

Pre-Service English Teachers' Teaching Practice Experiences: A Descriptive Thematic Analysis of Reflective Writings

Dilber Yaren Polat

Research Assistant, Faculty of Education, Department of Foreign Language Education, Gaziantep University, Gaziantep, Türkiye

Ahmet Nejdet Gokdemir

Faculty of Education, Department of Foreign Language Education, Gaziantep University, Gaziantep, Türkiye

Prof. Dr. Fatma Filiz Tilfarlioglu

Professor, Faculty of Education, Department of Foreign Language Education, Gaziantep University, Gaziantep, Türkiye

Abstract:

Field-based teaching practices play a key role in supporting English teacher candidates' professional skills, classroom management competencies, and identity improvement. However, qualitative and contextual studies that explore how teacher candidates interpret these experiences through their own reflections remain limited, particularly in the Turkish English Language Teaching (ELT) context. Therefore, this study aims to examine English teacher candidates' practicum experiences, the challenges they encounter and positive aspects of their teaching practices through reflective writing. This qualitative research employed a descriptive thematic analysis approach. The participants consisted of 16 English teacher candidates enrolled in the ELT program at a state university in Türkiye, who completed their teaching practicum in practice schools. Participants were selected through convenience sampling based on the researchers' accessibility. The data was obtained from reflective essays written by the pre-service English language teachers at the end of the practicum period. The texts were systematically coded according to recurring patterns and organized into meaningful themes. The findings revealed prominent themes such as classroom management difficulties, interaction with mentor teachers, student motivation, the mismatch between theoretical knowledge and classroom practice, professional self-confidence development, and challenges related to language teaching. Overall, participants perceived the practicum process as both challenging and supportive for their professional development. The study demonstrates that teaching practicum plays a crucial role in developing pre-service teachers' professional identity, awareness, and pedagogical competence in the Turkish ELT context. It also emphasizes reflective writing as a valuable strategy for supporting deeper understanding and structured reflection in teacher education programs.

Keywords:

English language teaching, ELT, teaching practice, reflective writing, teacher education.