

Assessing the Performance in EFL Teaching Practicum: Student Teachers' Views

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Abstract

This study aims to find out whether or not pre-service EFL teachers are satisfied with the way their performance in teaching practice is measured. A questionnaire was developed to elicit student teachers' views related to the components of the measurement policies employed in the two practicum courses at Anadolu University English Language Teacher Training program. 117 student teachers answered the questionnaire. 12 of them were interviewed to support the quantitative findings. The results of the analyses showed that majority of the students were satisfied with their grades in teaching practicum. Furthermore, student teachers found certain criterion measures as effective means for assessing their performance such as planning-preparation, general organization, and assessment by university supervisors while assessment by cooperating teachers, writing observation and reflection reports, and assessment by peer teachers were found to be the least effective ones. The findings are discussed considering the current measurement policies and certain other practices about teaching practicum component of teacher education programs. Some suggestions for university supervisors, cooperating teachers, student teachers, and all other parties related to teaching practicum are also provided.

Keywords: Teaching practicum, Foreign language teacher education, Assessing teaching performance

1. Introduction

Teaching practicum is a multidimensional activity involving student teachers, cooperating teachers, university supervisors, administrators, and students. Besides organizational difficulties, measuring the performance of teacher candidates in teaching practicum courses is a big concern as teaching practicum entails many different considerations such as lesson plans, observation reports, visits of mentors, etc. During the teaching practicum, student teachers basically benefit from lesson observation, the cooperating teacher and practicum school, university supervisors' supervision, communication with other school members, and the peer teachers (Gan, 2014).

1.1 Theoretical background

More than three decades ago, McNergney and Aylesworth (1983) characterized the criteria for evaluating pre-service education as explicit, implicit, and null evaluation. Explicit evaluation consists of the public purposes and methods of appraisal by examining trainees' general knowledge and verbal abilities. Implicit evaluation, on the other hand, is based on inquires about subject matter knowledge and professional attitudes. Null evaluation, finally, includes any highly subjective evaluation, in which there are not any intentional or nonintentional evaluation criteria to measure pre-service teachers' teaching performance. The beginning teachers, similar to the student teachers to some extent, are assessed according to ratings of professional trainers on a set of subject-specific rubrics that evaluate: planning, instruction, assessment, reflection, and academic language (Darling-Hammond, Newton, & Wei, 2013).

The challenges that student teachers face during the practicum may influence the performance of the student teachers negatively. Student teachers are sometimes too much stressed about the way they are assessed, which might, in return, result in a poor teaching practice performance and negative evaluation by the cooperating teachers (Canh, 2014). Student teachers also complain about having a limited degree of opportunity to implement in the school, not understanding the requirements by the supervising teacher, extra workload of writing lesson plans, time limits about completing the task, inadequate/late feedback (Allen, 2011). In the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, assessment and evaluation methods are among the problems: supervisors, cooperating teachers, and even student

teachers do not take the practicum assessment seriously. Student teachers sometimes need adequate training on issues such as lesson planning, preparation, presenting in the class, classroom management, communication skills, and evaluation procedures in order to augment English language teaching practices (Subedi, 2009).

In the practicum assessment, not only the professional standards but also the ‘personal’ standards are used by the assessors (Eisenberg, Heycox, & Hughes, 1996). The assessors refer to the student teachers’ personal characteristics as their professional skills, and they recognize competence development as both ‘personal’ and professional and may associate any successful or unsuccessful practice to the student teachers’ personal development (Eisenberg et al., 1996). Rorrison (2010) advocates a more humanitarian, reliable and courteous outlook to practicum assessment.

1.2 Research background

Although there have been several research studies concerning the various dimensions of practice teaching, research related to the assessment of the practicum has been limited in number. A quick look at practicum assessment programs shows that the assessment of the performance in the teaching practice is not well-grounded, and accordingly, the impact of assessment to any of the commitments given to practice teaching is problematic (Brooker, Muller, Mylonas, & Hansford, 1998). In this respect, Seferoğlu (2006) put forward that assessment procedures together with the type of courses offered, course contents within the Turkish teacher education program needed to be redesigned to meet the requirements of an innovative and flexible professional.

The use of documentation portfolios, which can be defined as a collection of student teachers’ practices centering to provide a multidimensional interpretation of teaching and professional development (Goodman, Goodman, & Hood, 1989; Shannon, 1994), is also used as a tool for practicum assessment. Portfolios are useful tools for using them as a vehicle for supporting the assessment system, which is flexible, uses various data sources and aids various purposes, gathers evidence longitudinally, and offers a unified assessment of the pre-service teacher (Ryan & Kuhs, 1993). The use of a portfolio assessment was found to be an accurate measure for assessing the performance of the student teachers in the teaching practicum (Gelinis, 1998). Performance-portfolio assessment was found to be a valid and reliable as an alternative assessment technique (Naizer, 1997). However, Meeus, Van Petegem, and Engels (2009) proposed that although they are valid tools, portfolio assessments can sometimes be problematic in terms of reliability for performance evaluation. They can still be employed by improving the level of reliability by using a common assessment protocol, using a common checklist of assessment criteria, holistic marking, adequate training of assessors, and use of various assessors (Meeus et al., 2009). Also, a team work comprising university supervisors and cooperating school teachers for a better portfolio assessment results in a better implementation of the portfolio assessment (Rakow, 1999).

Al-Mutawa and Al-Dabbous (1997) found in their study with Kuwaitian student teachers that personal qualities, language/linguistic knowledge, inter-personal relations, planning, and implementation as the components of the teaching practicum assessment were significantly correlated with each other serving hand in hand for a successful assessment. Leshem and Bar-Hama (2008) investigated how 58 Israeli EFL teacher trainees desire to be assessed by their counsellors and which criteria they saw as useful or impractical by means of questionnaires, interviews, personal diaries, and documents that included minutes from meetings and assessment forms. The findings revealed that teacher trainees preferred a criteria-based assessment, which is objective and explicit. They also favored numerical grading over a pass/fail grading. Moreover, the majority of teacher trainees preferred a holistic approach to an analytical approach for the evaluation of their practice teaching performance. According to the researchers, trainees need “explicit criteria for effective teaching in order to identify the quality of their teaching. Their preferences for assessment show that they regard the observation lesson as both a test and a means for reflection and professional development” (Leshem & Bar-Hama, 2008, p. 264). In the Canadian context, teacher candidates reported a wish for an authentic evaluation of their teaching practice in response to some factors that made the process appear inauthentic, including unusual preparation time and one-time viewing of a lesson (Parker & Volante, 2009).

In response to the question of what is really assessed in teaching practicum, Sedumedia and Mundalado (2012) analyzed the peer assessors, school mentors, and university teacher educators. The assessment by peer assessors was quite general, as they could not provide valuable feedback to foster student teachers’ knowledge about the way subjects are to be taught. School mentors focused on issues like classroom management rather than the subject matter knowledge and teaching skills. Finally, university teacher educators focused on classroom management, pedagogical skills, and learner knowledge, still not on subject matter knowledge. Researchers concluded that some teacher education practices, especially pre-service assessment of the practicum required revision; and “both the theoretical aspect especially subject matter knowledge and the pedagogical aspects in practical teaching need to equally

contribute to the total determination of assessment outcomes” (Sedumedia & Mundalado, 2012, pp. 86-87). Deering’s (2011) study using the letters of recommendation written by cooperating teachers suggested that teacher education institutions should no more utilize the traditional letter grade for evaluating student teachers’ practicum performance; they should rather start using a pass/fail system maintained by clear and specific letters of recommendation written by cooperating teachers about the strengths and weaknesses of the student teachers. In the same vein, Tillema, Smith, and Lessem (2011) concluded after their study with student teachers and mentors from Israel, Norway, and The Netherlands that while mentors and student teachers vary on basic aspects of assessment to some extent, they mostly agree on teachers’ possessing knowledge of the subject matter, being proficient in teaching methods, and being a good teacher as a model for the pupils.

Brooker et al. (1998) suggested some criteria and standards for assessing teaching practicum that included planning and preparation, communication and interaction, teaching for learning, managing the learning environment, student evaluation, and professionalism. Assessing Quality Teaching Rubrics (AQTR) was developed in four basic dimensions as components of practicum assessment: task design, task presentation, management, and responses (Chen, Hendricks, & Archibald, 2011). This tool was suggested as an instrument to assess performance in student teaching (Chen, Mason, Staniszewski, Upton, & Valley, 2012). Another competency scale cited in the literature, the Professional Education Personnel Evaluation (PEPE), assesses and evaluates the following competencies in teaching performance: preparation for instruction; presentation of organized instruction; assessment of student performance; classroom management; positive learning climate; communication; professional responsibilities, development, and leadership (Good & Weaver, 2003). Considering the integration of technology in teaching, Harris, Grandgenett, and Hofer (2010) suggested a new instrument to assist teacher educators to assess the quality of technology integration in lesson plans more precisely.

Recent research concerning the assessment and evaluation of student teachers during EFL teaching practicum also pointed out some issues. In a very recent study on the perceptions of Turkish pre-service teachers about these areas, a moderate, positive and meaningful relationship between the student teachers’ attitudes towards the teaching profession and their general teaching competency perceptions (Köksal, 2014). The researcher suggested the use of competencies as an assessment criterion in the “teaching practice” course to see how pre-service teachers applying the theoretical knowledge since general competencies were supposed to be presented only theoretically in the pre-practicum courses. In an empirical attempt to identify the teaching competencies, Yüksel (2014) found that student teachers felt themselves more competent in subject matter knowledge, engaging the students, and pedagogical knowledge than use of instructional strategies managing the class effectively. The study also found that student teachers needed improvement in the areas of working with dissimilar students, managing the time effectively, monitoring student progress, dealing with disruptive behavior, connected learning, giving homework, motivating students, assessing learning, and error correction and providing feedback.

1.3 Theoretical framework and the research questions

English Language Teacher Training program at Anadolu University (ELTAU) adopted the criteria for assessing the teaching practice performance considering the “General Teaching Profession Competencies Self-Assessment Form” offered by the Ministry of Education. According to this form, there are six main competency areas: ‘Personal and Professional Values-Professional Development’, ‘Knowing the Student’, ‘Instructional Process’, ‘Monitoring and Evaluating Learning and Development’, ‘Relationships between the School, Family and Society’ and ‘Curriculum and Content Knowledge’. Figure 1 presents the six components of the assessment criteria used at ELTAU.

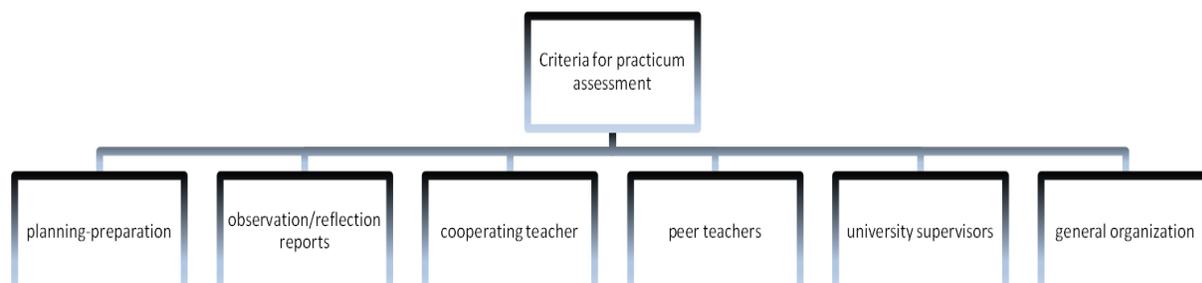


Figure 1. Six components of practicum assessment in ELTAU

As Figure 1 shows, planning-preparation, observation/reflection reports, cooperating teacher, peer teachers, university supervisors, and general organization were adopted as the criterion measures for assessing the performance of pre-service EFL teachers. According to this organization, planning/preparation refers to student

teachers' lesson plans prepared before delivering a lesson. Student teachers are also supposed to submit observation reports regarding their observation of the cooperating teachers. Cooperating teachers, peer teachers, and university supervisors are the parties who are supposed to observe student teacher performance and evaluate accordingly. Finally, general organization refers to the regular and punctual attendance to teaching practicum and keeping a comprehensive and neat teaching portfolio.

In response to the theoretical framework and practical considerations mentioned above, the present study aims to investigate whether pre-service EFL teachers are satisfied with the way their performance in teaching practice is measured and to find out the their perceptions about the criteria that measure their performance in the most and the least effective way. In regard with these specific purposes of the present study, the following research question was formed: *Which criteria do pre-service EFL teachers find more effective and less effective as tools to assess their performance in teaching practicum?*

2. Methodology

2.1 Participants

The participants of the study were 117 (30 male and 87 female) pre-service EFL teachers from Anadolu University Faculty of Education English Language Teaching Program. The student teachers were placed in three types of practicum schools: 26 of them in primary schools, 73 of them in secondary schools, and 18 of them in high schools. Since the placement is done unsystematically by considering the available schedule of the student teachers, cooperating teachers, and the university supervisors, the distribution was diverse.

The participants were enrolled in the 'School Experience II' and 'Microteaching' courses as part of their graduation requirement in 2012-2013 Fall Semester. For the Fall semester, the student teachers were given the chance to practice teaching. During a 14-week program, they were not only able to observe classroom teaching but also had the chance to conduct micro-teaching activities with assigned cooperating teachers in practicum schools for four classroom hours per week. The first two weeks were the 'observation weeks' for the student teachers so as to familiarize themselves with their cooperating teachers and the classrooms they would be teaching. Throughout the term, each student teacher taught one part of a lesson (e.g. presentation of a new grammar point, conducting during-reading activities, conducting post-listening activities, etc.) each week. During this time, they were observed by the cooperating teachers each time they delivered a lesson and by the university supervisors at least two times during the practicum for the evaluation of their performance.

The student teachers had already been assessed for their performance in the first phase of the teaching practicum in the Fall semester. They were awarded grades on their performance in lesson planning and reflection reports written about their self-development, and general organization for the 'Microteaching' course. In the 'School Experience' course, they received grades for the reports they wrote after observing their cooperating teachers and their teaching performance determined by supervisor visits.

In 2012-2013 Spring Semester, the student teachers were enrolled in the 'Teaching Practicum' and 'Macroteaching' courses as part of their graduation requirement. This time, each of them was assigned to a practicum school for 6 class hours a week in two different week days. They were also assigned a cooperating teacher and a university supervisor. The trainees worked in groups of three and with their assigned cooperating teacher for twelve weeks. Similar to the Fall semester, the first two weeks of the practicum were for observation. After two weeks, each student teacher taught 10 teaching hours throughout the teaching practicum. In the teaching practicum process, they were observed by the cooperating teachers each time they delivered a lesson and by the university supervisors at least two times during the practicum for the evaluation of their performance.

The criteria for the Spring Semester were not different from the ones in the Fall semester. Table 1 presents the evaluation criteria in the Spring semester. As Table 1 shows, student teachers were supposed to be awarded grades on their performance in lesson planning and reflection reports written about their self-development, and general organization for the 'Macroteaching' course. For the 'Teaching Practicum' course, they would receive grades for the reports they wrote after observing their cooperating teachers and their teaching performance determined by supervisor visits. Different from the Fall semester, this time, the cooperating teachers were also responsible to assign grades to the student teachers about their performances in the teaching practicum process.

Table 1. Evaluation criteria

Type of Evaluation	Description of the criteria for evaluation	%
Macroteaching Criteria		
Midterm Grade	Evaluation of the lesson plans 1 and 2 (The drafts prior to supervisor's feedback are graded)	20
Assignment Grade	Evaluation of a randomly selected lesson plan that focus on teaching one of the language skills	30
Final Grade	General organization & a reflection report written by the student teacher comparing and contrasting the beginning and the end of the teaching practice	50
Teaching Practice grading criteria		
Midterm Grade	Observation report: Reporting the three strong and three weak points of the cooperating teacher via in-class examples	20
Assignment Grade	Supervisory visit 1	30
Final Grade	Supervisory visit 2 & Cooperating teacher evaluation	50

2.2 Instruments

This study employed both quantitative and qualitative means to answer the research question. The quantitative data were collected by a survey developed by the researcher to use specifically for this study. The qualitative data, on the other hand, were obtained from the semi-structured interviews with a portion of the participants.

2.2.1 The Survey

The survey consisted of two parts. In the first part, participants were requested to provide some background information such as gender, age, type of practicum school, and their grades in the 'School Experience' and 'Microteaching' courses.

In the second part, participants responded to 20 statements that indicated different criteria for assessing their performance in teaching practicum. The items were written by the researcher benefiting from the literature and the already existing assessment criteria. Then, each item was checked by three experienced teacher trainers as the field experts and were modified by the researcher. Finally, the survey was piloted with 24 student teachers, which were excluded from the data of the study, to find out any possible problems related to misunderstanding. The items were written in Turkish as the mother tongue of the participants for the ease of understanding and performed a high reliability level (Cronbach's alpha= .911). The student teachers were asked to read each statement and indicate how effective they thought the criteria in each statement were to assess their performance on a Likert-type scale as 'Very much', 'Quite', 'A little', 'Very little', or 'Never'.

The items in the survey were categorized under six headings each of which indicated one of the criteria that might be utilized to assess the performance of the student teachers during their practicum process. These were observation/reflection reports (5 items), planning-preparation (5 items), cooperating teacher (2 items), peer teachers (2 items), university supervisors (2 items), and general organization (4 items).

2.2.2 Semi-structured Interviews

The qualitative data consisted interviews with 12 student teachers, who volunteered for the interviews. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured fashion by the researcher in participants' native language, Turkish. The interviews aimed to elaborate student teachers' opinions related to the survey items each starting with 'How effective do you think [the criterion measure] is/are to assess your performance in teaching practice? Why do you think so? Can you elaborate on it? Do you have any specific example to this? Etc.'

The interviews were tape-recorded within the permission of the interviewees for future transcription. Each interview lasted from 6 to 10 minutes depending on each interviewee's opinions and explanations.

2.3 Data Collection Procedure

The surveys were given to the student teachers around the beginning of the Spring semester of 2012-2013 academic year. The timing was important because the student teachers had not been assigned any grades considering the fact that it could have influenced their views about the assessment criteria. Although they did not receive any grades, they

were aware of the performance measures for the practicum courses. The interviews were also held before grading: two weeks after the survey around the first midterm week.

2.4 Data Analysis Procedure

As for the quantitative data analysis, descriptive statistics were computed using the responses of the participants to the survey questions. Mean scores were calculated for each statement individually and each category representing one criterion measure. Later, a one-way repeated measures ANOVA was run to check if there were significant differences among the components of the scale.

As for the qualitative data analysis, the content-analysis procedure (Miles & Huberman, 1994) was implemented by reading, comparing and finalizing the emerging themes for student teachers' ideas related to the measurement criteria. First of all, the tape-recorded interviews were transcribed by the researcher. Then, the explanations made or examples provided were identified for each criterion measure. The extracts, then, were coded and separated to fall into each category. The analysis procedure was conducted by two raters independently: the researcher and a colleague as an experienced teacher trainer. The inter-rater reliability was calculated by using a 'point by point method' with a formula of the number of agreements divided by the number of the agreements plus disagreements multiplied by 100 (Tawney & Gast, 1984). The inter-rater reliability was calculated as .1 as both raters totally agreed upon the coding.

3. Results

3.1 The quantitative findings

In order to answer the research question, first of all, mean scores obtained from the questionnaire were calculated for each item and for each category as a representative of the criterion measures for teaching practicum. Table 2 presents the mean scores for each item in the survey. According to the results, student teachers found the criterion measures as effective means for assessing their performance in general ($M=3.74$). As for the specific purpose of the study, the analysis focused on the individual categories, even single items. Among the categories, 'planning-preparation' measure together with 'general organization' ($M=4.09$ for each) and 'assessment by university supervisors' ($M=4.06$) were found to be the most effective measures for assessing their performance in teaching practicum whereas 'assessment by cooperating teachers' ($M=3.29$), 'observation and reflection reports' ($M=3.37$), and 'assessment by peer teachers' ($M=3.43$) were found to be the least effective ones.

When individual items in each category were considered, the most effective measures according to student teachers were 'writing an applicable lesson plan' (Item 8; $M=4.47$) and 'writing a lesson plan with appropriate techniques and methods' (Item 9; $M=4.46$). These two items related to planning and preparation were followed by a measure about general organization: 'attending the practice teaching activities regularly and punctually' (Item 18; $M=4.27$). Finally, 'being observed by the university supervisor' (Item 15; $M=4.08$) and their 'evaluation of student teachers' lesson plans' (Item 16; $M=4.06$) were among the preferred assessment tools for the student teachers.

On the other hand, student teachers indicated some criterion measures as less effective performance measures. For example, 'writing a detailed observation report based on the observation of the cooperating teachers' (Item 3; $M=3.10$) and 'writing reflection reports for the lessons taught' (Items 4 and 5; $M=3.17$ and $M=3.16$ respectively) were among the least effective means for assessing student teaching. Similarly, items related to assessment by 'cooperating teachers' observation of the student teacher' (Item 11; $M=3.32$) and their 'evaluation of the student teachers' lesson plans' (Item 12; $M=3.25$) showed that cooperating teachers were not seen as reliable sources of assessment in student teaching performance.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for the items in the survey

Item		Mean	SD
<i>Observation and reflection reports</i>			
Item 1	<i>Observing my cooperating teacher on a classroom issue that is assigned to me or that I choose</i>	3.70	.769
Item 2	<i>Observing my peer teacher on a classroom issue that is assigned to me or that I choose</i>	3.72	.764
Item 3	<i>Writing a detailed observation report according to my observation</i>	3.10	1.045
Item 4	<i>Writing a reflection report on a lesson that my university supervisor was in the class to observe me</i>	3.17	1.045
Item 5	<i>Writing a reflection report on a lesson that my university supervisor was NOT in the class to observe me</i>	3.16	1.098
<i>Planning-Preparation</i>			
Item 6	<i>Writing a neat and clear introductory page for my lesson plan</i>	3.25	1.312
Item 7	<i>Writing the overall and behavioral objectives clearly</i>	3.98	.956
Item 8	<i>Writing an applicable lesson plan</i>	4.47	.689
Item 9	<i>Writing a lesson plan with appropriate techniques and methods</i>	4.46	.714
Item 10	<i>Writing a neat and clear introductory page for my lesson plan</i>	3.25	1.312
<i>Cooperating teacher</i>			
Item 11	<i>Being observed by my cooperating teacher</i>	3.32	1.195
Item 12	<i>My cooperating teacher's evaluation of my lesson plan</i>	3.25	1.238
<i>Peer teachers</i>			
Item 13	<i>Being observed by my peer teachers</i>	3.52	1.022
Item 14	<i>My peer teachers' evaluation of my lesson plan</i>	3.33	1.106
<i>University supervisor</i>			
Item 15	<i>Being observed by my university supervisor</i>	4.08	.873
Item 16	<i>My university supervisor's evaluation of my lesson plan</i>	4.04	.959
<i>General organization</i>			
Item 17	<i>Being punctual about the given day/hour of conferences with the university supervisors and cooperating teachers</i>	3.85	1.085
Item 18	<i>Attending the practice teaching activities regularly and punctually</i>	4.27	.781
Item 19	<i>Doing/handing in the given assignments and activities in time</i>	4.18	.867
Item 20	<i>Keeping my practice teaching portfolio in a neatness and organized way</i>	4.08	1.035

To validate the findings obtained from the mean scores, a one-way repeated measures ANOVA was run. Results of one-way repeated measures ANOVA showed the significant difference among the components of the survey, $F(5, 112) = 42.386$; $p < .01$. A post-hoc test was also run to determine the specific differences among the components of the scale. Multiple comparisons with Bonferroni adjustment were confirming the differences among the components of the scale (Table 3).

Table 3. Pairwise comparisons

	Observation reports	Planning-Preparation	Cooperating teacher	Peer teachers	University supervisors	General organization
Observation reports	-	-,715*	,085	-,056	-,689*	-,723*
Planning-Preparation			,799*	,658*	,026	-,009
Cooperating teacher				-,141	-,774*	-,808*
Peer teachers					-,632	-,667*
University supervisors						-,034
General organization						-

*The mean difference is significant at the .05 level

As Table 3 shows, the mean scores for the three components (planning-preparation, general organization, and university supervisors) were significantly different from the mean scores of the remaining three components (observation and reflection reports, cooperating teacher, and peer teachers), which meant that student teachers found the former group of criterion measures more effective than the ones in the latter group for assessing the student teaching performance.

3.2 The qualitative findings

Qualitative findings of the study also mentioned that pre-service EFL teachers find some aspects of practice teaching more effective assessment measures than some others. In other words, they saw the following criteria as the best performance measures: planning-preparation, general organization, and university supervisors. On the other hand, they considered peer teachers, writing observation and reflection reports, and evaluation by cooperating teachers as less effective performance measures.

Adequate planning and careful preparation for the student teaching practice is an essential aspect of teaching practicum. One student teacher mentioned the fact that lesson planning gave them the necessary self-confidence. He indicates the importance of writing lesson plans and being prepared for the class in his words: *Planning is the most important thing, especially in managing the time. Knowing about what to do where before the lesson, finding ways to take the attention of the pupils, these are very important. And I need something that was done before everything happens.* Student teachers also agreed upon the idea of the evaluation of their lesson plans by their supervisors for a fairer evaluation. Another student teacher explained the situation about lesson planning as follows: *Writing lesson plans was quite boring, especially after we gain a kind of automaticity. But, to me, they were very helpful. My lesson plan was always with me as I was delivering lessons, and I checked it when I needed. But I believe all of my lesson plans must be evaluated, not one that is randomly selected. You now, sometimes, your plan is perfect, sometimes not reaching the expected level of success.*

General organization, which includes a punctual and regular attendance to all practicum tasks such as supervisor conferences and keeping the practicum portfolio, is an effective performance measure, according to the student teachers. One student teacher said: *I believe that being punctual, handing in the lesson plans on time, going to practicum school regularly and on time, neatness of our portfolios, even how we dress should be assessed. In the end, whether we like it or not, these all show the degree of importance we give to the job we do in practice; it shows how enthusiastic we are about being a teacher.*

University supervisors' visits to the practicum schools were also found to be effective measures of teaching performance. All of the student teachers without exception agree on the validity and reliability of the assessment by the university supervisors. However, some concerns were also disturbing them, especially when it comes to receiving a big final grade based on a 40-minute supervisor observation. Two student teachers acknowledged the situation as follows:

I think my supervisor must visit every lesson I deliver (which is almost impossible due to time considerations)

I always have good classes, but whenever my supervisor comes to visit me, everything goes wrong, the lesson fails. But at other times, I'm perfect.

Evaluation by peer teachers was seen as a secondary performance assessment tool by the student teachers in this study. In fact, peer teaching is an important tool for feedback. Most students being interviewed mentioned that it

would not be an objective measurement as one stated: *I think it is not possible to grade my peers or to be graded by them. I think it is not possible in our country [laughter], none of us would give bad grades to each other. Come on, we are all students. It wouldn't be objective.*

Observing the cooperating teacher and writing observation reports and reflection reports are among the less effective performance measures from the student teachers' perspective. In point of fact, student teachers find observation as an essential tool for professional development in the same fashion as the existing literature that has always announced the importance of observation and reflection in teacher education. For example, one student teacher specified the issue as follows: *It's very important. Why? Because we're observing the teacher and trying to adapt ourselves accordingly. You know, we will be teachers, too. So, we need to see the problems, goods and bads, and we will be doing the goods, avoiding the bads...* However, student teachers might not provide the true information about the student teachers, or may force them to write wrong or missing information about their observations or in the reflections about their own teaching. One student teacher bravely admits about the reports he wrote as follows: *We prepare lesson plans before we teach, and we think about everything in detail there. So, I don't think that it is necessary to write detailed observation reports or reflection reports. I may not say the truth in my reports, it would be a better idea to refer to my supervisors' observations rather than my ideas about my or the school teacher's performance.* Likewise, some student teachers were worried about being evaluated according to their performance written in the reflection reports as one student teacher said: *Now, if my supervisor gives me the grades evaluating my reflection report, he can make me fail, because I wrote such bad things about my lesson, things that must never had happened [laughter]...*

The most prominent finding of this study was about the assessment by the cooperating teachers. Student teachers indicated cooperating teacher assessment and evaluation as the weakest link both on the survey items and during the interviews. For example, one student teacher made the connection between feedback and assessment by her cooperating teacher as follows: *I don't think that my cooperating teacher this semester was efficient enough to give me feedback about my performance. Hence, as you know, there is a direct relationship between feedback and grades, so I think it would not be a fair evaluation if she were given the chance to evaluate me and assign me grades.* Another student teacher focused on the inadequacy of the cooperating teacher for assessing her performance. She mentioned: *You know, my teacher there [the practicum school in the first semester] was someone limiting us a lot. He always wanted us to focus on grammar. But we had to present all skills and grammar. Probably he wouldn't grade me about my performance in four skills, he would just consider grammar. That would affect my grade negatively.* On the contrary, student teachers believe that cooperating teacher might be a fair assessment if they are really good models for them and are able to provide fruitful feedback about their strengths and weaknesses. One student teacher elaborates on this discussion as follows: *My cooperating teacher in the first semester was great. She graduated from X University, and knew everything about methodology. Whenever we delivered a lesson, she was providing us with very good feedback, just like the feedback we get from our university supervisor. If she evaluates us, I'm OK, I can accept it. Because I rely on her observations and trust her fairness.*

4. Discussion and Conclusions

According to McMillan (2000), good assessment is valid, fair, ethical, efficient, and feasible; it uses multiple methodology, appropriately incorporates technology, enhances instruction, influences student motivation and learning, and contains error. Moreover, there is a need to create a rational evaluation system as an essential part of practicum; and the evaluation should be used primarily as a device to endorse student reflection and growth, thus, assessment should not be viewed as the first priority (Yan & He, 2010).

An interesting view from student teachers that appeared after the interviews was about the standardization of the assessment. Student teachers believed that the criteria are the same for all student teacher, but when it comes to practice, each group is treated differently according to the expectations of the supervisors. Supervisors' personal differences and their expectations stemming from these differences was another concern to the student teachers. While university supervisors' identity is a not a factor to impact their assessment of the student teachers in terms of their subject matter knowledge, it has a significant role in their assessment of student teachers' lesson plans, communication, use of instructional materials, classroom organization and management, and assessment and evaluation of lessons (Ssentamu-Namubiru, 2010). For example, while some supervisors consider chalk, chalkboard, and duster as instructional materials, others do not; and they may value the student teachers according to their particular principles (Ssentamu-Namubiru, 2010).

As a support to the findings of this study, teacher trainees in Singapore indicated that although lesson planning was a very time consuming and stressful task, writing detailed lesson plans assisted them to reflect on their teaching

strategies and classroom procedures in a more organized manner (Wong & Chuan, 2002). Moreover, peer teacher evaluation is considered as a subordinate assessment measure of performance by the student teachers in this study. In fact, peer teaching is an important tool for feedback. For example, Day (2013) found in a practicum-based research study that student teachers enjoyed participating in peer observation practices and confessed that it helped them adjust their teaching practices and beliefs. Additionally, there are several studies concerning the importance of portfolio keeping and portfolio assessment (Gelinias, 1998; Goodman et al., 1989; Meeus et al. 2009; Naizer, 1997; Rakow, 1999; Ryan & Kuhs, 1993; Shannon, 1994). Therefore, keeping the teaching portfolios together with other aspects of organization (punctuality, manner, regular attendance, etc.) should be given the necessary attention when it is inserted in the assessment of the teaching performance.

Similar studies concerning the role of the cooperating teachers in teaching practicum are able to support the findings in the way that, unfortunately, there is a mismatch between student teachers' expectations and cooperating teachers' meeting these expectations. According to Hudson and Nguyen (2008), student EFL teachers want enthusiastic, helpful, friendly, and knowledgeable mentor teachers who have communicative competence. The mentors should guide the student teachers about the rules of the system: curriculum, school policies, and assessment. They should also be good models for teaching in terms of methodology, pronunciation, and writing lesson plans. They should teach them the teaching strategies, classroom management, ways to motivate students, and tactics for dealing with unexpected situations. They should provide direct and detailed feedback about teaching performance and content knowledge. The necessary cooperating teacher roles, from the student teachers' perspective, are positive guidance, especially sharing experiences, reading lesson plans before teaching thoroughly, and providing more opportunities for EFL teaching, (Hudson & Nguyen, 2008). In the same vein, in the Vietnamese context, student teachers had mentioned that their cooperating teachers' feedback was vague, abstract, and confusing to them (Canh, 2014). In fact, as Yaman and Alkaç (2010) declared, student teachers always look for mentors who are ready to help and volunteer to guide them in the teaching practice.

Teaching practice gives a lot of importance to school placements as a vital part of teacher education. Effective professional training starts with an introduction to the realities of the teaching life. In this experience, student teachers will find the chance to decide if they are really ready to be teachers for the rest of their lives. Providing occasions for student teachers to incorporate theory and practice and work collaboratively with mentors and learn from them are the two fundamental purposes of practice teaching. Student teachers observe their mentors to learn about their skills, strategies and classroom realizations. They also get feedback related to their own teaching practices by means of discussions with their mentors and university supervisors. They are able to apply various approaches, strategies and skills within an understanding to generate meaningful learning via self-reflection. Along these lines, student teachers gather experience in dealing with classroom issues, retaining class discipline, creating their own teaching style, and becoming familiar with school organization and administrative issues (Subedi, 2009). In the same vein, the interactions and opportunities for collegial dialogue with their significant others during the practicum are perceived as essential to student teachers' professional growth and identity development (Gan, 2014).

There is no doubt that teaching practicum has a stressful, anxiety-provoking atmosphere. Assessment instruments such as being observed, paperwork, peer-teachers, cooperating teachers, and university supervisors are among those stress-creating phenomena (Coşkun, 2013; Merç, 2011). Therefore, the degree of stress and anxiety may result in a poor student teaching performance. Necessary measures should be taken by all parties in the practicum process including the university supervisors, cooperating teachers, even school administrations, and student teachers themselves for a better practicum placement and a more reliable assessment of student teaching performance.

Canh (2014) provides certain recommendations to make the teaching practicum a productive one for the student teachers. First, there ought to be a component of reflection in the teacher education program, which offers student teachers rudimentary skills of reflection such as observation, self-monitoring, and self-evaluating. Second, the practicum should be redesigned to make it a developmental learning experience for the student teachers. Third, the practicum assessment should be revolutionized. As teaching is now gradually considered less as the direct broadcast of knowledge than as a sense-making practice, the practicum assessment should match with these renovations. Also, reflective feedback sessions conducted by dint of video-recorded lessons contribute to the training of future teachers for the professional life (Eröz-Tuğa, 2013). Finally, "developing a perspective on the attitudes of student teachers towards their mentors is highly crucial in the sense that it enables authorities, who are responsible for the teacher education policies, to reflect on the efficacy of the teacher training programs" (Yaman & Alkaç, 2010, p. 76).

In summary, the following recommendations are presented along with the findings of the present study considering the student teachers' views about being evaluated for the teaching practicum courses:

- Planning and being prepared for teaching are in the heart of practice and needed to be assessed and evaluated for the well-being of the student teachers' practicum experiences.
- Cooperating teachers, excluding the good examples, need better professional qualifications to be trustworthy and reliable sources for assessing student teacher performance.
- Peer teachers are valuable sources of feedback, but not appreciated for assessment or evaluation.
- Observation is useful, but writing reports is not that effective as a performance evaluation measure. Supervisors and mentors should approach those reports in caution as they may not provide the complete or accurate information about the experiences.
- Punctuality, attendance, and portfolio keeping are very important and should be graded.
- University supervisors must be very careful at all stages of practice teaching: placing, observing, and assessing student teachers. Assessment criteria need to be internalized by especially the university supervisors because differences in the expectations and values would harm the student teachers rather by demotivating them resulting in frustration or disappointment.

Finally, this study has some limitations. First, this study was an evaluation of current practices with regard to the implementation of two practicum courses at an EFL Teacher Training Program; therefore, the findings may not be easily transferable to other contexts. However, there are still valuable implications about the way teaching practice performance is assessed for teacher educators and student teachers. Second, this study focused on the practicum assessment from the student teachers' points of view. As a matter of fact, the findings and implications of the study should be approached with caution. Further inquiries might look into the perceptions and practices of university supervisors, cooperating teachers, even pupils related to practicum assessment.

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Notes

Note 1. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the “20th International Conference on Learning” on July 11-13, 2013 in Rhodes, Greece.

Note 2. Sample extracts from the interviews were originally Turkish. They were translated into English by the researcher.