

## Pre-service Primary School Teachers' Opinions about School Experience and Teaching Practice Course<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

The aim of this study is to find out the opinions of pre-service primary school teachers regarding school experience classes. This study was designed as a case study, which is one of the qualitative research models. The sampling of the study consists of 32 female and 12 male pre-service teachers studying at Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University. The findings of the study are as follows: female pre-service teachers have the most positive views for gaining experience and male pre-service teachers have the most positive views for gaining skills for effective communication with students when they are having their school experience. Female pre-service teachers suggest as a negative side of school experience that it is in the last year of their education; male pre-service teachers suggest as the negative side of school experience that it needs to start earlier. What female pre-service teachers suggest as positive view is that they gain school experience; and what male pre-service teachers suggest as positive view is that they have more opportunities to learn about teaching profession. Female pre-service teachers have come up with the following opinion most often; "physical deficiencies of schools". Male pre-service teachers have come up with the following negative opinion regarding school experience.

### 1. Introduction

Primary school curriculums have been restructured in parallel with the principles of constructivist teaching approach since the 2004-2005 education years. The courses at primary schools are designed in parallel with the principles of constructivist teaching approach. As the school experience and teaching practices carried out at higher education are considered to offer significant contribution to pre-service teachers, these courses are considered to be very important at education faculties.

With the Education Faculty Programmes conducted in cooperation by the Board of Higher Education and World Bank in 1997-1998, some departments of education faculties were closed down, and new departments were established including departments of primary school teaching (Ada and Baysal, 2009). With the changes performed for the purpose of reconstructing departments of primary school teaching, the legal definition of teaching profession was created with the law no 43 of National Basic Education, which came into force in 1973 in accordance with the law no 1739. Teaching is defined as a profession which undertakes the responsibilities of the State related to education and training (Ünal and Ada, 2007). As teaching is a profession, which requires specialized knowledge, pre-service teachers who will be accepted to this profession need to have relevant field competencies. These competencies are world knowledge, knowledge of teaching profession and field knowledge. The courses of field knowledge in the teaching profession are how to teach the field of profession, having the knowledge of methods and techniques to be used in teaching as well as world knowledge and the course of professional teaching knowledge.

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At this stage, a teacher who does not know what tools and equipment they need to use and how they are going to develop these tools and equipment cannot be successful in their profession (Cemaloğlu, 2011). As a consequence of the works of reconstruction of education faculties, applied courses have become more important. The newly developed programme gives pre-service teachers with more observation and practice opportunities (Şişman, 2008). According to Arends (1998), teaching will always be inadequate unless teachers own personal competencies, and problem solving and reflection strategies developed by the teachers thanks to their school experience and teaching practices. Considering these qualities, teachers are supposed to improve their relevant skills in both pre-service and in-service stages (Arends, 1998; cited in Kocatürk, 2006). One of the most important functions of teachers in today's education system is to guide teachers and help them develop changes in their intended behaviors. When we consider the issue from this point of view, teachers need to be raised with the qualities and quantities which will satisfy the requirements of modern age. For teachers, to be able to satisfy these basic functions is closely related to having relevant theoretical and practical knowledge in their pre-service periods (Özkan, Albayrak and Berber, 2005).

Teacher training programmes consist of theoretical and applied courses. In pre-service teacher training stage, pre-service teachers are provided with theoretical knowledge about teaching profession in the theoretical courses to establish a basic framework. The teaching practices at schools help pre-service teachers put what they theoretically learned from their school training into practice in the school context (Koç, 2011). Beginning from the spring term of 1996-1997 education, five-week "teaching practice" was added into the curriculums and from the fall term of the 1997-1998 education year, "school experience" course was placed in the schedule (YÖK, 1998). School experience practice is a course in the faculty curriculum helping pre-service teachers get to know about school organization and the life at schools, examine the learning environments, participate in extracurricular activities, observe experienced teachers on duty, work with students in groups and individuals and gain short term teaching experience, understanding the profession of teaching correctly (MEB, 1998). The course of "teaching practice" aims, differently from the traditional courses, to improve pre-service teachers' classroom management skills, communication skills, motivation and learning rather than giving them theoretical information about how to teach, but help them learn about the solutions of problems they are likely to encounter in their future teaching lives (YÖK, 1998). "Teaching practice" is a course which helps pre-service teachers gain teaching skills in a classroom environment considering their field of teaching and the levels of the students that they teach. It also helps pre-service teachers gain skills used in systematic teaching of some courses, and offers pre-service teachers the opportunities to discuss their teaching practice related activities (Koç, 2011). Teaching practice is an inseparable and important part of pre-service teacher training (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 1996).

Pre-service primary school teachers receive practice based courses as well as theoretical ones during their undergraduate education. These applied courses are the courses of "school experience" and "teaching practice". Pre-service primary school teachers take 14 weeks of school experience courses, 1 day a week. Moreover, they also take 1-hour theoretical school experiences in a week and 2 hours of theoretical teaching practice courses in a week. These theoretical courses are carried out at universities.

The courses of school experience and teaching practice have great contribution to preparing pre-service teachers for their profession. Pre-service primary school teachers need to qualitatively and quantitatively benefit from these courses adequately to better prepare themselves for their profession. The number of studies carried out in the field in accordance with qualitative model to gather their views regarding school experience and teaching practice courses is very limited in the relevant literature. It is considered that this study will have great contribution to this deficiency. With this regard, it was the aim of this study to collect pre-service primary school teachers' views regarding school experience and teaching practice courses. The aim of this study is to find out the opinions of pre-service primary school teachers regarding the courses of school experience and teaching practice.

#### Sub-purposes of the study

- 1) What are the positive opinions of pre-service primary school teachers regarding the course of teaching practice?
- 2) What are the negative opinions of pre-service primary school teachers regarding the course of teaching practice?
- 3) What are the positive opinions of pre-service primary school teachers regarding the course of school experience?
- 4) What are the negative opinions of pre-service primary school teachers regarding the course of school experience?

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Research Design

This study was designed as a case study which is one of the qualitative research models (Creswell, 2008). Case studies are described as methods in which one or more events, social groups or other interconnected systems are examined in depth (Mills, Eurepos and Wiebe, 2010).

### 2.2. Research Group

The research group of this study consists of 16 female and 6 male 3<sup>rd</sup> year students and 32 female and 12 male 4<sup>th</sup> year students studying at Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Education Faculty, Department of Primary School Teaching in 2011-2012 spring and fall terms, and in 2012-2013 fall term. The research group of this study was chosen in accordance with "purposeful sampling" method which is one of the purposeful sampling methods. Purposeful sampling is not a probability and random sampling approach; it helps choose rich cases with regards to information depending on the purpose of the study and carry out in depth research (Büyüköztürk, Kılıç Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz and Demirel, 2008; Frankel and Wallen, 2008).

**2.3. Data Collection Instrument:** The data of this study was collected in 2011-2012 spring and fall terms and 2012-2013 fall terms. As an instrument for data collection in this study, structured interview forms and personal information forms were used.

**2.3.1. Structured Interview form:** This form consists of two open-ended questions, which are "what are your positive and negative opinions regarding school experience?", "what are your positive and negative opinions regarding teaching practice?" The structured interview form was investigated for its content validity by field experts. Moreover, validity of the form was validated through receiving exact quotations from teachers and pre-service teachers. To make the form reliable, the codes and the classification of the collected data were done by two researchers.

**2.3.2. Personal Information form:** this form, which was developed by the researcher, consists of the questions aiming to determine the classes of the pre-service teachers where they study and their genders. Content analysis technique was used in the analysis of the qualitative data (Yıldırım and Simsek, 20011). Content analysis is defined as a systematic and iterable technique in which some words of a text are summarized in smaller content categories with some codes based on some certain rules. It is a technique in which objective and systematic descriptions of some properties of messages are carried out for drawing new conclusions (Büyüköztürk and et. al., 2008). This study used categorical analysis which is one of the content analysis techniques (Bilgin, 2000). At the first stage of the categorical analysis, data are coded, at the second stage, themes are determined with the use of these codes and then findings are interpreted. In this article, pre-service primary school teachers are coded as A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, L. as the view of a pre-service teacher regarding themes is being given, the most important of those which are coded as the others, and whose frequency is 1 and which are related to themes are given place in this study.

## 3. Results

In this section, the findings obtained through the views of pre-service primary school teachers regarding the courses of school experience and teaching practice are presented. Positive views of pre-service primary school teachers regarding teaching practice

**Table 1: Female pre-service teachers' positive views regarding teaching practice**

N	Themes	f
	Gaining experience	15
	Getting to know students better	6
	Gaining classroom management skills	6
	Gaining trust	5
	Gaining skills of giving lecture	4
	Teachers' positive attitudes towards us	3
32	Experiencing the application of theoretical undergraduate courses	3
	Learning to be patient	3
	Learning how to behave towards the inclusive students	3
	Providing observation opportunities.	2
	Loving the profession of teaching	2
	Observing helpfulness of teachers	2
	Revising our failings	2
	Other	7

Regarding the theme of *gaining experience*, the pre-service teacher coded as A suggests as follows; "the positive contributions of teaching practice are as follows; it helps pre-service teachers gain experience, it also helps pre-service teachers learn about their field of teaching before they start their teaching profession by experiencing at first hand." Regarding the theme of *other*, they suggest as follows: "it helped me adopt a more positive point of view regarding teaching profession and helped me question my choice of profession."

**Table 2: Male pre-service teachers' positive views regarding teaching practice**

N	themes	f
	Gaining skills of effective communication with students.	4
	Effective use of teaching time	3
12	Gaining experience	3
	Learning how to manage classroom	2
	Gaining the sense of trust	2
	Other	12

Regarding the theme of *gaining the skill of effective communication with students*, the pre-service teacher coded as C delivered views suggesting "I have learned a lot about how to treat students and how to communicate with them." Negative views of pre-service primary school teachers regarding their teaching practice

**Table 3: Negative views of female pre-service primary school teachers regarding their teaching practice**

N	Themes	f
	Having the course of teaching practice at the last year	7
	Teaching different classes every week	7
	Not seeing enough value from class teachers and students	5
	Not starting teaching practice at earlier years	4
	Preparing lesson plans	3
32	Class teachers' not giving feedback regarding pre-service teachers.	2
	Class teachers' presence in the classroom during teaching	2
	Not being informed about school administration adequately.	2
	other	9

Regarding the theme of "*having the course of teaching practice at the last year*", the pre-service teacher coded as C suggests as follows; "*having the course of teaching practice at the last year has decreased our performance*". Regarding the theme of *Other*, pre-service teachers suggest their views as follows; "*assigning the already taught subjects to pre-service teachers, difficulties related to transportation*"

**Table 4: Negative views of male pre-service teachers regarding teaching practice**

N	Themes	f
12	Not starting teaching practice earlier	2
	Other	6

Regarding the theme of *not starting teaching practice earlier*, the pre-service teacher coded as D suggests "we should start teaching practice earlier". Regarding the theme of *other*, pre-service teachers suggest as follows; the duration of teaching practice course is not enough, class teachers are present in the classroom during teaching, they give grade to pre-service teachers, not communicating with school administration adequately, class teachers' interference into pre-service teachers' teaching, class teachers' not delivering feedback to pre-service teachers, class teachers do not give feedback regarding pre-service teachers, not knowing primary school students' names adequately"

Positive views of pre-service primary school teachers regarding school experience

**Table 5: Positive views of female pre-service teachers regarding school experience**

N	Themes	f
	Gaining experience	6
	Gaining skills of classroom management	5
	Observing children	5
	Getting to know the profession of teaching	5
	Learning about how to put theoretical knowledge into practice	3
	Observing how to communicate with children	3
	Observing how classes are taught at school	3
	Observing classroom environment	2
	Understanding the importance of school experience course	2
	Seeing that children take their teachers as models	2
	Learning how students are motivated	2
	Acquisition of knowledge about inclusive students	2
	Other	8

Regarding the theme of "gaining experience", the pre-service teacher coded as E suggests as follows "school experience course has many contributions to us as pre-services teachers. All the courses we have taken so far have always helped us create a virtual classroom environment. Thanks to the school experience, we have had the chance to observe a real classroom environment before we start our teaching profession. We also have the chance to observe class teachers' classroom management strategies at first hand as well as their teaching strategies and methods. We also have the chance to closely observe how teachers and students communicate and teachers' dialogue with their students." Regarding the theme of "other", pre-service teachers suggest "we learn about administrative affairs, how teaching is done in multi-purpose classes."

**Table 6: Positive views of male pre-service teachers regarding school experience**

N	Themes	f
6	Getting to know the profession of teaching	4
	Learning about how classroom management is achieved effectively	2
	Learning about how teacher-student relationships should be	2
	Gaining experience	2
	Helped me love teaching profession	2
	Other	7

Regarding the theme of *"getting to know the profession of teaching"*, the pre-service teacher coded as H suggests as follows; "I had the opportunity to get to know school environment, get into close contact with students and benefit from experienced teachers and learn from them. I had also the chance to how classes should be taught and various strategies of teaching. I had also the chance to observe what problems could arise in classroom environments, and what precautions need to be taken". Regarding the theme of *"other"*, pre-service teachers suggest as follows; "I learned about how to manage time effectively"; "I have learned about how to motivate students to the lesson."

Negative views of pre-service primary school teachers regarding school experience.

**Table 7: Negative views of female pre-service teachers regarding school experience**

N	Themes	f
	Physical deficiencies of schools	2
	Lack of acknowledgement about school directors and administrative affairs of school	2
	Excessive classroom sizes	2
16	Having school experience one day a week is not enough	2
	Teachers' deficiencies in using relevant technology	2
	Other	5

Regarding the theme of *"lacking of acknowledgement about school administrative issues"*, the pre-service teacher coded as F suggests as *"we could not recognize school directors and administrative issues"*. Regarding the theme of *"other"*, the following opinions were delivered; *"we could not observe how the teaching of a certain topic will be done"*, *"teachers are not shown deserved respect and given importance."*

**Table 8: Negative views of male pre-service teachers regarding school experience**

N	Themes	f
6	Not teaching classes adequately in accordance with new constructivist approach	1

Regarding the theme of *"Not teaching classes adequately in accordance with new constructivist approach"*, the pre-service teacher coded as L suggests as follows; "we have observed that the number of teachers teaching in accordance with the new constructivist approach is not enough"

#### 4. Discussion and Suggestions

In this part of the study, the findings of this study are compared to the views of pre-service teachers regarding teaching practice and school experience in the literature and the findings are presented. Positive views of female pre-service teachers are as follows; gaining experience, getting to know students better, achieving classroom management, gaining trust, gaining skills teaching a class, teachers' positive attitudes towards us, observing the application of many theoretical undergraduate courses, learning to be patient, learning about how to treat inclusive students, offering observation chances, helping love teaching profession, observing helpfulness of teachers, revising our deficiencies and other. Positive views of male pre-service teachers are as follows; gaining skills of effective communication with students, effective time management during teaching, gaining experience, improving classroom management skills, gaining the sense of trust and etc. Alaz and Birinci (2009) have suggested in their studies that the positive experiences that pre-service primary school teachers gained regarding teaching practices are experience, motivation, determining emotionlessness, responsibility, self-confidence and communication.

According to Altıntaş and Görden (2014), pre-service primary school teachers claim that their self-confidence has increased, they have also developed positive considerations for classroom management, communication with children effectively, adapt positive point of view towards teaching profession. The findings of these two studies also support the findings of this study.

Negative views of female pre-service teachers regarding teaching practice are as follows; teaching practice is at the last year of the education, teaching different classes every other week, not seeing enough value from teachers and students, not starting teaching practice earlier, preparing lesson plans, not receiving feedback from class teachers about pre-service teachers, class teachers' presence in the classroom when pre-service teachers are teaching, not being informed about school administration and administrative affairs, other.

Negative views of male pre-service teachers regarding teaching practice are as follows; not starting teaching practice earlier and other. Demir and Çamlı (2011) have found out in their study that pre-service preschool teachers and primary school teachers had difficulty in transportation, the gap between their faculties and the school, deficiencies in the physical conditions, difficulties regarding classroom management, not benefitting from the practice adequately, not being allowed for real practice, not having enough treasure of activity, being substituted for idle classes and discipline related problems at school. Koç and Yıldız (2012) have found out that pre-service teachers had problems in classroom management in teaching practice hours, planning, teaching period, mismatch between teaching and learning period and not structuring teaching practice activities. Alaz and Birinci Konur (2009) suggest that pre-service teachers have the following negative opinions regarding teaching practice, such as distribution of the practice hours in the week, distribution of teaching hours within classes, role conflicts of last year students, lacking of relevant experience at village schools, indifference of school directors. Demir and Çamlı (2011) suggest that pre-service teachers had the following problems regarding teaching practice; transportation difficulties for teaching practice, lacking enough teaching material, mismatch between their faculties and school, difficulties regarding classroom management, register related problems, teachers' not being informed. Tarman (2012) suggests that female and male pre-service teachers are negatively demotivated by the distance between the school and their faculties. Altıntaş and Gorgen (2014) suggest that pre-service teachers had the following problems; effective use of time during teaching, difficulties regarding classroom management especially at the initial stages of teaching practice, difficulty in adjusting the tone, disciplining problems in classes. Atmış (2013) carried out a similar study and came up with the following problems in their teaching practices; achieving classroom management, adjusting the tone, effectively communicating with students, choice of necessary techniques and methods, choice of teaching material and implementing them. These findings are in parallel with those of this study.

Positive opinions of female pre-service teachers regarding school experience are as follows; gaining experience, gaining classroom management skills, observing children, getting to know teaching profession better, learning how theoretical knowledge is put into practice, observing how to communicate with children, learning about how lessons are taught at school environment, observing classroom environments, comprehending the significance of school experience, observing that children take their teachers as models, learning about how to motivate children, getting knowledge about inclusive students, other. Positive opinions of male pre-service teachers are as follows; getting to know teaching profession better, learning about effective classroom management, learning about how teacher-student interaction should be, gaining experience, loving teaching profession, other. The supporting findings of this study are these; Oğuz (2004) has come up with the following findings in his study; "we were given the opportunity to experience our future professions, getting to know about our future professions better," "I realized that teaching is a profession with great responsibilities", "it requires great patience and devotion," "I realized what makes teaching profession a special one". Kaya and Samancı (2013) have found out in their study that pre-service teachers have come up with the following positive opinions; "class teacher responded my questions in accordance with his experience", "school director, deputy manager had positive attitudes towards us as pre-service teachers." School teachers behaved very nice to us and always asked our health.

Negative opinions of female pre-service teachers regarding school experience are as follows; "physical deficiencies of school", "not knowing about school administrators and administrative affairs of the school", "excessive class size," "one day school experience is not enough in a week, teachers' lacking of the knowledge to use relevant technologies," "other." Negative opinions of female pre-service teachers regarding school experience are as follows; "the number of teachers who teach their lessons in parallel with the principles of new constructivist approach". The supporting research findings are as follows; Oğuz (2004) has found the following findings in his study; "pre-service teachers teaching profession is not a simple profession as considered outside", "the nastiness of students", the noise they make have led them to scaring teaching profession." The findings of Kaya and Samancı (2013) are these; "teachers cannot make students listen to the lesson", "school administration was not warm enough to us." These two findings suggested above seem to be in parallel with those of this study.

The following suggestions can be made considering the findings of this study:

- 1) Further qualitative and quantitative research can be conducted receiving instructors' and teachers' opinions regarding school experience and teaching practice.
- 2) Necessary administrative and academic precautions can be taken to make teaching practice and school experience courses of Education faculties more fruitful.
- 3) The content of school experience and teaching practice courses in the curriculum of undergraduate primary school teaching department needs to be revised.
- 4) Coordination and cooperation with Ministry of National Education need to be enhanced to implementation more beneficial.

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