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STUDENT TEACHERS ASK: ARE WE WORKERS OR COLLEAGUES?

Research Article

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Abstract

The Teaching Practice Course is the most important course for student teachers to gain professional qualifications. This course will be able to achieve its goals through the healthy communication that mentor teachers will establish with the student teachers. This research focuses on the communication and interaction between student and mentor teachers. The purpose of the research is to determine how the student teachers interpret the relationship between the two stakeholders. For this purpose, basic qualitative research was carried out. In two different universities and in different majors of Turkey joining the 35 student teachers teaching practice course with focus group interviews were conducted at different times. The interview texts were examined by two different experts were subjected to content analysis. In the study; some student teachers stated that they did not consider the mentor teachers professionally adequate and experience professional burnout; were seen as colleagues by the mentor teachers, while others were concluded that they thought they were perceived or ignored as assistants. Student teachers pointed out that in order for this process to be more effective, they should be perceived as colleagues by the mentor teacher and that the teaching staff should participate more actively in the process.

Keywords: Teaching practice course, mentor teacher, student teacher, colleagues

1. Introduction

Depending on the scientific and technological developments, the concept of competence has come to the forefront in recent years, and studies related to the determination of the competencies that should be fulfilled regardless of which country in the world a profession is carried out have been focused. In this regard, the European Qualifications Framework and, according to this framework, Turkish Qualifications Framework were developed. In 2006, with the establishment of the Republic of Turkey Vocational Qualifications Authority, studies have been accelerated to determine qualifications for all occupations. Besides, eight competencies determined within the scope of Turkish Qualifications Framework have been included in the curricula developed by Ministry of Education (MEB, 2018). The curricula of the related courses have been prepared to raise students having these competencies.

Teaching profession is one of the primary professions that needs to gain global and local qualifications. Although it has been years since Güven (2001) stated that the expectations of the society from the teachers increased day by day, this expectation continues by deepening its existence. There are professional competencies that must be possessed in order for individuals who will attend teaching career to be trained (Özmen, 2008; Seferoğlu, 2004). These qualifications are those that have an affective dimension and require adaptability to the conditions that can change in any classroom environment, not in the form of following the



steps showing how a machine can be used. In modern societies, teachers are not seen as technicians, but as role models for students and society (MEB, 2017). The article 43 of the National Education Basic Law No. 1739 contains the statement that the preparation for the teaching profession is provided by knowledge of specific majors, pedagogical formation and general cultural knowledge. These qualifications have been updated in accordance with the requirements of the period over time. Ultimately, the general competencies of the teaching profession have been updated as "professional knowledge", "professional skill" and "attitudes and values" with the cooperation of many institutions and experts related to the field of education (MEB, 2017). The responsibility of gaining these qualifications is encumbered to the teacher training programs of universities, and theoretical knowledge and practices related to the profession are conveyed to student teachers in these institutions. Theoretical knowledge is put into practice in real school and classroom settings through "School Experience" and "Teaching Practice" courses. It is of great importance that teachers, who will guide future generations, are trained in accordance with the requirements of the age. It is imperative that the theoretical and applied education provided before starting the profession has an integrity in order to raise modern and internationally minded teachers. Teaching practice and school experience courses enable this information to be brought into practice (Özkan, Albayrak & Berber, 2005; Kasap, 2015).

While the school experience course is mostly observation-oriented, the teaching practice course focuses on student teachers' implementing their knowledge and skills in the classroom environment (Özay Köse, 2014). With the revision of teacher training undergraduate programs by YÖK (Council of Higher Education) in 2017, it was deemed necessary to remove it from the program since the school experience course was not performed in a functional and effective manner. Combining the content of that course, the Teaching Practice course has been extended to two semesters as Teaching Practice 1 and Teaching Practice 2 in all undergraduate programs (YÖK, 2017).

Faculties of Education constitutes one of the aspects of the Teaching Practice course and educational institutions affiliated to the Ministry of National Education constitutes the other aspect. Therefore, the effectiveness of the teaching practice course depends on the healthy implementation of faculty and school cooperation. Up until 2017, the Teaching Practice course was carried out within the scope of the "Directive Regarding Teaching Practices to be Performed by Student Teachers in Educational Institutions Affiliated to the Ministry of National Education" published on July 28, 1998. In 2016 and 2017, different directives related to the functioning of this process were tried by the General Directorate of Teacher Training and Development, and finally, the "Directive Regarding Teaching Practice to be Implemented by Student Teacher in Educational Institutions Affiliated to the Ministry of National Education" was adopted in June 2018. As of this period, faculty-school collaborations started to be carried out by adhering to the articles of this directive. In the relevant directive, the students taking the Teaching Practice course are defined as "Student Teacher", the responsible lecturer of the course is defined as "University Supervisor" and the teachers cooperating in schools are defined as "Mentor Teacher". It was also stated that this process should be spread over two semesters so that the practice time would be sufficient for the students to gain the teaching behaviours at the desired level (MEB, 2018).

Student teachers share their observations in schools with each other and with the instructor of the course during the theoretical course hours in the faculties. This process may enable the perceptions and attitudes of student teachers towards the teaching profession to become prominent or lead to their change. One of the most influential stakeholders in this process is



the mentor teachers (Bates and Burbank, 2008; Borden, 2014; Connor, Killmer, McKay and Whigham, 1993; Gareis and Grant, 2014; Yılmaz, 2015). Within the scope of the Teaching Practice course, each mentor teacher works with a maximum of four student teacher. Student teachers observe the mentor teacher every week according to the topics determined in the scope of the lesson (such as observation of asking questions, observation of group works), apply their own lesson plans and prepare evaluation reports. In order for the evaluation to be effective, the student teachers should be able to establish relations about the information they had acquired in previous periods. In this process, mentor teacher is expected to assist student teachers in terms of how theoretical information can be implemented in the classroom, what kind of problems can be encountered in practice, what methods and techniques can be used for the solutions of the problems and how they can be applied.

With the teaching practice course, student teachers make observations and begin to practice in accordance with their observations; thus, they are provided to learn by personal experience. The importance and necessity of teaching practice for student teachers who have not yet been placed in the profession is inevitable. This situation gives student teachers the opportunity to experience what they have learned theoretically for three years before the service and to see what situations they will encounter in their professional lives beforehand (Çelikkaya, 2015). The important factor here is that the faculty and the practice school work collaboratively and interactively in order for the student teachers to make the best use of the experience (Yılmaz, 2015; Azar, 2003). The interaction process between the university and the school contributes to both parties. As the university establishes the link between theory and practice, schools support the development of student teachers in this process, as well and assume the responsibility to prepare them for the profession (Allsopp, DeMarie, Alvarez-McHatton and Doone, 2006; Gökçe and Demirhan, 2005).

Teaching practice courses are crucial in terms of student teachers' recognizing the school climate, realizing the general structure in the school, and gaining experiences about how teaching profession is carried out (Harmandar, Bayrakçeken, Kıncal, Büyükkasap and Kızılkaya, 2000). In this sense, student teachers realize the tension, excitement and imbalance situations that arise due to the inconsistency between their learning structures, self-esteem and learning impulses regarding the performance of the profession throughout their experiences and examinations (Tang, 2003). Additionally, they acquire knowledge, skills, values and attitudes required for the teaching profession from their practice teachers through observations and experiences. In this process, it is aimed that student teachers gain selfconfidence both personally and professionally by being provided an opportunity for deeper thinking about the profession with intensive practices (Walkington, 2007). In the study of Öner and Aydın (2016), it was seen that student teachers considered themselves as teachers, were able to convey the information they learnt and control their excitement, learnt how to communicate with students by identifying their deficiencies, gained self-confidence and were provided real experiences with the help of teaching practice. Aytaç and Er (2018) emphasized the importance of teaching practice in ensuring the integrity of theory and practice, and stated that student teachers had the opportunity to observe and apply the theoretical knowledge they had acquired in a real classroom environment thanks to teaching practices.

Different practices are carried out in different countries in the selection of practice teachers, who will guide and facilitate student teachers during the Teaching Practice process. For instance; The National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) in America states that mentor teachers are required to have at least 3 years of experience, skills that will positively affect the learning of student teachers and professional skills such as guiding, observing,



communicating and giving feedback (NCTQ as cited in Yılmaz, 2015). There were no strictly defined criteria in the selection of mentor teacher in Turkey until 2018. Within the scope of the directive published in 2018, mentor teachers were imposed a condition that they have "Teaching Practice Training Certificate". In order for teachers to obtain this certificate, they need to attend 36 hours of training and be successful in the exam at the end of this training. Experienced, qualified or volunteer teachers in practice schools are generally asked to become mentor teachers for Teaching Practice courses by the school management. In some cases, teachers can also reluctantly support this process. It is a question to what extent teachers participating in this process can be a role model for student teachers. According to Kiraz (2003), while mentor teachers who are fully aware of what is expected of them ensure that student teachers make the best use of the course, those who are not aware of the expectation and are chosen by chance cannot contribute sufficiently to the professional development of student teachers. In his study, Eraslan (2008) stated the opinion of student teachers that mentor teachers were not aware of the task sense and not be able to display practices that would be a model for them. Research in the literature have generally focused on evaluating the teaching practice course. However a few studies, it was focused that there seemed problems between the student teacher and the mentor teacher (Baran, Yaşar and Maskan, 2015; Dilmaç and Dilmaç, 2008; Baştürk, 2009; Gökçe and Demirhan, 2005; Kaldi and Xafakos, 2017; Merc, 2010; Sancak Aydın and Çilsalar Sağnak, 2020).

In this study, it is aimed to examine the communication and interaction between the mentor teacher and the student teachers in the process of teaching practice through the eyes of student teachers. The question of "How do student teachers describe their experience with mentor teachers?" constitutes the main problem of the research.

2. Method

Basic qualitative research was conducted in this research as it was aimed to reveal the perceptions of student teachers existing in their experiences of their communication with mentor teachers. According to Merriam (2009) by the reason of all qualitative research are interpretivist, they can defined as a basic qualitative research. In this study, it was tried to find out the experiences of student teachers about mentor teachers and interpreted their experiences during the teaching practice process, and the research was conducted by using this design.

2.1. Participants

In this study, the participants were determined with maximum variation sampling method so as to analyse the experiences of groups who attended different majors, universities and worked with different mentor teachers instead of the experiences of only one specific group of student teachers. Thanks to this sampling method, main themes and patterns were tried to be revealed during the analysis (Johnson and Christensen, 2014). Different codes were used instead of real names to protect the privacy of the participants. Information about the participants of the research was presented in Table 1.



Table 1. *Information about the Participants*

University	Major	Date of Teaching Practice	The Number of Student Teachers	Codes
A	Social Studies Teaching	2017-2018	10	A-SST-2018-P?
		2018-2019	5	A-SST-2019-P?
	Primary School Teaching	2017-2018	5	A-PST-2018-P?
В	Social Studies Teaching	2019 - 2020	5	K-SST-2019-P?
	Primary School Teaching		5	K-PST-2019-P?
	Science Teaching		5	K-ST-2019-P?
		Total	35	

2.2. Data Collection Tools

In the research, semi-structured interview technique, which is often preferred in qualitative research methods, was preferred since it was aimed to determine how student teachers were perceived through the eyes of senior students studying in different departments of two different state universities. In terms of providing comparable and systematic information, the semi-structured interview technique performed in accordance with the predetermined protocol (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2016) is frequently used in qualitative research. Opinions of the experts in the field were obtained during the preparation of the interview form. In line with the feedback of the experts, the questions were finalized and adapted to the interview protocol. After the pilot implementation, the answers were listened, content was determined, and it was concluded that the questions were appropriate and adequate. The questions in the interview form used in the research are as follows:

- 1. What are your opinions about the competencies of your mentor teacher regarding their professional and field knowledge?
- 2. What do you think should be the characteristics of an ideal mentor teacher?
- 3. How should be the relationship between a student teacher and a mentor teacher? What are the conditions to achieve such a relationship? How was your relationship with your mentor teacher?
- 4. If you cannot experience the kind of relationship you should have with your mentor teacher, what do you think are the reasons?

2.3. Data Collection

In qualitative studies, mostly in-depth individual interviews are preferred however Yıldırım and Şimşek (2011) stated that focus group interviews ensure wealthy data than individual interviews. Focus group interviews were conducted with student teachers in order to gather opinions about more mentor teachers. The data of the research were obtained through focus group interviews carried out with student teachers. The first focus group meeting was conducted with the participation of 10 students from the Department of Social Studies Teaching between the hours of 11.00-11.45 on 13 April 2018, the second focus group meeting was conducted with the participation of 5 students from the Department of Primary School Teaching between the hours of 18.00–19.10 on 3 May 2018, the third focus group meeting was conducted with the participation of 5 students from the Department of Social



Studies Teaching between the hours of 13:00 and 14:00 on 5 May 2019, the fourth focus group meeting was conducted with the participation of 5 students from the Department of Primary School Teaching between the hours of 14.00-15.25 on 6 December 2019, the fifth focus group meeting was conducted with the participation of 5 students from the Department of Science Teaching between the hours of 16.00-16.55 on 9 December 2019 and the sixth focus group meeting was conducted with the participation of 5 students from the Department of Social Studies Teaching between the hours of 15:00-16:00 on 10 December 2019. Focus group interviews were recorded by the researcher using a tape recorder.

2.4. Data Analysis

The data obtained from the focus group interviews were transcribed and shared for the participants to examine. Following the approval of the participants, content analysis was carried out by two researchers. After coding, categories were created and placed under appropriate themes.

2.5. Trustworthiness

In this study, expert opinion was received to ensure the credibility of the study. The questions prepared went through the evaluation of an expert before the focus group interviews. In addition, the research process was tried to be explained in detail and the results were supported with direct quotations of the participants' opinions.

Creswell (2013) stated that most interpretive studies emphasize the researcher-researched interaction. In this study, as the researchers were faculty members who conducted different courses of the participants, they knew each other before the research. This situation provided a sense of mutual trust between the participants and researchers. The participants gave sincere detail while sharing their opinions. This led to more detailed data. However, at this point, attention was paid not to fall into an ethical error in this type of relationship, which Creswell defines as "being friends". Detailed information was provided on the collection of data and for what purpose they would be used.

3. Results

Within the scope of the research, the experiences of the student teachers with the mentor teachers were tried to be understood. Therefore, the research is limited to the opinions of the participant student teachers. Three main categories were reached from the data obtained from the responses of the students teachers participating in the research during the focus group interviews as follows: "The perception of the student teachers about the professional knowledge of the mentor teachers", "The perception of the student teachers about the relationship between the mentor teacher and the student teacher" and "The suggestions of the student teachers for their communication with the mentor teachers". The results were presented under these three primary headings.

3.1. The Perception of the Student Teachers about the Professional Knowledge of the Mentor Teachers

Until 2018, there was no criterion for determining mentor teachers. With the "Teaching Practice Certificate" brought in this year, teachers with this certificate were enabled to take part in this process. However, this certificate was given to teachers at the end of a training that includes the transfer of knowledge, and any teacher who wanted could participate in this



training. Here, it remains a question mark whether teachers who are competent enough to support the development of pre-service teachers can be selected. For this reason, it was tried to determine the opinions of the students about how competent their teachers were.

3.1.1. Professional Inadequacy of the Mentor Teachers

It is seen that most of the student teachers have the view that mentor teachers do not have the necessary competencies. Due to these incompetencies, student teachers consider their mentor teachers as negative role models. The examples from the interviews with student teachers are given below:

... Uses a website called X constantly. If it is not in the course book, he or she opens the X site and shows the subject there. It is not in the course book, so there is no gain. But it's on the X site. I cannot quite know if it's right or wrong! (A-SST-2018-P4)

... he or she makes the students memorize the subject. There is lack of professional knowledge. (A-SST-2018-P6)

X website is opened and activities are done. There is no use of station technique or something. (A-PST-2018-P2)

He or she does not prepare for the class in advance, prints out something just before the class, I also observed in other teachers asking the students what the subject was for the lesson that day. One day we were asked to "check the homework" but the teacher did not even know what the homework was. He or she asked the students what the homework was and then wanted us to check. There were even no plans about what to do and when to do, not to mention preparing for the class. (A-PST-2018-P1)

The style of teaching is just lecturing. The students get really bored. They prepare their own slides for the lesson. They are so sick and tired... (A-SST-2018-P2)

The teacher asks outside the class: "What was the first lesson? Social studies. What is the next lesson?" and the courses go on like this. There is never planning of materials, group work or making use of station technique. But, there are some worksheets prepared beforehand and they are determined by the group. They are printed out just in 10 minutes and distributed to the students in the class. Then, the course is covered somehow. (A-PST-2018-P3)

Sometimes while listening to the teacher I even get bored, not to mention the students. The ages and understanding capacities of the children are obvious. Yet, the teacher only lectures through slides monotonously. It is the exact opposite of what I have learned at university. (K-ST-2019-P4)

Before going to the teaching practice every week, we show our lesson plans to the relevant advisors for their approval. However, I can say that our mentor teacher does not care about our lesson plans at all. (K-PST-2019-P1)

Even though the teacher seems interested in the class, he or she is trying to keep us active on certain topics. A couple of times, he or she even said to students: "You can ask our student teachers, they probably know better than I do.". I think it wasn't a joke, he or she wasn't feeling confident. (K-PST-2019-P3)



The teacher is always lecturing the same way. There is no use in that for me! (K-SST-2019-P2)

Though not in every lesson, the teacher hands out some worksheets once every two lessons. None other assessment methods are used. He or she uses only this way to find out whether the students understand the subject or not. (K-PST-2019-P4)

It is seen that the student teachers evaluated the mentor teachers teaching monotonously as a negative example. Additionally, as stated by A-PST-2018-P, it drew their attention that the teaching methods and techniques they learned at university were not used in practice schools. Mentor teachers' opening a webpage about the subject and letting the students listen to it and students' feeling bored with this situation seems to be a striking finding.

3.1.2. Occupational Burnout of the Mentor Teachers

According to the comments of student teachers, mentor teachers experience occupational burnout, and this affects the Teaching Practice process negatively. The examples from the student teachers' opinions are given below.

Some of them have a negative effect on us since they find no joy in their profession anymore. (A-SST-2018-P2)

I guess they have a desire to maintain the existing system. They are not open to new ideas. They feel like they will fall behind the curricula and won't cover all the topics. That's why I guess they just want to lecture all the time. (A-SST-2018-P3)

... there are quite experienced teachers, of course. Yet, there are also too many teachers feeling weariness. (A-PST-2018-P1)

Sometimes I feel like I can hear in my mind that almost all of the other teachers, including my own mentor teacher, at the practice school say "Let the classes finish quickly so that we can go home right away". (K-PST-2019-P4)

Sometimes I feel really sleepy when I see the teachers in the teachers' room. Sometimes I can observe the same things with younger ones, as well. They look like they are fed up with their jobs... (K-ST-2019-P3)

I have read in a study that teachers get exhausted in the first five years of their profession. I think this exhaustion continues in some teachers after 5 years, as well. (K-PST-2019-P2)

Not all the teachers are the same. Sometimes I see our teacher looking at the clock. It seems like he or she wants to go home as soon as possible. (K-SST-2019-P2)

It is seen that the mentor teachers' behaviors and expressions of expecting the lesson to end right away have a negative effect on the student teachers. That mentor teachers experiencing professional burnout will be a positive model for the student teachers does not seem realistic and it can even be considered as a waste of time. Although it is known that the practice course hours are already insufficient, spending this process ineffectively, as well, can be argued as an important finding.



3.2. The Relationship between the mentor teacher and the student teacher

It will only be possible for the teaching practice course to reach its objectives through a healthy communication that can be established among the mentor teacher, student teacher and university supervisor. To be able to establish a healthy communication, student teachers primarily ask to be perceived as a colleague by all stakeholders. This perception can be achieved not only with the mentor teacher but also with the participation of other teachers, administrators and students in the school.

3.2.1. Being Perceived as a Colleague and Motivated by the Mentor Teacher

Mentor teachers' seeing them as their colleagues, feeling sympathy with them, providing opportunities for them to solve the problems, encouraging them, gaining self-esteem, giving feedback, guiding, offering professional advice and giving importance to them are found to be distinctive aspects by the student teacher for this process to be more effective. The examples from the interviews with student teachers are presented below:

For example, my teacher advices me to talk with the students during breaks, to look from their point of views, and states that knowing the student is more important. He or she talks about students with special needs and how we can recognize them. (A-SST-2018-P1)

Our teacher encourages us a lot, I'm really thankful for that. Sometimes we cannot be sure how to behave in class. He or she gives us feedback after every class such as "You've done this and that, you were great and etc.". This makes us feel good. (A-SST-2018-P5)

My teacher supports me a lot professionally. My teacher's seeing me as a colleague and being present in the class while I'm teaching make me feel a bit nervous sometimes. (A-SST-2018-P6)

He or she does not interfere when we face a problem during the class, so we proceed by solving the problems on our own. (A-SST-2018-P5)

Our teacher talked about his or her first years of experience in the profession and advice us not to worry. He stated that everything would not remain the same and we could gain self-confidence in classroom and school environment as time passes. Thus, he or she encouraged us for gaining confidence. (A-SST-2018-P1)

He or she tries to show us the life of a teacher outside the class, as well. (A-SST-2018-P6)

He or she treats us as remembering the old internship times of his or hers, which affects us. He or she has learnt this profession in time not from birth. Approaching us in this way is crucial. (A-SST-2018-P3)

When I started, I did something in the first lesson. The class was very crowded. The teacher came up to me while the students raised their fingers to speak. He or she adviced me to speak loudly and choose students from every part of the class, not to choose only from the back. It was very effective, I do it in this way now. (A-SST-2018-P8)



Our internship class was 7-C. When we were going to the class, the teacher said: "Go to your class, that's your class now.". When the teacher came in, he said to students that they were very lucky for having us. (A-SST-2018-P5)

For example, when children are playing in PE class, the teacher sits and chats with us, talks about experiences and gives some information about some situations that we may encounter. He or she warns us about some situations that we may experience such as late comers, and asks our opinions about what we can do then. These things are important in communication, this approach is helpful for us. (A-PST-2018-P2)

... sometimes when we cannot do something or I feel that I cannot do something, I prefer to remain silent not to draw attention. Fortunately my teacher undertands me right away and talks encouragingly by addressing to everyone without humuliating me in front of others. (K-PST-2019-P2)

I will never ever forget what my teacher said once: "I trust you. If this is the best you can do, I'm sure there is plenty more inside you. Just trust yourself and do not hesisate what you can do." (K-ST-2019-P2)

We were rarely left without feedback, very rarely. Fortunately, my teacher gave feedback about my mistakes almost all the time and stated this was not to upset but to improve me. (K-ST-2019-P5)

When I heard that some of our friends were not accepted in the teachers' room of the schools they went, I felt really upset. That's why I was hesitant to go in there when I first came to this school. But, we are treated as if we were actual teachers, not every teacher behaves like this of course. But our teacher is quite good at this, so I'm very happy. (K-ST-2019-K4)

Sometimes our teacher welcomes us as colleagues when we go to school in the morning. That makes my day. (K-PST-2019-P2)

... there comes times when I feel incompetent, I can be reluctant. But our teacher can encourage us in that sense. (K-SST-2019-P1)

Sometimes it is enough to hear "trust yourself"... (K-ST-2019-P2)

It is seen that the mentor teachers' conveying their experiences to the student teachers, offering clues about in-class relationships with students and behaving like a colleague have a positive effect. It is considered that these activities which are in the mood of conversation outside the class and make the student teachers feel better may be more beneficial for them.

3.2.2. Being Perceived as an Assistant by the Mentor Teacher

Some student teachers think that they are perceived as assistants by mentor teachers. This situation affects the teaching practice process negatively. While determining the mentor teachers, the features such as professional experience and qualifications are taken into consideration. When the administration of the school, which is determined as the practice school, gives approval, the teachers in the school are assigned in the Teaching Practice process. For this reason, there are also teachers participating reluctantly in the process. This situation may cause the mentor teachers to perceive the student teachers as assistants who will help them in their own work, instead of being a person contributing to the development



of the student teachers. The opinions of the students who think that they are perceived in this way are as follows:

The teacher is effective when he or she provides opportunities, leaves things to us freely without interfering, tries to guide and teach us something. However, when he or she uses us as an assistant to prepare materials or to do this and that, we make no use of the process. We just go there as if we were an employee and work there for a day, we just fulfill the wishes of the teacher. In a way, we become something like "servant". (A-PST-2018-P2)

... Because some mentor teachers treats us like that. For example, we have to cover a subject, so we prepare a lesson plan. But the teacher does not want that, wants somethin else! We are asked to prepare materials, worksheets, exams. They make us do their own work. (A-PST-2018-P1)

Our teachers see us only as a capital because they earn money. Even if they have something to convey to us, they don't do it either. They don't ask anything, just because they think we are capital. We cannot learn anything when it is not presented to us. This is a big deficiency. (A-PST-2018-P3)

He or she says bluntly: "I am going to smoke or have some coffee, you go on with the class." It may be because our faculty does not completely explain to them what a mentor teacher actually needs to do. Because they generally perceive us as assistants. This perception needs to be changed... (A-SST-2018-P6)

... our teacher is good but sometimes he or she makes us feel worthless by saying "To be honest, I did not even want to have any interns.". (K-PST-2019-P1).

I have been fed up with preparing materials since the very first week I attended the teaching practice. My mentor teacher wants so many different and colorful things every week that sometimes I ask if it is OK not to prepare for this week. But when I say this, he or she definitely makes a face. So I go on preparing in case I may get low marks. (K-ST-2019-P2).

It is seen that the student teachers have a negative attitude towards the mentor teachers who make them do the tasks that mentors are supposed to do themselves. Some mentor teachers' approach of expecting the student teachers to learn something while assisting their mentors is not appropriate, instead of seeing the practice process as a part of teacher training. The finding of mentor teachers' exhibiting such behaviors is an important one that should be taken into account in structuring the process.

3.2.3. Being Ignored by the Mentor Teachers

One reason for the deficiency in the subject of how the teaching practice process should be is seen as the poor cooperation between faculty-practice school. Because there is a practice process that university supervisor expects students to perform. However, student teacher rehearse in ideal settings through micro-teachings in faculties during the pre-service period. When they come to practice schools, they face a different world. Student teachers have an opinion that "good schools" are not preferred while selecting practice schools. This is because student teachers may not even have an environment to spend time during breaks when they go to schools. They state that they are exposed to the other teachers' disturbing looks and attitudes when they use the teachers' room. The examples from the opinions of the student teachers are presented below:



I feel like a parasite when I go to school. I feel redundant. (A-SST-2018-P4)

Maybe they don't think we are competent so they want to interfere. But, in this way we remain in the background. Our teachers need to know that we are potential teachers and should respect us. They need to see us as their colleagues. (A-PST-2018-P3)

Because we cannot go in the teachers' room. As if we are totally isolated, we sit in the garden, cafeteria, here or there or we wait in the class. Since we are 6 people, they don't accept us. (A-PST-2018-P1)

Then, let us not to do internhship at "bad schools". Because it discourages us. Why are bad schools chosen? Why are the students sent to those schools despite all the complains? I cannot understand that. (A-SST-2018-P3)

You are not accepted as a teacher in the teachers' room. The students don't accept you as a teacher in the class, either. (A-SST-2018-P2)

But the look of the other teachers. They talk among themselves, look at us as if they are disgusted. It is disturbing. (A-SST-2018-P5)

I saw the teachers eating some cakes and pastries together in the teachers' room. I just wondered if they would offer us, as well. When one of them looked me in the eye, I thought he or she would invite us to the table. But then he or she said: "Hey intern, come and grab a bite!" The tone of talking and the attitude was so disturbing! (K-PST-2019-P2).

Once, one of the teachers at school told me that there happened so much noise when the students go in the classrooms and said why we were there if we were not to intervene. (K-PST-2019-P3).

Another situation that negatively affects the teaching practice process is the students' perceptions about the student teachers. Student teachers expressed that it was reflected to the student in the class when they were not seen as a colleague or student teacher by the stakeholders in the school, and therefore they experienced difficulties in the process. They stated that the students in the class accepted the mentor teacher as the authority, they were not interested in the lessons, they did not want to participate in the active teaching methods and processes effectively, and their priority was the grades. They think that they can be perceived differently by the students if they have an opportunity to give grades. The examples from the opinions of some mentor teachers are stated below:

Also, our biggest problem is that some of our teachers introduce us to the class as teacher sisters or brothers, they don't say "our teachers" directly. (A-PST-2018-P1)

In my opinion, students do not accept us as teachers since we are not authorized to give a grade for students. In other words, students are more focused on grades. Therefore, there may have some problems. (A-SST-2018-P1)

While we are teaching, they ask questions such as "Will you give mark?" or "Will it be reflected in our exam score?" They only care about grades. (A-SST-2018-P3)

Students, for example, know how to stay quiet for the first five minutes. They may not to participate in the activities. They just want to be excluded from the activities. (A-SST-2018-P3)



The students don't accepts us as the authority, they accept their teachers. Therefore, they ask their teacher all the time while they are attending in our activities and answering our questions. (A-SST-2018-P5)

We cannot go to school with total willingness, we can't take control. We can't because we're very limited. We are expected to teach as if the class was our own class but we never belong to the class... (A-PST-2018-P1)

At the school we went to, one of the students came and asked me a question about my private life. When I told him how he or she could ask something like that, he or she replied: "Why not? You are not my teacher?" (K-ST-2019-P5).

... partly this is about our teacher at school. If they introduce us as "elder brothers or sisters" to their students, they won't accept us as teachers, of course. They even don't show that they care, how can we expect students to care. (K-PST-2019-P5).

Even though I sometimes like being a trainee "brother", it is not really a nice situation. (K-ST-2019-P2).

Sometimes I thought that they talked about us at home, because I observed when they came to school that they pointed us to their parents and said "Look! That is him or her." (K-SST-2019-P2)

The negativities experienced during the teaching practice process may also affect the perceptions of students about themselves. Student teachers experience difficulties in classroom management, especially in the classroom environments they face for the first time. Additionally, they experience feeling of incompetence in terms of field knowledge. The examples from the interviews with student teachers are presented below:

My only concern is that I sometimes feel nerveous whether I'm doing something wrong while our mentor teacher is watching me teaching, since he or she is a quite knowledgeable person. (A-SST-2018-P3)

We are concerned about what the teacher will think of us if we do something wrong. He or she gives feedback, not insulting but we feel nerveous anyway. (A-SST-2018-P1)

I generally do not know how to treat some students while teaching, which makes me feel anxious. (A-SST-2018-P6)

Since we are interns, they do not trust us completely in terms of our field knowledge. (A-SB-2018-P1)

Sometimes I feel really frightened in case I teach things that are incorrect or the students tease me. (K-ST-2019-P1).

Sometimes I just talk to myself and question why I'm here, I don't even know I can be a teacher and yet I do internhip. I feel both frightened and excited. If I experience any failure, the most important source of it is myself. (K-PST-2019-P5).

Student teachers are not considered as a teacher candidate in the teacher's room by other teachers and in the classroom by students or mentor teachers. This situation makes the student teachers feel ignored. This psychological effect prevents them from both following the process and participating in the process like a teacher.



3.3. Suggestions for the Communication between the Mentor Teacher and the Student Teacher

Student teacher made suggestions for the improvement of the communication between stakeholders to make the practice process more effective. These suggestions can be gathered under three headings as suggestions regarding the mentor teachers, teaching practice course and the assessment.

3.3.1. Suggestions Regarding the Mentor Teachers

Student teachers stated that there should be some criteria in the selection of mentor teachers and the teachers who met these criteria should be assigned to the process as mentor teachers. Besides, they suggested that the mentor teachers be informed in detail by the university about what their duties and responsibilities are in the process. The examples from the interviews with student teachers are given below:

Actually, there should be some standards in this teaching practice course. Some of the teachers never attend a class while some of them never leave some of us alone. I think there should be specific rules for this and we should determine them. Because in this way there seems unfairness. (A-SST-2018-P4)

A teacher should criticize oneself, too. He or she should think "I'm doing everything, but am I doing right?" (A-SST-2018-P3)

He or she should know how to approach children pedagogically. (A-SST-2018-P2)

The university should provide this. The faculty should set up a meeting with the students and the mentor teachers they will work with and determine some rules after discussing together. When there is something done out of the rules, it needs to be expressed easily... (A-PST-2018-P1)

The fees that the mentor teachers will receive may be improved. Some are very interested, while others are not. However, their opinions and feedback are pretty necessary for us in the process. (K-PST-2019-P2)

We should definitely evaluate our teachers in the internship. I think we should have an impact on which teacher will have a trainee teacher in the following year. (K-ST-2019-P3).

3.3.2. Suggestions Regarding the Teaching Practice Course

Student teachers think that if the duration of teaching practice is more than one semester, both teachers and students will have the opportunity to get to know themselves better and in this way it can be easier to be perceived as a teacher. Thus, they anticipate that they will feel more competent in classroom management and that the participation of students in active teaching processes may increase. The opinions of some student teachers who express their thoughts in this regard are as follows:

For example, a class can be taken over for a year, I think it can be given to the trainee without a teacher. We are active only once a week and we feel redundant (A-SST-2018-P4)



Due to the constant change of schools, we can't get to know the students, like how they are. For example, we don't know how to treat a student. We would like to continue with the same students. Since the teachers know them all, they control the class better, they adjust the management of the class accordingly. But we experience an adaptation process as we don't know them. Thus, we often stumble. (A-SST-2018-P1)

We worked with different teachers during three semesters. If we had worked with the same teacher and the class, we would have had better relationships with the students and they may have respected us. (A-PST-2018-P1)

Just like the interns at the faculy of medicine are sent to hospitals since the beginning of fourth grade, we should go to schools from the beginning of the third grade at the latest till graduation. The practice process needs to be revised by increasing the number of days we will go to school. It is definitely not enough to go only once a week. (K-PST-2019-P4)

3.3.3. Suggestions Regarding the University Supervisor

Another stakeholder of the teaching practice process is the university supervisor. The healthy communication that university supervisor will establish with the student teacher and mentor teacher will increase the quality of the communication between the student and mentor teacher, as well. Student teacher also expect more active participation of the university supervisor.

When the instructors giving the teaching practice course show their presence more in schools during this process, our perception at school can be different. Vice-principals treat us differently when the university supervisor is at school. (A-PST-2018-P2)

Our university supervisor comes to school once, in the beginning of the term and one more during the term to observe our teaching. I think that's not enough. When they come to listen to our teaching, our mentor teacher gives more feedback than usual. (A-SST-2018-P2).

4. Conclusion and Discussion

Mentor teachers are the most important stakeholder of the teaching practice process. They are expected to be role models for student teachers in every respect. According to the statements of the student teachers, mentor teachers come among the factors that affect the teaching practice process positively or negatively. It is a professional competence to effectively apply curricula, which are developed based on contemporary understandings, in the classroom environment. However, some student teachers perceive the mentor teachers as incompetent in terms of teaching without a proper plan, covering the courses by using different online tools and poor classroom management.

The approach of the mentor teachers to the practice teaching process has a great importance in the effectiveness of this process. In spite of the approach of some mentor teachers towards improving the student teacher, it is seen that some teachers have undergone this process by ignoring them, making excuses or using the trainee's effort in their own interests. The fact that teachers with different seniority and experience take part in the teaching practice process leads to a diversification of the learning experiences they have had with student teachers.



It is seen that most of the student teachers' suggestions for improving the teaching practice process are related to the mentor teachers. It is because the expectations of student teachers from the mentor teachers in this process are quite high. Yücesoy Özkan, Öncül, Çolak, Acar, Aksoy, Bozkuş Genç and Çelik (2019) stated in their study that student teachers had some expectations from the mentor teachers about getting to know the profession well such as sharing their knowledge and experience, guiding and directing, informing about the functioning of the class, giving duties and responsibilities, being a role model, collaborating and sharing tasks.

The necessity of mentor teachers' giving comprehensive feedback to the student teachers by observing them closely was determined as an important aspect in this study as well as in other studies (Koç and Yıldız, 2012; Yıldız, 2012; Özbal, 2009; Azar, 2003 and Şahin, 2003). The fact that mentor teachers do not adequately deal with or give feedback to the student teachers during the teaching practice also decreases the student teachers' expectation from the process and the related mentor teacher. Sezen Yüksel (2017) stated in her study that the student teachers did not get enough support from the mentor teachers during teaching and that they were not seen as a teacher in the classroom environment at least while teaching led to a decrease in their expectations from the mentor teachers.

Student teachers stated that the duration of the teaching practice course was insufficient and suggested it to be extended. Not only Yalın Uçar (2012) but also Aslan and Sağlam (2018) determined in their studies that there were expressions regarding the fact that the duration of teaching practice was not adequate, and this practice needed to be extended to last two years. In their research, Seçer, Çeliköz and Kayılı (2010) stated that so as to ensure collaboration between universities and schools, the duration of the teaching practice courses needed to be prolonged and meetings, which would be attended by both parties, should be held before the practices. Upon this situation, which has been frequently mentioned and criticized in the research carried out, the teaching practice course was extended to two semesters and the time required for the practice students to spend in schools was increased with the revision of Teacher Training Programs by The Council of Higher Education.

For this reason, it is clear that the selection of the mentor teachers, who are the main actors of the teaching practice process, and the communication process with the student teachers are crucial and have great effect on the student teacher. It is known that supervisor who deal with student teachers at the faculty have certainly affect on this process, as well. Smith and Lev-Ari (2005) also mentioned the roles of the supervisors, the other student teachers who attended the process with the student teacher and the mentor teacher in the teaching practice process. In their research, Harris and Tassell (2005) also touched upon the collaboration of mentor teachers, supervisors and school principals in the process of teaching practice and emphasized that the process was highly affected by this relationship.

Aytaç (2010) and Katrancı (2008) stated that performance evaluation criteria should be developed for the selection of mentor teachers, and teachers who comply with these criteria should be mentor teachers. In this study, student teachers suggested that specific criteria should be determined for choosing mentor teachers and that teachers who meet these criteria should participate in the process. Proper selection of mentor teachers, informing them about the process and their sincere support will ensure that the teaching practice course reaches its goals.



Another important stakeholder playing an active role in the teaching practice process is the supervisiors. Supervisiors' being responsible for the improvement of the student teachers, dealing with them or not caring about them at all during the teaching practice process carried out under their responsibilities affects the process differently. Student teachers have some professional and personal expectations from their advisors. Having these expectations is very necessary for the process and is important in the development of the student teacher (Conderman, Morin and Stephens, 2005). In this study, student teachers stated that they received consultancy from supervisiors or that they could not receive sufficiently in certain cases. As Aydın, Selçuk and Yeşilyurt (2007) stated in their research, it is a fact that student teachers' being informed by the relevant instructor during the teaching practice increases the efficiency. Görgen, Çokçalışkan and Korkut (2012) touched upon the importance of the supervisors who would carry out the teaching practice course and underlined the necessity of their being competent and experienced in terms of both educational sciences and field knowledge. Yetkiner (2019) stated in his research, which was conducted with student teachers going to practice schools, that graduate educational levels of the supervisors, the courses they are responsible for teaching, advisory and administrative duties they take on prevent them from controlling the teaching practices of student teachers and observing their classes regularly.

In the light of these results, determining certain criteria for the selection of mentor teachers and assigning the ones meeting these criteria as mentor teachers, selected mentor teachers' establishing a healthy collaboration with supervisors, learning about their responsibilities and carrying out their duties within the frame of these responsibilities are suggested. This will increase the workload of the mentor teacher. In this respect, financial and moral support should be provided by universities or the Ministry of National Education in order to ensure the motivation of mentor teachers.



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