

*Full Length Research Paper*

# Investigating the opinions of physical education teacher candidates on the school experience course

Mehmet Gullu\* and Cenk Temel

School of Physical Education and Sport, Inonu University, Turkey.

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The purpose of this study is to examine the opinions of physical education teacher candidates on the school experience course. The qualitative case study design was adopted for this study. The research group was composed of 67 teacher candidates. A semi-structured questionnaire was used in the study. The collected questionnaires were analyzed with Content Analysis Method. The concepts were evaluated in four main themes. The opinions of the candidates about the application were investigated in the first theme, the opinions of the candidates about the schools of practice were investigated in the second theme, the opinions of candidates about the activities in the school experience course were investigated in the third theme, and the opinions of the candidates about the practice instructor were investigated in the fourth theme. In conclusion, the study revealed that the opinions of the teacher candidates on school experience course were generally positive; practice teachers with strong personal relations and high professional experience increased the course success; the arrival of practice teachers in courses before prior preparation had a negative impact on candidates; and the instructor in charge of teaching the school experience course should be prepared excellently, particularly before the course, and monitor the implementation.

**Key words:** School experience course, physical education teacher candidate, qualitative data analysis.

## INTRODUCTION

Probing undergraduate programs of teacher training institutions can reveal that the education they receive is divided into categories such as general culture, specialized content knowledge, and professional knowledge. In this respect, the aim is to train teachers so that they acquire the qualities every teacher should possess by means of various teaching environments. One of the courses that can be evaluated within the

realm of professional knowledge in the training process in question is the group of courses in the field of school experience. In the curricula of the institutions training physical education teachers, this course is arranged as "School Experience I" in the second term; "School Experience II" in the seventh term; and Teaching Practice in the eighth term of teacher training programs (Council of Higher Education [CoHE], 1998). The purpose of these

\*Corresponding author. E-mail: mehmet.gullu@inonu.edu.tr.

courses is to enable the teacher candidates to observe the general cultural knowledge, specialized field knowledge and skills, the teaching knowledge and skills they acquire in relation to the teaching profession in actual education and training institutions, and to provide the students with the opportunity to use them, which can collectively enhance their experiences related to the teaching profession in actual environments. The School Experience course is a course that gives students a chance to become familiar with the school organization and management as well as the daily life in schools, probe into teaching environments, participate in extra-curricular activities, observe experienced teachers on duty, work with students individually and in small groups, and acquire short-term teaching experiences; and ensures that students perceive and adopt the teaching profession correctly (The Ministry of National Education [MoNE], 1998). Moreover, according to Kudu et al. (2006, as cited in Becit et al., 2009)), the School Experience course supports teacher candidates to become familiar with the school climate, comprehend the school structure, become familiar with school units, and acquire the knowledge and skills required by the teaching profession by mostly focusing on observation. Teacher candidates are expected to have acquired the following qualities upon the completion of the School Experience Course (CoHE, 1998, pp. 33-35):

1. *Familiarity with the teaching process and the organization of a school with a systematic approach.*
2. *Knowledge on school management, regular tasks performed in a school, and school facilities.*
3. *Ability to recognize course activities via observation.*
4. *Ability to plan and implement possible short-term activities in class.*
5. *Ability to recognize individual differences among students in terms of learning and development.*
6. *Acquire skills required to work effectively in a school in coherence with other teachers."*

Another course that improves the professional skills of teacher candidates is "Teaching Practice." In the "Faculty-School Collaboration" published by the Council of Higher Education (CoHE 1998, p. 35), the "Teaching Practice" course is defined as: "a course based on observation and consultation offered in order to enable teacher candidates to acquire a general familiarity with the school where they will practice, and with the students, the program, and the teachers." A look at the content of both courses reveals the aim of enhancing the professional experiences of teacher candidates. Because pre-service training, which can be defined as professional socialization, is important in terms of the cultural adaptation of teacher candidates to the school and the surrounding environment, professional socialization, and organizational socialization (McMahon and MacPhail, 2007). Christenson and Barney (2011) underline that

school experience enables students experience the learning atmosphere in emotional and physical terms with the field knowledge, course plan, educational standards of the country, teaching options, class management, teaching styles, teaching effectiveness, and learning by practicing and experiencing. Dodds (1989, as cited in O'Sullivan and Tsangaridou, 1992) states with a similar assessment, that field experience has an important impact on the perception and development of teacher candidates in relation to teaching. On the other hand, it is necessary to emphasize that school experience practices creates anxiety, to a certain extent, for teacher candidates, which allows them to improve their knowledge (Mawer, 1995). Depending on examining the majority of the researches about teacher candidates, it was seen to be related to their learning about diversity, social justice and themselves (Baldwin et al., 2007), their experiment about disabled students (Gill-Gomez et al., 2015), their attitudes about ethnic minority families (Amatea et al., 2012), their behavior relevant to digital games (Sardone and Devlin-Scherer, 2010) and their learning levels (Hildenbrand and Schultz, 2015). According to the results of the research conducted on the school experience course, teacher candidates find school experience and teaching practice courses beneficial, and have the chance to assess actual school environments as a result of the practices performed in the framework of these courses (Herguner et al., 2002; Guven, 2004; Isikoglu et al., 2007; Sag, 2008; Ozmen, 2008; Becit et al., 2009; Kavas, Buyukgoze and Bugay, 2009; Ozcelik, 2012; Temel et al., 2016). Taking this as a point of departure, the purpose of this study is to examine the opinions of junior students studying in the department of physical and sports education on school experience course practices, the problems they face, their proposals, and their thoughts on the course.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

A case study design was adopted for this study as a qualitative research method (Merriam, 2009; Simons, 2009). The research group was composed according to the convenience sampling method (Simsek and Yildirim, 2011). The research group comprised of 84 students in total, 44 from daytime education and 40 from double-shift education, who signed "the informed consent form" and received school experience course in the department of Physical Education and Sports Teaching at Inonu University during the 2011/2012 Academic Year. These students practiced for 13 weeks (13 activities), four hours weekly (52h in total) in groups of seven in five different high schools with 12 physical education teachers (practice teachers), and attended one course per hour a week (13 h in total) of a theoretical course given by the responsible instructor. Upon the completion of the school experience course, the students were given "a semi-structured questionnaire". The Questionnaire consisted of 12 open-ended questions that 8 questions were the positive and negative opinions of teacher candidates about the practice teacher, practice school, instructor and school experiment course activates; and 4 questions were about the proposal of the

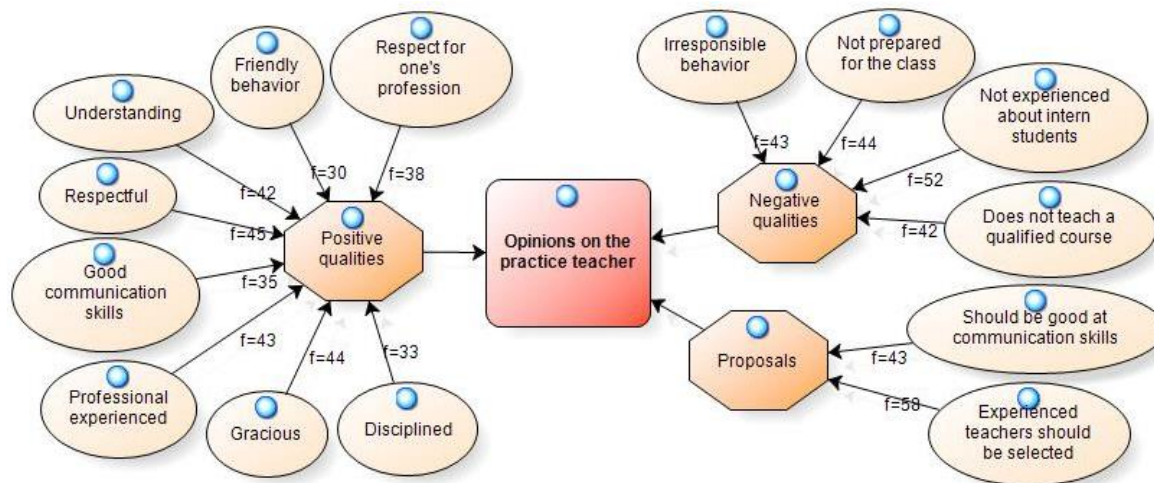


Figure 1. Opinions of the students about the practice teacher.

teacher candidates. Questionnaires that were completed electronically by 67 students and sent by e-mail were also taken into consideration. The questionnaires obtained were uploaded to Nvivo 9.00 Package Software Program; and a content analysis was performed (Silverman, 2009). The concepts obtained in the scope of the study were categorized under four main topics in a meaningful relationship. For the reliability of the research data, another independent researcher was requested to perform the content analysis on the same raw data. Cohen's Kappa coefficient was analyzed by the harmony between the two analyses results and was found to be 0.71. According to Landis and Koch (1977), Cohen Kappa Coefficient between 0.61 to 0.80 shows substantial agreement.

## RESULTS

In this chapter, the concepts categorized under four main themes are presented in figures with their frequencies. The opinions of the students about their practice teacher covered in the first theme of the research can be seen in Figure 1. In this theme, the opinions of the students on their practice teachers were investigated in three sub-dimensions. In the first sub-dimension, the students stated that the positive qualities they observed in their practice teachers were: friendly behavior (f=30), professional experience (f=43), respectful (f=45), good communication skills (f=35), respectful for one's profession (f=38), disciplined (f=33), understanding (f=42), and gracious (f=44). In the second sub-dimension, the students stated that the negative qualities they observed in their practice teachers were: not prepared for the class (f=44), not experienced about intern students (f=52), irresponsible behavior (f=43), and does not teach a qualified physical education course (f=42). Furthermore, students suggest that practice teachers should be selected from among those that are experienced about

intern students (f=58) and that have good communication skills (f=43).

The opinions of the students about the practice school covered in the second theme of the research can be seen in Figure 2. In this theme, the opinions of the students about their practice school were investigated in three sub-dimensions. In the first sub-dimension, students stated that the number of the classrooms in practice schools was high (f=39), the school facilities and opportunities were sufficient (f=43), and the school was in a central location (f=43) resulting in a positive assessment. In the second sub-dimension, negative qualities of practice schools were stated as the transportation problem (f=52), too much noise around the school (f=34), the high number of students in classes (f=38), overlapping physical education courses, (f=29), lack of a sports hall (f=46) and the reluctance of students during the courses (f=57). In the third sub-dimension, they proposed that practice schools should be selected from among those that had successful school teams (f=43), that had a sports hall (f=53), that had lower number of students in classes (f=46), a school management that supported athletics (f=33), active in sports organizations (f=37), a central location that was easily accessible (f=58), and that was disciplined (f=43).

The opinions of the students about the School Experience course covered in the third theme of the research can be seen in Figure 3. In this theme, the opinions of the students about the school experience course were investigated in four sub-dimensions. In the first sub-dimension, the students stated thanks to this course, they experienced an actual school atmosphere (f=56), learned about the official documents related to the physical education courses (f=39), acquired professional development and experience (f=64), and had the

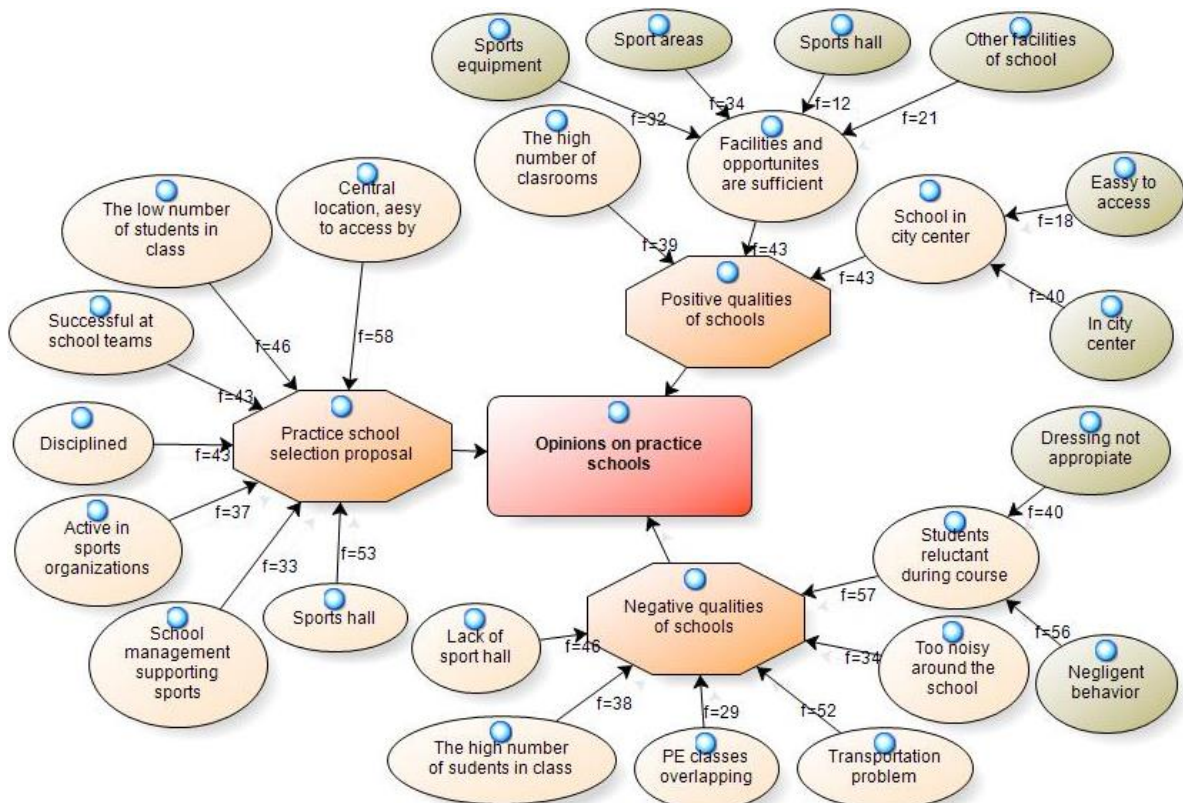


Figure 2. Opinions of the students about the practice school.

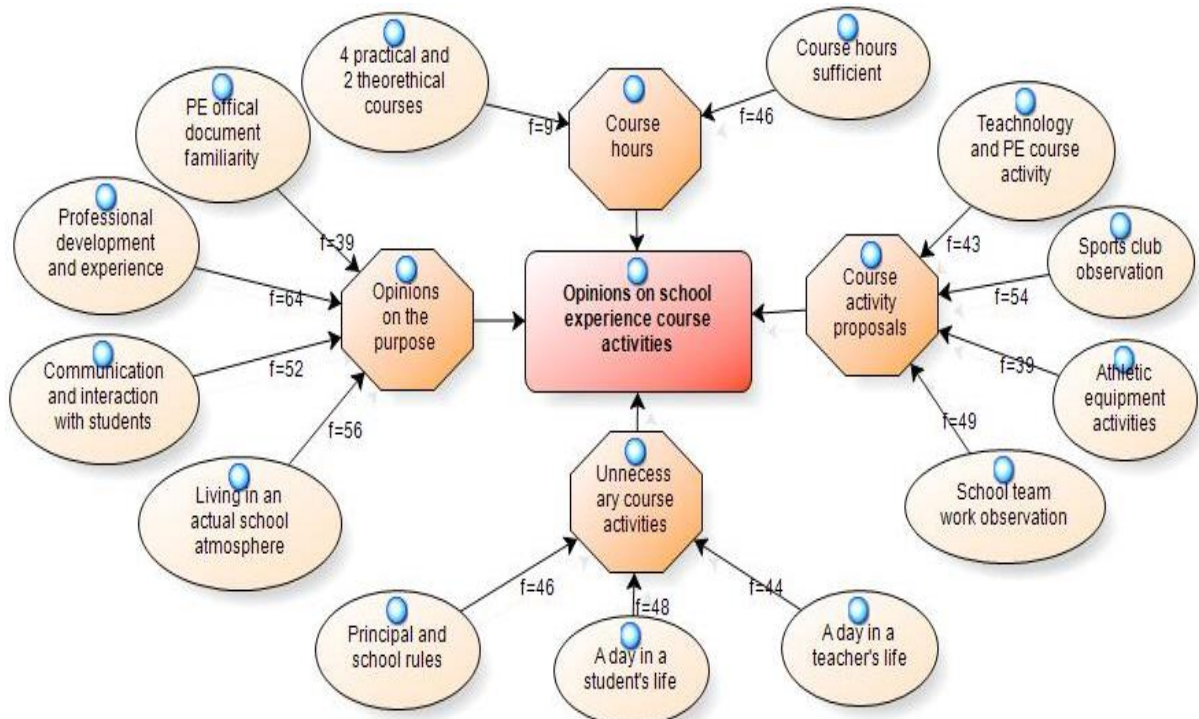


Figure 3. Opinions of the students about school experience course activities.

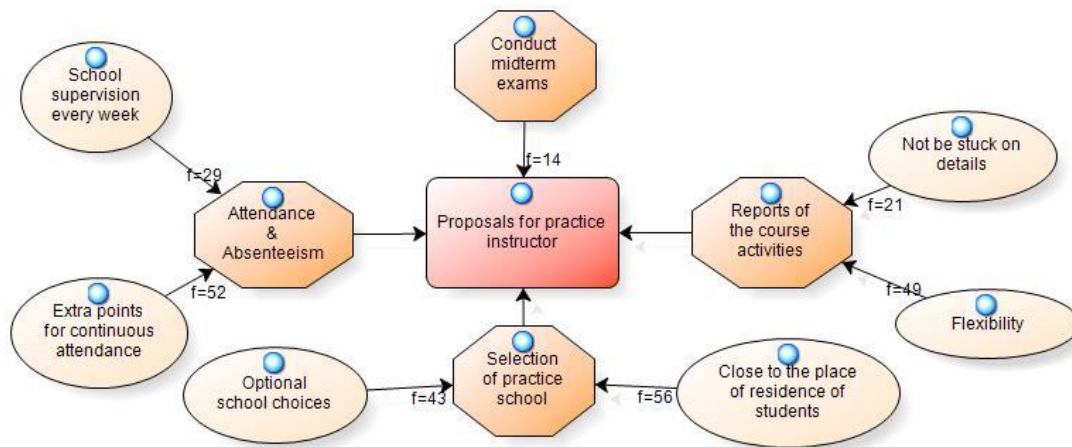


Figure 4. Opinions of the students about the practice instructor.

opportunity to interact and communicate with high school students (f=52). In the second sub-dimension, the students thought that it was unnecessary to have 'a day in a student's life' (f=48), 'school principal and school rules' (f=46), and 'a day in a teachers life' (f=44) activities. In the third sub-dimension, students thought that the course hours were sufficient (f=46), and proposed the course be implemented in 4h for practice and 2h for theoretical education (f=9). In the fourth sub-dimension, students proposed new course activities such as sports equipment activity (f=39), technology and physical education course activity (f=43), sports club observation activity (f=54), and school team work observation activity (f=49).

The opinions of the students about practice instructors covered in the fourth theme of the research can be seen in Figure 4. In this theme, the opinions of the students about practice instructors were investigated in four sub-dimensions. In the first sub-dimension, students proposed that instructors should grant extra points to students with continuous attendance (f=52), and conduct school supervision every week (f=29). In the second sub-dimension, students proposed that the instructor should offer flexibility in activity reports (f=49), and not be stuck on details (f=21). In the third sub-dimension, it was proposed that the practice schools that were close to the places of residence of the students should be preferred (f=56), and the selection of the practice schools should be optional (f=43). In the fourth sub-dimension, a written midterm examination was proposed (f=14) by the students.

## DISCUSSION

The combined assessment of the conclusion of all

findings investigated within the framework of the research study reveals that the opinions about physical education teacher candidates on school experience courses are generally positive. This result supports the findings of previous studies conducted on this subject (Herguner et al., 2002; Guven, 2004; Sag, 2008; Ozmen, 2008; Becit et al., 2009; Ozcelik, 2012). In the study they conducted on the course perception levels of physical education teacher candidates regarding the school experience course, Herguner et al. (2002) concluded that the school experience course was important for the educational life of the students, and it was important for the teaching profession and would have an additional positive impact on their future educational life and professional knowledge. The opinions of the students on practice instructors covered in the first sub-dimension of the study were investigated in three sub-dimensions; which are positive qualities, negative qualities, and proposals. The most positive qualities physical education teacher candidates observed in their practice instructors were being respectful and having professional experience. The most negative quality was found to be coming to the class without preparation. Teaching is one of the professions with the highest level of personal relations. In particular, physical education teaching requires the teacher to have the utmost level of affective skills due to the characteristics of the course. In this respect, it is remarkable that teacher candidates possess the most positive qualities of physical education teachers with concepts like respect and graciousness, which give prominence to personal relations. Furthermore, the positive opinion of the students on the professional experience of practice teachers, demonstrates that students are able to benefit from these qualities. This finding supports the research findings revealed by Becit

et al. (2009).

On the other hand, the reverse assessment of this conclusion reveals that candidates find themselves inexperienced. Bilgin et al. (2008), demonstrated that teacher candidates studying in various departments, visual arts students in particular, find themselves competent or partially competent. The conclusion stating that teachers come to the class without prior preparation, which was stated as the most negative quality of the practice teachers, is highly striking; whereas, the relevant legislation says; "*Preparing prior to educational activities and courses is legally obligatory and pedagogically necessary.*" (MoNE, 2003, p. 440). Students stated the transportation problem, lack of a sports hall, and crowded class sizes are among the negative qualities of practice schools, and proposed that practice schools should be chosen from schools that have a central location and are easily accessible. This result suggests that students do not sufficiently perceive the state of schools in Turkey and the reality of the teaching profession. The state of schools regarding the physical education course is not good at all. Physical education course was taught in the school garden due to lack of sports hall as stated by 77.1% of physical education teachers (Ozsaker, 2001). Also, there was lack of sports equipment as stated by 59.1% of them (Tasmektepligil et al., 2006). Hoskilimci (2011) pointed out that 46.6% of physical education teachers stated there were no dressing-rooms in public schools. According to official statistical data, the average number of the students per classroom consisted of 25 students in primary and middle schools, and 23 students in secondary schools (MoNE, 2016). But students per classroom in city center were more than this data. Students stated among the most positive opinions that the activities enabled them to experience the real school atmosphere of the course, as well as to acquire professional development and experience. This is because there are various aspects to pedagogical content knowledge in physical education teacher training (Ingersoll et al., 2014), many of which can be acquired via actual course practices. School environments, which are defined by Barney et al. (2012) as "*the real world,*" are supportive of the students' opinions. Since physical education courses in particular enable students to experience all aspects of this *real world*, it might be felt as more realistic by teacher candidates. The most negative opinion teacher candidates stated regarding school experience course activities was about the activity called '*a day in a student's life*'. The cause of this finding may be practical inconvenience rather than the content of the activity.

In the last theme investigated within the framework of the study, namely the proposals for the instructors, students proposed that the instructors should perform school supervision every week; practice schools should be chosen among schools that are close to the place of

residence of students; selection of practice schools should be optional; extra points should be granted to students with continuous attendance in the school experience course; and flexibility should be allowed in activity reports. However, in the study conducted by Kavas-Buyukgoze and Bugay (2009), students proposed that the number of practical courses in the field should be increased; course contents should be in harmony with today's state of affairs; and the number of optional courses needed to be increased. On the whole, some of these proposals are structural, some are related to the program and some are related to practice. For this reason, instructors responsible for practice should be aware of all problems and should focus on the problems they can solve. Barney (2005) stated that instructors should be prepared adequately for educational activities before school practices, which would boost the practice of the students. In conclusion, it was revealed that the opinions of physical education teacher candidates on the school experience course were generally positive; practice teachers that had strong personal relations and professional experience elevated the success of the course; the arrival of the practice teacher at the classes without prior preparation had negative impacts on students; and the instructor responsible for the school experience course should be prepared adequately before the courses, and monitor the practice.

### Conflict of interest

The author has not declared any conflict of interest.

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