

Developing Teaching Skills through the School Practicum in Turkey: A Metasynthesis Study

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Abstract

Using a metasynthesis approach, this study examined general teaching skills in previous studies on school practicum. The results and suggestions from 53 qualitative primary research studies that focused on school practicum in Turkey were reviewed. Data were collected using document analysis and content analysis using the NVivo10 programme. The results revealed that existing studies on practicum processes have focused mainly on pre-service teacher problems, such as classroom management, teaching management and the transformation of theoretical knowledge to practice; however, there was significantly less discussion on the development of teaching skills. There was also a lack of focus on the development of pre-service teaching skills, mentor interactions, integration of content and pedagogical knowledge and content organization and presentation. It was concluded that these areas require more detailed research.

Keywords: practicum, pre-service teacher education, teaching skills, content organization skills

1. Introduction

In pre-service teacher education, teaching skills are acquired through linking theory and practice in real classroom environments. Richardson-Koehler (1988) emphasized the importance of pre-service teachers gaining teaching experience by associating theory and practice (as cited in Kauffman 1992). Therefore, the school practicum is an important part of pre-service teacher education as it provides the pre-service teacher with the opportunity to apply teaching and learning knowledge and skills in real classroom environments (Qazi et al. 2012). However, it has been found in research on the school practicum that there is a significant gap between theory and practice in pre-service teacher education (Allen & Wright 2014; Korthagen & Kessels 1999; Tok 2010; van Velzen et al. 2012). Scheeler (2008) argued that pre-service teacher education institutions generally prepared teacher education students for ideal teaching conditions; thus, even though pre-service teachers learn effective teaching skills, they are often unable to use these in real classroom settings. Pre-service teaching research has shown concern for the apparent lack of connection between theory and practice and has raised questions as to the best way to integrate theory and practice and the ideal organization of realistic teaching environments (Oonk 2009).

Research has found that the school practicum is valuable for development of teaching skills for the teacher education students. Graham (2005) found that pre-service teachers' beliefs, views, knowledge and skills regarding assessment and planning were best developed in real classroom settings with the guidance of a mentor. In a study by Choy et al. (2013), it was found that beginning teachers' planning and classroom management skills and teaching strategies increased significantly in the first year of pre-service education. Similarly, in studies in Turkey, it was found that the school practicum increased in-class teaching skills, self-efficacy, and developed positive attitudes to teaching and the teaching profession (Koc 2012; Ozder et al. 2014). Many studies have investigated the development of teaching skills using micro teaching techniques, which were found to be effective (Bakir 2014; Kucukoglu et al. 2012; Saban & Coklar 2013; Sen 2010).

With this background, to fully understand the general pattern as to how teaching skills can develop through the school practicum, an analysis of previous studies completed on school practicum is important. However, similar literature investigations with related expectations have been conducted. A systematic research review of school practicum was conducted by Lawson et al. (2015), in which problems and research gaps were identified. Kasapoglu (2015)

systematically reviewed Turkish school experience and teaching practice studies from 2000 to 2010, but this analysis did not include studies on teaching skills. A systematic research review regarding the transfer of teaching skills to the real classroom environment was done by Scheeler (2008), from which four factors likely to support the sustainability of teaching skills were identified: using immediate feedback to promote efficient and effective acquisition of new skills, educating for mastery of specific teaching skills, programming for generalization and providing performance feedback in the classroom environment. Scheeler found that, even if pre-service teachers learn effective teaching skills, they often have problems generalizing or transferring the skills to a real classroom environment. There has not yet, however, been a systematic study conducted in Turkey that summarizes and examines current empirical studies as to the contribution of the school practicum on the development of teaching skills. A study of this nature can highlight possible research gaps, as well as consolidate the findings on possible teaching skill gaps or problems with the school practicum. The aim of this study, therefore, is to use a metasynthesis approach to examine the development of general teaching skills in school practicum studies.

In this study, the teaching skills considered to be in the scope of the teacher competencies recognized by the faculty-school partnership model were: content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, learning-teaching process (planning and teaching process), classroom management, communication, assessment and recording and other professional competencies (Koc et al. 1998). Consistent with the aim of this study, the following research questions were posed:

1. What is theoretical basis used in the Turkish studies?
2. What are the teaching skills identified and what teaching developments were noted?
3. What suggestions are given for the development of teaching skills?

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

This was a metasynthesis research. Metasynthesis is an approach in which findings from existing qualitative studies are integrated using qualitative methods (Savin-Baden & Major 2010). The aim of metasynthesis is to make sense of concepts, categories or themes that have recurred in a series of studies so as to develop a comprehensive picture of the findings (Savin-Baden & Major 2010). Data were collected using document analysis techniques.

2.2 Data Sources

Qualitative studies that focused directly on the school practicum in Turkey were selected. The data were gathered through database searches conducted on *Cukurova University library*, the *Academic Social Sciences Index (ASOS)*, the *Arastirmax-Science Publication Index*, *ULAKBIM* and *Google Scholar*. The reference list in each relevant research article was examined for additional sources. The following key words were used in the search query: teaching practicum, school experience, teaching skills and teacher competencies. During the analysis process, articles were selected based on the following criteria:

1. Focus on school practicum in pre-service teacher education in Turkey
2. Empirical studies conducted using qualitative methods and data collection tools
3. Publication in a refereed journal (national and international)
4. Results, discussion, and suggestions regarding teaching skills

Selected articles were examined independently by two researchers to determine adherence to the selection criteria and then checked using the 'paper assessment form' prepared by each researcher. At the end of this assessment scoring, reliability was calculated to be 100%. Finally, 101 quantitative and qualitative papers were selected, of which 53 qualitative studies complied with the selection criteria. Publication dates were restricted to between January 2003 and December 2014. The distribution of the analyzed studies in terms of aim, participants, type of qualitative research and data collection tools is shown in Tables 1, 2, and 3.

As seen in Table 1, 34 of the studies (64.15%) were conducted to obtain perceptions and opinions regarding school practicum experiences (the benefit of the practicum, encountered problems, and suggestions) and 13 of the studies (24.53%) were conducted to identify perceptions and opinions regarding teacher competencies in the school practicum. Three (5.66%) other studies were conducted to obtain opinions regarding cooperation between stakeholders two (3.77%) in the effect of the school practicum on forming bonds between theory and practice and one (1.89%) in and the perceptions of pre-service teachers related to teacher and student roles in the school practicum.

Table 1. Frequencies and percentage of primary research studies according to the aims

Aim of Studies	f	%
Obtaining opinions and perceptions regarding school practicum experiences (The benefits of practice, encountered problems and suggestions)	34	64.15
Obtaining opinions and perceptions regarding teacher competencies in school practicum	13	24.53
Obtaining opinions regarding cooperation between stakeholders in school practicum	3	5.66
The effect of the school practicum on forming bonds between theory and practice	2	3.77
The perceptions of pre-service teachers regarding teacher and student roles in the school practicum	1	1.89
Total	53	100

Table 2. Frequencies and percentage of primary research studies based on participant type

Participants	f	%	Studies
Pre-service teachers in various teacher education programs (German, physical education, science, elementary mathematics, pre-school, special education mental disability, elementary education, social studies, Turkish language teaching)	39	73.58	Akgun, Yildiz and Canbulat, 2003; Altintas and Gorgen, 2014; Becit, Kurt and Kabakci, 2009; Cetintas and Genc, 2005; Cicek and Ince, 2005; Ozden and Camli, 2011; Ekiz, 2006; Eraslan, 2008; Eraslan, 2009; Ergenekon, Ozen and Batu, 2008; Guven, 2004; Kab and Yilmaz, 2013; Kana, 2014; Koc and Yildiz, 2012; Ozen, Ergenekon and Batu, 2009; Saracaloglu, Yilmaz, Cogmen and Sahin, 2011; Simsek, 2013; Tasdere, 2014; Topkaya, Tokcan and Kara, 2012; Yapici and Yapici, 2004; Yigit and Alev, 2007; Yurdatapan, 2010; Basturk, 2009; Ozdemir and Canakci, 2005; Paker, 2008; Sonmez and Can, 2010; Tok, 2010; Yigit and Alev, 2005; Kavas and Bugay, 2009; Bekiroglu, Kahveci, Irez, Seker and Cakir, 2010; Kilinc, 2014; Arikan, 2009; Tepeli and Caner, 2014; Duman, 2013; Arslan, 2014; Yilmaz, 2006; Karaca and Aral, 2011; Basturk, 2010; Yesilyurt and Semerci, 2012
Mentor teacher	3	5.66	Akpinar, ColakandYigit, 2012; Yesilyurt and Semerci, 2011; Cakir, Bekiroglu, Irez, Kahveci and Seker, 2010
Pre-service teachers, supervisor,mentor teacher and principals	2	3.77	Kocadere and Askar, 2013; Unver, 2003
Mentor teacher and principals	2	3.77	Alkan, Simsek and Erdem, 2013; Simsek, Alkan and Erdem, 2013;
Pre-service teachers, mentor-teacher and principals	1	1.89	Nayir and Cinkir, 2014
Mentor-teacher and supervisor,	1	1.89	Arslantas andYildiz, 2013
Pre-service teachers and mentor teacher	1	1.89	Saritas, 2007
Pre-service teachers, mentor teacher and supervisor,	1	1.89	Unver and Kursunlu, 2014
Pre-service teachers and supervisor,	1	1.89	Dursun and Kuzu, 2008
Practice coordinators, principals and mentor teachers	1	1.89	Goktas and Sad, 2014
Pre-service teachers, mentor teacher, supervisor and coordinators	1	1.89	Secer, Celikoz and Kayili, 2010
Total	53	100	

As seen in Table 2, 39 of the reviewed papers (73.58%) were conducted on pre-service teachers in a range of teacher education programs (German, physical education, science, elementary mathematics, pre-school, special education mental disability, elementary education, social studies, Turkish language teaching). Other studies were conducted with the focus on supervisors, mentor teachers, principals and coordinators and primary students.

From Table 3, 31 of the studies (58.49%) did not mention a research type, 12 (22.64%) were case studies, four (7.55%) were descriptive, three (5.66%) were phenomenologic, two (3.77%) conducted qualitative research and one (1.89%) was action research. In 33 of the studies (62.26%), the sampling type was not indicated. In other studies, purposive sampling seven (13.20%), convenience sampling four (7.55%), typical case sampling three (5.66%), simple random sampling three (5.66%), maximum variety one (1.89%), snowball-chain sampling one (1.89%) and critical sampling one (1.89%) were used. Sample sizes varied with 11 studies having between one and 15 participants, 15 between 16 and 30, seven between 31 and 45, four between 46 and 60, three between 61–75 and two between 76 and 90. Eleven studies had 115 participants and over. Data collection tools also varied across studies, with 29 (54.72%) using an interview form, 11 (20.76%) using open-ended question forms, five (9.43%) based on documentation, five (9.43%) using observation forms and three (5.66%) using open- and closed-ended question forms.

Table 3. Frequencies and percentage of primary research studies according to research type, sampling type, sampling size and data collection tools

Variables of Method	Sub dimensions	f	%
Research types*	Type not mentioned	31	58.49
	Case study	12	22.64
	Descriptive	4	7.55
	Phenomenologic	3	5.66
	Qualitative research*	2	3.77
	Action research	1	1.89
	Total	53	100
Sampling types*	Not mentioned	33	62.26
	Purposive sampling*	7	13.20
	Convenience sampling	4	7.55
	Typical case sampling	3	5.66
	Simple random sampling*	3	5.66
	Maximum variation	1	1.89
	Snowball-chain	1	1.89
	Critical sampling	1	1.89
	Total	53	100
Sampling size	1-15	11	20.76
	16-30	15	28.30
	31-45	7	13.20
	46-60	4	7.55
	61-75-	3	5.66
	76-90	2	3.77
	115-...	11	20.76
	Total	53	100
Data collection tools	Interview form	29	54.72
	Open ended question	11	20.76
	Documents (daily and activities)	5	9.43
	Observation	5	9.43
	Open and close ended question	3	5.66
	Total	53	100

* In this study, during the classification of the sub dimensions of the variables for the research type and sampling type, in the 'method' part, the terminology mentioned by the respective authors was taken directly.

2.3 Analysis Procedure

Content analysis of the data was conducted using the NVivo 10 package program. First, each of the reviewed studies was coded P1 (Practice 1) or P2 (Practice 2). Content analysis was done using open coding and axes coding, as in Strauss and Corbin (1990). The studies were analysed in terms of the theoretical basis, the results-discussions and the teaching skill suggestions/recommendations given. Subcategories were also identified. Main themes were then generated after all codes and sub categories had been established.

The data were coded separately by two researchers, from which 237 codes were identified. To examine consistency between the two coders' analyses, a meeting was held and differences in only five codes were found. These differences were resolved and the inter-coder reliability rate between the two codings was calculated using the reliability formula (Agreement / agreement + disagreement X 100) suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994). The inter-coder reliability score was $(237/237 + 5 \times 100) = 97\%$. It was also observed that the inter-rater reliability was high. In conceptualizing the codes and categories, the theoretical basis was also clarified. Finally, the frequency and percentage of the themes and codes were calculated. The findings were presented in model and tabular form.

3. Findings

In this section, we discuss the findings of the study in reference to the research questions.

3.1 What was The Theoretical Basis in the Turkish Studies?

The findings regarding the theories or models are presented in Figure 1.

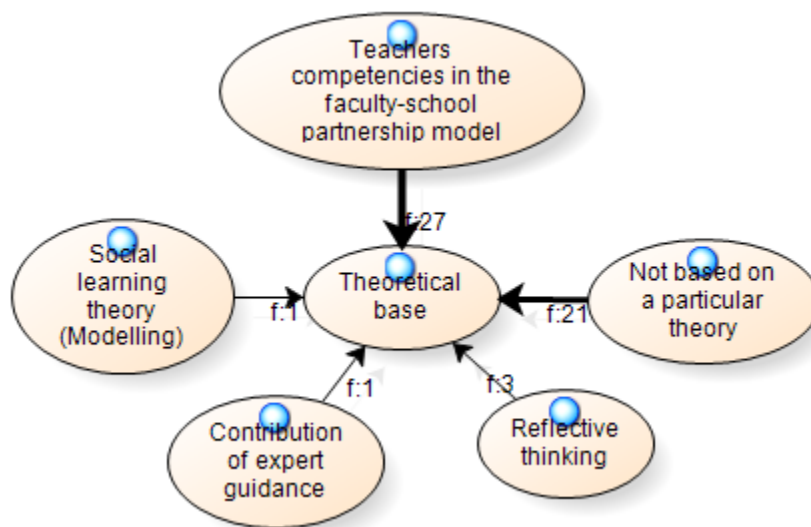


Figure 1. Themes regarding theoretical basis in the analyzed studies

As illustrated in Figure 1, 27 of the studies analyzed faculty-school partnerships, of which three focused on reflective thinking in teaching practice. Learning teacher roles (f:1) in relation to social learning theory and the contribution of expert guidance (f:1) was the basis in only one study. In 21 studies, no specific theoretical model was employed; however, the importance of teaching practice and the factors that affect the school experience were mentioned.

3.2 What are the Teaching Skills Identified and What Teaching Developments Were Noted?

The findings regarding the results in terms of teaching skills are given in Table 1 and Figure 2. Two main themes regarding teaching skills, *positive aspects of practicum* and *encountered problems during practicum process*, were identified. The positive aspects of the practicum are presented in Figure 2. As there were many codes for the problems encountered during practicum, these are presented in Table 4.

As shown in Figure 2, studies found that pre-service teachers acquired the following from the practicum; professional experience (f:15), communication skills (f:6); the opportunity to use different teaching methods and techniques (f:4) and classroom control (f:3). A few studies also identified positive attainments of others, preparing teaching materials (f:2), using suitable materials (f:2), acquiring efficacy in measurement and assessment activities (f:2), problem solving (f:1), associating content with introduction activities (f:1) and preparing effective lesson plans (f:2).

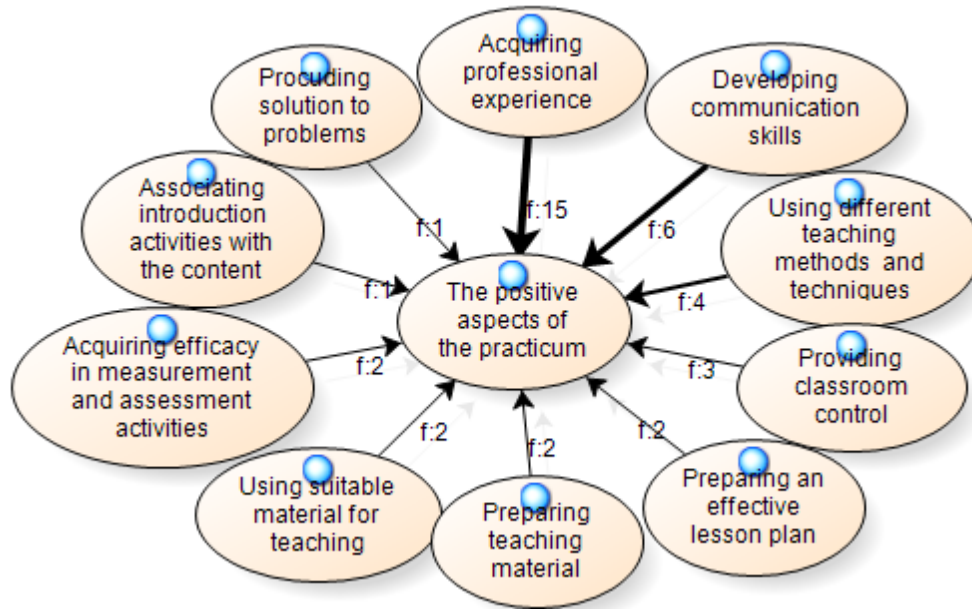


Figure 2. Themes related to the positive aspects of the practicum

As outlined in Table 4, the problems identified during the practicum were related to pedagogical content knowledge, planning skills and teaching skills in the classroom. Under the pedagogical content knowledge theme, pre-service teachers mostly had problems with missing and insufficient theoretical knowledge (f:7) and an insufficiency to transfer theoretical knowledge to practice (f:2). Under the planning skills theme, pre-service teachers mostly had problems with planning their teaching (f:6), and also had problems getting help during planning (f:3), getting help during the development of suitable material (f:2) and choosing strategies-methods and techniques (f:2).

Regarding teaching skills within class, pre-service teachers mostly had problems in teaching management (f:24) and classroom management (f:23) as well as problems in using teaching methods (f:6), benefiting from the teaching materials (f:4) and asking questions (f:3).

Table 4. Frequencies and percentage of codes and themes regarding problems encountered during teaching practice

Problems Encountered During the Practicum Process			
Sub themes	Codes	f (%)	
Pedagogical content knowledge	Missing or insufficient theoretical knowledge	7	
	Insufficiency in transforming theoretical knowledge to practice	2	
	Too much theoretical knowledge	1	
	Insufficient practice lessons (in terms of time and quality)	1	
	Rarity of lessons on pedagogical content knowledge	1	
	Total	12(13.64%)	
	Planning skills	Having problems in planning teaching	6
Inability to get help during planning		3	
Inability to get help during development of suitable material		2	
Having problems in choosing strategy-method-technique		2	
Inability to associate teaching activities with the content		1	
Inability to prepare lesson plan		1	
Total		15(17.04%)	
Teaching skills within classroom	Problems with classroom management	Insufficient	13
		Inability to manage time	6
		Inability to effectively communicate	5
	Problems with teaching management	Inability to achieve the level of the students	5
		Having difficulty in making students effective	4
		Inability to teach lessons effectively	3
		Having problems with assessment	3
		Inability to implement plan	2
		Difficulty in giving instructions and explanations	2
		Difficulty in concretizing the subject	1
		Inability to summarize and repeat	1
		Inability to be a cognitive coach	1
		Inability to form heterogeneous groups	1
	Problem in using teaching methods	Using traditional methods	3
		Difficulties in using special teaching methods	2
		Difficulties in using different techniques	1
	Problems in providing teaching materials	Just a few candidates using material	2
		Insufficient use of materials	1
		Limitation in activities due to materials shortage	1
	Problems with asking question	Inability to ask effective questions	1
Inability to give effective answers		1	
Inability to ask questions to the level of the students		1	
Total		61(69.32%)	

3.3 What Suggestions are Given for the Development of Teaching Skills?

In the reviewed studies, the findings regarding suggestions towards the development of teaching skills are presented in Figure 3.

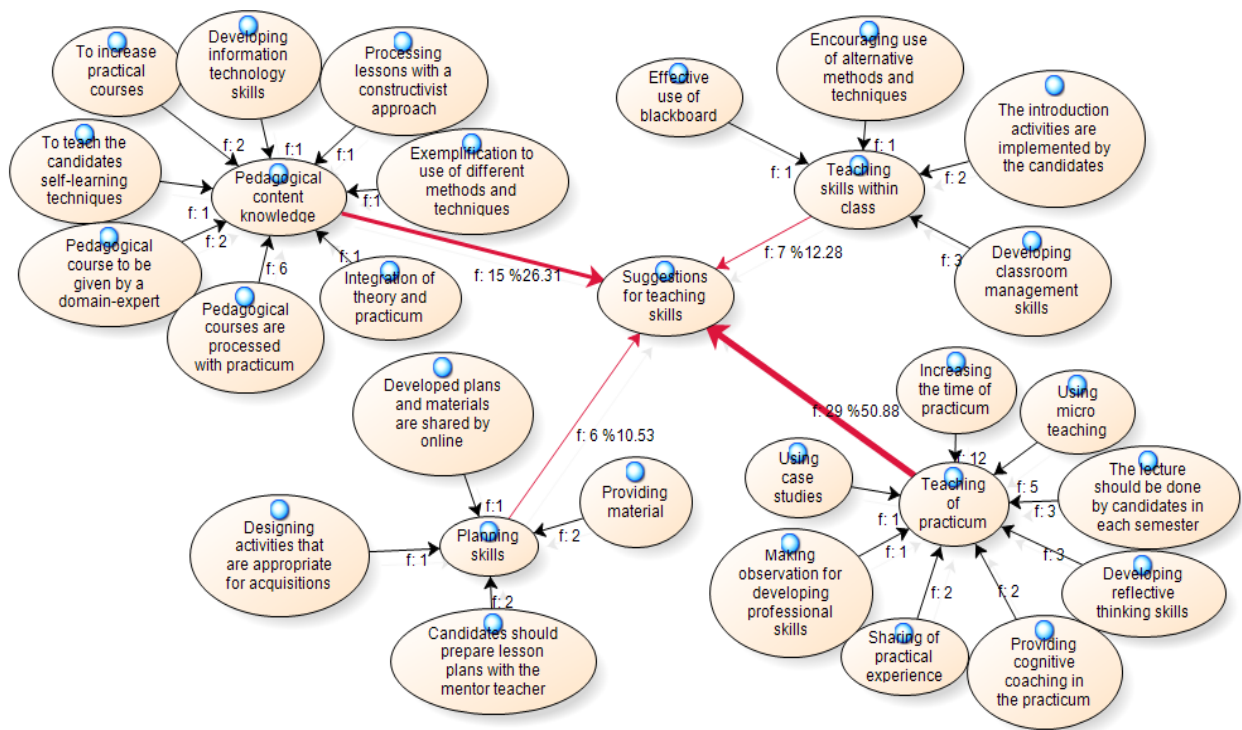


Figure 3. Themes regarding suggestions towards teaching skills in the practicum

As shown in Figure 3, the suggestions towards the development of teaching skills in the reviewed studies were collected under four themes: *Teaching of practicum*, *teaching skills within class*, *planning skills*, and *pedagogical content knowledge*. Most suggestions were related to practicum lesson instruction (f:29, 50.88%) and pedagogical content knowledge (f:15, 26.31%). For practicum instruction, most suggestions were related to increasing the practicum time (f:12). For pedagogical content knowledge, most suggestions related to practical teaching (f:6) and teaching lessons using micro teaching (f:5). However, there were only a few suggestions on teaching skills in the class (f:7, 12.28%) and planning skills (f:6, 10.53%).

4. Discussion and Conclusion

In this metasynthesis research, important issues related to the contribution of school practicum to the teaching skills of pre-service teachers were identified. The most important contribution of this research was to reveal the general teaching skills regarded as important for the school practicum and identify gaps in acquiring these skills.

In the theoretical dimension of the examined studies, teaching competencies in faculty–school partnership models were mainly considered, with most focusing on the learning of teaching roles, and a few others focusing on social learning theory (observational learning), reflective thinking and the contribution of expert guidance. Many studies did not mention any specific theoretical model and only the benefits of the school practicum and the importance of practical experience were emphasised. Most studies, however, had a similar point of view. There was an absence of studies that examined specific teaching skills, learning to teach or the pedagogical content knowledge of pre-service teachers, which could be seen as an important gap in school practicum studies.

Most studies emphasized practicum problems, with positive attainments focused on far less. Based on these results, it could be said that school practicum experiences might not contribute effectively to the development of teaching skills in pre-service teachers. Similarly, Kasapoglu (2015) found that, in school practicum studies, more practicum problems were reported than benefits for pre-service teachers.

Pre-service teachers were generally found to have problems with teaching skills in the class, of which classroom management and teaching management were particularly mentioned. It appeared from these studies that pre-service teachers have problems in transferring their theoretical knowledge to the real classroom environment during the learning–teaching process. This result was consistent with Scheeler (2008). Another interesting finding was that there were very few studies that reported on the value of the pedagogical content knowledge in school practicum studies. In the examined studies, it was found that pre-service teachers tended to have problems articulating theoretical knowledge in practice and that their theoretical knowledge was missing or insufficient. Therefore, it could be concluded that the

school practicum in Turkey does not appear to be effective in developing teaching skills or providing a unification of theory and practice. However, further research is needed to understand the bond between theory and practice (Korthagen & Kessels 1999), so as to provide pre-service teachers with the ability to transfer their teaching skills to real classroom environments.

It was also found that pre-service teachers had difficulties organising and presenting content, which has been recognised as an important basic skill for effective teaching (Coskun 2013; InTASC 2011). However, it was highlighted that pre-service teachers needed more guidance on planning, materials selection, teaching strategies and assessment methods. The acquired teaching skills appeared to focus mainly on basic applications rather than on the more complex situations surrounding in-class teaching. To clarify these findings, the teaching skills and experiences of pre-service teachers regarding lesson organisation and presentation of content needs to be examined in greater detail.

When the benefits of the school practicum to pre-service teachers were examined, these tended to be reported negatively, in terms of the teaching skills missing and practicum limitations. It was generally agreed that the school practicum provided professional experience to pre-service teachers and developed their communication skills. However, the scope of professional experience is wide, so the teaching skills that need to be acquired and the quality of this experience need to be researched further. Moreover, it was apparent that the pedagogical content knowledge and the organisation and presentation of content needs to focus more on pre-service teachers to gain the supposed benefits.

As there were many problems raised regarding the teaching practicum, the studies also gave a range of suggestions to increase the efficacy of the practicum. One of the most frequently mentioned suggestions was that pedagogical content knowledge courses be delivered practically rather than theoretically. However, few practical suggestions regarding classroom management, teaching management, variety in teaching (Borich 2014) and use of material were given. The problems found in the teaching of concepts, principles or processes and solutions to these problems deserve further attention.

Education is an activity that is socio-culturally structured (Brown et al. 1989). Thus, pre-service teachers need to be prepared for different teaching conditions to ensure the learning and academic success of the students. However, as has been discussed, major deficiencies were found in the development of teaching skills through the school practicum; yet, teaching skills were not examined in detail and different theoretical approaches were not adequately discussed.

5. Recommendations

Based on the results of this research, studies based on different approaches and which examine the contribution of the school practicum in Turkey to the development of teaching skills are needed. For example, the role of mentorship, which is quite new in Turkey, planning skills, and the organisation and presentation of content should be examined. In the studies examined, there was a main focus on general teaching skills, but pre-service teachers are also expected to have specific teaching skills for the different teaching stages and class levels. Therefore, how the school practicum contributes to the development of these specific teaching skills needs to be more comprehensively examined in future studies. Lastly, this research was limited to studies in a Turkish context. To generalise these results, further metasynthesis studies are required at the international level.

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Appendix

The Studies Examined in This Research

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