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Review of the studies on teaching practicum courses in Turkey: Suggestions for teacher education

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Abstract

Teacher candidates studying at the education faculties of universities are expected to complete their preparations for their profession and improve their teaching skills by organizing various activities in practice schools with "Teaching Practicum Courses". As mentioned in the literature, practicum courses include several strengths along with its weaknesses. This study aims to theoretically present strengths and weaknesses of practicum courses and define suggestions and implications. A review of the literature reveals several strengths such as: providing student-teachers with a plenty of teaching experiences, and realization of the value of their profession and the opportunities to evaluate their performance which help them have more self-confidence and independency. Apart from these, the practicum courses include some weak points as well such as; students-teachers having inadequate educational knowledge for preparing for classes, selecting material and carrying on lessons as well as the problems stemming from the supervisors' uncomfortable attitudes, negative aspects of the classroom environment and the big discrepancy between the conditions in real school settings and what presented to student in theory. Finally, the study presents suggestions and implication for student-teachers, mentors and supervisors, regulations of the ministry of education and higher education council. These suggestions may reduce the theory practice dilemma via practicum courses opportunities for student-teachers to be able to practice what they have learnt in theory.

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Keywords: teaching practicum courses; teacher education; strengths and weaknesses; suggestions

1. Introduction

Education has an important role in our life. In very early years, education begins at home in an informal way. Later on, education continues at schools in a more formal way which means children will be educated by someone else, the teacher. Hence, it can be concluded that after parents the teacher has the most important role in a child's life. That's a good reason for giving more importance to teacher education. There is a wide range of resources to learn how to be a better teacher; however, this cannot

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be sufficient enough to be a good teacher. Without practicing it in real life how can we know which kind of education will be better? Additionally, it may change according to students, setting, culture, etc. Therefore, practicum courses are taken by pre-service teachers. They become a student-teacher in real life conditions by the guidance of their supervisors and mentors.

School Experience and Teaching Practice courses have provided prospective teachers the chance to practice what they have learnt in theory. In addition to the theoretical education that teacher candidates have received in faculties, the experiences they have gained in practice schools have a very important role in the teacher education process (Gökçe & Demirhan, 2005). The main purpose of these courses is to help prospective teachers understand the intricacies of the teaching profession by observing actual classroom practices (Sarıçoban, 2008). In these courses, identifying teacher qualifications, planning effective lesson plans, teaching a lesson in a real-life like situations, getting the required experience and teaching skills, and assessing their and other prospective teachers' performances are among the things that are expected from the prospective teachers (Sarıçoban,2016).

Understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the practicum courses are important as prospective teachers will have Teaching Practice course in both fall and spring terms in 2021-2022 Academic Year due to the recent change in the curriculum of the ELT departments in Turkey. In this paper, the strong and weak sides of this practicum program will be presented, and some suggestions provided by the related literature will be discussed at the end of the study.

2. Strengths of Teaching Practicum Courses

First of all, student-teachers gain experience in a real classroom environment and realize the importance of their profession (Yıldız et al., 2016; İşcan, 2017; Yalçın-Arslan & İlin, 2018). With the help of their supervisor and mentors, they identify their strength and weaknesses during their teaching experience (Akcan, 2009; Kuter, 2009; Merç, 2015a; Serdar-Tülüce & Çeçen, 2016). Feedback given by supervisors and mentors has great importance in practicum courses as it will contribute to their future teaching ways. In the study of Akcan (2009) student-teachers video-taped their teaching course and then analyzed it together with their supervisor, this may be more effective as pre-service teachers can see their performance and evaluate it. Thanks to evaluation of student-teachers performance, they learn or develop new strategies in teaching (Merç, 2015c; Serdar-Tülüce & Çeçen, 2016; Yıldız et al. 2016). With these new alternatives, they also gain self-confidence and become more independent in their courses. İşcan (2017) explained this fact as 'Practicum course provides the students to create their own bridges between theoretical knowledge and real-life practice of their profession' (pp.27). Merç (2015c) stated that student-teachers moderate the negative consequences of anxiety with experience they gain in practicum courses. Gradually they overcome their anxiety in their teaching sessions, which is mentioned as the most encountered problem in almost all studies carried out so far.

Apart from developing their inner sights, they get accustomed to other facts like school administration, materials, learners, and maybe their parents. Shortly, it can be said that they get a clear picture of the educational system carried out at schools (Özek, 2009). Student-teachers encounter institutional processes and relationships between teachers in a school (Genç, 2016). On the other hand, they witness the classroom setting in real life which gives them an idea about what material they can use in which conditions (Busher et al., 2011). Merç (2015b) emphasized that technological materials are useful in language teaching. Another point mentioned by Serdar-Tülüce & Çeçen (2016) is that student-teachers will have the opportunity to observe the students and gain a deeper understanding of learners in those age groups. This knowledge may be very useful in their further teaching experiences.

To sum up, practicum courses have a lot of contributions. Student-teachers develop themselves in many ways while regarding the real environment of teaching. They also get used to the people they are going to work with. Supervisor or mentor guidance is the most important aspect of these practicum courses.

3. Weaknesses of Teaching Practicum Courses

There is no doubt that student-teachers learn a lot in their teaching experiences; however, there are still weak points of this program. These weaknesses can be categorized as Student-teacher case, Supervisor/Mentor case, School Environment case, and handicaps of the curriculum.

The first category is about the students taking practicum courses. As normal, they are human and casual events may hinder their teaching quality (Merç, 2010). Besides this, there can be problems with their educational knowledge. This might cause complications in preparing for classes, material selection, carrying on lessons, providing knowledge, etc.

Second factor can be supervisors and mentors' attitudes towards student-teachers. Some researches indicated that student-teachers feel uncomfortable while teaching before their mentors due to their negative attitudes towards them (Akyel, 2015; Merç, 2015c; Merç, 2010; Damar & Salı, 2013; Celen & Akcan, 2017). Merç (2010) also stated that in his research student-teachers also complained about their mentors' absence, interference, disruptive behavior, and student-teachers' lack of positive relationship with their supervisors. In accordance with the last one Yıldız et al. (2016) stated in their paper these lines "…coordination between school mentors and university, supervisors are not satisfactory enough.'' From those lines, it can be understood that there is a dissatisfaction not only with mentors but also with supervisors. In his study, Merç (2015c) concluded that differences in supervisor also bring difference in the expected role of the student-teacher and as a consequence, it brings different outcomes in grading which means there is a gap in the evaluation of student-teachers which may cause problems in their further teaching career.

Another issue is generally about the school environment. As student-teachers cannot get to know the characteristic of all students in such a short time, they struggle in classroom management (Merç, 2015c; Genç, 2016; İşcan, 2017; Mirici & Ölmez-Çağlar, 2017). They need more time to discover how to behave to each student (ex: encouraging shy students, being ready to prevent disruptive behaviors, etc.). Another problem encountered with students is that they feel strange to the student-teachers and their teaching methods. Akyel (2015) and İşcan (2017) stated that in some cases students even do not respect them as they think that student-teachers are temporary. Also, Merç (2010) mentioned that, in some circumstances, crowded classes and lack of materials at school cause problem to student-teachers in their practicum courses.

Lastly, probably the most problematic issue is the weaknesses caused by the curriculum of the practicum course. Demirbulak (2012) stated the prospective teachers do not have enough time to get used to the environment and practicing teaching. Demirbulak (2012) also criticized the curriculum in complaining that the gap existed between the teaching practice regulation developed by both Ministry of National Education (MoNE) and Council of Higher Education (CoHE). She claimed that they basically pay attention to what is being taught in courses rather than how much practice is done in teacher education. Mirici & Ölmez-Çağlar (2017) also supported this idea and concluded that this practice is carried out intensely in a short period of time.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

As it can be seen, many researchers came up with both positive and negative issues regarding the teaching practicum courses. Student-teachers learned a lot and at the same time, they encountered some

problems. In order to have a better training process, many researchers came up with suggestions to regulate teaching practicum courses. To discuss these suggestions in the light of the literature reviewed, they can be divided into three sections: Suggestions for Student-Teachers; Suggestions for Mentors and Supervisors; Suggestions for Regulations of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education Council.

The first thing that a student-teacher need is to feel ready for being a teacher (Yıldız et al., 2016). For this, they should be encouraged to take part in speaking development activities both in their own and target language (Merç, 2015b; Mirici & Ölmez-Çağlar, 2017). Additionally, Mirici and Ölmez-Çağlar (2017), Ögeyik (2010) and Yıldız et al. (2016) propose that student-teachers should be encouraged to find opportunities to teach except for practicum courses so that they can at least be used to problems encountered during the practicum courses. They may face problems even when they have experience in teaching. However, they have the opportunity to realize their handicaps and find solutions for that with the help of this course. As Akcan (2009) did in her study, they can videotape their lessons in order to have a look at their performance from another perspective. Merç (2015c) suggests that when student-teachers struggle, they should consider that this is just a beginning. In time they will be able to overcome practical problems and their teaching competence will develop (Yalçın-Arslan & İlin, 2018).

In this course, guidance has a vital role for student-teachers development in teaching competence. As a consequence, Damar and Salı (2013), Merç (2015a), and Genç (2016) stated that the mentor should be more knowledgeable in their proficiency and also they should get more informed about how to be a mentor during practicum courses. Genç (2016) and Damar and Salı (2013) agreed that a mentor should not only observe but also collaborate with student-teachers. They should support them in many ways (Merç, 2015c). Merç (2015c) also emphasized that mentors should also understand student-teachers feelings and they should not expect a perfect performance from them. Additionally, a vital need for reciprocal interaction between mentors and supervisors is pointed out by Yıldız et al.'s (2016) research study. Another important suggestion for mentors is the way of evaluating student-teachers. Ögeyik (2010) supports the idea that students should get their feedback weekly. This might be useful for their development in their practicum courses. However, as Merç (2015a) claims, these feedbacks taken during the ongoing lesson should not be the evaluation measure. Akcan (2009) evaluated the teaching performance together with student-teachers and Ögeyik (2010) also supported this idea of evaluating student-teachers' performances in a cooperative way.

Suggestions given by researchers are not only personal, but they also have some suggestion for regulations accepted by-law. Mainly researchers agree that more time should be spent on practicing teaching. Özek (2009) defined that practicum courses should be longer and more intensive. It can be said that Serdar-Tülüce and Çeçen (2016) share the same idea with Özek (2009). Akyel (2015), on the other hand, suggested that student-teachers need to devote more than two days to school practicum. Another suggestion for practicing time is in Genç's (2016) research study, he stated that the first two years should only consist of observation whereas the last two years should include practice in real teaching environments. Demirbulak (2012) mentioned her suggestion in these lines ''internship could be administered jointly by teacher education faculties and cooperating teachers as in medical students.'' Many of those ideas seem sensible. Maybe a harmony of them needs to be imposed to the curriculum of teacher education programs. Both Celen and Akcan (2017) and Merç (2015b) emphasized technology should be used in language teaching classes as they are useful. Another aspect is the evaluation of practicum courses. In order to be equal to all students, there is a need to have a national evaluation system to assess student-teachers' performance (Merç, 2015a). Mebbis (an online system to evaluate student-teachers' performance) proposed by the MoNE still has some problems to be solved.

As a conclusion, beginning to teach without having some practice sounds like jumping to the ocean without learning how to swim. In other words, without practicum courses, the prospective teacher will have troubles when they start to work in a school/course. However, as it is stated above, there are still

drawbacks that are caused by pre-service teachers themselves, supervisors, school mentors, school administrations, curriculums, etc. To get more efficient education, all these weaknesses must be taken into consideration and tried to be handled according to the suggestions proposed by the reviewed literature.

5. Ethics Committee Approval

The author(s) confirm(s) that the study does not need ethics committee approval according to the research integrity rules in their country (Date of Confirmation: February 07, 2021).

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Türkiye'deki öğretmenlik uygulaması dersine yönelik çalışmaların derlemesi: Öğretmen yetiştirmeye yönelik öneriler

Özet

Üniversitelerin eğitim fakültelerinde okuyan öğretmen adaylarının "Öğretmenlik Uygulaması" dersi ile uygulama okullarında çeşitli etkinlikler düzenleyerek mesleklerine yönelik hazırlıklarını tamamlamaları ve öğretmenlik becerilerini geliştirmeleri beklenmektedir. İlgili literatürde de belirtildiği gibi öğretmenlik uygulaması dersleri, birçok güçlü yönlerinin yanı sıra zayıf yönler de içermektedir. Bu çalışma, öğretmenlik uygulaması derslerinin güçlü ve zayıf yönlerini teorik olarak sunmayı; önerileri ve çıkarımları tanımlamayı amaçlamaktadır. Literatür incelendiğinde, bu derslerin öğretmen adaylarına bol miktarda öğretim deneyimi sağlama, mesleklerinin değerinin farkına vardırma, daha fazla özgüven ve bağımsızlık kazanmalarına yardımcı olma ve performanslarını değerlendirme fırsatları sunma gibi birçok güçlü yönü ortaya çıkmaktadır. Bunların dışında bu dersler, sınıflara hazırlık, materyal seçme ve dersi sürdürme konusunda yetersiz eğitim bilgisine sahip olan öğretmen adayları, danışman öğretmenlerin rahatsız edici tutumları, sınıf ortamının olumsuz yönleri ve gerçek okul ortamlarındaki koşullar ile teoride öğrenciye sunulanlar arasındaki büyük uyumsuzluktan kaynaklanan sorunlar gibi zayıf

noktaları da içermektedir. Son olarak, bu çalışma öğretmen adaylarının hali hazırda öğrendiklerini gerektiği şekilde uygulayabilmeleri için teori ve pratik ikilemini öğretmenlik uygulaması dersi ile azaltabilmeleri adına Milli Eğitim bakanlığı, yükseköğretim konseyi, hizmet öncesi öğretmenler ve danışman öğretmenlere yönelik öneriler ve uygulamalar sunmaktadır.

Anahtar sözcükler: öğretmenlik uygulaması dersi, öğretmen eğitimi, güçlü ve zayıf yanları, öneriler

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