PRE-SERVICE EFL TEACHERS' REFLECTIONS: THE CONTRIBUTION OF TEACHING PRACTICUM ON ACADEMIC SUCCESS AND SELF-IMPROVEMENT

Dilek Tüfekçi Can
Assist. Prof. Dr., Balikesir University, Balikesir, Turkey
tufekci@balikesir.edu.tr

Abstract

Teaching practicum, which provides great opportunity for pre-service English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers to observe, experience and practice the knowledge they have gained theoretically in practical basis, has had a critical role in preparing the pre-service teachers with the skills they required for teaching at real classroom settings. As the research on teaching practicum indicated that there is a significant gap between the theory and practice in EFL education, this study was carried out to explore whether teaching practicum contributed to the pre-service EFL teachers' academic success and additionally, whether teaching practicum contributed to their self-improvement as prospective teachers of English. The sample group of the current study consisted of 25 EFL pre-service teachers studying their last year at ELT department at Balikesir University in the 2016-2017 education year in Turkey. In this qualitative study, the data were obtained from a background questionnaire, reflective writings of EFL pre-service teachers and face to face interviews. The participants were interrogated to identify their reflections on the contribution of teaching practicum to their academic success and self-

improvement as prospective teachers. In this study, the findings were analyzed qualitatively and discussed in the light of related literature.

Keywords

Pre-Service EFL Teachers, Teaching Practicum, Academic Success, Self-Improvement, Reflection

1. Introduction

Teaching practicum in the faculties of education has always had a crucial impact on the pre-service teachers, particularly on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) pre-service teachers. In the literature, a number of research and reports into pre-service teacher education signify that the improvement of the quality of teacher education/training is a requirement as the connection between theory and practice is commonly neglected. Correspondingly, it is vital to state that teaching practicum serves as a bridge between theory and practice (Allen & Wright, 2014) while pre-service EFL teachers (hereafter PSTs) engage in learning how to teach at a real class context with the guidance of teacher educators, practice teachers and peers. In other words, teaching practicum provides PSTs with an opportunity to apply knowledge and skills they have acquired at the faculties of education in a practical setting (Daresh, 1990).

In the literature, among the most significant and general positive impacts of teaching practicum can be enumerated such as it has an important role as it is one of the most important aspects of a teacher education program for PSTs (Funk & Hoffman 1982; Richards, 2008); as it gives some insights about the nature of learning and teaching in terms of having some natural experience with real students, teachers and curriculum in its natural context (Freeman 1996; Slick, 1998; Calderhead, 1998; Huling, 1997); as it provides some perceptions on the roles of teachers (Smith & Snoek, 1996) and, as it helps student teachers decrease their anxiety (Murray-Harvey, Slee, Lawson, Silins, Banfield, Russel, 2000; Tüfekçi Can, 2018). Since the main purpose of this study was to explore whether teaching practicum contributed to the PSTs' academic success and their self-improvement, it is important to define these two concepts and their borderlines specifically.

Accordingly, academic success, as an ambiguous term, is 'one of the most widely used constructs in educational research and assessment within higher education' and also 'functions as an amorphous construct that broadly incorporates a broad range of educational outcomes from

degree attainment to moral development (York, Gibson & Rankin, 2015). Moreover, academic success used in the sense of student success "… is [also] defined as academic achievement, engagement in educationally purposeful activities, satisfaction, acquisition of desired knowledge, skills and competencies, persistence, attainment of educational outcomes, and post-college performance" (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, Hayek et al. 2006, 5). Similarly, the other definition of the term highlights its constituents such as "inclusive of academic achievement, attainment of learning objectives, acquisition of desired skills and competencies, satisfaction, persistence, and post-college performance" (York, Gibson, Rankin, 2015, 5).

The EFL PSTs are the ones whose aim is to learn a foreign or a second language to teach, which means that 'mastering a core set of basic skills, or competencies, that teachers make regular use of in the classroom' (Richards, 2014, 8) is of the utmost importance. In other words, they should develop a whole set of teaching skills which deeply affect their academic success. Among the factors that affect their academic success are intelligence (Harris, 1940), drive of motivation (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996), intellectual ability, which is among the most documented variable as predictor of cognitive performance (Sternberg & Kaufman, 1998), personality (Wolfe & Johnson, 1995) and learning styles.

Academic success is also related to or identified with some other factors like course completion with high grades, test scores and persistence levels (Fin & Rock, 1997; Lizzio, Wilson, Simons, 2002); early job outcomes such as job offers and employment (Colarelli, Dean, Kronstans, 1991; Ng, Eby, Dorensen, Feldman, 2005); a function of personal characteristics such as mental ability, academic skills, motivation, and goals, and the characteristic of environment (Muuss, 1996); student's subjective judgement about his/her achievement (Fralick, 1993); high academic achievement which is related with the total amount of time the students report studying as the potential predictor of success (Plant, Ericsson, Hill, Asberg, 2005).

As for self-improvement, the age in which one is living is regarded as 'not only the age of self-improvement and therapy but also biological psychiatry', and therefore the term self-improvement is commonly used in the sense of having a faith that 'one can change anything' (Seligman, 2011). Correspondingly, the competencies of 21st century language teachers are (re)defined in terms of the belief on changing or improving any problem they encounter with as such "… [they] must be able to respond to every issue, dilemma and problem they face, thus moving beyond their initial craft skills and knowledge and be able to evaluate possible roads of

action that take into account the needs of their students, their institution and their community" (Farrell, 2015, 83).

Equally, self-improvement is heavily dealt with "The way a person teaches, and his or her view of what good teaching is, will, therefore, reflect his or her cultural background and personal history, the context in which he or she is working and the kind of students in his or her class" (Richards, 2014, 5). In other words, self-improvement, as an umbrella term includes both 'professional identity', namely a dynamic process used for personal interpretation of professional conduct (Kelchterman, 1994) and a 'teaching identity', namely a process which has a vital influence on teachers' professional practice (Correa, Martínez-Arbelaiz, Gutierrez, 2014).

In the light of the aforementioned definitions on both concepts, we can suggest an overall view on the concepts in an attempt to provide revised definitions that are appropriate for a comprehensive review. Whereas 'academic success' in EFL judges a person's course completion with the high grades, drive of motivation, intelligence along with intellectual ability, engagement in the activities/tasks/assignments with persistence levels, acquisition of the knowledge s/he is responsible for, attainment of learning objectives, 'self-improvement' in EFL judges a person's own knowledge, status and character by the help of his/her own efforts, learning to deal with difficult positions and people, acknowledging one's own teaching and learning flaws, identifying blind spots which one is unaware of, learning from peers, practice teachers, supervisors, and students as well as many others, reading the latest publications and academic articles. Both of the terms are commonly used in the sense of a quest to make oneself better in any and every facet of life.

In sum, the myth on the 21st century skills pervades in all spheres of education including PSTs' training as "Modern graduate of the university is expected to be a highly competent worker, willing and able for lifelong learning, creative self-development and self-improvement, perception of himself as a citizen of the global community, critical analysis, understanding and utilization of innovative technologies in the context of globalization in all spheres of activity" (Bezukladnikov & Kruze, 2012, 104).

With these concerns in mind, this research attempts to explore whether teaching practicum contributed to the PSTs' academic success and self-improvement.

2. Literature Review

In the literature, the studies on teaching practicum particularly on the pre-service EFL teachers' reflections, considerations, beliefs etc., have commonly been on the focus of many researchers. Thus, building an identity as s teacher is considered as one of the pivotal issues for PSTs. In the literature review, Friesen & Besley (2013) highlighted that teacher identity development was an important step in the earlier teacher education process in terms of developmental and social psychological perspective. Moreover, personal wellbeing (Sammons, Kington, Gu, Stobart, Smees, 2007) was also considered among the factors that contribute to teacher identity. In the literature, apart from teacher identity, the research on teaching practicum which presented PSTs many aspects on learning and teaching, has become the focus of many researchers.

Some researchers found that teaching practicum is helpful in providing opportunities for PSTs to advance their professional practices in real classroom settings under the guidance of practice teachers (Wallace, 1991). Likewise, some of the other researchers found that it is useful for providing PSTs with the knowledge of classroom management and guided practice (Monroe, Blackwell, Pepper, 2010) whereas some others found it valuable as it can develop new insights and understandings for the improvement of teaching (Ghaye, 2011; Tiainen, Korkeamäki, Dreher, 2016).

Another field of research on teaching practicum has emphasized the importance of socio-cultural aspects of teaching practicum in teacher education programmes. For example, Farrell (2006) examined how existing beliefs and theories of PSTs in Singapure compete with each other in a case study. The study revealed the importance of social order, cultural transmission and learner-centered growth with the use of metaphors.

Zhu (2017) investigated how the student teachers construct their professional identities related to emotions and ethics experiences in teaching practicum with the use of qualitative research. The research concluded that the experiences revealed by the participants on emotional and ethical dimensions of practicum showed the complexity and uncertainty of professional identities. The study of Gan (2013) explored the challenges of 16 PSTs experienced in teaching practicum, the result of which indicated that PSTs experienced a reality shock because of the difficulties in experimenting with pedagogical practices and of the inadequacy in English language competence.

The studies on inquiry-based practicum (Beck, 2001; Rivera, Gomez, 2017) attempted to promote PSTs' abilities to deal with problems by analyzing the doubtful situations and making decisions on their own learning practices since the development of PSTs' critical thinking skills of their own performance marked that they were taking full care of their own responsibilities.

In another study, Parr, Faulkner and Rowe (2017) examined the concepts of dialogue and reciprocity in the participants' lived experience of teaching practicum. They suggested that both of the concepts were valuable discourses for international teaching practicums. The study of Hamiloğlu (2013) explored whether PSTs professional identities were influenced more effectively if they reflect during teaching practicum. The result indicated that teaching practicum plays a vital role only if it includes critical reflection. Likewise, the study of Sarıçoban (2016) explored the significance of micro teaching used during teaching practicum in order to find out the progress in-between the feedback sessions provided by mentor teachers to be performed by 120 PSTs. The findings revealed that micro-teaching practice facilitates reducing the PSTs' deficiency in teaching skills as well as helping them develop positive attitudes towards their future profession.

Additionally, integrating peer observation, making the peer observation a kind of reflective teaching among PSTs, and finally involving PSTs in the reflective conversations which are the outcomes of their own experiences were commonly the results of teaching practicum courses on the way becoming a language teacher. Similarly, Day (2013) attempted to explore whether peer observation in practicum led to reflective teaching or not. The findings indicated that the participants in an ELT practicum liked peer observation and their reactions to peer observation were positive as it was helpful for them not only to engage in reflective thinking about teaching and learning process but also to transform their teaching practices and beliefs.

In the literature review, although myriads of research have been conducted on the issue of teaching practicum and PSTs' experiences, there is little research on the contribution of teaching practicum particularly on PSTs' academic success and self-improvement. To address this gap in the literature this study aims to explore the contribution of two aforementioned concepts.

3. Methodology

The research outlined in this article is a qualitative study and provides the reflections of EFL PSTs on the contribution of teaching practicum on their academic success and self-

improvement. This qualitative research is conducted as a case study to explore the PSTs' reflections on their observed and experienced classroom practices with regard to EFL teaching at real class contexts. The main purpose of using a case study methodology mainly lies in the fact that it facilitates in-depth understanding of what is to be studied and engages with the complexity of real-life events (Yin, 1994). Furthermore, it is of vital importance to state that PSTs' reflections, which focus on in-depth insights, "cannot be adequately researched in any of the other common research methods" (Lier, 2005, 195). Moreover, the articulation of PSTs' beliefs on the contribution of teaching practicum on their academic success and self-improvement are also indicators of 'a meaningful basis for discussion and reflection on planned aspects of practice' (Basturkmen, 2012, p. 291).

The methodology of this research included three main issues such as research design, data collection and data analysis. Moreover, it is of vital importance to give some insights on the application of teaching practicum in Turkey as there might be some differences from country to country. In Turkey, teaching practicum, a 14-week study in the spring term during the 4th year of PSTs, was regarded as a compulsory course whose credit was the highest (2 credits theory + 6 credits practice) among many other subjects. As the selection of practice teachers, supervisors and schools was under the responsibility of faculty administrators, the researcher of this research, namely the supervisor in this case also had no right to decide primary or secondary school. During the study, the PSTs visited and observed classes and also participated at the activities and tasks.

3.1 Research Design

The data was collected with the use of qualitative methods. In this qualitative study, the data were obtained from a background questionnaire, reflective writings of PSTs and face to face interviews. As this research is a case study, a descriptive method was also used as the main purpose of this research was to explore the reflections of the PSTs whether and/or to what extent teaching practicum contributed to their academic success and self-improvement.

Since "well-crafted qualitative research questions can address sensitive topics and pursue issues that are of importance to a field of study" (Agee, 2009), the research questions on the contribution of teaching practicum were carefully chosen, as is the case in all qualitative research. Based on the existing literature on teaching practicum, specifically, three research questions guided the research:

1. Does teaching practicum contribute to PSTs' academic success? Are their reflections positive or negative on teaching practicum in relation to academic success?

2. Does teaching practicum contribute to PSTs' self-improvement? Are their reflections positive or negative on teaching practicum in relation to self-improvement?

3. What are the reflections of the pre-service EFL teachers after having a 14 week of teaching practicum? Were the theories what they have learned at the faculties similar to those what they have practiced at real class settings?

3.2 Participants

The participants were 25 4th year PSTs from the ELT department, and one female supervisor from the same department who also acted as a researcher in this research in a state university named Balikesir University during the 2016-2017 education year in Turkey.

3.3 Data Collection Instruments

The data was collected with the use of qualitative methods, including a background questionnaire, reflective writings of EFL pre-service teachers and face to face interviews. Reflective papers were used as the main data collection instrument in this research.

Table 1: *Amount and type of qualitative data*

Item	Time (min)	Participants	Total
Background Information	45	25	25
Practicum sessions observed	40 (4 times)	16	16
Face to face interview	10-20 (each week)	25	25
Reflective writings	45-75	7 Bi-weekly	7

3.4 Procedure

In order to carry out this research, the researcher initially presented a research proposal to the officials of the Necatibey Faculty of Education, Balikesir University. The research proposal, which clearly indicated the significance, purpose, methodology and data collection instruments, covered all the processes of the research. After the proposal was accepted, the researcher informed the participants about the procedure and stated that all their personal rights would be protected. In this research, a three-stepped procedure was used: instruction, practice and data collection, and data analysis.

3.4.1 Instruction

In the instruction part, the researcher recited the whole procedure with its 3 steps. The researcher also reported that each of the 25 participants were free to relinquish their participation in the research whenever they demanded. However, the participants were agreeable and they also sought to see the result of their endeavors as the research would ultimately give them an insight and create an awareness on teaching practicum. All the participants consented to participate in the research. Thus, the research began legally.

3.4.2 Practice and Data Collection

In the practice part, the researcher gave all the essential information about the research. Then, a background questionnaire was employed to the participants in order to comprehend their educational background. The questionnaire indicated that nearly all of the participants (N=24) were graduated from language classes at high schools or they had already had an education at prep classes. Only one participant (N=1) was from another country apart from Turkey. Thus, the average age of the participants was (N=26). As the teaching practicum included a 14-week process, the participants were grouped in five-person groups, each of which had an interview in each week at a definite time. However, the researcher made the participants feel free and visit her by ignoring the office hours allowed for each group if they were to share any information on the behalf of the research. Thus, in the practice part, the face to face interviews were either carried out in individuals or in groups. These face to face interviews were registered immediately after the participants left the office as the researcher was eager to show the participants that she was actively involved in the process of listening and comprehending the issue rather than to appear to them she was taking notes. As for another data collection instrument, the researcher used reflective writings of the participants. Through reflective writings, the researcher had a 'better understanding of one's teaching practices and routines (Richards & Farrell, 2005, 7). The participants handed their reflective writings on the research in by-weekly intervals, which accounts for a seven-week data. All these endeavors on reflective writings can also be regarded as 'reflective practices' as Farrell explicitly defines what makes reflective practice as an important issue in terms of data collection. According to him, reflective practice is 'a cognitive process accompanied by a set of attitudes in which teachers [in this case PSTs] systematically collect data about their practice, and, while engaging in dialogue with others, use the data to make informed decisions about their practice both inside and outside the classroom' (2015 b,

123). At the end, the researcher collected all the data instruments such as background questionnaire, reflective writings and face to face interviews in order to analyze and reach a conclusion.

3.4.3 Data Analysis

The data collected from background questionnaire, reflective writings and face to face interviews were analyzed individually and the statements on the academic success and self-improvement were coded by the use of descriptive and content analysis. In the data analysis process, similar statements were coded under certain themes such as positive/negative reflections of PSTs on the contribution of the teaching practicum on their academic success and their self-improvement. In the event of comparison of the statements and numbers in concept maps and the results found after the codification of the themes, it was found that the data gathered from different sources seemed similar. Then, the percentages of these codifications were stated and the correlated tables were drawn. At the end, the data were specified with the numbers and frequencies on the tables given in the following part.

The Reflections on Teaching Practicum
(Data from Reflective Writings)
N=25

Academic Success
N=16

Self-improvement
N=24
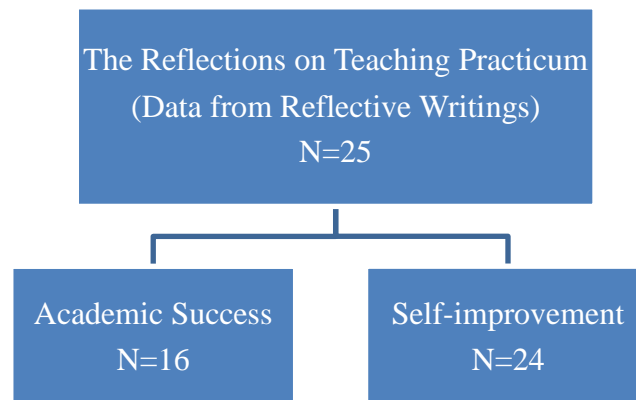
Figure 1: *Sample Concept map*

4. Findings

The findings revealed that teaching practicum contributed to PSTs self-improvement rather than academic success. The findings gathered from qualitative study were presented under mainly two headings: the first two items were about the contribution of academic success and the second two items were about the contribution of self-improvement.

The first research question asked was whether teaching practicum contributed to PSTs' academic success or not. If so, to what extent it contributed, and whether PSTs' reflections were positive or negative on teaching practicum in relation to academic success.

Among 25 participants, 16 of them stated that teaching practicum contributed to their academic success whereas 8 of them revealed that teaching practicum did not contribute at all. Additionally, one participant was neutral about its contribution on academic success.

Table 2: *The positive reflections on the contribution of teaching practicum on academic success*

Teaching Practicum contributed to…	f	%
1. my course completion with high grades	16	21.33
2. my job satisfaction	14	18.67
3. my professional development as a teacher	11	14.67
4. my persistence levels in terms of regular attendance	8	10.67
5. my acquisition of practical knowledge	8	10.67
6. my drive of motivation	7	9.33
7. my intelligence along with my intellectual ability	5	6.67
8. my engagement in activities/tasks/assignments	4	5.33
9. my engagement in applying learning objectives	2	2.66
Total	75	100

Among the positive reflections, one of the participants stated that "In teaching practicum, I have learnt how to use materials such as course book, teacher's book and supplementary materials. Additionally, I have acquired some practical knowledge on teaching. I have also had a chance to observe real student-teacher interaction. I have comprehended that each student has a different need and interest according to his/her age and gender. And once more, I have many times attempted to understand the terms such as 'scaffolding', 'zone of proximal development' (ZPD) and 'accommodation' etc. in our theoretical classes at the faculty of education, but it turned out to be useless many times. In one of those practical courses, I have just grasped the meaning of these terms and concepts as the real incident related with the term occurred instantly in the class. Then the bell rang!" (Registered Interview, PST 11).

Another extraction from reflective writings of one of the participants revealed that "I have had teaching practicum course. We have had an irreplaceable experience in teaching. However, what attracted me most was the score of my course which I passed with AA degree. I

do not know whether I am as good as the score offered. But I know that all my friends get the same scores which increased our academic success." (Reflective Writings, PST 6).

One of the participants also reported that teaching practicum was like a mirror to the future as s/he would have some idea about her/his teaching methods. "Teaching practicum helped me see my future occupation which I would do in the near future." (Reflective Writings, PST 17).

Table 3: *The negative reflections on the contribution of teaching practicum on academic success*

Teaching Practicum did not contribute to my academic success as	f	%
1. it did not reach its purpose as it is written in the official documents	8	26.67
2. it allowed the worse or the worst PSTs to get the highest scores	7	23.33
3. it did not work for the KPSS (a compulsory exam for becoming a teacher)	5	16.67
4. I did not get academic feedback from practice teacher	5	16.67
5. I did not realize my improvement in terms of academic success	3	10.00
6. it did not meet my expectations academically	2	6.66
Total	30	100

Among the negative reflections, one of the participants reported that "In some way or another, teaching practicum might have contributed to my academic success. However, it was not as much as I expected. Even though I have learned many tips about a wide variety of issues, I have learned nothing about the KPSS exam practically. I must also deny that what is expected from teaching practice is to make the PSTs have some experience on teaching. Unfortunately, it is not that useful as we did not get proper feedback from the practice teachers" (Reflective writings, PST 1).

Another negative reflection was on the effective experience "I really do not think that it contributed to my academic success. I have worked for two years at a private language academy. The experience which I have gained at that institution is much more effective than that in teaching practicum. The teacher was reluctant as well as the students. The motivation of them was low. In such a case, how would you think that teaching practicum contributed to my academic success?" (Registered Interviews, PST 2).

One of the participants stated his/her desperate position at a real class setting and his/her intimate insights on the contribution of teaching practicum to his/her academic success: "I think it did not reach its purpose. Our practice teacher was not good enough to guide us. S/he, let alone

guiding us, continually left us in the classroom with the students. Most of the time, I was alone in the class and the students were very noisy and I am unable to manage the class. S/he gave no information, no feedback, and nothing at all!" (Registered Interviews, PST 8).

The second research question attempted to explore whether teaching practicum contributed to PSTs' self-improvement or not. If so, to what extent it contributed, and whether PSTs' reflections were positive or negative on teaching practicum in relation to self-improvement.

Among the 25 participants, 24 of them stated that teaching practicum contributed to their self-improvement whereas only one of them revealed that teaching practicum did not contribute to his/her self-improvement at all.

Table 4: *Positive reflections on the contribution of teaching practicum on self-improvement*

Teaching Practicum contributed to …	f	%
1. my incentive to teach anything on teaching and life	22	21.15
2. my dealing with any problem in teaching	19	18.28
3. my engagement in evaluating/developing possible roads of action	16	15.38
4. my understanding of the needs of the students	14	13.46
5. my acknowledgement of my own teaching flaws	10	9.62
6. my understanding of showing kindness to people from different segments	8	7.69
7. my learning from students who inspire me	7	6.73
8. my dealing with difficult students	5	4.81
9. my getting into action instantly	3	2.88
Total	104	100

As for self-improvement, among the positive reflections, one of the participants reported that "I have learned a lot of things from teaching to speaking with the students. I have also learned using technology in a class setting. Apparently, I will use interactive boards in my classes when I become a teacher. Because I have observed that the students wanted to participate in the activities when these activities are integrated with the technology in some way or another. Once more, addressing the students with their names is also important. I believe that teaching practicum contributed to my self-improvement as I have learned many things which are not only about education but also life itself" (Reflective Writings, PST 23).

One of the other participants indicated that "Before becoming a teacher, it helped me experience what it will be like. I have got a taste of being a teacher. For instance, I have learned to tolerate students and I realized that each student is unique who come from different segments of the society. Such a societal challenge has created mutual understanding between me and the students and I also realized that I have had to create a bridge in order to fill the gap between the students" (Registered Interviews, PST 6).

Another participant revealed that "I have learned how to deal with problems in a real setting; how to behave the students, and what to do when something goes wrong. I have experienced a wide variety of emotions there such as happiness, sadness, shyness, arrogance, etc. Additionally, I realized that I am actually very happy with the children. It was the first time I have ever had such a feeling" (Registered Interviews, PST 16).

Another extraction on self-improvement was "People learn new things when they met every new people. So, the students also taught me lots of things. I noticed that everyone has a different world and I want to get to know everyone's world as a teacher. I really want to be inspired by their colorful world. Moreover, I see that I should have been more understanding and smiling to the students" (Reflective Writings, PST 13).

Among the negative reflections, only one participant reported that it did not contribute to his/her self-improvement at all. "I think it is not a useful course in practice even though it is planned very good in theory. It is more like an acting-out. Namely, it seems as if it were a simulation rather than a realistic practice. No body including students, practice teachers, supervisors, administrators gives respect and importance to this course. Moreover, I myself is a very social, positive and outgoing person. And I like teaching and children. I feel I am qualified enough for teaching. I have never had the feeling of its contribution to my personal improvement" (Reflective Writing, PST 22).

In sum, the findings of this study revealed that teaching practicum contributed to EFL PSTs' self-improvement rather than their academic success. Whereas most of the PSTs reported their positive reflections on the contribution of teaching practicum on self-improvement (N=24), a rather small number of PSTs (N=16) reported their positive reflections on the contribution of teaching practicum on academic success.

The first research question on this study was whether teaching practicum contributed to PSTs' academic success or not and whether their reflections were positive or negative on

teaching practicum in relation to academic success. In the study, it was found that teaching practicum contributed to PSTs academic success on their completion of course with high grades, feeling job satisfaction, professional development as a teacher, persistence level in terms of regular attendance, acquisition of practical knowledge, drive of motivation, and intelligence along with intellectual ability. Furthermore, the study also revealed that the positive reflections of PSTs on the contribution of teaching practicum on academic success outweigh the negative ones. However, it must be indicated that nearly one thirds (1/3) of the PSTs were not on the opinion that teaching practicum was helpful for their academic success. Thus, they reported that teaching practicum did not reach its purpose as it is written in the official documents. They also undoubtedly revealed that teaching practicum allowed the worse or the worst PSTs to get the highest scores. They indicated that teaching practicum was not helpful for KPSS, an exam for the Public Personnel Selection Exam through which the PSTs could get appointed to a teaching position after graduation. At last, they informed that they did not get academic feedback from the practice teachers.

The second research question on this study was whether teaching practicum contributed to PSTs' self-improvement or not and whether their reflections were positive or negative on teaching practicum in relation to self-improvement. In the study, it was found that teaching practicum contributed to most of the PSTs' self-improvement in terms of their incentive to teach anything on life, their dealing with any problem in teaching, their engagement in evaluating and developing possible roads of action, their understanding for the needs of the students, their acknowledgment of their own teaching flaws. Moreover, the PSTs also revealed that teaching practicum was helpful for their understanding of showing kindness to people from different segments of the society, for learning from the inspirational students, and dealing with difficult students. Conversely, only one participant stated that teaching practicum did not contributed to his/her self-improvement as s/he revealed that s/he had already had self-confidence and s/he thought that teaching practicum did not work at all as s/he felt that it was illusionary rather than a fact.

The third research question on this study was what the reflections of the pre-service EFL teachers were after having a 14 week of teaching practicum and whether the theories what they have learned at the faculties similar to those what they have practiced at real class settings. Among 25 participants, 19 of them revealed that theoretical and practical knowledge do not

complete each other. In other words, they clearly indicated that the knowledge they gained at the faculties were not similar to those that they practiced at real class settings.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

As can be seen in the current literature, the teaching practicum contributed to a number of issues. However, the recent literature provides no information particularly on the contribution of teaching practicum on the academic success and the self-improvement of PSTs. Thus, in the literature review, the research on these two issues remain rather elusive and it requires further studies whether teaching practicum contributes to both academic success, which is related with the teaching profession and self-improvement, which is related with the human psyche. Both of the two concepts are carefully chosen in this study to investigate because each of them completes to one another in order to be endowed with the skills and competencies of the 21st century on the behalf of PSTs.

In this study, as the reflective writings and face to face interviews clearly showed, the accounts from the PSTs seemed to confirm some of the results presented in the research. For instance, this study was similar to that of Daresh (1990) as both of the studies revealed that teaching practicum facilitates PSTs' teaching by presenting an opportunity to apply the knowledge and skills they have acquired at the faculties of education. However, in this study, among 25 PSTs 19 of them revealed that the theory and the practice were not interrelated with each other. Furthermore, in the literature review, whereas personality (Wolfe & Johnson, 1995) was among the factors that affect academic success, in this study no indication was found on the impact of personality on academic success. Furthermore, the result of this study was also comparable with that of Sarıçoban (2016), both of which concluded the importance of feedback sessions in order to explore and see how much the PSTs progress in the process of teaching.

As for self-improvement, the findings of this study seemed to be common with some of the others. For instance, after being immersed in teaching practicum, the findings of this study clearly indicated that the PSTs could teach and learn many things related with teaching and life itself from others. The result of this part of the study was similar to that of Morales Cortés since the result on the role of pedagogical practicum also concluded that the PSTs "could learn about different features behind teaching that they did not know" (2016, 55). The findings on self-improvement were also similar to those of Beck (2001) and, Rivera and Gomez (2017) as in

those studies PSTs deal with the problems, solve them and take the advantages of these problems for their own learning practices. Likewise, in our study, the PSTs deal with any problem in teaching, evaluate and develop possible roads of action, understand the needs of the students, acknowledge their own teaching flaws. Furthermore, this study revealed some different results from those found in the literature. For instance, the study of Zhu (2017) showed the complexity and uncertainty of professional identities in terms of emotional and ethical dimensions. Conversely, this study revealed that rather than complexity and uncertainty a sense of mutual understanding and concession occurred.

In conclusion, the concepts such as academic success and self-improvement can be regarded as the complementary components of being a teacher. Whereas academic success is important for professional development, self-improvement is for personality improvement. In teaching practicum, the PSTs reflections were highly distinguishable as they indicated their own positive and negative reflections on the contribution of teaching practicum on both academic success and self-improvement. In this research, it was found that teaching practicum contributed less to academic success than to self-improvement according to PRSs' reflections. What is interesting in this study was that most of the PSTs thought that the theoretical knowledge and the practical ones do not overlap to one another.

References

Agee, J. (2009) Developing qualitative research questions: a reflective process, International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 22(4), 431-447. https://doi.org/10.1080/09518390902736512

Allen, J.M., & Wright, S.E. (2014). Integrating theory and practice in the pre-service teacher education program. Teachers and Teaching: theory and practice, 20 (2), 136-151. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2013.848568

Basturkmen, H. (2012). Review of research into the correspondence between language teachers' stated beliefs and practices. System, 40, 282–295. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2012.05.001

Beck, S. (2001). Editor's Reviews of Vygotskian Perspectives on Literacy Research: Constructing meaning through collaborative inquiry and inside city schools: Investigating

Literacy in multicultural Classrooms. Harvard Educational Review, 71(2), 296-310. https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.71.2.c10541380w62g260

Bezukladnikov, K., & Kruze, B. (2012). An outline of an ESP teacher training course. World Applied Sciences Journal, 20 (Special Issue of Pedagogy and Psychology), 103-106.

Calderhead, J. (1988). Learning from introductory school experience. Journal of Education for Teaching, 14, 75–83. https://doi.org/10.1080/0260747880140106

Colarelli, S., Dean, R., & Kronstans, C. (1991). Relationship between university characteristics and early job outcomes of accountants. Canadian Journal of Higher Education, 21(3), 24-46.

Cook, V. (2007). The goals of ELT. In International handbook of English language teaching (pp. 237-248). Cummins, J. & Davison, C. (ed.) Springer, Boston, MA. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-387-46301-8_18

Correa, J. M., Martínez-Arbelaiz, A., & Gutierrez, L. P. (2014). Between the real school and the ideal school: another step in building a teaching identity. Educational Review, 66(4), 447-464. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2013.800956

Daresh, J.C. 1990. Learning by doing: Research on the educational administration practicum. Journal of Educational Administration, 28, 34–47. https://doi.org/10.1108/09578239010143468

Day, R. R. (2013). Peer observation and reflection in the ELT practicum. Journal of Language and Literature Education, 8, 1-8.

Farrell, S.C.T. (2015). It's Not Who You Are! It's How You Teach! Critical Competencies Associated with Effective Teaching. RELC Journal, 46(1), 79-88. https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688214568096

Farrell, T. S. (2006). 'The Teacher Is an Octopus' Uncovering Preservice English Language Teachers' Prior Beliefs through Metaphor Analysis. RELC Journal, 37(2), 236-248. https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688206067430

Farrell, T. S. (2011). 'Keeping SCORE': Reflective practice through classroom observations. RELC Journal, 42(3), 265-272. https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688211419396

Farrell, T.S.C. (2015 b). Promoting reflection in second language education: A framework for TESOL professionals. New York: Routledge.

Finn, J. D., & Rock, D. A. (1997). Academic success among students at risk for school failure. The Journal of applied psychology, 82(2), 221-34. https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.82.2.221

Fralick, M. (1993). College success: A study of positive and negative attrition. Community College Review, 20, 29-36. https://doi.org/10.1177/009155219302000505

Freeman, D. 1996. "Intervening in Practice Teaching." In Second Language Teacher Education, edited by J. C. Richards and D. Nunan, 103-117. Cambridge: CUP.

Friesen, M. D. & Besley, S. (2013). Teacher identity development in the first year of teacher education: A developmental and social psychological perspective, Teaching and Teacher Education, 36(1), 23-32. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2013.06.005

Funk, F. & J. Hoffman. (1982) 'The Cooperating Teacher as Most Significant Other: A Competent Humanist', Action in Teacher Education, 4, 31-38. https://doi.org/10.1080/01626620.1982.10519106

Gan, Z. (2013). Learning to teach English language in the practicum: What challenges do non-native ESL student teachers face? Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 38(3), 6. https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2013v38n3.3

Ghaye, T. (2011). Teaching and learning through reflective practice: A practical guide for positive action. Oxon: Routledge.

Hamiloğlu, K. (2013). Turkish student teachers' reflections on their professional identity construction and reconstruction process during the practicum (Doctoral dissertation, University of Leicester). Retrieved from https://lra.le.ac.uk/bitstream/2381/29135/1/2013_HAMILOGLU_EdD%20pdf.pdf

Harris, D. (1940). Factors affecting college grades: a review of the literature, 1930-1937. Psychological Bulletin, 37, 125-166. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0055365

Huling, L. (1997). 'Early Field Experiences in Teacher Education', ERIC Digest Number 97-11.

Kelchtermans, G. (1994). "Biographical Methods in the Study of Teachers' Professional Development." In Teachers' Minds and Actions: Research on Teachers' Thinking and Practice, edited by I. Carlgren, G. Handal, and S. Vaage, 93-108. London: The Falmer Press.

Kuh, G. D., Kinzie, J., Buckley, J. A., Bridges, B. K., & Hayek, J. C. (2006). What matters to student success: A review of the literature. Commissioned report for the National

Symposium on Postsecondary Student Success: Spearheading a Dialog on Student Success. Washington, DC: National Postsecondary Education Cooperative.

Lier, van L. (2005) Case study. In: Hinkel E (ed.) Handbook of Research in Second Language Learning. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 195-208.

Lizzio, A., Wilson, K., & Simons, R. (2002). University students' perceptions of the learning environment and academic outcomes: Implications for theory and practice. Studies in Higher Education, 27(1), 27-52. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070120099359

Monroe, A. E., Blackwell, S. E., & Pepper, S. K. (2010). Strengthening professional development partnerships while bridging classroom management instruction and practice. The Professional Educator, 34(2), 1-9.

Morales Cortés, Y. A. (2016). Unveiling pre-service teachers' attitudes toward teaching: The role of pedagogical practicums. Profile Issues in Teachers' Professional Development, 18(2), 47-61. https://doi.org/10.15446/profile.v18n2.49591

Murray Harvey, R., Slee, P.T., Lawson, M.J., Silins, H., Banfield, G. & Russel, A. (2000). Under stress: The concerns and coping strategies of teacher education students. European Journal of Teacher Education, 18(7), 763-80. https://doi.org/10.1080/713667267

Ng, T. W. H., Eby, L. T., Dorensen, K. L., & Feldman, D. C. (2005). Predictors of objective and subjective career success: A meta-analysis. Personnel Psychology, 58(2), 367- 408. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6570.2005.00515.x

Parr, G., Faulkner, J., & Rowe, C. (2017). Dialogue and reciprocity in an international teaching practicum. Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education, 45(2), 162-179. https://doi.org/10.1080/1359866X.2016.1199774

Pintrich, P. R., & Schunk, D. H. (1996). Motivation in education: theory, research and applications. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Plant, E. A., Ericsson, K. A., Hill, L., & Asberg, K. (2005). Why study time does not predict grade point average across college students: Implications of deliberate practice for academic performance. Contemporary Educational Psychology, 30(1), 96-116. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2004.06.001

Richards, J. C. (2008). Second language teacher education today. RELC Journal 39(2): 158-177. https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688208092182

Richards, J. C., & Farrell, T. S. C. (2005). Professional development for language teachers: Strategies for teacher learning. USA: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511667237

Rivera, P. M., & Gomez, F. P. (2017). Understanding Student-Teachers' Performances within an Inquiry-Based Practicum. English Language Teaching, 10(4), 127-139. https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v10n4p127

Sammons, P., Day, C., Kington, A., Gu, Q., Stobart, G. & Smees, R. (2007). Exploring variations in teachers' work, lives and their effects on pupils: key findings and implications from a longitudinal mix-method study. British Educational Research Journal, 33(5), 681-701. https://doi.org/10.1080/01411920701582264

Sarıçoban, A. (2016). Foreign language teaching practicum beliefs of student teachers. Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies, 12(1), 166-176.

Seligman, M. E. P. (2011). What you can change... and what you can't: the complete guide to successful self-improvement. Hachette UK.

Slick, S. (1998). The university supervisor: A disenfranchised outsider. Teaching and Teacher Education, 14(8), 821-34. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X(98)00028-6

Smith, K. and Snoek, M. Dutch and Israel student teachers' views on their future roles as teachers. Paper presented to the Annual Association of Teacher Education in Europe. September. Glasgow, Scotland: Strathclyde University.

Sternberg, R. J., & Kaufman, J. C. (1998). Human abilities. Annual Review of Psychology, 49, 479-502. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.49.1.479

Tiainen, O., Korkeamäki, R. L., & Dreher, M. J. (2016). Becoming Reflective Practitioners: A Case Study of Three Beginning Pre-service Teachers. Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research, 1-15.

Tüfekçi-Can, D. (2018). Pre-service teachers' foreign language teaching anxiety during teaching practicum. International Online Journal of Education and Teaching (IOJET), 5(3). 579-595.

Wallace, M. J. (1991). Training foreign language teachers. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wolfe, R. N., & Johnson, S. D. (1995). Personality as a predictor of college performance. Educational and Psychological Measurement, 55, 177-185. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013164495055002002

Yin, R.K. (1994). Case study research: Design and methods. 2nd edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

York, T. T., Gibson, C., & Rankin, S. (2015). Defining and Measuring Academic Success. Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation, 1-20.

Zhu, G. (2017). Chinese student teachers' perspectives on becoming a teacher in the practicum: emotional and ethical dimensions of identity shaping. Journal of Education for Teaching, 43(4), 491-495. https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2017.1341162