

#### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received March 18, 2023

Accepted May 11, 2023

Published Online May 22, 2023

#### CORRESPONDENCE

Gizem Mutlu-Gülbak

[mutlugzm@gmail.com](mailto:mutlugzm@gmail.com)

Biruni University, İstanbul, Türkiye

#### AUTHOR DETAILS

Additional information about the author is available at the end of the article.

**How to cite:** Mutlu-Gülbak, G. (2023). Expectations for Training Mentors: Insights from a Preservice Language Teacher Education Program. *Educational Process: International Journal*, 12(2): 76-92.



OPEN ACCESS

**Copyright** © 2023 by the author(s). This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (CC-BY-NC 4.0), where it is permissible to download and share the work provided it is properly cited.

#### RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Expectations for Training Mentors: Insights from a Preservice Language Teacher Education Program

Gizem Mutlu-Gülbak 

#### ABSTRACT

**Background/purpose** – The significant role of mentor teachers during practicum studies necessitates training that specifically addresses mentoring expectations in the teaching context. Drawing on critical constructivist teacher education, this study aims to investigate the expectations of student teachers, mentor teachers, and university supervisors from mentoring.

**Materials/methods** – Data were collected from 79 preservice teachers, 37 mentor teachers, and six university supervisors through a researcher-designed questionnaire and in-depth, semi-structured interviews.

**Results** – Analysis of the participants' responses showed that all three groups chose giving feedback to student teachers and knowledge on mentoring duty as the two most important themes that mentor teachers should receive training for. In addition, observing student teachers was another prominent theme for the mentor teachers group, whereas the student teachers group underlined the theme of knowledge on practicum procedures as a concern to be addressed in the training of mentors.

**Conclusion** – The results provided not only valuable data to inform an online mentor training program, but also uncovered concerns experienced by all three participant groups, highlighting certain actions that are recommended to be taken.

**Keywords** – mentoring, language teacher education, preservice teacher education, student teachers

**To link to this article**– <https://dx.doi.org/10.22521/edupij.2023.122.5>

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Offering field-based experiences in a real classroom environment, practice teaching (or practicum) opportunities are considered of significant value to teacher education programs, and accordingly to prospective teachers (e.g., Borg, 2009; Farrell, 2008). The practicum process promotes the socialization of student teachers into the profession through teaching under the supervision of mentor teachers and university supervisors. During the process, the professional development of student teachers are supported by these two sources. However, the primary support is received from their mentor teachers due to the amount of time and contact they have with student teachers (Farrell, 2008), making them arguably the most influential (Guyton & McIntyre, 1990) when it comes to the professional development of future teachers.

The crucial role of mentors during practicum teaching has been well-defined and acknowledged in the literature (e.g., Torrez & Krebs, 2012), and their efficiency in the process has been embodied with roles such as supporter, assessor, collaborator, facilitator, counselor, friend, trainer, and communicator (Ambrosetti & Dekkers, 2010). It has been widely affirmed that the multiplicity and vitality of cooperating teachers' roles require special preparation and training (e.g., Akcan & Tatar, 2010; Hudson, 2013). Despite this necessity, many international and local mentoring practices fail to include any specific training, apart from fulfilling basic criteria such as willingness and years of experience in most teacher education programs (Vasutova & Spilkova, 2011). Motivated by the clear need for the specific training of mentor teachers, the current study draws on the critical constructivist view of teacher education and aims to understand the expectations regarding training mentor teachers in practicum practices of language teacher education programs.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Critical Constructivist Teacher Education

As a theory of learning, the constructivist perspective postulates that the starting point for candidate teachers to learn is their personal theories, since they develop self-awareness through interpreting input and their previous classroom experiences during the learning process (Roberts, 2016). In teacher education programs that follow the constructivist perspective, input interpretation is made available for student teachers through reflection, collaborative learning, posing relevant problems to be solved, and working in cohort groups in which learning experiences are shared and meaningful dialogue concerning their beliefs and teaching practices are held (Rainer & Guyton, 2004). Additionally, relevant field placement, professional portfolios, and action research to assess teaching strategies are among the key features in constructivist teacher education programs. As an inquiry-based thinking process, reflection is considered to play a crucial role in the development of student teachers, in that it encourages gaining their own experience through applying knowledge to practice (Schön, 1983), develops a deeper understanding of knowledge and strategies in order to teach better, and which results in decisions made that are informed and confident actions taken (Akcan, 2011).

Adding a critical component to constructivism, critical constructivist teaching has an emancipatory potential and a primary aim of seeking change, regardless of being in the broader political sense or limited by a specific learning environment. It includes the "ability to take a step back from the world as we are accustomed to perceiving it and to see the ways our perception is constructed" (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 11). Critical awareness can be seen as a

key characteristic, both for teachers and to be fostered in their students. Teacher education programs that reconceptualize mentoring in critical constructive terms are influenced by displeasure with the existing knowledge of teachers, the school culture, and teaching practices. It is maintained that such mentoring is strongly shaped by two learning-based assumptions: The aim of learning is the transformation of existing knowledge; and that knowledge is built by learners via active thinking (Aderibigbe et al., 2014). Regarding the first assumption, it is suggested that mentoring practices should concentrate on the critique of knowledge and the culture of schooling, which makes mentors and teacher candidates learners and generators of new practices in this collaborative study. In relation to the second assumption, both parties are seen as agents of change with their commitment to develop and examine new ideas about teaching.

To achieve the general aim of mentoring programs influenced by critical constructivism, mentors should have experience in inquiring about classroom practices and be willing to reform teaching and education. When training such mentors, the main focus is on their engagement in studying teaching practice and inquiry into teaching, and also in helping them learn new skills together with teacher candidates through activities such as the use of an egalitarian structure in collaborative mentoring between teachers and student teachers to enable them to learn from one another (Bradbury, 2010) and orientating reflections towards the critique of roles, values, and expected practice. Based on this framework, the starting point to create change in mentoring practices for the better in teacher education programs is to understand the existing mentoring atmosphere. Thus, the expectations of components in practicum studies (i.e., university supervisors, mentor teachers, and student teachers) from mentoring would be valuable sources to understand what actions should be taken for improvement.

## 2.2. Teacher Education in Turkey

During the final year of the current language teacher education program offered in Turkey, student teachers attend two school practice courses, in which student teachers are first expected to observe a real class with a focus on teaching methods and techniques, perform micro-teaching practices individually or in groups, to manage a class, and to test, evaluate and reflect on their practices, whereas the latter course requires them to prepare lesson plans and teach independently (Yükseköğretim Kurulu Başkanlığı [Turkish Council of Higher Education], 2018). Throughout the two courses, lesson plans and teaching practices are evaluated by the mentor teacher and the university supervisor who are expected to work collaboratively in order to maximize the benefit that teacher candidates gain from their practicum experience.

The duties and responsibilities of the practicum process are officially prescribed. The university supervisor prepares student teachers for their practice teaching activities, plans the activities within the practicum program together with the mentor teacher and coordinator, whereas mentor teachers are responsible for ensuring that the activities are carried out successfully, to monitor student teachers during the activities, and to evaluate the performance of student teachers. The student teachers are expected to study regularly in accordance with their instruction, and to maintain a portfolio of their studies and reports during the practicum. In the last 3 years, redesigned mentoring seminars have been put into practice in which mentor teachers are shown how to maintain records of practicum practices and receive training designed according to the clinical supervision model (Bulunuz et al., 2014; Gürsoy et al., 2013). The mentors become familiar with the basic concepts of the

model, with pre-conference, observation and data collection, data analysis, post-conference, and reflection through videos and cases that exemplify the techniques and methods. Despite being a significant step towards the professional development of mentor teachers, the seminars and the dissemination processes have resulted in certain issues that stem from the training having been developed with a lack of contextual awareness. These issues can be exemplified as the delivery of training in a limited time period in order to meet the number of necessary mentors and the ignorance of teachers' subject-specific needs (e.g., science, mathematics, language education, etc.).

### 2.3. Previous Research

Mentoring in preservice teacher training has attracted significant interest in research studies, touching upon issues such as the efficacy of mentoring (e.g., Gareis & Grant, 2014; Yavuz, 2011), mentoring roles (e.g., Dos Reis & Braund, 2019; Sağlam, 2007), mentor development (e.g., Hudson, 2013), expectations related to mentoring (e.g., Albakri et al., 2021; Koç, 2008), and the mentoring relationship (e.g., Bal-Gezegin et al., 2019; Pungur, 2007). Although the overview of research on mentoring, in general, reveals that mentoring and practicum are considered valuable experiences for teacher candidates (e.g., Ellis et al., 2020; Farrell, 2008), problems that hinder effective mentoring have also been frequently mentioned in the literature (e.g., Gareis & Grant, 2014; Öztürk & Aydın, 2019).

The lack of coordination between practicum schools and universities is one of the problems areas highlighted, whereas such coordination is necessary for both the planning conducting of preservice teacher mentoring (Hughes, 2002). For example, Yavuz (2011) examined perceptions and experiences regarding the concepts of "mentor" and "mentoring" for a mentor teacher and six English language student teachers, and reported that the school-faculty partnership explained in the official document is not efficiently practiced in reality and thus the study's participants suggested the organization of regular seminars for mutual sharing and understanding. Similar results have also been reported in other studies conducted across various disciplines (Ekiz, 2006).

Bullough (2012) revealed mentor support to be essential to the effective development of student teachers, having reviewed mentoring practices in several parts of the United States. However, studies conducted in Turkey have indicated a lack of mentor support. For example, Yeşilyurt and Semerci (2012) examined the perceptions of student teachers from several departments and universities, and concluded that mentor teachers fail to provide effective support for teacher candidates. In the field of foreign language education, Sağlam (2007) reported that student teachers can experience problems, and especially in terms of receiving appropriate and critical feedback from their mentors. As a form of mentor support, the provision of a wide variety of teaching practices for student teachers to observe is another problem highlighted in the research to date. Seçer et al. (2010) found that student teachers fail to observe different teaching competencies that could actually stimulate their careers, resulting from negative attitudes towards mentoring and being incognizant of mentoring roles. (e.g. Seçer et al, 2010).

Another common problem indicated in previous research is a lack of criteria applied to mentor selection and training. Since simply being a teacher in itself is insufficient to provide guidance to student teachers, mentor selection and training have been a major concern in the relevant literature. Being experienced, having a willingness to provide mentoring (e.g., Hamilton, 2010; Hobson et al., 2012), and having received training on mentoring are among the criteria suggested in the literature. Furthermore, the positive impact of training has been

underlined by a growing body of research (e.g., Delaney, 2012; Örsdemir Panpallı, 2016). For example, training has been shown to increase mentor teachers' awareness of their roles and the differences between teaching and mentoring (Menegat, 2010). Gareis and Grant (2014) revealed that mentors were only able to evaluate the teaching performance of student teachers after receiving training. Moreover, many studies have indicated that mentor teachers request training on mentoring (Inal et al., 2014), underlining the need to examine the expectations of practitioners in order to design training to adequately address their needs. In line with this, the current study sought to answer the following research question: "What are the expectations of student teachers, mentor teachers, and university supervisors from mentoring within a preservice language teacher education program?"

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Research Context

The context of the current research was chosen as the language teacher education department of a state university in İstanbul, Turkey (hereafter BU-FLED), where the researcher had close contact with practicum studies. Teacher candidates are assigned to schools in groups where the school principal appoints a mentor to guide them for the duration of their 12-week practicum at the department. During these courses, the preservice teachers perform structured observation tasks based on discussions related to theoretical and experiential considerations in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL), and also experience teaching under the supervision of their mentor and the university supervisor.

#### 3.2. Participants

The practicum studies at the department involved three groups; student teachers, mentor teachers, and university supervisors who remained in close contact throughout. Therefore, the participants of the study consisted of three groups, chosen through convenience sampling among the purposeful sampling types, which is the most common form of nonprobability sampling (Merriam, 1998).

The first group of participants, student teachers, consisted of 79 senior-year students at BU-FLED in the 2019-2020 academic year. At the time of the first phase of the study, the student teachers were registered to the practicum course offered during the fall semester, and which included visiting practicum schools for course requirements such as classroom observation, reflection reports, and discussion about the classroom practice of teaching the English language. The second group of participants consisted of 37 teachers who were assigned as mentor teachers at the practicum schools (seven private and eight state schools) that the department cooperated with for practicum studies in the same academic year. Their experience in teaching English ranged from 6 to 30 years, whereas their experience as mentors ranged from 3 and 20 years. The third participant group consisted of six university supervisors who were offering the practicum courses at the time of the study and thus cooperated with both the student teacher and mentor teacher groups in the process. Having taught various field-based courses at the department for more than 10 years, the participating university supervisors each had experience in teaching practicum courses in excess of 5 years.

#### 3.3. Data Collection Tools and Procedures

The data were collected during the fall semester of the 2019-2020 academic year. Two different data collection tools were employed –questionnaires and interviews– so as to

increase the credibility and validity of the study's findings. A questionnaire was prepared by the researcher to ascertain what kind of expectations the participants had related to the training of mentors.

This approach was chosen for practical reasons, since conducting in-depth interviews with each participant in each group (six university supervisors, 37 mentor teachers, and 79 student teachers) would have proven extremely time-consuming. As the first step, a literature review was conducted in order to identify a pool of exam questions that could form the basis of the questionnaire items. A total of 50 studies were reviewed regarding various problems experienced during practicum studies offered in Turkey between 2006 and 2019. The start year of 2006 was determined since that was the year that language teacher education programs in Turkey took their current form following a restructure of university faculties of education (Yükseköğretim Kurulu Başkanlığı [Turkish Council of Higher Education], 2007). In these studies, problems and expectations were reported from the perspectives of all three groups in the practicum process; student teachers, mentor teachers, and university supervisors.

The literature review revealed the problems and expectations with specific reference to mentor teachers. From this, a total of eight possible training themes were listed: giving feedback to student teachers; assessing student teachers' performance; observing student teachers; the orientation of student teachers (to the classroom, school culture, and the teaching profession); motivation and attitude in mentoring; mentor-supervisor communication and cooperation of mentors; knowledge of practicum (procedures such as tasks, roles and responsibilities, official duties, etc.); and knowledge of mentoring (i.e., what mentoring entails, personal attributes, and pedagogical knowledge to support student teachers). All eight themes were listed in the questionnaire and the participants asked to rank them from the most important to the least important. A consent form was added at the beginning of the questionnaire and participants were asked to provide information related to their practicum school (in the student teachers' and mentor teachers' questionnaire), and years of experience both as a teacher and as a mentor teacher (in the mentor teachers' questionnaire). Additionally, another part was added to the end of the questionnaire for the participants to indicate whether or not they were willing to be interviewed about their responses.

Prior to the data gathering application, ethical approval was received from the ethics committee of the university, after which the questionnaire was piloted with two university supervisors, 10 mentor teachers, and 16 student teachers to check its comprehensibility. After applying some minor changes to the wording, the final version of the questionnaire was applied to six university supervisors, 37 mentor teachers from 15 different cooperating schools, and 79 student teachers.

The administration of the questionnaire was followed by semi-structured interviews which were conducted so as to better understand the issue in greater depth from the participants' perspectives by establishing greater rapport with them within a semi-formal conversational setting (Patton, 1990). Only those participants who indicated their willingness to be interviewed were contacted, with eight student teachers, seven mentor teachers, and three university supervisors agreeing to be interviewed regarding their expectations from practicum studies.

During the interviews, the selected participants were asked about the components of practicum that were in need of improvement and what kind of issues they considered essential in the training of mentors, with the intention to letting them elaborate on the



answers already provided to the questionnaire. The semi-structured interviews were conducted individually, with each lasting for approximately 25 minutes. The interviews were conducted in Turkish, the participants' native language, in order to reduce the risk of language or translation issues. The interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of the participants and later transcribed verbatim by the researcher.

In order to ensure reliability and accuracy, the researcher requested that the participants reviewed and approved their respective transcripts. In the meantime, several visits were paid to the practicum schools in order to observe the student teachers during their practice teaching classes and in the feedback conferences held with their mentor teachers. The researcher also attended the practicum courses offered in the department to observe the same student teachers in those courses with the intention of listening to their comments related to their practicum studies. During all the observations, the researcher took notes of any information that could possibly deepen the data gathered through application of the questionnaire and the subsequent interviews.

### 3.4. Data Analysis

Two different analysis procedures were employed in the current study. For the quantitative data, the questionnaire responses of all participants were analyzed using IBM's SPSS 27.0 for Windows software package. Descriptive statistics, namely frequencies, were utilized to understand the practicum themes that were considered the most important to cover in a mentor training program.

For the qualitative data gathered through semi-structured interviews, the transcripts of 18 interviews in total (eight student teachers, seven mentor teachers, and three university supervisors) were analyzed according to the content analysis method. Miles et al. (2013) suggested that content analysis should consist of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. According to this framework, data reduction includes the elimination of irrelevant information from the transcribed data, followed by coding of the raw data into conceptual categories. In the second stage, "data display," the data is represented in form of table or charts and potential connections between the categories are examined. In the final analysis stage, known as "conclusion drawing," the validity of the results is ensured by referring to field notes prior to conclusions being drawn.

Following this model, the researcher studied the interview transcripts in order to identify and classify the participants' comments as practicum themes to include within a mentor training program. Then, relationships between the different themes were carefully checked to ascertain whether or not they could be placed under the same theme. Finally, the researcher reexamined the emergent themes to ensure that each truly reflected the nature of its supporting data. As an important criterion for a scientific inquiry to be trustable (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), reliability was ensured via intra-rater reliability, with the study's successive phases aimed at confirming the former throughout the process. Thus, for the intra-rater reliability, the same analysis process in the coding of the data was repeated by the researcher after a period of 3 weeks. The first and second coding results were then compared in order to eliminate any differences, after which conclusions were drawn following minor revisions.

## 4. RESULTS

The results of the university supervisors', mentor teachers', and student teachers' responses to the questionnaire are presented in Table 1. In terms of the university supervisors, they ranked the themes of giving feedback to student teachers (50%) and knowledge of mentoring

(mentorship, personal attributes, and pedagogical knowledge) (33.3%) as the most important to be covered in the training of mentor teachers. Following those two themes, observing student teachers (33.3%) and knowledge of practicum (33.3%) were the other two themes equally perceived to be the most important.

**Table 1.** Questionnaire Results

THEME	Rank			%		
	US	MT	ST	US	MT	ST
1) Feedback	1	1	1	50	24.3	30.3
2) Assessment	4	2	6	33.3	21.6	18.9
3) Observation	3	1	5	33.3	37.8	18.9
4) Orientation of student teachers	8	4	2	33.3	27	20.2
5) Motivation & attitude of mentors	7	8	8	50	24.3	24
6) Communication between partners	8	3	8	33.3	16	17.7
7) Practicum procedures	3/6	6	1	33.3/33.3	16	25.3
8) Knowledge of mentoring	1	1	1	33.3	35	34.17

Note: US: University supervisor, MT: Mentor teacher, ST: Student teacher

For the mentor teachers in the study, three different themes were ranked in first place: giving feedback to student teachers (24.3%); observing student teachers' performances (37.8%); and, knowledge of mentoring (35%). The student teachers, on the other hand, ranked three themes in equal first place as the most important to be included in a mentor training program, namely giving feedback to student teachers (30.3%), knowledge of practicum (procedures) (35.3%), and knowledge of mentoring (34.17%). The prominent themes for each participant group are summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Prominent Themes

University Supervisors	Mentor Teachers	Student Teachers
Giving feedback to student teachers (50%)	Giving feedback to student teachers (24.3%)	Giving feedback to student teachers (30.3%)
Knowledge of mentoring (33.3%)	Observing student teachers' performances (37.8%)	Knowledge on practicum (procedures) (35.3%)
	Knowledge of mentoring (35%)	Knowledge of mentoring (34.1%)

The summary of the themes chosen by each participant group shown in Table 2 revealed that giving feedback to student teachers after their teaching practice and knowledge of mentoring were common sources of concern in practicum studies for all three participant groups. In addition, observing student teachers and knowledge of practicum procedures were two other issues considered as important to be addressed in mentoring training.

Analysis of the study's qualitative data, collected through semi-structured interviews, showed that the participants' comments centered around similar themes from the questionnaire. The overview of themes identified in the interviews conducted with each group of participants is presented in Table 3 together with frequencies.



**Table 3.** Interview Themes

Group	Themes
University supervisors	Knowledge of feedback and observation ( $f = 3$ ) Knowledge of mentoring ( $f = 2$ ) Communication difficulties ( $f = 2$ )
Mentor teachers	Knowledge of mentoring ( $f = 4$ ) Guidance in practicum ( $f = 4$ ) Collaboration between faculty and school ( $f = 3$ )
Student teachers	Knowledge of feedback ( $f = 5$ ) Knowledge of mentoring ( $f = 3$ ) Collaboration between faculty and school ( $f = 3$ )

The university supervisors' comments regarding their expectations from mentoring in practicum were conceived under three themes: knowledge of effective feedback and observation; knowledge of mentoring; and, communication difficulties. The first theme, mentor teachers' knowledge of effective feedback and observation, indicated the university supervisors' concerns about inadequate observation and feedback practices employed by mentor teachers. The participating university supervisors (US1, US2, US3) all referred to this theme. One of the university supervisors remarked about the mentors' practices based on their observation:

The mentor teachers we work with during practicum, unfortunately, do not know how to give feedback effectively. They are not aware of the benefits of reflective teaching practices, namely questioning performances. Rather, they tend to list and say what they observed without any real dialogue having taken place with the student teacher. (Interview 2, US2)

The concern here was expressed as the way feedback is provided and the absence of reflection in feedback sessions. Similarly, another university supervisor emphasized that mentor teachers prefer to focus on prescriptive feedback, rather than being critical. On this, they further explained that, "Feedback and observation are complementary to each other; if you do not know what to observe it is very hard to know what to give feedback on" (Interview 3, US3). Therefore, according to the university supervisors, mentor teachers are in need of training on how to provide constructive feedback to student teachers in order to better contribute to their professional development.

The second theme, knowledge of mentoring, referred to the mentor teachers' partial understanding of their roles. Two of the university supervisors (US2, US3) emphasized that being a mentor teacher does not merely involve fulfilling certain official duties. For example, one of the university supervisors stated that, "Mentor teachers are not aware of the fact that practicum is a type of training for student teachers. They think that giving feedback to a student teacher, communicating with them is just another procedure to complete" (Interview 2, US2). They underlined that mentoring is considered above and beyond regular duties and should include forming a professional relationship in which mentors share their knowledge and experience. Thus, they believed that mentor teachers are in need of clarity regarding their roles.

The third theme highlighted in the university supervisors' interviews revealed communication difficulties between mentor teachers and student teachers. According to the

university supervisors, communication is an important attribute that significantly influences mentoring. Two of the university supervisors (US2, US3) reported that mentor teachers needed to know how to approach student teachers. The following extract exemplifies their position about the communication problem they observed:

I think they need to know how to communicate with student teachers...they need to introduce student teachers to their classrooms as a colleague, and should not then ignore them in the class. Sometimes they express their ideas openly and directly, which may offend the student teachers; whereas they should be providing emotional support. (Interview 3, US3)

From the university supervisors' perspective, communication difficulties can result from the attitude of mentors towards the student teachers they are assigned to mentor. They drew attention to the importance of mentors having an approach to student teachers as colleagues, rather than managers or evaluators.

As indicated in Table 3, the mentor teacher participants' responses fell under four themes; knowledge of mentoring, guidance for practicum studies, enthusiastic students, and collaboration between faculty and school. Similar to the university supervisors group, the theme of knowledge of mentoring indicated that the mentors themselves consider limited knowledge of mentoring to be an issue which has resulted in unfortunate mentoring practices. Emphasizing their need to learn what mentoring should actually entail, the mentors (MT1, MT2, MT4, MT6) highlighted knowledge of mentoring as an important problem to be addressed since they could only rely upon their teaching experience and intuition when performing their mentoring roles. One of the mentor teachers explained their thoughts on this as follows:

When I am with my student teachers, I observe them or give feedback to them, but I rely on my intuition and experience with that class. However, I don't really know how much and what I should share, and so I'm unsure whether what I say is correct or not. (Interview 4, MT1)

The mentor teacher's comment showed that mentoring as a duty was perceived to include observation and the provision of feedback for which they, as mentors, felt inadequate. Mentoring was also believed to go beyond these two practices, as indicated by the word "sharing," and that they were unsure of their exact position. The comments indicated that the solution they found to this dilemma related to their own teaching experience. For example, one mentor teacher stated that, "I don't know how much I talk, or what points I should focus on when observing. Since I am working with two different [cooperating] schools, I thought it would be good to compare them and give examples from my teaching contexts" (Interview 7, MT4). In that way, the mentor teacher's own lack of knowledge about mentoring was replaced by the mentors' own teaching practices as their point of reference. Given that the only source for mentorship to be conceptualized in the teachers' minds was their own experience, their knowledge about what mentoring should entail, what kind of personal attributes and pedagogical knowledge was required to be able to support student teachers effectively was limited to their own professional experience.

The theme of guidance for teaching practicum signified the mentors' expectations for clear guidance to fulfill the procedures associated with practice teaching. The procedures referred to the roles and responsibilities as well as the mentors' official duties. The mentors (MT1, MT2, MT3, MT4) mentioned that they sometimes experienced difficulties in understanding what was expected of them as mentors, as indicated in the following extract:

The expectations for the practicum study are not clear to us. We have hard times reaching the faculty when we need to ask a question about what to do. We work with different universities, and they may each have different expectations. (Interview 5, MT2)

The same mentor further suggested that universities should compile a guidebook to which mentors could refer in order to answer questions related to their roles and responsibilities. The suggestion was also mentioned by the other mentor teachers who further stated that such a guidebook could include the official documents to be completed, as well as explanations regarding the completion and use of such documents. In addition, explanations about practicum courses offered by a university were mentioned as being important to include in such a guidebook so that mentors could correctly follow the flow and relation of tasks that needed to be conducted as a part of any practice teaching.

The mentors' reported their need for guidance in practicum courses were supported by their responses under the theme of collaboration between faculty and the cooperating schools during practicum. The theme signified a lack of collaboration between faculty and schools that can lead to imperfect practicum applications. Four of the participant mentors (MT2, MT5, MT6, MT7) mentioned sometimes experiencing difficulty in contacting faculty members. One mentor exemplified this problem as follows: "From time to time, I am lost. I do not know what to do with a student teacher who did not show up for the whole semester" (Interview 9, MT6).

In the last group of participants, as presented in Table 3, the student teachers' responses about their expectations from mentoring in practicum were categorized under three themes: knowledge of mentoring; knowledge of feedback; and, collaboration between faculty and cooperating schools. Similar to the concerns reported in the other two participant groups, the first theme identified by the student teachers was knowledge of mentoring, which refers to mentors having an incomplete understanding of their roles. Three of the student teachers (ST1, ST6, ST7) believed that the mentor teachers largely carried out their duties just for the sake of performing them, as indicated in the following:

I feel that my mentor teacher does not know their role as a mentor and did mentoring just because they were assigned as a mentor. They also said that they do not feel like a part of the practicum. (Interview 11, ST1)

The comment showed that any lack of knowledge regarding mentoring had consequences perceivable by student teachers. This was also reflected in the other theme that emerged from the student teachers' comments, knowledge of feedback, indicating their concerns for the absence of proper feedback after teaching. Five of the preservice teachers (ST1, ST2, ST3, ST4, ST8) interviewed stated that it was very difficult for them to make sense of the feedback given by their mentor teachers as the feedback was inadequately detailed. The student teachers commented that they needed to hear more about the classes they had taught and how they could improve in their teaching. The following excerpt illustrates the student teachers' thoughts on this issue:

After my macro teaching, my mentor teacher did only this [showed a thumbs-up gesture]. We did not have a chat about my class at all. It was my first teaching experience. I was very excited. Yes...I felt very good after the class, but I do not know what exactly went well or wrong. I would have liked to hear the details. (Interview 12, ST3)

This example revealed that incomplete knowledge of feedback was considered a problem on the part of the student teachers, just as indicated in the mentor teachers' comments. It indicated that the mentors' reported insufficient knowledge of how to provide adequate feedback was reflected in the unfortunate experiences of student teachers, since they were unable to receive constructive or detailed feedback regarding their practicum teaching lessons.

The third theme that emerged from the student teachers' interviews was collaboration between faculty members and the cooperating schools. The theme included views related to the lack of collaboration in practice teaching, as was also mentioned by the mentor teachers group. Three of the student teachers (ST4, ST6, ST7) stated that the practicum schools lacked detailed information about the procedures of the practicum process, which sometimes resulted in student teachers experiencing difficulties in following the required tasks. The subsequent quotation exemplifies this concern:

My mentor teacher does not know what to do as a mentor in this process. What I mean is we always have to remind them of the procedure such as how many hours we have to spend at school, their [required] signature, when the university supervisor will visit them, clerical work we should complete, etc. (Interview 15, ST6)

The comment revealed that the mentors' need for guidance in practice teaching reported earlier was observable in the form of a lack of collaboration between faculty members and cooperating schools in the eyes of student teachers. According to the interviewed student teachers, the mentors' incognizance of the procedures stems from the absence of or inadequate collaboration between the institutions, which should be addressed in order to overcome these types of problems.

## 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Analysis of the study's collected data showed that the expectations clustered around four central themes; practicum procedures, knowledge of mentoring, how to observe student teachers, and how to provide feedback to student teachers in the process of practice teaching. It could be stated that the findings obtained were as expected, especially since the themes listed in the questionnaire were drawn from the existing literature, i.e., studies that focused on problems experienced during practicum studies in teacher education programs in Turkey (e.g., Ekiz, 2006; Koç, 2008). Therefore, the findings obtained in the current study can be said to support the previous findings.

One important finding from Kasapoğlu's (2015) review of research about teaching practicum problems was that school experiences were not implemented in accordance with the goals set by universities and cooperating schools, pointing out failures in the fulfillment of practicum procedures such as meeting official requirements, and undertaking certain set tasks and responsibilities. The possible reason behind this issue may lay in a lack of cooperation between schools and universities (Hughes, 2002), which was also emphasized during the interviews in the current study. The lack of such inter-institutional cooperation can also reflect negatively on the relationships between mentors and student teachers, resulting in communication problems between the two.

Another important finding was the need for specific knowledge about mentoring duties, which was revealed in numerous previous studies (e.g., Akcan & Tatar, 2010; Menegat, 2010), indicating that mentoring is a duty that necessitates a comprehensive understanding of mentoring, and especially skills such as personal attributes and pedagogical knowledge

with which to approach student teachers. The participants' comments reflected the findings of previous studies in that the absence of mentorship knowledge can result in mentors having problematic experiences in guiding student teachers in areas such as lesson planning, orienting, supporting them in their new profession, or in providing the necessary instructional support that student teachers need throughout their practice teaching (Rakıcıoğlu-Söylemez & Eröz, 2014). One important reason behind the lack of knowledge on mentoring is a lack of motivation and interest in the role itself (e.g., Albakri et al., 2021; Dos Reis & Braund, 2019), paving the way to question the selection process for mentor recruitment/assignment. In the absence of motivation and interest in mentoring, practice teaching is perceived traditionally as a task in which student teachers only observe and then conduct a lesson for a few hours, and where attendance is considered the most important criterion in assessment. However, practice teaching is a process that should be framed by collaboration, and requires considerable motivation and interest in order to promote the development of both parties. Years of teaching experience, as the key basic criterion for mentor selection, does not provide a workable solution to problems related to motivation and thus remains an ongoing issue. Given that motivation is an important factor in mentors' behavior and accordingly their practices, it is considered an important element to be included in the list of criteria to be developed based on research in the field. Additionally, mentoring should go beyond simply accepting student teachers into the classroom for observation, and instead requiring knowledge of mentoring that includes various skills such as personal attributes, pedagogical knowledge, system requirements, modeling, and feedback (Hudson, 2013), which all requires special preparation. Preparation for the mentoring role is also needed in order to eliminate risks that the contribution of mentors to the professional development of student teachers is only based on their own personal experience and common sense, rather than upon confirmed actual theoretical and pedagogical knowledge.

Another important finding directly related to the knowledge of mentoring concerned the participants' reports about the inefficiency of observation and feedback given by mentor teachers. Given that teacher learning and development is not considered achievable when student teachers are left on their own (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2005) and is accepted as a social process dependent upon dialogue and interaction, observing student teachers and giving effective feedback are considered the two key elements that shape student teachers' professional growth. It was seen that the incognizance of the requirements of mentorship was inevitably reflected in the unfortunate experiences of all three groups (i.e., university supervisors, mentor teachers, and student teachers) regarding the mentors' feedback practices. Possible reasons for this could relate to the availability of mentors and their concerns about the provision of proper feedback to their student teachers. During the short school visits and interviews, the researcher observed that teachers usually have busy schedules and that mentoring is then seen as a burden added to their already busy to-do list. Unfortunately, for most mentor teachers, their already full schedules hinder them being able to allocate sufficient time for mentoring duties such as the provision of detailed feedback (Hobson, 2002). In addition, as suggested by Clarke et al. (2013), mentors may have concerns about their feedback skills and may not feel able to trust their own pedagogical content knowledge and thereby provide a valid viewpoint. This reason was evidenced by the mentor teachers' comments in the current study, stressing that they just placed trust in their own experience and intuition when it came to mentoring. The results, therefore, highlight the importance of training on the part of mentor teachers, a finding also underlined by mentors themselves in previous studies (e.g., Hamilton, 2010).

It is believed that the current research could be seen as a starting point in the sense of understanding the common needs and accordingly supporting mentors' ongoing learning and development through online/in-person training programs. Yet, it should be acknowledged that the current study was limited to a specific English language teacher education program. It is therefore recommended that further research be conducted in different contexts to in/validate and generalize the current study's results. In addition, questionnaire and interview data could be triangulated with long-term observations in order to understand whether or not real practices reflect the same needs and expectations. Further research could also focus on the design and development of preservice teacher training programs based on contextual expectations. The long-term and immediate effects of future training program designs should be investigated from the perspectives of both mentor teachers and student teachers, along with on-site observation of mentoring practices.

## DECLARATIONS

**Author Contributions:** The author took sole part in every phase of the study including the writing of this article.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

**Funding:** This work was supported by the Boğaziçi University Research Fund, İstanbul, Turkey [Grant number: 16485]

**Ethical Approval:** Ethical approval was received from Boğaziçi University (SBB-EAK 2019/60).

## REFERENCES

- Aderebigbe, S. A., Colucci-Gray, L., & Gray D. (2014). Mentoring as a collaborative learning journey for teachers and student teachers: A critical constructivist perspective, *Teacher Education Advancement Network Journal*, 6(3), 17-27. <https://ojs.cumbria.ac.uk/index.php/TEAN/article/view/192>
- Akcan, S. (2011). Analysis of teacher candidates' learning experiences in an "English Teaching Methods" course. *Education and Science*, 36, 247-260.
- Akcan, S., & Tatar, S. (2010). An investigation on the nature of feedback given to pre-service English teachers during their practice teaching experience. *Teacher Development*, 14(2), 153-172. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13664530.2010.494495>
- Albakri, I. S. M. A., Ismail, N., Hartono, R., Tahir, M. H. M., Abdullah, M. S. H. B., Sarudin, A., & Zulkepli, N. (2021). Mentoring practice during practicum: The perspectives of Malaysian pre-service English language teachers. *Studies in English Language and Education*, 8(2), 642-655. <https://doi.org/10.24815/siele.v8i2.19282>
- Ambrosetti, A., & Dekkers, J. (2010). The interconnectedness of the roles of mentors and mentees in pre-service teacher education mentoring relationships. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 35(6), 42-55. <https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2010v35n6.3>
- Bal-Gezegin, B., Balıkçı, G., & Gümüşok, F. (2019). Professional development of pre-service teachers in an English language teaching program. *International Online Journal of Education and Teaching (IOJET)*, 6(3), 624-642. <https://iojet.org/index.php/IOJET/article/view/560>
- Borg, S. (2009). Language teacher cognition. In A. Burns & J. C. Richards (Eds.), *The Cambridge guide to second language teacher education* (pp. 163-171). Cambridge University Press.



- Bradbury, L. U. (2010). Educative mentoring: Promoting reform-based science teaching through mentoring relationships. *Science Education*, 94(6), 1049-1071. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sce.20393>
- Bullough, R. V. (2012). Mentoring and new teacher induction in the United States: A review and analysis of current practices. *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*, 20(1), 57-74. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13611267.2012.645600>
- Bulunuz, N., Gürsoy, E., Kesner, J., Baltacı Göktalay Ş., & Salihoğlu, U. M. (2014). The implementation and evaluation of a Clinical Supervision Model in teacher education in Turkey: Is it an effective method? *Educational Sciences: Theory and Practice*, 14(5), 1823-1833.
- Clarke, A., Triggs, V., & Nielsen, W. (2013). Cooperating teacher participation in teacher education: A review of the literature. *Review of Educational Research*, 84(2), 163-202. <https://doi.org/10.3102%2F0034654313499618>
- Darling-Hammond, L., & Baratz-Snowden, J. (2005). *A good teacher in every classroom: Preparing the highly qualified teachers our children deserve*. Josey-Bass.
- Delaney, Y. A. (2012). Research on mentoring language teachers: its role in language education. *Foreign Language Annals*, 45(1), 184-202. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1944-9720.2011.01185.x>
- Dos Reis, K., & Braund, M. (2019). Are school-based mentors adequately equipped to fulfill their roles? A case study in learning to teach accounting. *Africa Education Review*, 16(4), 17-36. <https://doi.org/10.1080/18146627.2018.1460210>
- Ellis, N. J., Alonzo, D., & Nguyen, H. T. M. (2020). Elements of a quality pre-service teacher mentor: A literature review. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 92, Article 103072. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2020.103072>
- Ekiz, D. (2006). Mentoring primary school student teachers in Turkey: Seeing it from the perspectives of student teachers and mentors. *International Education Journal*, 7(7), 924-934.
- Farrell, T. S. C. (Ed.). (2008). *Novice language teachers: Insights and perspectives for the first year*. Equinox.
- Gareis, C. R., & Grant, L. W. (2014). The efficacy of training cooperating teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 39, 77-88. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2013.12.007>
- Guyton, E., & McIntyre, D. J. (1990). Student Teaching and School Experiences. In W. R. Houston (Ed.), *Handbook of Research on Teacher Education* (pp. 514-534). Macmillan.
- Gürsoy, E., Bulunuz, N., Baltacı Göktalay, Ş., Bulunuz, M., Kesner, J., & Salihoglu, U. M. (2013). Clinical supervision model to improve supervisory skills of cooperating teachers and university supervisors during teaching practice. *Hacettepe University Journal of Education, S.E.1*, 191-203. [http://efdergi.hacettepe.edu.tr/shw\\_artcl-1661.html](http://efdergi.hacettepe.edu.tr/shw_artcl-1661.html)
- Hamilton, J. (2010). *Cooperating teachers: An investigation into their needs and training as mentors and supervisors of student teachers* [Doctoral dissertation, University of San Francisco, CA]. <https://www.proquest.com/openview/59fbea0b0e74fa97fe1475e17f328a63/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750>
- Hobson, A. J. (2002). Student teachers' perceptions of school-based mentoring in Initial Teacher Training (ITT). *Mentoring and Tutoring*, 10(1), 5-20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13611260220133117>

- Hobson, L. D., Harris, D., Buckner-Manley, K., & Smith, P. (2012). The importance of mentoring novice and pre-service teachers: findings from a HBCU student teaching program. *Educational Foundations, Summer-Fall*, 67-80.
- Hudson, P. (2013). Mentoring as a professional development: "growth for both" mentor and mentee. *Professional Development in Education*, 39(5), 771-783. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2012.749415>
- Hughes, M. (2002). Mentor teacher programs: A survey of practices and program features across Virginia. [Doctoral dissertation, University of Virginia, Virginia, USA]. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/305485195?pq-origsite=gscholar&fromopenview=true>
- Inal, S., Kaçar, I. G., & Büyükyavuz, O. (2014, May 15-17). *Inner voices of mentors and mentees heard and a blueprint for practicum produced* [Paper presentation]. 8th International ELT Research Conference: Innovative Approaches to research in ELT, Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Turkey.
- Kasapoğlu, K. (2015). A review of studies on school experience and practice teaching in Turkey. *Hacettepe University Journal of Education Faculty*, 30(1), 147-162. [http://efdergi.hacettepe.edu.tr/shw\\_artcl-27.html](http://efdergi.hacettepe.edu.tr/shw_artcl-27.html)
- Kincheloe, J. L. (2005). *Critical constructivism primer*. Lang.
- Koç, E. M. (2008). *An investigation of cooperating teachers' roles as mentors during the teaching practicum at distance B.A. program in ELT at Anadolu University Open Education Faculty* [Doctoral dissertation, Anadolu University, Eskişehir, Turkey]. <https://www.proquest.com/openview/3f5580a61296d11cc7c65a1b87f3b4d0/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=2026366&diss=y>
- Menegat, G. M. (2010). *Mentor/protégé interactions and the role of mentor training within a novice teacher mentoring program* [Doctoral dissertation, Lewis & Clark College, OR]. <https://www.proquest.com/openview/57b11a7e692946a549a10a915b05ec11/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750>
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2015). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). Wiley.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana J. (2013). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook*. Sage.
- Örsdemir Panpallı, E. (2016). *Becoming a mentor: An action research on enhancing an EFL teacher's mentoring skills in Turkey* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Çukurova University, Adana, Turkey.
- Öztürk, G., & Aydın, B. (2019). English language teacher education in Turkey: Why do we fail and what policy reforms are needed? *Anadolu Journal of Educational Sciences International*, 9(1), 181-213. <https://doi.org/10.18039/ajesi.520842>
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. SAGE Publications.
- Pungur, L. (2007). Mentoring as the key to a successful student teaching practicum: a comparative analysis. In T. Townsend & R. Bates (Eds.), *Handbook of teacher education* (pp. 267-282). Springer.
- Rainer Dangel, J., & Guyton, E. (2004). An emerging picture of constructivist teacher education. *The Constructivist*, 15(1), 1-35.

- Rakicioglu-Soylemez, A., & Eroz, B. (2014). Mentoring expectations and experiences of prospective and cooperating teachers during practice teaching. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 39(10), 146-168.
- Roberts, J. (2016). *Language Teacher Education*. Routledge.
- Sağlam, G. (2007). *Perceived roles, responsibilities and challenges of CT's in the procedure of teaching practice course in practicum* [Doctoral dissertation, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey]. <https://open.metu.edu.tr/handle/11511/17205>
- Seçer, Z., Çeliköz, N., & Kayılı, G. (2010). Problems in school practices in department of pre-school teaching and solution offers. Okul öncesi öğretmenliği okul uygulamalarında yaşanan sorunlar ve çözüm önerileri. *Yüzüncü Yıl University Journal of Education Faculty*, 7(1), 128-152.
- Schön, D. A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. Basic Books.
- Torrez, C. A. F., & Krebs, M. M. (2012). Expert voices: What cooperating teachers and teacher candidates say about quality student teaching placements and experiences? *Action in Teacher Education*, 34(5-6), 485-499. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01626620.2012.729477>
- Vasutova, J., & Spilkova, V. (2011). Teacher education in Czech Republic. In V. M. Zuljan & J. Vogrinc (Eds.), *European dimensions of teacher education: Similarities and differences* (pp. 193-225). Slovenia: Faculty of Education-The National School of Leadership and Education.
- Yavuz, A. (2011). The problematic context of mentoring: evidence from an English language teaching department at a Turkish university. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 34(1), 43-59. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2010.516431>
- Yeşilyurt, E., & Semerci, Ç. (2012). The problems that teacher candidates encounter during teaching practice curriculum and solutions offered. *International Journal of Human Sciences*, 9(2), 475-499. <https://www.j-humansciences.com/ojs/index.php/IJHS/article/view/1628>
- Yükseköğretim Kurulu Başkanlığı. (2007). *Oğretmen yetistirme el kitabı* [Manual for teacher training].
- Yükseköğretim Kurulu Başkanlığı. (2018). *İngilizce Öğretmenliği Lisans Programı* [English Language Teaching Undergraduate Program].

## ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTOR

Gizem Mutlu-Gülbak (PhD) is currently working as an assistant professor at Biruni University, İstanbul, Turkey. Her main research interests include language teacher education, mentor training, and online education.

Email: [mutlugzm@gmail.com](mailto:mutlugzm@gmail.com)

ORCID ID: 0000-0002-4248-8003

---

**Publisher's Note:** ÜNİVERSİTEPARK Limited remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

---