

# Investigation of Special Education Department Research Assistants' Perceptions of Teaching Practice Course

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**Abstract:** This study aims to examine the perceptions of research assistants in the department of special education about the teaching practicum course in the VII. and VIII. semester. Eight research assistants who conducted teaching practicum courses in the field of special education participated in the phenomenological approach. The data obtained through semi-structured interviews were analyzed through inductive analysis. The findings include the perceptions of the practice kit, the roles of the research assistants in the teaching practicum process, the grading of the students, and the perceptions of the teaching practicum process from the perspective of the students from the practitioner's point of view. On the other hand, the study recommends shortening the lesson plans and making them clear, understandable and usable.

**Keywords:** Special education, teaching practice, practice kit, practice file, practice materials.

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## Introduction

All teacher training institutions around the world utilize pre-service and in-service training models in the process of providing teaching knowledge and skills (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Işık, Çiltaş & Baş, 2010). Pre-service education can be defined as the practices that higher education institutions carry out through many teacher training approaches or models during their undergraduate programs (Abazaoğlu, Yıldırım & Yıldızhan, 2016). Pre-service practices aim to prepare prospective teachers for the teaching profession during the undergraduate program (Aykaç, Kabaran & Bilgin, 2014). Today, two pre-service models are frequently applied. These models are the simultaneous model (modèle simultané) and the sequential model (modèle consécutif). The simultaneous model, which is also used in Turkey, is the preferred practice in most European countries. In this model, the decision to become a teacher is made in advance, and the prospective teacher starts the teaching program from the first year according to this decision (Ministere Education Nationale, 2006).

As of 1994, the first steps for YÖK's Pre-Service Teacher Training Project were taken with the support of the World Bank (Grossman, Onkol & Sands, 2007). In cooperation with the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) and faculties of education, the pre-service teacher training model has continued to be structured since the 1998-1999 academic year. YÖK prepares the undergraduate program for special education teacher training like all other programs.

The teacher training process in pre-service education consists of many steps such as general culture, teaching professional knowledge, field education courses and teaching practice is among the basic steps (Kavcar, 2002). The teaching practicum course is the experience step of the education process in which theoretical knowledge is transferred to the real environment and results in teaching (Paker, 2008; Yücesoy-Özkan et al. 2019). The teaching practice course aims for pre-service teachers to provide professional development, prepare materials and use them most accurately, and develop their evaluation skills (YÖK, 1999). Evaluation skills are the pre-service teachers' making inquiries about themselves, identifying their shortcomings and making efforts to close these gaps, realizing their teacher identity and developing reflective thinking skills (Poulou, 2007; Freese, 1999).

The practicing instructors are one of the most important stakeholders in the successful completion of the teaching practice, which is the final step of the teacher training process in the undergraduate education dimension. Practicum instructors, who represent teacher training programs and have a consultancy and evaluation role (Borko & Mayfield, 1995), should be experienced in the field and have consultancy competencies. These competencies include conducting the process with scientifically based knowledge, having experience in their field, and providing guidance and assistance to pre-service teachers. In addition, carrying out the assessment processes in an ideal way, reorganizing the process when necessary, communicating correctly with pre-service teachers, providing

emotional support, and timely tips and feedback are also skills that instructors should have (Hyland & Lo, 2006).

As in every branch, special education teacher candidates graduate by completing teaching practice courses. Teaching practice in the field of special education plays a role in ensuring that candidates reach certain standards. These standards are the qualities and development of students, individual learning differences, teaching strategies, learning environments and social interactions, communication, instructional planning, measurement, professional and ethical practices, and collaboration published by the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) in 2001. Therefore, examining the relationship between the teaching practice process carried out in the special education teacher education program and the stated standards is important. However, it is seen that research on teaching practice in special education teaching is quite limited.

Dedeoğlu, Durali, and Tanrıverdi (2004) examined the opinions of undergraduate students and graduates of special education teaching programs about their departments, teacher training experiences and faculties of education. As a result of the research, it was stated that there should be more intensive applied courses in undergraduate courses and that there is a need to restructure faculties of education and teacher training methods. Especially graduated teachers stated that the course contents in undergraduate programs do not adequately represent real school environments. Yıkılmış et al. (2014) examined the views of final-year special education teaching students on the physical environment and mentor teachers in the classrooms where they practiced. The pre-service teachers stated that they found both the instructors and the practicum classroom teacher inadequate in skills such as feedback, guidance, planning, reinforcement, and behavior change. They stated that the physical conditions of the classrooms were deficient in terms of tools and materials. Karasu, Aykut, and Yılmaz (2014), in their research with teachers of the mentally disabled, found that the number of practice-oriented courses should be increased. While the participants stated that material supplies and appropriate physical environments could not be provided, they stated that solving behavioral problems in the classroom context was the most difficult issue. In another study, it is seen that pre-service teachers who continue their teaching practice in institutions where children with autism spectrum disorders are educated have a theoretical background but cannot transfer it to practice and need more experience. However, it can be said that the research is limited to the experiences of pre-service teachers and the perspective of the instructors conducting the practice will also contribute (Güleç-Aslan, 2014; Karasu et al., 2014). Therefore, there are very few studies on teaching practice in special education, revealing how the implementation process is carried out and how much the process overlaps with the teacher training standards is based on the participants' experiences.

The aim of this study is to examine the perceptions of research assistants in the special education department about the teaching practice course in VII. and VIII. semester. For this purpose, the following research question was sought to be answered:

1. How do the research assistants conducting the teaching practice course in the VIIth and VIIIth semesters of the special education teaching program perceive the teaching practice process?

## Method

### Research Design

Phenomenological A phenomenological approach was used in qualitative research designs. Phenomenology A phenomenology is an approach that tries to understand and explain the nature of a phenomenon by examining people's experiences of that phenomenon (Neubauer et al., 2019). In this study, the qualitative research method was preferred in order to examine in depth to examine the perceptions of research assistants conducting the teaching practice course in the VII and VIII semesters of the special education department special education teaching program about the teaching practice process. The teaching practice course for special education teaching is the phenomenon that is attempted to be understood and explained in this research. To examine this phenomenon, the life experiences of research assistants who have been conducting teaching practice for many years were utilized.

### Participants

Eight research assistants who led the teaching practice course in the seventh and eighth semesters of the special education teacher education program took part in the study. Convenient sampling, one of the purposive sampling methods, was used in the selection process of the participants (Creswell, 2012). The criteria for inclusion in this study were having at least three years of experience in the teaching practice course in special education teaching, having a bachelor's degree from special education teaching programs, and voluntary participation. Participants who met these criteria were included in the study. Demographic information about the participants is given in Table 1. To protect the confidentiality of all participants, codes K1, and K2 were given.

**Table 1.**

*Demographic information of the participants*

Participants	Age	Gender	Work Experience	
			Teacher – Research Asistant	Experience in conducting teaching practice
K1	35	Male	2 year - 8 year	6 year
K2	35	Male	10 year - 3 year	3 years 6 months
K3	32	Male	1 year 5 month - 8 years	3 year
K4	32	Male	1 year 5 months - 8 years	8 year
K5	35	Male	4 year - 6 year	6 year
K6	29	Male	2 month - 5 year	5 year

K7	29	Male	7 month - 6 year	6 year
K8	29	Male	7 month - 6 year	6 year

The participants of the study work as research assistants in a state university in Turkey and in the special education department of the same university. All participants were male and aged between 29-35 years. Prior to their research assistantships, the teaching experience of each participant ranged from two months to ten years. The participants' years of experience in conducting instruction practice ranged from 3 to 8. All participants were informed about the study before it, and their consent was obtained for voluntary participation. Consent forms were signed by the participants before the interview.

### **Data Collection Tools**

Research data were collected through semi-structured interviews. While preparing this form, the content of the teaching practice course of the VII and VIII semesters of special education teaching, including the practice kit, student files, materials, grading system, and what the students do in the teaching practice schools, were examined. In addition, the studies on this topic in the literature were examined in terms of data collection tools, findings, results and recommendations (Alptekin & Vural, 2014; Dedeoğlu et al., 2004; Doğan & Güven, 2021; Özen et al., 2009; Polat, et al., 2020; Yıldırım-Yakar et al., 2021; Yıkılmış et al., 2014; Yücesoy-Özkan 2019 et al.,). Based on the analyses, interview topics were constructed. The questions were distributed to three lecturers who are experts in special education instructional practice and qualitative research methods. In accordance with the feedback of the experts, the interview questions were revised. The revised questions were sent to the experts again and the experts were informed that the interview questions were appropriate. The semi-structured interview form consists of eight open-ended questions.

### **Data Collection Process and Analysis**

The first and second author conducted face-to-face and one-on-one interviews on the day, time and place specified by the participants. The interviews were conducted in the participants' offices in November 2021. Audio recordings were made during the interviews with the consent of the participants. Information from the audio recordings shows that the duration of the interviews varied between 24 and 90 minutes. After the interviews with all participants were completed, the third author listened to the audio recordings and transcribed the participants' responses to the questions. After the transcription process of the audio recordings was completed, the data obtained were analyzed by the first, second and third authors to determine the themes and codes. The inductive analysis method was used to analyze the data. The analysis process consisted of data transcripts, validity and reliability of the transcripts, listing, eliminating, thematizing, and organizing the themes (Moustakas, 1994). As a result of the analysis, five main and 14 sub-themes were reached.

The main themes of the study are; (a) opinions on the implementation kit, (b) opinions of research assistants on their roles in the implementation process, (c) opinions on the

grading of students, (d) students in the implementation process from the practitioner's perspective and (e) suggestions on the teaching practice process. The theme of opinions on the implementation kit is not divided into sub-themes. The main theme of research assistants' views on the roles they played in the implementation process is broken down into three subthemes: obligation, different practices, and the role's contribution. The theme of opinions on the grading of students is divided into two sub-themes: the grading system of the research assistant and the teacher's grading system. From the practitioner's perspective, the theme of students in the implementation process is divided into three sub-themes: student achievements, material preparation process and instructional technologies and material design course in special education, and opinions on student files. The theme of suggestions regarding the teaching practice process is divided into five sub-themes: suggestions regarding the practice kit and student files, lesson plans, material preparation and the instructional technologies and material design course in special education, suggestions regarding the grading of students, and suggestions of research assistants regarding the conduct of the practice process.

### **Credibility**

The concept of credibility in qualitative research is related to the accuracy, transferability, reliability and confirmability of the study (Christensen, Johnson, & Turner, 2015; Creswell, 2013; Ekiz, 2015; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). With this perspective, while trying to ensure credibility, data were collected in depth, data triangulation was tried to be utilized (researcher's diary), the researchers regularly audited data, expert opinions working in the field of special education were taken, and consistency was tried to be achieved in all research steps (transcription, analysis, reporting) (Ersoy, 2016; Glesne, 2013; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013; Brantlinger et al., 2005). On the other hand, ethical principles including confidentiality, non-harm, non-deception, fidelity to data, honesty and respect for private life (Ekiz, 2015; Creswell, 2013; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) were followed throughout the research. Research approval was obtained from Anadolu University Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee with protocol number 440108.

### **Findings**

Through the analysis of the data obtained after the research, findings were obtained regarding the participants' opinions on the implementation kit, their own roles in the implementation process, the grading system, their views on students during the implementation process and their suggestions regarding the whole process (Figure 1).

**Figure 1.**

Themes

#### Opinions on the Application Kit

#### Research Assistants' Views on the Roles They Assume in the Implementation Process

- Necessity
- Different applications
- Contribution of the executive role

#### Opinions on Grading of Students

- Grading system for research assistants
- Teachers' grading system

#### Students in the Implementation Process from the Practitioner Perspective

- Opinions on student achievements
- Opinions on material preparation process and instructional technologies and material design course in special education
- Opinions on student files

#### Suggestions Regarding the Teaching Practice Process

- Suggestions for the application kit and student file
- Suggestions for lesson plans
- Suggestions for material preparation and instructional technology and material design course in special education
- Recommendations for grading students
- Suggestions of research assistants regarding the execution of the implementation process

### Opinions on the Application Kit

The practicum kit is a syllabus that includes the weekly tasks/tasks that students should do during the teaching practicum course. In this study, it was found that the research assistants stated that the practice kit enables the students to "plan" the process they will follow during the semester and provides "feedback" about the situations that the students do not understand during the practice process. K3, one of the research assistants, described the planning function of the implementation kit as "...clearly determining what will be done every week paves the way for the student" and K8 said "...it facilitates the process. At least they can see ahead of them; they can do this week, they can make their plans accordingly". K7 expressed the feedback function of the application kit with the words "...if they have any questions about whether this lesson plan will be about a subject or not, they ask us and we give our answers accordingly".

In addition to the toolkit's positive aspects, such as planning and feedback, negative aspects were also mentioned. The research assistants stated that the toolkit was "outdated", that the information in it was too old, that it burdened students with "drudgery" such as just collecting and filing documents such as regulations, evaluation forms, and unnecessary printouts, and that it "encouraged students to lie". They also

stated that the application kit caused a "conflict" between teachers and academics. Research assistant K5 expressed her views on this issue;

*"We ask the students to complete the rough evaluation form in the second week. They go two days a week for six hours. In the first lesson, students with intellectual disabilities do not come because of the bus delay. This leaves 2 hours for our students to fill out the form. We ask students to keep ABC and anecdotal records and fill out the rough assessment form. On the one hand, they will fill out the rough assessment form and on the other hand, they will keep records. When will they do all this? I mean, these don't seem realistic to me... The internship practice kit includes a workload beyond what is feasible. Thus, people are forced to pretend"*

expressed with these words. Research assistant K6 expressed her views as follows;

*"This internship kit, which is prepared based on the principles of one school, is not accepted by teachers graduated from different schools. In this case, the teacher's and the research assistant's expectations of the student may conflict. Since the student feels responsibility towards both authorities, this puts pressure on the student."*

### **Research Assistants' Views on the Roles They Assume in the Implementation Process**

This study found that research assistants' perceptions of their roles in the teaching practice process were grouped under three sub-themes: obligation, different practices and contribution of the role.

#### **Necessity**

Research assistants perceive their role in the teaching practice process as an obligation. Regarding the necessity of their role, the research assistants stated that "teaching practice was assigned to them as a course without any opinion" and "it was a very serious workload". One of the research assistants, K7;

*"I learn that the internship is assigned to me at the beginning of the year when the students are assigned to me from the system. I am not given any explanation in any way. I am only told, "you will carry it out". However, many professors have the right to choose their courses. We do not have such a right. We cannot give an opinion about the school where we will carry out the internship" and emphasized that the internship was assigned as a course without their opinion. K3 said, "The workload of the internship is actually too much. Eight students, two different schools, reading weekly files, giving feedback, when we add all these together, there are times when it takes at least two or even almost three days."*

emphasized the workload of the teaching practice.

#### **Different practices**

It was found that research assistants used different practices in grading students and establishing relationships with students. The research assistants who participated in the study stated that "some research assistants graded students according to the humanity of the students, while others graded them according to the grading guide, so there were conflicts due to different practices in grading". Regarding the different practices in relations with students, they stated that "some research assistants are very sincere with



students but do not give any feedback to students, in this case, research assistants who are distant with students and give regular feedback to students are not liked". Research assistant K6 said, "Imagine two different students taking an internship in two different groups, and although these two prepare completely equivalent files, the student in one group can get 100 while the other can get 60. It doesn't seem very objective to me, frankly", while K4 said, "sometimes the work can go beyond the limits. Do we grade the work done by the student or do we grade the whole personality of the student? Sometimes things get confused".

### Contribution of the executive role

Regarding the contribution of conducting the teaching practicum course, the research assistants stated that they gained experience on how they will conduct the teaching practicum in the future, what the deficiencies in the implementation process are and what needs to be done in the future. K8 mentioned this issue;

*"...we will carry out teaching practice in the future, about how we should carry out it, for example, I say, the guide, maybe I will create the guide differently where I go because I can see the deficiencies or the expectations of the students and I can do something accordingly in the future. The teaching practicum has increased my initiative, quick decision-making and implementation skills."*

In addition, two research assistants stated that the teaching practice increased their initiative, quick decision-making and implementation skills. Research assistant K2 expressed her views on this issue as follows:

*"...conducting the teaching practicum strengthens my ability to take the initiative and make quick decisions. For instance, while the intern student is practicing in the classroom, I may encounter problem behaviors that I have never seen before or that necessitate reflection or lesson objectives may be achieved. Since we have to give instant feedback to students in such situations, I think my initiative and quick decision-making skills have strengthened over time."*

### Opinions on the Grading of Students

This study determined that research assistants' perceptions about the grading of students were grouped under two sub-themes: the grading system of the research assistant and the grading system of the teachers. The findings related to each sub-theme are presented below.

#### The grading system of research assistants

The research assistants stated that they followed the scoring guide while grading the students, but they had difficulties in grading the students due to various deficiencies in the guide. The research assistants stated that the deficiencies in the grading guide were that "the items in the guide are not observable and measurable" and "open to interpretation". In addition, they stated that the grading system is generally "unfair" and that "it is difficult to evaluate and put a price on people".

K8 stated that the scoring guide is not observable and measurable and is open to interpretation as follows: "...let me give an example, it says that the student completes their preparations before the lesson, for example, what do we expect them to do? The deficiencies in the guideline led the research assistants to interpret the guideline items according to themselves and give subjective grades to the students. K1 stated this,

*"There is a situation like this, there is a completely subjective evaluation, for example, one person evaluates the same child and gives him/her 50, another evaluates him/her and gives him/her 100". K2 stated that the grading system is not distributed fairly, "For example, the grades allocated to lesson plans, file level, behavior change program, skill program are not equal. Why is it not equal? We talk about the whole semester mainly on the daily plan. However, the grade rate allocated for the daily plan constitutes 40% of the total grade rate. This does not provide a fair distribution of grades,"*

expressed it with these words. K5 stated that it was difficult to grade students with the words, "I mean, it is really hard to put a price on people. Especially in such practical courses, I don't think everything can be graded according to the items.

Finally, the research assistants stated that the research assistants conducting the practicum in the same school were influenced by each other while grading the students. K1 stated this situation as follows: "Whichever way the tendency in the group is, you are also affected by it or you can affect the others. For example, when I approach the event very positively, you see that the man who is normally torn to pieces while grading is suddenly affected by you and he starts to give high grades ... there is such a strange situation.

### Teachers' grading system

It was found that the research assistants had negative perceptions about the grading system of the teachers in the practicum school. The research assistants stated that "teachers use their grading authority as a means of pressure to oppress students and overload them with too much work". K2 expressed this situation as follows: "The teacher comes and tries to crush the trainee strangely because the trainee has come, bring my tea, take this and that, and after a while, we see that the trainee is completely burdened with the work that he has to do, such a thing, that is, some ethical problems...". K4 stated that "for example, something like this happens, children have to put up with bad behaviors, they are oppressed, so we cannot protect them, because in such a situation, the man will open the system in the evening because he can give a low grade there, you have to undercut it, you have to act strategically politically.

In addition to this, the research assistants stated that "teachers grade students subjectively; they do the grading more according to the personality of the students; therefore, teachers and research assistants do not have expectations when grading students.

## Students in the Implementation Process from the Practitioner Perspective

This study determined that research assistants' perceptions of the teaching practice process in terms of students were grouped under three sub-themes: student achievements, material preparation process, instructional technologies and material design course in special education, and student files. Findings related to each sub-theme are presented below.

### Views on student learning outcomes

Research assistants indicated that students had 'insufficient experience' in the internship practice because they had only worked with students with special needs until the last year and the number of days they practiced was low, that they had 'concerns' about how to work with students with special needs during the internship practice process, and that these concerns led to "negative attitudes" in the intern students towards students with special needs. They also learned "negative behaviors" about the teaching profession from the special education teachers in the class. Regarding students' inadequate experience and anxiety, K7 stated, "Some students see a child with special needs for the first time in the internship practice. In such cases, when they see the intense problem behaviors of students with special needs, they experience anxiety about how to deal with them. Naturally, this situation continues as a source of stress throughout the semester". K6 stated the inadequate experience of the students as follows: "I don't think that the time they go is enough. Therefore, I think this causes them problems acquiring certain teaching skills. They go two days a week for six hours. Four to five weeks of this time is spent getting used to the school". Regarding negative attitudes, K7;

*"Students should go to do this job with enthusiasm. Our profession can be exhausting. When students do not do their jobs with enthusiasm, they can develop negative attitudes towards the profession and students at the end of the year and try to avoid direct contact with students such as being an administrator, working in Guidance and Research Centers."*

For example, the behavior of a teacher who neglects their job and does not do it properly is added to the intern's repertoire as a negative acquisition. As for the negative teacher behaviors at the practice school, K2 said, "For example, the behaviors of a teacher who neglects his/her job and does not do it properly are added to the intern's repertoire as a negative acquisition. For example, the teacher yells at the students and the intern yells at the students".

According to the research assistants, intern students experience "teaching satisfaction" in teaching skills and behaviors to students with special needs, strengthen their "interaction" skills and gain "self-confidence" that they can teach. For example, K1;

*"Students start to feel self-confidence towards the end of the internship practice. In the first weeks, students are very hesitant and do not know how to interact. In the following weeks, they run towards students with special needs, and they have fun...It is very nice for us to see these. In the last weeks, we can see that the students have adapted, and their belief that they can do this job has increased, and the students do not understand what they are doing during the internship."*

Finally, the research assistants stated that the rationale for the work such as preparing internship files, lesson plans, etc., during the internship was not explained to the students,

so the students saw such work as drudgery. K5 expressed his opinion on this issue as follows: "If you do not explain the logic of this work, the student will not gain anything. They do it just to do it. When you ask the student why they wrote like this somewhere in the plan, they may answer, "I wrote it because the teacher said so". This situation stems from the fact that we do not explain the reasons for what we do. We are already training technicians, not teachers...".

### **Opinions on material preparation process and instructional technologies and material design course in special education**

The research assistants mentioned the positive and negative aspects of students preparing their own materials during the teaching practice. Regarding the positive aspects, they stated that preparing materials "develops students' ability to produce their own materials" so that they learn how to develop good materials from waste materials even under bad conditions in the places where they are assigned and that they develop "adaptation skills" by learning how to adapt materials according to the characteristics of different disability groups (autism, mental, hearing, etc.). Concerning the negative aspects, they stated that the materials prepared were very "expensive" in terms of obtaining good grades. Nonetheless, the materials were "not functional and original," and they were "thrown away" after being evaluated. In addition, due to the "high expectations" of the research assistants and their constant negative criticism of the materials, preparing materials has become a "torture" for the students over time and they see it as a serious "workload". Finally, the students mentioned that the difference between the research assistants who teach the materials course and the research assistants who carry out the teaching practice "eliminates the possibility of testing the materials prepared in the course in the classroom environment".

### **Opinions on student files**

According to the research assistants, the weekly files prepared by the students allow students to give feedback on what they do right and wrong regularly. In addition, preparing files has an instructive aspect as it increases students' knowledge about special education. K8 explained the feedback function of internship files;

*"The file actually provides them with an order. It encourages them to work regularly. We provide feedback to the students on their files, whether it is lesson plans or other things they need to do. Students make corrections accordingly and start to implement the lesson plan. If students consider these feedbacks, it is a great convenience for them,"*

We are doing this for a reason. The research assistants stated that although there are benefits of preparing files, these benefits are not transferred to the students. The students constantly ask, "why are we doing this?" during the semester and graduate without knowing why they prepared the files. For example, K5 expressed his views on this situation as follows: "You tell the student to do something and he does it. But to what extent his actions impact his sense of meaning is a serious problem."

### **Suggestions Regarding the Teaching Practice Process**

This study determined that the research assistants' suggestions for the teaching practice process were grouped under five sub-themes: the practice kit and student file, lesson plans, material preparation and material course, grading of students and suggestions for research assistants. Findings related to each sub-theme are presented below.

### **Suggestions for the application kit and student file**

The participants suggested that the content of the toolkit should be prepared by taking the opinions of all the instructors conducting the course and that the items that cannot be implemented should be removed from the toolkit. They suggested that student files should be prepared in a digital environment instead of printouts, thus reducing the cost and time loss.

### **Suggestions regarding lesson plans**

The research assistants stated that the students' lecture plans should be shortened and made more concise, clear, and comprehensible as opposed to lengthy and ineffective. K3 suggested that "we should focus our attention on teaching effectively rather than on the theoretical information in the lesson plans. Short and understandable plans should be prepared to ensure this focus so students do not drown in theoretical information". In addition, they stated that lesson plans should be prepared by using different methods for different lessons and subjects every week. K8 expressed his views on this issue with the following words:

*"...for example, if students prepare a plan for academic skills this week, they should prepare plans for different courses and subjects, such as community participation next week, daily life skills the week after that. From the first week to the last week, they carry out their internship practice for 12 weeks with the direct teaching method." Because some students are constantly practicing practising academic skills.*

### **Suggestions on material preparation and instructional technologies and material design course in special education**

Research assistants stated that students should prepare low-cost, recyclable, functional materials suitable for different student characteristics that they can use in their teaching life. Regarding the materials course, they stated that it should first be taught theoretically for at least one semester by a lecturer who is expert in preparing materials, and then how to use the materials should be practiced in the second semester. K6 expressed his views on this issue as follows: "For us to have expectations from the students, a theoretical material course should be given as a prerequisite. I don't know if a teacher can give it, I don't know how, I can't, for example. After this theoretical part, students can be expected to practice with materials in the second semester.

### **Recommendations for grading students**

The research assistants mentioned that the grading guide should be improved, the grading system should be fair, and the instructor's opinion grade should be considered in the grading process. Regarding improving the grading guide, the participants suggested that the items in the guide should be observable and measurable and written

more clearly, a systematic reliable scale should be developed, and everyone should grade according to this scale. K8 expressed his opinion on the subject: "the guides I mentioned in the grading system need to be examined in more detail .... I think a detailed, more systematic and reliable scale can be prepared so that the research assistants can make more accurate decisions." In addition, research assistants suggested that a place should be created for teachers to evaluate students' interpersonal skills on the same scale and that teachers should grade accordingly and academicians should grade professional skills. K7 expressed his views on this issue with the following words:

*"I can grade 15 items of the same scoring guide and the teacher can grade 15 items. While I can grade the student's application/assessment methods when I go to observe at work, the teacher can grade more interpersonal skills such as how is the student's relationship with teachers when he/she carries out the teaching profession, do they participate in social activities, or how are his/her communication skills?"*

### **Suggestions of research assistants regarding the conduct of the practicum process**

Regarding the research assistants conducting the teaching practice, the research assistants suggested that the research assistants explain to the students the logic of their work (why lesson plans are prepared, how the details in the lesson plans relate to learning the practice better, the benefits of keeping records for the students, and how evaluations are used to set new goals) and discuss the teaching practice by evaluating it in their meetings with the students. Finally, they suggested that the research assistants who will conduct the course should have at least four years of teaching experience and should have been a research assistant for at least three years.

## **Discussion**

This study aimed to examine the perceptions of research assistants in the special education department about the teaching practice course in the VII. and VIII. semester. The findings obtained from the research show that the research assistants have opinions about the practice kit, their own roles in the practice process, the grading system, and the students in the practice process.

According to the research assistants, the practice kit is important for regularly continuing the teaching practice course. In addition, the implementation kit facilitates the planning and follow-up process and provides feedback to students. However, when evaluated in terms of time, it was stated that there were items such as filling out a rough evaluation form, keeping a behavior record, reading all the regulations and preparing a report that were not possible to do during the teaching practice course. In a study examining the opinions of students taking the teaching practice course in the special education department, it was found that the expectations of the students regarding the practice kit were that the practice kit should serve to plan to teach and use teaching methods and techniques effectively. In addition, it was stated by the students that the practice kit used during the special education teaching practice is appropriate in its current form. There were no findings regarding the lack of time (Yücesoy-Özkan et al., 2019). The finding

that the practice kit obtained in this study has planning and feedback functions is similar to the finding of Yücesoy-Özkan et al. (2019) that the practice kit facilitates the planning and implementation of teaching methods and techniques. However, it differs from the finding on time limitation. In special education teaching practice, students are expected to examine and interpret three laws, laws and regulations on special education consisting of 65 pages in total for the first week of teaching practice. In the second and third weeks, they are expected to fill in an average of 200 items for all developmental areas, each requiring special student evaluation. Based on this information, it can be said that although it is generally stated that the application kit is appropriate, it can be said that what the students are expected to do is not realistic in terms of the time given. To summarize, it can be said that the time limitation finding obtained in this study regarding the application kit expands the knowledge in the existing literature.

The findings regarding the roles assumed by the research assistants during the implementation process indicate that there are differences among the research assistants in terms of conducting and grading the teaching practicum and that their opinions were not considered in the creation and execution of the content of the teaching practicum course; however, conducting the course contributed to their professional development by teaching them skills such as making quick decisions, taking the initiative, and collaborating with others. In the literature, the studies on this issue generally focused on the opinions of intern students or teachers and did not include the opinions of the instructors who conducted the teaching practice (Alptekin & Vural, 2014; Doğan & Güven, 2021; Özen et al., 2009; Polat, et al., 2020; Yıldırım-Yakar et al., 2021; Yücesoy-Özkan et al., 2019). In the studies conducted with intern students, it was found that some lecturers have positive characteristics such as being highly communicative, providing feedback, helping and understanding. In contrast, others have negative characteristics such as not guiding students and not following student development, lack of communication, not allocating enough time, and lack of knowledge (Alptekin & Vural, 2014; Doğan & Güven, 2021; Polat et al., 2020; Yıldırım-Yakar et al., 2021; Yücesoy-Özkan et al., 2019). Therefore, the information obtained from the students also shows that there are differences among the instructors in terms of the way they carry out the teaching practice. The finding that there are differences in how instructors conduct the teaching practicum in this study confirms the students' opinions. It strengthens the finding in the literature that instructors do not conduct the teaching practicum consistently. In addition to all these, the finding that the teaching practice course contributes to the professional development of the instructors shows that teaching practice is a useful course not only for students but also for instructors. (Heppner, 1994; Lawson et al., 2015; Speer et al., 2005).

Based on the findings regarding the grading of the students, it can be said that the instructors do not make objective evaluations and especially the practicum teachers who are assigned interns do not have enough knowledge to grade the students and use the grade as a means of sanction. It is a recurring finding in many studies on this subject that instructors cannot make fair and objective evaluations (Alptekin & Vural, 2014; Doğan & Güven, 2021; Polat, et al., 2020; Yıldırım-Yakar et al., 2021; Yücesoy-Özkan

et al., 2019). In contrast to other studies investigating special education teaching practice courses, the finding that teachers cannot conduct objective evaluations stands out. However, the finding that teachers could not make objective evaluations stands out as a finding that differs from other studies examining special education teaching practicum courses. In addition to this, the finding of using the grade as a sanctioning tool draws attention. Studies in the literature show that mentor teachers generally cannot help students with teaching methods and techniques, lack knowledge, and have insufficient communication (Alptekin & Vural, 2014; Baran et al., 2019; Bural & Avşaroğlu, 2012; Özen et al., 2009; Polat, et al., 2020; Yıldırım-Yakar et al., 2021; Yıkılmış et al., 2014). Lack of sufficient knowledge about teaching and assessment is a factor that makes it difficult to make objective evaluations. In the literature, it has been revealed in many studies that teachers are inadequate even in evaluating students with special needs. Therefore, mentor teachers cannot make objective evaluations because of the lack of knowledge about teaching and assessment (Brownell et al., 2005; Mertler, 2009; Nougaret et al., 2005; Stiggins, 1999).

Participant views on how the teaching practice process was shaped for the students show that although the students' teaching experience improved, they did not graduate with sufficient teaching and evaluation knowledge, they could develop anxiety and negative attitudes towards students with special needs, but they generally finished the teaching practice with high self-confidence and interaction skills. In addition, it was found that student files prepared weekly contributed significantly to the professional development of the students. In the studies focusing on the views of intern students on teaching practice, the focus was generally on students' perceptions of the practicum teachers, the practicum school, the instructors and their expectations regarding the teaching practice process (Alptekin & Vural, 2014; Baran et al., 2019; Bural & Avşaroğlu, 2012; Dedeoğlu et al., 2004; Özen et al., 2009; Polat et al., 2020; Yıldırım-Yakar et al., 2021; Yıkılmış et al., 2014; Yücesoy-Özkan et al., 2019). In only one study, newly graduated special education teachers were asked about their own competencies, and it was found that teachers did not leave the teaching practice course with sufficient knowledge and equipment related to the teaching profession (Doğan & Güven, 2021). The basic condition of being a qualified teacher is to receive a qualified education (Dedeoğlu et al., 2004). According to the instructors, intern students do not receive qualified education. This situation limits the ability of graduates to provide quality teaching and assessment to students with special needs in their teaching life (Doğan & Güven, 2021). Therefore, it can be said that the views of the research assistants in this study that intern students may develop negative attitudes and concerns towards students with special needs when they do not graduate with sufficient teaching and assessment knowledge are important in terms of showing that it is necessary to teach planning, teaching and assessment skills effectively in teaching practice.

According to the opinions of the research assistants about material preparation and instructional technologies and material design course in special education, it shows that material preparation improves the intern students' ability to adapt and design materials according to the individual characteristics of students with special needs, but the



materials made in the material course lose their design purpose because they are not used in the classroom environment. Since the material course is not conducted by the instructor from whom the students take the teaching practice course, it is not developed according to the characteristics of the students in the schools where they practice, but only to take notes in the course. This situation causes the prepared materials to lose their value. Studies have found that intern students generally stated that schools are inadequately equipped in terms of teaching materials (Alptekin & Vural, 2014; Bural & Avşaroğlu, 2012; Yıkılmış et al., 2014; Yücesoy-Özkan et al., 2019). Some studies found that teachers of students with intellectual disabilities had difficulty in preparing materials and felt inadequate (Dedeoğlu et al., 2004; Doğan & Güven, 2021). The fact that schools are inadequate in terms of materials increases the importance of preparing and using the right materials in the course of the material. However, the findings obtained from this study show that the participants believe that the instructors who teach the materials course are not equipped to teach this course and, therefore cannot provide the necessary information to the students about material preparation. Pre-service teachers are thought to have problems in this context in their professional lives.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Teaching practice is a critically important course in which planning, teaching and evaluation processes are demonstrated in practice before moving on to the teaching profession, as well as providing students with skills that contribute to personal development such as work ethic, self-confidence, interaction, feeling competent, and positive attitude. Using a practice kit during the teaching practice is important in providing a planned process to the intern students, providing feedback, and monitoring their development of teaching knowledge and skills. Although research assistants have the qualifications to conduct the course, there are differences in their attitudes towards students, the way they conduct the teaching practice and their grading. These differences may lead to negative thoughts about fair evaluation, receiving adequate feedback, providing the right guidance, communicating well, and graduating with the necessary teaching and evaluation knowledge and skills. In particular, the subjective evaluation of practicum teachers in grading and using grades as a means of pressure put intern students between the negative attitudes of two different stakeholders (lecturers and teachers) and lead intern students to anxiety. Nevertheless, despite various negativities, intern students develop their knowledge and skills, albeit limited, regarding teaching practices such as preparing lesson plans, teaching concepts and skills, and changing behaviors during the teaching practice process. At the same time, intern students gain behaviors that contribute to developing their skills such as self-confidence, feeling competent in terms of teaching, and good interaction. When the opinions of the research assistants are evaluated using CEC (2001) criteria, it can be concluded that the current method of conducting teaching practice contributes partially to the quality and development of the students, that the individual learning differences of the intern students are not taken into account, and that the intern students do not develop their planning,

teaching, and evaluation skills to the desired level. As a result of instructors' attitudes toward the course, there are variations in ethical practices and cooperation. In summary, based on the participant opinions, it can be said that the current implementation of the teaching practice is insufficient to reach the professional standards that special education teachers should have.

Based on all these results, the following suggestions can be made regarding the special education teaching practice in line with the opinions of the participants:

1. The practice kit should continue to be used in the teaching practice process. However, the content of the practice kit should be prepared by taking the opinions of all instructors conducting the course. Items that cannot be implemented should be removed from the practice kit. Student files should be prepared in a digital environment instead of being prepared as printouts, thus reducing cost and time loss.
2. Lesson plans should be simplified and short, clear and understandable plans should be prepared instead of long, unusable plans. In addition, lesson plans should be prepared using different methods for different lessons and subjects every week so that students can see different planning, teaching and evaluation processes as much as possible.
3. Trainee students should be taught to prepare low-cost, recyclable, functional materials suitable for different student characteristics they can use in their teaching life. The materials course should be taught theoretically for at least one semester by a lecturer who is really an expert in preparing materials. How to use the materials should be practiced in the second semester.
4. Although the teaching practice process cannot be evaluated objectively due to its nature, to evaluate it as objectively as possible, the scoring guide should be created in an observable and measurable way, it should be turned into a systematic reliable scale and everyone should grade according to this scale. In the same scale, a place should be created for the mentor teachers to evaluate the personal relationship skills of the trainee students. In this way, it should be ensured that teachers evaluate students' personal relationships and instructors grade their professional skills. In addition, since the instructors' impressions of the students are also important in this process, the use of opinion grades should also be allowed in the grading process.
5. Research assistants should explain the logic of all the work done during the teaching practicum process to the intern students; in other words, they should discuss the process by making evaluations about the practice process in the teaching practicum course meetings, and thus, they should conduct the course as objectively as possible by providing justifications to the students. In addition, to show that they have sufficient knowledge about the teaching practice course, the research assistants who will conduct the course should have at least four years of teaching experience and be a research assistant for at least three years.

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## Genişletilmiş Türkçe Özet

Bu araştırmanın amacı, özel eğitim bölümü araştırma görevlilerinin, VII. ve VIII. dönem öğretmenlik uygulaması dersine ilişkin algılarının incelenmesidir. Bu amaçla özel eğitim bölümü özel eğitim öğretmenliği programı VII. ve VIII. döneminde yer alan öğretmenlik uygulaması dersini yürüten sekiz araştırma görevlisinin, öğretmenlik uygulaması sürecine ilişkin algılarını derinlemesine incelemek amacıyla nitel araştırma yöntemi tercih edilmiştir. Nitel araştırma desenlerinden ise fenomenolojik yaklaşım kullanılmıştır. Bu çalışmada anlaşılma ve açıklanmaya çalışılan fenomen özel eğitim öğretmenliği öğretmenlik uygulaması dersidir. Bu fenomeni incelemek amacıyla uzun yıllardır öğretmenlik uygulaması yürüten araştırma görevlilerinin öğretmenlik uygulamasına ilişkin yaşam deneyimlerinden yararlanılmıştır.

Araştırma verileri yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yoluyla toplanılmıştır. Bu form, hazırlanırken öncelikli olarak özel eğitim öğretmenliği VII. ve VIII. dönem öğretmenlik uygulaması dersinin içeriğini oluşturan uygulama kiti (öğretmenlik uygulaması dersinde yapılması gerekenleri, günlük plan, beceri öğretimi planı, kavram öğretimi planı, pekiştirme belirleme formu, değerlendirme formları vd. içeren belgeler bütünü), öğrenci dosyaları, materyaller, notlama sistemi ve öğretmenlik uygulaması okullarında öğrencilerin neler yaptıkları incelenmiştir.

Analizler sonucu beş ana 14 alt temaya ulaşılmıştır. Araştırmanın ana temaları; (a) uygulama kitine ilişkin görüşler, (b) araştırma görevlilerinin uygulama sürecinde üstlendikleri rollere ilişkin görüşleri (c) öğrencilerin notlandırılmasına ilişkin görüşler, (d) uygulayıcı bakış açısıyla uygulama sürecinde öğrenciler ve (e) öğretmenlik uygulaması sürecine ilişkin önerilerdir. Uygulama kitine ilişkin görüşler teması kendi içinde alt temalara ayrılmamaktadır. Araştırma görevlilerinin uygulama sürecinde üstlendikleri rollere ilişkin görüşleri teması; zorunluluk, farklı uygulamalar ve rolün katkısı olmak üzere üç alt temaya ayrılmaktadır. Öğrencilerin notlandırılmasına ilişkin görüşler teması; araştırma görevlisinin not verme sistemi ve öğretmenin notlandırma sistemi olmak üzere iki alt temaya ayrılmaktadır. Uygulayıcı bakış açısıyla uygulama sürecinde öğrenciler teması; öğrenci kazanımlarına, Materyal hazırlama sürecine ve özel eğitimde öğretim teknolojileri ve materyal tasarımı dersine ve öğrenci dosyalarına ilişkin görüşler olmak üzere üç alt temaya ayrılmaktadır. Öğretmenlik uygulaması sürecine ilişkin öneriler teması ise uygulama kiti ve öğrenci dosyalarına, ders planlarına, materyal hazırlamaya ve özel eğitimde öğretim teknolojileri ve materyal tasarımı dersine, öğrencilerin notlandırılmasına ilişkin öneriler ve araştırma görevlilerin uygulama sürecinin yürütülmesine ilişkin önerileri olmak üzere beş alt temaya ayrılmaktadır.

Sonuç olarak öğretmenlik uygulaması öğretmenlik mesleğine geçmeden önce planlama, öğretim ve değerlendirme süreçlerinin uygulamalı olarak gösterildiği bunun yanı sıra öğrencilere iş ahlakı, özgüven, etkileşim, yeterli hissetme, olumlu tutum gibi kişisel gelişime katkı sağlayan becerilerin kazandırıldığı kritik öneme sahip bir derstir. Öğretmenlik uygulaması sırasında uygulama kitinin kullanılması stajyer öğrencilere planlı bir süreç sunulması, geri bildirimlerin sağlanması, öğretmenlik bilgi ve beceri

gelişimlerinin takip edilmesi açısından önemlidir. Araştırma görevlileri dersi yürütecek yeterliliklere sahip olsa da öğrencilere karşı tutumlarında, öğretmenlik uygulamasını yürütme biçimlerinde ve notlandırmalarında farklılıklar söz konusudur. Bu farklılıklar öğrencilerde adil değerlendirme, yeterli geri bildirim alma, doğru rehberlik sunma, iyi iletişim kurma, gerekli öğretim ve değerlendirme bilgisi ve becerisiyle mezun olma gibi konularda olumsuz düşüncelere yol açabilmektedir. Özellikle notlandırma konusunda uygulama öğretmenlerinin sübjektif değerlendirme yapması ve notu bir baskı aracı olarak kullanması stajyer öğrencileri iki farklı paydaşın (öğretim elemanları ve öğretmenler) olumsuz tutumları arasında bırakmakta ve stajyer öğrencileri kaygıya sevk etmektedir. Bununla birlikte çeşitli olumsuzluklarına rağmen stajyer öğrenciler öğretmenlik uygulaması sürecinde ders planı hazırlama, kavram, beceri öğretimi sunma, davranış değiştirme gibi öğretim uygulamalarına ilişkin sınırlı da olsa bilgi ve becerilerini geliştirmektedirler. Aynı zamanda stajyer öğrenciler bu süreçte özgüven, öğretim yapma açısından yeterli hissetme, iyi etkileşim kurma gibi kişisel becerilerinin gelişimine katkı sağlayan davranışlarda kazanmaktadırlar. Araştırma görevlilerinin görüşleri CEC (2001) kriterleri açısından değerlendirildiğinde öğretmenlik uygulamasının mevcut yürütülme şeklinin öğrencilerin nitelik ve gelişimlerine kısmen katkı sağladığı, stajyer öğrencilerin bireysel öğrenme farklılıklarının göz önünde bulundurulmadığı, planlama, öğretim ve değerlendirme becerilerini geliştirdiği ancak bu gelişimin istenilen düzeyde olmadığı, etik uygulamalar ve iş birliği konusunda öğretim elemanlarının derse ilişkin tutumlarından kaynaklı farklılıklar olduğu söylenebilir. Özet olarak, katılımcı görüşlerinden hareketle öğretmenlik uygulamasının mevcut uygulanma şeklinin özel eğitim öğretmenlerinin sahip olması gereken mesleki standartlara erişirmede yetersiz kaldığı söylenebilir.

Tüm bu sonuçlardan yola çıkarak katılımcıların görüşleri doğrultusunda özel eğitim öğretmenlik uygulamasına ilişkin şu öneriler getirilebilir:

Uygulama kiti öğretmenlik uygulaması sürecinde kullanılmaya devam edilmelidir. Ancak uygulama kitinin içeriği dersi yürüten tüm öğretim elemanlarının görüşleri alınarak hazırlanmalıdır. Uygulama kitinden uygulanması mümkün olmayan maddeler kaldırılmalıdır. Öğrenci dosyaları ise çıktı olarak hazırlanmak yerine dijital ortamda hazırlanmalı böylelikle maliyet ve zaman kaybı azaltılmalıdır.

Ders planlarında sadeleştirmeye gidilmeli oldukça uzun, kullanılmayacak planlar yerine kısa, açık ve anlaşılır planlar hazırlanmalıdır. Ayrıca ders planları her hafta farklı derse, konuya ilişkin farklı yöntemler kullanarak hazırlanmalı böylelikle öğrencilerin mümkün olduğunca farklı planlama, öğretim ve değerlendirme süreçlerini görmeleri sağlanmalıdır.

Stajyer öğrencilere öğretmenlik hayatında da kullanabilecekleri, düşük maliyetli, geri dönüşürebilir, farklı öğrenci özelliklerine uygun işlevsel materyaller hazırlaması öğretilmelidir. Materyal dersi ise en az bir dönem teorik olarak materyal hazırlama konusunda gerçekten uzman bir öğretim elemanı tarafından öğrencilere anlatılmalı ikinci dönem materyallerin nasıl kullanılacağına uygulanması yapılmalıdır.

Öğretmenlik uygulaması süreci doğası gereği tam olarak nesnel değerlendirilemese de mümkün olduğunca nesnel değerlendirilmesi için puanlama kılavuzu gözlenebilir ve ölçülebilir şekilde oluşturulmalı, sistematik güvenilir bir ölçek haline getirilmeli ve herkes bu ölçeğe göre notlama yapmalıdır. Aynı ölçekte uygulama öğretmenlerinin stajyer öğrencilerin kişisel ilişkiler becerilerini değerlendirebileceği bir yer oluşturulmalıdır. Böylelikle öğretmenlerin, öğrencilerin kişisel ilişkilerini değerlendirmesi öğretim elemanlarının ise mesleki becerilerini notlaması sağlanmalıdır. Ayrıca bu süreçte öğretim elemanlarının öğrencilere ilişkin izlenimleri de önemli olduğundan notlama sürecinde kanaat notunun kullanılmasına da izin verilmelidir.

Araştırma görevlileri stajyer öğrencilere öğretmenlik uygulaması sürecinde yapılan tüm işlerin mantığını başka bir deyişle altında yatan gerçek anlamı anlatmalı, öğretmenlik uygulaması dersi toplantılarında uygulama sürecine ilişkin değerlendirmeler yaparak süreci tartışmalı böylelikle öğrencilere gerekçeler sunarak mümkün olduğunca objektif bir şekilde dersi yürütmelidirler. Ayrıca öğretmenlik uygulaması dersine ilişkin yeterli bilgi birikimine sahip olduklarını göstermek açısından dersi yürütecek araştırma görevlilerinin en az dört yıllık öğretmenlik deneyimine sahip olması ve en az üç yıl gibi bir süreyle araştırma görevliliği yapmış olması gerekmektedir.

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