PRE-SERVICE ENGLISH TEACHERS' NARRATIVE IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT

Aim. This phenomenological study probes the experiences of pre-service English as Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in the practicum process. Thus, this paper aims at bringing a light to the effects of practicum experiences of pre-service EFL teachers on their professional identity.

Methods. Based upon a narrative identity method, this phenomenological inquiry examines the experiences of pre-service EFL teachers (N= 20) in their practicum. A one-shot question was directed to the informants with the aim of clarifying their personal constructs.

Results. Practicum has got a significant role in education faculties all over the world. The theories applied in teaching practicum are quite common and universal. However, the practices utilised in practicum may show variations among education faculties. Further, the practicum content, and the characteristics of teacher candidates and supervisors may cause practicum to be carried out in diverse ways. The practicum aspect of pre-service teacher education is contemporarily given significant emphasis all around the world. Further, the exact theory of practicum and the desired outcomes of the related practices are relatively identical in education faculties throughout the world. Nonetheless, the practicum practices represent diversities among institutions. Yet, the characteristics and experiences of pre-service teachers may lead the practicum to be carried out in diverse ways in dissimilar contexts.

Conclusion. The results of the study suggest that teacher candidates developed both positive and negative cognitive constructs during their practicum. Related implications are provided to overcome the problems encountered during practicum, as well as to suggest ways to develop EFL pre-service teachers' practicum process.

Key words: EFL teachers, pre-service EFL teachers, practicum, narrative identity, professional identity

INTRODUCTION

Practicing is meaningful if it is carried out properly (Worpole, 2007; Pitts & Davidson, 2000). Yet, mastering and representing an efficient practicum in teacher training programmes are not always easily achieved. Prac-



ticum in teacher training programmes involves five dimensions. The first one is that novice teachers actively take part in the practicum. The second one refers to faculty supervisors who are competent in assisting pre-service teachers. The third one deals with teachers cooperating with pre-service teachers at practicum schools. The next dimension is related to students who receive what teacher candidates teach. And the last one refers to the educational context in which pre-service teachers need to fulfil their pre--service teaching qualifications (Merc, 2010). Foreign language teacher education programmes in several countries involve prior faculty lessons on teaching theory pursued by practicum in different schools (Cruickshank & Westbrook, 2013; Huhn, 2012; Tedick, 2009; Farrell, 2001). In novice teacher training programmes, particularly in foreign language teacher training programmes, the experience of practicum has been interpreted as one of the most fundamental requirements for educating student teachers (Dang, 2013; Coker & Schrader, 2004; Smith & Lev Ari, 2005; Walsh & Elmslie, 2005).

Researchers in the related field have suggested several problems novice teachers encounter during practicum (Tarquin & Truscott, 2006). Some of these problems were interpreted as stress, deficiency of support, and conceptual difficulties on teaching. Therefore, an increasing concern on how to supply pre-service teachers with more assistance during the practicum appears. Student teachers are commonly integrated into the profession by means of mentoring and relationships during the practicum (Tuli, 2009; Wang and Odell, 2002).

Recent literature has supported the advantages of mentoring in improving candidate teachers' learning (Liu, Tsai, & Huang, 2015; Hudson, 2013; Mann & Tang, 2012; Nguyen & Hudson, 2012; Sempowicz & Hudson, 2012; Hennissen, Crasborn, Brouwer, Korthagen, & Bergen, 2011; Simpson, Hastings, & Hill, 2007; Cornu, 2005; Walkington, 2005; Price & Chen, 2003). The consultation and assistance of a mentor does not alone assure the success of the socialisation process. Further, the practicum may lead to isolation and anxiety of pre-service teachers (Paker 2011; Farrell, 2007). While student teachers are struggling in the demanding practicum process, they require proper support from diverse stakeholders who take part in practicum (Hudson, Nguyen, & Hudson, 2008; Beck & Kosnik, 2002). Supplying teacher candidates with more opportunities and support during practicum has been regarded as a significant issue. Research has displayed that social support is highly related to decreased burnout and lower stress (Brannan & Bleistein, 2012; Fothergill, Edwards, & Burnard, 2004). Lack of research studies on particular strategies to supply candidate teachers with the required support during practicum exists in English language teaching (ELT). For instance, support from peers is one of the undiscovered issues within this context (Nguyen, 2013; Farrell, 2008; Richards & Crookes, 1988). Taking all these points in mind, this study probes the experiences of pre-service EFL teachers in their practicum. Thus, the following research question was put forward: How does the practicum experience affect the professional identity of pre-service EFL teachers?

METHODOLOGY

In this century, self-stories suggest that the self is challenged by a kind of postmodern disorder varying from dispersing to saturation to dissolution. Daily experiences and academic discourse are extremely influenced by each other if the prognosis is true. Individuals will quit having a sense of themselves as actors if interaction in society ends (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). Accordingly, a narrative research method creates a proper way to voice the unvoiced stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Indeed, a narrative identity approach conforms to research with individuals having a disability in which they tell and retell stories again and again. Yet, in order to acquire their personal constructs, this approach is utilised by normal people as well (Mollow, 2004). Narrative is suitable to figure out identity as the practice of developing, telling, and retelling a story facilitates people to explore, acquire and unveil their self. Narratives are identities of individuals (Polkinghorne, 1991). Common characteristics of respondents' stories are clarified by breaking their whole narrative into paradigmatic groups, developing common themes to appear across the gathered stories (Polkinghorne, 1995). Narrative identity refers to phenomenological, hermeneutical, psychoanalytic and existential customs. It is structured on one's ideas which appear in a large spectrum of contexts, containing narrative versions of psychology. The hermeneutical phenomenological human self appears particularly by narrative which indicates more than solely a story. Narrative involves the means of experiencing time, comprehending the future possibilities, and psychologically constructing the logic of past. Based upon a narrative identity method, this phenomenological inquiry examines the experiences of pre-service EFL teachers (N= 20) in their practicum. The participants of the study are studying ELT at a state university in Turkey. In order to inquire the issue, the informants were asked to narrate a story they experienced during their practicum, which had an impact on their professional identity.

FINDINGS AND RESULTS

The findings and results of the study are based the stories narrated by the pre-service EFL teachers. The emerged themes are tabulated based on the responses given by the participants. Some remarks of the students are given in a detailed way.

Themes related to Professional Identity Emerged out of the Stories Told			
Theme	Identity	f	%
Anxiety	Professional, Psychological	20	27.78
Classroom Management	Professional, Psychological	15	20.83
Role Modelling	Professional	12	16.67
Special Education Needs	Professional	10	13.89
Cultural Conflict	Professional, Cultural, Psychological	8	11.11
Democracy	Professional, Cultural	7	9.72
Total		72	100.00

Source: Developed by the researcher.

Table 1.

As can be observed from Table 1, anxiety is the shared characteristic of the informants (27.78%) which represent their professional (plus psychological) identity. Further, classroom management based problems (20.83%) comprise a big part of their professional (and psychological) identity as well. Role modelling is another professional identity highly emergent (16.67%), additionally children with special educational needs (13.89%) affecting the professional identity of the respondents. Moreover, being related to professional, cultural, and psychological identities, cultural conflict occurred with a percentage of 11.11. Lastly, democracy emerged with the lowest occurrence (9.72%) shaping the professional (plus cultural) identity of the respondents:

We were sitting in the teachers' room. There was a picture on the wall. The picture was about a German headmaster. In order to put it in my practicum file, I was about to take a photo of it. Suddenly, a teacher approached me in an aggressive manner. He aggressively told me not to take a picture of it. He added that the picture did not symbolise our current culture. His tone of voice really depressed me. All my positive attitudes towards teachers and teaching profession were suddenly turned upside down.

At the practicum school, I was attending the classes were of junior students. It was really hard times for me to discipline these classes because of naughty children. I tried my best to approach these naughty kids with tolerance because it was my first experience in the teaching profession and I did not know much about how to manage students. Actually, my anxiety level was extremely high. I thought that I had classroom management problems as a result of socio-economic and cultural differences among the students. In time, I became stricter towards the students since it was too hard to supply the required classroom atmosphere for effective teaching. Consequently, I took control of the students since I took their individual differences into consideration while teaching them English. This opportunity developed my professional identity a lot.

Now, I will talk about my micro-teaching experience during practicum. My supervisor told me to teach Past Tense two days before the class and added that if I wanted, we could move to a classroom with a projector. Firstly, he asked me to explain was/were, regular verbs, and 5 irregular verbs in two lessons. While planning how to give three topics in such a short time, I tried to keep it short and easy. I prepared my course materials through Web 2.0 tools for each subject. I informed my supervisor that I would use the projector. When I arrived on the day of the lesson, the teacher asked me to teach only for 1 hour and we started the lesson in a classroom with no projector. I thought he was going to teach the lesson himself. However, when my teacher started the lesson, he called me to the board and asked me to teach was-were for which I prepared briefly. However, all my preparations were based on using the projector. I just looked at the class for a while. I felt really anxious. I taught the lesson standing on the board and played the game I prepared without the projector. However, I had trouble remembering what and how to teach. I had many handmade materials, online activities and games that I prepared with great care for that day and I could not use them. This professional experience developed my professional identity in that it taught me to be ready for any unknown situation in the classroom. We should always have a, b, and c plans for the unknown.

In the practicum school, one of the students stopped up to me and said, "My dream was to become a science teacher before I met you, but now I want to be an English teacher since I learnt a lot from you." At that moment, I realised how valuable my profession was, and once again I was proud of myself for choosing this profession. First of all, touching the dreams of a little boy was the most special thing for me. This event developed my professional identity a lot.

During practicum, I discovered an extraordinary student. He had some difficulty in speaking. The supervisor had him perform role-plays and activities in the last 10 minutes of the lesson. His peers supported him by applauding him. Afterwards, I learned by chance that he was an introvert student, a very different child. In special days at school, I told this student to read poems and the whole school cheered him enthusiastically. And I realised that his self-confidence increased and he was so happy as a result. It was a great opportunity to develop myself professionally. If I meet such students in my future career, I would like to do my best for such students and include them in the society. My identity as a candidate teacher improved a lot.

I had a micro-teaching for 2 lessons in the practicum school. I carried out the micro teaching by means of a PowerPoint presentation and computer activities. The first hour was very productive and enjoyable, but there was a power cut in the last minutes of the lesson. Initially, all my energy decreased and I became anxious since I wouldn't be able to use the projector. Then, the kids complained about not being able to practice through the computer which demotivated them. I managed to motivate them again, although I could not use the Web 2.0 tools. When the lesson was over, it was actually a great opportunity for me. I realized the importance of having other plans in case of unforeseen situations. This was a great experience that teaching was not only teaching, but also being a great organizer. This event was a great opportunity for me to find out my professional identity.

When I started practicum, my supervisor showed me a student and asked me to sit next to him and assist him. I sat next to him several times and the boy was too scared to do anything wrong. He was usually sitting in the back seats in order not to be seen by the teacher. During the lessons, I observed him and decided to talk him about his problem. I told him that everybody could make mistakes as humans. At that time, I deliberately made a simple grammar mistake and corrected it afterwards. Noticing my mistake, the child smiled. In time, he slowly began attending the courses.

We were all anxious in the first day of our practicum. We greeted our school supervisor, but he did not greet us. He just greeted our university supervisor who came to school with us. He didn't even look at our faces. He did not see us as teachers. He ignored us during the overall practicum. Thus, the practicum process was highly stressful for us.

DISCUSSION

The related literature puts emphasis on the significance of identity in teacher development. Further, figuring out identity and identity related matters can be a challenging practice. Thus, Catherine Beauchamp and Lynn Thomas (2009) revised teacher identity related discussions in that they examined the challenge of interpreting the related term; self-identity; the place of subject, narrative and discourse; the use of reflection; and the impact of contextual states. They specifically emphasized pre-service teachers' identity and related implications on teacher education programmes. This paper also analysed the same issue by means of narratives of EFL pre-service teachers on their practicum.

Gail Richmond, Mary Juzwik, and Michael Steele (2011) interpret the practice of working with pre-service teachers whose identity development cycles create problems. They inquire how practicum supervisors are informed and how they are responsible in the practicum process. In order to do so, they examine the narratives of three pre-service teachers with different problems at different levels. Their inquiry pursued the first, second, and third-person narratives of pre-service teachers having experienced problems in their practicum. They suggested that pre-service teacher education programmes where identity is framed should apply explicit practices that shape the teaching profession. In this study, first person narratives of pre-service teacher training practices.

Neil Hooley (2007) declared that reshaping pre-service teacher education on the grounds of narrative inquiry may simultaneously reanalyse the system of both pre and in service teacher education practices. He also highlighted the relation between narrative identity approach and professional identity which may supply rational and authentic learning for both pre and in service teacher education. In this paper, related implications were also provided for EFL preservice teacher education.

Sandra Chang-Kredl and Sarah Kingsley (2014) examined pre-service teachers' identity expectations in that teacher candidates narrated biographies interpreting memories that affected their exact reasons for deciding to be a teacher. They discovered that teacher trainers valued the emotional facets of pre-service teachers' identities; supported teacher candidates' declaring their expectations about teaching; and represented as role models. In the present paper, it was found out that teacher trainers did not function efficiently in dealing with the problems of pre-service teachers.

Maria Ruohotie-Lyhty and Josephine Moate (2016) tried to figure out the agency forms appearing in teacher candidates' professional identity development. By means of analysing the assignments of pre-service teachers, they hinted on how teacher candidates are active in their self-development and their experiences as teacher candidates which influence their identity-agency. They supplied an image of identity development focusing on how identity-agency is put in a particular context, possibly fostered by the relations between self and other. In this study, the same issues were analysed with reference to the development of professional identity of pre-service EFL teachers.

Janet Alsup (2003) declared she has encountered a large number of preservice teachers who had esteem in their capability to teach EFL in their practicum. However, she found out that their esteem can veil the insufficiency of comprehending adequate pedagogy, particularly when it is grounded on school experiences. She discovered that their personal narratives became prime narrative ideologies in which their teaching philosophies are structured. Almost every practice is shaped by ideologies which give way to whatever humans do (Ulum & Köksal, 2019; Ulum, 2016), thus, this paper was also framed by implicit ideologies contained in the narratives of the informants.

CONCLUSION

A teacher is someone having finished a programme of meticulous preparation containing particular knowledge as established by the profession, as well as being someone confirmed by the profession as a certified expert with the authority to practice professional evaluation. As can be understood from the overall study, pre-service EFL teachers have narrated both positive and negative identities. Those having a positive practicum setting in which they coordinated with supportive supervisors developed an efficient professional identity. On the other hand, those having problems with their supervisors at the practicum schools developed a negative professional identity. The mentioned negative cases are highly encountered in the practicum settings. Thus, policy makers, education faculties, school directorships, and practicum supervisors have to take the necessary precautions in order to diminish the possible negative outcomes of the practicum.

IMPLICATIONS

This study was an attempt to discover how the practicum affects pre-service EFL teachers' professional identity by means of narratives. Related implications for EFL pre-service teacher education can be drawn based on the narrative findings developed by the informants. The findings of the study mainly indicated that pre-service EFL teachers developed both positive and negative Journal of Education Culture and Society No. 1_2020

professional identities as a result of the problems they experienced in their practicum. If the experiences of teacher candidates are taken into consideration, a more efficient and meaningful practicum becomes available. Thus, education faculties need to take the required precautions to eliminate the problems experienced by teacher candidates. Furthermore, teacher candidates' emotional, socio-economical, and professional readiness states should be considered by both university and practicum school supervisors in order to diminish the potential risks. To do so, practicum supervisors should be trained accordingly through in-service development programmes arranged by the council of higher education or the ministry of national education. A longer practicum may allow pre-service teachers to reflect on themselves pedagogically. Therefore, practicums with long periods should be administered to supply student teachers more time to get accustomed to the practicum setting which includes every dimension of school setting.

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