PRACTICUM FROM THE ELT STUDENT-TEACHERS' EYE: EXPECTATIONS AND GAINS

Öğretmen Adaylarının Bakış Açısından Öğretmenlik Uygulaması: Beklentiler ve Kazanımlar

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Abstract

Practicum is a period when student-teachers practice teaching for the first time in a real school setting. Depending on the nature of the experiences student-teachers encounter at this final phase of their education in the department, the period may or not be considered as a fruitful one. The extent to which the period meets prospective teachers' expectations seems to have a determining role on the learning outcomes. Based on these discussions, This study attempts to draw a general picture of student-teachers' expectations and gains from the practicum exploring their thinking while they proceed through this stage. Totally 16 student-teachers of the English Language Teaching Department of a Turkish University and two mentors, with more than 15 years of experience as high school language teachers, participated in the study. Data for the study came from three sources: weekly task reports student-teachers prepared throughout the ten-week practicum as part of the requirements coming from their departments, weekly written reflections on their experiences and follow-up interviews. Findings reveal that practicum, although student-teachers benefit from the period by means of some strategies they utilised, does not thoroughly meet their expectations. In addition, mentors, the main focus of student-teachers' interest, appear to be the most frequently criticised element of the experience. The study also uncovers the need for the ELT departments to make relevant adaptations of practicum procedures to comply with real life practices at schools, providing mentors with in-service training programmes on better mentoring and systematic collaboration of universities and practice schools to contribute more to professional development of prospective teachers.

Key Words: Teacher education, teaching practice, mentor, student-teacher, teacher thinking.

Özet

Öğretmenlik uygulaması, öğretmen adaylarının öğretmenliği gerçek bir okul ortamında ilk kez denedikleri bir süreçtir. Adayların eğitim fakültesi bünyesinde aldıkları eğitimlerinin bu son aşamasında, öğretmen adaylarının edindikleri deneyimlerin doğasına bağlı olarak öğretmenlik uygulaması sürecinin adaylara olan yararı değişkenlik gösterir. Bu tartışmalara bağlı olarak, bu çalışmanın amacı, öğretmen adaylarının öğretmenlik uygulaması sürecindeki düşüncelerini inceleme yolu ile bu dönem ile ilgili beklentilerinin karşılanıp karşılanmadığını ve kazanımlarının neler olduğuna dair genel bir resim ortaya koyabilmektir. Çalışma, bir Türk üniversitesinde İngiliz Dili Eğitimi bölümünün 16 öğretmen adayı öğrencisi ve 15 yıl ve üzeri öğretmenlik deneyimine sahip, uygulama okulunda görevli iki danışman öğretmen çalışmada katılımcı olarak yer almıştır. Bu çalışmada, elde edilecek sonuçların daha derin yorumlanabilmesine yardımcı olacak şekilde üç ayrı yöntemle veri toplanmıştır. İlk olarak, öğretmen adaylarının on haftalık uygulama dönemi boyunca hazırladıkları bölümlerince istenen haftalık çalışma raporları dönem sonunda toplanmış, sonrasında ise yazılı olarak verdikleri uygulama deneyimlerine dair haftalık değerlendirmeleri ve karşılıklı görüşmeler ile veriler genişletilmiş ve içerikleri analiz edilmiştir. Çalışma bulguları, uygulama döneminin öğrencilerin beklentilerini karşılamadığını, ancak yine de öğrencilerin geliştidikleri kendilerine özgü stratejiler sonucu verimli görüldüğünü, uygulama okulundaki danışmanların öğrencilerin ilgi odağı ve aynı zamanda en çok eleştirdikleri unsur olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Bulgular ayrıca uygulama sürecinde öğretmen adaylarının yerine getirmesi istenen haftalık görevlerin bölümlerce daha gerçekçi bir biçimde yeniden gözden geçirilerek uygulama okullarındaki şartlara göre uyarlanması gerektiğini göstermektedir. Son olarak, üniversite ve uygulama okullarının arasında işbirliğinin üniversite öncülüğünde artırılması ve uygulama okulundaki danışman öğretmenlerin hizmet içi eğitim yoluyla daha fazla bilgilendirilmesi ile adayların mesleki gelişimlerine katkının artabileceğini göstermektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Öğretmen yetiştirme, öğretmenlik uygulaması, danışman, öğretmen adayı, öğretmen düşünceleri.

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1. Introduction

In the related literature, the prominent components of teacher education reveals that observation is fundamental (Apprentice model, Lortie, 1975 in Mewborn and Tyminski, 2006), practice is pivot (Reflective practitioner Schon, 1987), and reflection is a key for development (Dewey, 1910). Constituting a match with these views, teaching practice appears to be a period that provides student-teachers with all these three components; that is, student-teachers are assigned to schools, observe their mentor teachers throughout one semester and finally practice teaching for another semester. Meanwhile, they go in reflective discussions with their peers, mentors and university supervisors; they evaluate themselves as teachers in a real classroom atmosphere making judgements on various aspects of this experience.

Although practice teaching is to do with the quality of feedback, reflection, and general conditions of practicum (Sacher, 1988), and the more open the dialogue is and the more divergent the views are allowed, the more satisfied the student teachers are with their practicum (in Talvitie, Peltokallio,and Maennnisto, 2000), they may still feel that they have not fully benefitted from the practicum. During this period, student teachers' personal beliefs sometimes come into conflict with the realities of teaching that may lead to a sense of resignation that may shape their teacher identity (Flores and Day, 2006). Similarly, based on their beliefs for each of the facets of practicum, student-teachers have pre-formed expectations, and thus they start practicum with these expectations in their baggage. These expectations and reality in the practicum experience may or may not cohere with each other, which may result in mixed attitudes by prospective teachers ranging from "useful" to "not effective". To elaborate, student-teachers' beliefs, background experiences as learners, and their conceptualisation of the world around them play a role on the benefits they may gain through the educational process. Undoubtedly, the student-teachers' expectations, either met or not, seem crucial at this stage. To illustrate, although traditional approaches to teacher education programmes are criticised as they bear limited relationship to student teachers' needs and impact on their practice as teachers (Korthagen, Loughran, and Russell 2006), Paechter, Maier, and Macher (2010) suggest that students' motivation and goals can be influenced by adapting the instruction according to students' expectations. To learn more about the experience, there is a growing body of research that focuses on pre-service beginning teachers' beliefs, expectations and attitudinal changes during this stage. (Ozgun –Koca and Sen, 2006).

2. The Study

Taking the question whether or not practicum meets student-teachers' expectations as a starting point, the study attempts to draw a general picture of the teaching practice, and shed light on the probable discrepancies between student-teachers' expectations and the reality they face during this stage. During the practicum, the department depending on the number of senior students each academic year forms groups of student-teachers and two or three of these groups are assigned to one practice school. At the time of the study, each group consisted of eight prospective teachers and each practice school accepted two groups. Using convenience sampling, one of these practice schools was selected. This also constituted a chance as the study adopted an in depth descriptive approach through which all the possible views the student-teachers held throughout this stage were attempted to be uncovered. To sum, totally 16 student-teachers of the ELT Department of a Turkish University contributed to the study. Although gender was not considered as a variable for the study, we may still say that three of the participants were males while 13

were females exactly representing the male and female proportion of the department population. Two mentors, with more than 15 years of experience as high school language teachers, also took part in the study as they were the mentor teachers of the practice school.

The study is based on the following research questions:

1. How do the prospective ELT teachers evaluate the practicum in general terms?
2. What kind of a base constitutes a source for student-teachers' evaluations?
3. Do their probable expectations from the practicum and reality at the practice schools cohere with one another?

Data for the study compose of three different sources; these are weekly task reports student-teachers prepared throughout the ten-week practicum, weekly reflections on their experiences, and finally, semi-structured follow-up interviews. As a component of the practicum, student-teachers are assigned by the department with tasks each week. These are such as getting to know about the school rules, observing group/pair work activities in their mentors' classes, preparing exam questions, correcting students' papers and the like. Having completed each of the tasks, the student-teachers wrote short reports about what they observed. In order to achieve a deeper perspective about the happenings, in this study, the participants were also asked to write critical reflections on their experiences during this period. Based on the data gathered, follow-up interviews were held with the student-teachers on a one-to-one basis. These interviews, apart from bringing insight into the study, served to the triangulation of the data collected.

With regard to data analysis, the collected data comprising of reports, reflections and transcriptions of interviews were subjected to content analysis. To go in more detail, the content of the data was scanned, recursive expressions were identified. Following this, the emerging categories were designated. These were labelled and when necessary relabelled, new arising themes and sub themes were detected. Finally, all the verbal data were interpreted and displayed in tables.

3. Findings

The first and the most common approach to inducting novice teachers focuses primarily on providing them with school orientation information, support, and guidance in the classroom, typically through a mentor. Mentors play an important role on the student-teachers' transition into the new career of teaching and in providing professional development to assist new teachers in reaching the necessary level of skill required for effective teaching (Odell and Huling 2004, p. 6). To do that, mentors shift among roles from that of an advisor, to a trainer, partner, friend or assessor (Jones, 2001). Parallel to the emphasis detected on the mentors in the related literature, the analysis revealed mainly three prominent areas about mentors on which the student-teachers focused. These are the mentors' personal qualities, their relationship with the students, and mentors' academic qualities. This finding verifies that mentors seem to be a central point of student-teachers' attention during practicum and they play a crucial role throughout this stage. However, an evident discrepancy shows itself in the findings between what mentors in fact are like and how student-teachers conceptualised them in advance or in other words what they expected from them.

Mentor's personal qualities can easily be said to be the least negatively criticised aspect during this phase. As displayed in the table, student-teachers do not underestimate the personal attributes of their mentors.

Table 1. *Mentor's Personal Qualities*

	Positive	*f*	Negative	*f*
1	Is disciplined	5	Is disappointing	2
2	Is a good model	4	Makes you feel worthless	2
3	Is polite	3	Never smiles	1
4	Is positive	3	Never jokes	1
	Total	15		6

Although they partially find their mentors disappointing in some ways (totally 6 citations), still they appreciate their disciplined (5) and positive (3) behaviours, and politeness (3), and characterise them as "good models" as persons (4). To sum, in terms of personal characteristics, mentors almost met student-teachers' expectations in this study.

As compared to their mentors, the participants appear to draw a more understanding, interested and a more "nurturing" (Fung and Chow, 2002) picture toward learners when teacher learner relationship is considered. In this respect, they criticise the mentors negatively (18) as well as positively (15) as seen in the following table.

Table 2. *Mentor's Relationship with Students*

	Positive	**ƒ**	**Negative**	**ƒ**
1	Values learners	8	Is not understanding	8
2	Listens to students carefully	4	Does not care about students	7
3	Motivates learners	2	Uses no reinforcement	2
4	Reinforces	1	Is impolite to students	1
	Total	**15**		**18**

According to the student-teachers, mentors valued the learners (8), and listened to them carefully (4). Probably, through these means, they motivate the learners (2) and positively reinforce them (1). On the other hand, some hold contradictory beliefs as shown in the table above.

Student-teachers' views on their mentors' academic qualities seem to be the biggest disappointment they experienced during practicum. They contradict with the mentors in the way they manage the classroom (122), teach (117), use mother tongue in the lesson (22), give assignments (17), assess the learners (16), organise the lesson phases (13), and finally correct mistakes (5). In terms of this category, we may suggest that the reality of the practicum does not fully correspond to student-teachers' expectations.

Table 3. *Mentors' Academic Qualities*

		Positive *f*	Negative *f*
1	Teaching Style	125	117
2	Classroom Management	22	122
3	Lesson Phases	11	13
4	Error Correction	3	5
5	Mother Tongue Use	0	22
6	Assessment	1	16
7	Assignment	0	17
	Total	**162**	**312**

The diversity that emerged between student-teacher expectations and mentors' academic qualities at the end of the analysis necessitates a further look into the matter. The following table displays the areas of agreement (38) and disagreement (43) between the mentors' teaching style and the way student-teachers evaluate the issue.

Table 4. *Mentors' teaching style*

	Positive	*f*	Negative	*f*
1	Uses target language	7	Sticks to the course book	11
2	Considers students' needs	6	Uses no lesson plans	8
3	Is academically qualified	6	Has a boring teaching style	7
4	Generates students' attention	5	Ignores students' needs	6
5	Teaches within a context	4	Cannot generate interest	5
6	Encourages autonomy	4	Skips listening activities	2
7	Clearly defines goals	3	Does not teach vocabulary	2
8	Gives clear instructions	3	Is not motivated	2
	Total	**38**		**43**

Student-teachers' opinions of their mentors' teaching style show traces of the education they received at the department. To illustrate, they find teacher's use of target language worthy (7) while they criticise teacher's sticking to the course book (11). As another example, encouraging autonomy (4) is approved while mentors' view of the listening activities as a waste of time and skipping them (2) is criticised negatively. In the following extract from the interviews, we see a student-teacher's opinions of the issue in her own words:

"Our mentor always encourages the students to become more autonomous in their learning and this is very good. I appreciate her in this respect but when it comes to listening activities, she skips them. I really cannot understand how the students will become autonomous in language learning when they do not have the ability to listen, comprehend and speak. I believe that the teacher herself is not good at these skills and does not want to lose face while conducting them in front of the students. I believe that's unfortunately why".

Some find the mentors academically qualified (6), contrary to those; some others claim that the mentors have a boring teaching style (7).   Probably based on the specific lessons the student-teachers observed, they developed their views on their mentors' qualities in different ways. For example, some think that the mentors consider their learner' needs (6) while others argue that mentors ignore them (6). Regarding this finding, we further find out during the interviews that student-teachers make their judgements on what they have been experiencing at the practicum mainly according to language teaching principles they studied at methodology courses in their department as in following:

> "I observe that our mentor teaches according to her own choice or decision. In our courses, we did not learn this way. A teacher should consider a lot of factors while preparing the lesson. Especially, she should take into account the student needs".

Urged with the same motive, classroom management skills of the mentors concerned the participants. As revealed, only two mentor qualities which were cited totally 18 times were valued. However, they cited 60 negative aspects regarding classroom management, which can be considered as a sign of disappointment in student-teachers.

Table 5. *Mentor's Classroom Management Skills*

	Positive	f	Negative	f
1	Is good at classroom management	15	Is not good at classroom management	14
2	Is good at seating arrangement	3	Uses no classroom rules	12
3			Scolds students	10
4			Threatens students	7
5			Teaches only interested students	5
6			Cannot manage the time	4
7			Ignores students' reactions	3
8			Does not keep promises	3
9			Punishes students	2
	Total	**18**		**60**

We have almost equal number of positive (15) and negative (14) citations about how the mentors managed the class. Some student-teachers appreciate their mentors' skill in regard to managing and organising the seating arrangement (3). Except for these two qualities, they poorly evaluate their mentors in this category. One of the major criticism stems from the lack of classroom rules and routines (12). However, as they discussed in their written reflections they know from the courses they took at the department that setting classroom rules and routines is an effective way of managing the class and teaching (Cameron, 2005; Scott and Ytreberg, 1997). In addition, the mentors scold (10) and threaten (7) students, do not address all the students while teaching (5), cannot properly manage the lesson time (4), ignore students' reactions (3), do not keep their promises (3) and what is more, they punish the students (2). Student-teachers, finding all these observations contrary to what they know, criticise the mentors.

One of the sources of discontent that showed itself in the analysis was related with the ways the mentors designed their lesson phases. As a matter of fact, the mentors were

already criticised because they did not prepare and use lesson plans (Table 4). According to the student-teachers, without a lesson plan prepared in advance, the phases of a lesson may not be effectively estimated and can easily be distorted from. Based on this finding, we may deduce that the participants, as inexperienced student-teachers, may not find it possible to conduct a lesson without a plan in hand. On the other hand, the mentors who have more than ten years of teaching experience may hold the belief that they do not need a lesson plan at all.

Table 6. *Mentor's Use of Lesson Phases*

	Positive	*f*	Negative	*f*
1	Elicits answers from students	6	Does not use warm-up	6
2	Uses warm-up stage effectively	5	Does not give a purpose for activities	3
3			Uses no opening	2
4			Uses no closure	2
	Total	**11**		**13**

As displayed in the table below, student-teachers do not seem to tolerate the strategies the mentors use to correct mistakes. According to them, depending on the situation, feedback may come from peers (1), be delayed to give time to the students to think (3) or students may be allowed to discover the correct use themselves (1). What is more, contrary to what the mentors were doing, they believe that the correction of pronunciation mistakes should not be ignored (2).

Table 7. *Mentor's Error Correction Strategies*

	Positive	*f*	Negative	*f*
1			Uses immediate feedback only	3
2			Never corrects pronunciation mistakes	2
3			Does not encourage peer correction	1
4			Never lets self-correction	1
	Total	**0**		**7**

In addition to the above mention discrepancies between student-teachers' expectations and the mentors' practices, frequent use of mother tongue constituted another disaccord between the two parties. Although the student-teachers are equipped with the knowledge that mother tongue use may have potential benefits in the language classes depending on the situation, as they state, they find the mentors' use unnecessarily excessive. As displayed in Table 8. student-teachers do not find any constructive sides in their mentors' language choice.

Table 8. *Mentor's Mother Tongue (MT) Use*

	Positive	*f*	Negative	*f*
1			Conducts all activities in MT	7
2			Translates the course book	5
3			Checks vocabulary knowledge in MT	2
4			Gives MT equivalents of unknown vocabulary	2
5			Translates students' words	2
6			Stops students when they use MT	1
	Total	**0**		**19**

As the student-teachers complain during the interviews, mentors seem to have developed a habit of conducting all the activities in the classroom in mother tongue without a visible necessity (7). Furthermore, mentors almost translate the entire course book (5) and even check the students' vocabulary knowledge using mother tongue (2). When someone needs help with the meaning of an unknown word, mentors immediately provide the mother tongue equivalent (2). However, they do not let students say things in their mother tongue (1). To conclude, probably either with the will to make everything clearly understood by the students or as an unconscious habit, mentors fail to meet student-teachers' expectations in terms of mother tongue use in the classroom. The interview excerpt below summarises the situation:

> "For me, it was very confusing to see my mentor translating everything into the mother tongue. Even at times when the learners were saying something in the target language, my mentor was translating them into the mother tongue. What I found even more interesting was that in spite of her own behaviour, my mentor did not tolerate students' use of mother tongue in the classroom. How will these students learn speaking? The teacher is not using listening speaking activities; she is teaching in her mother tongue. Students do not have a model".

On the other hand, although the participants appear to be disappointed by the assessment techniques their mentors use, they seem partially satisfied with the way mentors conceive the term "assessment" (3) as in the table below.

Table 9. *Mentors' Assessment Techniques*

	Positive	*f*	Negative	*f*
1	Views assessment as feedback	3	Exams have no face validity	3
2			Exams are poor at timing	2
3			Exam style develops a sense of failure in students	1
4			Teacher ignores emotional outcomes of exam	1
5			Excessive number of questions are asked	1
6			Teacher does not seem to possess a repertoire of assessment techniques	1
	Total	**3**		**9**

Contrary to the appreciation the student-teachers felt toward the mentors' conception of assessment, they find the exams poor in terms of face validity (3) and timing (2). As they discuss, on the exam paper there are too many questions with a careless lay out making it difficult to proceed from one section of the exam to another. What is more, the allocated time is inadequate for the questions. Probably due to these characteristics, one of the student-teachers believes there may be emotionally negative outcomes of such an exam (1) which the teachers do not seem to be aware of. According to the student-teachers, teachers should have a repertoire of assessment techniques which they may utilise depending on the situation and population they encounter (1). When we look at the issue from this perspective, we may say that student-teachers' knowledge and beliefs about how to assess students do not match with those of the mentors. In this case, student-teachers still try to benefit from the situation with a "the other way around approach" as explained in the following excerpt:

> "Through teaching practice, we learnt how to benefit from bad examples as well as the good ones. I strongly believe that even the disappointing experiences were highly educational".

To conclude, student-teachers' expectations regarding assessment given to the students do not appear to have been met during the practicum stage. However, we see that they managed to turn the situation into an opportunity for themselves.

Another theme that emerged from the analysis of the data was the assignments mentors gave to the learners at the practice school. The table displays how the student-teachers deem the assignments given.

Table 10. *Mentors' Assignments*

Positive	*f*	Negative	*f*
1		Does not check homework	4
2		Gives irrelevant homework	3
3		Gives incomprehensible homework	2
4		Uses homework as a threat	2
Total	**0**		**11**

As seen in the table, the student-teachers cited no positive remarks about the mentors' approach to the issue. However, mentors are criticised because they do not assign learners with homework that is relevant to what they do in the classroom (3), the given homework is not easily understandable for learners (2), they give homework just for the sake of giving it but never check to see whether or not or how learners do it (4). One other criticism from student-teachers is that the mentors use homework as a threat from time to time (2).

As regards to the learners at the practice school, student-teachers may seem to benefit from the experience partially meeting their expectations on one hand while reconstructing their views about their prospective students in the very near future on the other.

Table 11. *Learners*

	Positive	*f*	Negative	*f*
1	Seem eager to learn	8	Do not seem motivated	11
2	Are motivated	6	Are not interested in activities	11
3	Attentive	5	Are uncontrollable	6
4	Do their tasks & homework	4	Are noisy	4
5	Respectful	4	Have annoying behaviours	4
6	Are very clever	4	Are not respectful	3
7	Deserve more reinforcement	3	Difficult to deal with	3
8	Use extra books	2	Wander around the classroom	2
	Total	**3 6**		**44**

According to the student-teachers' evaluations on the learners, from the academic point of view, they are eager to learn (8), motivated (6) and attentive (5). Although the teachers do not check the homework, the learners do it (4) even using extra books (2). In personal terms, the learners are clever (4), respectful (4) and they deserve more reinforcement by the teacher (3). On the other hand, when it comes to the disappointing features, there are contradictory citations; learners are not motivated (11), or interested (11). They are also uncontrollable (6), and noisy (4). In addition, they have annoying behaviours (4) such as wandering around the classroom (2) which is difficult to deal with (2) and this is not a respectful behaviour (3).

The last theme related with the practice school, that is, "the school administrators" constitutes the only category about which student-teachers cite no negative comments. As shown in the table, they find the administrators constructive (14), interested (9), helpful (6), understanding (4) and easy to communicate (3).

Table 12. *Administrators*

	Positive	*f*	Negative	*f*
1	Are constructive	14		
2	Are interested	9		
3	Are helpful	6		
4	Are understanding	4		
5	Are easy to communicate	3		
	Total	**36**		**0**

Contrary to the satisfaction with the administrators, an evident discontent is detected regarding the weekly tasks assigned by the department. In table, we see that negative citations clearly outweigh the positive ones.

Table 13. *Weekly Tasks Assigned by the Department*

	Positive	ƒ	Negative	ƒ
1	Informative	6	Not relevant to what we do	12
2	Useful	2	Reflections better than tasks	4
3	Guiding	1	Asking "recall" questions	3
4	Serve various purposes	1	Limited question types	2
5			Requires negative answers	1
	Total	**10**		**22**

In spite of citations as informative (6), useful (2), guiding (1) and serving to various purposes (1) about the tasks, we come up with more negative views as compared to positive ones. For example, student-teachers emphasise that what is expected from through some of the tasks, does not correspond to what they really experience at the practice school (12). This also constituted a problem while they were preparing their weekly reports. As they did not observe some of the teaching practices in their mentors' classes, they were not able to write their reports. The excerpt below may shed light into the discussion:

> "To carry out one of the tasks, I had to observe my mentor teaching a song to the learners. My mentor never teaches songs; in fact, she never conducts a listening activity or even speaks English".

Four student-teachers believed that reflections they wrote during practicum helped them more than the reports of pre-fabricated irrelevant tasks. The following excerpt was taken from the interview with one of them:

"When I was dealing with some of the reports, I felt that I was doing them not for myself but for my university supervisor. However, with the reflections, I was thinking, brainstorming and discussing in my mind, asking and answering questions to myself and attaching new meanings to my experience".

As the voices of the participants make it clearer, student-teachers do not find the tasks relevant to real life situations and prefer doing more reflective activities instead.

When it comes to the analysis of the student-teachers' reflections on the practicum, almost equal number of positive and negative remarks is revealed. Student-teachers cited that the practicum was an informative experience (15) as shown in the following excerpt:

> "I strongly believe that the opportunities afforded for lesson observation and teaching practice are invaluable for learning more about teaching during this stage".

Student-teachers believe that teaching practice was fruitful because it was a real life experience (2) and provoked a lot of new thoughts in their minds (2). Being able to practice teaching in a real environment gave them confidence (2) and they felt proud of

themselves as prospective teachers (2). The following seem to give more clarity to the issue:

> "Teaching practice is definitely contributing as it provides opportunities for interaction with real students and teachers in a real environment. During this period, you develop a sense of ownership toward this teaching-learning community and feel yourself as if you were in your own school with your real students".

The student-teachers benefitted from the practicum in some additional ways. For example, the experience provided them with the sense of a more optimistic look at the profession (2), during the sessions they developed survival strategies which they certainly would need especially in their first years of teaching (2). Finally, some of them felt more motivated at this stage (2).

Table 14. *Reflections on Practicum*

	Positive	ƒ	Negative	ƒ
1	It was an informative experience	15	I leant that teaching was hard	12
2	It was real classroom environment	2	I saw that teachers are bad	6
3	It was a thought provoking experience	2	I regret having chosen teaching	4
4	It was reassuring	2	It did not meet my expectations	2
5	It made me proud of myself	2	It was a dreadful experience	1
6	It made me more optimistic	2	I now see that I cannot manage my class	1
7	I developed survival strategies	2	I have not got the patience to teach	1
8	It was a motivating experience	2		
	Total	**29**		**27**

By the following, we can elaborate this view:

> "Teaching practice met my expectations because I had realistic expectations. I am now more aware of the problematic sides of the system and I feel myself more equipped for teaching".

Contrary to the citations above, there are some pessimistic approaches coming from student-teachers in terms of the outcomes of practicum. For example, some developed certain beliefs such as teaching was hard (12) and teachers were bad (6). Some student-teachers confessed that they regretted having chosen this profession (4), and teaching practice did not meet their expectations from teaching (2). Some others describe the experience as dreadful (2) and there are some student-teachers who lost faith in themselves to make good teachers. As one of them is quoted in the following, teaching requires some qualities she does not possess:

"There is a lot of noise in the classroom; I cannot control such a class. The students need interest, a certain amount of understanding, friendliness. I am not that kind of a person. I understand here that patience is the number one quality for a person to make a teacher. I am not patient. I understand that I am not at all cut out for teaching".

Discussion and Conclusion

When we go through student-teachers' overall evaluations on the aspects of practicum, we come to the conclusion that there does not exist a profound gap between the number of negative (445) and positive citations (431). This finding may suggest that the practice period, although criticised by various means, cannot be said to have not met the student-teachers' expectations. This conclusion appears to be due to the fact that student-teachers had realistic expectations, and thus, they managed to benefit from the negative examples as well as from good models. Furthermore, as they stated during the interviews, they constantly compared and contrasted the real life experiences, namely practice, with what they learnt from school, the theory, which gives the answer to the second question of the study. This strategy they used turned the period into a reflective process which contributed to the student-teachers' change and professional development. We detect in student-teachers' words that they made their judgements regarding the practicum experience on the basis of the knowledge they acquired during the courses at the department.

Contrary to some beliefs, as methods and content knowledge introduced to students have little influence on their subsequent actions during their training (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1998), student-teachers' conceptions of teaching and learning may be said to be vague and undifferentiated; they start pre-service training with images in mind and these do not go through change (Calderhead, 1988), and prospective foreign language teachers enter methods class with many preconceived ideas about how languages should be taught and these beliefs can directly interfere with their understanding of and receptivity to the information and techniques presented (Horwitz, 1985). In this study, we find that student-teachers have developed faith in and held tightly on to what they learnt in methods courses and they seem to be paving their way as teachers in consideration with this phenomenon. This finding echoes in Sendan, 1995; Ilin, 2003 where they claim that student-teachers' and teachers' opinions go through a change during teacher education or training programmes in both thematic and hierarchical terms, which make this period even more important than imagined.

In fact, Hacher and Moser (2004) put forth that practicum, providing real classroom experience for student-teachers, is an important means that serves to a pre-service learning context. It is also useful in evaluating teaching ability and supporting socialization within the profession. In addition, practicum stimulates the development of teaching skills in pre-service teachers constituting a protected area for experimentation. They conclude that practicum allows insights into new perspectives and increases motivation to continue studying.

In spite of the above mentioned benefits of practicum, in this study student-teachers express disappointments as can be imagined. The biggest source of disappointment, in this study, appears to be related with the mentors. Although student-teachers do not underestimate the mentors' personal qualities, they criticise them from various perspectives. However, the strongest criticism goes to the academic qualities the mentors bore. To illustrate, mentors' teaching style, management skills, organisation of the lesson

phases, error correction strategies, their choice of assignments and assessment techniques and finally, excessive use of mother tongue were the most frequently cited negative issues about the mentors. Based on this finding, we conceive that the student-teachers have developed a uniform understanding on the qualities of an effective model and mentors do not match with the picture in their minds in this respect. Student-teachers may need to involve in more realistic tasks in methods courses rather than idealistic micro-teaching sessions. In addition, the importance of contexts, and the probable requirements of specific situations may be emphasised which may lead to a more flexible evaluations by student-teachers. We also suggest that the mentors should go through a training stage that would provide them with opportunities for both raising their awareness on what really is expected from them as mentors and refreshing their professional knowledge keeping up with the latest trends in teaching. These specific training programmes for more effective mentoring may also heal aspects of teacher burnouts, motivating them. Universities may undertake the organisation and implementation of this activity in collaboration with the practice schools.

Students at the practice school and the tasks student-teachers need to complete during this stage revealed to be two other sources of complaint. In terms of this finding reached, we understand that student-teachers benefit from reflective activities such as discussions and reflective essays more rather than weekly tasks that are not relevant to the real life situations at the practice schools. Thus, a university - school collaboration on the principles and feasibility of practicum and tasks may contribute to the problem by enabling a commonly shared understanding of aims and procedures of practicum. Similarly, teacher educators need to cross the typical boundaries that exist between schools and universities and create less hierarchical relationships that promote learning across partnerships (Zeichner, 2010 in Rigelman and Rugen, 2012, p. 988). In line with this view, Kahn (2012) writes about cooperating teachers' expectation for more support and collaboration with the university teachers. Without clear expectations and high quality training, mentors' ability to enhance student-teachers' professional knowledge, skills and dispositions may be minimized. In this way there would be a culture of collaborative problem-solving that would strengthen school/university partnership and illustrate the synergy between theory and practice (Stuart & Thurlow, 2000; deLeon Carillo, 2007).

Better briefing by university supervisors on what is expected of both the mentors and trainees through discussion meetings is another beneficial step for this stage. In addition, departments may constitute groups to scrutinise the tasks once again and set more realistic goals for student-teachers based on the outcomes of this collaboration. When expectations are unstated, ambiguous or minimal, or based roughly on what "comes naturally" (Ganser, 2002), the practicum process may not achieve its purpose at least in terms of the elements related to mentoring.

Although student-teachers did not experience a highly important problem with the school students, still some student behaviours appear to have discouraged them from teaching. Some easily tolerable student behaviours such as wandering around the class gave rise to deterring the student-teachers from teaching. Designing tasks in such a fashion that student-teachers would have more opportunities to interact with students may seem to help to familiarise both parties with each other.

Besides, university supervisors' work load may be decreased to allocate more time for student-teacher feedback sessions. Peers may attend one another's sessions turning the gathering into a reflective activity where all aspects of classroom incidents are discussed,

experiences are shared and solutions are offered. Such activities may also add to the student-teachers' world knowledge, professional development as well as to their confidence as teachers. This finding echoes in Haritos (2004). According to the results of his study, self-awareness and reflection exercises allow candidates to identify their teacher roles, beliefs and perceptions regarding the classroom challenges and the reasoning behind such beliefs before they actually submerge in education and fieldwork experiences.

To sum, practice teaching does not fully meet student-teachers' expectations in relation to the issues under question in this study. Some argue that a poor practicum experience may be of little or no value. However, this view should not be interpreted as there should be less emphasis on the practicum, only that it should be improved (Britzman, 1991; McIntyre, Byrd, and Fox, 1996 in Beck and Kosnik 2002, p.81). Similarly, in this study, we convincingly find that the student-teachers took lessons from the inconveniences and turned them into learning opportunities. The finding is also in line with the results reached in Myles, Cheng, and Wang's (2006) where they report that the non-native teacher candidates conveyed their content with their teaching practice period in Canada. According to the candidates' views, the experience was positive, they learnt from the students, associate teachers, and the school environment. Consequently, even together with all the inconveniences, practicum can be said to be fruitful and rewarding for student-teachers' preparation for the profession. In their words "the period is of great value" in their academic as well as personal development as future teachers. As a final implication, we may suggest that teacher training programmes should be restructured "in such a way that they harmonise the attitudes of teacher candidates in an individualised and flexible way" to better the situation (Demirbolat, 2006, p.1068).

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