FACTORS AFFECTING STUDENT TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS ON MENTOR ROLES: A STUDY AT DISTANCE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT
The present study aims to investigate whether perceptions of 4th year student teachers enrolled a distance English language teacher training program about mentor roles differ significantly according to some factors such as gender, the type of graduation school, the type of the cooperating school they are experiencing teaching practice at, and the number of student teachers in the supervisory group. 1846 student teachers participated in the study. The results indicated that these variables did not affect student teachers' perceptions as to their perception about mentor roles. The study is important in that it provides valuable information for the organization of the student teacher placements prior to practicum and it provides a chance to student teachers to voice their thoughts about their cooperating teachers at distance B.A Program in English Language Teaching.
Key Words: distance teacher education, student teachers, mentoring, computer-mediated communication

1. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Along with the population growth, the demand for all types of education has been increasing whereas the resources such as schools and teachers are limited and impossible to reach adequate levels in short period of time. (Özkul, 2001). Özdemir (1997, pp.1) states the educational problems such as inadequate number of schools at every level, inadequate opportunity of high education for everyone, inadequate number of qualified teachers and a need for educated person in technical areas. Distance education implemented by Anadolu University Open Education Faculty (AUOEF) is the major attempt in Turkey to overcome these problems. In order to find a solution to the need for a big number of English teachers, Turkish Ministry of National Education (MNE) and AUOEF signed a protocol in February 2000 to initiate a four-year Distance English Language Teacher Education Program named 'Distance B.A program in English Language Teaching (ELT)'. This program is a blended teacher training program where the student teachers have face to face education in the first two years, and distance education in the last two years. The computer-mediated communication constitutes a vital part of the Distance B.A program in ELT. There are two basic supports of it: 'academic' and 'socialization'. The distance student teachers do not get face to face (traditional) training during the 3rd and 4th years, but they are provided with online help to enhance their academic development and achievement for most of their courses. For each course of the 3rd and 4th year, the open education faculty appointed specialist tutors who are the university instructors at the ELT department of the education faculty to give support and guidance in the study of the courses. This is the 'academic' aspect. 'Socialization' is the other. The distance format teacher training involves student teachers learning individually. They are isolated from interrogating interactions between their peers and the course instructors (Van Schaik, Barker & Beckstrand, 2003). One of the most common problems of distance education is the limitation of dialogue between instructors and learners, and amongst learners themselves (Kirkup &Jones, 1996; Holmberg, 1989; Tsolakidis, 2000). The use of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) is a vital part of distance teacher education. CMC is useful to provide the student teachers with the support and communication during field experience (Eden, 2000; Roody, 1999). In addition to this online discussion boards on the Web-CT enable the student teachers to communicate with their peers throughout Turkey. Besides, they have the chance to communicate with the course instructors. Such communication and interaction with their peers and course instructors reduce student teachers' feeling of isolation and make them believe that they belong to a part of a social community (Bloomfield, 2000)

1.1. Practicum at distance ELT program

As to the practicum at distance ELT program, the student teachers at the 4th year take 'School Experience II and Teaching Practice', which is an annual course. The Course organizers at the Open Education Faculty assign each student teacher to a cooperating school and a cooperating teacher working there. During the first term, the student teachers take limited responsibilities when teaching in a classroom under the supervision of the cooperating teacher and are required micro teaching. That is, the student teachers practice teaching for 5-10 minutes in the classroom. In the second term, the students take more responsibility in teaching. Each student teacher makes a lesson plan and teaches a lesson in the classroom under the supervision of the cooperating teacher. During the practicum, each student teacher is supervised by the cooperating teacher assigned by the Open Education Faculty. The student teachers and the cooperating teachers have a chance to contact with the Open Education Faculty via phone or e-mail in order to get information about any issue regarding the practicum

process. Also, the student teachers are provided with online support where they can mention their problems to the course instructor of the 'School Experience II and Teaching Practice' course. Concerning the practicum period, the computer-mediated communication is also important not only for the student teachers but for their cooperating teachers as well. The student teachers at the distance ELT program at the Open Faculty are mentored regularly by only their cooperating teachers whereas the ELT student teachers getting traditional training at the faculties of education are supervised by both a cooperating teacher and a university supervisor, which means they get 'double support'. In order to compensate for the non existence of a regular university supervisor, the Open Education Faculty provides regular support for the students on the Web-CT, on the discussion board and through e-mail. Through the use of computer-mediated communication the student teachers communicate with their peers and their course experts with respect to their experience during school-based teaching. Through the discussion board, the course coordinators provide support and guidance for the students at any time and answer the students' questions regularly.

1.2. Mentoring at distance practicum
Student teachers consider school-based teaching practice to be the most important part of teacher training, for it provides them with opportunities for actual teaching and real learning (Calderhead, 1988; Griffin *et al,* 1983; Feiman-Nemser&Buchman, 1985; Franke&Dahlgreen, 1996). It is not possible to gain the roles, behaviors and the teaching skills only through only theoretical information gathered during pre-service teacher training. The practicum experience provides prospective teachers with the essential bridge between theory and practice and the opportunity to define and refine teaching skills. The current literature supports the importance of teacher practice and identifies student teaching as the most helpful part of their professional education since this period is regarded as the first steps of a personal journey to become a teacher (McIntyre & Byrd, 1996; Rand & Shelton-Colangelo, 1999; Turley, 1999; Thibeault, 2004; Walkington, 2005; Williams, 2001).   Cooperating teacher and the university supervisor whose roles are defined as the supervisor, the mentor, the observer, the model teacher and the supporter, are important to help them to gain the essential skills and a teacher identity during this journey.

The term 'mentor' is rooted in Homer's epic poem 'The Odyssey' in which Odysseus gave the responsibility for nurturing his son Telemachus, to his loyal friend, Mentor. Mentor educated and guided Odysseus' son. This education included every facet of his life: physical, intellectual, spiritual, social and administrative development. According to Anderson and Shannon (1988) mentoring can be best defined as:

'a nurturing process in which a more skilled or experienced person teaches, sponsors, encourages, counsels, serves as a role model, and befriends a less skilled or less experienced person for the purpose of promoting the latter's professional and personal development'.

 Bey (1990) defines mentoring as 'a professional practice that is emerging as a way for experienced teachers and supervising teachers to offer assistance to new teachers. The definitions above is evidence that there is no clear universal definition of mentoring due to the highly personal interactions conducted under different circumstances in different schools (Zanting, Verloop &Vermunt, 2001). Therefore, in the present study Odell and Huling's mentor definition will be taken as a base in pre-service teacher education. They (2000) define mentors as experienced teachers who mentor pre-service\beginning teachers as they are learning to teach as a part of their professional assignment.

With respect to student teachers' perceptions on school practices, student teachers consider mentoring to be the key aspect of school-based teacher training (Hudson, 2004).   The student teachers find it very essential to plan lessons with a mentor, to have mentors observe their teaching and give feedback would be very essential (Hudson, 2004). Wooley (1997) conducted a longitudinal study of students' perceptions of their mentors and results highlighted 9 themes: guide, feedback, expert, style, power, welcome, support, ideas, and evaluation. Zanting et al (2001) investigated the student teachers' beliefs about the characteristics of a 'good mentor'.   30 student teachers were interviewed. The qualitative data were categorized into five factors: 1) the effective aspects of learning to teach, 2) information source, 3) assessment of the student teacher, 4) reflection on student teacher's lessons, 5) the school content \school orientation.

The only study conducted in the Turkish context in relation to the roles of the triad members (cooperating teachers, university supervisors and student teachers) is Demirkol's (2004) in which the expectations for the roles of cooperating teachers and university supervisors during the practice period were investigated. The findings revealed   that the triad members didn't hold very clear expectations for the roles of university supervisors and cooperating teachers.

In the continuum of the mentor role, the roles of the cooperating teacher in traditional teacher training contexts have been investigated in detail (Beck and Kosnnik, 2000;Brown, 1992; Dayan, 1999; Demirkol,2004; Hobson, 2002; Hudson,2004; Johnson,2003; Jones,2000; Karmos & Jacko,1977; Kimberly, 2003; Lamant *et al*, 1995; Morin & Lamlech,1987; Penny *et at*,1996; Ramanathan *et al*, 1997; Shippy, 1984; Tanruther, 1964; Zantig *et al,2001*). The only study on the mentor roles during distance student teaching practice is an initial study which investigated the perceptions of cooperating teachers and student teachers about the implementation of mentor roles during distance practicum (Koç, 2008). According to the results, the student teachers indicated that their cooperating teachers most frequently provided moral support and gave feedback on teaching performance and least frequently facilitated socialization and interacted with other cooperating teachers. However, the initial study did not explore whether factors such as the gender, type of the graduation school of the student teachers, the type of the cooperating school where the student teachers are having their teaching practice and the number of the students under the supervision of a cooperating teacher affected the student teachers' perceptions about mentor roles. Therefore, the present study is an extended investigation of the initial study and aims to investigate whether these factors significantly affect the student teachers' perceptions on the implementation of the mentor roles. Based on these quandaries, the study will be guided by the research question: Is there a significant difference among the student teachers' thoughts about their cooperating teachers' implementation of the mentor roles of the cooperating teachers with regard to gender, the type of the graduation school of the student teachers, the type of the cooperating school and the number of the student teachers mentored by the cooperating teacher?

2. METHODOLOGY
2.1. Participants
There were 2463 4th year students enrolled to the Distance B.A Program in ELT at the AUOEF and took 'School Experience II and Teaching Practice' course in 2007. Detailed information about the descriptive of the student teachers is displayed in Table 1. According to Table 1, most of the student teachers are in the Middle Anatolia (N= 813) whereas the least are in East Anatolia (N=56) and West east Anatolia (N=82). Of the 2463 student teachers 1846 of them participated in the present study.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of student teachers with regard to the four variables

Components of student teachers' demographic profile	Categories of each demographic profile component	N	Percentage %
Gender	Female	1374	74.59
	Male	468	25.41
Type of graduation school	Anatolian teacher training high school	281	15.5
	Other schools	1536	84.5
	Elementary	158	8.568
	Private high school	29	1.573
	Anatolian teacher training high school	114	6.182
Type of cooperating schools	Anatolian high school	1096	59.436
	State high school	424	22.993
	Science high school	23	1.247
	one to four	89	4.83
Number of the students in the supervisory group	five	392	21.23
	six	1252	68.00
	Seven	108	5.86

Table 1 shows that a majority (N=1374) of the student teachers are female whereas one forth (N=468) of them are male. A minority of the student teachers (15. 5 %) indicated that they graduated from an Anatolian teacher training high school, while a great majority (N=1536) indicated they graduated from other schools. More than half of the student teachers (59.4 %) experience their teaching practice at Anatolian high schools, and minority private high school (1.5 %), science high school (1.2 %), teacher training state school (6.9 %) and at elementary school (8.5 %), private high schools (1. 5%), Anatolian teacher high schools (6.5%), state high schools (22. 9%) and science high school (1. 2%). More than half (59.4%) of the student teachers have their teaching practice at Anatolian High Schools. The second most common type of cooperating school is the state school with a percentage of 22. 9 %. As to the number of the student teachers in the supervisory group, most of the student teachers (68%) reported that their cooperating teacher mentored six student teachers. The second most common response is five with a percentage of 21.2 %. Very few (5.8%) of them indicated that their cooperating teacher mentors seven student teachers.

2.2. Data Collection Tool
Student Teacher Questionnaire (Koç, 2008) has two parts. The first part aims to gather demographic information such as the student teachers' gender, type of graduation school, type of cooperating school, and the number of the students in the supervisory group. The second part aims to gather information about their perceptions with regard to the implementation of their cooperating teachers' roles. There are 10 cooperating teacher role categories covering 38 items designed on a five-point Likert scale : 1 is assigned to 'never', 2 to 'rarely', 3 to 'sometimes', 4 to 'often' and 5 to 'always'. In the initial study (Koç, 2008), Cronbach alpha value was determined as 0.928 and principal component analysis explained ten factors, 43 items with a total variance of 60.19%.

2.3. Data collection and analysis
In the initial study (Koç, 2008) the questionnaires were sent to the 2462 student teachers at the end of the first term in 2007 and 1846 student teachers turned their questionnaires. The original data collected in the initial study was re-analyzed, but this time in terms of the four variables: the gender, the type of the graduation school, the type of the cooperating school and the number of the student teachers supervised by the cooperating teacher. The statistical program for the social Sciences (SPSS) version 15.0 was used for the analysis. In order to find out whether these variables significantly affected the responses of the student teachers independent t-tests, one-way between-groups ANOVAs were conducted for each of the ten mentor role dimension.

3. FINDINGS
The findings will be displayed accordingly to each variable.

3.1. Gender
In order to compare student teachers on each factor in terms of gender, ten independent-samples t-tests were conducted. Before the analysis, Bonferroni Adjustment Procedure was followed and the probability value was determined as .005. Means and standard deviations of male and female student teachers on each factor were provided in Table 2. Table 2 displays that both the female and male student teachers indicated that their cooperating teachers most frequently provided moral support (M=4.66; M=4.59) and least frequently facilitated socialization of them (M=3. 47; M=3. 58).

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of males and females for each factor

	Gender	N	Mean	SD
1) Providing facilitative information to enhance classroom performance	Female	1374	4.283	0.548
	Male	468	4.242	0.571
2) Giving feedback on teaching performance using feedback strategies	Female	1372	4.512	0.468
	Male	467	4.450	0.506
3) Helping student teachers' form a professional identity and be aware of their professional development	Female	1369	4.464	0.511
	Male	466	4.419	0.567
4) Providing moral support	Female	1374	4.644	0.486
	Male	467	4.595	0.512
5) Facilitating socialization of student teachers	Female	1374	3.473	0.950
	Male	468	3.585	0.942
6) Scaffolding lesson planning	Female	1373	4.476	0.580
	Male	466	4.430	0.606
7) Facilitative information voluntarily offered by cooperating teachers	Female	1369	4.430	0.566
	Male	466	4.442	0.574
8) Preparation for the mentor role	Female	1374	4.331	0.574
	Male	467	4.316	0.607
9) Using and understanding observation forms	Female	1369	4.332	0.801
	Male	466	4.322	0.811
10) Interacting with other cooperating teacher	Female	1371	3.926	0.777
	Male	467	4.032	0.753

To understand whether differences between male and female student teachers in terms of each factor were statistically significant, ten independent-samples t-tests were conducted as summarized in Table 3:

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances was considered while reporting each t-test result. The test showed that none of the variables disturbed the assumption of the homogeneity of variance. As the results of independent-samples t-tests indicated, male and female cooperating teachers did not differ from each other on any of the factors at a probability value of .005 or below. This showed that male student teachers and female student teachers did not differ in terms of their responses related to the frequency of their cooperating teachers' accomplishing the mentor roles.

Table 3: Independent-samples t-tests comparing male and female student teachers on each factor

	t	df	Sig.
1) Providing facilitative information to enhance classroom performance	1.361	1840	0.174
2) Giving feedback on teaching performance using feedback strategies	2.435	1837	0.015
3) Helping student teachers' form a professional identity and be aware of their professional development	1.598	1833	0.110
4) Providing moral support	1.874	1839	0.061
5) Facilitating socialization of student teachers	-2.196	1840	0.028
6) Scaffolding lesson planning	1.468	1837	0.142
7) Facilitative information voluntarily offered by cooperating teachers	-0.392	1833	0.695
8) Preparation for the mentor role	0.464	1839	0.643
9) Using and understanding observation forms	0.243	1833	0.808
10) Interacting with other cooperating teacher	-2.562	1836	0.010

3.2. Type of the graduation school of the student teachers
Table 4 shows that both the student teachers who graduated from Anatolian teacher high school (N=281; 15.2%) and who graduated from other high schools (N=1536; 83.2 %) indicated that their cooperating teachers always provided moral support (M=4.60; M=4.63) and sometimes facilitated socialization of them (M=3.48; M=3.49). In order to compare cooperating teachers for each factor in terms of the program of graduation, ten independent-samples t-tests were conducted. The probability value was determined as 0.005 as done in previous analyses. Means and percentages for each program of graduation are provided in Table 1.

Independent-samples t-tests were conducted to compare graduates of Anatolian teacher schools with other schools in terms of each factor. The summary table of t-tests is provided in Table 5. The results indicated that student teachers who graduated from Anatolian teacher high schools did not differ from the student teachers who graduated from other schools in terms of their responses related to the mentor role implementation of their cooperating teachers.

Table 4: Descriptive statistics of student teachers in terms of the type of graduation school

	Gender	N	Mean	SD
1) Providing facilitative information to enhance classroom performance	Anatolian teacher	281	4.278	0.560
	Other	1536	4.274	0.553
2) Giving feedback on teaching performance using feedback strategies	Anatolian teacher	281	4.479	0.511
	Other	1533	4.503	0.471
3) Helping student teachers' form a professional identity and be aware of their professional development	Anatolian teacher	279	4.428	0.508
	Other	1531	4.461	0.527
4) Providing moral support	Anatolian teacher	281	4.609	0.500
	Other	1536	4.638	0.493
5) Facilitating socialization of student teachers	Anatolian teacher	281	3.486	0.994
	Other	1536	3.499	0.941
6) Scaffolding lesson planning	Anatolian teacher	281	4.464	0.602
	Other	1533	4.467	0.584
7) Facilitative information voluntarily offered by cooperating teachers	Anatolian teacher	279	4.390	0.637
	Other	1531	4.441	0.555
8) Preparation for the mentor role	Anatolian teacher	281	4.286	0.594

	Other	1536	4.334	0.580
9) Using and understanding observation forms	Anatolian teacher	281	4.272	0.871
	Other	1529	4.339	0.792
10) Interacting with other cooperating teacher	Anatolian teacher	280	3.950	0.804
	Other	1533	3.954	0.769

Table 5: Independent-samples t-tests comparing student teachers on each factor in terms of the type of graduation school

	t	df	Sig.
1) Providing facilitative information to enhance classroom performance	0.094	1815	0.925
2) Giving feedback on teaching performance using feedback strategies	-0.792	1812	0.429
3) Helping student teachers' form a professional identity and be aware of their professional development	-0.955	1808	0.340
4) Providing moral support	-0.896	1815	0.370
5) Facilitating socialization of student teachers	-0.204	1815	0.839
6) Scaffolding lesson planning	-0.074	1812	0.941
7) Facilitative information voluntarily offered by cooperating teachers	-1.259	359.037	0.209
8) Preparation for the mentor role	-1.248	1815	0.212
9) Using and understanding observation forms	-1.287	1808	0.198
10) Interacting with other cooperating teacher	-0.073	1811	0.942

3.3. Type of the cooperating school

Table 6. Summaries of one-way between-groups ANOVAs on type of school students having teaching practice at

ANOVA		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1) Providing facilitative information to enhance classroom performance	Between Groups	.003	1	.003	.009	.925
	Within Groups	556.864	1815	.307		
	Total	556.867	1816			
2) Giving feedback on teaching performance using feedback strategies	Between Groups	.143	1	.143	.627	.429
	Within Groups	413.583	1812	.228		
	Total	413.726	1813			
3) Helping student teachers' form a professional identity and be aware of their professional development	Between Groups	.251	1	.251	.912	.340
	Within Groups	496.560	1808	.275		
	Total	496.811	1809			
4) Providing moral support	Between Groups	.196	1	.196	.803	.370
	Within Groups	442.996	1815	.244		
	Total	443.192	1816			
5) Facilitating socialization of student teachers	Between Groups	.037	1	.037	.042	.839
	Within Groups	1637.196	1815	.902		
	Total	1637.233	1816			
6) Assisting on lesson planning	Between Groups	.002	1	.002	.005	.941
	Within Groups	624.091	1812	.344		
	Total	624.093	1813			
7) Facilitative information voluntarily offered by cooperating teachers	Between Groups	.620	1	.620	1.916	.166
	Within Groups	584.608	1808	.323		
	Total	585.228	1809			
8) Preparation for the mentor role	Between Groups	.529	1	.529	1.558	.212
	Within Groups	615.994	1815	.339		
	Total	616.523	1816			
9) Using and understanding observation forms	Between Groups	1.072	1	1.072	1.655	.198
	Within Groups	1170.755	1808	.648		
	Total	1171.827	1809			

	Between Groups	.003	1	.003	.005	.942
10) Interacting with other cooperating teacher	Within Groups	1086.012	1811	.600		
	Total	1086.015	1812			

To compare student teachers in terms of the cooperating school they are having practice at, one-way between-groups ANOVAs with an adjusted probability value of .005 were conducted. Results of one-way between-groups ANOVAs were provided in Table 6. As the ANOVA summary table suggested, none of the factors showed a significantly different pattern when different types of school where students having teaching practice were taken into account at a probability value of .005 or below. This shows that the student teachers who attend different cooperating schools do not differ in terms of their responses related to the frequency of their cooperating teachers' accomplishing the mentor roles.

3.4. The number of the student teachers at the supervision group
To calculate the relationship between the number of student teachers in teaching practice group and student teachers' means on each factor, Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficients were calculated. Since 10 coefficients were reported for this analysis, the probability value was determined as .005 after a Bonferroni Adjustment. Correlation of each factor with the number of people in groups is provided in Table 7:

Table 7. Correlation coefficients between the factors of the scale and number of students in groups (N=1836)

1) Providing facilitative information to enhance classroom performance	Correlation	-0.004
	Significance	0.861
2) Giving feedback on teaching performance using feedback strategies	Correlation	-0.032
	Significance	0.175
3) Helping student teachers' form a professional identity and be aware of their professional development	Correlation	-0.039
	Significance	0.092
4) Providing moral support	Correlation	-0.001
	Significance	0.952
5) Facilitating socialization of student teachers	Correlation	-0.023
	Significance	0.329
6) Scaffolding lesson planning	Correlation	0.006
	Significance	0.798
7) Facilitative information voluntarily offered by cooperating teachers	Correlation	-0.036
	Significance	0.122
8) Preparation for the mentor role	Correlation	-0.022
	Significance	0.344
9) Using and understanding observation forms	Correlation	-0.016
	Significance	0.507
10) Interacting with other cooperating teacher	Correlation	0.004
	Significance	0.863

As the correlation coefficients between the number of student teachers in groups and factors of the scale revealed, none of the factors was significantly related with the number of the student teachers in each group under the supervision of a cooperating teacher.

4. DISCUSSION
The findings of the study indicated that female and male student teachers did not show any disparity in their perceptions considering their cooperating teachers' implementation of the mentor roles. This means that gender was found not to be a significant variable effecting student teachers' perceptions on mentoring roles. The finding is not line with Çakır's (n.d.) who investigated the perceptions of the first year distance ELT student teachers' views on the teaching profession. The results indicated that the student teachers' perceptions showed significant difference regarding gender.

Another finding showed that the type of the graduate school of the student teachers did not affect their perceptions as to the implementation of the mentor responsibilities. A considerable number of the student teachers (Table 1) were the graduates of Anatolian Teacher Training High Schools. Different from other high

schools, Anatolian Teacher Training High Schools aim to train students for the teacher training programs at the faculties of education. In this regard, besides the standard courses, teacher- profession related courses are offered to the students to help them gain a 'teacher identity' and acquire knowledge, skills and behaviors that a 'teacher' should be equipped with. Any graduate of Anatolian Teacher High School is expected to be well aware of 'the characteristics and responsibilities of a good teacher. Therefore, prior to the present study it was expected that the graduates of Anatolian Teacher Training High School are likely to differ in terms of their perceptions about the implementation of mentor responsibilities.

Most of the cooperating schools where the student teachers were having their teaching experience were high schools, very few were elementary ones. However, the type of the cooperating school was not a significant factor regarding as the perceptions of the student teachers on mentor roles. This indicates that whatever the type of the cooperating school is (elementary or high school), the cooperating teachers fulfill their mentor responsibilities.

The last finding of the study was that the number of the supervisory group was not a significant factor to implement their mentor roles during the distance practicum. This means that for a cooperating teacher it is not a significant factor to supervise a group of 4, 5, 6 or 7 student teachers to fulfill the mentor responsibilities. Such a finding was unexpected. The cooperating teachers participating at the distance practicum have two roles. The first one is the 'class teacher role' which covers up responsibilities such as making lesson plans, teaching English to the students, checking the homework of the students, evaluating the tests and exams, etc. The second one is the 'mentor role'. Giving feedback to the student teacher's lesson plan prior to the teaching, observing the student teacher's teaching practice and giving feedback to the student teacher after the teaching performance are the outstanding responsibilities of the cooperating teacher stated in the handbook prepared by the AUOEF. Nevertheless, trying to implement these both roles is demanding and also time consuming. Therefore, cooperating teachers mentoring seven or more student teachers are assumed to likely to have difficulty in implementing their mentor roles when compared with cooperating teachers supervising fewer student teachers. However, this assumption is not supported by the findings. Therefore, one possible explanation could be the 'lack of quality' in the implementation of the mentor roles. Zeichner (1979) also states that the quality of feedback is as important as the quantity. As a result, 'quality in the implementation of the mentor role' in a crowded group involving six or seven student teachers is a matter of question.

5. CONCLUSION
The present study was undertaken in an attempt to investigate whether some factors such as gender, the type of graduation school, the type of the cooperating school, and the number of student teachers in the supervisory group affected student teachers' perceptions on mentor roles. The results indicated that these factors did not have a significant affect on the student teachers' perceptions as to the fulfillment of the mentor roles. The results of this study contributed to increased understanding of cooperating teacher support related to mentoring process at the distance B.A ELT program at the Open Faculty during teaching practicum. The results could provide valuable insights to be used in the organization of the practicum process at Distance BA Program in ELT at AUOEF. The findings also provide valuable information to choose the cooperating schools and group the student teachers prior to the practicum.

It is really a difficult job to find adequate cooperating schools to place student teachers who are big in number. In 2007, the Open Education Faculty assigned 2463 student teachers to 432 cooperating teachers working in 112 schools in 74 cities in Turkey. 'Quantity' is one problem when organizing the distance field practice. However, quality is another. Robinson (1997) outlined this problem and stated that stability of quality in practicum is very demanding for widely geographically spread students and it is challenging to understand cooperating school conditions and be receptive from a centralized point of control. So, a recommendation for further research is the need to investigate the 'quality' of the cooperating schools and the 'cooperating teachers' of the distance practicum. The student teachers reported that their cooperating teachers implement their mentor roles; however, no information is available about 'the quality of the implementation of these mentor roles'. Another recommendation for further research is the investigation of the practicum members' (cooperating teachers and student teachers) opportunity of utilization of the computer technology. As mentioned before, the Open Education Faculty provides the student teachers with online support where they have a chance to participate in forums and discussions on the Web-CT with their peers and the course instructors. Forums on the Web-CT for the 'School Experience II and Teaching Practice' course offers the student teachers access to supportive information and increases the collaborative opportunities for the student teachers to exchange ideas, receive feedback and ask any questions about the implementation of the field experience. However, it is a very big concern whether the student teachers and cooperating teachers have access to internet and computer.

Khine and Lourdusamy (2003) found that online discussion during the practicum provided the student teachers with a path to discuss their problems and ideas and that responses from peers and instructors helped clear their responses about the situation at distance English teacher training program? Are the student teachers satisfied with the online support provided on the 'School Experience II and Teaching Practice' course? This is another issue that should be investigated in detail.

Although Distance English Language Teacher Training Programme at AUOEF is a great solution to the problem of inadequate number of English teachers, there hasn't been a profound investigation of the distance English Language Teacher Training Programme since it was first put into progress in 2000. Further studies are essential for the development and implementation of a better distance teacher training program and for more effective teaching practices as well.

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