Department. Teacher trainees carry out focused observation for the first three or four weeks, which is the first phase, to get to know school and classroom environment, to understand the strategies and techniques used by the classroom teachers and to get familiarized with all the events taking place in the language classrooms. They write reports based on their observations and they share their observation results in a session in the department. They exchange their ideas and they get feedback from the methodology teacher depending on the topic.

In the second phase of their practice, teacher trainees teach in the classroom starting with small tasks to full responsibility of a whole class period. They try to take part in all the events going on in the classroom. Besides, they prepare and evaluate homework assignments, worksheets and examinations. Before and after their teaching, they get feedback from their mentors and/or from their university supervisors. In this phase, especially, they collaborate with their mentors in planning a lesson, choosing materials to be used, decision making about timing, etc. They get feedback related to their performance from their mentors after their teaching. Their teaching performance is also observed at least twice by the university supervisor. Teacher trainees receive feedback from their supervisors related to their performance in the classroom as well. The feedback they get may vary from lesson plan to material selection, teaching a specific point to using an equipment such as video, OHP or tape recorder.

At the end of the second phase, each teacher trainee is observed and evaluated both by university supervisor and mentor on his/her teaching performance. Both the university supervisors and the mentors use an observation schedule as well as field notes to evaluate the performance of teacher trainees. Depending on the performance of teacher trainees in classroom and the teaching level they have reached during the whole TP period, they are graded as either pass or fail.

### **Data Analysis and Outcomes**

Since the data collected are qualitative, the ideas of student teachers have been analyzed and categorized in terms of frequency. Even though some of the issues mentioned only by one or two students, they have been taken into account because they were crucial. The issues raised by TP students have been categorized as a) issues related to teaching that student teachers feel they are in dilemma b) issues related to TP organization, and c) issues related to the roles of a mentor and a supervisor in TP.

### **Issues Related to Teaching Student Teachers Feel Themselves in Dilemma**

The issues raised by students, though various in terms of content, have been sequenced from top frequency to the least one. The issues in this category are related to classroom management, and the type of activities carried out in learning/teaching process in classes. TP students see all these issues as problematic because they have stated that they have been instructed as not to do them when they teach at the university in methodology courses .

As a first issue, TP students (100%) have pointed out that as a result of their observations in the classes their mentors teach, the teaching is teacher-centered and everything is decided, organized and carried out by the teacher without having any initiation by the students in class. Furthermore, all the activities are carried out from a textbook with almost no extra activity and the activities are mostly based on making mechanical drills, or exercises from the textbook or 'making a sentence' to practice a newly learned grammatical pattern or a new word.

The second issue is that the interaction in classes is from mostly teacher to students and from students to teacher and there is almost no student to student interaction. Moreover, the purpose of interactions is to reply a question posed by teacher, to read aloud a reading passage, to do exercises in the text book or to ask meaning of an unknown word. They add that only bright students take part in these interactions and the distribution of questions or tasks is not equal.

Another issue stated by 80% of ST is that mentors mostly do not have a written lesson plan. "My mentor had a lesson plan in her mind" quotes a student teacher. One more issue pointed out by 70% of ST is that mentors follow the teacher's book strictly. In addition to these, 40% of them have added that the pace of lesson does not change no matter how difficult or easy the subject matter is and this creates a monotonous atmosphere in the classroom. Moreover, mentors do not ask imaginative/creative questions to extend a topic/subject matter but mostly pose display questions. Thus, students cannot carry out a pair/group work activity apart from those mechanical exercises in their text books because text-related activity usually means 'homework' in these classes.

The other issues raised by 30 % of ST in this category are as follows: Mentors mostly give instructions in Turkish. When they echo a student, they do it to help other students to hear the speaking one better because students do not accept a student's response as "correct" without the teacher's echoing. Furthermore, mentors do not accommodate their speech and pace according to their students' level in the classroom and they also despise students in classes while teaching.

A final point is that mentors do not make use of "wait time" after posing a question.

All these issues student teachers raised have provided evidence for two things. The first one is that mentors should go through an in-service programme because the teachers

who work in such schools are not all graduates of ELT Departments of Faculties of Education. Rather, some of them are the graduates of Philology Departments of Faculties of Letters where they do not take any methodology courses. Therefore, when choosing a mentor in a TP school, we must be very careful and know the CV of the mentor. The present situation is, for example, when a school is chosen as a TP school for ELT Department, all the teachers teaching English are considered as mentors. As a result, we have this kind of issues. Although there are now some criteria set by YÖK and Ministry of Education, (Koç, et al. 1998, Yönerge, Temmuz 1998), they seem not to have been taken into account. The second one is that our student teachers are aware of various teaching methods and techniques. Providing such an environment has created self-awareness in student teachers and this has led them to form a model teacher of their own.

### **Issues Related to Teaching Practice Organization**

The issues related to the organizations and opportunities/facilities provided by either TP schools or university are about the variety of classes ST have observed and taught, and their other individual concerns.

About the variety of classes observed, during the TP period, 48 % of ST had opportunity to observe only two different teachers' classes, 30 % of them were able to observe 3-4 different teachers' classes, and 16% of them were able to observe 5 or more different teachers' classes. In addition, 98% of ST have mostly done their observations in preparatory classes. This shows that ST have not been exposed to various teachers' teaching styles, and teaching atmosphere in those schools. In fact, the student teachers need to see more variety in various classes to make a decision and form a model for their own teaching.

Regarding teaching in various classes, ST have taught mostly in preparatory classes in various frequency; 20% of them have taught 3 hours or less , 42% of them have taught 4 or 6 hours , 14% of them have taught 7 or 9 hours , and 24% of them have taught 10 or more hours during their practice. We can state that 38% of them were lucky to teach 7 or more hours, which means they have had more feedback from their mentors and supervisors to be aware of their teaching performance. They have also had more time to try out what they have learned in the methodology courses. The fact that they have been able to teach only in preparatory classes is a pity because they have not gained any experience about teaching in upper classes. It is a well-known fact that these students will not be teaching only in these classes when they begin to work. For that reason, they should be exposed to as many different teaching environments as possible. Apart from the issues mentioned above, some student teachers have stated their individual concerns in this matter. Since they have expressed their observation and experience so explicitly that we have quoted them as stated:

- "We were placed into a TP school where there were not enough mentors."
- "We need to be able to teach on our own without the mentor in the classroom."
- "The attitude of the administrators in TP school was bad."

- " The lack of communication between my supervisor and mentor led some serious problems."
- "Some school teachers did not have us observe their classes or teach in their classes, however, some school teachers usually wanted us to take over most or all of their classes."

Although one or two students have mentioned these problems, it does not mean that the other students have not come across such or similar ones. When doing or coordinating such an organization, we should consider them and take some measures as much as we can.

**Issues Related to the Roles of a Mentor and a Supervisor in TP**

Although most of student teachers have had an opportunity to discuss their observation results with the mentors or supervisors and got feedback from them, 40% of them believe that they have not fairly been evaluated due to the lack of observation by either the mentor or the supervisor. They have emphasized that they have been observed only once or twice. They believe that they would have improved their teaching more if they had been observed more because after each observation they got feedback related to their teaching and in this process they have become aware their strengths and weaknesses. One of the ST states that "I could not show my supervisor that I had improved my teaching as a result of his feedback on my previous teaching."

Another issue raised by 40% of student teachers is that their mentors gave feedback on their teaching in general terms such as "good," "fine," or "only this part is bad." This type of feedback creates some problems because student teacher is not clear which part of his/her teaching is good, for example, the warm-up or the main topic, or classroom management, posing questions, and so on.

The data in this category indicate that ST need to be observed more than two or three times and need to get detailed and constructive feedback to improve themselves professionally.

To sum up all the issues and the controversies that the student teachers have encountered we have classified them as follows:

**Controversies**

- New methods and techniques      Versus      Classical way of language teaching
- Use your own creativity and make use of extra activities outside the text book      Versus      Too much dependence on textbooks
- Lesson plan format in ELT Department.      Versus      Lesson plan format of the mentor

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|--|--------|--------------------------------------|
| - Lesson plan is required by supervisor      | Versus | No lesson plan is required           |
| - Emphasis on skills                         | Versus | Emphasis on grammar teaching         |
| - Emphasis on the usage of audio-visual aids | Versus | Almost no usage of audio-visual aids |

All these issues raised by student teachers show that mentors should be selected very carefully and they should undergo a training/orientation period at the university so that they can be informed about what they are expected from them, and also about some of the main problems regarding their teaching mentioned in this study by student teachers.

### **Suggestions**

Although some suggestions have already been made after each section just after mentioning the issues, all possible solutions and suggestions have been stated item by item to draw attention to the issues once more.

- Student teachers should be informed in advance about what is expected from them, e.g., a qualified teacher competencies, activities in TP school, the context of TP schools, etc.
- Faculties should organize orientation sessions for the mentors and supervisors for the purpose of consistency in the organization.
- Because of the various educational background of the teachers in TP schools, a teacher should not be a mentor just because s/he is there. We should have detailed criteria to choose them.
- Mentors should be provided in-service teacher development programs in Faculties of Education.
- All of the planned activities should be agreed among the parties involved and prepared as a document to be referred to when necessary.

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