

**The DESCRIPTION of a COURSE: COMMUNITY SERVICE PRACTICES in the
EDUCATION FACULTIES at UNIVERSITIES in TURKEY**

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Abstract: A teacher's main concern is the student at school; however, s/he is the person who deals with individuals outside the school atmosphere as well. Therefore, the programs educating future teachers should include some extra activities in order to impose social awareness on teachers. Because of such necessity in the society, there have been some renovations in teacher training programs in the universities in Turkey. Higher Education Institution (YÖK) which is responsible for organizing the teacher training programs at the universities in Turkey added a new course called Community Service Learning which is obligatory for prospective teachers in the 6th semester to the programs in 2006. In this study, therefore, the current implementation of the course will be introduced in detail and its effects on prospective teachers' pedagogical development will be discussed. In order to collect data, semi-structured questionnaire was delivered to the prospective teachers and findings are discussed in two perspectives: the impact on prospective teachers' pedagogical development and their reflections on this project.

Introduction

“Community Service-Learning” (CSL), is a kind of experimental learning, can be defined as a learning-teaching method which develops learning by relating community service works with the educational works in school, teaches citizen responsibility and strengthens the community (Abravanel, 2003; cit. Erjem, 2004). CSL is considered as a process that enables students to recognize dominant groups and values in the society (Carrington & Selva, 2010). It can be regarded as a course of educational practice where students participate in an organized service activity focusing on the identification of community needs and reflection on the service activity. In this sense, students gain further understanding of the course content, raise the value of discipline and develop sense of civic responsibility.

The history of ‘Service-Learning’ goes back to Dewey’s original notion of “learning by doing” (Butin, 2010). It addresses to the students in each stage of the instructional level as an instructional method which combine the community needs with the program-based teaching

implementations. The basis of CSL implemented most commonly in United States is considered “School and Society” written by Dewey in 1903. After accepted as a pedagogical method which can carry out democratic citizen by educators, CSL has become widely used in all instruction levels in all over the world (Titlebaum, Williamson, Daprano, Baer, and Brahler, 2004).

CSL in Turkey

In order to update primary education program of Ministry of Turkish National Education in 2005, academic programs of Faculties of Education were also revised also in 2006. In this context, the Council of Higher Education (YÖK), within the scope of updating teacher training programmes, decided to put forward a new course called Community Service Practices (CSP) as a compulsory course in the curriculum of teaching programmes of faculties of education in 2006. CSP course is an obligatory course which is taught in every department for a period including 1 hour theory, 2 hours of practice, totally 3 hours/2 credits for a week. This course is usually taught in third or fourth class in fall or spring semester according to educational and instructional plans of the departments. This is a kind of course during which a combination of theoretical and practical studies take part, the student is active with the guidance of the instructor; the instructors observe and orient the students’ studies by being a guidance (HEB, 2011).

This course fills an important gap in terms of enabling preservice teachers in gaining many of knowledge, skills and attitudes that they need to serve the community. The main objective of the course is to allow student teachers to prepare projects aimed to identify the current problems of society and providing solutions to those problems. In this course, pre-service teachers are intended to comprehend the importance of community service practices, to determine the current problems of the society, to prepare projects aimed to find out solutions to the current problems of the society, to attend various scientific activities as audience, speaker or organizer, to participate in the various projects voluntarily within the framework of social responsibility and to acquire the basic knowledge and skills oriented to implement community service activities at schools (YÖK, 2011).

During the theoretical and practical activities in the semester, the CSP course is given under the guidance of the supervisor who is the academician at the department. The student is in the center and undertakes active roles; the instructor remains in the background and observes, directs and guides the students’ works. With activities performed, it is aimed to develop teacher candidates who have qualities of social sensitivity and awareness,

cooperation, solidarity, effective communication, self-evaluation skills, social responsibility awareness and self-confidence (Trakya Universitesi Topluma Hizmet Uygulamaları Yönergesi, 2010).

Implementation and Process of CSP

Instructional process of CSP course is basically composed of three phases such as planning, implementation and evaluation. In the first stage, the activity is determined and objectives of the practice are clarified, and a weekly outline of the practice is composed. In addition to these fundamental aspects of the activity, student characteristics, timing, location, materials and facilities should be taken into account. In the implementation Phase, the task/s should be applied in the light of pre-determined principles and outline. In the final stage, the practice of the team is evaluated. In the Evaluation Phase whether the objective of activity has been achieved or not should be evaluated.

Since this course does not require mid-term or final exam from the candidate teachers, project teams deliver their portfolio file after completing the tasks and these files are used for evaluation of teacher candidates' performances. When the CSP course is evaluated, the candidate teachers' works during the semester are evaluated by the instructor according to the pre-determined criteria and the student's grade is rated as midterm and final grades. Project teams organize seminars and present what they had already done during the implementation to share their opinions with the members of other project teams.

Studies carried out at the Department of English Language Teaching (ELT)

Hismanoğlu (2011), in his study, aimed at examining the opinions of pre-service EFL teachers concerning community service practices course. The participants consisted of eighty two pre-service teachers of ELT Department enrolled at Lefke European University. The participants who were interviewed revealed more information about the challenges they faced and the benefits they gained from the course. The findings of the study indicated that pre-service teachers benefitted from practices of community service course in terms of academic development, personal improvement and social responsibility. On the other hand, they stated that they had experienced some difficulties since the institutions had raised problems on giving official permissions to carry out the activities/projects during the implementation process of CSP course at the institutions in North Cyprus.

Külekcı (2014), in her study, aimed to find out candidate English teachers' experiences that they gained during the implementation process of CSP course. The reflections of prospective teachers of English submitted through portfolios revealed they had encountered

some negative challenges during the implementation process of CSP course such as the lack of convenient materials for young learners and feeling incompetent in keeping young learners motivated. The kindergarten did not have suitable teaching materials for that age group so they had to prepare their own materials. However, prospective teachers pointed out that they obtained unique benefits from the activities they carried out at kindergartens within the framework of CSP course such as increasing their self-confidence especially in teaching English to young learners at kindergartens. Overwhelmingly, they stated that they had gained a lot of experiences about child psychology and about how to teach English to young learners efficiently. They maintained that these experiences would lead to development in their future teaching profession.

Tülüce (2014) tried to determine the views of candidate teachers of ELT concerning the advantages they gained from CSP course. In the study, teacher candidates were asked to write a report at the end of each week reflecting the implementation details, their performance, the process they had experienced and their views about the outcomes of the implementation. The opinions collected from teacher candidates were analyzed by using content analysis technique. The findings revealed that the participating prospective teachers of ELT improved themselves in terms of personal, professional, emotional and social aspects.

Korkmaz (2015) in his MA thesis stated that an overwhelming number of participant candidate teachers highlighted that CSP course allowed them to transfer their experiences to their teaching profession. When the contributions of CSP course to the personal development of pre-service teachers were examined, the majority of pre-service teachers emphasized that CSP course improved their self-confidence.

Many studies indicate that community service learning has many benefits such as strengthening critical thinking skills, improving integration of theory and practice, clarifying career goals, developing skills for work success including team-building and interpersonal skills (Gray, Ondaatje & Fricker, 2000). Furthermore, sense of community responsibility is developed by the students as they take part in the service of various projects which are authentic. As another important aspect of CSP, psychological and cognitive development can be marked since it enables the students to realize their role in the society as well as invest them in their future careers (Abes et al., 2002). Dinçer also claims that this course plays an important role for the purposes of candidate teacher's recognizing of professions and social conditions and learning to tackle with the problems (2006). Therefore, the programs educating future teachers should include some extra activities in order to impose social awareness on

teachers and in a sense, CSP course allows them accomplish this task. During the process, they take part in the project and, in the end, they write a rapport of the project. In this sense, they gain a chance of doing an experimental study and writing a research rapport like a researcher.

Activities and Practices Performed within CSP Course

The institutions and organizations contributed to the CSP project in English Language Teaching Department-Trakya University were Edirne Municipality (cleaning up some areas), Provincial Directorate of National Education (Teaching English at kindergartens; translating international official writing/letters), TEGV-Turkish Education Volunteers Foundation-(bringing educational service to the disadvantaged schools), EDOSK- Edirne Nature Sports Institution (organizing outdoor activities for the disadvantaged groups), organizing book or clothes campaign for the ones who need.

The current study is carried out with three kindergartens in Edirne affiliated with Provincial Directorate of National Education. The candidate teachers conducted the project in 2016-2017 academic year, through both semesters. Although the candidate teachers had to take the course only one semester, they started to implement the project from the first semester. The project lasted 28 weeks.

Aim of the study

In this current study, it is aimed to find out the perceptions of the teacher candidates towards “Community Service Practices” course.

More specifically the study tries to find out the answer to the research question of “What are the perceptions of the candidate teachers whose projects was teaching English at kindergarten towards the course CSP?”

Method

Qualitative method was applied. Qualitative research is especially effective in obtaining culturally specific information about the values, opinions, behaviors, and social contexts of particular populations. It provides information about the “human” side of an issue – that is, the often contradictory behaviors, beliefs, opinions, emotions, and relationships of individuals. [<https://course.ccs.neu.edu/is4800sp12/resources/qualmethods.pdf>]

Research tools

In order to gather the data, semi-structured interview was implemented to explore candidate teachers’ understanding of teacher cognition. Švec et al. (1998) find the semi-structured interview suitable for those research settings where participants’ perceptions,

opinions, beliefs, and attitudes are the core units of the research. Cohen et al. (2007) consider that open-ended outset in the semi-structured interview lead the interviewer to gain new and unforeseen knowledge. In this regards, the researcher has to focus on individuality, subjectivity, uniqueness, and spontaneity of response. Besides, he needs to understand and interpret the main points of respondents' statements with the use of natural language, avoiding generalizations and focusing primarily on specific topics, ideas, and situations (Cohen et al., 2007).

Participants

38 prospective teachers attending Trakya University, English Language Teaching Department participated in the study. They were enrolled in the CSP course in 2016-2017 academic years, Fall and Spring semesters. 9 of the participants were engaged in a social responsibility project before taking this course. The participants taught English at three different state kindergartens in Edirne within the scope of the project. Participants implemented the project for 28 weeks, 2 days a week. They wrote their daily lesson plans and expressed their reflections of each day to put them in final project dossier.

Data collection

In this study, the researcher designed the questions of the interview in accordance with the research question. Four open-ended interview questions were prepared by the researcher before the interview session. However, the researcher prepared an outline of guiding questions in advance to obtain detailed data from the respondent.

The researcher selected the research participants randomly from the population of the candidate teachers taking part in the practice. The interviews were held at the end of the practice.

Findings about data were gathered from the 38 teacher candidates. Their perceptions and opinions about CSP course were tried to be collected through four guiding interview questions.

To enhance the validity of the research, the researcher informed the participants about the main aim of her study after conducting the interviews.

Data analysis

After the interview sessions, the responses were transcribed through content analysis. Kvale (1996) explains that the processing of the rich data developed in the course of a semi-structured interview requires a qualitative content analysis. Therefore, the researcher outlined the content analysis for interpreting the data. According to Cohen et al. (2007), the analytical

process often requires some form of coding or scoring. Coding can be understood as “[...] the ascription of a category label to a piece of data, with the category label either decided in advance or in response to the data that have been collected” (283).

The open coding method was used to analyze the qualitative data and emerged themes were recorded by the researcher based on their frequencies of occurrence within the interview.

Findings

1. What do you think are the benefits of the CSP course in general?

Table 1.

The Benefits of the CSP Course

Key Themes	F
Academic improvement	20
Social responsibility	10
Self confidence	8

Three key themes of the content analysis of the question 1 revealed as social responsibility, academic improvement, and self-confidence. Majority of the candidate teachers stated that they gained experience on teaching young learners and improved academically.

P1: *“I learned how to manage very young learner class.”*

P2: *“I learned more about children characteristics and found solutions to the quick problems when I met in the classroom.”*

P3: *“I feel myself confident enough in planning the activities and designing the lesson procedure.”*

2. Do you believe you were given adequate guidance during the course?

Table 2.

Given adequate guidance during the course

Key Themes	F
Adequate guidance from the university	30
In adequate guidance from the university	8
Adequate guidance from the institution	25
Inadequate guidance from the institution	13

For the second interview question, overwhelming participants stated that they received adequate guidance from their supervisor at the university whereas they claimed that they did not have the similar guidance in the institution they implemented the project.

P1: *“We did not have any problem with our supervisor whereas our classmates working for different projects did not have enough information about what to do. It would be better if they received enough guidance.”*

P2: *“At the beginning of the implementation, our supervisor organized a meeting with us. We discussed about the process.”*

P3: *“The teachers at the kindergartens tried to give us extra chores that were not responsible.”*

P4: *“We were not informed about the institution; moreover the officers sometimes did not respect us”*

3. Did you have any problem during the course implementation?

Table 3.

Problems during the course implementation

Key Themes	F
Timing problem (university course program)	12
Unplanned activities at the institution	10
Disagreement among the group members	8
Financial problems (for material&transportation)	8

Responses to the third interview question content analysis revealed four key elements; timing problem, unplanned activities at the kindergartens, disagreement among the group members, financial problems of the participants for the teaching materials and transportation. During the implementation, participants had problems on finding a suitable time period for teaching English at kindergartens since kindergartens have dual-teaching periods as morning and afternoon classes. Therefore, participants had to rush to catch the classes.

P1: *“Sometimes I had to miss my courses at the university because of the kindergarten schecule.”*

P2: *“We sometimes go to kindergarten and see that the school has organized another activity like theater, going to picnic or cinema without informing us beforehand. These situations made us discouraged and upset since we had difficulty to arrange timing.”*

P3: *“I wished we were sponsored by the university since we are the university students we may have some financial problems.”*

4. How do you feel about taking part in such an implementation?

Table 4.

Perceptions about the project

Key Themes	F
Experienced	23
Self-confident	6
Planned	6
Lucky	3

Analysis of the responses to the second question revealed four key elements as experienced, self-confident, planned and lucky. Majority of the participants stated to be experienced after the project. They had the opportunity to see the real teaching and learning atmosphere. This is regarded as an advantage for them since they do micro-teaching presentations which do not show the real impacts of real class and a real time line.

P1: *“I feel myself happy to be the first English teacher of the little kids.”*

P2: *“I think we are very lucky to be in such projects before being a teacher because I met real class, various situations and many problems. I feel myself ready for the future career with kids.”*

P3: *“I broke down my prejudice towards teaching very young learners, I’m more confident now...”*

Results and Discussion

Participants’ responses to the first interview question indicated that CSP course has benefits on their academic development and social responsibility and self-confidence. Similarly, in the study of Özdemir and Tokcan (2011) teacher candidates expressed that the CPL course added them social sensibility, awareness and responsibility. It is clear that CSP course enables the candidate teachers to develop their social and emotional qualities and contribute the settlement of citizenship awareness at the same time support academic development (Uğurlu and Kırıl,2011; Gökçe,2011). The majority of the participants of this current study expressed that they had the opportunity to experience the real class atmosphere which enabled them put the theory into practice. Korkmaz (2015) mentioned the similar results in his thesis that most of candidate teachers conducted the projects through experiencing/doing by themselves. Likewise, Cebeci (2016) in her study stated that candidate teachers had the chance of teaching to very young learners and observing them closely which

let them adapt the procedure to the school atmosphere. Such a result might be explained by the idea that the prospective teachers enjoyed micro teaching practices which gave them a great opportunity to apply theoretical issues to real life situations in the kindergartens.

Most of the participants stated that they were given enough information about the procedure before and during the implementation process. Yet some of them claimed that some supervisors do not take the CSP course seriously. Similarly, in Soykan's research, the responses of most participants revealed that candidate teachers faced lack of information and unplanned activities and uncoordinated staff (2015). In Korkmaz's (2015) thesis, pre-service teachers declared that they should be informed about the aims and outcomes of the CSP course explicitly. Likewise, in Arcagök's (2011) master thesis and in his study (2013), the teacher candidates stressed that to make CSP course more efficient, the aim, scope and quality of the projects that will be carried out within the scope of CSP course should be distinct.

All in all, the results of this research indicated that participants have positive opinions for implementation of the CSP course; they expressed that they gained important values from the project. Likewise, Küçüköglü stated (2012) that CSP course may help pre-service teachers gain individual, social, academic skills. Participants of the current study also felt content and lucky for being part of such an organization and they believed that more importance should be given to the CSP course in English Language Teaching contexts.

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