

Abstract

Practicing teaching is one of the most important components of teacher education as student-teachers have the opportunity to integrate theory and practice in real classroom environment (Wilson, 2006). For that reason, teacher training programs (TTP) have a vital role to prepare future teachers for their profession, and accordingly, TTPs should provide student-teachers with field work tasks that give them chances of gaining insights about what teaching really is, what kind of pre-requisite skills are required, what kind of problems might arise in the classroom, what kind of solutions they can find out, etc. As they are the ones going through this process, student-teachers' perceptions of practicum experience should also be an integrated part of determining the content of teacher training programs (Korthagen and Vasalos, 2005). The aim of this study is to shed light on the perceptions of student-teachers on teacher training program they practice, and examine elaborately what they face in practicum. In addition, what possible rearrangements they suggest for the current program. In the present study, pre-service English teachers' perceptions on teacher training program of ELT Department in Cukurova University is investigated through semi-structured interviews and a focus group discussion. The students have been asked questions about their experiences in their placement schools, benefits of practicum, the problems they face, general views about teacher training program tasks, positive attributes of the program, deficiencies of it, and possible suggestions about teacher training program. In addition, a focus group discussion has also been conducted to make students share and discuss their opinions freely with their peers and researcher.

Keywords: Teacher Training, Student-Teacher Perceptions, Practicum

Özet

Öğretme deneyimi, öğretmen adaylarına teori ve pratiği gerçek sınıf ortamında bir araya getirme imkânı verdiği için öğretmen eğitiminin en önemli unsurlarından birisidir (Wilson, 2006). Bu sebeple öğretmen yetiştirme programları geleceğin öğretmenlerini kariyerlerine hazır hale getirmede önemli bir role sahiptir. Bunu göz önüne alarak, öğretmen yetiştirme programları öğretmen adaylarına öğretmenin gerçekte ne olduğu ne gibi gereklilikler arz ettiği, sınıf ortamında ne gibi sorunların ortaya çıkabileceği, bu sorunlara nasıl çözüm bulunabileceğine dair iç görü kazandırma şansı verecek öğretmenlik deneyimi etkinlikleri sağlamalıdır. Bu süreçten geçen kişiler onlar olduğu için öğretmen adaylarının öğretmenlik deneyimi çalışmasına dair görüşleri öğretmen yetiştirme programlarının içeriğinin kararlaştırılmasına dahil edilen bir element olmalıdır (Korthagen ve Vasalos, 2005). Bu çalışmanın amacı aday öğretmenlerin dahil olduğu

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öğretmen yetiştirme programına dair görüşlerini ortaya çıkarma ve onların öğretmenlik deneyimi çalışmalarında nelerle karşı karşıya olduklarını detaylıca incelemektir; buna ek olarak, şu anki programı iyileştirmek için ne gibi düzenlemeler önerdiklerini öğrenmektir. Çalışmada Çukurova Üniversitesi, İngilizce öğretmenliği öğrencilerinin öğretmenlik eğitimi programına dair görüşleri yapılandırılmış görüşme ve odak grup tartışması ile araştırılmıştır. Öğrencilere staj okullarındaki deneyimleri, öğretmenlik deneyiminin faydalı yanları, karşılaştıkları problemler, öğretmen yetiştirme programı etkinlikleri hakkındaki genel görüşleri, programın pozitif katkıları, eksiklikleri ve program için önerileri ile ilgili sorular sorulmuştur. Ayrıca odak grup tartışması da gerçekleştirilerek öğrencilerin birbirleri ve araştırmacı ile görüşlerini rahatça paylaşma ve tartışma imkânı sağlanmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Öğretmen Yetiştirme, Aday Öğretmen Görüşleri, Öğretmenlik Deneyimi

INTRODUCTION

In teacher education practice, teaching is one of the key components (Wilson, 2006). Teacher educators continually have had the challenge of supplying student teachers with opportunities of promoting effective teaching and maximizing student learning (Ostorga and Estrada, 2007). In order to meet that challenge, field work practices are included in curricula for student teachers. Since Dewey (1933) asserted that reflective practice is the key for meaningful learning, and advocated the experiential teacher education emphasizing student-centered learning, teacher education programs started to give more importance to practice part of the programs. Dewey (1938) states that experience is one of the important notions that helps the improvement; he also adds that students should not try only what they have learned and believed; instead they should learn from others such as mentors, supervisors, peers and also from literature. In this way, student teachers may be challenged to reconstruct what they know with what they have learned as a good practicum is the place where student teachers are challenged (Korthagen, Loughran, and Russell, 2006).

As it is stated, the challenges the student teachers face will make them reconstruct their previous knowledge and beliefs with the help of current information they get from the practice, mentors, peers, supervisor, and theory. Besides, the challenges the students face have utmost importance for supervisors as they are the ones preparing the teacher training programs. Considering the challenges, the students have, the supervisors can re-think about possible ways to make the program more effective and fruitful, especially in terms of teaching practice (Ngwaru, 2013). As a result, while preparing student teachers for future teaching practice, getting their opinions is also quite necessary to prepare more functional teacher training programs. As more importance has been given recently to students' perceptions, much research has been conducted on that issue investigating student teachers' perceptions on the teacher training program they have, the problems they encounter, the suggestions they make to improve the programs. In this study, the perceptions of ELT students in Çukurova University have been explored. In the literature, various challenges have been described from different countries or contexts. In their study, Ulvik and Smith (2011) investigated Norwegian student teachers' views about their teacher training programs and found that students give foremost importance to relationship between mentors and student teachers, as mentors are the suppliers for good practice advice; however, some of the mentors are found to be not qualified enough to provide students with necessary help for teaching practice. In addition, the weak collaboration among school, university, supervisors, and mentors is another deficiency of the program that Norwegian student teachers identified. Liaw (2012) conducted a study in Taiwan and found that the biggest problem the student teachers encounter in their teacher practice is classroom management. The researcher discussed that the reason why the students had problems with management is that they have inadequate understanding of young children and the role of the teacher. If students are provided with supportive environment during practicum process, they may have a clearer self-image as teachers. In Rwanda, Otara (2014) also conducted a study on student teachers' perspectives on

internship program focusing on effectiveness and challenges. The results show that the student teachers were generally satisfied with the program; however, they find the guidance for classroom teaching very insufficient. In addition, as the feedback was given late students were also not pleased. In Turkey, this topic has been explored by many researchers investigating the pre-service teachers' perceptions on their teacher training program (Tercanhoğlu, 2008; Ok, 2005; Nergis, 2011; Saban and Çoklar, 2013; Salihoğlu, 2012; Sariçoban, 2010; Yıldız, Geçikli, Yeşilyurt, 2016). Ok (2005) found that student teachers stress the importance of cooperation between mentors and instructors to supply adequate feedback to students, adding that mentors and supervisors should be trained specifically as teacher trainers.

Teaching practice is a crucial part of teacher education. As a result, preparing programs which contribute students' improvement as teachers is one of the most important responsibilities of teacher trainers. Student teachers are the main characters of the practicum process. Consequently, learning their perceptions of the program: the positive sides of the program, the challenges they encounter, the suggestions they make to have better teaching practice is invaluable to prepare more functional and effective teacher training programs. In this study, 10 student teachers' perceptions of their teacher training program have been investigated with semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion. The student teachers are studying at ELT Department of Çukurova University, they are all senior students, and they have teaching practice at field schools this year. The present study aims to maximize the effectiveness of the teacher training program with the data gathered from student teachers.

1.1. Problem Statement

In their study, Lanier and Little (1986) described teacher education as a field which is well known, studied thoroughly, components are identified clearly, problems and solutions are suggested for specific situations: however, problematic situations remain the same. Sandlin, Young, & Karge (1992) state that graduates generally complain about the gap between what they were taught at the university and the practice in real schools. Even though student teachers are supplied with up-to-date teaching methods, they see that there is no change in schools in terms of new instruction ways. These results indicate that there is a need to change educational practices to break the circle of traditionally trained teachers who teach in a traditional manner (Stofflett & Stoddart, 1994). To break that circle, preparing effective teacher training programs is a must for teacher education, and student teachers' views on those programs are invaluable sources to make improvements in both the program and the frame of teaching profession as they are the ones who practice the current program. Previous research has shown that student teachers encounter with various problems in their field work experience such as integrating theory into practice, lack of cooperation between the school and the institute, lack of feedback on their practice, inadequate support from mentors, classroom management problems, negative school environment (Liaw, 2012; Ngwaru, 2013; Ok, 2005; Ulvik and Smith, 2011). In the present study, student teachers' perceptions of their teacher training program at ELT Department in Çukurova University are investigated to see in what terms they are satisfied or unsatisfied with their program.

1.2. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the student teachers' perceptions of their teacher training program at ELT Department in Çukurova University in terms of effectiveness and ineffectiveness. In addition, the study also aims at identifying the problems the students face at their field work experience during the teaching practice process to be able find solutions for following practices. Last but not least, as the main actors of teaching practice, getting student teachers' rearrangement suggestions in terms of the program is

another important purpose of the present study to prepare a more efficient teacher training program.

1.3. Research Questions

In this study, following questions are supposed to be answered with the data collected:

1. What do pre-service teachers in ELT department think about their teacher training program in general?
2. Do they think that the current teacher training program is efficient?
 - a. (If yes) In what ways is it efficient?
 - b. (If no) In what ways is it inefficient?
3. What possible rearrangements do student teachers suggest for their current teacher training program?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Since Dewey (1933, 1938) put forward the idea that experience is the key factor to nurture the growth of teaching quality, much importance has been given to practice part of teacher education programs. As Dewey indicated, unless student teachers share their experiences with their peers, mentors, and instructors, learning will not be meaningful and it may result in ineffective teaching practices. Only this kind of reflection on the experiences and the challenges they face will make them reconstruct their thoughts and beliefs about their teaching programs; consequently, they will be equipped with tools to act professionally in unique situations. With the changing face of the teaching profession, the students are expected to break traditional circles and Schön (1991) calls this as a cognitive risk that student teachers should take by learning from others and literature. As it can be seen, student teachers should be supplied with various kinds of support to have a richer teaching practice environment.

In teacher training programs, two types of knowledge are handed to student teachers: received knowledge and experiential knowledge. Received knowledge includes theoretical knowledge given by experts; and experiential knowledge is acquired by trainee's direct interaction with real teaching practice (Wallace, 1991 and 1998). To apply what they have learnt as received knowledge in real life teaching context, gaining experience is the key factor for student teachers as interns. As a result, the theoretical and practical knowledge student-teachers are given in teacher training programs has the utmost importance because preparing pre-service teachers shapes future in-service teachers (Tercanlioğlu, 2008; Yıldız et al., 2016).

Teacher training programs should have some qualities to give student teachers the best opportunities to improve their teaching. Teacher education is inevitably inadequate that the students cannot be prepared for every possible situation in their career (Northfield & Gunstone, 1997). As a result, this suggests that student teachers should be provided with an efficient program which supplies students with as rich experiences as possible. A good practicum cannot be defined with certain characteristics; nevertheless, in the literature there are some specifically highlighted features of a good practicum. Zeichner (2002) notes that one of the purposes of a practicum should be developing professional identities in student teachers. Korthagen and Vasalos (2005) states that student teachers should be equipped with tools necessary for further development emphasizing the importance of reflection. Another highlighted aspect is collaboration of peers, supervisors, and mentors (Korthagen et al., 2006; Sulistiyo, Mukminin, Abdurrahman, Haryanto, 2017). Also, the relationship between student teachers and the mentors has also been identified as an

important aspect of a good practicum. In addition to mentors, the role of the supervisors has also been stated as a crucial component of an effective teacher training program. Wilson (2006) offers that the supervisors should not only give feedback to students but also mentor the mentors about teacher education and teaching practice.

The researchers have identified the characteristics of a good teaching practice; however, what the student teachers think about teacher education programs is also another critical issue as they are the ones who are trained to be teachers. Much research has been conducted on this issue around the world and the results indicate that student teachers face different kind of problems, they find some aspects efficient, some aspects inefficient, and they also make quite beneficial suggestions to improve the programs. In his study, Gan (2013) investigated the perceptions of student teachers from Hong Kong of their teaching practice and found that student teachers generally complained about the difficulty they have to apply theory into practice, the unsupportive attitude of the mentors, classroom management, and the gap between what they were taught at the university and the classroom tradition in Hong Kong schools. Ulvik and Smith (2011) conducted a study in Norway on student teacher perceptions of teacher training programs. The results show that quality of the mentoring and the feedback is very important; autonomy and responsibility given to student teachers, diverse experiences, feeling as a part of the school environment, experiencing the comprehensive role of a teacher and having a structured practicum are also notable features of a good practicum according to student teachers. Fahmy and Bilton (1992) carried out a study in Oman to find out about student perceptions and concluded that students were generally having problems with English proficiency, especially with grammar and oral skills; they also added that they need more practice to have more effective teaching skills. In the study of Otara (2014), the students from Rwanda were questioned about their views on their teacher training program. The results showed that the participants found classroom management as a big problem, they found the support from the supervisors poor in terms of classroom teaching. In Otara's study (2014), the students asserted that the assistance they got from the mentors was satisfactory; however, they were not satisfied with the assistance of mentors in terms of practice activities planning. Nevertheless, the student teachers stated that field work experience served them as a functional tool to get prepared for real world work experience and improve themselves as effective teachers. In a report prepared investigating the American teacher education, it was stated that the feedback given was infrequent, uncoordinated, vague and not actionable (Park, Takahashi and White, 2014). It was stated that the feedback is valuable throughout the teaching profession, yet is invaluable for new teachers as they need more support and feedback to reflect on their experiences and reconstruct what they know with what they newly learnt. In Iran, similar studies have been conducted. Javanbakht (2014) found that the student teachers were not satisfied with the mentors as they were not aware of the education theories, development psychology, and technological innovations in schools. They were also complaining that the mentors did not talk about any teaching methodologies and give feedback to them. In addition, the attitude of the supervisor was not approved. In England, the role of coordinator teachers was investigated (Evans, Holland, Wolstenholme, Willis, Hawksley, 2006) as teacher programs were constructed by starting a partnership between universities and schools who prepared the teacher training programs together to solve the problem of lack of collaboration. Ong'ondo (2009) conducted a similar study in Kenya, and found that the students generally aimed to survive the practicum and get the required grades. The students complained about the gap between university courses and real-life classrooms, vague definition of practice, and lack of support in the field. Similar studies have been conducted in different contexts such as Malaysia, Nairobi, Hong Kong, Zimbabwe, Taiwan, Thailand, Jordan, and Turkey (Chung, 2002; Hamaidi, Al-Shara, Arouri, & Awwad, 2014; Jusoh, 2015; Liaw, 2012;

Nergis, 2008; Ngwaru, 2013; Ok, 2005; Otieno, 2012; Saban and Çoklar, 2013; Salihoğlu, 2012; Sarıçoban, 2010; Tercanlıoğlu, 2011). Sulistiyo and his colleagues (2017) conducted a study in Indonesia and they found that student teachers found the practicum time too limited to conduct what they had learnt at university.

As it is stated this study is conducted at ELT Department of Çukurova University, which is in Turkey. There is some other research conducted in Turkey on student teachers' perceptions of teacher training programs. Ok (2005) found that some of the points highlighted by student teachers were: lack of cooperation between schools and universities, between mentors and supervisors, mentor's irresponsibility. School climate was also found to be an effective factor for student teachers' teaching practice. In Salihoğlu's study (2012), the students claimed there were overlaps among the course contents, the aims of the courses were not clear, and most importantly, they were a lack of teaching language skill practice opportunities. Regarding the strength of the teacher training program, with the help of some courses they could combine theory and practice, and the instructors were good at their profession. In Tercanlıoğlu's study (2008), it was found that the students were not satisfied with the support of their instructors who were claimed to have limited knowledge about the program. They also added that they do not have enough number of alternatives as elective courses, as a result, they have to take what the program suggests. They were also not happy with the classroom conditions and the attitude of the faculty towards students. It was also explored that the coordination between mentors and university is weak and not giving enough support to student teachers (Yıldız et al., 2016).

The perceptions of student teachers are valued by researchers as the students are the ones who are aimed to be trained to be future teachers. As a result, their satisfaction with the teacher training programs has utmost importance. The studies conducted beforehand suggest comparable results about student teachers' perceptions such as lack of support, unclear aims of the practice, lack of collaboration between mentors and supervisors, etc.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

This study is a descriptive, qualitative research which has been conducted by using two qualitative data collection tools: semi-structured interview and focus group discussion. As the study aims at investigating student teachers' perceptions of their teacher training program, using qualitative research tools was considered to be more useful for the study's purpose because the researcher wanted to have a deeper understanding of what the students really think about their program. In the present study, there are 10 participants who are student teachers having the field work experience in 2016. Firstly, an in-depth interview was made with each of the participants with questions prepared beforehand. And then after interviewing all of them, a focus group discussion was held with all the participants (n=10). The focus group discussion was an efficacious tool to support data gathered from the interviews. As students had similar experiences during their practicum they had a good number of topics to discuss. A lively and natural discussion made them feel relaxed and they shared their experiences, ideas, suggestions, and beliefs about the field work.

3.2. Participants

In this study, there are 10 participants, 7 female and 3 male students. The study does not seek answers about gender related questions; as a result, the data were not analyzed taking gender factor into consideration. All the participants are senior students who have their "Teaching Practice" course in 2016 in both semesters. In the first semester, they

have gone to schools to observe the mentors in the classroom regarding the tasks they are requested to complete each week. There were 10 weeks and 5 main task topics in the first term program. The topics were the language, the lesson, classroom management, classroom context and language tasks, lastly, the blackboard and error correction. The students were obliged to complete each topic in two consecutive weeks.

3.3. Instruments

This is a qualitative research consisting of two qualitative data collection tools, namely, semi-structured interview and focus group discussion. In semi-structured interviews, the researcher had prepared an interview guide before conducting the interviews. The topics and the questions were identified; the interviews were recorded for later analysis. 10 participants were interviewed to gather information about their thoughts on teacher training program. That kind of interview provides participants with clear instructions and gives reliable and comparable qualitative data. The second tool was focus group discussion, which is another qualitative research tool providing the researcher with natural and reliable data. After conducting the semi-structured interviews with each of the participants, a focus group discussion was held to discuss the key issues related to teaching practice. The moderator (here the researcher) introduces topics or interests that the whole group goes through and the group discusses on these concerns. With this opportunity, the students have a chance to share their thoughts, ideas, agreements, disagreements and suggestions freely with their peers and the researcher. This kind of tool is beneficial especially when the participants go through the same or similar processes and experiences; in this way, the discussion provides an insight about how the thoughts vary on specific issues, what the other group members think, what the range of thoughts is.

3.4. Procedure

3.4.1. Data Collection

To be able to describe how they perceive the teaching practice, students were asked several questions during semi-structured interview. The questions explored their general views regarding the teacher training program, the effective and ineffective sides of it, and their suggestions to rearrange the program components. All the 10 participants were interviewed, the same questions were asked to them and the interview durations ranged from 15 to 40 minutes. Afterwards, the interviews were transcribed to find recurring points stated by the participants.

The other data collection tool was focus group discussion, which is a useful tool to investigate how the group members' thoughts are similar or different on a certain topic or interest. This tool was especially important for this study as during the practice the student teachers could not have a chance to share their opinions as practice group, they could only talk with their practice peers. As a result, this focus group discussion was appreciated by the participants as they could hear what the other group members experienced, what they think about the practice, what kind of problems they encountered, whether they could have support from mentors, instructors or peers. With these two data collection tools, the researcher was able to gather detailed data about the perceptions of student teachers of their teacher training program.

3.4.2. Data Analysis

The data collected in this study presents qualitative results, to analyze the data content analysis method was used. There are two types of content analysis quantitative and qualitative. In the present study, qualitative content analysis was preferred as the number of the participants is limited, and the purpose of the study is not reaching

statistical results instead exploring deeply how the participants perceive the teacher training program and what kind of problems they face during their field work experience. There are two sub-categories of qualitative research procedures: inductive and deductive category development (Mayring, 2000). While developing inductive categories, you decide on the themes during the process; oppositely, deductive category development requires pre-set category titles according to the research questions you wrote or the data you gathered. In this study, deductive category development is used as the themes were identified beforehand because the focus of the study is on general perceptions on the program, effective and ineffective sides of it, what kind of problems they face at the teaching practice, and suggestions on possible rearrangements for the teacher training program's improvement. As a result, the transcribed interviews were analyzed and coded in detail to find the specific views of the participants under certain themes. Recurring codes showed the common experiences among the participants.

4.RESULTS

The results of the study are analyzed in two phases. firstly, the interview transcriptions were analyzed and recurring statements the participants made were found. Secondly, the transcriptions of the focus group discussion were analyzed according to the research questions. There are four main deductive categories which were determined before the study was conducted considering the aim of the study: student teachers' general perception of the TTP (teacher training program), effective sides of the TTP, deficiencies of it, lastly, the suggestions for a more efficient TTP. First, the results of the interviews are given under four categories, then focus group discussion results are presented.

4.1. Semi-Structured Interview

Semi-structured interview was conducted with each of the participants, and they were asked questions about the general perceptions of TTP, effective and ineffective aspects of it, and suggestions for a better program. In Table 1, general results of semi-structured interview are presented:

Table 1. General Results of Semi-Structured Interview

Categories	Recurrent Student Answers
General perceptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pleased to have teaching practice - Positive school atmosphere - Applying theory into practice - Breathing real classroom atmosphere - Huge gap between theory and practice - Experiencing potential problems and solutions in class
Efficiencies of TTP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The chance of applying theory into practice - Supportive school members - Learning more about the classroom routine and management - Useful tasks asked by TTP
Deficiencies of TTP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Theory suggested at university conflicts with reality in classrooms - More practical courses should be suggested - Duration of the tasks - Lack of support from supervisors - Lack of collaboration between practice schools and university - Lack of regular feedback sessions

Suggestions for a more efficient TTP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The numbers and durations of practice courses should be increased - Feedback sessions should be more regular and planned - Task numbers should be increased - Mentors and peers should be changed periodically - Collaboration between practice schools and supervisors should be improved -
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Detailed explanations about the results suggested in Table 1 can be found below:

4.1.1. General Perceptions

Participants' answers indicated that they were satisfied with the teaching practice itself as they had the chance to observe what they had learned at the university course. Applying theory into practice helped them to create a clearer frame for their profession. P3 (Participant 3) stated that:

“Observing what we had learned was good for us as I could embody the abstract theories in real classrooms. After having that teaching practice my ideas about the profession changed and I decided to be a teacher.”

That statement of P3 clearly shows that teaching practice is a quite influential phenomenon for student teachers. Similarly, other participants also stated that they had a more precise understanding of their profession while going through this TTP. They also remarked the supportive attitude of mentors, school directors, students and peers made them more comfortable and enthusiastic towards the practice. However, all the mentors were not appreciated by the student teachers. P2 noted that the mentor was not helpful, not answering the questions after the lessons and that negative atmosphere affected her perception badly. P2 stated that:

“At the beginning of the practicum I was more enthusiastic and excited, the negative attitude of the mentor disinclined me towards the teaching practice.”

P2's statement indicates that every single deficiency of the TTPs may have an extreme impact on student teachers' perceptions of the program and even teaching profession.

Participants were satisfied with the fact of getting engaged in the real teaching process and the positive school atmosphere; nevertheless, they generally complained about the fact that there was a huge gap between what they had learned at university and the real classrooms. The mentors were teaching in traditional ways nearly all the time, and they could not have much chance to observe the contemporary teaching methods. P7 said, in that concern, that:

“There is considerable difference what was taught to us and what is being applied. The teachers are not enthusiastic; they look like they are bored with their profession. I think they should be evaluated in certain intervals; in that way they have to work more.”

All the participants agreed that within the program they had the chance of experiencing classroom atmosphere and saw the possible situations and problems they may encounter in the teaching experience; in addition, the solutions or how to behave in certain situations were observed. The classroom management was one of the most problematic issue for student teachers so the teaching practice helped them to become more professional in managing the classroom. In TTP there was an elective course “Classroom Management” which was found considerably helpful to develop a better understanding of

classroom atmosphere. Not all the students were enrolled in that course; however, the ones enrolled expressed their satisfaction. P6 stated that:

“The content of ‘Classroom Management’ course was quite parallel with the field work tasks as a result we felt pretty relaxed with the help of this course. We learned a lot about teaching and how to act in the classroom. I think this course should be elected by all the students.”

As it can be seen, the participants were content with the practice concept itself as the following year they are supposed to become an English language teacher. As a result, they need to engage in real teaching practice applying what they learned at the university. They also had a chance to see possible situations they may encounter in real life and that made them feel more self-confident and professional. They stated that there was a supportive atmosphere in schools generally, and they saw what teaching really was. However, they had negative observations in the field that the mentors were going on using traditional teaching methods and that not let students to experience contemporary teaching methods. They complained about lack of effective models of teaching.

4.1.2. Effective Sides of the TTP

After learning the general perceptions of participants of TTP, effective sides of the program were asked to the student teachers. The general view was that the most important function of the teaching practice was giving them the chance of applying the theory into practice. They remarked that they learned how to adapt the theoretical knowledge in to practice and the importance of it. As the students in the school seemed bored and showed undesired behaviors, the participants realized that they should use different kinds of activities to meet students’ expectations and keep them busy preventing the boredom. Regarding application into practice, P3 stated that:

“We felt like that we got the ingredients at the university and now we are in the kitchen.”

This metaphor was quite good to express their feelings towards practice. Even though there are few exceptions, the attitude of the mentors was appreciated by the participants. With mentors’ supportive manner, they felt like a part of the teaching profession, and it helped them to develop a teacher identity. The participants also added that not only the mentors but all the school community was supportive, they answered all the questions they had, and administration was also very helpful.

Importance of the theory and practice balance was highlighted by the participants; moreover, they asserted that they saw not only the theoretical knowledge but also some certain behavioral knowledge is required for effective teaching. During the TTP, they could see how to start and end a lesson, what kind of activities they should use in which stage of the lesson, how the individual differences play a vital role in the classroom, how to manage the classroom. Experiencing these kinds of knowledge made them feel more secure and confident for their future profession.

The participants were also content with TTP tasks about which they have to write reports once every two weeks. They said the topics were well-chosen and useful; however, they could not observe what was asked in the tasks as the mentors generally used traditional methods, and the lesson did not go in the expected direction.

4.1.3. Deficiencies of the TTP

Students gave invaluable information about the effectiveness of the TTP, and emphasized certain points. Even they were content with the program, they added that there were some deficiencies of it. The most recurring statement was that the theory they got at the university was not preparing them adequately for the real classrooms. General view was

that there should be more practical courses such as “Teaching Skills,” and “Teaching English to Young Learners” in the curriculum, especially in third and fourth year; in that way, they can be more equipped for teaching practice. Regarding this point, P5 asserted that:

“I do not feel myself well-equipped enough to apply the things we learned into the practice at school. We are left alone in the schools to realize what was taught. The practice courses are limited in time and number.”

As the answers imply the number of the practical courses were found limited, they also stated that “Classroom Management” was a crucial component of the teaching, as a result, all the students should take that course at the university.

Participants also stated that writing a report about one topic for two weeks was too long, they added that they did it in one week (four hours) and the next week they felt that they had no goal. One task for each week was suggested by the students. The topics of the tasks were welcomed by the students; however, they stated that as the mentors were traditional practitioners, sometimes they could not observe what the task asked for. This gave the impression that the reality and the expectations did not fit each other.

One of the biggest deficiencies identified by the participants was that they could not get enough support from the instructors at university. They stated that they felt alone in the field work experience, they could not get regular feedback on what to do. At the beginning of the term, there was a TTP meeting; however, the students confirmed that the hall was excessively crowded they could not get in and have information about tasks. As a result, they needed to ask the points they could not understand to their supervisors whenever they need. This was the general complaint made by participants about the lack of support from university instructors. On that issue, P1 asserted that:

“We did not get help from instructors during the practice process, only when we asked the points which are unclear to our supervisor. And the TTP meeting was overcrowded we could not even get in the hall.”

Along with the lack of instructors’ support, the participants also emphasized the lack of collaboration between school and university. They felt like they were stuck between university and the school. The supervisor went to the school only once at the beginning of the term; the mentors and the other school workers were not well-informed about the process. As a result, there was a chaos at the beginning. The students found that lack of collaboration as one of the factors hindering the efficiency of the TTP.

One of the other deficiencies was that there was not a regular feedback session on the practice, if there was a routine of changing ideas and sharing thought, the process would be much fruitful. The participants demanded a weekly session to be held to learn the group members’ practice experiences and get their ideas on theirs. This shows that the students are aware of the importance of the reflection and its positive attributions to their professional development.

4.1.4. Suggestions for a More Efficient TTP

The participants both stated the effective sides and deficiencies of their TTP; regarding the deficiencies they were requested to make suggestions to improve the current program as they are the ones deeply involved in it. They made beneficial contributions with their substantial suggestions.

One of the most-highlighted suggestion was that the number and the duration of the practical courses should be increased, and especially during the teaching practice, they should be supported with practical courses (Sulistiyo et al., 2017). In addition,

“Classroom Management” course was suggested to be a compulsory course instead of an elective one. Because they saw that the theory cannot be implemented easily in real life, they needed professional support and feedback during the practice period.

In addition to the practical course number and duration, another important suggestion was about feedback sessions. The participants stated the lack of regular feedback about their practicum experience and detailed explanations on the tasks they are asked to complete. They suggested that if the group met the supervisor every week and got feedback on their experiences and got information about the following week’s task; the practice would be more effective for them.

In terms of the tasks, they stated that one topic for two weeks was not sufficient as they stay for 4 hours in a week at the school and they said that they complete the task at the first week and do not know what to do following week. As a result, one task for each week would be better for the student teachers.

Some of the participants noted that they should change their mentors and peers periodically during the practice process to learn more from different kinds of people, various kinds of experiences. The more they share their thoughts and give feedback the more fruitful the practice will be.

Another valuable suggestion made by the participants was that the cooperation between the school and the university should be improved. There is no communication between supervisors and mentors, as a result, the student teachers sometimes feel lost between two institutions. P3 summarized what the other participants also think about the weak cooperation between the school and the university:

“The connection between the school and faculty is too weak but the success is bound to that connection. The mentors and supervisors do not communicate during our teaching process; they do not share their views or they do not give any feedback to each other. This is a general problem in Turkey’s institutions.”

For the deficiencies they identified, participants made clear suggestions such as more practical courses supporting their teaching practice, and more support for classroom management skills. They asked for regular feedback sessions and clearer explanations on the tasks, they also suggested that the number of the tasks could be increased. Especially the cooperation between the supervisors and mentors was valued by the participants, and suggested to be improved.

4.2. Focus Group Discussion

The student teachers’ perceptions of their TTP was investigated individually firstly, then a focus group discussion was held to create a relaxing and free environment to make them share their ideas with the researcher and the other group members. The main topics were again general views, the problems they encountered in teaching practice experience, efficiency and deficiency, and suggestions. In Table 2 general results of focus group discussion can be seen:

Table 2. Overall Results of Focus Group Discussion

Categories	Recurrent Student Answers
General perceptions	- Pleased to have teaching practice
	- Applying theory into practice
	- Gap between theory and practice
	- Observing bad teachings also help them to avoid in the future
	- Improvement in teacher identity
	- More practical knowledge, especially in teaching grammar
	- Clear explanations about practicum during the whole process

Efficiencies of TTP	-	Experiencing real school atmosphere
	-	Getting prepared for possible problems by experiencing them in the class
	-	Increasing their self-confidence with experience
Deficiencies of TTP	-	The gap between theory and practice
	-	Lack of support from supervisors
	-	Lack of cooperation between practice schools and university
Suggestions for a more efficient TTP	-	More practical courses should be suggested
	-	More regular and well-structured feedback sessions should be provided
	-	Classroom management course should be compulsory

As it is seen in Table 2, the results of the group discussion showed that the participants shared similar information with their interviews. The general perception towards the TTP was positive, as they were glad to get engaged in the real practice environment. They felt that they were teachers in that school and they could have the chance of observing how to apply the theory into practice. However, they found that the reality and the theoretical knowledge they had differed a lot. At that point, they felt they need more practical knowledge about teaching as the mentors goes on using traditional methods. The good thing was that the student teachers managed to see the positive side of the coin and stated that seeing the wrong example may also help us to see what we should not do in the future. P7 expressed his feelings that:

“Whenever my mentor did something wrong or not appropriate, I felt that I should not do this in my classroom.”

They found that field work experience was the thing that made them feel like teachers and only then did they improve their teacher identity. As a result, they suggested that in their final year at the university, they should have more practice and reflect deeper on their teaching with the feedback from peers, instructors and students. They feel that they have enough theoretical knowledge but they lack the application practice especially in teaching grammar. One of the course suggestions made by the participants was “Pedagogical Grammar,” because they feel insecure and unqualified about teaching grammar effectively.

In addition, they again emphasized the clear explanation and feedback at the beginning, during and at the end of the teaching practice.

5.DISCUSSION

The results show that participants are generally content with being involved in the TTP as they could have the opportunity to be in the real classrooms observing how to apply theory into practice. Nevertheless, they stated that they need more support and feedback from the university instructors and mentors, also there should be a closer relationship between mentors and supervisors to create a tighter-knit circle. In addition, they strongly suggested that the program should include more practical courses in the third and fourth year.

When all the results are taken into consideration, the participants were content with the teaching practice experience as they learned the importance of the engagement in the real-life classrooms, as Dewey also (1933, 1938) stated. In his study, Liaw (2012) also found that student teachers could have the chance of putting theory into practice, and learned a lot about the profession. In the study of Salihoğlu (2012), the participants also expressed their satisfaction about the program as they could have the chance of practicing and getting feedback on it.

In terms of the efficient sides of the programs, students had experience in teaching and learned about school atmosphere. Ok (2005) also found that student teachers were content with learning about the school atmosphere in general. In this study, students

expressed that they could encounter the possible situations they may face in their classrooms and this made them more self-confident. Similar results were found in previous research that in the classroom unexpected or undesired situations may arise, so students should be prepared (Kabialn and Izzaham, 2008; Liaw, 2012; Hamaidi, Al-Shara, Arouri, & Awwad, 2014). Consequently, students had a clearer self-image as teachers as they felt as a part of this environment (Liaw, 2012). Like the results of the study conducted in Jordan (Hamaidi et. al, 2014), the students noted that the program urged them to reflect on their practices and helped them to improve. In the present study, the practical courses are much valued as they are seen as the most effective tools to get prepared for future profession. The study of Jusoh (2015) also shows that the student teachers in Malaysia also see practical lessons in TTPs as one of the most important components of the program.

For the deficiencies, the gap between the theoretical knowledge they got at the university and practice was one of the most frequently stated one in the present study. In Ok (2005), Liaw (2012), Javanbakht (2014), Chung (2002) studies, they also found that student teachers feel confused when they get to the field placement schools seeing that the theoretical knowledge they got at university and reality at schools; as a result, they need more support and feedback from the mentors and supervisors. They state that they feel like they do not know how to apply the contemporary teaching methods in the classroom. They also complain about the lack of support from the supervisors stating that they need more feedback to improve themselves. Otieno (2012) also found in his study that student teachers value the support of supervisors crucially since they are the ones the students learn how to teach effectively. Another deficiency stated by the participants was lack of cooperation between schools and university which result in a weak connection between supervisors and mentors. In the literature, this point was also highlighted quite frequently (Hamaidi, Al-Shara, Arouri, & Awwad, 2014; Jusoh, 2015, Beck and Kosnik, 2002) that the cooperation between the mentors and the supervisors are quite important as they are the facilitators of the same program. As a result, they should be working together during planning and running the program to have more outstanding outcomes.

In terms of the suggestions, the participants suggested to have more practical knowledge but not excessive workload. They have enough theoretical knowledge, the thing they need more is how to apply what they know. When students dive into the field placement schools they face the problem of lack of practice, as a result, they should be supplied with as much practice as possible (Beck and Kosnik, 2002). In addition, student teachers also require more meaningful and better-structured feedback about their practice. As the improvement is only managed with reflection, they need clear feedback to reconstruct what they know and do, in that respect, providing them with rich feedback will make them more self-confident and secure about their teaching (Le and Vasquez, 2011). One of the problematic issues for student teachers was classroom management, and they suggested that the "Classroom Management" course should be a compulsory one instead of being elective. The results show that the students' beliefs about teaching profession change substantially as they saw that the theoretical knowledge itself is not enough for effective teaching, but they also have some pedagogical knowledge and experience. They need to know how to act in certain unexpected situations or how to handle the classroom routine. In that case, giving students enough sources about classroom management is also another vital component of effective TTPs (Ngwaru, 2013; Liaw, 2008, Sariçoban, 2010).

6. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

In this study, as the main actors of teacher training programs student teachers views about their program have been investigated from different perspectives. However, the

program itself does include other actors such as supervisors, program makers, mentors, national education directors, etc. As a result, exploring the views of different stakeholders of the field would be a significant contribution to the field to prepare more yielding programs.

7. LIMITATIONS

The number of the participants (n=10) is limited to conduct quantitative research tools; however, with in-depth interviews and focus group discussion the researcher had a deep understanding about student teachers' perceptions of their teacher training program. In addition, the researcher works at the same department where students study which may be an obstacle for students to share their thoughts freely. Nevertheless, the researchers ensured the participants that the data will not be shared with anybody and their names will be enclosed.

8. CONCLUSION

Teaching practice is maybe the most important part of teacher education programs as student teachers can have the opportunity of implementing what they have learned at the university in real classrooms. As a result, while preparing teacher training, programs should take many points into consideration to make them more effective and functional. Student teachers' perceptions of TTPs are also invaluable sources to prepare or improve the programs as they are the ones practicing them. In this study, the aim was to learn student teachers' general perceptions of TTP, effective sides and deficiencies of the program, and suggestions to improve it. The data collected by the means of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion showed that the student teachers are generally content with being in practicum and experiencing the real classroom as they can observe the natural flow of the lessons and possible situations they may encounter in their classrooms in the future. However, they realized that there is a gap between what they were taught and reality in schools. In schools, the mentors go on using the traditional teaching methods paying no attention to contemporary innovations in teaching. As a result, the students expect more practical courses at university which embody the theories giving examples of teaching activities. In addition, the participants also give substantial importance to feedback given by supervisors, as they can reflect on their practices and improve themselves with the feedback they receive. They suggest that the supervisors should meet with the student teachers regularly and they should share their views and ideas about the practicum. Finally, the cooperation between university and schools were also found weak resulting in a negative atmosphere for student teachers as they feel they do not belong to any sides. They suggest that the supervisors and mentors should work more cooperatively to create a more influential TTP.

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