



The effects of teaching practicum on EFL pre-service teachers' concerns

Fadime Yalcin Arslan^{a*} , Gulden Ilin^b 

^a*Gaziantep University, 27310, Gaziantep, Turkey*

^b*Cukurova university, 01330, Adana, Turkey*

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Abstract

This study aims to find out whether accumulating theoretical knowledge through methodology courses and experiencing real teaching practice during practicum may lead to any changes in EFL student-teachers' probable concerns about teaching. The study further attempts to define these changes, if any. To reach the aims of the study, data were collected by means of a scale developed on the basis of the student-teachers' concerns about teaching and teaching practice concerns sheets (TPCS), which they kept for a period of ten weeks. In order to bring more depth to the study, the data were triangulated by the student-teachers' narrative reflections. Results indicate a significant difference between student-teacher concerns at the beginning and the end of teaching practice. It appears that practicum provides student-teachers with a base for awareness on teaching related issues in real contexts. In addition to this hands-on experience, the findings also demonstrate that the knowledge base of student-teachers played an influential role in triggering the change in the nature of their concerns.

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1. Introduction

In particular, teacher education has become a prominent focus of foreign language education studies. Research pertaining teacher education has explored various aspects such as teacher thinking, teacher beliefs, and teacher perceptions. For example, Hawkins (2004) supports the idea that "teaching is no longer considered as a mainly technical performance, teacher education concentrates more on the teacher thinking and its development" (p.4). The importance of establishing a solid knowledge base among language educators, on the other hand, has been emphasized by numerous scholars (Schulman, 1986; Day, 1993; Marks, 1990). Moreover, in terms of teacher education programs, Day (1993) claims that two types of knowledge exist. These are knowledge that is expected of students and that is delivered to students. Johnson (2009) defines teacher knowledge base as "a professional self-definition", which is about "what people need to know and are able to carry out the work of a particular profession" (p.11). Day (1993) presents four categories of knowledge that form the basis of teacher education programs. The first is content knowledge, which denotes knowledge of subject matter; the second is pedagogic knowledge, which refers to general teaching knowledge derived from

*Corresponding author. Tel.: +90 342 317 3782
E-mail address: fayalcin@gantep.edu.tr

practices, strategies and beliefs; the third is pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), which refers to the knowledge of how to represent content knowledge, what difficulties teachers may encounter in the classroom and how to overcome these difficulties; and the fourth is support knowledge, the knowledge of various disciplines which forms our approach to the teaching and learning of English. PCK has attracted considerable research attention (Liu, 2013), and it is considered necessary for transferring subject-matter knowledge to students' understanding. Related to this, Van Driel and Berry (2010) assert that pre-service teachers possess less PCK because they lack teaching experience. Thus, pre-service teachers need to master basic classroom skills and gain sufficient confidence as well as experience in order to develop their PCK. The role of teaching experience and reflection may be considered as means to contribute to novice teachers' PCK. Similarly, teaching experience and reflection on the relationship between subject-matter knowledge and classroom practice may promote the development of PCK. One assumption in teacher education is that PCK is gained through teaching practice, so experienced teachers have well-formed PCK (Liu, 2013). Some studies indicate that novice teachers have concerns about PCK, and they have difficulties in transforming and representing concepts in a comprehensible way to their students (Wilson, Schulman & Richert, 1987). These difficulties can be attributed to a lack of knowledge as well as contextual factors and/or teacher-related factors, which may induce teacher concerns.

It is largely agreed that teacher practice in teacher education plays a crucial role in the professional education and development of pre-service teachers. Accordingly, this topic has received considerable research interest recently. One widely studied topic is the sources of concern experienced by pre-service teachers. To illustrate, Çelik (2008) states that the factors generating stress during practicum should be identified and necessary precautions should be taken to minimize their occurrence. Thus, pre-service teachers can make effective use of practicum.

A great number of studies within teacher education focus specifically on teachers, such as teachers' perceptions (Hergüner, Arslan & Dündar, 2002; Oral & Dağlı, 1999), thoughts (Özdemir & Çanakçı, 2005), and concerns about teaching practice (Capel, 1997, Yourn, 2000; Leach, 2005; Goh & Mathews, 2011; Heeralal & Bayaga, 2011) among others. However, the topic of student-teachers' concerns (anxiety) regarding teaching practicum has received less attention, which suggests that there is a need to study this subject in a more detailed way. Further investigation into language teachers' concerns related to teaching practicum and methodology courses may contribute toward filling this gap. Caires and Almeda (2005) assert that the investigation of teacher expectations, doubts, needs, fears and the achievements may enable us to form a more thorough understanding of these concerns. Similarly, Sharma (2015) claims that "the more is known about the student teachers' experiences during teaching practice, the greater possibility of reducing the stress and maximizing the benefits of teaching practice for them" (p. 16). Since an essential facet of teacher education is learning through observation and practice, teaching practice should be of primary focus. In the same vein, Mau (1997) emphasizes the importance of school-based practice and adds that "student-teachers who can reflect and resolve their concerns gain more professional confidence from their practicum (p.53)". Murray-Harvey, Slee, Lawson, Silins, Banfield, and Russel (2000, p. 20) similarly point out that the stress experienced by student-teachers during practicum supports the fact that stress is an important phenomena of the teaching practice period; thus, in order to minimize the sources of concern and maximize the benefits of teaching practicum, it seems to be worth addressing the concerns of students related to their teaching practice experiences.

1.1. Theoretical background

Educators have frequently emphasized the importance of teacher concerns as a major factor in teacher effectiveness. Job interviews, professional development workshops and various teacher

conferences all support the need to address these concerns, which may affect the personal as well as professional lives of teachers (Jeansome & Caliste, 2001). Teacher concerns were first studied by Fuller (1969), who examined the concerns of prospective pre-service teachers and categorized these into three phases: pre-teaching (non-concern), early teaching (self-concern), and late concerns (concerns about teaching).

Dunn and Rakes (2010) explored the relationship between pre-service teachers' concerns and their beliefs concerning learner-centeredness. Findings revealed that pre-service teachers possess an increased awareness of learner-centeredness, considering the effects of learner-centred education on students. From a broader perspective, Ralph (2004) examined pre-service teachers' and their mentors' concerns about practicum. Nearly all participants in his study stated that some new concerns emerged while some others remained. The teachers and mentors are also reported to have developed certain strengths during the practicum.

Another study exploring the effects of teaching practice on pre-service teachers' perceptions was carried out by Şişman and Acat (2003). The results they reached revealed that the perceptions of pre-service teachers changed in a positive way. The results also showed that their perceptions related to the position of teaching profession and sufficiency of content knowledge was affected in a positive way.

Mok (2005) investigated the concerns which teachers exhibit from early to middle to later stages, differences in concern between stages, and differences in concern between groups of teachers. His findings reveal that teachers are concerned not only about the impact of their teaching on students but also about their own teaching performance, personal teaching style, teaching efficiency, and conflict/relations with colleagues. Findings also imply that teachers' concerns deepen in later stages of teaching.

In addition, Gökçe and Demirhan (2005) examined the views of teacher candidates about the responsibilities of mentors at Elementary Education Level. They found that the cooperation among the teacher candidates, mentor and teaching staff is not at enough level.

In Poulou (2007), we see that student-teachers believed that teacher educators should reflect on the organization and evaluation of teacher training programmes. Lotter (2004) described pre-service science teachers' concerns during a science methods program and his findings reveal that teachers focus on the importance of developing lessons on the basis of student characteristics.

Sarıcoban (2009) searched pre-service teachers' concerns at tertiary level through observation and a questionnaire. The results showed that the participants were good at effective use of verbal and body language. However, they seem to lack in classroom management and motivating students.

Melnik and Meister (2008) dealt with this theme from a broader perspective that involved both beginning and experienced teachers. They investigated the teachers' concerns related to classroom management, time constraints, workload, parent interactions and academic preparation. There were significant differences in the concerns experienced and beginning teachers' concerns in terms of classroom management and parent interactions, while no significant difference was detected in terms of academic preparation and time management.

From the above studies, we can conclude that pre-service teachers experience several concerns during their pre-service education and training. However, whether or not these concerns go through changes as the student teachers accumulate knowledge and experience in the ELT departments also seems worth to investigate. This study assumes that these concerns may change in time and that methodology classes as well as teaching practice may affect these changes. The rationale for this suggestion is that teacher education comprises of a two-folded period: the first is the period in which teachers accumulate and extend their content knowledge by means of methodology classes, and the

second phase is the one in which experience is obtained via teaching practice. Both periods involve social interaction, exchange of help and support, wherein student-teachers interact with their peers, mentors, supervisors and students. These social aspects of their teaching experience may be elaborated through the lens of Vygotsky's social constructivism. Vygotsky (1978) states that language develops through social interaction and those children can advance to higher levels of performance and knowledge in a supportive environment. He terms this metaphorical place in which children could do more than they would be capable of independently as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). While applying the concept of ZPD to various educational contexts, Wood, et al. (1976) developed scaffolding theory. According to this theory, children learn more effectively when they have a more knowledgeable figure to support them. This more knowledgeable person may be anyone who has a better understanding or a higher ability level than the learner concerning a particular subject, topic or task. Vygotsky's ZPD and scaffolding theory similarly applies to the ELT context and practicum may be said to be a period in which these are better observed and experienced. All these may trigger change in the student teachers.

In this respect, it is widely agreed that the recognition and examination of student-teachers' experiences, beliefs, attitudes and concerns might offer insight to teacher educators concerning the improvement of teacher preparation programs (Poulou, 2007). In light of the studies mentioned previously in this paper, it is possible to suggest that teacher concerns deserve being researched. In summary, studies conducted thus far have dealt with different aspects of teacher concerns; however, none, as to our knowledge, have dealt with the possible changes in student-teacher concerns from the stand points as methodology classes and teaching practicum. Thus, this study aims to find out whether accumulating theoretical knowledge through methodology courses (MCs) and experiencing real teaching practice may lead to any changes in EFL student-teachers' concerns about teaching and if so to define these probable changes.

1.2. Research questions

Specifically, this study focuses on the following research questions:

1. Do prospective English Language teachers from a Turkish university hold any concerns about teaching? If so, what kind of concerns do they have?
2. Can a significant difference in the senior student-teachers' concerns about teaching be observed as they go through the following phases of their education in the ELT department?
 - a. After they have completed taking methodology courses,
 - b. Before they start practicum,
 - c. After they have completed the practice period.

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

Assuming that they are probably the most moulding aspects of prospective language teachers' education in the English Language department, the current research was to find out the probable influence of methodology courses and teaching practicum on the pre-service teachers' concerns about teaching. This study employed a mixed research paradigm. Mixed method research design is defined as the combination of at least one quantitative and one qualitative data (Tashakkori & Teddlie,

1998). According to Greene (2007), it helps researchers to consider multiple viewpoints and perspectives at the same time. To begin with, student-teacher concerns were elicited from seniors and by means of these concerns Scale of Language Teachers' Concerns (SLTC) was devised. In order to detect the changes that possibly occurred in students-teachers' concerns, the scale was given to seniors three times as will be explained in detail below. In order to gain a deeper understanding of how, if any, teaching practicum influenced their concerns about teaching, these students were asked to complete a Teacher Practice Concern Sheet (TPCS) following each of the teaching practice sessions. To confirm the results, teacher practice concern sheets and narrative reflections were subjected to content analysis.

2.2. Participants

The entire senior student-teacher population of an ELT department at a state university in Turkey participated in this study. In the first application of the SLTC which was at the beginning of the academic year as mentioned above, totally, 124 student-teachers participated. However, the number of senior student-teachers in three applications in the middle and at the end of the academic year of the SLTC varied. Additionally, 10 practicum students contributed to this study through qualitative means and in an in-depth manner. These participants, similar to the rest, were members of the senior student population attending practice schools for teaching practice. Convenience sampling was used because participants meet practical criteria such as easy accessibility, geographical proximity and availability. Their characteristics such as age, sex, marital status, ability level and socio-economic status were not considered as variables in this study.

2.3. Data collection instruments

The instruments utilized for data collection in this study included the SLTC, Teacher Practice Sheets and narrative reflections.

2.3.1. The Scale of Language Teachers' Concerns (SLTC)

The SLTC was used in order to investigate whether teaching practice influences the concerns of senior students. In order to develop the scale, an open-ended question, which was "what are your worries related to teaching?" was asked to the all pre-service EFL student population that is totally 126 in order to obtain information regarding their concerns related to teaching. Later, both with the help of these statements and similar studies in the literature, a 52-item scale was developed. In order to realise the reliability of the scale a factor analysis was conducted to summarize the items included in the scale. Therefore, factor analysis was applied as a data reduction or structure detection method. Principal component was applied as the extraction method. Inter-item correlations were checked and Varimax with Kaiser Normalization was selected for rotation as suggested by Field (2000). Then, Cronbach's Alpha value was calculated for the whole scale which revealed a value of .956 which was quite ideal. Later, inappropriate items, particularly those items did not serve to the purpose of the current study's data collection tool, were eliminated. The new Cronbach's Alpha was .959. Later, the Kaiser-Meyer-Okin Measure of Sampling Adequacy was checked. The factor analysis revealed a KMO value of .935, which was an acceptable value. The Cronbach's Alpha was .959 after all these eliminations were realized. The total number of items in the questionnaire was determined as 43. The analysis with two factors and 43 indicators explained 54.407% of the total variance. Thus, the SLTC including 43 items, based on a Likert-type scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree was developed. Since the values obtained from Kolmogorov-Smirnov test were not significant ($p > 0.05$, asymp. sig. = 0,0512), the data indicated normality. After having proven the validity and the reliability of the scale, it was administered to seniors after they had completed

receiving all the methodology courses at the department at the beginning of the academic term. Thus, the student-teachers were expected to have already accumulated the necessary theoretical knowledge in these courses. The SLTC was applied three times in the study, before the teaching practice, that is when they completed taking methodology courses. After they finished their observations during teaching practice, which is before the second term in their fourth year and finally after the completion of the teaching practice, when they had real teaching experiences at a real school. This procedure was used to identify probable changes that might have existed in their concerns during this period.

2.3.2. Teacher Practice Concern Sheet (TPCS)

In order to illuminate whether or not and if so how teaching practicum influences teacher concerns about teaching totally ten EFL pre-service teachers were asked to complete a TPCS before and after each of the teaching practice sessions. These forms included guided questions such as whether teachers found the teaching session to be effective in terms of remedying any of their concerns, how that specific session contributed to their concerns and whether any prior concerns no longer affected them after each specific session.

2.3.3. Narrative Reflections

Five Student-teachers also reflected on their teaching experiences in the form of essays. These essays were written in English. These reflections contributed to the better understanding of the changes which occurred during practice.

3. Results

Data related to the concerns of seniors regarding teaching was obtained via the SLTC administered at the beginning of the first term (before teaching practice), before the second term (after observations experience -before teaching practice) and at the end of the second term (after teaching practice). During the analysis, the options “strongly agree” and “agree” were re-coded into the same variable as “agree”, and the values of “strongly disagree” and “disagree” were re-coded as “disagree” in order to facilitate the interpretation of each item. The percentage and frequency of each item were computed, and the results were represented as in Table 1 (See Table 1).

Table 1. The percentage and frequency of senior student regarding teaching

| | | FIRST | | | | | | SECOND | | | | | | THIRD | | | | | | |
|--------------|--|---|------|-----------|----|-------|----|----------|----|-----------|------|-------|------|----------|------|-----------|------|-------|------|------|
| | | Disagree | | Undecided | | Agree | | Disagree | | Undecided | | Agree | | Disagree | | Undecided | | Agree | | |
| Statements | | f | % | f | % | f | % | f | % | f | % | f | % | f | % | f | % | f | % | |
| Items | I feel skilled in | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 1 | using class time effectively | 3 | 2.4 | 22 | 17.7 | 99 | 79 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5.1 | 93 | 94.9 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5.1 | 93 | 94.9 |
| | 11 | changing my students' previously adopted ineffective learning habits | 4 | 3.2 | 48 | 38.7 | 72 | 58.1 | 3 | 3.2 | 26 | 27.7 | 65 | 69.1 | 2 | 2.1 | 18 | 18.8 | 76 | 79.2 |
| | 12 | putting theory into practice | 34 | 27.4 | 39 | 31.5 | 51 | 41.1 | 7 | 7.4 | 23 | 24.5 | 64 | 68.1 | 3 | 3.1 | 21 | 21.9 | 72 | 75 |
| | 29 | having the support of parents | 3 | 2.4 | 43 | 34.7 | 78 | 62.9 | 3 | 3.2 | 27 | 28.7 | 64 | 68.1 | 4 | 4.2 | 27 | 28.1 | 65 | 67.7 |
| | 40 | having no problems with school management | 9 | 7.3 | 48 | 38.7 | 67 | 54 | 8 | 8.5 | 30 | 31.9 | 56 | 59.6 | 6 | 6.2 | 23 | 23.7 | 68 | 70.1 |
| 42 | having adequate materials and equipment at school | 41 | 33.1 | 57 | 46 | 26 | 21 | 31 | 33 | 46 | 48.9 | 17 | 18.1 | 24 | 24.7 | 26 | 26.8 | 47 | 48.5 | |

When the results were examined, it was observed that senior student-teachers felt more confident regarding time management, which they previously felt less confident (App1:79%; App2:72.3%) after teaching practice (item 1; 94.9%). Senior student-teachers appeared to be feeling more confident as time passed in terms of the concern *changing [their] students' previously adopted ineffective learning habits* (item 11; App1:58.1%; App2:69.1%; App3:79.2%). This finding may be considered as an indication that student-teachers' experiences had contributed to their self-confidence. In terms of *putting theory into practice*, results revealed that the student-teachers gained more confidence in time. Before teaching practice, 68,1% of them felt that they could put theory into practice. When they finished MCs, 41.1% of the senior student-teachers believed that they could put theory into practice (item 12). Moreover, after they finished teaching practice, 75% of senior student-teachers stated that they could transfer theory into practice. When we examined student-teachers' relationships with students' parents, we found that before the teaching practice they were more confident about *getting the support of students' parents* than after the teaching practice period and after finishing the MCs period. (item 29; App1:62.9%; App2:68.1%; App3:67.7%). Their experiences during the observation period might have influenced their concerns. Additionally, although student-teachers felt more worried about *having problems with school management* after they had finished MCs, they appeared more confident about this concern after the teaching practice, which underpins one of the positive aspects of teaching practice (item 40; App1:54%; App 2:59.6%; App3: 70.1%). Student-teachers were observed to feel more confident in terms of *having adequate materials and equipment at school* after the teaching practice (item 42; App1:21%; App2:18.1%; App3: 48.5%).

In order to determine whether there was a significant difference among three applications of the SLTC, repeated measures ANOVA was conducted. The results are presented in Table 2 (See Table 2):

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Repeated Measures ANOVA

| | N | \bar{X} | Sd |
|-------------|-----|-----------|------|
| App1 | 124 | 4.00 | .467 |
| App2 | 124 | 4.04 | .353 |
| App3 | 124 | 4.29 | .330 |

As seen in Table 2, App 3 (third application) had the greatest mean value (\bar{X} =4.29), and App 2 (second application) followed this one (\bar{X} =4.04). On the other hand, App 1 (first application) had the smallest mean value (\bar{X} =4.00), which shows that student-teachers went on learning, reduced their stress and developed themselves professionally. Yet, the results of the tests between subjects and Bonferroni were examined once again in order to determine whether or not these findings were significant (See Table 3).

Table 3. The Results of Repeated Measures ANOVA for Senior Students

| Source | Sum of squares | Df | Mean square | F | P | Sig. |
|------------------------------|----------------|-----|-------------|-------|------|---------|
| Between Subjects | 18.045 | 123 | .147 | | | |
| Measure (Greenhouse-Geisser) | 5.930 | 2 | 2.965 | 19.39 | .000 | 1-3;2-3 |
| Error | 37.610 | 246 | 0.153 | | | |
| Total | 61.585 | 371 | | | | |

As shown by Table 3, no significant difference was found to exist between App 1 and 2 ($p < .01$). On the contrary, there was a significant difference between App 1 and 3 ($p = .000$). This meant that there was a significant difference in student-teachers' concerns after they had finished MCs and after they had completed their teaching practice. Similarly, there was a significant difference between App 2 and 3 ($p = .000$), implying that there was a significant difference in student-teachers' concerns before the teaching practice and after the teaching practice. Looking at these results, we can infer that teaching practice played a crucial role in reducing the concerns of student teachers.

In addition to the data collection tools mentioned above, student-teachers were also asked to complete TPCS after each practice session, and these forms were subjected to content analysis. The results reached by means of this instrument are presented in Table 4 (See Table 4).

Table 4. The analysis of TPCS

| Themes | Effects of teaching session | | Contributions of teaching session to concerns | | The things Student-Teachers Will Not Worry About | | The things Things Student-Teachers will Do/not Do | | The Changes in Student-Teachers' Way of Thinking | |
|----------------------|---|---|---|---|--|---|---|---|--|---|
| | Codes | f | Codes | f | Codes | f | Codes | f | Codes | f |
| Academic Qualities | having an extra plan | 6 | being prepared for unexpected situations | 4 | teaching abilities | 4 | having different and various activities | 3 | having alternative activities | 4 |
| | raising participation | 2 | learning about learners' interests, level and attitudes | 4 | having extra plans | 3 | considering students' levels | 2 | being prepared for some unexpected situations | 4 |
| | using visual materials | 1 | getting used to teaching day by day | 4 | | | considering students' participation | 2 | trying to carry all characteristics of teaching profession | 2 |
| | using voice effectively | 1 | having extra plans and activities | 2 | | | not doing reading aloud activity | 1 | | |
| Personal Qualities | being very effective | 9 | having self confidence | 2 | being self-confident | 3 | not be passive in the classroom | 2 | having self-confidence | 3 |
| | feeling like a teacher | 3 | teaching and sharing knowledge | 2 | being ready for unexpected situations | 3 | | | using your voice efficiently | 1 |
| | having both positive and negative experiences | 2 | overcoming your excitement through practice | 1 | having different perspectives | 2 | | | keeping the distance between a teacher and a student | 1 |
| | | | | | | | | | trying to think from different perspectives | 1 |
| Classroom Management | time management | 4 | | | classroom management | 4 | managing the class properly | 4 | not worrying any more | 1 |
| | classroom management | 3 | | | time management | 4 | | | | |
| | managing students' activities | 3 | | | making students active | 3 | | | | |
| Material Development | | | developing various materials | 1 | preparing appropriate activities and materials | 3 | preparing materials appropriate to their levels | 2 | | |
| | | | | | | | not choosing boring materials | 1 | | |

At the end of the term, student-teachers were asked to reflect on their teaching practice in order to support the data gathered by means of the TPCS. Their narrative reflections were then gathered and their contents were analysed. Inductive content analysis was used in order to code and categorize the data. In the first phase, the data were read by the researcher. In the second phase, the data were once again read word by word to derive codes by highlighting the exact word in the text to capture key ideas and thoughts (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Morgan, 1993). In the third phase, similar codes were sorted into categories based on the way they were related to one another. After the coding ended, all transcriptions were shared with an expert in the field. Based on his suggestions, some codes were revised and incorporated. In narrative reflections, student-teachers generally focused on how teaching practice reduced their concerns. The contribution of teaching practice to their concerns and the effects of that experience on their concerns were listed under four categories. These are represented in Table 5 (See Table 5).

Table 5. The analysis of reflection forms

| Academic Qualities | | <i>f</i> |
|--------------------------------|--|-----------|
| Student-teachers learnt | | |
| 1. | to use body-language | 3 |
| 2. | to make all students participate to the lesson | 3 |
| 3. | to develop an awareness in terms of teaching profession | 3 |
| 4. | to be prepared for unexpected situations | 3 |
| 5. | the importance of calling students with their names | 2 |
| 6. | some deficiencies in terms of teaching | 2 |
| 7. | to follow every step in the lesson | 1 |
| 8. | to use eye-contact | 1 |
| 9. | to use visual materials | 1 |
| 10. | to follow every step in the lesson | 1 |
| 11. | to use eye-contact | 1 |
| 12. | to use time efficiently | 1 |
| 13. | to raise students' participation | 1 |
| Total | | 23 |
| Personal Qualities | | |
| 1. | to use their voice efficiently | 2 |
| 2. | to overcome their excitement | 2 |
| Total | | 4 |
| Classroom Management | | |
| 1. | the importance classroom management | 3 |
| 2. | to manage the class | 1 |
| Total | | 4 |
| Material Development | | |
| 1. | to choose materials appropriate to students' levels | 2 |
| 2. | to prepare more interesting activities and materials for warm-up | 1 |
| Total | | 3 |
| Positive Contributions | | |
| 1. | to be a very useful experience | 5 |
| 2. | to learn a lot in terms of teaching | 5 |
| 3. | to learn a lot when compared to the beginning of the term | 4 |
| Total | | 14 |

As displayed in Table 5, we found that five categories emerged from student-teachers' data regarding their concerns about teaching. To go in detail, of 22 themes, 13 fell into *academic qualities*, which received the most frequent citation. Student-teachers generally focused that teaching practice was an opportunity for them to improve their professional practice in real classroom atmospheres and this experience helped them to reduce their anxiety while teaching in a real classroom. For instance, one of the student-teachers stated:

“When I started teaching practice, I was very nervous. I was not sure about what to do in a real classroom. However, this experience (teaching practice) taught me a lot. It helped me to lessen my anxiety, and I learnt how to deliver a lesson and overcome the problems I might encounter during teaching” (Teacher 5).

For *academic qualities*, student-teachers reported that *they used body language (3)*, *tried to make all students participate in the lesson (3)*, *developed awareness in terms of teaching profession (3)* and *tried to be prepared for unexpected situations (3)*. The following extract may help to illustrate the situation:

In these lessons, I understand that I should always have different and extra activities for unexpected situations. Furthermore, I learnt I should not come to my lessons without a lesson plan. I think that these materials will let me cope with the unexpected situations in the class and help me to have an effective lesson (Teacher 5).

Teacher 5 found teaching practices to be beneficial. They mentioned what to do in the case of unexpected situations, generally focusing on the benefits of teaching experience.

The second most emphasized category was *positive contributions*. The participants agreed that the practicum *was a useful experience (5)* and *they learnt a lot (5)* and reported that they realized that *they are equipped with more knowledge when compared to the beginning of the term (4)*. It is seen that teaching practice helped student-teachers to raise awareness about teaching and thus to lessen their concerns about teaching in a real classroom atmosphere. A teacher's words may make an example:

Actually, I found the lesson effective. Now I am much more experienced to decide what to do or not. I raised awareness about how to put theory into practice (Teacher 3).

This excerpt clearly indicates that Teacher 3 found the teaching practice experience to be beneficial, and s/he seemed to have felt more confident. The other categories were *personal qualities*, *classroom management* and *material development*. Regarding *personal qualities*, participants stated that they had tried to *use their voice efficiently (2)* and *overcame their excitement (2)*. In terms of *classroom management*, student-teachers mentioned that they realized its importance (3) and emphasized that they had attempted to *manage the class (1)*. The following student-teacher excerpt may elaborate this situation:

I was worried about the class management while we were playing a game, because it was a bit noisy and tiring. I realized that before we started the game, I should have warned the students (Teacher 2).

The student-teacher in the above excerpt expressed that she was worried about classroom management while playing games; moreover, she realized that she should have managed the class during the games. *Material development* was another category emphasized by participants. They focused on the fact that they should *choose materials appropriate to their students' levels (2)* and *prepare more interesting materials and activities for the warm up of the lesson (1)*.

When the student-teacher reflections as a whole are considered, it is clear that academic qualities were emphasized more than other emergent themes. This indicates that teaching practice played an important role in student-teachers' beliefs. They raised awareness in terms of teaching and the

profession of teaching. They believe that teaching practice was a crucial experience for them since it helped them to overcome some of their concerns such as feeling more confident academically and personally.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

The first research question of this study tried to find out whether prospective English Language teachers from a Turkish university held any concerns about teaching and the kind of concerns they had, if any. Results of the study indicate that regarding the concern the student teachers held, *academic* and *personal qualities* were the most emphasized themes of student-teachers. When these themes are considered, it can be said that student-teachers generally emphasize the benefits of teaching practice in terms of student learning and classroom teaching (Şişman & Acat, 2003; Sarıcoban, 2009). These findings are consistent with a study carried out by Goh and Matthews (2011), in which they reported concerns about student learning and classroom teaching. Similarly, in a study carried out by Çelik (2008) with pre-service teachers during practicum, personal concerns generated the highest level of stress. Based on these findings, we can assume that when student-teachers are introduced to the real classroom atmosphere for the first time, it might be natural for them to bring these two themes in the foreground. Academic and personal qualities, as a consequence, might have been the focus in their micro-teaching sessions or in the meetings they had with their peers, mentors or supervisors. In terms of personal qualities, we observe that student-teachers developed confidence in teaching. Goodings (1982) also claims that when teachers are trained by exposing to the realities of their future career, it might enable them to eliminate some weaknesses; thus, they might possess a high level of confidence in their abilities. On the other hand, material development seemed to be the least significant concern, perhaps because they did not prepare new materials themselves during their teaching practice or used the ones they had prepared before for their micro teaching sessions at the department.

When the content of the above-mentioned themes is considered, it becomes clear that student-teachers were generally concerned with improving their teaching abilities in terms of academic and personal qualities and classroom management skills, which might be supported by other studies in the literature (Youn, 2000; Goh & Matthews, 2011). Additionally, they were able to observe other teachers/mentors and to compare and contrast them, which may have enabled them to synthesize all they had learned and observed. The idea that teaching practicum positively affects student-teachers' perceptions is echoed by Hergüner, et al. (2002). Similarly, we can say that teacher knowledge is shaped through experiences in a social context. That is, their interactions with teachers, peers, and students all influence their knowledge and their learning. These conceptualizations can be explained by sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), which supports that learning has its basis in interacting with other people. Related to this, Richards and Farrel (2002) mention that “teacher learning is understood as normative and lifelong, built of and through experiences in social contexts: as learners in classrooms and schools, as participants in professional teacher education programs, and as members of communities of practice in the schools where they teach” (p.2).

The second research question of this study concerned whether a significant difference in the senior student-teachers' concerns about teaching could be observed as they went through the following phases of their education in the ELT department: that is, after they have completed taking methodology courses, before they start practicum, and finally after they have completed the practice period. Results indicate that a significant difference did exist between the student teachers' concerns held before and after the practicum. Thus, we may assume that the practicum leads to a change in the concerns of student-teachers. To elaborate, when they attempt to transform their subject-matter knowledge into practice, the student teachers may experience various difficulties. With the help of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), student-teachers can become aware of certain aspects of the

target language related to how it should be presented to learners (Day, 1993). During this teaching phase, factors such as knowledge of teaching context, knowledge of learners, pedagogic knowledge and subject-matter knowledge might influence teachers' transformation of knowledge. If student-teachers have limited knowledge related to one of these categories, they may experience difficulty in transforming their subject-matter knowledge or relating it to students' learning. This type of knowledge can only exist when pre-service teachers begin teaching in a real classroom atmosphere, where they are able to develop their PCK (Liu, 2013). Teaching is a process which not only involves transforming knowledge, but also involves reconstructing knowledge depending on context and learner characteristics. We can relate this aspect of teaching to socio-cultural theory, which emphasizes that "...learning to teach, from a socio-cultural perspective, is based on the assumption that knowing, thinking, and understanding come from participating in the social practices of learning and teaching in specific classroom and school situations" (Johnson, 2009, p.13).

In addition to the above-mentioned difference, in our study, there also existed a significant difference between the concerns of student-teachers before and after practicum. Regarding this finding, we may conclude that practicum played an important role in shaping the concerns of participants. Teaching practice is claimed to be one of the most important aspects of teacher education (Farrell, 2008). Via teaching practice, student-teachers experience teaching in a real atmosphere which enables them to discover more about the teaching context, curriculum, learners, and materials as well as how to transform content knowledge in consideration of these factors. Through teaching practice, student-teachers gain the opportunity to observe different aspects of the teaching and learning process. They become aware of the importance of the knowledge gained during their teacher education program, and they have the opportunity to practice this knowledge. Thus, the practicum experience as is one of the findings reached in this study as well, makes the teacher candidates feel more confident and reduces their concerns.

This study investigated the concerns of EFL pre-service teachers after they completed taking MCs, and before they started teaching practice and after they have completed the practice period. The results of both qualitative and quantitative analyses revealed that the experiences of student-teachers lead to changes in the nature of their teaching concerns. Moreover, methodology courses and teaching practice play an important role in reshaping these concerns.

The present study shows that student-teachers generally have concerns related to academic and personal qualities as well as classroom management skills. In line with those of Fuller (1969), the findings of this study verify that teachers pass through developmental stages during their teaching career, and the professional concerns which they may have may increase or decrease based on factors such as the knowledge they obtain, the observations they make of others, and the experiences they have in the classroom.

The results of this study demonstrate that teacher knowledge base may lower student-teacher concerns regarding teaching. The more knowledge and experience possessed by a student-teacher, the more confidence he/she may develop. Moreover, more confident teachers may contribute to teaching and learning contexts (Martin, 2006). This finding implies that in order to trigger student-teachers' developmental processes, student-teachers should be given more opportunities to practice teaching during their teacher education programs. Cohen and Manion (1983) suggest that the theory and training in college prior to practice might not provide with all the answers for the problems which a future teacher might encounter in the classroom or at school. Since it is so important, teaching practice should be conducted in such a way that, it should contribute to student-teachers ongoing learning and their professional development. The findings of this study might be used by teacher educators in

planning and organizing teaching practice as well as supervising and assessing student-teachers. By means of this study, we also see that some practical problems student-teachers may experience during teaching practice should be minimized in order to reduce their anxiety and more easily develop their teaching competencies. The present study was conducted at an ELT department of one university with EFL pre-service teachers. Therefore, we do not intend to generalize the situation to other universities.

Based on the findings of the present study, we suggest that future research should focus on investigating student-teachers' concerns within a larger population comprised of members from different universities and different departments.

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Öğretmenlik uygulaması derslerinin hizmet öncesi İngilizce öğretmenlerinin kaygılarına etkileri

Öz

Bu çalışma, yöntem dersleriyle elde edilen kuramsal bilginin ve öğretmenlik uygulama süreci boyunca gerçek bir öğrenme deneyimi yaşamamanın, İngilizce öğretmen adaylarının öğretmenlikle ilgili muhtemel kaygılarında herhangi bir değişikliğe neden olup olmadığını araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Çalışma, eğer varsa, bu değişiklikleri tanımlamaya çalışmaktadır. Araştırmanın amaçlarına ulaşmak için öğretmen adaylarının, öğretmenlik konusundaki kaygılarından yola çıkılarak geliştirilen bir ölçekle veriler toplanmıştır ve on haftalık bir süre boyunca öğretmenlik uygulaması ile ilgili kaygı notları tutulmuştur. Çalışmaya daha fazla derinlik kazandırmak için, veriler öğretmen adaylarının öyküsel anlatımları ile zenginleştirilmiştir. Sonuçlar, öğretmenlik mesleğinin başında ve sonunda öğretmen adaylarının kaygıları arasında anlamlı bir fark olduğunu göstermektedir. Öğretmenlik uygulama derslerinin, gerçek bir ortamda öğretmen adaylarına farkındalık kazandırmada bir temel oluşturduğu anlaşılmaktadır. Birebir yaşayarak elde edilen bu deneyimin yanında, bulgular, aynı zamanda öğretmen adaylarının bilgi tabanının da kaygılarının doğasındaki değişimi tetiklemede etkili bir rol oynadığını göstermektedir.

Anahtar sözcükler: öğretmen endişeleri; öğretim uygulamaları; öğretmen yetiştirme

AUTHOR BIODATA

Dr. Fadime Yalcin Arslan holds a PhD degree from Cukurova University in Turkey. She currently teaches in the English Language Teaching Department of Faculty of Education, Gaziantep University. Her research interests include language learning, teacher education, language teaching and professional development. ORCID ID: 0000-0003-0644-5636. E-mail: fayalcin@gantep.edu.tr

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Gulden Ilin has been working as a lecturer in ELT department of Cukurova University, Turkey. Her interests are research into teacher cognition, action research and professional development of pre and in-service language teachers. ORCID ID: 0000-0003-1798-6956. E-mail: guldenilin@cu.edu.tr