

WCES 2012

# The effects of teaching practice course on professional development of student teachers

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine student teachers' views about teaching practice courses and their professional gains from this process. In this qualitative research, participants of the study consisted of student teachers from three teacher training programs at Marmara University and Atatürk Faculty of Education. Data were gathered through three open-ended questionnaires and analyzed in conformity with content analysis to attain patterns related to students' problems and professional gains in this process. According to the results of this study, student teachers have some problems with the faculty members (supervisors) who instruct teaching practice courses and practice teachers in practice schools. Student teachers pointed out some of their expectations from faculty members and practice teachers for the solution of these problems and finally this study revealed that teaching practice courses support student teachers' professional development especially about gaining teaching experience.

*Keywords: Teacher training programs, teaching practice course*

## 1. Introduction

Teacher training is a type of undergraduate program that aims to train student teachers according to various areas of competence in their pre-service training stages. These programs have been implemented in Turkey's universities since 1982 (Öztürk, 2009). In 1997, some changes were made in the structure of teacher training programs in Turkey and more emphasis was given to practice. In 2006, these programs were updated and some arrangements were made to train student teachers especially for the education field, professional knowledge and general cultural dimensions. Teaching Practice course is one of the courses offered to student teachers within the scope of professional knowledge. This course enables student teachers to practice their knowledge and skills that they acquire during their undergraduate studies in real school settings and to recognize the profession of teaching (YOK, 2007). This course is composed of two parts which are theory part and practice part. Faculty members (they will be called supervisors in the rest of this report) offer theoretical part in their courses and student teachers practice the theory they learn in the schools. The student teachers are expected to gain some knowledge, skills, and experience related to their profession through this course. (Karadüz, Eser, Şahin and İlbay, 2009). Therefore, this course plays an important role on student teachers' recognition of their profession they will perform in the future (Sılay and Gök, 2004). In addition, the student teachers may have an opportunity to apply their theoretical knowledge in real

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classroom environment (Dursun and Kuzu, 2008). Some studies have revealed that this course has an effect on the social-emotional development of student teachers (Caires, Almeida and Martins, 2010). It can be said that the quality of this process depends on various factors; the major factor is the attitude of supervisors and practice teachers in attaining objectives of this course (Dursun and Kuzu, 2008). Cooperation and development of effective communication between supervisors and student teachers are other factors for achieving the aims of this course (Carlson, Kimpton, Oswald and Puglisi, 2007).

Teaching practice course has three main participants which are student teachers, supervisors and teachers whom student teachers observe. Perceptions and evaluations of student teachers who are directly affected by the process and consequences of this course are seen as a major problem area. Considering the important role of the teaching practice course on teacher training programs, the aim of this study is to determine student teachers' problems, expectations and gains from this course.

## **2. Methodology**

### *2.1. Participants and Setting*

This study was conducted by using qualitative method to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching practice courses and to determine their effects on professional development of student teachers. These courses were assessed from the perspectives of student teachers to attain these objectives. Participants of this study consisted of 70 student teachers who studied at Marmara University and Atatürk Faculty of Education, Department of Primary Education. For the study, three teacher training programs (kindergarten (PT), social studies (SST) and science (ST) were chosen as the sample.

### *2.2. Data Collection Instruments*

In this study, data were gathered by means of three open-ended questionnaires. The first questionnaire was designed to determine how student teachers assess supervisors' contributions to their professional development. Similarly, the second questionnaire was related to practice teachers' approaches and behaviors in practice schools. The last questionnaire was designed to reveal the problems which student teachers encountered during their teaching experience.

### *2.3. Data Analysis Procedure*

Content analysis was conducted to analyze qualitative data. First of all, responses of 70 students were transcribed. Then all texts were read by each researcher separately. In this process, two researchers coded the data and obtained a coding list. After that, two coding lists were compared and a final list was prepared. Content coding was performed according to the last coding list. Finally, frequencies were calculated and quotations were chosen and organized. A coding system was used to refer the quotations of kindergarten student teacher (PT), social studies student teacher (SST) and science student teacher (ST).

## **3. Findings from the Study**

The findings of this study have been presented in three parts. In the first one, findings are related to the problems encountered by student teachers in their teaching practice courses. The second part includes student teachers' expectations from supervisors and practice teachers in this process. The last part reflects student teachers' gains from teaching practice course.

### 3.1. Encountered Problems

This part includes the issues which student teachers perceive as problems related to supervisors who give these courses, practice teachers, and the other issues. Student teachers' responses are given in Table 1. As indicated in Table 1, the problems encountered by student teachers during teaching practice courses can be divided into three distinct categories: supervisors, practice teachers and other issues. Two of these categories reflect the problems stemming from supervisors and practice teachers who are expected to guide student teachers in this process. The other category includes the problems arising from physical conditions of school and classroom management of student teachers. The most important problems pointed out by student teachers are that supervisors do not carry out theoretical part of the course, and practices are not monitored and they are not provided feedback. PT, 50's statement "*Supervisors who are responsible for the teaching practice course should give feedback instead of threatening student teachers with course scores and must train students to be more creative and participative*" exemplified this problem. Similarly, ST, 28 and ST, 1 highlighted the same problem with these words: "*We were unable to get in touch with our supervisor and we could not talk about teaching practice courses (ST, 28)*" and "*We completed the teaching practice course without any information or any feedback. We were not accepted as teachers in the practice school and I felt as worthless. I think supervisors should follow the process better. Because this is not an unimportant course or practice, experience we have gained in this course will enlighten us when we graduate from the school (ST, 1)*".

Table 1. Student Teachers' responses and its frequencies related to encountered problems

<b>Encountered Problems related to Supervisors</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Carrying out theoretical part of the course	11
Not following practices/disregarding	11
Not giving feedback about practices	8
Not informing about the course	3
Lack of guiding	2
Lack of supervision	2
Could not get through to supervisors	2
Not making objective evaluations, Not having evaluation standards	2
Disregarding student teachers	2
Not communicating with student teachers	2
Reducing the motivation	2
Ignoring the course	2
Not allocating enough time for student teachers	1
Not helping student teachers to make their plans	1
Lack of comprehension	1
<b>Encountered Problems Related to Practice Teacher</b>	
Showing negative attitude and behaviors to student teachers (verbal violence, insult, humiliation, not to respect, not to regard them as teacher)	17
Performing physical and verbal violence to students in the class	9
Not giving them any chance to practice	3
Not guiding, indifference	3
Not giving feedback	2
Not being open to communication	1
<b>Encountered Problems related to Other Issues</b>	
Classroom management problems (inability to communicate, not to enforce obedience, discipline problems, inability to use time efficiently, excitability)	11
Insufficient physical conditions (crowded class, lack of equipment/not to be allowed to use)	5
Problems in planning (to assign many student teachers for the same practice school)	2

Student teachers mentioned some behaviors as the most important problems related to practice teachers. These behaviors include verbal violence, humiliation and disrespectful ones towards student teachers as well as verbal and physical violence towards students in the classroom. Not having any opportunity for making application in the classrooms and not receiving any feedback are the other problems related to practice teachers. ST, 38 pointed out this issue by these words, "*Negative attitudes of practice teachers for students led me to lose my confidence in teaching profession.*" Likewise, SST, 57's statement is another example of this problem: "*Some teachers were not open to dialogue and treated us in a bad way*". Another student's words indicate the significance of the status: "*The*

practice teacher gave the students punishment including violence. Children were slapped when they gave wrong answers to the questions. Children were scared to speak. He /She humiliated us in the presence of the children. Practice teacher suddenly asked questions and made us feel unimportant (SST, 68).” PT, 60 mentioned another problem they encountered in this process: “The practice teachers used practice plans of the student teachers for spending time. He/she did not show the students that we were teachers too.”

The evaluation of student teachers’ performance in teaching practice course is perceived as another problematic area. Student teachers especially draw attention to the lack of objectiveness in evaluation. For instance, SST, 68 said that “Without observing us and having an idea of our practice, he/she gave the marks of this course just looking at our names. Although I attended courses more regularly than some of friends, they received higher grades than me.”.

The most stressed problems of student teachers in the category of other problems could be evaluated within the scope of classroom management. The inability to communicate with students and to control them, disciplinary problems, inefficient use of time and overexcitement are some of these problems within this framework. Other problems related to teaching practice course are not using equipment in schools for their own practice studies, having more than one student teacher for a classroom.

### 3.2. Expectations

This part includes expectations of student teachers from practice teachers and supervisors regarding teaching practice course. Table 2 shows the responses of student teachers. As can be seen in Table 2, student teachers’ expectations are in conformity with the problems they stated. They are in expectation of guidance from supervisors, monitoring practices, and teaching theoretical part of courses regularly. In addition to this, sharing knowledge and experiences, and motivating and encouraging the student teachers are other important expectations from supervisors.

Table 2. Student Teachers’ responses and its frequencies related to their expectations

<b>Student Teachers’ Expectations regarding Supervisors</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Guiding	26
Monitoring practices regularly	23
Carrying out the theoretical part of courses regularly	19
Sharing knowledge and experience	9
Supporting for planning	8
Giving motivation and courage	8
Inform about Teaching Practice Course process	6
Being in touch with practice school to follow the status of student teachers	5
Being in touch with student teachers	4
Endearing the profession to student teachers	3
Developing self-confidence	3
Providing individual support	3
Providing support for material and teaching method	2
Providing communication between student teachers and practice schools	2
<b>Student Teachers’ Expectations regarding Practice Teachers</b>	
Guiding	35
Sharing knowledge and experience	18
Providing support for planning and conducting lessons	11
Giving opportunity for practice	11
Monitoring the practices	10
Being a model	7
Introducing student teacher to class as a teacher	6
Giving motivation and courage	6
Giving feedback	6
Developing self-confidence	3
Constructing positive dialogue	3
Giving responsibility to student teachers	2
Monitoring development of student teachers	2
Being in contact with supervisors	2
Having professional knowledge	1

It may be said that student teachers’ expectations from practice teachers are consistent with their expectations from supervisors. Guiding, sharing knowledge and experience, supporting for making plans and applications, giving

a chance for class practices and monitoring the applications are the most repeated expectations, respectively. For example, SST, 55 highlighted the importance of this with his explanation: “*Supervisors and practice teachers must be aware of that they are training the teachers of the future*”.

### 3.3. Gains from the Course

The last part reflects the student teachers’ gains from teaching practice courses. As shown in Table 3, gaining teaching experience is the most highlighted contribution pointed out by student teachers. However, sixteen student teachers stated that this course did not provide any contribution to them. When students’ responses are analyzed in detail, it is understood that student teachers who stated that this course provided some contribution to them such as professional contribution, developing communication skills, self-confidence, and classroom management skills refer to practice schools as sources of these developments. In contrast, student teachers who pointed out that this course did not contribute to them refer to this situation to the lack of supervisor’s support for practice process and inadequacies in conducting theoretical part of courses and problems in having feedback. ST, 26 pointed out that she gained some experience in teaching practice courses on her own: “*In our faculty generally, teaching practice courses are not considered important. In the process of practicing, I had a chance to think about my applications and myself. I could transfer my theoretical knowledge into practice*”. ST, 13 and ST, 32 highlighted their gains from this process by these words: “*Having an experience was good before our career started. We could see the challenges we might face* (ST, 13), “*Now I can easily teach, I gained self-confidence* (ST, 13).”

Table 3. Student Teachers’ responses and its frequencies related to gains from the teaching practice course

Gains from the Course	Frequency
Acquiring teaching experience	35
Helping to recognize the profession	14
Acquiring skills to communicate with students	10
Acquiring self-confidence about teaching profession	8
Having a chance to transfer the theoretical knowledge to practice	8
Recognizing classroom environment	5
Noticing lack of information	3
Recognizing school environment	2
Contribution to personal development	2
Acquiring knowledge on school management	1

## 4. Conclusion and Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that student teachers have some problems with teaching practice courses on various aspects. Student teachers mostly stated that supervisors did not carry out the theoretical part of the courses, not observe them in schools and not evaluate systematically. In addition, they stressed that they did not receive any feedback related to the process of the course. The results of the research carried out by Dursun and Kuzu (2008) support these findings especially related to monitoring and evaluation section of this course. Eraslan (2009)’s study showed that student teachers did not receive feedback on their applications. In Eraslan (2009)’s study also indicated that student teachers were unable to find enough time for practice. A study findings carried out on students from kindergarten teacher training program indicated that they were not seen as a teacher in their practice schools and there were inconsistencies in the process of evaluations of the course (Karaca and Aral, 2011). Same results were obtained from current study. Practice teachers and supervisors’ guidance and cooperation are the most important factors in achieving purposes of this course (Karadüz, Eser, Şahin and İlbay, 2009; Ediger, 2009; Carlson, Kimpton, Oswald and Puglisi, 2007). Considering the related literature, all of these issues could be addressed within the scope of responsibilities of the supervisors’ guidance. According to Can (2001), supervisors do not perform training and assessment responsibilities on teaching practice courses regularly and systematically. In this context, these results of the current study could be interpreted to mean that supervisors and practice teachers’ guidance is inadequate for teaching practice courses. Moreover, this result is valid most of the students studying at different teacher training programs. According to the results of research done on this issue, student teachers studying at different teacher training programs have similar views about teaching practice course. Some of these common views pointed out the

lack of guidance to be expected to do by supervisors and practice teachers, lack of being followed during applications, lack of feedback.

Another important finding of this research is that the teaching practice course makes certain contributions to student teachers' professional development. To apply the theoretical knowledge, to gain self-confidence and professional experience are some of the major contributions. These findings are consistent with the results of various studies (Karadüz, Eser, Şahin and İlbay, 2009; Eraslan, 2009; Caires, Almeida and Martins, 2010; Becit, Kurt and Kabakçı, 2009; Şişman and Acat, 2003).

In conclusion, it could be said that experiencing the teaching profession (meeting and communicating with the students, being an active teacher, experiencing the school atmosphere, etc.) makes significant contributions to professional and personal development of student teacher. However, both practice teachers and supervisors are not supportive enough to them in the process of this course and do not meet their expectations. These conclusions should make us rethink the goals and methods of this course and our responsibilities. Given these results, the following recommendations can be made:

1. Authorized people in faculties of education and practice schools should cooperate more effectively to plan and manage the beginning of this process,
2. Objective evaluation standards can be developed and applied in all faculty of educations,
3. All supervisors in a faculty should cooperate with each other about this course,
4. Some considerations should be taken into account in choosing practice schools such as teachers' approaches (they should be good models for student teachers), physical conditions of schools, etc. For this purpose, practice teachers should be trained as professionals for a longer period.

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