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The problems of teacher candidate's about teaching skills during teaching practice

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Abstract

The purpose of the study is to determine teacher candidates' problems who attend teaching practice courses about teaching skills. A qualitative design was selected for this research study. The participants of this study were 40 pre-service primary education teachers pursuing their studies in the academic years of 2005-2006 and 2006-2007. Participants were asked to keep reflective journals about the teaching skills problems during their practice teaching. The problems that the student teachers in both the academic years experienced in the process of practice teaching are "planning, subject matter knowledge, using instructional materials, motivation, communication, and time management and *behavior management skills"*.

Keywords: Teacher training; teaching practice; teacher candidates; teaching skills; practice school.

1. Introduction

Quality and achievement in education is a reflection of teachers' quality and achievement (Baştürk, 2009). Teacher quality concerns the inputs that teachers bring to the school, including their demographics, aptitude, professional preparation, and prior professional work experiences. Teaching quality refers to what teachers do to promote student learning inside the classroom. Teaching quality includes creating a positive learning climate, selecting appropriate instructional goals and assessments, using the curriculum effectively, and employing varied instructional behaviors that help all students learn at higher levels. Teacher qualification may play important roles in how much students learn (Darling-Hammond 2000; Ferguson 1991; Haycock 1998, 2000; Wenglinsky 2000; cited in Kaplan & Owings, 2001).

Teaching practice plays an important role in teachers' acquisition of teaching skills. Student teaching experience serves as a culmination of the teacher education process. It is a time for individuals preparing for a career in education to apply the theories and methods that they have studied during their teacher preparation program (Norris, Larke, & Briers, 1990). Practice teaching is the first opportunity for the student teacher to participate in activities involved in teaching in actual situations. It is also recognized as an experience of guided teaching in which the student teacher assumes increasing responsibility for directing the learning of a group of pupils over a specific period of time. Practice teaching is also a period of helping the student teacher to try out and make more meaningful

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use of the principles he has learnt while in the college or university. Practice teaching is designed to provide opportunities and guidance in a school setting for student teachers to develop in themselves professional competencies, and the personal characteristics, understanding, knowledge, and skills of a teacher (Olaitan & Agusiobo, 1981).

Effective 21st century elementary education teacher candidates must possess an overarching understanding and knowledge of the key concepts which drive all content instruction. These key concepts, connected with other core standards, include candidates' knowledge of assessment and instruction, the nature of the learner, school governance and culture, theories of learning and development, critical use of technology and the understanding of how the arts affect and interact with all other content areas. In addition, teacher candidates are required to have the necessary information regarding time management, planning for acquisition, dissemination and management of materials and equipment (NCDPI, 2009). A student teacher is also expected to possess effective teaching skills such as "subject matter knowledge**,** motivation, communication, *behavior management skills*" (Olaitan & Agusiobo, 1981).

Hascher, Cocard, and Moser (2004) asked student teachers and cooperating teachers to evaluate pre-service teachers' professional development in practice classes. Their evaluations showed that student teachers' learning increases and improves in practice classes. In addition, when student teachers' attitudes towards students before and after the practice course were measured, it was observed that they displayed a more positive attitude after the practice course. However, according to Calderhead and Shorrock (1997), student teachers appear to be dissatisfied with the gap between theory and practice. Some research conducted in this area examined the problems that student teachers' experience in relating theory and practice. Karamustafaoğlu and Akdeniz (2002) studied the degree to which student teachers in the department of physics teaching were able to transfer the behaviors that they were required to acquire in the pre-service program to their behaviors in practice schools. The results of the study indicate that student teachers failed to find the opportunity to transfer certain behaviors, such as using metaphors, making use of the laboratory, developing simple tools and equipment, and selecting and evaluation an instructional document to teaching situations (cited in Özkılıç, Bilgin, Kartal, 2008). In their study, Özkılıç, Bilgin, and Kartal (2008) found that teacher candidates viewed themselves as insufficient in dealing with individual differences among students and using mother tongue effectively.

Numerous studies have shown that student teachers and the science teachers in their first years in the profession experience problems in transforming their subject knowledge to the form that students can understand (Canbazoğlu, 2008; Simmons et al., 1999; Veal, Tippins & Bell, 1998). The problems in matching theory and practice increases the importance placed to practice teaching course every day (Power, Clarke & Hine, 2002; Sinclair, 1997; cited in Baştürk, 2009). Dewey (1904) argued that the primary purpose of teacher education programs should be to help pre-service teachers who reflect on problems of practice (cited in Mewborn, 1999). Therefore, determining the problems that student teachers encounter in their classroom teaching skills, determining the quality of theoretical and practical education that candidates receive in the duration of their education, and analyzing the needs of candidates are important with respect to taking the necessary measures. Therefore, the purpose of the study is to determine teacher candidates' problems who attend teaching practice courses about teaching skills in academic years of 2005-2006 and 2006-2007.

2. Method

A qualitative design was selected for this research study. Qualitative research is an umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry that help us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural settings as possible (Merriam, 1998).

The participants of this study were 40 pre-service primary education teachers pursuing their studies in the academic years of 2005-2006 and 2006-2007. The participants were selected through convenient sampling strategy. This is probably the most common sampling strategy (Patton, 1987). The reason that the data were collected from different student teachers pursuing their studies in two academic years is to be able to determine whether similar problems were encountered and thus to increase the reliability of the study. The participants were asked to keep reflective journals about the teaching skills problems during their practice teaching. After the teaching practice, the participants submitted their reflective journals. The collected data were analyzed through the technique of content analysis. Content analysis involves identifying coherent and important examples, themes, and patterns in the data (Patton, 1987). The data obtained through reflective journals were coded by the researcher and another expert in the field. Then, the codes were gathered to identify common points, thus forming the themes to frame the main structure of the findings of the study. The themes were called "planning, subject matter knowledge, using instructional materials, motivation, communication, time management, *behavior management skills.*"

3. Results (Findings)

The analysis of the data resulted in the following themes: (1) planning, (2) subject matter knowledge, (3) using instructional materials, (4) motivation, (5) communication, (6) time management, and (7) *behavior management skills.*

The problems that student teachers in the practice teaching course in the first academic year of the study (2005-2006) experienced and the number of participants who stated these are the following: "planning" (20), "subject matter knowledge" (25), "using instructional materials" (15), "motivation" (35),"communication" (28),"time management" (15), and "*behavior management skills*" (52). The problems that student teachers in the second academic year (2006-2007) stated to be experienced and the number of participants who stated these are the following: "planning" (18), "subject matter knowledge" (19), "using instructional materials" (12), "motivation" (32), "communication" (31), "time management" (18), and "*behavior management skills*" (48).

In summary, the problems that the student teachers in both the academic years experienced in the process of practice teaching are "planning, subject matter knowledge, using instructional materials, motivation, communication, and time management and *behavior management skills".* The most problematic areas were *behavior management skills*, motivation and communication.

4. Discussion

This section presents and discusses the problems that student teachers experience in practice teaching course in the teaching skill areas of planning, subject matter knowledge, using instructional materials, motivation, communication, time management and *behavior management skills.*

One of the problems that student teachers experience is planning. This is not to say that unplanned learning is impossible. Effective implementation of educational and instructional activities requires planned work. Instructional environment has a complicated structure, because many events take place at the same time. This complication may impede teachers to make correct decisions. The most effective method to overcome this difficulty is to plan. Planning guides what to teach to students, how to teach, and how to evaluate the acquired knowledge. The success of a lesson depends on good planning and effective execution of this plan. Planning supports the determination of the time to allot to a particular topic and effective use of this time (Koç, 2009). Planning that leads to shared understanding and acceptance of clear and attainable goals enhances student performance. Teacher planning produces a smoothly running classroom with fewer discipline problems and fewer interruptions. Planning is the key to eliminating most management problems (Arends, 1998). Planning is one of the instructional skills that student teaches should possess. The student teacher is expected to make decisions beforehand about pupils' needs, the most appropriate goals and objectives that can help them meet these needs; what they should learn (content) to obtain the required understanding and skills; the teaching strategies and organizing centers to be involved for the attainment of the pupils' goals and objectives. The planning function takes place before student teachers get to the classroom. Some of these activities of the student teacher during the planning function include assessment of pupils' needs, setting goals and instructional objectives, sequencing goals and objectives, selecting instruction-related organizing centers and methods, and determining appropriate pupil learning activities. There are advantages to lesson planning for student teachers. It helps student teachers to get their own thinking straight, promotes efficiency in instruction, helps to the "how" of teaching, helps to enable the student teacher, the supervisor, and the cooperating teacher to assess whether the student teachers have realized their objectives, enables effective use of time, gives the inexperienced student teacher a feeling of self confidence (Olaitan, Agusiobo, 1981). In this study, the cause of the problems that student teachers experienced in planning may be that they could not receive sufficient amount of support from their co-operating teachers and supervisor teachers. In a study conducted by Gökçe and Demirhan (2005), it was found that co-operating teachers and supervising teachers did not sufficiently support student teachers in the process of developing lesson plans. In the study by Baştürk (2009), it was found that pre-service teachers did not talk with their mentors about their lesson plans before their teaching.

Another problem that student teachers experienced was in the area of "subject matter knowledge". Several studies showed a positive relationship between teachers' subject matter preparation and both higher student achievement and higher teacher performance on evaluations, particularly in mathematics, science, and reading (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Goldhaber and Brewer, 2000; Guyton and Farokhi, 1987; Monk, 1994.) The studies suggest that the subject matter preparation that teacher candidates currently receive is inadequate for teaching toward high subject-matter standards. It appears that prospective

teachers may have mastered basic skills, but they lack the deeper conceptual understanding that is necessary when responding to student questions and extending lessons beyond the basics. The research suggests that the limited knowledge of teacher candidates is acquired in coursework across a prospective teacher's K-12 and university experience—in high school, in general (liberal) education undergraduate requirements, and in relevant university subject-matter departments. Teacher candidates arrive in teacher education courses with limited subject matter knowledge. However, another study found that, despite the good intentions of a mathematics methods instructor, the teacher education program did not create the conditions for a new teacher to overcome the limitations of her own knowledge of mathematics (Borko, Eisenhart, et al., 1992; cited in Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001). In addition, in a study conducted by Matyar, Denizoğlu and Özcan (2008), it was found that the student teachers in their senior years of class teaching department did not have sufficient knowledge in the area of "Living beings and Life". On the other hand, according to the results of a study reported by Matyar, Denizoğlu, and Özcan (2008), the subject matter knowledge of student teachers of science (Özdemir, 2006; Uşak, 2000) and senior year student teachers of class teaching (Kahyaoğlu & Yavuzer, 2004). The results of this study are consistent with current study.

One other problem that student teachers encountered is using instructional materials. Learning and teaching can be improved by effective selection and use of instructional materials because they appeal to human senses. Lessons delivered with the use of suitable teaching aids motivate pupils to learn and remember what is learnt when there is a recall. When instructional materials are efficiently utilized by a student teacher they help to stimulate the interest of the pupils, reduce the number of verbal responses, make learning more permanent, and provide experiences not easily secured in other ways. When effectively used, they offer a reality of experience which stimulates individual activity and motivates pupils to investigate or explore, thereby increasing voluntary reading in pupils (Olaitan, Agusiobo, 1981). In this study, the reason that student teachers encountered problems in using materials may be that they did not receive sufficient support from the co-operating teachers and supervisor teachers. In a study conducted by Gökçe and Demirhan (2005), it was found that co-operating teachers did not sufficiently help student teachers in the process of developing materials.

Student teachers also encounter problems in "time management". According to Olaitan and Agusiobo (1981), making plans may help student teachers to use time effectively. In this study, student teachers' shortcomings in planning lessons may have led to the problems in time management. Özkılıç, Bilgin, and Kartal (2008) found in their study that student teachers do not view themselves to be effective regarding time management. This result supports the findings in the current study.

One of the most important problems that student teachers experience is "motivating students". Similarly, Harrow, Diziuban, Rotberg (1973) found in their study that one of the problems that student teachers encounter was motivating students. Moreover, in this study, suggestions were made for the teacher education programs to emphasize student motivation.

One of the problems that student teachers face most is communicating with students. The reason for this may be that student teachers are not viewed as real teachers by learners. Another reason may be lack of adequate communication skills in student teachers. Poor communication results in failure on the part of the pupils, and the feedback the student teacher receives for poor communication is very poor responses from his pupils. When this occurs the pupils suffer a grave handicap because they become helpless in the face of unclear and complex messages. The price a student teacher pays for poor communication is exertion of more energy to make the pupils respond accurately to his messages (Olaitan, Agusiobo, 1981).

The final problem that student teachers experience in practice teaching courses most is "behavior management". *The ability of teachers to organize classrooms and manage the behavior of their students is critical to achieving positive educational outcomes (Emer & Stough, 2001). A significant body of research also attests to the fact that classroom organization and behavior management competencies significantly influence the persistence of new teachers in teaching careers (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). Teachers who have problems with behavior management and classroom discipline are frequently ineffective in the classroom, and they often report high levels of stress and symptoms of burnout (Berliner, 1986; Browers & Tomic, 2000; Espin & Yell, 1994). Disruptive classroom behavior is a significant reason why teachers leave the profession (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). Inadequate preparation and inadequate professional development are major contributing factors to the classroom management problems faced by new teachers. Although the importance of effective classroom organization and behavior management is widely acknowledged by educators, many new teachers report inadequate training and little assistance from colleagues and supervisors in establishing positive and productive classroom environments (Baker, 2005; Siebert, 2005). Teacher educators insist that their preparation programs teach classroom organization and behavior management*

skills, but the indication is that such skills are not taught thoroughly or with adequate supervision in real classroom context (Siebert, 2005) (cited in Oliver & Reschly, 2007). The effective teaching of classroom management and discipline skills remains a major challenge for teacher educators in the 21st century. In some ways, instruction and experience with these issues should be the priority for all education programs. Teachers cannot be effective if they do not have appropriate management and discipline skills. Although these skills are difficult to teach, there are ways to demonstrate and model effective management skills for pre-service teachers (Watson, Ackerman, Goodwin, & Parker, 2007).

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

This study aimed to explore the problems that student teachers experienced in practice teaching course related to instructional skills. Based on this, the most important points that the current study indicates may be presented as in the following:

Teacher candidates had similar problems about planning, subject matter knowledge, using instructional materials, motivation, communication, time management and *behavior management skills"* in both academic years. According to these findings, it may be suggested that curricula in faculties of education be rearranged in regard of these problem areas in order that student teachers are able to relate theory and practice, and that co-operating teachers and supervisor teacher act as models in these areas and guide their students.

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