

Social Studies Prospective Teachers' Views on Community Service Practicum Course¹

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Abstract

Purpose of the present study is to determine views of prospective social studies teachers on community service practicum course. Sample of the study included 24 prospective teachers studying in Social Studies Teacher Program at Artvin Coruh University Education Faculty in the spring semester of 2013-2014 academic year. The present study was designed in phenomenological research which is one of the qualitative research designs Data were collected through semi-structured interview. Data were analysed through content analysis. As a result of the data analysis it was concluded that prospective social studies teachers experienced happiness and difficulties on the process of taking the necessary legal permissions to initiate activities, developed sensitivity towards social problems the course allowed them to work.

Keywords: *Social Studies Candidate Teachers, Community Service Practicum, Social Responsibility.*

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Introduction

Today's global developments have influenced all aspect of our living in different ways. Due to globalization, the world has become a huge market in the economic sense and educational institutions have been heavily influenced by those developments as in many areas (Horzum and Yılmaz, 2005). Education is an important process having impact on both individual and social life. In this context, it can be said that characteristics of economic and social life have been determined mostly by education. Education process always must be revised in the light of new developments and innovation. Principles, aims and activities should be always updated. Teacher-centered education approach is not much functional but student-centered learning activities become important (Eryaman & Riedler, 2010). Student's thinking, questioning, research, and practice in learning process refer to this active participation. It is known that Problem-based group work teamwork increases greatly both the intellectual development of students and their motivation of learning. This kind of teamwork allows students to reach optimum academic attainment by developing self-confidence (Şentürk, 2008). (Ada and Ünal, 2004; Şerefoğlu, 2004).

It has been known that classroom environments can be constituted thanks to presence of qualified teachers in schools. It has also ruminated on how qualified teachers can be trained (Arkün Kocadere and Seferoğlu, 2013). As a result of research, Higher Education Council concluded that community service practicum (CSP) course is necessary for training of qualified teachers and it has been taught in all education faculties of Turkey since 2006 (Elma, Kesten, Kıroğlu, Uzun, Dicle and Palavan, 2010; Yılmaz, 2011). It has been known that there is a gap between universities and society (Çuhadar, 2008; Sandy and Holland, 2006; Eryaman & Schneider, 2017) and that this gap can only be removed by well coordinated work. CSP course has allowed both individuals as well as institutions to fulfill their responsibilities in a complete manner by creating a bridge between universities and society (Elma et al., 2010; Saran, Coşkun, İnal Zorel and Aksoy, 2011).

Origin and underlying principles of the CSP depends on the interaction between individual and society, and come from 1870s John Dewey's statements in 1900s (Hatcher and Erasmus, 2008; Titlebaum, Williamson, Daprano, Baer and Brahler, 2004, Eryaman & Bruce, 2015). However, CSP as a concept was firstly used in the USA in 1966. In addition to that, Kolb (1984) stated that CSP was an active learning strategies (Hatcher and Erasmus, 2008). According to the definition in the National Community Service Act issued in the U.S. in 1990, CSP is a process which presents the information required for individuals in real life is necessary for the individual's future career and life (Quezada and Christopherson, 2005). Anderson (1998) defined CSP as both a teaching method and an educational philosophy. Furco (2003) defined the CSP as a process establishing the link between school and real life and turning the theory into practice. CSP is a process in which individuals are not satisfied what they learn in school and they exit from artificial class

environment to enter the real world, they socialize, reveal leadership characteristics and gain social awareness (Elma et al., 2010). Berman (2003) defended that the activities carried out within the course of the CSP should gain various understanding and skills. This understanding and skills are listed in the following way:

- To define the needs of the community
- To plan and perform the applications according to needs of society.
- To organize training program acquisitions through activities
- To develop awareness of civic responsibilities by participating CSP
- To strengthen moral values through CSP

From the academic year of 2006 and 2007 on instructional curriculum of teacher preparation includes both theoretical courses and applied courses. In this context, CSP course was decided to be included into instructional programs of teacher training. CSP aims to allow the prospective teachers to be aware of present problems of society and, design activities and initiations to solve the social problems through panels, conferences, congresses, symposia, to allow them to participate as a volunteer in various projects within the framework of social responsibility, acquire basic knowledge and skills related to community service works in schools (Higher Education Council, 2007). CSP is the course in which theoretical and practical works are carried out together and set of activities coordinated under the supervision of a faculty member. While students have an active role in this course, instructors have different duties such as guiding, orientation. CSP is the course which is carried out in society rather than a class. Consequently it is so important. In this process, the important aspect of the CSP is that prospective teachers develop a solution plan and apply it on a social problem. Failure in planned activities is prevented through optimally constructed objectives. The most important objective is to encounter prospective teachers to social problem and let them to deal with problems of society. Not only the activities help them to be aware of the social problems but also they allow them to develop values and sensitivity in social problems based on assistance, collaboration, cooperation, equality and social justice (Yılmaz, 2011). Additionally, prospective teachers have an opportunity to improve their emotional developments (Dinçer, 2006; Seban, 2013; Speck and Hoppe, 2004). CSP course has a great importance for prospective teachers to be able to do their own research and overcome the social problems (Coşkun, 2009). Even another purpose of the CSP is to sustain their way of life to form sensitivity and positive attitudes among their students (Ataunal, 2003). Therefore, teachers are seen as architects of society and are expected to play crucial roles in social sense (Gündüz, 2007). The academic studies on CSP course in Turkey have indicated that prospective teachers generally have positive attitude towards this course (Akkocaoğlu, Albayrak and Kaptan, 2010; Çoban, Kaşkaya and Ağırbaş, 2010; Dinçer, Ergül, Şen and Çabuk, 2011; Elma et al., 2010; Gürol and Özercan, 2010; Özdemir and Tokcan,

2010; Sönmez, 2010; Tanrıseven and Yelken, 2010; Yılmaz, 2011). Evaluation of CSP is very seminal for prospective teachers, and educators to determine its impact. It has been thought that this study can make contribution in solution of problems related to CSP course. With this context, the aim of this study is to evaluate CSP course based on views of prospective teachers studying social studies program.

Method

Design of the Study

In the present, it was aimed to understand views and experience of prospective teachers during CSP. Therefore, this study was conducted to evaluate CSP course through evaluations of the prospective teachers. In this regard, the present study was designed in phenomenological research, one of the qualitative research traditions. Phenomenological research is used to understand participants' experience about a phenomena (Moustakas, 1994).

Sampling

In the present study, criterion sampling strategy, one of the purposeful sampling strategies, was used because of the fact that phenomenological research requires inclusion of the participants who undergo experience related to the phenomena being studied. As a result of the criterion sampling 24 prospective teachers who studied at the department of social studies in education faculty in 2013-2014 academic year were selected.

Data Collection Tools

Data were collected through semi-structured interview. In semi-structured interview five open-ended questions were asked to the prospective teachers. Open-ended questions enable the researchers to flexibly collect data in depth and dig up richer data about the phenomenon being studied. (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2008). The participant prospective teachers took part the semi-structured interview.

The following questions were asked:

- What is your general view about CSP course?
- What are the challenges that you have faced during the CSP course?
- What kind of contributions to your personal development does the CSP course make?
- What kind of contributions to your social development does the CSP course make?
- What kind of benefits to social studies education do you think the CSP course contributes?

Data Analysis

Data were analysed through content analysis. In structured interview, the prospective teachers were requested to write their neagtive and positive experiences during the CSP course which had lasted for 14 weeks. In addition; answers given by the prospective teachers to the open-ended questions were coded according to similarities and repetition. In qualitative studies reliability refers to as credibility rather than consistency between measurements in quantiative research traditions (Miles & Huberman, 2002). In order to improve the reliability of studies, themes that were dug up in the data analysis were examined by an another researcher. As result of examination by another researcher, it was concluded that themes were highly persuasive and credential.

Findings

Findings from the semi-structured interview were reached inductively. Five questions were asked to the prospective teachers their responses to the five open ended questions were analysed.

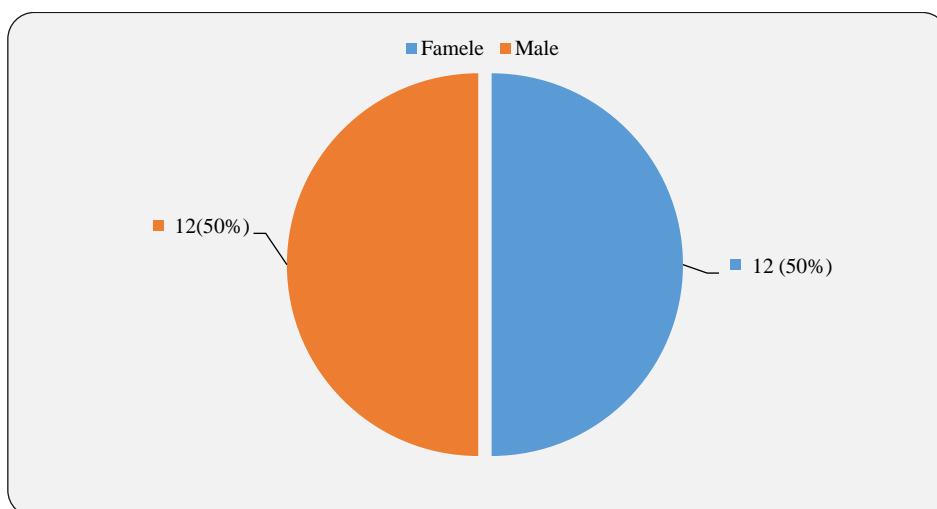


Figure 1. *Demographic Informations Belong To Social Studies Teachers*

As shown in Figure 1, 12 (50%) of the participant prospective teachers were female while 12 (50%) of them were male.

General Findings related to Practises of Community Service According to Views of the Prospective Teachers

Relevant findings related to the first question of the interview reveals that the prospective teachers could obtain information about institutions and organizations in which activities were conducted in the context of the CSP course and that they could have an opportunity to know more closely. Thus; deficiencies and problem experienced in society was correctly identified by group members and solutions ways were

sought out. It can be said that group members generating solution against problems during the activities experienced happiness.

10 prospective teachers stated that *“It allows us to experience happiness feeling through activities”*, 8 prospective teachers reported that *“It enables us to know more about institutions and organizations”*, 4 prospective teachers said that *“It allows us to understand the society more closely”* and 2 prospective teachers stated that *“It enables working in collaboration and taking responsibility”*.

The teacher view about the expressions of *“It allows the individual to experience the happiness feeling through activities”* is as follow: *I saw that activities for children in the city center did not create so much excitement on them. However, I could say that activities conducted by our group members at rural school created so much excitement among children. When I saw this excitement, I was much more excited than the children. Consequently, there are situations such as serving the society and make them happy in the nature of CSP course.”* (Prospective Teacher-18)

Findings about Limitations of Practices of Community Service According to the Views of Prospective Teachers

The participant prospective teachers have stated that they have encountered with many problems during activities. Findings indicate that problems can be divided into five sections as taking official permission from local authorities, financial opportunities, problems related to transportation, indifferent attitudes of institutional managers However, the participant prospective teachers noted that getting official problems and financial strains are more important problems than any other problems. In addition, the frequent expression of deficiency of financial opportunities is confined to many students coming from the low-income families.

8 prospective teachers said that *“the most challenging issue is getting official permission from the local authorities”*. 8 of them noted that *“lack of financial resources is the toughest problem”*. 5 of them pointed out that *“problems related to transportation is the most compelling”* and 3 of them said *“indifferent attitudes of managers are the most stringent problem”*.

Verbatim example about *“the subject of necessary legal permission for activities (bureaucratic obstacles)”* is as follow: *“Nobody knew our difficulty when we got necessary permission together with our university advisor from the institution. Our petition to the was responded three weeks later by the local authority. We felt ourselves helpless in getting rid of this bureaucratic obstacles”* (Prospective Teacher-9)

Example on “*Insufficiency of financial opportunities*” is as follow: “*We constantly needed money for our activities. The money our family sent met only our food needs so we had a difficulty with procuring necessary amount of Money. We needed for getting material during application.*” (Prospective Teacher-24)

Findings related to Practicises of Community Service About Contrubiting to Personel Progress According to the Views of Prospective Teachers

Prospective teachers stated that the CSP course had contributed to their personal development in term of providing the opportunities to work in cooperation, providing the opportunities to empathize, increasing self-confidence, contributing to the professional experience. The frequent expression of the view that the course provides the opportunity to work in cooperation has been thought to be thanks to decreasing of workload in group working and sense of belonging towards the group.

12 prospective teachers noted that “*Providing the opportunities to work in cooperation*”, 5 prospective teachers said “*Providing the opportunities to empathize*”, 4 prospective teachers underlined “*Increasing self-confidence*” and 3 prospective teachers reported “*Contributing the professional experience.*”

Verbatim example about “*Providing the opportunities to work in cooperation*” is as follow: “*Normally, in my opinion, it is more sensible to do a job alone. However, I have seen that better activities can be managed in cooperation by experiencing fewer problems and spending less effort when jobs are performed jointly. As our Ancestors say: Two hands are better than one hand. I have learned it through experience.*” (Prospective Teacher-13)

Findings related to Pratices of Community Service About Contrubiting to Social Progress According to Views Prospective Teachers

The prospective teachers think that the CSP course has a positive contribution to their social development with respect to being sensitive to social problems, finding solutions to social problems, having knowledge about the overall structure of institutions. The prospective teachers also noted that they could gain a sensitivity to any problem in society thanks to the CSP course. Answers given by the prospective teahcers to the question of “*What kind of contributions to your social development do you think the CSP course contributes?*” were detailed.

Findings displayed that 13 of the prospective teachers emphasized “*Sensitivity to social problems*”, 7 of them underlined “*Finding solutions to social problems*” and 4 of them noted “*Having knowledge about the overall structure of institutions*”.

Verbatim example about “*Sensitivity to social problems*” is as follow: “*Formerly, I did not think about any problem in society. But now I am very sensible to societal problem. For instance; in nursing home we went for activities, elders said that they were in need of love and their children did not come to visit them.*”

I was very impressed by this statement and thought a lot about what we could do to resolve this problem. Therefore, we talked with the children of elders and we told them to deal with their parents more. Consequently, I can say that I'm so relieved in conscience” (Prospective Teacher-8).

Findings related to Practises of Community Service About Contrubiting to Social Studies Education According to Views Prospective Teachers

The prospective teachers reported that the CSP course had a positive contribution to social studies education thanks to providing an information informing in firsthand against the problem in social life, better recognition of the society we lived and a closer recognition of Non-governmental organizations.

Findings showed that 12 prospective teachers stated that *“It allows me to be informed in firsthand against the problems in social life”*. 7 prospective teachers said *“It provides a better understanding of society we live”* and 5 of them pointed out that *“It allows a closer recognition of Non-governmental organizations”*.

Verbatim example about *“It allows to be informed in firsthand against the problems in social life”* is as follow: *We can learn about some problems experienced in social life from the books we read, from T.V or as far as we heard from people. However, I can say that this course gives us important clues to train the children usefully for society. That we face with problems in social life through this course provides us the experience.”* (Prospective Teacher-7)

Conclusion

In this study, experience of the prospective teachers during the CPS course was understood. Their experience was evaluated in terms of positive experience and negative experience, positive impact of the CSP course on them.

It was observed that the prospective teachers studying social studies experienced happiness thanks to beneficial activities in the context of the CSP course. Arkün et al., (2013) found that the CSP course allowed the individuals to feel happy and tranquil. This study supported the findings of the present study. The other result found in the study is that the prospective teachers experienced problems related to getting the official permissions for activities from the local authorities, financial opportunities. In parallel of this result, Uğurlu and Kral (2011) concluded that the toughest problem experienced in the CSP course was the bureaucratic obstacles. Ural, Keleş and Aydın (2011) reported that bureaucratic obstacles for prospective teachers stemmed from institution officials. Yılmaz (2011) reached the conclusion that problems related to the bureaucratic obstacles was highly prevalent. Tanrıseven and Yanpar Yelken (2011) noted that financial problems are another major problems that prospective teachers encountered during the CSP course.

As result of the data analysis it was also concluded there appeared sense of cooperation, personal development, firsthand information about social problems, sensitivity for social problems. course conducted in cooperation has a positive effect on personal developments of teacher candidates of social studies. Similarly, Uğurlu and Kırıl (2012) determined that prospective teachers could join and work in teamwork thanks to this course. Hasırcı Kaf and Sarı (2013), it stated that habit of group working could be gained throguh the CSP course. Gökçe (2011) concluded that activities inte context of the CSP course contributed personal developments among prospective teachers and prospective teachers developed sensitivity against social problmes throguh CSP course. Ural Keleş and Aydın (2011) found that the CSP course plays crucial roles in developing social awareness. Moreover, Hasırcı Kaf and Sarı (2013) stated that the CSP course made prospective teachers aware of social problems. Yılmaz (2011) and Özdemir and Tokcan (2010) concluded that the CSP course helped prospective teachers to develop sensitivity against social problems. Seban (2013) noted that the CSP course was an important course because it developed social sensitivity and awareness of students. Allen (1997) stated that behaviors could change thanks to CSP course. Akkocaoğlu et al., (2010) found that that there was a variation in levels of social awareness among prospective teachers during the CSP course.

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