

The ELT Practicum in Turkey: A Meta-synthesis of 2008-2017 Qualitative Research*

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Abstract

Practicum is a potential opportunity which acquaints pre-service English language teachers with the real world of teaching in a way that textbooks cannot capture. That is why it is of importance to provide better understanding into practicum, and attempt to improve its quality. This study reports the results of a meta-synthesis of qualitative studies on the ELT practicum published in academic journals for the period 2008-2017. A comprehensive search of five electronic databases (university library, Academic Search Complete, Academic Social Sciences Index (ASOS), Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) and ULAKBIM Turkish National Databases) was done to identify qualitative studies investigating the practicum experiences of pre-service English language teachers in Turkey and 13 studies were included. Thematic analysis was used to identify, analyse and report overarching themes within data. Implications for English language teacher education in Turkey are addressed.

Keywords

Pre-service
English
language
teacher,
practicum, meta-
synthesis

Introduction

The school practicum is a vital part of pre-service teacher education in which pre-service teachers have their initial experience in formal education settings. Thus, the content and effect of school practicum on teacher education remain to be questioned especially by teacher trainers and researchers. School practicum is the period during which pre-service teachers are required to implement certain classroom tasks and teach certain subjects under the supervision of a mentor teacher; thus, they encounter

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the reality of classroom and gather information about their personal and professional capabilities regarding teaching (Atay, 2007). Since the school practicum provides pre-service teacher with the opportunity to implement their teaching skills and content knowledge in a real classroom environment, it is essential for teacher education (Qazi, Rawat, & Thomas, 2012).

School practicum in Turkish teacher education programmes in faculties of education is an obligatory course that is composed of two parts distributed in two semesters. In the first semester, pre-service teachers are obliged to attend classes in certain schools they are appointed to and observe and report the lessons to their supervisors. In the second semester, they are required to plan, prepare, and implement lessons under the supervision of the university supervisor and with the guidance of mentor teachers whom pre-service teachers have observed in the first semester. Apart from being a vital part of teacher education programmes, practicum may also become a drastically problematic issue for pre-service teachers. Short though it is, this one-year process has the impact of changing pre-service teachers' cognition about the teaching profession.

Based on this context, the current study intends to identify and highlight the problems reported in the current qualitative research. By doing so, the study aims at providing a clear picture of underlying problems with regard to the ELT practicum in Turkey. Therefore, sustainable and prospective teacher research grounded on the real practicalities and underlined by different academic perspectives can be initiated.

Background

The literature provides several findings on the practicum experiences of pre-service teachers of English as a foreign language (hereafter, ELT practicum). For instance, Başyurt-Tüzel and Akcan (2009) reported that pre-service teachers suffer from difficulties in explaining certain grammatical structures or unknown words to students and in modifying language according to students' level of the target language. Besides, they also asserted that authenticity of the classroom language is also an aspect with which the pre-service teachers have problems. Similarly, Koç (2016) also reported some skill-based problems faced by pre-service teachers during the ELT practicum such as assessment systems, computer-assisted communications as well as other problems like mentor-pre-service teacher relationship and psychological issues.

The prior studies also suggest several ways to overcome these difficulties. For example, Akcan (2010) suggested that the use of video recording and reflective evaluation of these recordings helped the pre-service teachers to have a critical and reflective self-evaluation. In another study, Demirbulak (2012) inquired the ways to foster propensities for reflective practice at the undergraduate methodology and stressed the naïve optimism of methodology is not in align with the practicalities of an ELT classroom. It was argued that the focus of ELT practicum needs shifted from teachers' qualifications to how teachers can enrich the teaching-learning environment. The literature provides a number of other studies that discuss the aspects of ELT practicum in Turkey; however, the prior research lacks the provision of a holistic view over the ELT practicum research conducted in the Turkish setting. Therefore, the current study intends to report the results of a meta-synthesis of qualitative studies on the ELT practicum published in academic journals for the period 2008-2017 in order to provide a better understanding into the teaching practicum and attempt to improve its quality.

Method

The study adopted a meta-synthesis method of inquiry. Meta-synthesis is the systematic review and additional level of interpretation of primary qualitative research studies (Nye et al., 2016). Similarly, “meta-synthesis is an umbrella term that refers to the synthesis of findings across qualitative studies to create a new interpretation” (Finfgeld, 2003: pp. 895). Moreover, as Nye, Melendez-Torres, and Bonell (2016) highlighted “meta-syntheses are not meant to sum all available data; rather, they present new perspectives on the phenomena by the interpretation of the prior qualitative research and to reach a “third-level” finding(s).

In order to constitute the set of studies to be reviewed in the current meta-synthesis, qualitative studies that focused directly on the ELT practicum in Turkey were selected through searching multiple databases including: (1) Dokuz Eylul University library, (2) Academic Search Complete, (3) Academic Social Sciences Index (ASOS), (4) Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), and (5) ULAKBIM Turkish National Databases. The following key terms were used in the search query: “*qualitative, pre-service English language teachers, practicum, school experience,*

school-based teaching, pre-occupational teacher training, field experience". The studies meeting the following criteria were eligible for inclusion:

1. focus on school practicum of pre-service English language teachers in Turkey,
2. research articles conducted using only qualitative methods and data collection tools,
3. publication in a refereed journal (national and international),
4. publication date between Jan 2008 and Dec 2017.

These limitations reduced the number of studies to 21. The full texts of the remaining 21 articles were reviewed and appraised for quality by the authors using a checklist developed for qualitative research (Hawker, Payne, Kerr, Hardey, & Powell, 2002). The checklist included various questions such as:

- Does the author provide a clear description of the study?
- Are there a good background and a clear statement of the aims of the research?
- Is the method appropriate and clearly explained?

After applying the checklist, the authors discussed and negotiated on 13 studies to be included in the meta-synthesis. The studies analyzed are presented in Table 1, which includes information with regard to the article's publication, research design and data collection tools, and the number of participants included.

Table 1
List and information of the eligible studies for the meta-synthesis

No	Title of study	Author & year of publication	Publication source	Publication source	Number of Participants
1	Watching Teacher Candidates Watch Themselves: Reflections on a Practicum Program in Turkey	Akcan (2010)	Profile Issues in Teachers Professional Development	Not reported/videotaped samples of the teacher candidates' teaching performance, lesson plans,	27 pre-service teachers (PST)
2	An investigation of the nature of feedback given to pre-service English teachers during their practice teaching experience	Akcan & Tatar (2010)	Teacher Development: An International Journal of Teachers' Professional Development	Case study /student artifacts, self-evaluation reports, journals and video recordings	52 PST 30 mentors 4 supervisors
3	Raising the language awareness of pre-service English teachers in an EFL context	Başyurt-Tüzel & Akcan (2009)	European Journal of Teacher Education	Case study/classroom observations, feedback sessions, semi-structured interviews, retrospective protocols and discussion meetings	5 PST
4	Code-switching in English language teaching (ELT) teaching practice in Turkey: Student teacher practices, beliefs and attitudes	Bilgin (2016)	Educational Research and Reviews	Not reported/stimulated recall interviews	5 PST
5	Stress in English Language Teaching Practicum: the Views of All Stakeholders	Coşkun (2013)	Hacettepe University Journal of Education	Not reported / open-ended surveys or interviews	11 administrators 31 mentors 68 PST
6	Fostering propensities for reflective practice in undergraduate methodology and practicum courses	Demirbulak (2012)	Eurasian Journal of Educational Research	Not reported / reflective essays, semi-structured interviews	27 PST

Table 1 (continued)
List and information of the eligible studies for the meta-synthesis

<u>No</u>	<u>Title of study</u>	<u>Author & year of publication</u>	<u>Publication source</u>	<u>Publication source</u>	<u>Number of Participants</u>
7	To Be Anxious or Not: Student Teachers in the Practicum	Ekşi & Yakışık (2016)	Universal Journal of Educational Research	Not reported / open-ended questions and follow-up focus group discussions.	52 PST
8	Reflective feedback sessions using video recordings	Eröz-Tuğa (2013)	ELT Journal	Case Study / recorded feedback sessions, self-evaluation reports	11 PST
9	A critical look at a blended English language teacher education program with an emphasis on the practicum	Koç (2016)	International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning	Not reported / semi-open interview questions	11PST
10	Self-reported problems of pre-service EFL teachers throughout teaching practicum	Merç (2010)	Anadolu University Journal of Social Sciences	Not reported / reflection journals	99 PST
11	A sociocultural perspective on the development of Turkish pre-service teachers' competencies and qualifications	Tavil & Güngör (2016)	Pedagogy, Culture & Society	Mixed-method study / video-recordings of mentors' and PSTs' in experimental and control groups and the journals of	44 PST 2 supervisors 7 mentors
12	Using the Case Story Method in a Teacher Education Practicum: Affordances and Constraints	Tülüce (2016)	Educational Sciences: Theory & Practice	Case study/Post-course reflection papers and a focus group interview	21 PST
13	Scrutinizing Practicum for a More Powerful Teacher Education: A Longitudinal Study with Pre-service Teachers	Tülüce & Çeçen (2016)	Educational Sciences: Theory & Practice	Case study / self-evaluation reports of the video-recorded microteaching performance, focus group interviews	13 PST

An inductive thematic analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke (2006) was utilized to identify, analyze and report themes within the data. The data gathered from the selected qualitative studies were analyzed by the three researchers independently without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame. After some initial codes were generated, these codes were collated into potential themes. The themes were reviewed and discussed by the researchers until consensus was reached.

Findings and discussion

The thematic analysis revealed four several overarching themes that appeared in the prior research:(1) pedagogical factors of ELT practicum, (2) reflective practices in ELT practicum, (3) psychological factors of ELT practicum, (4) and lack of awareness regarding classroom reality in Turkey.

First, the meta-synthesis of the existing qualitative research demonstrated that certain pedagogical factors were underlined as the problematic points for pre-service teachers in the course of the ELT practicum. For instance, pedagogical classroom competences such as classroom management (Başyurt-Tüzel & Akcan, 2009; Coşkun, 2013; Ekşi & Yakışık, 2016; Eröz-Tuğa, 2013; Merç, 2010; Tülüce & Çeçen, 2015), time management (Ekşi & Yakışık, 2016; Eröz-Tuğa, 2013; Merç, 2010; Tülüce & Çeçen, 2015), fail of continual assessment of student progress (Eröz-Tuğa, 2013) and lack of students' motivation (Ekşi & Yakışık, 2016; Merç, 2010) were presented as such factors. What is more, linguistic and paralinguistic abilities of the pre-service teachers are particularly important in ELT practicum. Accordingly, incompetence in the target language (Başyurt-Tüzel & Akcan, 2009; Eröz-Tuğa, 2013; Merç, 2010; Tüzel & Akcan, 2009) is a problematic pedagogical factor that handicaps pre-service ELT teachers. Similarly, the improper use of body language and voice (Eröz-Tuğa, 2013; Merç, 2010; Tülüce & Çeçen, 2015) constitute the paralinguistic problems that the prospective teachers face.

Second, the prior research highlights the lack of reflective practices in the ELT practicum and tends to focus on the effect of reflective practice in several ways. First, the reflective feedback sessions and reflective reports were presented as useful initiators of reflective practice (Akcan, 2009; Akcan & Tatar, 2010; Tülüce & Çeçen, 2015). Likewise, an alternative methods such as the case story method (Tülüce,

2015), constructive feedback (Akcan & Tatar, 2010), teaching the use of code-switching to PSTs as a topic (Bilgin, 2016), and language awareness trainings (Tüzel & Akcan, 2009) were suggested as an effective way to foster reflective practice.

Third, psychological factors were inquired in the studies that were synthesized. The effect of being observed by other ELT practicum stakeholders on PSTs. (Coşkun, 2013; Ekşi & Yakışık, 2016), being videotaped while teaching (Tülüce & Çeçen, 2015), PSTs being assessed with a grade point (Coşkun, 2013), lack of sustainable and assertive support from mentors, supervisors and/or administrators, (Bilgin, 2016; Coşkun, 2013; Eröz-Tuğa, 2013; Merç, 2010), classroom visits by supervisors and administrators without any notification (Ekşi & Yakışık, 2016) are stressing psychological factors that PSTs encounter during the ELT practicum. Furthermore, there is a heavy burden of the final year of PST's undergraduate studies when most of them are supposed to get ready for central examinations. It is very important for PSTs to have a high score from these examinations in the Turkish context to start working or continue their graduate studies. These exams are Civil Servant Selection Exam (KPSS), which is obligatory for being a teacher in the state schools in the following year, Foreign Language Examination (YDS) and Admission Exam for Graduate Study (ALES), which are required for applying to graduate schools.

Finally, lack of awareness towards the classroom realities across the country is the other problematic aspect of ELT practicum that was pinpointed by the synthesized research. More specifically, the experience of teaching in rural areas and getting familiar with the students' social, cultural, economic realities, and regional differences (Tavil & Güngör, 2016), are vital to formulate a successful ELT practicum in the Turkish context.

The results of the current meta-synthesis provide several points to elaborate. To illustrate, the fact that PSTs are not aware of classroom realities and practicalities such as ways of increasing motivation, moving actively in class, using appropriate classroom language and use of effective paralinguistic cues leads to deficits in classroom management (Tülüce & Çeçen, 2015). Second, it can be viewed that PSTs are rather egocentric: They mainly focus on their own performances and neglect student responses (Tülüce & Çeçen, 2015), which also leads to classroom management problems. Next, the synthesis reveals that reflective practices are not regarded as a component of the whole practicum experience. Practicum is not seen as

the reflective process itself; there is no room for reflection neither at the faculty nor in the teaching school (Akcan, 2009; Demirbulak, 2012; Eröz-Tuğa, 2013). The feedback provided by mentors does not lead to reflection, either. Last, it is evident that PSTs are not aware of the realities of different regions, cultures, and socioeconomic groups across the country (Tavil & Güngör, 2016). This issue is not handled during the practicum year, which leads to the “praxis shock” experienced by PSTs in their initial years of teaching (Tülüce, 2015).

Reflections and looking into the future

Several practical implications can be drawn from the above-mentioned results. Initially, a central reform of ELT practicum seems to be most crucial and inevitable if the initial teacher education is supposed to meet the progressive standards. Thus, a more reflection-oriented practicum curriculum should be introduced, which is supposed to get PSTs ready for the regional and contextual realities that they are due to face.

Moreover, pedagogical and psychological factors that diminish the quality of the practicum should be kept in mind in designing the new model of ELT practicum. As pre-service teachers navigate the challenging practicum in the face of severe limitations in school-university collaboration and mentor support, they can get the psychosocial support they need from their peers, for instance. In this sense, team teaching and/or peer mentoring instead of solo practice might be a way of overcoming some of the challenges (Nguyen, 2013). When pre-service teachers are assigned to work with other peers during the practicum, they can share their weaknesses and strengths with peers more comfortably and build up more confidence in teaching.

Last but not the least, the results provide a clear picture for all the stakeholders of ELT practicum in Turkey. The supervisors, mentors, pre-service teachers and administrators can base their research on the findings of the current meta-synthesis. It was stated that the quality and feasibility of teacher research is closely linked to certain criteria (Borg & Sanchez, 2015). Considering the current findings, prospective teacher-researchers can have opportunities to share their work with the academics; and they can integrate the research resources provided by the universities into the practicum research so that they can create potential benefits. Thus, the authors of the

current study recommend taking the above-mentioned findings as research points for further teacher research.

It is important to note that the current meta-synthesis is limited to the 13 studies that were eligible according to the selection criteria. The further analyses can widen the scope and range of the eligibility criteria to have a wider synthesis. The future studies are also required to design and elaborate on the progressive curriculum of the new ELT practicum model, which is after all clearly very crucial for ELT teacher education in Turkey.

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