



Turkish Pre-School Practice Teachers' and Pre-School Teacher Candidates' Perceptions of School Practices

Research Article

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to explore preschool teacher candidates' and practices teachers' views of school practices. As the research approach, the survey method was used. Using convenience sampling, it was chosen one hundred eight teachers and two hundred fifty-six preschool teacher candidates in education faculty in a state university in Turkey. Data were collected by the two written opinion forms developed by the researchers and analysed descriptively. The results showed that the teacher candidates saw school practices as necessary to put the training they received at teacher training into practice, but they thought weekly practice hours to be insufficient. And some other findings suggested that the teacher candidates complained about the lack of teaching material and the school physical conditions. They claimed that transportation to schools is another significant challenge. They acknowledged that practice teachers exhibited positive attitudes towards them, while just a minority complained of undesirable teacher behaviours. And, they believed that practices had a considerable contribution to their professional development and class size had an unfavourable effect on the practices in crowded classes. It was another finding of the study that being watched by candidates had a harmful influence on the practice teachers' motivation. Furthermore, practice teachers pointed out that the crowded, unsuitable, and small size classes affected negatively the practices and emphasized the importance of spreading the practices throughout all training programs.

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Keywords:

Early Child Education, School Practices, Pre-School Teacher Training

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Introduction

Teachers are increasingly expected to prepare learners for changing society (Marais and Meier, 2004). No matter how much facilities that schools have, how developed educational programs, the most important variable to enhance the quality of education are teachers, in particular, their professional knowledge and experience. Teachers playing a strategic role in child education can only be trained by a qualified and efficient teacher training program and they might fulfil this mission only if equipped with the knowledge and skills required. In Turkey, teacher training duty has been given to the universities. The TCs (teacher candidates) enrolled in the education faculties affiliated in universities are expected to attend schools practice and to put their theoretical knowledge into practice to be professionally competent (Arkun Kocadere and Askar, 2013; Giebelhaus and Bowman, 2002; Kiraz, 2002; Ozkan, Albayrak and Berber, 2005).

Turkish Teacher Training System and School practices

Teacher training in Turkey is carried out by the teacher high schools affiliated to Turkish Ministry of National Education, which was terminated in the year 2014, and teacher training faculties of universities. According to their success in Turkish central placement exams, students who graduated from high school could enroll to follow teacher training programs of universities. Besides, other high school graduates are accepted straight-forwardly to the education faculty of universities with the same central examination. Teacher training in universities is performed according to the curriculums predetermined by Turkish Higher Education Council. In the curriculums, while some in-class teaching practices are carried out in teacher training courses together with other TCs and instructor, school practice courses are planned in a way to be performed in state pre-schools and primary schools in one or two semesters (at least 14 weeks per semester), usually in the last year of the relevant training program. They are carried out in two ways as school experience (one- hour theoretical per week in the faculty, four- hours per week in the practice schools) and teaching practice (two- hours theoretical per week in the faculty, six- hours per week in the practice schools). School experience, aiming to familiarize TCs with the school system, is one focusing on a structured observation of the school community as a social system. On the other hand, the teaching practice aims to provide TCs with teaching opportunities in an authentic class setting in the mentorship of the PT (practice teacher). In this process, instructors are responsible for visiting the practice school for one or two weekdays and watching the students' development. While the practices are conducted in predetermined schools on specified days of the week in collaboration between the faculty and the schools, the student assessment is carried out together by practice and teacher instructor.

Within the scope of cooperation between universities and Turkish Ministry of National Education, the school practices have been regulated by an instruction prepared about TCs' school practices in schools affiliated with the ministry (Periodic Notification Bulletin, 1998). Under the aim title, it stated the instruction aimed to regulate the principles and procedures associated with the school practices to enable the TCs, in an authentic educational environment, to prepare well themselves for the teaching profession and gain the ability to use the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and habits of the general culture, special field education and teaching profession which they have acquired in faculty courses. In the second section, it was mentioned the main principles in school practices: inter-institutional cooperation and coordination, on-site (in school) practice, active participation, spreading the application process over a wide time range, joint assessment, scope and diversity, continuous improvement of the processes and staff, on-site and supervised implementation of the practice. In the fourth section about weekly practice hours, it was emphasized that, in the divergent teaching profession fields, by TCs at undergraduate and graduate levels, teaching practice is done throughout the last semester for one full or two half-days every week in such a way that it should be at least one semester before TCs' graduation. They are expected to practice at least 24 hours of this time by teaching actively in class (Periodic Notification Bulletin, 1998).

In Turkey, with the above-mentioned Faculty of Education-Implementation School Cooperation program, weekly practice hours was increased and it was anticipated their acquiring the teaching experience in the authentic learning environment and integrating the observation and experience with the knowledge and skills gained in the university courses (Higher Education Council, 2007). Since the appointment of the education faculties to the teacher training mission, through school experience and teaching practice courses, called also jointly as the school practice, included in almost all teaching profession fields, the theoretical part of which is in the faculty and the practice one is in the schools, it was expected TCs to get to know in detail the teaching profession and to improve their teaching experiences (Sisman and Acat, 2003). It was emphasized in the former studies that the practice courses have an important place in terms of TCs' professional development (Haciomeroglu and Sahin, 2011; Paker, 2008).

Teaching practice forms an integral part of teacher training (Marais and Meier, 2004). The TCs should practice teaching skills as much as possible and gain experience in the schools so that they can put the theoretical knowledge they learned in the faculty into practice. For this reason, it is necessary to seriously plan, carry out, and evaluate the activities within the scope of school practices (Gultekin, 2008). Ingvarson, Reid, Buckley, Kleinhenz, Masters and Rowley (2014) stated that well-designed teacher education programs had great importance in qualified teacher training. They reported some main characteristics emphasizing the practice dimension of such a program:

- *“A strong core curriculum, taught in the context of practice, grounded in knowledge of child and adolescent development, learning in social and cultural contexts, curriculum, assessment, and subject-matter pedagogy;*
- *Extensive, connected clinical experiences that are carefully developed to support the ideas and practices presented in simultaneous, closely interwoven course work;*
- *Well-defined standards of professional knowledge and practice are used to guide and evaluate coursework and clinical work;*
- *An inquiry approach that connects theory and practice, including teacher research applying learning to real problems of practice;*
- *Strong school-university partnerships that develop common knowledge and shared beliefs among school and university-based faculty, allowing TCs to learn to teach in professional communities,*
- *Assessment based on professional standards that evaluate teaching through demonstration of critical skills and abilities using performance assessments and portfolios” (Darling-Hammond, 2006a, p. 276, cited in Ingvarson et al., 2014)*

Beraza (1996) has emphasized that programs of teaching practice are richer and more effective when contents and goals have previously been identified, and responsibilities of practice school and faculty have been clearly defined. The author suggested that good school practice aims to:

- *Let students face real professional settings.*
- *Set up frames of reference to better understand concepts met in academic subject matter studies.*
- *Let students become conscious of their needs, strong points and weaknesses, to recognize aptitudes and abilities (especially those concerning interpersonal relationship)*
- *Have them reflect on the contents of practice periods, keeping logs and writing reports*
- *Further reflecting on their reports, through the “reconstruction of scholastic experience”, to perceive the difference between pupils' and teachers' standpoints”*

Present situation of pre-school education in Turkey and the importance of the study

It has officially been made pre-school education obligatory in Turkey since the year 2017. In the 2017-2018 educational years, the total number of students enrolled in the preschools is almost one and a half million and the number of on-duty pre-school teachers is nearly eighty-five thousand. The ratio of schooling is nearly 45% for 3-5 year-olds (National Education Statistics, Formal Education 2018). The number of students per teacher in preschool education is nearly 17 (Kazu and Yilmaz, 2018). Pre-school education involves the education of children in age groups ranging from three to five. In National Education Statistics (2018) it was reported the following statements about the objectives and establishments of preschool education institutions:

“Pre-school education institutions may be established as independent kindergartens or, where considered necessary, as nursery classes within a primary education school or as practice classes affiliated to other related educational institutions. The objective of pre-school education is expressed in the way to ensure that children develop physically, mentally and emotionally and acquire good habits that they are prepared for primary education, that a common environment of upbringing is provided for children who come from a disadvantaged background” (National Education Statistics, Formal Education, 2018).

The school practices are of great importance for the TCs to see their prospective occupational environment and to recognize their profession in practice. In examined the studies conducted with Turkish TCs and PTs on school practices (Kırksekiz, Uysal, Isbulan, Akgun, Kiyici and Horzum, 2015; Altintas and Gorgen, 2014; 2015; Arkun Kocadere and Askar, 2013; Aydin, Selcuk and Yesilyurt, 2007; Becit, Kurt and Kabakci, 2009; Cepni and Aydin, 2015; Degirmencay and Kasap, 2013; Dursun and Kuzu, 2008; Ermis, Uygun and Inel, 2010; Eraslan, 2009; Gorgen, Cokcaliskan and Korkut, 2012; Karaca and Aral, 2011; Severcan, 2007; Koc and Yildiz, 2012; Mete, 2013; Ozkan et al., 2005; Ozay Kose, 2014; Saritas, 2007; Sasmaz Oren, Sevinc and Erdogmus, 2009; Tasdere, 2014; Yilmaz and Namlı, 2017; Yalcin, Aggul Yalcin and Ozeken, 2016; Yesil and Caliskan, 2006; Yildirim Hacıbrahimoglu, 2016), it can be seen that very few of them deal with the views of Turkish preschool TCs and PTs (Karaca and Aral, 2011; Ramazan and Yilmaz, 2017; Secer, Celikoz and Kayili, 2010; Severcan, 2007; Yildirim Hacıbrahimoglu, 2016). In being examined the samples and the research years of the studies, it can be seen the study group of Karaca and Aral (2011) conducted in the year 2011 consisted of only 13 preschool TCs, while Secer et al. (2010) researched total of 60 teachers and preschool TCs in 2010. And, Yildirim Hacıbrahimoglu (2016) and Ramazan and Yilmaz (2017) studied 110 preschool TCs in the year 2016 and 586 in the year 2017, respectively, but they did not involve preschool teachers who are a crucial actor in teaching practice. Finally, in the year 2007, Severcan (2007), the earliest conducted study, used a teacher candidate group of 184. It was found out that all these studies used convenience sampling methods except for the study by Ramazan and Yilmaz (2017). In considering that the total number of Turkish preschool students and teachers are one and half million and eighty-five thousand, respectively, according to the year 2018 statistics (National Education Statistics, Formal Education, 2018), it appears that the number of the related studies is rather low and guessing that their validities are rather low is not difficult. It is clear, if the researches of Turkish preschool teaching practices are to provide more valid and truthful findings to international literature, more studies should be performed on the issue. Here, besides its other purposes, this study prioritizes the above-mentioned one. With the school practices, the TCs are allowed to practice in an authentic classroom environment. For this reason, it is one of the most important aspects of a teacher training program. So, it is also expected that the present study, which aims to explore Turkish preschool TCs' and PTs' opinions about school practices, is to provide a valuable contribution to the validity of the findings of the earlier studies. And also it is believed that it is to reveal more clearly how the school practices work for TCs and draw attention to the challenges the teacher experienced. Finally, it is also thought that it will provide the solution suggestions

to the challenges to which the teacher training faculties and the practice schools encountered in the school practices. The research questions of the study are given as follows:

What are TCs' views of whether the teacher training curriculum and school practices are compatible with each other?

What are TCs' views of weekly practice hours and PTs' attitudes towards them?

What are TCs' views of attending both the school practices and faculty courses on practice days?

What are TCs' views of physical conditions of the schools, arrival to the schools, and what could be done to make school practices more effective?

What are PTs' views of the effect of practice group size and TCs' in-class presence on teaching practice?

What are PTs' views of the effect of physical conditions of school on the practices?

What are PTs' views of what should be done for increasing the effectiveness of the practices?

Method

Study Design

In the study, the survey method was used, which is a frequently used quantitative-based method to reveal people's attitudes, beliefs, values, habits, and thoughts on various subjects. It is very popular in education, primarily because of its versatility, efficiency, and generalizability (McMillan and Schumacher, 2004). Survey data collected directly from research participants by asking them questions has an advantage in providing a snapshot of how people think and behave at a given point in time (Cozby and Bates, 2018, p.229).

Research Sample

The study group was selected by using the convenience sampling method, which is frequently preferred by the researchers due to some practical constraints, such as efficiency, and accessibility. Although the approach makes it easier to conduct the research, research findings cannot be generalized from the sample to any type of population (McMillan and Schumacher, 2004). The sample of the study consisted of 108 preschool PTs aged from 25 to 47 years with teaching experience ranging one to five years, working in preschool institutions in the city centre of a middle-scale province in Turkey, and 256 fourth grade preschool TCs aged between 18 and 23 years at middle socio-economic level enrolled in Preschool Teacher Training Program in faculty of education, in a state university in the same province.

Data Collection Tools

The data collection tool used in the study was enhanced by revising the written opinion forms developed previously by Yalcin et al. (2016). The two different written opinion forms were used to identify the TCs' and the PTs' views of teaching practices. While the first contained four items to be directed to preschool PTs, the second consists of eight items to be directed to preschool TCs. The items related to the TCs are designed to determine their views of the compatibility between teacher training education in the university and teaching practices in schools, weekly practice hours, problems faced in the practices, the effect of the physical conditions of the schools to the effectiveness of the practice, and PTs' attitudes towards them. On the other hand, the teacher-written form aimed at determining the effect of TCs' in-class existence on the practice, the group sizes, and the physical properties of the school. In both forms, there was an item to identify the views of the PTs and TCs on what can be done to make the school practices more effective. The data were collected through two educational years. The validity of the forms was provided by consulting the opinions of two educational researchers and one language expert. Primarily, the participants were informed about the

aim of the study and the researchers ensured that their responses to the questions would be confidential, and participation was voluntary. While administering the written-opinion forms, it was observed that the TCs took the test seriously, which contributed to the validity of the findings.

Data Analysis

The data collected were analysed descriptively. In the analysis, the data were coded in the framework of the concepts which is involved in the questions, by classifying the expressions bearing the same meaning under the same category (Creswell, 2007, p. 150). The results were presented in percent and frequency. The percentages were calculated by considering the number of PTs or TCs who responded to the item. The analysis was performed individually by two researchers and found to be a consistency of 86% in their analysis results. The reliability between coders was calculated by the formula, $reliability = \frac{\text{number of agreements}}{\text{number of agreements} + \text{disagreements}}$ (Miles and Huberman, 1994). To increase the credibility and validity of the study, some excerpts from TCs' and PTs' written responses are given in the next section, coded as TC and PT, respectively.

Results and Discussion

In this section, while the results from the opinions of the TCs are shown in Table 1-4, those from the PTs are given in Tables 5 and 6.

TCs' views of school practices

In this section, the findings from the opinions of pre-school TCs are given in the tables under the categories of curriculum, weekly hours of school practices, their willingness to participate in practice, coinciding faculty courses with school practices on weekdays, school physical conditions and the PTs' attitude toward them.

Table 1. TCs' views of compatibility of teacher training curriculum and school practices with each other and weekly practice hours

	f	%
<i>TCs' views of whether the teacher training curriculum and school practices are compatible with each other</i>		
What was learned in the faculty courses is not useful in the school practices	124	48
The difficulty in putting theoretical knowledge into practice	51	20
The courses such as "drama", "play", and "material development" contribute to the school practices.	27	11
There is no inconvenience between practice and faculty courses. The school practices reinforce the knowledge learned in the faculty	54	21
<i>TCs' views of weekly hours of school practices</i>		
Weekly hours of school practices are insufficient to gain experience and so should be increased	124	48
Weekly hours of school practices are insufficient to get to know the children and accustomed to class and school	45	18
Weekly hours of school practices are adequate, but PTs are not adequately qualified	42	16
Weekly hours of school practices are sufficient, but the activities such as breakfast and free time make the time inefficient	12	5
Weekly hours of school practices are sufficient	33	13

As can be seen from Table 1, while nearly 79% of the TCs thought that there was no correspondence between the teacher training courses and the school practices, almost half of them (48%) claimed they could not use in the school practices what they have learned in the teacher training program: "In the faculty, they teach us the theoretical part of the job (he mean "teaching profession"). At the school we learn the practice of the profession "(TC8);" So, our undergraduate courses do not do much, we're having considerable trouble in the first weeks (in practice

school)" (TC24). And they argued they found it difficult to convert theoretical knowledge into practice (20%). On the other hand, it is clear from the same table that only nearly one-fifth of them (21%) have believed the school practices to be compatible with the training curriculum and to help reinforce what was learned in university. Also, the minority of them (11%) advocated that only courses such as drama, play, and teaching material development supported the school practices. An excerpt from TCs' written responses is given in the following:

"We only benefit from some courses such as drama, material development, playing"(TC75)

In the study conducted by Tasdere (2014) and Ozay Kose (2014), TCs expressed that the courses they have taken at the undergraduate level were inadequate for teaching practice and their prospective occupation. Zeichner (2010) noted also that the lack of connection between university-based teacher education courses and teaching practice is a remarkable problem in teacher education programs. Some earlier studies revealed that both TCs and PTs advocated school practices to be indispensable for teacher training programs (Arkun Kocadere and Askar, 2013; Kiraz, 2002; Ozkan et al., 2005). It is suggested that although their conceptual developments are ensured by university-based courses, the school practices have an important role for the TCs to be able to put the theoretical- oriented teaching knowledge into practice and acquire professional competency.

Marais and Meier (2004) stated that university lecturers valued teaching practice as the bridge between theory and practice and TCs sometimes had difficulty in relating course content to school practice and thus tended to treat theory and practice individually. TCs are not fully aware of the importance of the theoretical courses such as classroom management, measurement, and evaluation which have no practice component in the curriculum; they are unable to apply the knowledge to actual situations in the school practice (Arkun Kocadere and Askar, 2013). Kiggundu and Nayimuli (2009) acknowledged teaching practice enabled TCs to integrate theoretical knowledge with what they experienced in schools. Although they learn educational knowledge by attending lectures and doing assignments, teaching practice makes it meaningful when they are faced with real situations. It is during teaching practice that knowledge is affirmed. So, Marais and Meier (2004) found it imperative that PTs are aware of the factors restraining a positive teaching practice.

The TCs (Table 1) emphasized the necessity to increase the number of weekly practice hours (48%) and thought that only one school day was not adequate for getting to know the children, class, and school (18%): "We go to schools one day a week; we need to go more often"(TC3); "When we got used to the school and made activities more comfortable, the practice had finished "(TC64); "The much time is spent... with the arrival of children to the school, breakfast, free time, departure from school. There is little time left for us to practice" (TC34). While 13% of the TCs believed weekly practice hours to be adequate, 16% found it adequate but added PTs were not qualified enough. Some quotations from their responses are given below: "To me, weekly practice hours are not insufficient; it can be considered sufficient" (TC66); "The hours, I think, are enough, but the inadequacy of PTs causes the time in the school wasted"(TC21).

In the present study, similar to the findings in the literature (Alaz and Birinci-Konur, 2009; Altıntas and Gorgen, 2014; Arkun Kocadere and Askar, 2013; Aydin et al., 2007; Azar, 2003; Degirmencay and Kasap, 2013; Gokce and Demirhan, 2005; Karatas, 2010; Ozay Kose, 2014; Sasmaz Oren, Sevinc and Erdogmus, 2009), most of the TCs viewed weekly hours of the practices as inadequate to experience the teaching skills, get to know the children and get used to school.

Ozder, Isiktas, Iskifoglu and Erdogan (2014) revealed that PTs enrolled in school practice courses requested the credit and time allocated to the practice be increased to provide more opportunities for in-class teaching. But, a study by Chambers Sharon and Hardy James (2005) to determine whether there were any differences between one-semester and two-semester regarding teaching efficacy of TCs has shown that the

lengthened student teaching experience does not impact TCs' self-efficacy. They suggested the continued use of the one-semester student teaching option.

TCs in the study by Kiggundu and Nayimuli (2009) complained that teaching practice started too late. Some of the TCs have found the time assigned for the practices enough but suggested PTs are not competent enough. In the studies of metaphors about preschool teachers by Yildirim Hacıbrahimoglu (2016) and Yildirim, Unal and Celik (2011) it was determined that PTs are perceived as "inefficient" by TCs, which had significant implications for the effectiveness of school practices. Caires, Almeida and Vieira, (2012) noted that the practice teacher played a significant role as a facilitator in the transitions of TCs to a new cultural environment, namely, practice school. Despite TCs' enthusiasm to get knowledge and skills, the PTs' inadequacy to provide the guidance service for the professional development of the TCs and their lack of knowledge about their responsibilities can be considered a possible reason for the perception "inefficient". Another problem in school practices is the choice of PTs. Thorsen (2016) remarked the selection of PTs involved very few quality standards or requirements. They are usually often designated as PTs without any formal qualifications. So, their new role as a practice teacher is unclear, which implies unclear expectations concerning TCs' professional development. Ingvarson et al. (2014) asserted that features of teacher education programs supporting effective school practice were the ones that are guided by professional standards involving mentoring where PTs are carefully selected for their expertise and receive continuous training. In Turkey, also, it is not given any formal qualifications for teachers to prepare the practices. They are assigned by school headmasters at the beginning of the semester. Ozder et al. (2014), referred to the lack of interaction between TCs and PTs as the major problem in teaching practice and emphasized PTs could not provide feedback on the progress of TCs. Since being a successful teacher does not mean that he/she has enough guidance skills, it is suggested the efficiency of practices can be developed through practice teacher selection after following a particular training for this purpose. PTs with low guidance service skills may cause TCs to develop negative attitudes towards their profession (Kiraz, 2002).

Table 2. The views of TCs about their willingness to attend the school practices and faculty courses in practice days

	f	%
<i>The views of TCs about their eagerness to attend the school practices</i>		
I love my prospective profession and attend excitedly to practices	58	23
I think it is necessary to gain teaching experience	49	19
My anxiety about the public personnel selection exam affects adversely my desire to attend to practices	43	17
I attend the practices because it is a compulsory course	69	27
I am reluctance to attend the practices owing to teacher intervention and control	37	14
<i>TCs' views of attending the faculty courses in practice days</i>		
It is tiresome to attend to both faculty lessons and school practices within the same day, and this makes both ineffective for me	163	64
I have no such a problem. I am regularly going to practice school on the days allocated to school practice	93	36

The findings (Table 2) indicated that a significant part of the TCs (23%) embraced their prospective occupations and attended desirously to school practices and also 19% of them pointed out that the school practices are crucial for teaching experience and therefore enthusiastically joined the practices: "I love my job, I think school practice is the best side of the teacher training program"(TC4); "Our undergraduate courses are not practice-oriented ones. The places we can practice are just schools, so I think it is important to gain teaching experience" (TC9). Another 17% mentioned the negative impact of the anxiety of the Turkish public personnel entrance exam, which is a national central exam compulsory to inaugurate as a teacher in the ministry schools on their motivations of school practice: "In fact, I want to go to school practice. But the practices I have done there do not

contribute to the national central placement exam. So it is a waste of time" TC23. Moreover, while the remaining 27% asserted because the school practice is a compulsory course to graduate from the training program they joined: "During teaching practice, I do not want to be in the classroom of the teacher but I have to.." (TC10), some remarked (14%) they felt uncomfortable with the teacher's conversation with them and watching.

Some earlier studies emphasized also that TCs found school practices essential in recognizing their prospective occupation, gaining experience, creating occupational awareness and so paid particular attention the attendance to the practices (Aydin et al., 2007; Baran, Yasar and Maskan, 2015; Becit et al., 2009; Degirmencay and Kasap, 2013; Demircan, 2007; Eker, 2015; Kirksekiz et al. 2015; Ozay Kose, 2014; Ozevin Tokinan, 2012; Ramazan ve Yilmaz 2017). It was another significant finding from the literature that school practices carried out effectively, despite various problems, have developed a positive attitude towards the profession (Becit et al., 2009; Simsek, Alkan and Erdem, 2013). In this study, some P, it was found, are reluctant to get involved in school practices and they thought it an obligatory course in which they have to participate to graduate from the program getting a high score. TCs' uncomfortable feeling of the intervention and mentorship of the practice teacher could be related to PTs' attitudes towards them. The present findings have supported those from the study by Caires et.al. (2012), underlining the various gains in teaching practice. Caires et al. (2012) have claimed that the psychological atmosphere experienced in schools by TCs might have an important effect on their sense of 'belonging' and their self-fulfilment regarding the teaching profession. Furthermore, they explained TCs' perception of the achievement and progression in their skills and knowledge by the quality of their socialization process within the school community. In the present study, it is determined that the stress of public personnel selection examination is negatively affecting the TCs' desire to participate in the practices, supporting the findings from the studies of Guzel, Berber and Oral (2010), Gorgen et al. (2012). This situation could be considered one of the main reasons why TCs see the hours spent in school as a waste of time and they prefer to spend more time on the exam preparations.

As can be seen from Table 2, 64% of the participants stated coincidence of the school practice with faculty lessons within the same day caused them to get tired and led to the inefficiency of their faculty lessons. The excerpt below illustrated the response of a candidate.

"As for me, it is exhausting to run together both practice and faculty courses. I am joining the faculty courses due to obligation" (TC45)

Kiggundu and Nayimuli (2009) related this situation to the view that they had to play a dual role of being both teacher and student. It seems to be necessary that the school practice and the university courses be performed on different days. It is put forward that the gains expected from the school practices can be achieved by making all their attention focused on children and activities without focusing on faculty lessons. In a study by Caires et al. (2012), similar to the findings in this study, it was underlined teaching practice was regarded as a stressful and compelling period by TCs.

Table 3. TCs' views of school physical conditions, arrival to the schools, and PTs' attitudes towards them

	f	%
<i>TCs' views of school physical conditions and arrival to the schools</i>		
The difficulty of arrival to the school has an unfavourable effect on the practices	97	38
The absence of activity corners and inadequate teaching materials, as well as the small size of classes, have an unfavourable effect on the planned activities	72	28
Unsuitable preschool class arrangement and inaccessible materials for pre-school education have an unfavourable effect on the class atmosphere and activities	54	21
Physical conditions of the schools are adequate for teaching practice	78	30
Bad weather conditions in winter and the difficulty of getting up early in the morning	68	27
<i>TCs' views of PTs' attitudes towards them</i>		
PTs' treating TCs as a kind of assistant	85	33

Communication problems stem from the insufficiency of weekly practice hours	23	9
TCs' unfavourable perception of the children's attitude and behaviour towards them due to PTs' presenting them to children as sister and brother	41	16
PTs' expectation from the TCs to supply teaching materials and other educational inadequacies	30	12
PTs' helpful attitudes towards TCs	77	30

* TCs answered more than one for this question.

The results revealed they experienced (Table 3) the difficulties of transportation (38%) and the weather conditions and waking early (27%): *"For me, cold weather in winter and waking early morning to go to practice school are the significant challenges"* (TC20); *"Some practice schools are too far away. We have to walk a long time to reach schools"* (TC79). 24% of them said they have no problems getting to the practice school. As shown in the same table, 30% thought the physical conditions of the schools are satisfactory. Teaching materials deficiencies and the small scale of classes were considered as unfavourable school conditions by some TCs (28%), while 21% emphasized that the physical sizes and designs of the classroom were not suitable for preschool education: *"Schools do not have enough teaching materials; If we are to conduct any one activity we should to get the materials"* (TC29); *"Class physical sizes in many preschools are rather small. I think they are not suitable for the preschool teaching"* (TC96).

Similar to the findings of Sahin, Erdogan and Akturk (2007), Aydin et al. (2007), Secer et al. (2010), Demir and Camli (2011), Ozay Kose (2014), Cepni and Aydin (2015), and Koross (2016), the problems such as inadequacy of schools concerning teaching materials and particular activity corners, the small and crowded classes (Dursun and Kuzu, 2008; Karaca and Aral, 2011; Yalcin et. al., 2016), and transportation problems were shown among main disruptive influences on the teaching practices by TCs. In the study, it was shown that the TCs believed that the physical conditions of classes adversely affected the class atmosphere and the activities. This can be explained that, in Turkey, some preschools are established in classes allocated for early period children within primary and secondary education institutions even though their physical conditions are not very appropriate, as well as the lack of the materials and inadequacy of the interior design of these classes.

As TC33 emphasized in the statement *"practice teacher kind to me.....helps in all matters I faced"*, a good part of the TCs (30%) had positive feelings about the PTs' attitudes and behaviours towards them and were aware of PTs' effort to help them. But it was also demonstrated the opposite views such as that PTs (33%) treated them as assistants because of being introduced to children as sisters and brothers, student behaviours towards them (16%) in comparison with PTs' views showed differences: *"Children think us to be the teacher assistant"* (TC1); *"Because children do not regard us as teachers, they do not follow our instructions, except to the orders of the teacher"* (TC80); *"The practice teacher calls me with my name, while children call me "brother"... I do not like it"* (TC54). Finally, the minority (12 %) thought that PTs expected them to provide some educational needs, like the teaching materials. The following excerpt from a teacher candidate supports the idea.

"When the school facilities are not adequate, PTs make us prepare teaching materials needed for the activities" (TC7)

Similar results regarding PTs' attitudes towards TCs are also found in the studies by Ozcelik (2012) and Saracaloglu, Yilmaz, Cogmen and Sahin, (2011), which bear great importance for TCs' attitude toward their profession and quality of the school practices. In the study by Marais and Meier (2004), it was found that TCs perceived PTs as ones who were supportive, friendly and also admitted that they had gained invaluable experiences in school practices. But, a part of the participants in the same study stated that the PTs had been unfriendly and defined their role in the classroom as 'being used as a cover teacher'. Ozevin Tokinan (2012) reported the findings supporting the authors. Kiggundu and Nayimuli (2009) have advocated TCs should join in all aspects of the school and remarked they were limited in their participation in the school activities and treated as *"second class citizens"* in the school.

As similar to the findings from former research (Alaz and Birinci Konur, 2009; Boz and Boz, 2006, Koross, 2016; Secer et al., 2010; Severcan, 2007), addressing the challenges such as the PTs' perception of TCs as a kind of assistant, the children's discriminating them from PTs, being called by PTs as "sister" and "brother", the TCs in the current study mentioned also the difficulties of establishing in-class authority over the children and no feeling themselves as a teacher. Clarke, Triggs and Nielsen (2014) argued that PTs' principal focus was on their students, which sometimes limited the mentoring possibilities that might otherwise exist in school practice settings for TCs. Kiggundu and Nayimuli, (2009) reported that, in school practice, although some TCs indicated a supportive relationship with PTs, others were dissatisfied with this relationship. They stated that PTs saw them as a kind of teaching assistant. Koross (2016) emphasized while some PTs overloaded TCs, others did not trust in TCs and also a part of them did not allow TCs to teach since they believed that TCs were wasting students' valuable time. Depending on the situation, the author claimed that this caused the TCs to get discouraged and feel inadequate.

Table 4. TCs' views of what it should be done to make school practices more effective

	f	%
Being presented as a teacher to children by PTs	150	59
Instructing TCs about how to conduct in-class observations, what to do in the school practices, and building effective communication between the instructors and the PTs	132	52
Decreasing practice group size	102	40
Revising the teacher training curriculum in such a way that each semester of the 2nd, 3rd and 4th educational years would involve school practice courses	94	37
Overcoming common difficulties faced in planning and implementing the activities	75	29
Ensuring the inter-compatibility of academic calendars of the Ministry of National Education with universities	63	25
Ensuring that practice teacher is present in class to give TCs to the required instructions and feedbacks	37	14

Table 4 illustrated that the majority of TCs (59%) advocated that how to be introduced to children played an important role in their motivation, children's attitude towards them, in class authority, and occupational affection: *"I wish that at the beginning of the term, we had gone together to school with the instructor and introduced to the children as a teacher from the beginning"* (TC27)

And some participants (40%) like TC43 stressed that crowded practice groups decreased the weekly number of the practices, preventing them from building healthy and warm relationships with children and also suggested making some regulations for this: *"...crowded practices groups, as for me, are the most serious threat for the efficiency of the practices"*(TC43). They believed PTs did not inform enough about the observations in school practice, what to do in schools, and their responsibilities, and recommended that effective communication between practice teacher and the instructor was to contribute to the efficiency of the practices (52%): *"It would be useful If the instructor regularly meets with the practice teacher and visits the school frequently because sometimes there can be contradictions among the instructions of the director, the teacher and the instructor"*(TC45). Also, they emphasized if the beginning date of the practices was aligned in such a way that it is compatible with that of schools affiliated with the Ministry of National Education, it will also provide them with the opportunity to observe children's first days in school and school adaptation processes (25%): *"When we started practices, children were already accustomed to school. We are not able to gain experience about the school adaptation and the associated challenges... the practice should begin earlier"* (TC99). And, to improve the effectiveness of practices they should be allocated in each semester starting from the second year (37%): *" I believe we will get more experience if all third- and fourth- years are allocated into the practice or we go into practice throughout our undergraduate education every year"*(TC39). TC4 stated *"In the crowded classrooms, the teaching material is usually insufficient; I prefer the activities demanding the limited material not to annoy other classes. Classes*

which are uncrowded and rich concerning teaching materials will make the practice more effective". 29% who think like TC4 advocated that they faced difficulties in planning and implementing the activities.

Similar to the proposals of TCs in this study, even in previous studies, it was reported that TCs conceived that faculty instructors did not fulfil the counselling duties adequately and supervised regularly just a few TCs (Koross, 2016; Paker, 2008; Ramazan and Yilmaz, 2017; Sag, 2008; Saracaloglu et al., 2011; Silay and Gok, 2004; Yapici and Yapici, 2004) and also there were compliance problems of TCs with the practice teacher (Akkoc, 2003) as well as the problems about cooperation and miscommunication between instructor and practice teacher (Sahin, 2003; Secer et al, 2010). School administrators and PTs need to be informed by instructors to ensure that the school practices can move in line with the practice objectives. In a study conducted by Tasdere (2014), it was identified that, through low self-confidence of teaching and concern of losing in- class authority, PTs tend to make the TCs perform an insufficient and limited number of the activities.

Identified in former studies (Paker, 2008; Ramazan and Yilmaz, 2017; Secer et al, 2010), the findings such as PTs' lack of guidance, their getting involved in other things, and their leaving class during practices of the TCs were encountered also in the present study. TCs underlined the importance of monitoring them by PTs and providing feedback required without leaving the class during activities. Considering the intense teacher dependence in school practices, it is crucial that PTs with teaching experience and playing a crucial role for TCs' professional development take care not to leave them alone in class and help them develop their self-confidence and contribute acceptability as a teacher by the children, regarding the TCs as the colleague (Kirksekiz et al. 2015; Koc and Yildiz, 2012). Otherwise, the indifferent behaviors of the PTs may negatively affect the practices by reducing the motivation of the TCs (Karaca and Aral, 2011). Foster (1999) reported that TCs regarded the quality of the candidate-practice teacher relationship as a crucial element for efficient school practice.

In a study by Kiggundu and Nayimuli, (2009) it was reported that TCs believed that there was no general initiation in place in their first days in school. They demonstrated some of the TCs felt a sense of alienation and such feelings of alienation resulted in panic and a lack of self-confidence, reducing the effectiveness of teaching practice and TCs' attitude towards the teaching. On the contrary, the TCs' positive reception of the headmasters and PTs contributed to a positive attitude towards teaching. Also, Marais and Meier (2004) stressed that PTs had a considerable influence on TCs' development and thus a good relationship between them was crucial. The authors went on the assertions like the following:

"Disagreement between them was often the direct result of PTs' inability to match their mentorship style to the student's capacity to perform instructional tasks and inadequacy in the supervisor's guidance and training reduced the effectiveness of practical teaching and could lead to a negative experience of teaching practice "

PTs' views of school practices

In the second section, the findings from the analysis of pre-school PTs' views of the practices are given under the categories such as practice group size, the in-class presence of the TCs, school physical conditions, and their suggestions to develop the efficiency of the practices.

Table 5. PTs' views of the effect of practice group size and TCs' presence in class on teaching practice

	f	%
<i>PTs' views of the effect of practice group size on teaching practice</i>		
The crowded groups leading to the disturbances such as in-class noise and the inadequate class space size have an unfavourable effect on the practices	77	71
Crowded groups cause children and PTs to be distracted	34	31

The greater the number of TCs per practice teacher, the higher the number of people to assist the teacher it means	31	29
<i>PTs' views on the effect of TCs' presence in class on teaching practice</i>		
Being watched by TCs had a harmful influence on the PTs' motivation. It causes them to behave more restrictedly.	56	52
The first weeks, the in-class presence of TCs causes the children to be distracted	35	32
Because lessons continue without having a break, the teacher does not get out of class even if he has a need. Therefore, PTs view the in-class presence of TCs as an opportunity to rest	30	28

PTs (71%) focused on the adverse influence of crowded practice groups (Table 5) on the effectiveness of practices due to in-class noise and inadequate size of classes and emphasizing that they led to the distraction of children and PTs (31%).*“Due to small physical size and the high number of TCs, it obstructs keeping in-class discipline” (PT21)*; furthermore, 29% thought crowded practice groups to be beneficial because it means the further people who would help them in the activities: *“...They help me in class, so it is easy to take care of children”(PT8)*. In the present study, some PTs interpreted the TCs' presence in class as an unfavourable influence on the practice, leading to noise and dissatisfaction. And this situation, they believed, due to particularly the crowded practice groups, gave rise to both the students and themselves to be distracted: *“TCs' in-class presence distracts children's attention ”(PT40)*; *“I think the number of TCs per the practice group should be diminished since it leads to the problems such as noise”(PT3)* and *“I think two or three practice students will be more suitable for teaching practice every day” (PT4)*.

Alaz and Birinci Konur, (2009) and Arkun Kocadere and Askar, (2013) also showed that the size of the practice group caused the students to be distracted and depending on the situation, decreasing in-class spatial area adversely affected classroom management. Aydin et al. (2007) demonstrated the adverse effects of the in-class presence of the TCs on PTs' instruction schedules and the children's lesson concentration. They claimed it caused PTs to go over these topics by bringing about failing weekly teaching programs. The PTs who participated in this study made some proposals, which supported the results in the study by Simsek et al. (2013). To increase the quality of practices, they offered to plan it in such a way that there would be only one candidate in every class daily, so to prevent the in-class noise and children's distraction stem from crowded groups. The proposal can provide advantages in developing the various aspects of school practice such as recognizing the children, establishing authority in the class, feeling themselves like a teacher, and the PTs' monitoring them more carefully and guiding effectively. In the present study, similar to the finding from TCs, the PTs also complained of the lack of teaching material which affected TCs' preferences of activities. In the studies by Dursun and Kuzu (2008), Demir and Camli (2011) it was argued that problems such as inadequate teaching materials could be eliminated by utilizing those developed in the faculty courses such as *“teaching material design”*.

As TCs highlighted, PTs in the study emphasized also that senior year TCs' preparation and anxiety of public personnel entrance exams prevented them from taking care of the practices and underlined that the school practices should be extended throughout all the undergraduate education. Similar results were reported by Kana (2014), Yilmaz and Namli (2017) and Baran et al. (2015). PTs think it to be important for faculty instructors to visit practice schools to check the school attendance of TCs, guiding them to prepare and implement the activities, and developing their observation skills. So, instructors' regularly visiting practice schools could avert the problems such as TCs' difficulty in planning and implementing teaching, preference to use predetermined instruction lesson schedules, and inadequate knowledge about how to do observations. Moreover, it is one of the significant findings of the study that PTs found it necessary for instructors to inform them about TCs' responsibilities of teaching practices at the beginning of the semester. Zeichner (2010) pointed out that school practices were often not carefully planned like campus-based courses and TCs and PTs engaged in daily routines of student teaching with little guidance and connection to campus courses and it is

usually thought that good teaching practices are caught rather than taught. Thorsen (2016) also stated that school practices seem as if it was left to chance and the curriculum has a little effect on the content of school practice.

In some previous studies as well, it was reported the challenges such as the lack of knowledge and communication about the mutual responsibilities of the TCs, instructors, and the PTs (Alkan, Simsek and Erdem, 2013; Degirmencay and Kasap, 2013; Gomleksiz, Mercin, Bulut and Atan, 2006; Karasu and Avcı, Unal Ibret, 2016), TCs' nonfulfillment and unawareness of their responsibilities (Secer et. al., 2010; Saracaloglu et al., 2011), the problems resulting from the inconsistency of instructors' and PTs' expectations from each other and TCs (Karaca and Aral, 2011), the instructors' lacking of supervision and their negligent behaviors to follow TCs regularly (Alkan et al. 2013; Cepni and Aydin, 2015; Dursun and Kuzu, 2008; Koc and Yildiz, 2012;). It is obvious that to achieve the outcomes of school practices, all stakeholders at the beginning of the practices should be in communication with each other and fulfil their duties and responsibilities meticulously. Greaves (1995, cited in Koster, 1996) elaborated the cooperation to be established between practice schools and universities should be organized in such a way that all stakeholders of school practices fulfilled their expectations. Similarly, Ozder et al. (2014) argued that TCs' problems of school practices are entirely due to the way that it was planned and organized.

Almost half of the PTs (52%) had an adverse perception about the TCs' existence in class due to the view that being observed by TCs affected negatively their teaching motivation, caused them to behave more controllably and distracted in particular the children in the first weeks (30%): *"To be carefully watched by the TCs sometimes makes me uncomfortable"*(PT49); *"In the preschool period, directing the children's attention to the activities is a great challenge for me. The TCs' in-class presence makes this circumstance more difficult"* (PT71). As PT17 drew attention with the statement *"thanks to the TCs' presence in class I can rest a couple of minutes and I can take a tea break of a couple of minutes and meet my needs, like the lavatory"*, about one-fourth of them (28%) stated that this situation helped them to have the resting opportunity when they were tired of conducting ongoing activities. In Turkish preschools, there were no class assistants to help them. They cannot have a break and have to continue lessons uninterruptedly, so the findings remarked the substantiality of having class assistants in preschool classes.

Table 6. PTs' views of school physical conditions and what it should be done for increasing the effectiveness of the teaching practices

	f	%
<i>PTs' views of the effect of school physical conditions on the practices</i>		
The crowded, unsuitable and small size classes have affected the practices in a harmful way	61	56
Lack of teaching materials have driven TCs to prepare themselves the needed materials and restricted the diversity of the activities to be performed in class	33	31
To perform some activities, TCs have demanded to take children to the showroom or larger classes, but it caused in-class confusion	13	12
Schoolyards are not suitable for out-of-class activities	11	10
School physical conditions have had no negative effect on practices	46	43
<i>PTs' views of what it should be done for increasing the effectiveness of the teaching practices</i>		
Spreading the practices throughout all training program	92	85
TCs' and instructors' spending more time together to plan, implement the practices and develop TCs' observation skills	79	73
Instructors' monitoring regularly the TCs	72	67
Informing PTs about instructors' expectations	62	57
Planning the size of groups to attend the practice in such a way that one candidate in each class in weekdays practices	51	47

Planning faculty timetable in such a way that the practice and faculty lessons are not placed on the same days	39	36
Supporting the practices by using the materials developed in courses such as material development in faculties in case of inadequate material facilities	37	34
Supporting TCs for joining parental involvement activities	20	19

About half (56%) of the PTs focused on the effect of inadequate physical spaces of classes on practices, which led to TCs to demand moving children to larger classrooms for some activities in particular and thus created the disorder in class (12%), although 43% thought that the physical conditions had no adverse influence on practices. 31% mentioned the lack of material needed for the activities to be performed by TCs and added that it caused them to spend further effort to prepare the required materials. Some excerpts from the teacher responses exemplifying the above asserted claims are given in the following.

“My class is rather crowded... so it sometimes exhausts me”(PT94)

“The school’s facilities are not adequate. So, sometimes I request the TCs to prepare the needed teaching materials” (PT54)

“Classrooms are small. So, when the teacher candidate practices, we use the drama room” (PT31)

“Classrooms are large enough, thus the crowded classes are not trouble for me”(PT23)

As reflected in a practice teacher’s statement *“It will be more useful if it (she means the practice) is not placed into just the fourth educational year and the TCs attend the practices throughout their undergraduate education. So I think that it will decrease the crowd stem from their in-school presence, in particular in small- scale schools”*(PT90), a part of PTs suggested (Table 6) spreading the practices throughout teacher training education (85%) could increase the effectiveness of practices, enabling the TCs and instructors to spend together more time (73%) for planning, implementing the activities and improving the observation skills. They claimed that to enhance the efficiency of practices, it was indispensable for faculty instructors to regularly follow the practices (67%), to inform the TCs about the expectations of the faculty (57%), and to plan the practices in such a way that only one candidate would practice in every class in weekdays (47%): *“The instructors should follow more regularly the TCs and visit more frequently the schools. But they do not ... ”*(PT9) Some TCs have stated that their instructors have given the instructions dissimilar to the ones they do“(PT14). About one-fifth of them (19%) expressed the significance of supporting that TCs participate in parental involvement activities. Parental involvement activities are an integral part of preschool education. So, it will be beneficial for the TCs to experience such activities for their professional development.

Conclusion and Suggestions

TCs offered some solution suggestions to the challenges they faced at practice schools and to the low efficiency of the practices. They claimed that, by the instructors, they should be informed about what they should do in practice, what they should pay attention to during their observations, and what their responsibilities are, that is to say, they stressed the significance of instructors’ effective counseling. Besides, they added the proposals such as empowering communication between instructor and practice teacher, monitoring the development of their teaching skills by instructors, early intervention to encounter problems, reducing the number of TCs under a PT’s responsibility and thus enabling each candidate practice on weekdays. Furthermore, PTs also suggested similar solution proposals to the TCs for a variety of problems. In considering the importance of the preschool period in child development, in which her/his personality and the prospective academic preferences begin to shape, it is of great importance that pre-school PTs pass a qualified preparation process. Thus, the planning and implementation of efficient and qualified school practices are crucial from the perspective. The study demonstrated there were some serious problems stem

from all shareholders in the course of school practices. The findings implied neither PTs nor TCs self-criticized about the course of school practices as main partners of school practices. While PTs focused on the responsibilities of TCs and instructors, TCs addressed those of PTs and instructors, which, it is thought, was due to the miscommunication among all three partners in school practices. Both PTs and TCs emphasized the effect of school physical conditions and miscommunication on the practices. This study revealed that from the perspective of the practice teacher and TCs, the efficiency of school practice is mainly determined by the school facilities and physical conditions, an effective communication of all parties and the organization of school practice. It should not be forgotten that an organization and coordination where all parties are aware of their mutual responsibilities, are in constant communication and take common responsibility for the problems encountered through the process is among the prerequisites for an effective school practice. The results of this study are limited to a total of four hundred four participants including preschool PTs and TCs, and thus the authors suggest that repeating the study with similar groups and levels will increase the validity of the study.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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