

WCES-2010

Problems encountered by student-teachers during their practicum studies

Arif Sariçoban^a *

^a Faculty of Education, Hacettepe University, Ankara, Turkey

Received October 29, 2009; revised December 7, 2009; accepted January 15, 2010

Abstract

This study tries to scrutinize the potential problems student-teachers encounter during their practicum studies and suggest ways to cope with them. In order to get valid and reliable data, these intern-teachers (n=59 in the public primary schools: n=39 and secondary schools: n=12 for Public High School and n=8 for Public Anatolian High School), at the end of their intern-teachers' practicum studies, were administered a questionnaire adapted from Ersen Yanik (2008:131), modified by the researcher, and edited and approved by a team of experts in the field. The survey mainly questions (a) lack of support in terms of materials and equipments, (b) problems resulting from the course book, (c) problems resulting from the students, (d) problems resulting from the curriculum, and (e) problems resulting from the classroom environment. It is hypothesized that most of the problems take place due to the lack of mainly audio-visual materials, other supplementary materials needed, pronunciation, translation, reading, speaking, writing activities. Lastly, it is agreed that overcrowded classrooms and sitting arrangement impede the effectiveness of foreign language instruction. At the end of the study, some recommendations are made for foreign language educators, researchers, and teachers to cope with these problematic situations.

© 2010 Elsevier Ltd. Open access under [CC BY-NC-ND license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

Keywords: Practicum studies; student-teachers; problems; materials curriculum; classroom environment.

1. Introduction

In the classroom, teaching and learning are considered social activities that imply relationships between not only the teachers and their students, but also between these parties and materials, equipment, classroom environment, curriculum as well, as is asserted by Wright (1988:10). Lack of support in terms of materials, audio and visual equipments, the course book that is considered to include communicative tasks and activities, students' interests and their background in English as a foreign language (EFL) all affect the outcome of the learning and teaching process. In addition, foreign language teachers as well as others should encompass language, content area, and pedagogy courses (Watzel, 2007). Besides, their teaching experience is another helpful component for successful language teaching. However, it is inevitable to observe some problematic cases in any teaching. Veeman (1984) focuses on "classroom discipline, motivating students, dealing with individual differences, assessing students' works,

* Arif Sariçoban. Tel.: +90 312 297 85 86

E-mail address: arifs@hacettepe.edu.tr

relationships with their parents, the organization of class work, insufficient and/or inadequate teaching materials and supplies, and dealing with problems of individual students” (page 143).

2. Method

Quantitative methods include a self-report survey that was administered to the student-teachers who did their practicum studies in the state primary and secondary schools (n=59: in the public primary schools: n=39 and in the secondary schools: n=12 for Public High School and n=8 for Public Anatolian High School). They range in age from 22 to 24. They all graduated from the Department of ELT at Turkish state university in 2008. The 32-item survey was constructed by the researcher. Three experts judged the validity of the items of this survey and internal consistency analyses were conducted. Any result *3 and over* is considered a *problematic case* in this study. The survey also included the qualitative method with open-ended questions to seek for the suggestions of those student-teachers for the problems they encountered during their in-classroom teaching.

2.1. Research Questions

The present study aims to find out the possible problematic cases the student-teachers face during their practicum studies in the public schools. Therefore, the following research questions were formed:

1. What are the problems the student-teachers encounter during their practicum studies in teaching English as a foreign language with special reference to
 - (a) the course-book(s),
 - (b) the students,
 - (c) the curriculum, and
 - (d) the classroom environment?
2. What are the suggestions of those student-teachers to solve these problems?

3. Findings

At the end of the study, the following findings were obtained.

3.1. What are the problems the student-teachers encounter during their practicum studies in teaching English as a foreign language?

a. Lack of Support in Terms of Materials and Equipment

Table 1. Means for Lack of Support in Terms of Materials and Equipment

	Audio	Visual	Aud-Vis.	Supplem.	Total
Primary	2,68	3,05	<u>2,92</u>	3,03	2,92
Secondary	2,33	2,19	2,43	2,81	2,44
Total	2,56	2,75	2,75	2,95	2,75

As a result of the analysis of Table 1, it is clearly seen that the primary schools where our student-teachers did their practicum studies seem to lack the necessary visual (m=3.05) and other supplementary materials (m=3.03). Another striking point is that most of these schools seem to lack audio-visual materials, too (m=2.92). As to the secondary schools, this problematic case seems to be almost unimportant. Thus, it can be speculated that the secondary school students are provided with at least adequate audio, visual, audio-visual and other supplementary materials.

b. Problems Resulting from the Course Book

Table 2. Problems Resulting from the Course Book

	B1	B2	B3	B4	B5	B6	B7	B8	B9	B10	B11	Total
Primary	2,92	2,47	2,53	2,71	3,08	3,16	2,79	2,74	2,37	2,55	2,37	2,70
Secondary	2,71	2,67	1,95	2,48	3,29	3,14	2,24	2,62	2,90	1,95	2,67	2,60
Total	2,85	2,54	2,32	2,63	3,15	3,15	2,59	2,69	2,56	2,34	2,47	2,66

B1:Communicative Tasks and Activities; B2:Unknown Language within the Text; Inadequate number of B3:Grammar Exercises, B4:Vocabulary Exercises, B5:Pronunciation Exercises, B6:Translation Exercises; B7:Physical Layout; B8:Long and Unauthentic Reading Passages; B9:Grading of Content; B10:No Explanation for Grammatical Structures, and B11:Unsuitable for Students' English Level.

A careful analysis of Table 2 simply indicates that the ELT course book that was used in the primary schools lacks pronunciation ($m=3.08$) and translation exercises ($m=3.16$). We also observe the same result for the secondary schools ($m=3.29$ for pronunciation and $m=3.14$ for translation). It is quite a natural outcome because the student-teachers have reported that the course book does not include any translation activities and exercises for EFL students.

c. Problems Resulting from the Students

Table 3. Problems Resulting from the Students

	Interest	Reading	Writing	Background	Total
Primary	3,05	2,74	2,79	3,37	2,99
Secondary	3,29	2,52	<u>2,90</u>	3,00	2,93
Total	3,14	2,66	2,83	3,24	2,97

Another significant problematic case was reported about the students' interests and their backgrounds. The student-teachers doing their practicum studies in the primary schools reported that their student lack interest ($m=3.05$) in learning English and their language proficiency background ($m=3.37$) is low. This case is also valid for the secondary education: students' interests ($m=3.29$) and their language proficiency background ($m=3.00$). Moreover, those practicum teachers in the secondary schools also report that their students' writing skills ($m=2.90$) seem to be almost another problem (Table 3).

d. Problems resulting from the Curriculum

Table 4. Problems resulting from the Curriculum

	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6	D7	D8	D9	D10	Total
Primary	2,76	2,95	2,87	3,11	3,32	3,00	2,66	2,21	3,00	2,34	2,82
Secondary	3,14	3,19	3,00	3,52	3,76	3,33	2,67	1,81	2,52	2,43	2,94
Total	2,90	3,03	2,92	3,25	3,47	3,12	2,66	2,07	2,83	2,37	2,86

D1 Loaded curriculum content; Ignorance of D2 listening skills; D3 writing skills; D4 speaking skills; D5 Pronunciation; D6 translation; D7 vocabulary; D8 grammar; D9 no time left for review and practice; D10 no revision units.

The curriculum for foreign language studies can be defined and prescribed as the course of studies, which students must fulfill in order to pass a certain level of foreign language education. The students are offered listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and translation activities in their curriculum to improve their communication skills. However, when we examine Table 4 the student-teachers report quite interesting results. In the primary schools the curriculum seems not to offer adequate speaking skills ($m=3.11$), pronunciation ($m=3.32$), and translation ($m=3.00$) activities. In the secondary schools, in addition to the above features, they report that the secondary students are not provided with the adequate listening ($m=3.19$) and writing ($m=3.00$) activities, though they believe that they have a loaded curriculum content ($m=3.14$) with other issues such as grammar ($m=1.81$).

e. Problems Resulting from the Classroom Environment

Table 5. Problems Resulting from the Classroom Environment

	Crowded Classes	Different Levels	Sitting Arrangement	Total
Primary	3,47	3,45	3,24	3,39
Secondary	3,14	2,71	3,29	3,05
Total	3,36	3,19	3,25	3,27

The last significant point refers to the problems resulting from the classroom environment. As seen in Table 5, in both school types, the classrooms are crowded ($m=3.47$ and $m=3.14$ respectively). The primary schools seem to place different level students in the same class ($m=3.45$). As to the sitting arrangements, both school types still seem to use the traditional sitting arrangement ($m=3.24$ and $m=3.29$ respectively) which has been disfavored by the developed countries.

3.2. What are the suggestions of those student-teachers to solve these problems?

It is clearly surprising that both primary school student-teachers and secondary-school teachers (Public High Schools and Public Anatolian High Schools) report almost the same problematic cases. Relying on this finding we can assert that whether it is primary and/or secondary school (High School and Anatolian), the public schools in which the researcher conducted his study display the same sorts of problems. Therefore, they did almost the same suggestions to solve these problems as seen in Table 6 below.

Table 6. Suggestions of student-teachers to solve these problems

Materials & Equipments	Course-book	Students	Curriculum	School Environment
VCD, DVD, Projectors, Internet, Teacher-made Materials, Games, Cartoons, Visuals.	Enjoyable, Authentic, Communicative, Boring Reading Topics, Target Culture, Unrealistic Characters, Up-to-date, Revision Parts, Mistakes, Explanation for Grammar, Speaking & Writing Skills, Pronunciation, Translation, Vocabulary, Daily English Use.	Needs, Interests, Levels, Motivation, Curiosity, Discipline, Background, Participation, Interest, Memorization.	Speaking Skills, Pronunciation, Translation, Writing, Very Loaded, Revision, Pair & Group Work, Grading, Comprehensive.	Sitting Arrangements (U-shape), Class Size, Noise, Colorful Atmosphere, Heating, Lightening, Social & Cultural Activities.

4. Conclusion and Implications

The present study aims to display the possible problematic cases that occur in public primary and secondary schools with special reference to the use of materials, equipments, course-books, students' profile, curriculum, and the classroom environment. It has been observed that there are still some problems that we should take into consideration in designing our program. These are;

- Lack of Support in Terms of Materials and Equipments: audio-visual aids and other supplementary materials such as internet, cartoons, teacher-made materials, xerox, etc.
- Problems Resulting from the Course Book: pronunciation and translation activities.
- Problems Resulting from the Students: needs and interests, motivation, curiosity, discipline. participation, memorization, language proficiency, reading, speaking and writing skills.
- Problems Resulting from the Curriculum: speaking skills, pronunciation, and translation activities, revision, pair & group work activities, grading, comprehensive.

e. Problems Resulting from the Classroom Environment: overcrowded classrooms, students at different level of language proficiency, and sitting arrangement, noise, colorful atmosphere, heating, lightening, social & cultural activities.

The researcher strongly believes that the results of this study will provide valuable insights into the self-perceptions of student-teachers when they are appointed by the Ministry of National Education. As we all know foreign language (FL) teacher educators and researchers need to gain more insights into the challenges faced by those teachers so that teacher training programs can design their curricula that will effectively prepare these teacher candidates for their real professional lives. The foreign language teachers should be very careful when they select the course-book. First, it should meet the students' needs and respond to their interests. It should include translation, pronunciation, and speaking activities. It seems that it is a must for the school to provide foreign language teachers with the necessary technical and non-technical materials such as OHPs, projectors, computers, photocopy machine, flash cards, and etc. Another significant issue to be taken into consideration is the overcrowded classrooms. The less the class size is, the better learning takes place. Another striking feature is students' foreign language proficiency (their FL background). The school administrations should be very careful about to place students at the same level of foreign language proficiency in the same classroom at least as much as possible. Lastly, but not the least, the sitting arrangements in our schools must be changed into a semi-circle (Sariçoban and Tilfarlıoğlu, 1998) and/or U-shape style for efficient and effective teaching and learning to take place.

References

- Ersen Yanık, A. (2008). Primary school English language teachers' perceptions of the English language curriculum of 6th, 7th, and 8th grades. *H. U. Journal of Education*, 35:123-134.
- Sariçoban, A. & F. Y. Tilfarlıoğlu. (1998). On the role of clinical supervision in EFL situation. *Language Journal*, 63:31-37.
- Smolen, Lynn., Colville-Hall, Susan. and Liang, Xin. "A study of the self-perceived challenges of beginning foreign language teachers from two different programs" *Paper presented at the annual meeting of the MWERA Annual Meeting, Westin Great Southern Hotel, Columbus, Ohio*, Oct 15, 2008 *Online <PDF>*. 2009-11-18 <http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p275199_index.html>
- Veeman, S. (1984). Perceived problems of beginning teachers. *Review of Educational Research*, 54 (2), 143-178.
- Watzke, J. (2007, Spring). Foreign language pedagogical knowledge: toward a developmental theory of beginning teacher practices. *Modern Language Journal*, 91(1), 63-82. Retrieved April 16, 2008, doi:10.1111/j.1540-4781.2007.00510.x .