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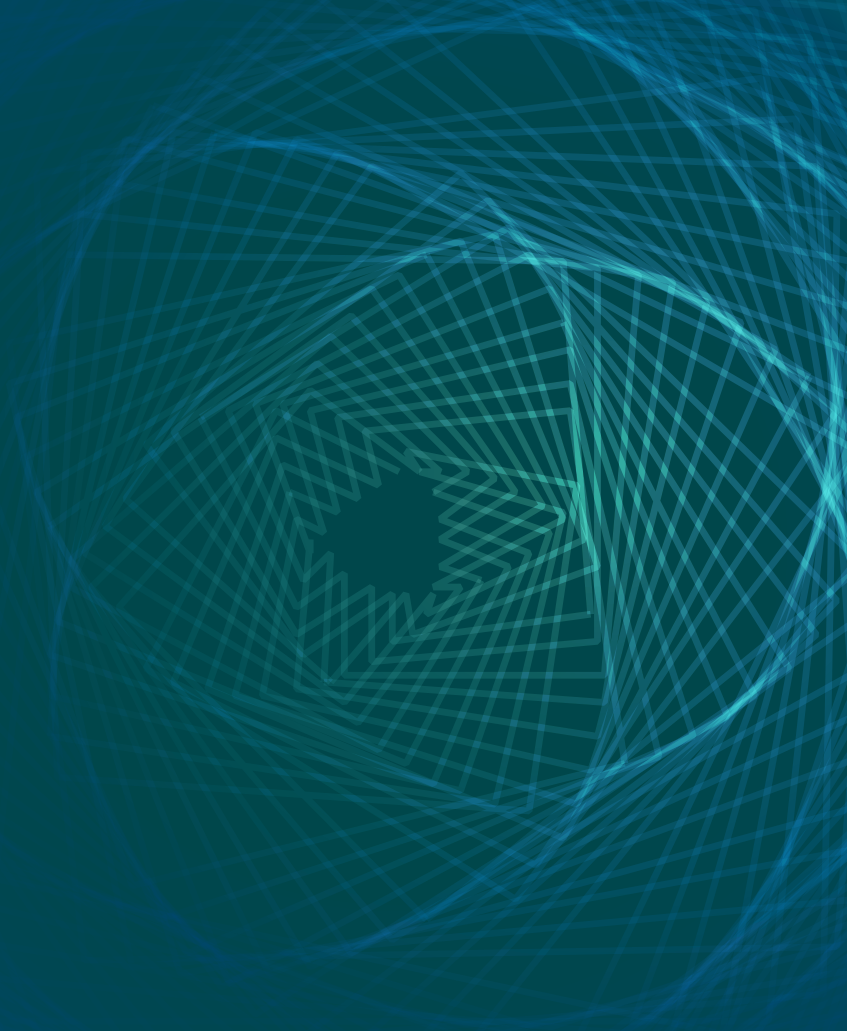

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Are Student Teachers Ready to Teach? What Do Different Stakeholders Think?

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Abstract

Teaching practice is one of the most important components of teacher education programs, yet (it) has been frequently criticized for including various problems. The curriculum change in 2018 included significant changes improving the applications in Turkey. These changes - ranging from limiting the number of student teachers to having a centralized evaluation system - had significant effects. Yet, how the system change impacted the applications and how this is perceived by the stakeholders have not been studied much. This study aims to identify the perspectives of three stakeholders. Opinions of 63 academics, 24 mentor teachers and 56 student teachers stated positive and negative opinions in three main variables influencing the implementation process, academic development of student teachers and their readiness on the teaching process.

Keywords: teacher education, student teaching practice, English language teaching, curriculum change, perspectives of stakeholders

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Introduction

Having real life experience is one of the most important factors of being a good teacher. The more opportunities we have in teaching students, the easier it becomes to give instructions, to use the classroom language, to deal with any possible problems, along with doing many other pedagogical tasks. As Legutke and Ditfurth (2009) point out, school-based experience helps to build bridges between institutions, encourages pre-service teachers to be a part of teaching communities and become aware of themselves as future teachers. However, teacher education programs have frequently been criticized for not providing their pre-service teachers with sufficient practice opportunities. In Turkey, for instance, future teachers have to wait till their last year to start practicing in a real classroom environment. That is why, as stated by many researchers, teacher education programs have been criticized for being theory-oriented and not preparing their future teachers to deal with the realities of a classroom by giving them sufficient practice opportunities (Darling-Hammond, 2006, Demir & Çamlı, 2011)

Field experience, which is generally gained through teaching practice courses in the teacher education programs, serves as outstanding opportunities for pre-service teachers to develop practical knowledge on the act of real teaching experiences (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, Dursun & Kuzu, 2008). In other words, field experiences help actualize the lived curriculum of teacher education. As stated by Darling-Hammond (2006, b), the development of expertise through

experience is a critical part of teacher learning. With the help of teaching practice courses, student teachers are expected to (Faculty-School Cooperation Document, 1998, p.4):

- improve their competencies of the teaching profession by having teaching experience in various classes and grade levels,
- grasp the nature and structure of lesson plans, evaluate course books, conduct assessments,
- improve their skills by sharing their experiences they gained during their practice with their peers.

In Turkey, teacher education programs are delivered by education faculties at the universities and all are coordinated by the Council of Higher Education (YÖK). YÖK, in cooperation with the Turkish Ministry of Education (MoNE) prepared some regulations defining faculty-school collaboration.

Until 2019, the process of teaching practice was structured as 3 courses: namely, School Experience I, II, and Teaching Practice. School Experience I, which was a one day- one semester course aimed to familiarize students with school life and teaching processes, guided student teachers with activities mainly by observing experienced teachers on the job as well as getting to know students from various perspectives. In School Experience II, which was a one day- one semester course similar to the first one, student teachers were encouraged to implement individual and group work to experience teaching in limited terms. In the Teaching Practice and Seminar course, one semester was comprised of 6 hours of teaching and 2 hours of seminar, student teachers were expected to participate in 3 hours of in-class activities, and work as well as stay within the school and do other teaching related work for another 3 hours. Student teachers were also asked to document all their work in a file or portfolio. A mentor teacher was responsible for monitoring the student teachers' teaching practices. The university supervisor, on the other hand, was responsible for monitoring and guiding the practice teaching process. Student teachers' improvements on teaching and learning processes were carefully monitored by course observation forms filled out both by the university supervisor and the mentor teacher; however, the final grade of student teachers were given by the faculty professor (Faculty-School Cooperation Document, 1998).

The teaching practice process in education faculties was restructured in 2018 with a directorate (MoNE, 2018), and salient changes were made to improve the system. With the directorate, School Experience I and II courses were removed from the curriculum. Instead, the number of teaching practice courses was increased to 2 and incorporated into the curriculum as two semester courses - one in the 7th and one in the 8th semesters. In addition, a new online tracking system, the Ministry of National Education Data Processing Systems (MEBBIS), was created to keep track of the whole process, including the attendance records of student teachers as well as their daily and yearly evaluations by both parties.

With the new implementation, the ratio of student teachers to each university supervisor was reduced to 8/1 and to each mentor teacher to 4/1. The aim of these, it seems, was to make university supervisors and mentor teachers more closely monitor student teachers and spend more time to improve their teaching skills. On the other hand, different from the 1998 directorate, the new directorate required university supervisors to observe each student teacher's teaching practice in a class at least four times in a semester. In addition, teachers working at schools were required to

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get a mentor certificate so that they could be appointed as mentor teachers. The certificate was issued by the MoNE upon completion of a 3 day-in service training delivered by the MoNE specialists and the ones without this certificate were not accredited as mentor teachers.

The new undergraduate curricula was put into practice in 2018 by YÖK. When analyzed it was seen that the curricula was compatible with the directorate of the MoNE. As stated, practice teaching courses to be conducted at the 7th and 8th semesters aimed at: making observations of field-specific teaching methods and techniques, organizing and conducting individual and group micro teachings, preparing and implementing field-specific activities and materials, preparing a suitable learning environment, and improving classroom management as well as assessment and reflection skills (YÖK, 2018, p.12,13) Thus, in the current curriculum, teaching practice is conducted in the final year in the last two semesters and teacher candidates are required to make classroom observations as well as conduct demo-lessons at schools with the help of a mentor teacher. This system however, has been criticized for some problems by the future teachers and academics.

Literature Review

Literature is rich enough with lots of salient studies conducted on the teaching practice processes in the world. Problems with the traditional teacher education design that predominated between 1950 and 1990 in the USA include inadequate time, fragmentation, uninspired teaching methods, superficial curriculum, and traditional views of schooling (Darling-Hammond, LaFors, & Snyder, 2001, p. 17).

For instance, regarding inadequate time of student teaching, Kaya and Mclntyre (2020) state that because of student teachers' perceptions that more learning occurred during student teaching, teacher candidates in their study suggested a longer period (i.e. one academic year) for student teaching.

Soslau and Raths (2017) regard the most commonly stated problems in student teaching as summative evaluation systems, lack of formative feedback, field and university disconnects, and complex curriculum in seminar and field instruction conferences. They argue that field-based curriculums do not address the needs of student teachers and field instruction has a low status in some institutions, besides the roles of the participants being unclear

In the Malaysian context, (Goh & Matthews, 2011) adjustments to the role as teachers, appropriate use of teaching methodology and strategies, understanding of the subject matter for student learning, working harmoniously with the school staff, and classroom management were the mostly recognized concerns according to the results. Similarly, Marais (2016), in a study conducted with South African student teachers, found out numerous problems experienced by student teachers, mainly including teaching in overcrowded classrooms.

There are studies reporting the problems of the Turkish system, including the lack of cooperation between the faculty and the practice school, as well as the vague status of student teachers at practice schools. For instance, Yapıcı and Yapıcı (2004) argued that the number of student teachers per mentor teacher was too high; there was a lack of cooperation between the faculty and the practice school; the theoretical courses provided at the faculty did not suffice for the in-class

teachings of student teachers; the status of student teachers at practice schools was vague and some of the mentor teachers enforced student teachers to do most of the tasks on their own. Similarly, Gökçe and Demirhan (2005) concluded that the cooperation between the mentor teacher, the student teacher, and faculty professor was not in a sufficient level and mentor teachers were not supportive enough in the period of developing materials and lesson plans.

In a notable study in the Turkish context (Aksoy, 2020), academics and student teachers complained about not observing contemporary teaching methods used by mentors at schools. They thought mentor teachers were either unmotivated or unable to use contemporary methods in their own classrooms. For this, Mullen and Klimaitis (2019) commented that more experimentation with mentoring alternatives, with insight from practice updating frameworks, is needed.

While the implementation of the new directorate in 2018 brought about a couple of notable changes on the student teaching practice process, which had consequential impacts, these impacts have not been focused on much yet due to the novelty of the implementations.

So far, no previous study has focused on evaluating the practice process from all the stakeholders' perspectives. This study, therefore, is valuable for gathering the opinions of all three stakeholders, that is: the university supervisors (academics), student teachers and mentor teachers in evaluating the teaching practice process for English language teaching in Turkey.

Thus, by analyzing the new 2018 teaching practice processes in accordance with the new directorate, the present research aims to shed light on the strengths and weaknesses of the new student teaching practice implementation processes and thus aims to offer some possible implications to policymakers for further steps. The present study also aims to investigate the opinions of different stakeholders in the teaching process. This study, therefore, aims to focus on getting a better picture by gathering the opinions of:

a) student teachers, b) mentor teachers, and c) academics on the new implementation process of student teaching practice.

Methods

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology and is based on a survey study design. Data were collected by a cross sectional questionnaire. Participants' perceptions were sought by studying multiple perceptions of the phenomenon as experienced by different people, and by then trying to determine what is common to these perceptions and reactions (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012, p.432).

Sample

For the online questionnaire, the snowballing sampling method was adopted. All voluntary academics of English language teaching departments, mentor English language teachers and student teachers of English language teaching departments in various cities of Turkey were targeted. A total of 63 academics, 24 mentor teachers and 56 student teachers voluntarily participated into the questionnaire.

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Academics were from 25 different cities of Turkey: Eskişehir (n=10), Ankara (n=7), Aydın (n=6), İstanbul (n=4), Antalya (n=3), Çanakkale (n=3), Muğla (n=3) and Erzurum (n=3). Academics consisted of full professors (19 %), associate professors (17 %), assistant professors (51 %), lecturers (11 %) and research assistants (2 %). Most of them conducted practice courses at the public schools (94 %) and a few at private schools (6 %).

A total of 24 mentor teachers from 12 different cities, the majority of whom were from Çanakkale (n=6), Eskişehir (n=4), Erzurum (n=3), Denizli (n=2), Sivas (n=2), participated in the questionnaire. Most of them were female (%92) whereas a few (8 %) were male. The majority were graduates of English language teaching departments (68 %). All participants were working at public schools.

A total of 56 student teachers from 13 different cities, the majority of whom were from Ankara (n=9), Sivas (n=8), Aydın (n=6), Eskişehir (n=5), Amasya (n=5), Çanakkale (n=4), Diyarbakır (n=4), Muğla (n=4) Samsun (n=4), participated in the questionnaire. All were students at English language teaching departments of universities. The majority were having their practice courses at the high school level (66 %), some at the elementary school level (27%),and a few (7 %) at the primary school level.

Data Collection

Data was collected over a period of two months. First, document analysis was carried out on the 1998 and 2018 guidelines of teaching practice as well as undergraduate English language curricula of education faculties. The questionnaire was subsequently sent online to participants on a voluntary basis. For this study, MoNE's 1998 and 2018 guidelines for teaching practice processes as well as undergraduate teacher education programs of YÖK acted as the main documents. As for the opinions of the participants, data were collected by means of an online questionnaire including open ended questions. Data collected from the document analysis and questionnaires were incorporated and analyzed concurrently. The online questionnaire, consisting of two sections, was designed based on the teaching practice guidelines of MoNE. The first section of the questionnaire included demographic information of the participants. The second section of the questionnaire was designed to collect the participants' opinions on the new guidelines and the implementation process of teaching practice. The draft questionnaire was analyzed by three academics of English language teaching for the suitability of the questions. Fine tuning was handled based on the experts' suggestions. There were seven items in the first section of the questionnaire, and 13 open ended questions in the second section. The open-ended questions sought to reveal the positive and negative opinions of the participants as well as their suggestions for improvement for the implementations by 2018 guidelines.

Data Analysis

Participants' opinions were analyzed by content analysis. A qualitative data analysis program, NVivo, was used for content analysis, and a pattern coding method was utilized (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In terms of ethical codes, questions were carefully structured so that none of the participants could be negatively affected. In addition, ethical consent was obtained from TED University's Ethical Committee.

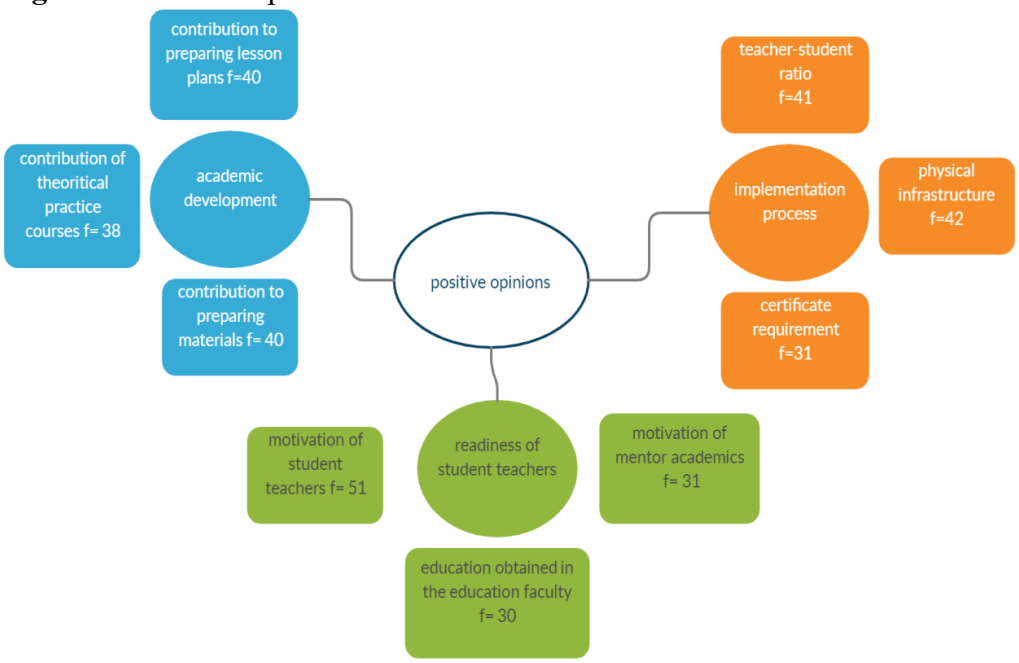
Findings

For the questionnaire, academics', mentor teachers' as well as student teachers' opinions were separately analyzed to present the findings. Opinions of all three groups were presented under three main themes as positive opinions, negative opinions and suggested improvements and three sub themes including the factors influencing the implementation process, factors influencing the academic development of student teachers and factors influencing the readiness of student teachers.

Opinions of Academics on the Student Teaching Implementation by 2018 Guidelines

Positive Opinions. Positive opinions of the academics are presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Positive Opinions of the Academics



Implementation Process. As seen in Figure 1, the majority of the academics (f=42) regarded the present physical infrastructure of practice schools as adequate and sufficient in that these schools provide a good base to implement the new regulations of 2018 MoNE. One academic noted that: "I carry out this practice in a school where, socio-economically, the middle-class families' children study. Class size, physical and technological opportunities in the classroom are not bad." (Assoc. Prof. Dr, Eskişehir) Another highly emphasized strength (f=41) was the new regulation of MoNE limiting the number of student teachers with 8/1 for academics and 4/1 for mentor teachers. One academic commented: "This is the right thing to do. We have dealt with much higher numbers of students for years. In fact, the ideal one is one student per teacher." (Assist. Prof. Dr. Edirne)

Academic Development. The most frequently stated positive opinions of academics were on the contribution of the student teaching process on preparing lesson plans (f=40) and materials (f=40). One academic noted: "I think it is beneficial when students are explained the necessity of detailed planning for their profession and acknowledge that flexibility is possible. The process makes a

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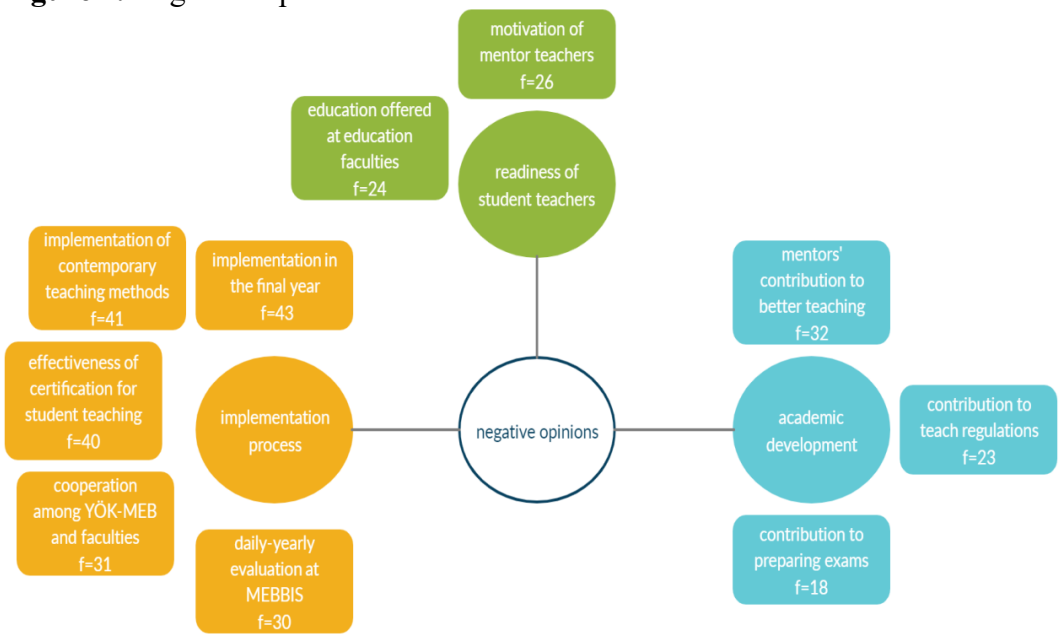
contribution to their pedagogical development except excelling in assessment practices." (Lecturer, Eskişehir)

Readiness of Student Teachers. The most notable positive aspect stated by academics (f=51) was that student teachers were highly motivated towards practice courses. One academic stressed: "Students usually get excited since they will find a chance to implement what they have learnt almost in four years and they feel like "a real teacher", and thus their motivation is high." (Assit. Prof. Dr, Erzurum)

Negative Opinions. Negative opinions of the academics are presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Negative Opinions of the Academics



Implementation Process. It is clear in Figure 2 that the majority of the academics (f=43) regarded the implementation of student teaching solely in the final year as inadequate and insufficient. One academic had the opinion: "Implementation in the fourth year, in my opinion, is insufficient. An observation, at least, either in the first or second year, and an observation along with an implementation in the third year is necessary." (Assoc. Prof. Dr, Bolu) In addition, lots of participants (f=41) also stated that mentor teachers are unable or unwilling to implement contemporary teaching methods in their classrooms. As one put forward: "Frankly, as you interpret from students' feedback, contemporary methods are not used. This is a case observed in many of the teachers after a couple of years; that is, moving away from the ideal and correct one, and choosing the easy and comfortable one. Simply, most [of the teachers] don't even talk in English in lessons." (Assoc. Prof. Dr, Eskişehir) Another weakness stated by academics (f=40) was the ineffective certification process of mentor teachers at MoNE. One stated that: "I think mentorship should be a career step just like being a teacher trainer. Being a teacher trainer means being a good instructor, being observed many times. However, as it is not possible to be a mentor with a 3-day-certificate program, this title is given to people who do not deserve it." (Asst. Prof. Dr, Ankara) Still another negative point (f=31) was about the ineffective and insufficient cooperation among MEB-YÖK and faculties of education. One member put forward: "Cooperation is limited to

finding a school and a teacher with a certificate for student teachers and placing them to the school." (Assist. Prof. Dr, Ankara) Finally, MEBBIS daily and yearly evaluation systems were regarded as deficient by many (f=30) academics.

Academic Development. The most frequently stated negative opinions of academics were on the contribution of mentor teachers on better teaching. (f=32) Other weaknesses stated by academics were that the implementation did not suffice enough to teach regulations (f=23) as well as preparing exams (f=18) to student teachers. One put forward: "The implementation procedure does not contribute to making future teachers aware of the regulations as well as assessment." (Assist.Prof. Dr, Ankara)

Readiness of Student Teachers. The most notable negative aspect stated by academics (f=51) was that mentor teachers' motivation level was low. One said: "I think most of them do this either because they have to or because they know that the candidates will take over some of their burdens." (Assist. Prof. Dr, Ankara) Another weakness stated by academics was that education provided at education faculties did not provide a sufficient enough background for an effective implementation process. "The program generally focuses on providing theoretical information. There is very little opportunity for students to put their practical knowledge into practice." (Assist. Prof. Dr, Ankara)

Suggested Improvements. Suggested improvements of the academics are presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Suggested Improvements

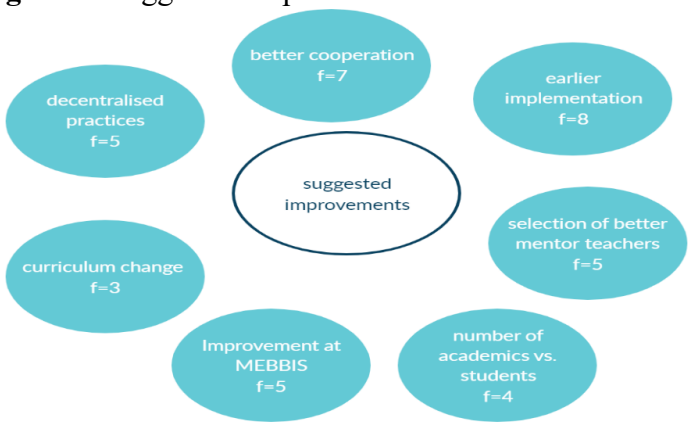


Figure 3 shows that a couple of academics (f=8) suggested an earlier implementation of student teaching. They found the implementation in the last year was too late and stated that student teaching should start earlier in the program. One noted: "The implementation should be four semesters, but the school-university cooperation should start from the first year. The implementation period should be increased." (Assist.Prof. Dr, İstanbul)

In addition, some of the academics (f=7) suggested that a better and more influential cooperation is required among MoNE-YÖK and education faculties. One stated that: "I couldn't understand to whom policy-makers of the last 4-year plan consulted while preparing the program. The last 4-year plan is only suitable for training primary school English teachers. The policy-makers should

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definitely consult to heads of English Language Education Departments while preparing the program." (Prof. Dr, Ankara)

Some other academics (f=5) suggested that improvements are needed at MEBBIS in terms of the evaluation procedures as well as the distribution of student teachers among academics and mentor teachers. One was of the opinion that "such a system as MEBBIS should either be opened to the access of faculty members (in terms of both feedback and development) or both parties should determine a common system." (Assist. Prof. Dr, Bursa)

Furthermore, a number of academics (f=5) suggested more decentralized practices stating that MoNE dictates the new regulations in a top-down manner. One said that: "The departments should be authorized on elective courses. The Council of Higher Education should recognize the Faculties of Education as an academic unit and, according to the founding law of 2547, should allow them to prepare their own programs as in Vocational Schools." (Prof. Dr, Aydın)

A need to select better mentor teachers was another suggestion of academics (f=5). Academics (f=4) also advised that more numbers of academics should be hired at education faculties and that the number of student teachers enrolling into education faculties should be limited.

Opinions of Student Teachers on the Student Teaching Implementation by 2018 Guidelines

Positive Opinions. Positive opinions of the student teachers are presented in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Positive Opinions of Student Teachers

Implementation Process. It is clear in Figure four that the majority of student teachers (f=38) regarded the teacher-student ratio of 4/1 and academic-student ratio as 8/1 in the new implementation as adequate and appropriate. Student teachers (f=35) also stated that physical infrastructure of schools were adequate in that they were highly equipped with educational

technologies and the school climate was effective enough for a good teaching. Most of the student teachers regarded the certification requirement of mentor teachers as necessary. They stated that certification- no matter how long it takes- will provide mentor teachers betterments so that they could better equip student teachers with classroom pedagogies.

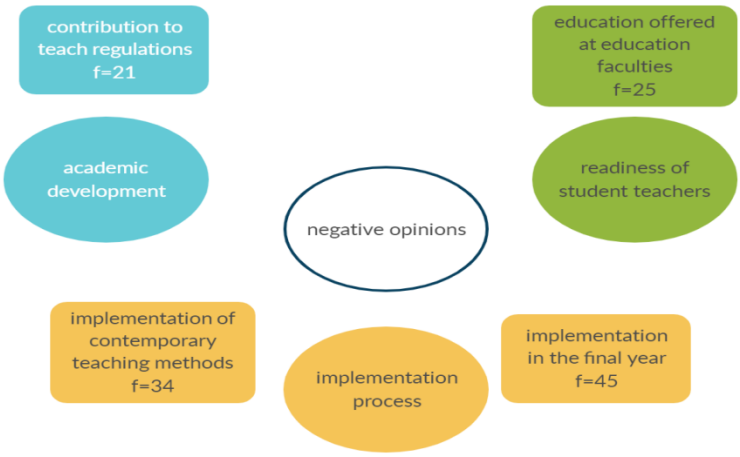
It is also clear that student teachers mostly considered the daily-yearly evaluation system at MEBBIS as necessary and effective (f=24), there was a good cooperation among YÖK-MEB and faculties (f=20) and the certification trainings were effective (f=16).

Academic Development. The most frequently stated positive opinions of student teachers were on the contribution of mentor academics on better teaching. (f=42) Another notable strength stated by student teachers was that the student teaching process helped them to better prepare materials (f=40) as well as lesson plans (f=39). In addition, student teachers (f=32) also stated that their mentor teachers highly contributed to better their teaching processes. One of them said: "I think they've contributed a lot because they have utilized this process quite well with what they have taught us along with the experienced teachers and with their feedbacks during our implementation." (ST, Samsun) Finally, some student teachers (f=26) commented that the theoretical practice courses at their faculties were effective and beneficial.

Readiness of Student Teachers. The most notable positive aspect stated by student teachers (f=40) was that academics had high motivation levels to make their student teachers better. Other positive opinions, though the frequency was not so high, were on the motivation of student teachers (f=26), motivation of mentor teachers (f=24) and the quality of education obtained in the faculty (f=18).

Negative Opinions. Negative opinions of the student teachers are presented in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Negative Opinions of Student Teachers



Implementation Process. It is clear in Figure 5 that majority of student teachers (f=45) regarded the implementation of student teaching solely in the final year as inadequate and insufficient. One noted: "This course should be in the third grade as well. The implementation course only in two terms are, I think, not enough. Also, one of the terms is spared only to observation." (ST, Antalya).

In addition, many stated that their mentor teachers were unable or unwilling to implement contemporary teaching methodologies in their classrooms. One criticized: "No, the approaches

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we've learned are taught quite differently in a way completely based on memorization. Since Turkish is used too much, the lesson continues as if it is a Turkish lesson. " (ST, Diyarbakır)

Academic Development. The most frequently stated negative opinion of student teachers were on the contribution of practice teaching process on teaching regulations. (f=21) One said: "Since we are called "student teachers", we do not get any information about the regulations at the school. We mostly dwell on student profiles or topics related to the lesson." (ST, Bursa)

Readiness of Student Teachers. The most notable negative aspect stated by student teachers (f=25) was that they were not satisfied with the four year education offered at education faculties and the most notable reason was stated as the insufficient number of practice courses. One commented: "Since we are trained according to a utopic educational environment that is far from reality, we forget everything we know and stay all alone when we enter the classroom and the reality hit our face." (ST, Çanakkale)

Suggested Improvements. Suggested improvements of student teachers are presented in Figure 6.

Figure 6. Suggested Improvements of Student Teachers

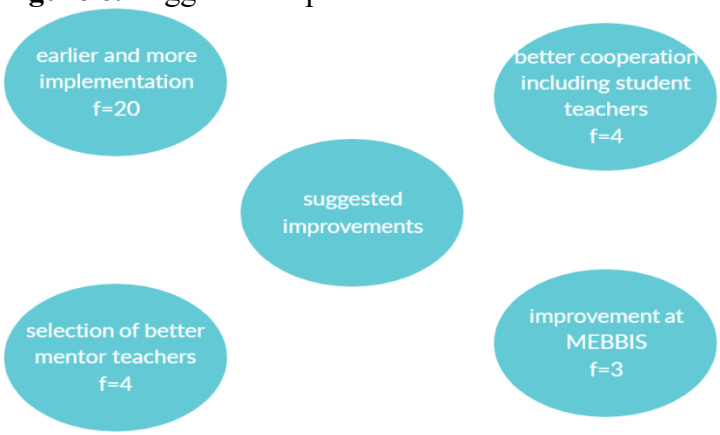

Figure 6 shows that many student teachers (f=20) suggested an earlier implementation of student teaching. They also suggested that the practice process should be longer. They found the implementation in the last year too late and stated that student teaching should start earlier in the program. One notable suggestion is: "I suggest this application to be at least three terms. Personally, I believe that the prospective teacher will launch himself/herself better in schools if there are four [terms]." (ST, Sivas) In addition, a couple of student teachers offered that faculties should target better mentor teachers. One said: "I think that mentor teachers should consist of those who are more knowledgeable and capable of making the process effective."(ST, Sivas) Finally a few student teachers offered an improvement at MEBBIS. One suggested: "It would be more efficient and beneficial if we, students, could also have access to MEBBIS and view the evaluation about us." (ST, Aydın).

Opinions of Mentor Teachers on the Student Teaching Implementation by 2018 Guidelines

Positive Opinions. Positive opinions of the mentor teachers are presented in Figure 7.

Figure 7. Positive Opinions of Mentor Teachers

Implementation Process. It is clear in Figure 7 that the majority of mentor teachers (f=19) regarded the teacher-student ratio of 4/1 and academic-student ratio as 8/1 in the new implementation as adequate and appropriate. One teacher said: "I think it is definitely the right decision because the process is tiring. It takes a lot of time to give feedback before and after the lesson, and to make the necessary checks. Hopefully, it can be sustainable." (MT, Çanakkale**).**

In addition, many mentor teachers (f=19) indicated that the certification requirement of teachers to become eligible as mentors was necessary and a good practice. One thus voiced: "A must-have condition. It separates willing and unwilling teachers. All teachers are not volunteers for mentoring. Volunteers go on and get their training." (MT, Erzurum) Many (f=15) stressed that the certification trainings were effective and that they contributed to mentor teachers a lot for being better mentors. Some others (f=17) stressed that daily and yearly evaluations at MEBBIS was a necessary and an effective implementation, the physical infrastructure of schools were good enough (f=17), the certification trainings were effective (f=15), and the cooperation among YÖK-MoNE and education faculties was harmonious (f=12).

Academic Development. The most frequently stated positive opinions of mentor teachers were on the contribution of them on better teaching. (f=19) One notable opinion is stated as: "I try to have students experience implementation as much as possible, and then we do portfolio assessments together." (MT, Çanakkale) In addition, the majority (f=15) stated that the practice teaching process contributed to student teachers in developing better lesson plans as well as materials. They

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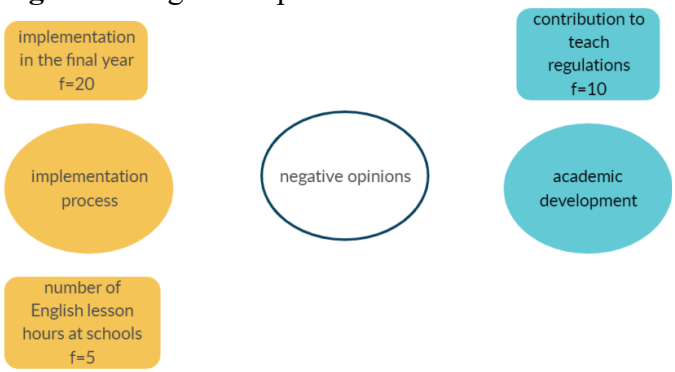
(f=11) also stressed the contribution of academics on the development of student teachers during student teaching practices.

Readiness of Student Teachers. The most notable positive aspect stated by mentor teachers (f=16) was that they had high motivation levels to make their student teachers better. In addition, the majority (f=14) were satisfied with the education that student teachers got in their education faculties. Some teachers, though the frequency was not so high, also regarded the motivation of student teachers (f=12) and academics (f=9) as high.

Negative Opinions. Negative opinions of the mentor teachers are presented in Figure 8.

Figure 8. Negative Opinions of Mentor Teachers



Implementation Process. It is clear in Figure 8 that almost all mentor teachers (f=20) regarded the implementation of student teaching solely in the final year as inadequate and insufficient. One salient opinion is provided as: "I think this is not enough. It should be carried out in the third or fourth year because they could teach two or three, or four times at most. I think this is not enough." (Edirne) In addition, some also stated the inadequate number of English lesson hours at schools as a weakness for student teaching practice.

Academic Development. The most frequently stated negative opinion of student teachers were on the contribution of practice teaching process on teaching regulations. (f=10)

Suggested Improvements. Suggested improvements of mentor teachers are presented in Figure 9.

Figure 9. Suggested Improvements of Mentor Teachers

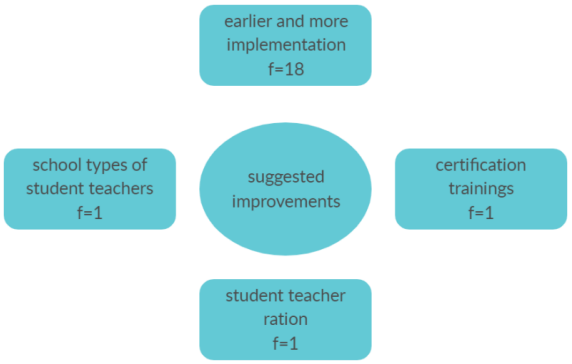


Figure 9 shows that almost all mentor teachers (f=20) suggested an earlier implementation of student teaching. They also suggested that the practice process should be longer. They found the implementation in the last year too late and stated that student teaching should start earlier in the program. A few mentor teachers also suggested that student teachers should have the opportunity to choose any school that they would like to do their practice teaching (f=1), certification trainings should be offered online (f=1) and student-teacher-academic ratio should be decreased to 4/1 and 2/1.

Conclusions

As a conclusion, it seems clear that the new regulations have brought many positive changes into teaching practice; yet, there is still a lot to be done. Giving more chance to practice in real classroom environment seems necessary for all the participants to help future teachers to be ready in dealing with the realities of teaching. Decreasing the number of student teachers each academic and mentor teacher needs to deal with, and adding a certification requirement for becoming a mentor are appreciated by all parties. Yet, having a better certification program involving good role models who are also applying the current teaching practices in their own classrooms would support future teachers in their own journeys. Teaching practice process should also be organized in a better way to make student teachers ready for all the aspects of the job. Assessment, for instance, one of the most important competencies that will be necessary in real life, seems to be ignored in the current applications. High motivation of all stakeholders is an indication of the value and importance given to teaching practice process. This motivation level can even be increased by providing more practice opportunities at various school contexts. It seems clear that very good steps have been taken, yet there still is a way to go.

Theoretical Implications

The new certificate requirement that mentor teachers had to become eligible for being a mentor with a 3-day intensive in-service training program offered by the MoNE was welcomed by all three groups. However, the 3-day in-service training for mentoring certification should be redesigned into a continuous professional teacher training model. Such a model could also include contextual factors for the mentors referring to their individual need, in addition to adjusting them to the current teaching models and practices. In the study, some academics expressed their concerns about the effectiveness of a 3-day intensive program offered by MoNE. Thus, the length and the depth of the 3-day training needs to be reconsidered, by including the academics in the decision-making process. As pointed out by Malders (2009), the “mentoring” process is “being supportive of the transformation or development of the mentee and of their acceptance into a professional community” (p. 260). To ensure an efficient mentoring process, mentor teachers need preparation and should be supported with opportunities in gaining the knowledge and skills to adjust their mindsets required for their new roles. Helping prospective teachers notice their own practices, beliefs and attitudes, listening to them actively, choosing the correct words to give feedback, helping them see the gaps between what they think they do and what they actually do are not skills gained effortlessly. Echoing Jones and Straker (2006), if we want to provide quality mentoring for trainees and newly qualified teachers, we need to encourage mentors to reconsider their practices they may have established over the years and providing adequate professional development opportunities.

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Cooperation among MEB schools and universities revealed different results for the groups. While mentors and student teachers were satisfied with this cooperation, academics were not. They believed that cooperation is restricted to making organizations and placing student teachers to the schools at the beginning of the process. MEBSIS evaluation was also perceived positively by student teachers and mentors but negatively by academics, arguing that they did not have much right in the final evaluation process. If the participants learn more about each other's expectations and contextual factors, they might also create better opportunities for all stakeholders. This might also give a chance to the universities for solving the problem of being too theory-oriented.

Academics and student teachers complained about not observing contemporary teaching methods used by mentors at schools. Agreeing with this point, a UNESCO report (2012) states that teachers are not equipped with the requirements of the field and the field cannot find teachers having the necessary skills during their education; thus, both sides suffer. Literature complains about classes which are teacher-oriented (Shu, 2014), and dominated by teachers' talk (Zhang, 2012) with minimum involvement from students (Aydın & Kecik, 2005). This case supports the study conducted by Aksoy (2020) who stated that English language teachers were not able to implement communicative teaching methods in public schools. Thus, mentor teachers need to be continuously trained, not only in terms of regulatory processes, but also for the use of contemporary teaching methods in their courses. They need to be provided effective in-service trainings on the implementation of especially communicative and task based techniques into their particular class levels.

Practical Implications

Participants had salient negative opinions about the new implementation of student practice process. For example, three groups believed that practice teaching conducted solely in the final year of the program was insufficient. Echoing Darling-Hammond (2006,b), when student teachers learn theory in isolation from practice and have a quick encounter with classroom practice divorced from theory, the problem of enactment becomes severe for many beginning teachers. Starting the teaching practice earlier in the 4-year program has strongly been suggested by all participants. Thus, a need for a curriculum transformation giving more opportunities for practicing in real environments to future teachers and involving the opinions of the academics have been pointed about. This finding is in line with Darling-Hammond, Hammerness, Grossman, Rust, and Shulman (2005) who report that many programs now emphasize the importance of providing clinical experience early and throughout a teacher education program- so that prospective teachers develop an image of what teaching involves and requires. Minor changes in the curriculum structure of education faculties will suffice this shortage. Practice courses could start at either the first or second year of education faculty programs or education faculties could be provided more flexibility in designing their practice courses throughout their four year programs. Giving more practice opportunities to student teachers ideally in different contexts should be emphasized as one of the salient implications of the study. Starting to work with different mentors at various school contexts with different types of students at varying ages at an earlier stage would definitely prepare the student teachers for their jobs better. Thus, student teachers should be provided with more practice chances.

Another implication of this study was on the lack of teaching regulatory processes of the Ministry as well as assessment or evaluation techniques to be used in classes. Considering that student

teachers may learn about regulations in their start to their careers, this may not be an important concern for practice teaching. However, it is of vital importance that student teachers should analyze and in fact be given the freedom to prepare and implement quizzes, alternative assessment techniques, as well as midterm exams during their practicum. Otherwise, it is obvious that they will have great difficulty when they take the responsibility of assessing the performance of students in their own classes. Equipping and giving chances to student teachers in assessment practices during their practicum need to be highlighted.

Related to the variables influencing the implementation process, all three groups' satisfaction could easily be seen on limiting the number of student teachers with 4/1 for mentor teachers. As a significant result, this was perceived as one of the strongest improvements of the system. Thus, the 8/1 ratio of each student teacher to academics should be decreased to maximum 4/1 as is the case for mentor teachers.

Student teachers in the study were found highly motivated towards practice courses and found the experience rewarding. This result is contradicting the literature which states that the teacher candidates do not really identify themselves as teachers. Still having the perception of a student, they are busy with finding ways of combining what theoretical knowledge they have and how to find the best ways of carrying it into classroom. (Fergusson & Donno, 2003; Borg, 2006). Turkish student teachers have been identified to adapt the teacher identity due to their high motivation level. The difficulties of the employment process and high competition in becoming a teacher in the Turkish system might be one of the reasons of this high motivation. However, some academics were dissatisfied with the motivation level of some mentors. In their opinion, some mentors were not very much willing to take part in the system or wanted to be a mentor to transfer some of their own workload to student teachers. As also stated by Valencia, Martin, Place & Grossman (2009), the lack of necessary preparation and support in guiding the pre-service teachers and unhealthy communication between the academics and the mentor teachers are among the main reasons for the problems caused by cooperating teachers. As Darling-Hammond (2006,b) stated, university and school based faculty did little planning or teaching together. Sometimes, their cooperating teachers were selected without considering their quality and often on the basis of seniority or familiarity. Thus, better qualified and highly motivated mentor teachers need to be included in student teaching practices and once they are credited, they need to be kept within the practice system for longer periods.

Limitations and Future Research

The data gathered for this study was limited to 63 academics, 24 mentor teachers and 56 student teachers in the Turkish context. Thus, findings cannot be generalized to the whole population. However, the data provides salient implications for the present practices and how they can be improved. Future research can be conducted on cross cultural student teaching practices as well as empirical studies with intervention processes.

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