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Abdullah Surucu, Ali Unal, Atila Yildirim
Necmettin Erbakan University

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Evaluation of Teaching Practice Course Teachers According to Opinions of Math Teacher Candidates

Abdullah Surucu, Ali Unal, Atila Yildirim

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Abstract

Teacher candidates learn to whom, why and where to teach theoretically through teaching profession knowledge lessons. And the skill to use the theoretical knowledge is learned through School Experience and Teaching Practice lessons in Turkey. In acquire these skills, the personal and professional characteristics of the practice teacher at the school where the teacher candidate had his internship are of importance. This research aims to determine the ideas of the teacher candidates who are studying elementary school math teaching about the personal and professional characteristics of the Teaching Practice lesson teachers. In line with this aim, the ideas of the teacher candidates were determined with regard to how they evaluated the practice teachers who are in charge of teaching practice lesson. The study group of the research consists of the senior students who are studying at Ahmet Keleşoğlu Faculty of Education at Necmettin Erbakan University. The data was collected with an unstructured interview in which the teacher candidates were asked to evaluate the practice teachers in personal and professional terms. The data were evaluated by making content analysis.

Introduction

The need for qualified human power with a large variety of skills increases every passing day. Education is of great importance in gaining qualified individuals to the society. There is a need for qualified teachers in order for education to fulfill this function. The teachers who are assigned to execute education activities should be well trained before service. A good teacher is possible by not only theoretical education but also practical activities. That is to say, teaching profession requires educational processes where theoretical knowledge is gained as well as necessary applications are performed to practically convey such knowledge to daily life. For effective education, the teacher should be well trained in terms of class management. This is because effective execution of teaching activities is substantially related to class management. Class management has dimensions such as class climate, way of interaction, student participation, arranging physical conditions, eliminating undesired behaviours. One of the main skills of an effective teacher is to bring the learning environment to a position to serve fulfilling the purposes at a maximum level. Teachers should also primarily improve their communicating skills. This is because communication skill is directly related to the teacher's opinion about the child's nature (Selçuk, 2011).

However, teacher candidates were observed to have frequently experienced problems in matters such as preparing the right questions, motivating the students and perceiving individual differences etc. for class management and discipline, using time effectively, organizing and using suitable educational environments, preparing necessary lesson tools, equipments and materials and using them effectively, making assessments in accordance with the purposes (Saritaş, 2007). For the teacher candidates to effectively use the theoretical knowledge that they have learned within the framework of the program in the real educational environments, they should be involved in the practical working environments at a sufficient level during pre-service educational process (Kocabaş, Durukafa and Gürses, 2000). It is obvious that the theoretical knowledge that the teacher candidates have received will not make so much sense and will not be so useful unless they face the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviors that will be needed by them in the real educational environments. Teacher candidates can learn the knowledge and skills that they need in the class environment only through experience. One of the important points in teacher training is to make them gain the skills and attitudes to convey theory to practice. Contemporary training models emphasize the importance of practical works and cover practice much more (Çelikkaya, 2011). Besides the theoretical lessons which are made in the classrooms in the educational faculty programs in order to make the teacher candidate gain teaching skills, there are also School Experience and Teaching Practice lessons. The teacher candidate is personally involved in the teaching process while s/he observes the teaching process in the School Experience lesson. The teaching practice which

is received by the teacher candidates in the 8th term consists of 2 hours theoretical and 6 hours at-school practice.

Teaching practice is a lesson which aims to make the teacher candidate put his/her previously obtained knowledge and skills into practice and improve them and gain competencies and sufficiency in relation to teaching profession. Teacher candidates should have gained the following qualification once the Teaching Practice lesson is completed:

- Performing teaching practice in several classrooms of the practice school to which they are sent to gain teaching experience and improve the competencies which are necessary for teaching profession,
- Being able to learn the school education program of their own field, comment on textbooks and student assessment techniques,
- Share the experiences that have been gained during the teaching practices at the practice schools with the practice instructors and improve them (YÖK, 2016).

According to Flowers (as cited in Şimşek, 2013), the practice works make contribution to teacher candidates in many aspects in education and these contributions occur in three fields: (1) enabling the opportunity to practice the theory, (2) helping the student see his/her needs and deficiencies to guide the studies, (3) managing real teaching-learning condition while enabling the opportunity to study with the student and improve the capability to become effectively functional. According to Kale (2011), on the other hand, thanks to teaching practice, teacher candidates have the opportunity to see their own level, correct the specified mistakes, improve their weaknesses. The teacher candidate sees what s/he might experience when s/he is given a classroom and gains significant experiences about solving the problems that s/he might encounter. Indeed, many problems could occur, undesired conditions could emerge while gaining such experiences. The problems can only be eliminated by determining them in an accurate manner and developing potential ways of solution. Professional and personal characteristics of the practice teacher are of importance at school in the teaching practice which is necessary for the teacher candidate to gain teaching skill. It was emphasized that practice teachers should have advanced communicating skills and they should be open to communication with teacher candidate(s). An effective practice teacher: listens to students, communicates with them, understands them and helps teacher candidates improve. According to Grady, on the other hand, open communication environment should be established between the practice teacher to increase the success of the practice and the efficiency of the teacher candidate in the classroom. It was emphasized that practice teachers should be young but experienced teachers with a good level of knowledge in the field as well as teaching knowledge, be open minded and capable of keeping communication channels open and discussing with the students and teacher candidates (Boreen, 2009; as cited in Kırksekiz et al., 2015).

Purpose

This research aims to determine the opinions of the teacher candidates who are studying elementary school math's teaching about the personal and professional characteristics of the teaching practice lesson teachers. In line with this purpose, the opinions of the teacher candidates about how they evaluate the practice teachers who are responsible for teaching practice lesson were determined.

Method

Aiming to determine the opinions of the math's teacher candidates about the personal and professional characteristics of the teaching practice teachers, this research was carried out by qualitative method. Qualitative research design focuses on phenomena of which we are aware but we do not have in-dept and detailed understanding (Creswell, 2007).

Study Group

The study group of the research consists of 40 final grade students who are studying Elementary Mathematics Teacher Education program at Necmettin Erbakan University Ahmet Keleşoğlu Faculty of Education. 33 of the participants are female while 7 of them are male. The participants talked to practice teachers minimum 3 times, maximum 28 times and mean 10 times. 14 of the teachers are female, 26 of them are male at school. Practice teachers have minimum 8, maximum 30 years and mean 14 years of professional seniority.

Data Collection and Analysis

Research data was collected from the participants by means of open ended survey. The participants were asked “Could you evaluate your practice teacher in the school that you visit for teaching practice in terms of her/his personal/professional relations with you and the students and positive and negative effects on you in brief?”, so the teacher candidates were asked to evaluate their practice teachers in personal and professional terms. The data was evaluated by making content analysis. The data was primarily coded. The codes were integrated in the themes by the first and second researcher by considering their similarities which are independent from each other. Three researchers gathered and evaluated the process of integration which was made separately. As a result of the evaluation, the themes were protected as they were, the themes which were integrated in a different manner were discussed and final shape was given to the themes. Furthermore, direct quotes were given while presenting findings in order to allow the readers to track the findings and ensure the credibility of the findings. For transferability, the findings obtained were tried to be identified in detail and comparisons were made with the previous studies constantly.

Results

The answers given by the students who participate in the teaching practice lesson for the questions which were asked about their practice teacher in the school were analyzed and total 80 codes were obtained. The codes were divided into the themes such as relationships with students by their similar characteristics, personal characteristics and relationships with practice teachers and their effect on practice students. Also, sub themes were created under each theme. Themes and their characteristics are explained below.

Relationship with Students

24 codes were integrated under this theme. Upon the analysis of the codes, it was seen that 15 of them established positive relationship, 5 of them established negative relationship with the students of the practice teacher, and positive relationships along with negative ones were pointed out in 4 of them.

Positive

Based on the opinions which were integrated under this theme; practice teachers establish very good relationship with their students, the practice teacher does not discriminate between successful and unsuccessful students, addresses the student with their names, tries to pay attention to all students. While one student expresses it as “The most important point that influences me is that s/he does not discriminate between the students in terms of knowledge and addresses every student with her/his name”, another participant said “S/he addresses the students so sweetly, s/he pays attention to establishing eye contact, s/he does not avoid smiling them”.

Negative

Based on the opinions which were integrated under this theme; practice teachers discriminate between the students, hurt the students, scold them and even apply physical violence and reduce the students’ desire to learn and give harm to their self-confidence. According to practice teachers, students are not reliable. This was expressed by a participant as “S/he discriminates between the students; s/he is colder towards male students, inclined to violence, exhibits calmer attitude towards female students”. Another participant said “S/he can sometimes hurt the students and reduce their desire to learn, give harm to their self-confidence and perception of self-sufficiency”. Another participant uttered “According to her/him, students are not reliable. S/he had a hard attitude towards those who did not do their homework and those who were naughty during the lesson”.

Both Positive and Negative

Based on the opinions which were integrated under this theme; while practice students find the practice teachers’ relationships with their students positive in general, they evaluate some of their behaviors as negative.

For example, one participant expressed it as “Despite hurting the students from time to time, s/he was calm and positive and s/he was paying attention to his/her students during the breaks.” Another participant said “S/he tries to make promises to all of the students. Besides that, I saw him/her scolding some students and s/he once hit a student. This was a negative event, s/he sometimes utters hurting words.”

Professional Characteristics

16 codes were integrated under this theme. Upon the analysis of the codes, it was seen that 11 of them mentioned that the practice teacher was successful in his/her profession, tried to improve himself/herself, 4 of them while 4 of them emphasized the classical, non-innovative and cold attitude of the practice teacher.

Innovative

Based on the opinions which were integrated under this theme; practice teachers are successful and they make efforts to become more successful in their profession. For example, one student expresses it as “S/he is quite good in his/her profession and makes efforts to become better”. Another participant said “S/he wanted us to use different strategies while teaching the topics to get informed in this regard.

Traditional

Based on the opinions which were integrated under this theme; the practice teacher teaches the lesson in a teacher centered manner, s/he does not use the new methods and techniques for math’s teaching. One participant said “Lesson teaching is too old, this classical teaching style which is based on memorizing made me sad”. Another participant said “S/he is teaching math’s while sitting and the students are so accustomed to this that they cannot accept a different style”.

Personal Characteristics and Relationships with the Practice Students

25 codes were made under this theme. Upon the analysis of the codes, it was seen that 14 practice teachers had positive behaviors towards the practice students while 1 of them attracted attention with his/her negative characteristics. All of the 10 codes are related to the personal characteristics of the practice teacher and all of them are placed in the positive sub theme.

Positive

Based on the codes which were integrated under this theme; practice teachers exhibit respectful, warm, sincere, helpful behaviors towards the practice students. Practice students are satisfied about the behaviors of the advisor. Practice students are also satisfied about the warm and positive attitude of the advisor and the personal characteristics of the advisor that does not utter humiliating words. For example, a practice student expresses this as “S/he behaves respectfully and warm towards me. S/he is trying to help me whenever I have a desire, s/he does not reject me”. Another student said “S/he was highly respectful towards us. S/he had a good relationship with the trainee students. S/he helped us when we had a problem s/he was a guiding light for us”.

Negative

Based on the codes which were integrated under this theme; practice teacher does not take care of the practice students, s/he does not spend sufficient time with them, does not give feedback. A practice student mentioned this as “S/he did not care us much, s/he only talked to us when we were about to tell a topic”.

Effect on Practice Students

15 codes were integrated under this theme. Upon the analysis of the codes, it was seen that 11 practice teachers had a positive effect on the practice student while 1 of them had a negative effect and 3 of them had both positive and negative effect.

Positive

Based on the opinions which were integrated under this theme; practice teachers introduced teaching profession to the practice students; exhibited exemplary practices, behaviors, and showed them behaviors which can be used by them particularly in teacher-student communication and class management. Practice students expressed that as follows:

“I think class management and student control have positive effects on the practice phase.”
“S/he had a very positive effect on me, s/he influenced me about how to establish nice communication with the student, which way I should run my lesson to be efficient, which way of teaching topic I should use.”
“S/he is a teacher who really introduced my profession to me and showed me how important our profession is for human life. I learned how to approach the students.”

Negative

Based on the opinion which was integrated under this theme; advisor had a negative effect on the practice student. A practice student expressed it as “S/he was a very harsh teacher, s/he sometimes raised his/her voice towards his/her colleagues as well. S/he usually scolded and tried to keep the students under discipline. S/he had a negative effect on me”.

Both Positive and Negative

Based on the opinions which were integrated in this theme; although practice students said that they were satisfied about their practice teacher in general and that they were positively affected by their practice teacher, they also added that they were disturbed about some behaviors of the teacher. One student expressed it as “S/he was a teacher whom I highly appreciate in terms of both lesson teaching and class management. But when I watched the lesson with male students, I saw that s/he behaved male students rudely and talked to them with insulting content. I don’t like this side of the teacher and I don’t approve that”. Another student said “I was positively affected about the fact that s/he got on well with the students. But s/he sometimes uses bad words and this disturbed me”.

Discussion

The practice students who participated in the research expressed that their practice teachers established very good communication with their students, they addressed their students with their names, they tried to take care of all of their students. This finding is considered important for the teacher candidates to improve their communicating skills with their students. According to Kırksekiz et. al (2015), on the other hand, practice teachers should have advanced communicating skills. An effective practice teacher listens to the students, communicates with them, understands them and helps teacher candidates improve themselves. In a study which was carried out by Saracaloğlu et al. (2011), teacher candidates expressed that they learned how to establish healthy communication with their students thanks to the practice teacher.

However, practice students expressed that practice teachers discriminated between the students, behaved hurting to their students, scolded them and there are those who reduce the students’ desire to learn and harm their self-confidence. There are some researches which promote these negative opinions of the practice students towards the practice teachers. According to the research by Demircan (2007), on the other hand, teacher candidates were seen to have a negative opinion about the practice teacher. Teacher candidates expressed that practice teachers did not make any effort to make practice students be involved in the lesson, warm them up for school life, make sure that they can maintain the practice willingly and that they maintained the practice unwillingly themselves. Practice students expressed that practice teachers were successful and they made efforts to become more successful in their profession. In a research by Saracaloğlu et. al (2011), teacher candidates expressed that

they found the practice teacher sufficient in terms of knowledge in the field and that the practice teacher used the lesson tools and equipments in an effective manner. Practice students have positive opinions about the practice teachers but they expressed that there were also some practice teachers who taught the lesson as teacher oriented, did not use new methods and techniques of math's teaching. This finding makes us think that there are some teachers who do not make any efforts to renew and improve themselves. Practice students expressed that they were satisfied about the personal characteristics of the practice teachers in that they exhibit respectful, warm, sincere, benevolent behaviors towards them and they have warm and positive attitudes towards people and they do not utter any humiliating words. In a research by Kale (2011), on the other hand, it was seen that practice teachers did not have any insulting words or behaviors towards the practice students.

The participants stated that there were practice teachers who do not take care of the practice students, do not spend sufficient time for the student and do not give feedback. In a research by Çelikkaya (2011), teacher candidates expected the teachers to establish smiling and reliable relationship with them most while this expectation occurred at a lower level. Teacher candidates stated that "They could only see the practice teacher for two minutes on the run during 10 minutes' break after teaching the lesson and this was not enough at all and that they wanted some time organized to talk to them where both the practice teacher and the advisors could communicate their experiences to them and in order to discuss their performances". In a research which was made by Kale (2011), on the other hand, İMÖ students stated that they had problems in establishing contact with the practice teacher and the students' approach to them. However, in it was seen that, general terms, there were not so many serious problems during teaching practice, and no great disruption was experienced to move the system away from its purpose except for some small problems. It was stated that the practices were quite useful for training teacher candidates and they would be much more helpful if small problems are eliminated. Practice students stated that the practice teacher introduced the teaching profession, exhibited exemplary practices and behaviors and showed the students the behaviors which can be used by them particularly in matters such as teacher-student communication, class management. Teaching profession is seen to be useful in that the purpose of the Teaching Practice is to improve the knowledge, skills and attitudes about the teaching profession which are received by the teacher candidates during their education in the light of theoretical lessons. In a study by Şişman and Acat (2003), the teacher candidates' perceptions about the social status of the teaching profession, ethical values of the teaching profession and their own competencies changed in the positive direction. The teacher candidates who participated in the research which was made by Becit, Kurt and Kabakçı (2009) stated that they gained awareness about the professional rights and responsibilities of teaching together with the practice teachers in the schools where practice is performed. And this was characterized as the most important contributions made by school practice lessons for the teacher candidates. There were also some practice students who mentioned that the practice teacher had a negative effect on the practice student. In a study which was done by Kuzu and Dursun (2006), it was seen that several problems which could originate from both the practice teachers and the practice instructors during the practices could adversely affect the teacher candidate (as cited in Becit et.al, 2009).

Recommendations

In order to avoid problems between the practice teachers and practice students and let the practice make positive contribution to the teacher candidates. Attention must be paid to have practice teachers who are successful in their profession and advanced in terms of human relations and in professional terms. For the practice teachers, a seminar program should be prepared in the topics such as things to be considered before and during the practice. The practice teacher, the instructor who is charge of the practice and the practice student should have a meeting from time to time to evaluate the problems which are encountered in the practice and determine what to do in order to make the practice more effective. Making similar researches in the different branches and determining teaching principles and standards based on the research results will be helpful to make the teaching practice more effective and thus have the teachers well trained before service.

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Author Information

Abdullah Surucu

NEU Ahmet Kelesoglu Education Faculty
Konya/Turkey
asurucu@konya.edu.tr

Ali Unal

NEU Ahmet Kelesoglu Education Faculty
Konya/Turkey

Atila Yildirim

NEU Ahmet Kelesoglu Education Faculty
Konya/Turkey
