THE EFFECT OF PRACTICUM ON THE DISCIPLINE ORIENTATIONS OF PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS

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Abstract

This study aimed to examine the classroom discipline perceptions of pre-service language teachers both before and after the student teaching experience. Before going to their practice schools and immediately after completing their full-time student teaching experience, pre-service teachers (N = 104) from three state universities in the Turkey completed a discipline belief questionnaire identifying their preferred model of classroom discipline. The results indicated that although the student teaching experience in practice schools increased beginning teachers' preferences from a humanistic discipline model to a more assertive discipline model, this increase is not significant. These results show that the student teaching experience does not create a difference in previous perceptions and beliefs of pre-service teachers. The results of the study also suggest that student teachers' preconceptions regarding the profession will not change despite the practical experience gained during practicum.

Keywords: classroom management, discipline, pre-service teacher, practicum experience

1. Introduction

Classroom management is a multi-faceted part of teaching, including instructional management, people management and behavior management (Nancy, Zenong & Beatrice, 1998). To Doyle (1986; in Zuckerman, 2000), it refers to the process of establishing and maintaining social order so that instruction and learning can occur. Nevertheless, we see that the term is usually equated with discipline, the treatment of misbehavior, behaviors teachers regard as disrupting or threatening to disrupt instruction.

One of the frightening issues for teachers is to deal with the misbehaviors of challenging students in the classroom. Although confrontations do not take place every day in every classroom, most teachers have to deal with a student acting aggressively and speaking in the classroom. For the sake of responding to student misbehavior and creating a more supportive classroom climate, the mission of preparing effective teachers is becoming harder for pre-service teacher education programs (Kaya, Lundeen & Wolfgang, 2010). Discipline is generally believed to be necessary for students to be successful in education, especially during the compulsory education period (Kilimci, 2009). Pre-service teacher education students are concerned with discipline-related problems in schools. Therefore, perceptions of discipline influence preservice teachers in many different ways as they go about making decisions regarding management, discipline, and career choices (Young, Snead & Sutarso, 2013).

2. Relevant Research

Weinstein (1998) believes in the importance of helping prospective teachers develop broader, more inclusive notions of both caring and order. According to the results of her study in which one hundred forty-one teacher education students think about achieving order mainly in terms of management rather than pedagogy or interpersonal relationships.

Tartwijk et al. (2009) tried to find an answer to the question "Which elements of practical knowledge underlying classroom management strategies, are shared by teachers who are successful in creating a positive working atmosphere in their multicultural classroom?" In their interviews, teachers mostly referred to the importance of providing and enforcing clear procedures and sound rules, and implementing those procedure and rules in way that no escalation occurs with negative consequences for the classroom climate.

Again another study with a different multicultural perspective was conducted by Lewis et al. (2008). They investigated the extent to which students from three diverse countries (Australia, Israel, and China) report that their teachers' classroom disciplinary behavior affects their attitudes towards schoolwork and the teacher. Regarding the results of six strategies (Punishment, Discussion, Recognition, Aggression, Involvement, Hinting), they found that a) both punishment and aggression have a reasonably strong association with distraction and negative affect towards the teacher, b) the use of recognitions and discussions with students, were found to relate to less distraction, greater liking of the teacher and c) more hinting and involvement of students in decision making related to a stronger belief that the discipline actions taken by a teacher are warranted.

The findings of the study investigated by Buyukkarci and Genc (2007) indicate that Turkish student-teachers generally prefer an interactionist approach towards students' (mis)behaviors. Although their attitudes may differ depending on the condition they come across, they tend to be in more interaction with their students.

According to the findings reported by Bada and Genc (2008), prospective teachers' perceived problems mostly originated from students. Of primary concern for the participants was observed to be the issue of discipline in classroom. Most of these solutions were categorized into three main groups: interventionist, interactionist, and non-interventionist.The obtained data from this study illustrates that interventionism was the most favoured classroom management approach (51%). Interactionism, with 38%, was by all means found to be an effective way in dealing with discipline problems, and non-interventionism, by 11%, was not found to be an influential way in responding to classroom management problems.

Research on teacher beliefs during the pre-service period of teaching preparation remains a major focus for those wishing to understand, educate, and train beginning teachers. The main question that drives this research is how the discipline perceptions of pre-service teachers develops and changes over time. Therefore, this study aimed to reveal the changes in beliefs about discipline as a result of the situation-specific student teaching experience.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

The sample consisted of 104 teacher candidates enrolled in English Language Teaching programs (ELT) at three different universities in Turkey: 57 pre-service teachers from Gazi University, 27 from Cukurova University and 20 from Inonu University. ELT programs in the three universities were similar in terms of course contents and applications. After completing similar, state-mandated pre-requisite courses, all pre-service teachers took courses such as Approaches to Language Teaching I-II, Teaching Language Skills I-II, etc.

Prior to the full-time student teaching experience, pre-service teachers in all three universities also completed a course on classroom management, which emphasized management techniques, discipline models, ethics, and legal issues.

3.2.Research Questions

In this study we have tried to find answers to the following research questions:

1. Are there any differences among ELT students from different universities in Turkey in terms of their discipline orientations?
2. Are there any differences between male and female ELT students from different universities in Turkey in terms of their discipline orientations?
3. Does the practicum study have any effect on the discipline orientations of ELT students in Turkey?

3.3. Data Collection

In order to evaluate student teachers' beliefs on classroom discipline, this study used the "Beliefs about Discipline Inventory", as developed by Glickman and Tamashiro (1980, cited in Kaya, Lundeen & Wolfgang, 2010). The inventory has three subscales: Relationship-Listening; Confronting-Contracting; and Rules and Consequences. It was administered at two specific points during the study: prior to entering the classroom for the student teaching experience and immediately after the student teaching semester. Data was collected at the universities during meetings with the university supervisors. Participant anonymity was kept safe by means of numeric coding practices. The participants were given 12 dichotomous choices between two value statements representing one of three discipline-philosophical view points:

(1) Relationship–Listening (RL); (2) Confronting–Contracting (CC); and (3) Rules and Consequences (RC).

The participants were told to choose between two competing philosophical value statements and then to locate responses for each numbered question on the self-scoring record that was included with the inventory. The following are examples of the statements presented in the inventory:

(1) The books and similar classroom equipment are being misused, soiled, and at times destroyed. I will most likely:

a. Hold a class meeting, show the damaged books to the class, and ask them how we may solve this problem, including what action should be taken toward a student found to be misusing books. (Confronting-Contracting).
b. Physically remove or limit the number of books available and observe closely to see who is misusing the books. I would then tell that student how such action was affecting other students and how I felt about the loss of such books. (Relationship-Listening).

Subscale scores for each of the three discipline models were obtained by adding response scores in three sets of pairwise comparisons (RL, CC, and RC). Comparisons among RL, CC, and RC were each described by four items where eight responses fell under each subscale. Thus, scores on each subscale range from zero to eight. A score of zero on any subscale shows that the participant does not approve the underlying discipline model for any of the items. On the contrary, a score of eight points out that a preference toward that discipline model is reaffirmed for every item. The subscale with the highest score indicates the preferred discipline model represented.

The validity and reliability of the Beliefs about Discipline Inventory was previously established. Kaya, Lundeen & Wolfgang (2010) field-tested the instrument with 220 teachers. They reported the alpha reliability coefficients of subscales as 0.73 for Relationship-Listening, 0.84 for Confronting-Contracting, and 0.76 for Rules and Consequences.

3.4. Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics for the subscale scores of RL, CC, and RC reported both before and after the pre-service teachers' teaching experience was completed. Using SPSS 16 program, paired-sample t-tests was conducted to examine the score differences among the subscales.

4. Results and Discussion

In this section, we discussed the responses given to the items in the discipline inventory by the three groups of participants (Gazi University ELT students, Inonu University ELT students and Cukurova University ELT students). As mentioned n the methodology section, the three participant groups filled out the discipline inventory before the start of practicum and after the completion of the practicum.

Research Question 1: Are there any differences among ELT students from different universities in Turkey in terms of their discipline orientations?

In Table 1 below, we have provided the descriptive statistics of three groups' scores for three discipline models applied during the four months (one academic term) to the senior students at three different universities.

Table 1. *The results of descriptive statistics among groups*

		Groups	N	$\overline{X}$	Sd
Pre-Tests	Relationship-Listening **(RL)**	Gazi	57	4.2632	1.17300
		Cukurova	27	4.2222	1.25064
		Inonu	20	4.9000	1.02084
		Total	104	4.3750	1.18393
	Confronting-Contracting **(CC)**	Gazi	57	4.9474	1.50500
		Cukurova	27	4.9630	1.22416
		Inonu	20	4.9000	1.20961
		Total	104	4.9423	1.37118
	Rules-Consequences **(RC)**	Gazi	57	2.7544	1.44272
		Cukurova	27	2.7778	1.18754
		Inonu	20	2.2000	.95145
		Total	104	2.6538	1.30547
Post Tests	Relationship-Listening **(RL)**	Gazi	57	4.3684	1.38398
		Cukurova	27	4.2963	1.43620
		Inonu	20	4.5500	1.46808
		Total	104	4.3846	1.40255
	Confronting-Contracting **(CC)**	Gazi	57	4.5439	1.69105
		Cukurova	27	4.7407	1.65466
		Inonu	20	4.9000	1.25237

	Total	104	4.6635	1.59861
	Gazi	57	3.0877	1.43029
Rules-Consequences (**RC**)	Cukurova	27	2.9630	1.19233
	Inonu	20	2.4500	1.53811
	Total	104	2.9327	1.40225

As seen in Table 1, in Pre-tests, the average score of RL Inonu (X= 4.90) is higher than Gazi (X= 4.26) and Cukurova (X= 4.22); the mean scores of CC Inonu (X= 4.90), Gazi (X= 4.94) and Cukurova (X= 4.96) are similar; the mean scores of RC Gazi (X= 2.75) and Cukurova (X= 2.77) are higher than Inonu (X= 2.20). In the Post tests, the average scores of RL Gazi (X= 4.36), Cukurova (X= 4.29) and Inonu (X= 4.55) are similar; the mean score of CC Inonu (X= 4.90) is higher than Gazi (X= 4.54) and Cukurova (X= 4.74); the mean scores of RC Gazi (X= 3.08) and Cukurova (X= 2.96) are higher than Inonu (X= 2.45). Although there were some differences in some models of classroom discipline among the groups, the difference in mean scores among the groups was small.

A One-Way ANOVA among groups analysis of variance was conducted to investigate the changes in pre-service teachers' views towards the three models of classroom discipline.

Table 2. *The results of One Way ANOVA among groups*

			Sum of Squares	sd	Mean Square	F	P*
		Between Groups	6.856	2	3.428		
	RL	Within Groups	137.519	101	1.362	2.518	.086
		Total	144.375	103			
		Between Groups	.049	2	.024		
Pre-Tests	**CC**	Within Groups	193.605	101	1.917	.013	.987
		Total	193.654	103			
		Between Groups	5.110	2	2.555		
	RC	Within Groups	170.428	101	1.687	1.514	.225
		Total	175.538	103			
		Between Groups	.773	2	.386		
	RL	Within Groups	201.843	101	1.998	.193	.825
		Total	202.615	103			
		Between Groups	2.096	2	1.048		
Post Tests	**CC**	Within Groups	261.126	101	2.585	.405	.668
		Total	263.221	103			
		Between Groups	6.054	2	3.027		
	RC	Within Groups	196.474	101	1.945	1.556	.216
		Total	202.529	103			

*p>.05

According to the results of One Way Anova among groups, as can be seen in Table 2 there were not statistically significant differences among them (in pre tests, RL (F=2.518), CC

(F=013), RC (F=1.514); in post tests, RL (F=.193), CC (F= .405), RC (F=1.556)). In addition, the results of all items revealed that there were not significant differences among the pre-service teachers' preferences in three discipline models after the completion of the full-time student teaching experience (p>.05).

Research Question 2: Are there any differences between male and female ELT students from different universities in Turkey in terms of their discipline orientations?

One Way ANOVA was again conducted on the scores of participants in order to see whether there is a significant difference between genders.

Table 3. *The results of One Way ANOVA between genders*

		Gender	N	$\overline{X}$	Sd	F	P*
Pre-Tests	**RL**	F	82	4.4024	1.17442		
		M	22	4.2727	1.24142	.207	.650
		Total	104	4.3750	1.18393		
	CC	F	82	4.9512	1.41336		
		M	22	4.9091	1.23091	.016	.899
		Total	104	4.9423	1.37118		
	RC	F	82	2.6220	1.33000		
		M	22	2.7727	1.23179	.230	.633
		Total	104	2.6538	1.30547		
Post Tests	**RL**	F	82	4.3780	1.47104		
		M	22	4.4091	1.14056	.008	.927
		Total	104	4.3846	1.40255		
	CC	F	82	4.6951	1.52096		
		M	22	4.5455	1.89554	.151	.699
		Total	104	4.6635	1.59861		
	RC	F	82	2.9024	1.34816		
		M	22	3.0455	1.61768	.179	.673
		Total	104	2.9327	1.40225		

*p>.05

As seen in Table 3, there were not any considerable changes in terms of genders on the discipline model preferences of seniors from three different universities (p>.05); (in pre-tests, RL (p=.650), CC (p=.899), RC (p=.633); in post tests, RL (p=.927), CC (p= .699), RC (p=.673).

Research Questions 3: Does the practicum study have any effect on the discipline orientations of ELT students in Turkey?

A paired-samples t-test was also conducted to compare the scores of pre and post tests including models of classroom discipline and to see the impact of the senior teaching experience during one semester.

Table 4. *The results of paired samples t-test*

	N	$\overline{X}$	Sd	t	Df	p*
preRL - postRL	104	-.00962	1.95828	-.050	103	.960
preCC - postCC	104	.27885	2.14275	1.327	103	.187
preRC - postRC	104	-.27885	1.92307	-1.479	103	.142

*p>.05

The results of paired samples t-test in Table 4 demonstrated that there were not significant differences between pre tests and post tests, preRL - postRL:t(103)=0.050 p>.05), preCC - postCC: t(103)= 1.327 p>.05), preRC - postRC: t(103)= 1.479 p>.05). According to these findings, there were not any significant changes on the preferences of pre-service teachers in discipline orientations.

In the study conducted with the participation of 220 pre-service elementary teachers, Kaya, Lundeen and Wolfgang (2010) found that the student teaching experience significantly increased beginning teachers' preferences toward a more assertive discipline model (Rules and Consequences) and decreased their preferences toward the humanistic discipline model (Relationship-Listening), which indicates a disagreement between pre-service teachers' prior beliefs and experience in classrooms.

In our study, however, we observed just a slight increase in the beginning teachers' preferences toward a more assertive model and just a slight decrease toward the humanistic model. Having a look the distribution of the participants in our study, we could argue that the difference between the findings of Kaya, Kundeen and Wolfgang and those of our study could be due to the participant student teachers' majors. It seems that language major student teachers display a more humanist attitude toward their students.

Another possible cause for the difference could be the age of the students attending the practicum. Elementary school teachers generally work with younger students. Foreign language education was offered to only the 4th grade and older students; therefore, foreign language teachers meet the students who have become accustomed to school rules and a more disciplined life.

One of the most important issues in teacher education programs is the problem of bridging the gap between theory and practice. This problem has long been discussed among educational circles. When we have a look at the questionnaire results, we see that there is just a slight change between the student teachers' prior ideas and ideas following the practicum. One or all of the four suggested causes for the gap between theory and practice can account for this slight change:

- Students' prior knowledge plays a powerful role in their learning process and their beliefs show resistance to change.
- If student teachers do not have personal concerns or have not encountered concrete problems, they do not perceive the usefulness of theoretical knowledge.

- The nature of teaching: Teachers' behaviors in classrooms are influences by a variety of factors such as curriculum, context and students' way of responding, and teachers have to find concrete answers to situations. Those problems cannot easily be solved by the abstract, systematized and general expert knowledge that student teachers get at their teacher education programs.
- Teacher training programs are generally focused on providing professional knowledge to prospective teachers and display negligence towards feeling and emotions of teachers. However, the problem of dealing with the natural emotional reactions of human beings to the threat of losing certainty, predictability or stability is also associated with promoting fundamental professional change (Korthagen, 2011)

Finally, as with Weinstein's (1998) study, in our study our single data collection instrument was a questionnaire, which, as Weinstein argued, may have influenced findings. Questionnaires have the advantage of involving large number of participants into the study; however, they may produce ambiguous results which lead the researchers to a misunderstanding.

5. Conclusion

Without a doubt the student teaching experience is a crucial period for the career of prospective teachers. Results of this study might suggest that teacher training programs in the field of language teaching in Turkey have quite a liberal approach to teaching in that the students teachers participated in this study revealed a tendency towards 'giving an ear to' students. That there is just a slight change in the student teachers' ideas towards 'rules and consequences' also suggests that the effects of liberal education is so prevailing that a real life experience in a language classrooms is not enough to dissuade the students teachers from their 'liberal' belief.

The results of the current study also suggest the ages of the students affects the way teachers handle discipline problems in the classrooms. When working with a younger group, a teacher might espouse a stricter way of classroom management; while with a relatively older group the teacher might tend to prefer a more relax discipline in the classroom.

Finally, we should always bear n mind that classroom discipline problems may require unique intervention approaches depending on the school and community. We, however, believe that research both on the teachers', student teachers' perceptions and universal principles to solve classroom discipline problems will go on.

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