



Training Process Cycles for Special Education Teachers and University Supervisors: A Turkish Context

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Abstract

In special education teacher training programs, the teaching practicum's role is both wide and extensive. Since, during this process, providing qualitative and satisfactory consulting services to supervisors is crucial, it is very important that university supervisors be experienced and have obtained proficiency in the field of consultation. However, for the program which the university study is currently implementing, no study has yet been made systematically reporting the teacher training process in Turkey. As such, this present study has aimed to reveal the training process cycle for university supervisors and to describe teaching practicum applications. In this study, there were two groups of participants, one of them direct participants, and the other indirect participants. Data were collected via voice and video records, field notes, and university supervisor candidate's diaries. At the end of the data analysis, researchers delineated four basic themes, being (1) the process of practicum, (2) the skills which a potential university supervisor should have, and (3) the weekly working schedule, roles and responsibilities, and components of the practicum cycle. The subthemes of the practicum meetings, reading folders, and observations, which made up the components of the practicum cycle, were focused on. Consequently, it was observed that the practicum process provided multi-dimensional learning and teaching opportunities for university supervisors, potential supervisors, and pre-service teachers.

Key Words

Action Research, Professional Development, Special Education, University Supervisor Candidate Preparation for Special Education, Teaching Practicum, Supervision.

The most important purpose of teacher training programs is to train qualified teachers, and it is just as important for this process to be based on empirical results as it is to avoid political concerns (Güven, 2001). The fundamental aim of

special education teacher training programs is to enable pre-service teachers to acquire evidence-based practices and to apply them competently in a classroom setting. Despite this aim, the discrepancies existing between findings found

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in special education studies and their real-life applications in schools has become, as of recently, a controversial issue (Paulsen, 2005). Additionally, it has been stated in the literature that although such programs have attempted to combine theory and practice, a serious gap exists between the theory and its actual due to these attempts being unsystematic (Goodlad, Soder, & Sirotnik, 1990; Guyton & McIntyre, 1990; Lengyel & Vernon-Dotson, 2010; Sindelar, Brownell, & Billingsley, 2010). Despite their significance, studies evaluating the qualities of teacher training programs are limited. To give a concrete example, UNESCO discussed this issue at the Education Conference in 1996 where it emphasized the necessity of solving the problem of teacher training globally by calling each respective country's ministry of education to develop effective action plans, strategies, and applications. Regarding teacher training in special education, Brownell, Ross, and McCallum (2005) stated that virtually no well-established studies have dealt with this issue. However, Sindelar et al. (2010), in their collection of articles, examined the current situation in which they provided further suggestions about the persistent need for research as well as the lack of supporting research funds.

Throughout the course of teaching practica, pre-service teachers switch between their separate responsibilities as students and teachers (Conderman, Morin, & Stephens, 2005). When teacher training programs provide evidence based practices and strategies in training processes for pre-service teachers, it would be possible to address such a gap and to enable pre-service teachers to use practices proven to be reliable in a classroom setting. University supervisors, therefore, especially those who represent teacher training programs and whose roles include supervision and evaluation (Borko & Mayfield, 1995), should have experience and consulting competency in the field since supervisors play a crucial role in helping students to complete this educational process successfully. Supervisors' roles include evidence-based information and experience in the field, effective interaction with pre-service teachers, the presentation of appropriate clues and feedback at the right time, and the exchange of ideas after observations are made. Moreover, since pre-service teachers, in fact, also expect emotional support in addition to academic support (Hyland & Lo, 2006), these roles also require them to guide and help the candidate teachers in determining their strengths and weaknesses, making predictions, becoming cognizant of the steps making up

evaluation processes, the skills to rearrange the process when necessary by reviewing it (Morris, 1980), interacting with candidate teachers in an appropriate manner, and providing students with convenient and timely tips and feedback while also providing emotional supports in addition to their scientific based information and experience in the field (Hyland ve Lo, 2006).

Haberman (1983) and Warger & Aldinger (1984) wrote that because instructors with little practice experience are inadequate in providing feedback, those who have smaller workloads are charged as supervisors in the United States of America. Krueger and Joy (1991) stated in their study, which aimed to determine the role and effectiveness of practice instructors, that while practice instructors continue to be an important element in the teaching experience, their level of proficiency and preparation in the consultancy process is being questioned by both teachers and candidate teachers who are partners in the process. While the both teachers and candidate teachers define the practice instructor's role as being a problem solver, a consultant, the liaison with the university, and the "go-to" person, they also stated that practice instructors' scientific and educational contributions to the teaching environment were lacking and that their consultancy skills were insufficient. Regarding teacher training in special education, Brownell et al. (2005) stated that virtually no well-established studies have dealt with this issue. However, in their collection of articles, Sindelar et al. (2010), examined the current situation in which he made further suggestions about the persistent need for research and about the lack of supporting research funds. In Turkey, the teaching practicum in special education departments is conducted by instructors who have, and sometimes those who haven't, received any instruction on consulting, depending on the number of instructors in the department. Thus, another important issue related to supervisors is that each one is responsible for too many pre-service teachers (Ergenekon, Özen, & Batu, 2008).

The teaching practicum is a process that contributes to the professional development of both university supervisors and to pre-service teachers by providing them with bidirectional learning and teaching experience. In this respect, the training of university supervisors able to conduct teaching practica as an important part of teacher training programs has become quite significant. In this context, Ergenekon et al. (2008) offered

two important suggestions concerning teaching practica in their studies in which they examined the perceptions and suggestions of pre-service teachers in Teacher Training Programs for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities. Among their suggestions is that a teaching practicum should be conducted by university supervisors who are enthusiastic about, and experienced in, instructing teaching practicum courses. Additionally, they suggested that university supervisors should attend a teaching practicum with an expert supervisor for at least one semester before taking charge of their own teaching practicum group. Furthermore, there is a study related to educating university supervisor in the field of special education which discusses the teacher practicum process for teaching students with hearing impairments (Gürgür, Girgin, & Uzuner, 2009). Learning to be educators of teachers involves carrying out a variety of responsibilities, of which include teaching or giving seminars in teaching practice, consulting with teacher candidates about their practice, and designating and realizing research projects (Zeichner 2005). From this need stems the objective of this study: to present the process of training a candidate practice instructor who will be able to carry out the teaching practice. In accordance with this purpose, the answers to the following problems will be sought: (a) How does the practice process work in the program of teaching individuals with varying degrees of mentally retardation in the special education department of the university in which the study is to be carried out? (b) What are the skills that the candidate practice teacher is required to possess? and (c) How is the cycle followed within the practicum process?

Method

In this section, the participants of the study, the research setting, the model, the teaching practicum process, and data sources are explained.

Participants

The study included two kinds of participants: (1) those who were involved directly and (2) those who were involved indirectly. The group of direct participants were a university supervisor candidate, a university supervisor, and a reliability committee coordinator. The group of indirect participants was composed of nine pre-service teachers and three cooperating teachers who worked in special education. The university supervisor candidate

became a direct participant as he participated voluntarily in the study planned by the reliability committee coordinator and university supervisor. The practice teacher was responsible for two of the nine candidate teachers in the group. One of these candidate teachers was a student who had achieved a significant level of success in her undergraduate program coursework, who was the top student in her department, and who was considered to be inclined to the practice by the researchers. The other candidate teacher was a student who had transferred the previous year to the university in which the study was carried out, and thus, whose educational history was not known well despite the fact that she took the same courses as the other candidate teacher.

Research Setting

The theory of teaching practice in the university in which the study was carried out is taught in the university's School of Education whereas actual practice takes place both in a nearby primary school's special education classes and in a nearby training center for children with autism. The candidate teachers undergo their educational practices in one of the aforementioned institutions during each educational term. The study was conducted at Anadolu University's Research Institute for the Handicapped within the Unit for Children with Developmental Disabilities. During the 2009-2010 academic year, 14 pre-service teachers attending the final year of the Teacher Training Program for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities at the Department of Special Education conducted their teaching practicum at this unit. Nine of the pre-service teachers practiced with the morning groups, while five of them practiced with the afternoon group. In this study, the nine pre-service teachers from the morning group were included. The university supervisor candidate took charge of the two pre-service teachers in this group.

Research Model

This study was conducted as action research whose goal was to explain the cycles in the training process for the university supervisor candidate who will conduct the teaching practicum. This research model was chosen because of its ability to reveal the processes followed in teaching practicum studies as well as its ability to pinpoint areas for improvement (Stringer, 2007). During the research process, the necessity to train the instructor for the

practice was self-evident. Therefore, the situation was described, data related to the problems were gathered, and literature was reviewed. Solutions to emerging problems were then sought in reflection reports and during reliability meetings. To facilitate the implementation of suggestions for improvement, a cyclical design in which each cycle of the process could be repeated, allowing the process to continue in a different order when needed, was used (Johnson, 2002; Uzuner, 2005).

In this study, before explaining the action process for training the university supervisor candidate, an explanation of the teaching practicum's features and the manner in which it shall be conducted was presented in an effort to provide insight into the training cycle of the candidate.

The Process and Features of Teaching Practicum

The Teacher Training Program for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities at the Department of Special Education at Anadolu University, being the focus of this study, has graduated students since 1987 for 26 consecutive years. This program is comprised of a four-year program of eight semesters. For six semesters, theoretical courses are given, while the last two semesters is reserved for the teaching practicum.

What Courses does the Teaching Practicum Process Involve and How Long does it Last?

The teaching practicum process involves Teaching Practicum I-II and Instructional Technologies and Material Development for Intellectual Disabilities I-II at the Department of Special Education. These two courses constitute the process of the teaching practicum and are handled as a whole. In the fall term, during which the data of the study were collected, the teaching practicum courses were conducted with eight practicum groups, totaling 60 enrolled pre-service teachers.

In an academic year, the Teaching Practicum I-II courses are conducted for three half-days in a week for approximately four hours a day. In other words, a pre-service teacher participates in a teaching practicum program for 12 hours each term. However, Instructional Technologies and Material Development for Intellectual Disabilities I-II courses are conducted as "practicum-meetings" for three hours a week during both terms. At these meetings, their course requirements are fulfilled. The information and skills necessary for the teaching practicum are also presented to the pre-service teachers. Although the official requirement

for the teaching practicum course for pre-service teachers is 13 class hours, in this department, they attend 15 class hours. Moreover, the pre-service teachers should complete 240 European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) credits to graduate. Anadolu University uses ECTS (Turkish Council of Higher Education, 2001), which is the value representing students' entire studies (e.g., theory, practice, seminar, individual study, exams, and homework) to pass the course successfully.

What is the Preparation for the Process and how does it Start? The teaching practicum starts with a meeting held by the presidency of the practicum's coordinator, in which pre-service teachers are assigned to groups and the work for the upcoming term is planned. After the meeting, a general meeting is organized with the participation of all university supervisors and pre-service teachers. The agenda of this meeting concerns written and unwritten rules.

What is the Content for the Teaching Practicum?

The Teacher Training Program for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities has "Teaching Practicum Guidelines" for the 2009-2010 academic year. The title of this guideline is presented in Table 1.

Table 1.
Teaching Practicum Guideline Index

Contents	
- Teaching practicum shareholders' roles and responsibilities	- Implementation and grading guideline for teaching plans
- Teaching practicum fall and spring semester lesson schedules	- Guidelines for daily lesson plan preparation
- Evaluation criteria and principles of the teaching practicum	- Implementation and grading guideline for daily lesson plans
- Reinforcement assessment form	- Teacher grading form for daily lesson planning
- Preparation guideline of individualized behavioral intervention program	- Material examination form
- Social skills control list	- Material grading guidelines
- Planning guidelines for social skills; concepts and teaching academic/nonacademic skills	- Follow-up schedule for the teaching practicum lesson plan (fall-spring)
	- Pre-service teachers' evaluation form for cooperating teachers

What are the Pre-service Teacher's Responsibilities in the Teaching Practicum Process?

The teaching practicum process is conducted over two stages: observation and active participation. The observation stage lasts for three weeks during each academic term. The observation stage lasts for three weeks during each academic term. During this three-week-long process, the pre-service teachers observe the students and the

cooperating teacher's performance. From the fourth week until the end of the eleven-week term, they actively participate in education/teaching activities in class. In the fall term, the pre-service teachers are expected to prepare an Individualized Behavioral Intervention Plan and Social Skills Teaching Plan and three daily lesson plans a week, while in the spring term they are required to prepare a Concept and Skills Teaching Plan and, again, three daily lesson plans a week. In addition to these, they must prepare and acquire the equipment and materials necessary for their programs and daily lesson plans.

How is the Teaching Practicum Evaluated?

The pre-service teachers are evaluated with two midterms and one final exam for both courses during the course of the teaching practicum. The weight of the exams for the final grade is 20% for the first midterm, 30% for the second midterm, and 50% for the final exam. The cooperating teachers at the school are also involved in the evaluation, making a 10% contribution to the evaluation of the pre-service teachers' observation grades.

Research Process

To explain the cycle of the action research, just how the teaching practicum at the Department of Special Education at the Faculty of Education at Anadolu University were to be conducted was reviewed. After the practicum process and its features were revealed, not only were the aims, roles, and responsibilities of the university supervisor candidate were determined, but so were the research setting and the components of the university supervisor candidate's training, which included file reading, observation, and participation in the meetings. In addition to these, reflection and reliability meetings were also arranged. With the support of the head of the department, this study was designed in the form of action research using the action research cycles proposed by Mills (2003).

Data Sources and Analysis

The data of the study were collected from the participants' diaries, Teaching Practicum Guidelines, the pre-service teachers' files, feedback on these files, audio records for the file evaluation meetings, audio records for reflection after these evaluation meetings, lesson observations, the scores for the observations, the notes related to post-observation sessions, video records of the meetings with the students, the notes and audio records of the

meetings with the reliability committee, and finally, the pre-service teachers' perceptions concerning the teaching practicum.

The research team met in the 12 committee meetings of acceptance, which lasted between 60 and 120 minutes on average during the practice. The practice instructor and the candidate held 14 reflection meetings for 20-45 minutes. The notes, transcripts of the voice records, and summaries of the visual records attained from the data sources listed above have been read repeatedly, questions have been formed, and the data have been analyzed by the research team by returning to the data sources when necessary. As a result of the analyses, four main themes appeared: (1) the process of the practice, (2) the skills and weekly work plan that the practice instructor is required to have, (3) the roles and responsibilities of the people who are to participate in this study, and (3) the components of the practice cycle. Three sub-themes were focused on within the components of the practice cycle, namely: (a) reading files, (b) observations, and (c) practice meetings. The changes in the process of the action cycle and the answers to the questions that appeared during the analysis process have been reported as findings of the research.

Findings

This section presents the data analysis of the cycles within the university supervisor training process, and subsequent findings are explained.

THEME 1: The Process of the Teaching Practicum

How is the Teaching Practicum Group Conducted? In the study, there were nine pre-service teachers who worked in three different classes with children with developmental disabilities (e.g., autism, Down syndrome, and intellectual disabilities) aged 5-10. Three pre-service teachers for each class were assigned at the beginning of the term, attending until the end of the term. Each pre-service teacher in the group were expected to fulfill his/her weekly responsibilities delineated in the Teaching Practicum Guidelines, as presented in Table 2.

Table 2.
Weekly Routine of Pre-service Teachers

Day	Activities
Monday	Participates in implementation Gives back his/her folder
Tuesday	Participates in implementation Attends to teaching practicum meetings
Wednesday	Free day
Thursday	Takes his/her file Participates in implementation Consulting from university supervisor as needed
Friday	Free day The lesson schedule is prepared and sent to the university supervisor by the group leader via e-mail

If the group spokesman was determined in the reflection and acceptance meetings held throughout the research process to have successfully fulfilled his/her tasks and responsibilities without delay, it was decided that the spokesman should continue his/her work without any need to make a change in the weekly work routine of the teacher candidates.

THEME 2: What are the Aims and the Weekly Working Schedule for the University Supervisor Candidate?

Within the action, the aims and weekly working cycle for the university supervisor candidate were determined by the supervisor, reliability committee coordinator, and the candidate himself. These aims were as follows:

- To determine the pre-service teachers’ strengths and weaknesses
- To attempt to develop the pre-service teachers’ weakness
- To evaluate the pre-service teachers objectively
- To give written and oral feedback to the pre-service teachers
- To provide supervision for the pre-service teachers
- To prepare and present presentations related to the meetings’ agendas
- To behave ethically
- The working schedule for the university supervisor candidate is presented in Table 3.

Table 3.
The Weekly Work Routine of the University Supervisor Candidate

Days	Responsibilities	Approximate duration (hours)
Monday	The candidate takes and reads the files for which he/she is responsible	2
Tuesday	Participates in the teaching practicum routine	3
Wednesday	Checks and/or reads the files with the university supervisor Gives back the checked files to pre-service teachers Consulting for the pre-service teachers	1 1
Thursday	The candidate joins in the observations of the university supervisor Exchange of views with the university supervisor after the observation sessions	2 1
Friday	Attendance of reliability committee meeting	1-2
Total duration		~11-12

In relation to this part of the study, no changes were made to the skills, liabilities, and the work routine that the candidate practice instructor was required to have in the action process.

THEME 3: Roles and Responsibilities

In the action process, after the aims had been decided and the weekly study schedule had been planned, researchers’ roles and responsibilities were analyzed and determined by the research team. At the end of the analyze, 10 roles and responsibilities about the university supervisor candidate, 35 roles and responsibilities about the university supervisor and 6 roles and responsibilities about the reliability committee were determined. Roles and responsibilities were finalized by revising in the reliability committee meetings. Roles and responsibilities which were determined had been performed exactly and presented by summarizing below for the research report.

The Roles and Responsibilities of the University Supervisor Candidate: In this study, the university supervisor candidates had roles and responsibilities related to both the university supervisors and the pre-service teachers. These roles and responsibilities included tasks such as teaching, consultancy, evaluating, reporting the process, and coordination, which are stated in the literature (Borko & Mayfield, 1995; Krueger & Joy, 1991; Morris, 1980; Nerenz, 2006). The specific tasks related to these roles and responsibilities are listed below:

- Examination of the pre-service teachers' files
- Participation in in-class observations
- Attendance of practicum meetings
- Provision of written and oral feedback to pre-service teachers
- Reporting on weekly tasks to the university supervisor

The Roles and Responsibilities of the University Supervisor:

In compliance with the aims of the study, the university supervisor had specific roles and responsibilities related to preparations both before and during the practicum in addition to training the university supervisor candidate.

The Roles and Responsibilities related to Preparation before the Teaching Practicum: The university supervisor

- Is under the presidency of the practicum coordinator
- Assigns the pre-service teachers into groups
- Plans the pre-service teachers' work for the term
- Participates in meetings by updating the program and uploading materials

Roles and Responsibilities during the Teaching Practicum: The university supervisor:

- Informs the pre-service teachers about the general processes and duties during the term
- Reads and gives written feedback for the pre-service teachers' files
- Observes and gives oral feedback for the pre-service teachers' practices
- Meets weekly with the pre-service teachers and informs about their mistakes when needed
- Evaluates the pre-service teachers on their requirements

The Roles and Responsibilities for Training the University Supervisor Candidate: The university supervisor:

- Arranges weekly meetings with the candidate and gives feedback about his/her report
- Evaluates the candidate's performance

The Roles and Responsibilities of the Reliability Committee Coordinator: The reliability committee was established to determine the roadmap of the study and to ensure the trustworthiness and reliability of the data. The first author was charged as the coordinator of this committee. The roles and responsibilities of the committee coordinator are as follows:

- Takes charge in planning, conducting and drawing conclusions about the research (through analysis of the collected data and reporting on the research).
- Plans what to do with the university supervisor candidate, together with the university supervisor.
- Attends and chairs the weekly reliability committee meetings.
- Determines whether the cycle is being performed as planned.
- Enables the implementation of decisions made at the reliability committee meetings.
- Offers suggestions for both the practicum process and the university supervisor candidate's work.

THEME 4: Application Components for Training the University Supervisor Candidate

The action cycle, parallel to the teaching practicum process, includes component tasks, such as reading files as well as observing, arranging, conducting, and attending both the teaching practicum meetings and the reliability committee. This cycle repeats weekly and each component has its own cycle. Thus, the following illustrates both the processes and how the participants were influenced by them. These processes were explained on the basis of the data obtained from the processes at each stage of the cycle. The schematic illustration of the cycle followed in the action process is presented in Figure 1.

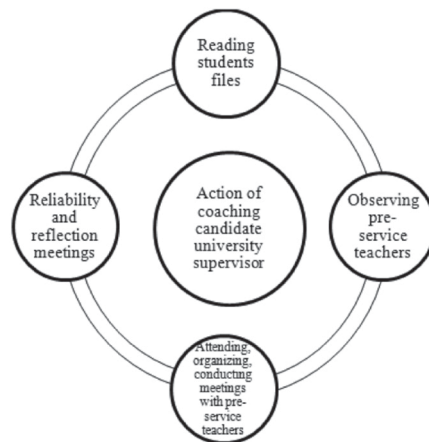


Figure 1.
The Teaching Practicum Cycle for Training the University Supervisor Candidate

Subtheme 1: File Reading

In accordance with the aims of the study, the university supervisor candidate was assigned with reading two pre-service teachers' files. As the Teaching Practicum Guideline explains, the candidate examined the documents to be included in the pre-service teachers' files, wrote feedback on them, and marked the results on the checklist. This process is summarized in Figure 2.

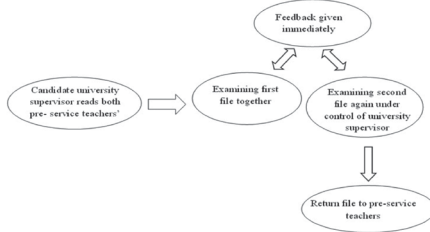


Figure 2.

Cycles of File Reading

How was the Process of File Reading Taught to the University Supervisor Candidate?

At the beginning of the file reading process, the university supervisor candidate was informed about how to read the files and he examined one file with the university supervisor. In this process he was informed about: (1) how to provide written feedback to pre-service teachers files, (2) how to provide oral feedback to pre-service teachers, (3) how pre-service teachers should be reinforced, and (4) how to complete the checklists. The samples of these steps were demonstrated on a file while reading it with the university supervisor. While providing feedback to the university supervisor candidate, the same process with the pre-service teachers' feedback sessions was performed. The university supervisor made certain sure to read the pre-service teachers' files weekly and to return them the same week. In this way, the university supervisor became a positive model for the university supervisor candidate.

Which Stages did the University Supervisor Candidate Pass and What were the Outcomes?

The file-reading process was informative, albeit difficult, duty for the university supervisor candidate to perform. During the first three weeks, the university supervisor reviewed and corrected the candidate's approvals and corrective feedback on the first file from the meetings. During this process, the university supervisor issued verbal feedback to the candidate and motivated him/her to write the missing points on the pre-service teacher's file. After the first few weeks, the

university supervisor candidate confessed that he had abstained from providing feedback and that he felt uncomfortable about the possibly of giving incorrect feedback; however, he later started to behave "more confidently." Hence, the university supervisor approved and expressed that they had more consensus on the files and the candidate read the file with "fewer missing points."

At the file evaluation meetings after the fourth week, the pre-service teachers' individualized behavioral intervention and social skill teaching plans were the main focus. Out of these, examining the Social Skill Teaching Plan took more time and the university supervisor candidate required more feedback in order to provide a proper evaluation of the program. At the third and fourth meetings, the candidate explained his trouble while reading the Social Skills Teaching Plan; the following statement is telling:

"I hesitated on the Social Skills Teaching Plan in the file. In my opinion, a person's competencies are quite important. For instance, I read the Individualized Behavioral Intervention Plan more easily ... but I could not perform well with the Social Skills Teaching Plans. I began to doubt [myself] and question whether [my evaluation] is correct."

Moreover, the candidate stated that the process helped him to overcome his own deficiencies.

How long did the File Reading Process Last?

At the reliability committee meetings, particularly during the program preparation weeks, it was often emphasized that the practicum process took a long time and a great deal of effort. Thus, beginning with the sixth week, since it was decided to determine the time allocated for file reading, observation, file evaluation, and meetings, each session was recorded. Accordingly, the time spent by the university supervisor for file reading totaled 112 class hours (one class hour is equivalent to 45 minutes). This time was determined by calculating the mean time for reading one pre-service teacher's file for the recorded weeks and by multiplying this mean by the number of pre-service teachers. The time for file reading during an academic term was then calculated by multiplying the obtained time by the practicum duration (14 weeks).

How long did File Reading Take for the University Supervisor Candidate?

According to the candidate's record, the time that the candidate spent reading these files independently totaled 23 class hours per term. Moreover, the time allocated for answering the pre-service teachers' questions,

providing technical support, and consulting, in which the candidate became a model to the pre-service teachers, totaled 620 minutes; that is, approximately 14 class hours over 10 weeks.

How much Time did the Examination of the Files by the Candidate and University Supervisor Take?

The examination of the files that the candidate read together with the university supervisor was one of the most important components of the study. The time allocated for this examination was approximately 10 class hours per term. For file reading cycle, the time that two supervisors worked together decreased as the accuracy of the candidate’s feedback increased and as the pre-service teachers fulfilled their requirements more accurately and with fewer mistakes. Before the third reliability committee meeting, the supervisors decreased the cycle of file reading. The new cycle is presented in Figure 3.

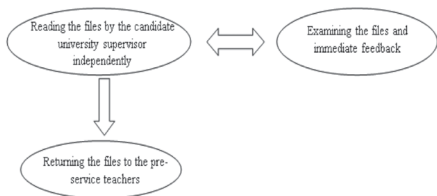


Figure 3.
New Cycle Followed Beginning from Fourth Week

Subtheme 2: Observations

The second component of the process in training the university supervisor candidate was the pre-service teachers’ observations and evaluation of these observations. During the teaching practicum, the university supervisor observed each of the nine pre-service teachers four times in a term, giving them marks after each observation. Each observation time took an average of two class hours to complete. Direct observation of the pre-service teachers, the evaluation of these observations, and providing the pre-service teachers with feedback all constitute an important part of the process for training the university supervisor candidate.

How were the Observations Conducted during the Teaching Practicum?

The observations were conducted without informing the pre-service teachers beforehand. During the observation, the university supervisor sat in the corner so that she could observe both the pre-service teacher and students easily in the class, while also taking short notes about the pre-service teacher’s

performance and the lesson. After the observation, the university supervisor scored the pre-service teachers’ performances using the “Application of Daily Lesson Plans and Scoring Guideline.” The pre-service teachers were also asked to evaluate themselves using the same guideline. At the post-observation sessions, the university supervisor discussed the pre-service teachers’ strengths and weaknesses with them, offering suggestions for their future performance.

How is the University Supervisor Candidate Involved in the Observations?

It was decided that the university supervisor candidate would participate in the direct observation and evaluation of the pre-service teachers’ performances. Thus, the candidate observed the pre-service teachers who were in the class on observation days (the observed pre-service teachers could be different from the ones whose files he had read). The observation cycle is illustrated in Figure 4.

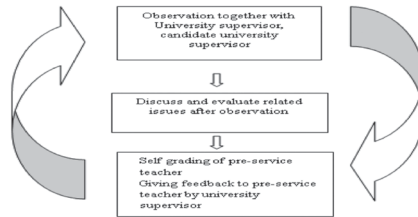


Figure 4.
Observation Cycle as Attended by the University Supervisor Candidate

How were the Observations Scored?

The university supervisor observed the lesson using the “Daily Lesson Plan Application and Scoring Guideline.” This guideline contains 20 items, each of which is scored from 0 to 5. If pre-service teachers perform well in all items (5 points for each item), they earn a score of 100. After the observations in which the university supervisor candidate participated, this guideline was scored by both the university supervisor and the candidate independently. After the observations in which the university supervisor candidate participated, this guideline was scored by both the university supervisor and the candidate independently. The items on which the university supervisor and candidate mostly agreed regarding the observations were items 5, 8, and 18; and those on which they agreed least regarding the observations were items 14 and 15.

How was the Feedback Process at the Post-observation Session Conducted? After the observations, the university supervisor gave feedback to both the university supervisor candidate and the pre-service teachers separately. While doing evaluations, the candidate's sole role was that of a listener at the beginning; however, during the following weeks he received the opportunity to explain his own opinions. During this feedback session for the candidate, techniques such as focusing first on the pre-service teachers' competencies and then focusing on the errors and/or missing points were demonstrated.

How much Time is Dedicated to the Observations? The component to which the practice instructor and the candidate practice instructor allocated the most time in this study was the communion process performed both during and after observations. The practice instructor allocated 69 class hours to observations and 63 class hours to the consultancy service for the students in the group. The candidate practice instructor also participated in the whole process related to the observations.

Subtheme 3: Meetings

Another important component of the teaching practicum process is the weekly meetings with the pre-service teachers. Since it was considered that this process would also be instructive for the university supervisor candidate, the candidate participated in all of these meetings. At the beginning, the candidate was an active listener (i.e., the one who shared personal opinions or knowledge appropriate to the context, when needed), and after the following weeks he became an instructor who lectured to complete the pre-service teachers' missing points. At the meetings, different agendas, such as the teaching practicum process, the emerged problems, solution suggestions, and lectures on the pre-service teachers' missing topics were discussed in consideration of the needs of the pre-service teachers. A total of 42 hours was allocated to the meetings throughout the study.

How was the Agenda of the Meeting Determined? The university supervisor and the candidate noted the issues with which the pre-service teachers mostly made mistakes and/or those which were missing. After these notes were classified and the cooperating teachers' opinions and suggestions were recorded, the agenda of the meeting was decided upon. The meetings held lasted approximately three hours and were conducted by the university supervisor

making use of methods like lecturing, discussion, question-answer, demonstration, and brain-storming. In conjunction with the university supervisor candidate's competencies, the basic philosophy and use of graduated guidance help, discrete trial teaching, incidental teaching, and methods such as matching, classification, and imitation teaching as well as activity charts in EIBIP were explained. The university supervisor candidate expressed his opinion that attending the practicum meetings as a lecturer made him feel "honored." Additionally, he stated that all of these helped him to make "important contributions," "to refresh his knowledge," and "to transfer his knowledge to others."

Cooperation with the Cooperating Teachers: In the candidate teachers' process of learning to teach—or in other words, the process of teaching practice—two key people hold positions of responsibility. One of these is the class teacher who coordinates with or who hosts and consults the practice teacher in his/her class, and the other is the practice instructor functioning as a bridge between the school in which the practice is carried out and the university, periodically visiting the candidate teachers and providing feedback regarding the applied methods and theories. The teaching practice requires a three-member relationship among the practice instructor, the practice class teacher who is coordinated with, and the candidate teacher (Cuenca, 2010) in which the pre-service teachers spend more time with the cooperating teachers in their practicums. Therefore, for the pre-service teachers, the cooperating teachers become more important than the university supervisors (Pellet, Stravye, & Pellet, 1999; Woods & Weasmer, 2003).

This being the reality, although the cooperating teachers are very important role models, job partners, and mentors (Ergenekon et al., 2008), it was realized and discussed in the reliability committee meetings that adequate efficiency could not be expected from the cooperating teachers during the teaching practicum. They were also asked to evaluate the pre-service teachers when the university supervisor did not observe using that guideline. Unfortunately, the cooperating teachers did not do this on time or in an appropriate manner. This problem was, in fact, brought to the agenda of the meetings at the department. To solve this problem, the cooperating teachers were paid for their contributions in the teaching practicum process. Although this payment was a satisfactory sum, the cooperating teachers again did not perform the expected duties.

When reasons for this were discussed at the reliability committee meetings, the researchers reached the conclusion that in spite of payment, the cooperating teachers still view work related to pre-service teachers as an “extra load.” Furthermore, it was observed that the cooperating teachers could not always guide the pre-service teachers effectively. Thus, it was considered that the cooperating teachers did not tend to update their knowledge, and those who did update their knowledge were still reluctant to perform new applications requiring greater effort. For these reasons, a number of limitations emerged in training the university supervisor candidates within the context of this study.

The Pre-service Teachers’ Opinions about the Teaching Practicum Process and Its Components

To determine the opinions of the pre-service teachers’ opinions in the group under investigation and about the teaching practicum process and its components, a form with nine open-ended questions were given, mostly emphasizing the issue of giving feedback for both file reading and observation processes. The pre-service teachers stated that they had benefited more from quick and frequent feedback. Furthermore, they pointed out that the only problem they encountered in the process was the stress they had experienced during the observations.

Two pre-service teachers mentioned the benefits that they had gained from the university supervisor candidate. One of the pre-service teachers in particular, whose files were read by the candidate, reported on the contribution of the process. The pre-service teacher underlined the fact that he could comprehend even small details when his files were examined, expressing the following: “Taking feedback from both instructors enables me to learn everything better and not to ignore the small but important details.” Furthermore, they explained that the university supervisor candidate contributed much to their preparation in the Social Skills Teaching and Individualized Behavioral Intervention Plans. Additionally, one pre-service teacher stated that as a result of the process, both his desire to perform research and his level of self-confidence increased: “Thanks to good feedback I received from my instructors, I prepared a qualified assignment and as a result, felt a desire to put this research to practice.”

The pre-service teachers generally pointed out that the most important disadvantages in the teaching

practicum process were the problems caused by the cooperating teachers as well as their shyness and anxiety at the beginning of the term.

Discussion

This study attempted to describe the process of training the university supervisor candidate who would conduct the teaching practicum and the cycle followed in this process. The action research design was preferred because it reveals both the operative and nonoperative aspects of the practice process and offers suggestions and solutions within the process. Thus, this research design enabled detailed discussion of the works at each level. Additionally, multiple data sources ensured the accuracy and trustworthiness of the data while also providing multiple benefits for the pre-service teachers and researchers.

In Turkey, a standard program is applied at the Teacher Training Program for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities. However, considering the fact that this is a four year-program, one-fourth of the program is reserved for the teaching practicum. In terms of ECTS credits, one-fifth of the credits required for graduation (22%) consist of the teaching practicum. The Teacher Training Program for Intellectual Disabilities at the Department of Special Education is the first in Turkey. The instructors of this department boast and defend the teaching practicum and objective evaluation criteria as the strengths of this program. Indeed, the teaching practicum programs are reviewed and updated every year in this department. In this respect, the process followed in this study revealed that the teaching practicum cycles work well. Likewise, in the literature, the study comparing special education and general education programs indicated that 84% of the examined programs contain an intense and widespread teaching practicum. Moreover, it was emphasized that the instructors of those programs heralded supervision and evaluation as the strengths of their programs (Brownell et al., 2005). When considered from this perspective, the findings obtained from the research are consistent with the existing data in the literature (Brownell et al., 2005; Haberman, 1983; Warger & Aldinger, 1984). Furthermore, the present study revealed that during the supervision process, which is among the strongest aspect of the program, the university supervisors’ roles and responsibilities demand a significant amount of both time and effort and that university supervisors spend more time than the amount specified in their course loads. In detail, the programs allot 13 class hours for the teaching practicum courses

for university supervisors. Thus, for the teaching practicum process, itself lasting 14 weeks in a term, a university supervisor allocates officially 182 class hours in a single term. These class hours are based on the university supervisors' other course-loads and responsibilities. However, in the present study, the findings indicated that a university supervisor spends 296 class hours for the teaching practicum process in a single term. Out of this total time, 112 class hours are allocated for file reading, 42 for weekly meetings, 69 for observation, and 63 for the supervision/consulting of students in the practicum group. These findings apparently underline the overload on the university supervisor during the teaching practicum process and injustice of financial and emotional compensation. This could therefore cause cases of low motivation, fatigue, and inadequate emotional and institutional support for pre-service teachers, all of which are, in fact, very common troubles in the teacher training process. The findings from both the pre-service teachers' opinions and the discussions of the reliability committee meetings showed that the cooperating teachers at school do not fulfill their roles and responsibilities appropriately, and instead see them as "extra workload." This situation also increases the load of the university supervisor during the process.

In this study, the conscious blending of theoretical information and practice as well as their presentation to pre-service teachers and university supervisor candidates requires a significant amount of time and effort. In the literature, it is agreed that the conscious blending of theoretical information with practice is one of the important features of effective teacher training (Brownell et al., 2005). In this study, the university supervisor became a model to both the pre-service teachers and to the university supervisor candidate in integrating theoretical information into practice. Additionally, she allocated considerable time to discuss important issues, providing numerous opportunities to reflect on what they had learned in the practicum environment. The meaning comes from practice consultancy to the candidate teachers is active participation in the teaching-learning process. The practice instructor should have profound knowledge and experience in the theories of development and learning as well as teaching. To only visit candidate teachers as they attempt to gain practice experience in a school is not enough to foster the systematic application of knowledge and skills to find solutions for educational problems in the class (Morris 1980). In the action cycle, the university supervisor candidate gains the skills of the teaching practicum process

along with file reading and lesson observations as well as arranging, conducting, and participating in the meetings. Thanks to these skills, the candidate improves his/her role and responsibility in the field of teaching, consultancy, assessment, coordination and reporting the process (Borko & Mayfield, 1995; Krueger & Joy, 1991; Morris, 1980; Nerenz, 2006). Additionally, the candidate was provided the opportunity to comprehend the significance of reliability committee meetings for qualitative studies and data collection within the context of the research processes. After the study was completed, the candidate expressed that his self-confidence level was increased and that he could perform the teaching practicum courses on his own.

The changes in the cycle made the process dynamic. Such dynamism contributed to the professional development of both the university supervisor and that of the candidate. Furthermore, the candidate gained the competency to fulfill the duties within the practicum process. Thanks to this competency, it is hoped that both he and the pre-service teachers would not lose time with trial and error.

Conclusion and Suggestions

As a result, it is hoped that this study may serve as a road map, especially for newly opened departments, teachers and instructors who work, or will work with students with mental retardation. Considering the limited amount of research available on the training of special education teachers, this study could serve as a pioneering guide for future studies. At the same time, this study is important because it reports the process of training special education teachers in Turkey on the basis of data. It is hoped that this well-planned and carefully conducted process will improve the quality of education presented to children with special needs. In a similar vein, Feng and Sass (2013) emphasized that the processes and results of teacher training studies would increase the quality of education for students with disabilities. One of the most significant results of the current study is that instructors who plan to work with experienced practice instructors will be provided with a certain systematic process based on data which will contribute to training more highly qualified candidate teachers. As a real-life example moreover, after the completion of this study, such a program was implemented in the institution in which the current study was performed.

Suggestions for Teaching Practicums

1. University supervisors and cooperating teachers for special education teaching practicums may be trained following the processes implemented in this study.
2. Cooperating teachers could participate more actively in the process of the special education teaching practicums.

Suggestions for Further Studies

1. The special education teaching practicum could be evaluated considering all stakeholders' opinions.
2. Studies that evaluate the contribution of the special education teaching practicum to university supervisors, candidates and pre-service teachers, and children with special needs could be designed.
3. This study was undertaken with the university supervisor candidate in one environment. Thus, similar studies could be conducted in different contexts using different research methods.
4. The studies could enable the active involvement of cooperating teachers in the practicum process that is to be designed and conducted.

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