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Pre-service ELT teachers' concerns about student teaching through classroom observations

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the concerns of pre-service ELT teachers about the practicum studies of the student-teachers in the ELT departments at tertiary level. 19 student-teachers receiving their pre-service education were observed by their classroom teachers and their university supervisor (the researcher) during their two-class hour teaching in their practicum schools. The observers (the practicum supervisor and the EFL classroom teacher) were asked to respond to a questionnaire ($r=.94$) which consists of four main sections: (a) knowledge of the field and field education (b) teaching/learning process, (c) evaluation and keeping records, and (d) other professional skills. The main findings indicate that the student-teachers seem to be well-educated in their field of study although they lack in some of the teaching qualities such as (a) making effective use of the technology and providing their students with a safety learning environment, (b) being able to make good transitions from the previously studied point to the new one, motivating their students, taking precautions against possible interruptions and impediments likely to occur in the classroom, having an effective tone of voice, and being able to use both verbal and body language effectively, (c) being able to keep records daily and inform the administration on time, and (d) being aware of the code of laws and regulations.

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Keywords: Practicum; practicum teachers; student-teachers; student-teachers' teaching behaviors; teacher development.

1. Introduction

In teacher education, the output (the practicum studies) is of great importance for practicum teachers as well as the input (the theoretical methodology courses). Therefore, "practical experience has always been part of 'foreign language (FL)' teacher education regardless of the approach taken" (Smith & Lev-Ari, 2005, p.289). They report that "when most teachers were educated in a form of apprenticeship, students of teaching spent their time in school observing an experienced modal (the EFL classroom teacher) before engaging in their own practical experience" (p.289) to put the theory into practice. In our country as well as in others student-teachers take two compulsory courses to observe (School Experience) and reflect on their theoretical experiences (The Practicum) to be engaged in professional development. "Professional development should contribute to measurable improvement in student achievement. It is a continuous process of individual and collective examination and improvement of practice. It should empower individual educators and communities of educators to make complex decisions; to identify and solve problems; and to connect theory, practice, and student outcomes" (<http://www.aft.org/topics/teacher-quality/prodev.htm>). Sarıçoban (2007) suggests that "... the practicum teaching courses provide the student-teachers with the necessary professional point of view as an educator." Handal and Lauvas, as is cited in Smith & Lev-Ari, 2005, "call ... practical knowledge 'practical theory': a person's private, integrated but ever-changing system of knowledge, experiences and values which is relevant to teaching practice at any particular times" (1987). It must be noted that professional and pedagogical development are among the most important characteristics in foreign language teaching. Therefore, a combination of the researcher experience and of the other practicum teachers as well as the classroom EFL teachers directed the researcher to make a study on their concerns about student teaching in the real classroom situation.

2. The purpose

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The current study tries to develop a picture of how pre-service ELT teachers instructional concerns change during a term long ELT program at tertiary level spanning classroom observations through student teaching. For this purpose, the ELT student-teachers (n=19) were observed about teaching behaviours in their practicum studies.

3. The method

This study basically aims to help student-teachers become aware of the effective teaching behaviours in the real EFL classroom situation. To do this the researcher thought to conduct a study on this issue. In his study observation technique was used. In each observation the practicum teacher (the researcher) and the classroom teacher were required to fill out the questionnaire (the evaluation form developed and designed by the department teaching staff of educational sciences) to see the answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the pre-service ELT teachers instructional concerns about their student-teachers' teaching behaviours?
2. In which areas do the student-teachers lack, are acceptable, and well-trained?
3. Do male student-teachers differ from the female ones in their teaching behaviours?

3.1. Participants

The participants of this study include 19 student-teachers (5 males and 14 females) enrolled in the department of ELT at tertiary level, their practicum teacher and the EFL classroom teachers (n=6) at the elementary school where they do their practicum study. The students are fourth year ELT students who work under the guidance of the researcher in their practicum studies. They range in age from 22 to 24.

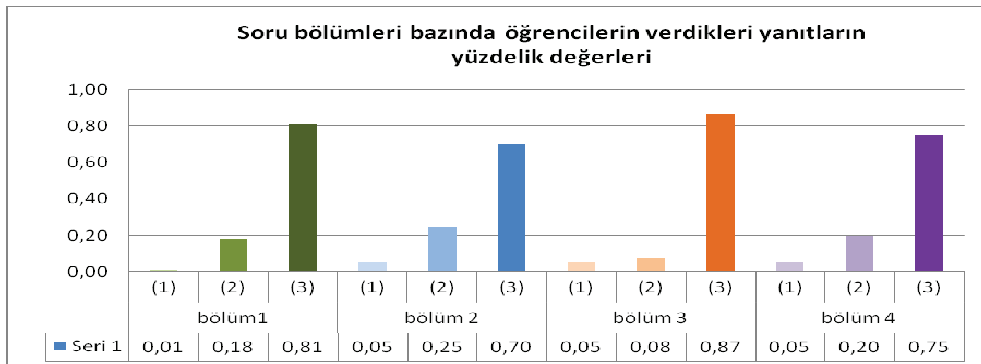
3.2. Instruments

An evaluation form for practicum studies developed and designed by the department teaching staff of educational sciences was used (Cronbach alpha $r=.94$). It consists of four sections: *Section 1*: knowledge of the field and field education with 9 questions: (1) knowledge of the field (4 questions), and knowledge of field education (5 questions), *Section 2*: teaching/learning process with four sub headings that include (1) planning with six questions, (2) instructional period with eight questions, (3) classroom management with two questions for the beginning of the lesson, four questions for the period the lesson is conducted, and three questions for the end of the lesson, and (4) communication with six question items, *Section 3*: evaluation and keeping records with four questions, and *Section 4*: other professional skills that include four question items. Each behavior in the form was evaluated on a three-point Likert scale: "Lack," "Acceptable," and "Well-trained." The answers were credited as "1" for "Lack", "2" for "Acceptable", and "3" for "Well-trained."

4. Data Analysis and Discussion

As to the data analysis the researcher wanted to scrutinize the issue. To serve this purpose, an overall analysis was done first to see in which areas the student-teachers seem to lack, have acceptable, and have effective teaching behaviours in foreign language teaching in the real classroom situation. Then, the other analysis was conducted regarding the gender differences if there were any.

4.1. Overall analysis



To see in which areas the student-teachers seem to lack, have acceptable and effective teaching behaviours in foreign language teaching in the real classroom situation an evaluation form was used by both the EFL classroom teacher and the practicum

teacher (advisor) during their observation of the student-teachers for two class hours. Table 1 reports that the student-teachers seem to have been well-trained in ELT though there are some moderate differences in (a) knowledge of the field and field education (81 %), (b) teaching/learning process (70%) (c) evaluation and keeping records (87 %) , and (d) other professional skills (75 %). According to the findings obtained in the study it can be asserted that the student-teachers performed good teaching behaviors in the real context. Their micro teaching trials in the departmental methodology courses may have contributed to this desired outcome.

Table 2. Weak/acceptable points

Items		Lack	Acceptable	Total	M	F	Total
		M	F				
1.2.2	Frequency	0	0	0	2	7	9
Technology	%	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,11	0,37	0,47
1.2.5	Frequency	0	0	0	1	5	6
Safe Learning Environment	%	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,05	0,26	0,32
2.1.6	Frequency	1	1	2	1	6	7
Transition from the previous topic to the new one	%	0,05	0,05	0,11	0,05	0,32	0,37
2.3.4	Frequency	0	1	1	4	6	10
Motivation	%	0,00	0,05	0,05	0,21	0,32	0,53
2.3.5	Frequency	0	1	1	1	8	9
Precautions against interruptions	%	0,00	0,05	0,05	0,05	0,42	0,47
2.4.4	Frequency	0	3	3	1	7	8
Tone of voice	%	0,00	0,16	0,16	0,05	0,37	0,42
2.4.6	Frequency	2	0	2	2	11	13
Verbal/Body Language	%	0,11	0,00	0,11	0,11	0,58	0,68
4.1	Frequency	0	1	1	1	5	6
Professional Code-laws and Regulations	%	0,00	0,05	0,05	0,05	0,26	0,32

Relying on the findings, on the other hand, in this study it is reported that the student-teachers lack and/or have some acceptable qualities such as (a) making effective use of the technology and providing their students with a safety learning environment, (b) being able to make good transitions from the previously studied point to the new one, motivating their students, taking precautions against possible interruptions and impediments likely to occur in the classroom, having an effective tone of voice, and being able to use both verbal and body language effectively, (c) being able to keep records daily and inform the administration on time, and (d) being aware of the code of laws and regulations (Table 2).

4.2. Analysis concerning gender differences

Table 3. Means of Student-teachers Practicum Evaluation

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Section 1	F	5	2,75	,171	,077
	M	14	2,85	,180	,048
Section 2	F	5	2,61	,228	,102
	M	14	2,66	,329	,088
Section 3	F	5	2,90	,137	,061
	M	14	2,79	,579	,155
Section 4	F	5	2,90	,224	,100
	M	14	2,62	,535	,143

As to the second research questions on gender differences, the means for four main sections in the questionnaire seem very close to each other (Section 1:F=2,75;M=2,85, Section 2:F=2,61;M=2,66, Section 3:F=2,90;M=2,79, and Section 4:F=2,90;M=2,62). It is clearly seen that male student-teachers and female student-teachers did not differ in their teaching behaviors in general.

Table 4. Independent-sample t-test Results

	F	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
		Sig.	t _{hesap}	df	Sig. (2-tailed)		
Section 1 Equal variances assumed	,003	,958	-1,017	17	,323	-,094	,093
Equal variances not assumed			-1,044	7,434	,329	-,094	,090
Section 2 Equal variances assumed	,003	,954	-,298	17	,769	-,048	,161
Equal variances not assumed			-,355	10,380	,730	-,048	,135
Section 3 Equal variances assumed	1,551	,230	,430	17	,673	,114	,266
Equal variances not assumed			,687	16,107	,502	,114	,166
Section 4 Equal variances assumed	1,214	,286	1,099	17	,287	,275	,250
Equal variances not assumed			1,576	16,216	,134	,275	,174

Independent samples t-test was run to see if there was any statistically significant difference between the female student-teachers and the male ones in their practicum studies. A careful analysis of Table 3 and Table 4 once again indicates that the two groups did not differ in their real classroom teaching process in regard to (a) Section 1: knowledge of the field and field education ($t_{\text{calculated}}=-1,07 < t_{\text{table}}=1,740$, $df=17$, $\text{Sig. (2-tailed)}=,323 > P=0,05$; M for males=2,85 and M for females=2,75), (b) Section 2: teaching & learning process ($t_{\text{calculated}}=-,298 < t_{\text{table}}=1,740$, $df=17$, $\text{Sig. (2-tailed)}=,769 > P=0,05$; M for males=2,66 and M for females=2,61), (c) evaluation and keeping records ($t_{\text{calculated}}=,430 < t_{\text{table}}=1,740$, $df=17$, $\text{Sig. (2-tailed)}=,673 > P=0,05$; M for males=2,79 and M for females=2,90), and (d) other professional skills ($t_{\text{calculated}}=1,099 < t_{\text{table}}=1,740$, $df=17$, $\text{Sig. (2-tailed)}=,287 > P=0,05$; M for males=2,62 and M for females=2,90).

5. Conclusion

The focus of this study has been the importance of effective foreign language teaching behaviors of the student-teachers during their practicum studies in the real classroom situations upon subject matter courses, general education courses, micro-teaching sessions and other related courses. It has been observed that there is no statistically significant difference between the male student-teachers and the females ones in their teaching behaviors. However, the findings indicate that, in general, the student teachers still need help in the following areas:

1. Paralinguistic features

It was observed that student-teachers need to be well-trained in prosodic features such as the effective use of verbal and body language because verbal behaviors and body language should go in accordance with the related culture. In other words target language paralinguistic features may mean something, but the student-teachers' paralinguistic features being under the influence of their native language may mean something totally different, which may invite many misleading learning difficulties.

2. Method

These prospective teachers of English should keep progress records daily and inform the administration on time and be able to make transitions from the previously studied point to the next item successfully. If students are aware that their teachers follow their progress closely, only then these teachers will feel comfortable in front of the students.

3. Educational technology

They should make use of the up-dated technology in their EFL classes. Technology is an indispensable part of both audio and visual educational/pedagogical resource which makes the classroom teaching interesting, motivating, enjoyable and learnable.

4. *Classroom management*

They seem to lack in taking precautions against interruptions and impediments likely to occur in the classroom, creating a safety learning environment, motivating their students, and being aware of the code-laws and regulations. “The classroom climate influenced by the teacher has a major impact on pupils’ motivation and attitude towards learning, that is to say, for teachers, having been equipped with pedagogical and professional characteristics would not be enough to establish a positive, learnable, and teachable classroom climate” (Açıkgöz, 2005, pp.104). The results produced by this article also signal the same issues pointed by him.

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