



The Supervisory Practices in a Special Education Department's Teaching Practice Programme: The Perspectives of Student Teachers

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Article Information	ABSTRACT
<i>Received:</i> 01.01.2021	<p>The purpose of this current study is to make a contribution to the literature by investigating university tutors' (UT) and cooperating teachers' (CT) practices in one special education department's teaching practice programme in Turkey from the student teachers' (ST) perspective. The relations between the programme participants with a phenomenological research design were analysed in order to determine how the programme works, and possibly make suggestions for improving it. Therefore, the following research question was addressed: How do STs perceive the UTs' and CTs' practices within a special education department's teaching practice programme? Fourteen STs in a teaching practice programme were interviewed in the 2016-2017 academic year. The data were analysed using thematic analysis, and four contexts were created for better clarification: professional, partnership, material, and personal contexts. Results indicated that UTs', CTs' and STs' practices, and STs' standpoints in the programme need to be handled by considering participants' collective level of agency and each one's professional agency based on relational agency.</p> <p>Keywords: Supervision, teaching practice programme, student teachers, special education, thematic analysis</p>
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1. INTRODUCTION

The most fundamental factor in the success of an education system depends on the quality of the teacher (OECD, 2010). The first step of gaining this quality is the initial teacher training program. This programme consists of theory and practice which are always needed to support each other. Kant says "theory without practice is empty; practice without theory is blind". For this reason, practice can be meaningful by supporting theory in the practice programme for understanding where the behaviours come from; how teachers should behave; how they plan to act. Teaching practice programme is the first step of learning to teach by putting theory into practice with professional support.

The essential intention of the teaching practice programme is to transform theory into practice effectively by enabling teachers to receive the appropriate guidance, supervision and experience in the consideration of experts – university tutor (UT) and cooperating teachers (CT) (Crasborn et al., 2008). This supervision acts like 'spectacles', which help Student teachers (ST) to see the real-world teaching environment from their own point of view with the help of appropriate guides. These guides link theory and practice for the STs, which helps to improve their reflection and professional development, including knowledge, teaching skills, making professional decisions, problem-solving and reviewing their own implementations by adhering to the supervisory principles provided for CTs and UTs (Crasborn et al., 2008; Kalule & Bouchamma, 2014; Sergiovanni & Staratt, 2007). This process enables STs to learn the teaching profession because STs mostly learn effectively by having regular constructive feedback on their classroom practice from the experts (Leko & Brownell, 2011; Parker-Katz & Tejero-Hughes, 2008). In addition, UTs and CTs support the STs throughout the practice programme to gain skills such as creativity, critical thinking, and reflective thinking (Crasborn et al., 2008; Klingner et al., 2003; Leko et al., 2012; National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education [NCATE], 2010).

The main actors, UTs and CTs, are required to have particular experience and knowledge in the special education subject, including its theoretical and practical research background, in order to provide effective guidance to STs (Boyd et al., 2007;

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Bullough, 2005; Murray & Male, 2005), to motivate STs to learn and teach, and to teach them how to learn from their experience and to find alternative ways of teaching in the profession (Korthagen, 2004, 2011). However, each actor has different duties; UTs are responsible for creating multi-functional teaching practice models that include giving constructive feedback both in the university and in the associated school environment before, during and after the teaching sessions, at the planning stages and the observation stages, and for the training folders by showing appropriate/inappropriate examples (Butler & Cuenca, 2012; Giebelhaus & Bowman, 2002) and helping STs to collaborate and communicate with the parents of their pupils (Conderman & Stephens, 2000; Whitaker, 2000). On the other side, the CTs are also expected to guide STs for transforming theory into practice in a real environment (Brouwer and Korthagen, 2005; Crasborn et al., 2015; Darling-Hammond, 2017; Education Authority of Northern Ireland [EANI], 2018; Hamilton, 2010; Jones et al., 2014; Meegan et al., 2013). Having an experienced guide in a real environment can make a great impact on STs' learning progress from multiple perspectives. Furthermore, they are mostly expected to be like a role model in the schools, because they have a great power to influence STs' pedagogies and beliefs as well as teaching new strategies and classroom management in their classroom (Hamilton, 2010).

Additionally, this practice programme has a high chance of success as long as it consists of a shared structure consisting of three participants: UT, CT and ST. In this way, they observe each other, give feedback, and share tasks at every point. As a result, if the expected partnership among these participants is implemented effectively (Alptekin & Vural, 2014; Brouwer & Korthagen, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2006), the lifelong professional and personal development of ST can be promoted, and a more effective teaching practice environment is created.

In the Turkish literature, there are studies that examine the opinions and suggestions of STs in the special education departments' teaching practice programme (Ergül et al., 2011; Ozen et al 2009; Yücesoy-Özkan et al., 2019). These studies focused on various notable subjects in the programme; a) extension of the duration of the teaching practice programme (Dedeoğlu, et al., 2004; Ergenekon, et al., 2008; Ergül et al., 2013), b) theoretical and practical courses should be implemented at the same time (Dedeoğlu et al., 2004; Ergül et al., 2013), (c) UTs should be responsible for less number of STs during the programme (Ergenekon et al., 2008), d) the UTs are expected to give more sample sessions, to make more observations, and have more constructive feedback to the STs from UTs and CTs (Yücesoy-Özkan et al., 2019; Yıkımış et al., 2014; Ergenekon et al., 2008; Özen et al., 2009), (e) the evaluation process is also expected to be more professional and equal (Yücesoy-Özkan et al., 2019). Furthermore, Alptekin and Vural (2014) report that STs do not know what to do in the teaching practice programme properly, and lack of correct guidance from some CTs whose undergraduate degree was out of special education.

The main aim of this current study is to make a contribution to the literature by investigating UTs' and CTs' practices in one special education department's teaching practice programme in Turkey from the STs' perspective in the light of relational agency approach, and by analysing the relations between the programme participants in order to determine how the programme works, reveal the positive aspects of the programme and possible areas need to be improved. In order to determine these points, the following research question has been addressed: *How do STs perceive the UTs' and CTs' practices within a special education department's teaching practice programme?*

1.1. Relational Agency

Each individual [UTs and CTs] has a particular level of motivation to learn and to act (Bandura, 1997). It enables them to engage their existing knowledge and new information such as ideas, approaches, theories and practices (Pietarinen et al., 2016). Combining these issues is mostly actualized by the relationship of others in the organizations (Edwards, 2005) because individuals are the product of society as well as their individual autonomy (Bandura, 2000). When they learn the professional requirements and practices, they interact with others and create a more integrated approach combining the results of their relations with others in the organization and their own sense of professional agency (Edwards & Mackenzie, 2005).

Edwards and D'Arcy (2004) stated that this relational approach is the capacity to investigate and use colleagues' support for their knowledge, skills, experience, and practices in order to achieve the objective at the expected level. Also, this approach depends on the explanation of the issues by taking all participants and resources in the organizations as a whole (Edwards & D'Arcy, 2004). The interpretation of the involved organization's and colleagues' ideas is the main identifier for individuals' reflective practices (Pietarinen et al., 2016). On the other hand, each actor in an organization has a unique perspective and has a voice in there, so their sense of professional agency, personality and reflection on the practice also has an effect on others. So positive emotions in an organization reinforce the participants' enthusiasm to become creative and innovative (Hoekstra et al., 2009). Furthermore, a negative atmosphere in a group can also affect the actors' willingness to practise what is required and they might prefer to meet these requirements at a minimum expected level individually. This understanding can also negatively affect the perceptions and practices of others within the group (Pietarinen et al., 2016), individually or collectively, and allow them to do what they want by ignoring the group or formal rules. This is also a result of a low sense of relational agency. For this reason, a lack of collective action in this kind of organizations can be a highly significant problem. In order to understand the behaviour of individuals and whether they have a high level of professional agency, it is necessary to examine the practices of group members within the same organization.

2. METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research method, phenomenology, was used in order to understand how STs experience, understand and perceive UTs' and CTs' practices. This research design tries to understand the experiences, perceptions, and perspectives of individuals in the existing social environment (Cohen, et al., 2011). For this reason, a semi-structured interview technique was used in order to obtain the views of the teacher candidates in the best way. The sample for the study comprised of 14 STs in the teaching practice programme in the eighth semester at a Turkish university's special education department in 2017.

Six of the participants were male and eight of them were female. The ages of the participants were varied from 21 to 36. All of the participants went to school for the first time to practice as part of the teaching practice programme in this special education department. Each trainee worked with 1 experienced UT and 3 or 4 assistant UTs. These participants undertook their practice programme in special education classes in 7 different state schools under different UTs' and CTs' supervision in order to ensure that the data to be collected was rich, consistent and valid. They were selected by the purposive sampling strategy for their suitability to answer the intended interview questions and for being one of the most important actor groups and rich sources of data in the teaching practice system (Cohen et al., 2007; Vanderstoep & Johnston, 2009). Based on the decision of the ethics committee (dated 31.05.2017 and numbered 11/26), the required ethical consents for the data collection; audio recording and taking notes during the interview, and the subsequent analysis were obtained from these STs before the interview sessions. The interview questions were developed by the researchers on the basis of acquiring sufficient data to answer the research question, and three academicians who have PhD in special education subject evaluated and feedbacked on the questions. There were minor recommendations, and all these were corrected in consensus. After creating a draft of the proposed question guide, a pilot study was conducted with two STs in order to determine how the questions were understood by interviewees, the average length of the interview and, in terms of the researcher's role, the appropriate way of asking the questions and, if necessary, expanding on them. An academician with PhD reviewed the pilot study recordings and gave feedback on the researcher for how the interview sessions could be completed smoothly. The pilot study showed that the length of interviews was 27 and 42 minutes and that the interviewer could use the question guide to let the participants freely express their thoughts, experiences, understandings and relationship to the UTs and CTs related to the supervision that they had received and to other elements of their teaching practice.

2.1. Data Analysis

The data collected from the interviews with the STs was analysed using thematic analysis, due to the nature of the teaching practice programme, the collected data should be well categorized and easy to understand under the relevant themes. Qualitative data inevitably had a complex structure based on individual ontological perspectives. Besides, all the interviewees had their own spectacles through which they saw the practice system (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) because of the complex structure of individuals' understanding, perception and way of expressing themselves. So, the acquired qualitative data needed to be clearly clarified and simplified (Berg, 2007). There were also some data which were irrelevant to the study, so they were excluded in order to enable a better and easier understanding of the responses to the interview questions.

In the next stage, the raw data were categorised under a few core themes in the teaching programme. The deductive approach to identifying themes used by the Hazir (2019) was used as a basis for the categorisation. These were 'partnership context', 'professional context and 'material context'. However, these contexts were inadequate for the scope of the current study, because the STs' perceptions revealed the necessity to introduce another theme that is often ignored in the teaching practice. Hence, the fourth theme of 'personal context' was added. In other words, the Hazir's (2019) framework was used deductively, but the researchers modified the ideas and the change made it possible to use the themes inductively. After collecting the data, the audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed using NVIVO 12 software; numerical pseudonyms were given to the participants and the relevant codes were categorised under these contexts. Some of the codes were found to match more than one context because they were linked or overlapped with each other.

The interviews were conducted in Turkish, so additionally, after the analysis, two independent translators translated the necessary parts for the results chapter from Turkish into English in order to ensure the greatest possible reliability. The two translators reached mostly similar translation results, including their synonyms. Furthermore, the thematic analysis was carried out by two researchers independently at different times and in different places, but they reached generally similar results; any minor issues of difference were discussed and sorted out by consensus.

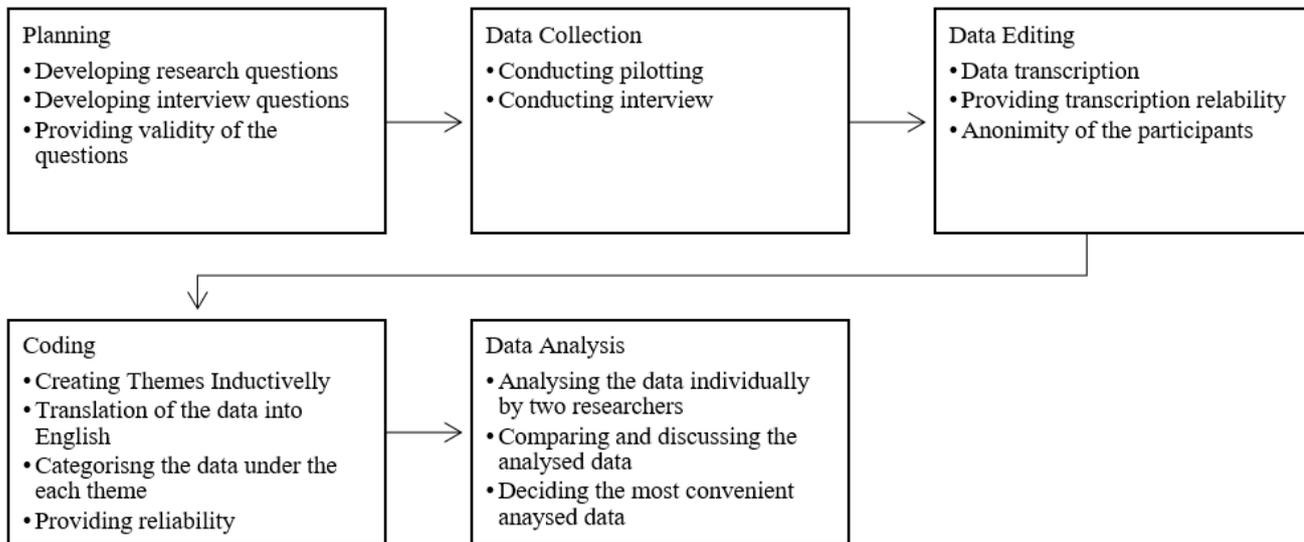


Figure 1: The data analysis process

Under these contexts, the effects of actions, materials, activities, rules and the teaching practice environment on the subjects' practices, and the UTs' and CTs' support for and influence on each other will be discussed in detail. In this section, another core issue that will be discussed is how these activities by the participants affect the process and the targeted aims. Examining all these points under different contexts and making sense of the behaviours with the help of relational agency will make this research more understandable.

2.2. Validity and Reliability

The compatibility between the research question and the data collection technique shows the validity of this study. The qualitative data collection techniques for exploring the experiences and perceptions of individuals were used in the research show that this study is valid. In addition, based on the perspectives of the STs and their interpretation of the environment (*Confirmability*), reaching the supervisory practices of UTs and CTs in the teaching practice presented the appropriate data about the *authenticity*, the *credibility*, and the *plausibility* of the study. Further, in terms of *transferability*, the obtained data gives an idea of similar practice programs and their participants. However, these qualitative data collected reflect the authenticity of the STs rather than generalizations of the data.

The authors independently analysed the data to provide the reliability of the study. While the second researcher argued that explaining the data with 5 themes would be more understandable, the first researcher argued that a more appropriate analysis would be made with 4 themes, and the two researchers agreed on 4 themes, showing that the reliability coefficient was high (80%). At the following stages of analysis, the authors reached a complete consensus.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the opinions of STs about the main actors' practices and the participants' standpoint in the teaching practice process implemented in a special education department in Turkey. Interview questions were devised which would answer the research question. The findings showed that although STs, as the core of the teaching practice process, were satisfied with some parts of the practice process, they generally stated that the process had to be improved.

In this department, STs had to complete a few tasks successfully during the one-year programme such as; observation of the pupils, planning the sessions, preparation of the teaching materials, performing teaching sessions, writing a report for their teaching performance and filling out some official documents. This was not an easy process and sometimes it was too intensive for them. While STs discussed the UTs', CTs' and their own roles in the teaching practice process, they tended to criticize the training programme and its' participants based on their interpretation of the interactions with others in this busy process and how this process reflect on their perceptions. Therefore, the STs' explanations about UTs, CTs and themselves were examined critically whether the challenges which they faced brought realistic comments.

The data analysis showed that the participants gave similar explanations of their special education department's teaching practice programme. The Turkish special education teacher-training programme consists of a four-year course in which each year has two semesters. The first three years (six semesters) contain theoretical courses and the final year (two semesters) is predominantly based on teaching-practice modules. However, the participants stated that the teaching practice needed to be started in the earlier semesters because the final two semesters were too intensive (Yücesoy-Özkan et al., 2019). They went to the associated schools for three half-days each week during these two semesters and for the rest of the week, they have to attend more theoretical courses and do lesson planning for the associated school sessions. They also explained that the practice

programme started with observation sessions for the first three weeks of the seventh semester. In the following weeks, the STs started to perform teaching in the training classes under the supervision of their UTs and the CTs.

One of the principal requirements of the practice programme was that they had to organize their own programme regularly based on a session plan and at least one hour of independent teaching with the pupils each week. Furthermore, each semester, in different schools, the STs had to complete different modules; behaviour changing and skills teaching modules in the autumn semester, and social skills and concept teaching modules in the spring semester. Nevertheless, some of the participants commented that these modules were not used for teaching the skills or knowledge to pupils, but were based on mostly STs demonstrating their teaching skills to the supervisors. In other words, the pupils were used as experimental subjects. Nevertheless, this is the nature of the training process, otherwise completing a couple of different teaching modules would not be possible for each ST in two semesters. On the other hand, the regular assessment after the STs' teaching sessions would be beneficial for the generalization and the maintenance of the knowledge and skills for the pupils during the programme. In order to understand the participants' responses clearly, the analysed data is presented under the four main contexts: the material, the professional, the partnership and the personal contexts.

3.1. Professional Context

The participants raised a few issues which need to be taken into careful consideration. Primarily, the programme was conducted predominantly by members of the higher education institution who act under the UTs' supervision. CTs were generally the second most important members of the programme because they only accept STs into their classroom for them to carry out practice teaching sessions. Ergenekon, Özen, and Batu (2008) and Hazir (2019) support this finding. The special education department created a structure that is mostly based on UTs' supervision, however, CTs were also responsible for contributing to STs' professional learning and for converting their theoretical knowledge into practice (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Nevertheless, the findings of the current study showed that the UTs took on the greatest control and mostly exclude CTs from the mentoring role. Hazir (2019), however, found that CTs were happy with where they were located in the practice programme and already gave priority to their pupils rather than to STs.

The STs also stated that CTs were frequently unqualified to work as special education teachers because they had mostly been transferred from other subjects in which they had worked as certified teachers (participants 2, 3, 6, 7, 8), so *they need to be assessed too* (participant 7). Several previous studies (for example, Ergül et al., 2013; Nartgün, 2004; Nougaret et al., 2005; Özyürek, 2008) also found that teachers certified in a different subject could not achieve the goals in this very specialised area. Furthermore, they were assigned to act as mentors but did not receive any qualitatively well-planned training for becoming a CT. In other words, teachers who have no special education background or experience are expected to train future special education teachers, and some of these future special education teachers would become CTs in the future. This creates a vicious circle in special education teaching practice.

The participants also stated that each person responsible for supervision needed to be trained before having an active role in the programme, echoing the view of Vuran et al. (2014). This suggestion also arose in regard to CTs who are from outside special education subjects; CTs had to be observed and assessed (Participant 3, 7); *they do nothing, and receive a salary* (participant 3). Because of this lack of mentoring ability, some of the participants also suggested that certified teachers should be given training for becoming CTs. That was why UTs did not collaborate with CTs. Even the newly employed UTs did not attempt to collaborate with CTs, and listened the organization's voice in order to suit their environment. At this stage, the supervisors behaved collectively because they had a logical understanding of the practice programme, and these collective actions shaped their professional agency by interpreting their colleagues' ideas and practices. However, they did not attempt to improve CTs' mentoring skills even though they were trained to teach how to become a teacher. UTs' preferred the easiest way by excluding CTs from the system. This was also a result of the relational agency which was learned from others who had been in charge or had had more voice in the department. Accordingly, they did not need to have a transparent system or to share what they planned for STs. This 'excluding CT understanding' did not come up straight, it became an unwritten rule affecting each other's perception in their department, but the UTs were not affected by the department only; they had the potential to change and modify it because they were part of the system and can potentially influence others (Hoekstra et al., 2009).

3.2. Partnership Context

The partnership approach in teaching practice had a highly significant role in creating a strong structure and complementing the support of the associated school and the university (EANI, 2018). As already discussed, each department assigns UTs who should have close contact with the associated school, especially with the CTs, and maintained regular supervision of the STs in collaboration with the CTs (Brouwer & Korthagen, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Fancourt et al., 2015; Henry & Weber, 2010). CTs also had a crucial role in teaching practice in creating an appropriate learning environment for STs (Crasborn et al., 2015; Darling-Hammond, 2017). Both of these key contributors to the programme, UTs and CTs, were expected to provide criticism to STs as a friend (EANI, 2018; Jones et al., 2014), but to give them some responsibilities as a colleague.

In this current study, most of the participants had similar expectations of the school/university partnership; teamwork between these two participants was the core of the practice programme (Participants 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14), but in reality, the main

actors and environments had no proper collaboration. The practice programme is expected to be conducted by UTs because the CTs argued that UTs had greater competency than school teachers for training STs (Hazir, 2019). The supervisors also had a similar practice and were, therefore, conducting a system in which they had sole responsibility, which reduced their accountability and liability, and this was their preferred way rather than having a school/university partnership idea. This understanding of UTs influenced their own belief, and their belief modifies the professional agency which allows them to act intentionally (Biesta et al., 2016). Hence, their low level of agency did not let them create a collaborative partnership, even between colleagues in the department.

These were not the only reasons why strong partnerships were not created in the programme. There were also other personal relationships, such as UT with ST, and partnerships between UTs. Each supervisor had his/her own teaching style and showed differences compared with others. This is the nature of the world because each individual is different. Nevertheless, most of the participants stated that their supervisors' assessment, grading and feedback (detailed face-to-face feedback and constructive or negative feedback) differed from one to another: We generally received written feedback, but verbal feedback [from UTs] differed among the groups (participants 6, 7). Even though the department had a Likert-type standard assessment form, different supervisors give different scores for the same independent teaching session delivered by STs and (Ergenekon et al., 2008; Hazir, 2019; Yücesoy-Özkan et al., 2019) research also reached similar results. These assessment errors might result from the structure of the form, but the interviewees predominantly talked about supervisors' unfair behaviours between STs, such as 'sycophantic STs', 'over grading', 'providing detailed/superficial feedback' and 'adequate/ inadequate assessment'. There are similar practices in some countries such as Younus et al., (2017) in Pakistan, Mokoena (2017) in South Africa and Ibrahim (2013) in the United Arab Emirates. When they encountered a problem, they reflected their actions on others by finding an alternative way, which had a negative effect on STs. This negative atmosphere brought also unwillingness between STs, and might cause them to perform their tasks at a minimum level. Thus they might graduate with a low-level potential for bringing change in their future professional working environment. This problem expressed by the participants may have been caused by only one or two UTs, but these UTs are part of the teaching practice programme and can affect dozens of STs each year at least. 'Teaching skill' is not only learned within the framework of the plan prepared by the special education department. This skill is also learned as a result of the interaction of the teacher candidate with the individuals in the practice environment, the impact of the rules of the school and the university on the individuals, and the individual's professional agency. Therefore, UTs and CTs are expected to maintain their professionalism by creating a partnership between both environments and in their own environments.

The special education department created small teams consisting of 10 to 12 students and a supervisor, but even in these groups, the practices within the groups had differences: *While some groups' supervisors expect to get a few documents on time, other groups' supervisors give priority to other tasks and ignore the deadline* (participant 3). So STs feel stressed because they were responsible for submitting the teaching practice documents on time to the department. These different practices between groups and between supervisors caused other issues in the department. When STs criticised a supervisor or even talk about these issues, UTs threatened to give them a lower grade (participants 1, 3, 6). These non-professional attitudes affected STs' motivation negatively and caused them to have to endure unfairness, discrepancies, and negligence during their teaching practice. Hagger and McIntyre (2006) reported a similar finding but their main point was that STs faced humiliation as a result of their own lack of competence. They suggested that these motivational issues could be resolved by the key actors creating more constructive environments for the practice sessions, especially UTs and CTs. These issues needed to be taken into careful consideration because some of the STs interviewed in this study were clearly not happy with some of these UTs behaviours in the programme. By all means, this complex and intensive programme brought lots of workload, and it was generally challenging to complete all the tasks on time. Therefore, STs might face these behaviours depending on their task completion rate, 'UTs' behaviours might be unacceptable', 'STs may have exhausted and misunderstood UTs' but as a result; the UTs are expected to provide professional supervision to the STs. Otherwise, this reduces their motivation and creates unhappy special education teachers as tomorrow's professionals. The partnership approach, therefore, needs to be reconceptualised. Thus CTs can be more integrated into the teaching practice program and supported to collaborate with UTs (Fancourt et al., 2015). Besides UTs need to be open to discussing how to develop a learning environment at the expected level. Continuous training should be provided for UTs, CTs, and STs under the university/school partnership model.

3.3. Material Context

Reflecting theory into practice in the classroom can be achieved by the use of specific teaching materials in the teaching practice programme. These resources have a crucial role in teaching the pupils effectively. Most developed countries give priority to creating a special education environment which is equipped with functional materials (Darling-Hammond, 2010) such as supporting with visual, auditory, tactile materials. Each pupil with special needs has different learning needs and the programme must be designed to take every pupil's learning process into consideration (EANI, 2008). This allows teachers to have a more structured and integrated approach, which facilitates them to interact with one another actively and encourages them to behave collectively (Edwards & D'Arcy, 2004).

The participants in this study stated that teaching resources such as lesson plans, pupils' assessments, teaching materials and classroom arrangements were all vitally important components in the practice programme. The policymakers at the Council of Higher Education (CoHE) are aware of the importance of these preparations during the practice, so they put modules on

preparing teaching materials in the final two semesters of the course when STs conduct their classroom practice in the associated schools. However, the special education department changed this theoretical course into a practice course for STs to be able to spend more time in the associated school. They thought that spending more time and performing more teaching sessions in the associated school is better (Vuran et al., 2014). Due to this understanding, the teaching practice programme was conducted on 3 half-days (12 hours) each week despite the fact that the teaching practice regulations stipulate 1 whole day or 2 half-days each week in an associated school (Ministry of National Education [MoNE], 1998). However, the regulation was updated in 2018 to stipulate 6 lesson hours (approximately 1 whole day) each week (MoNE, 2018). This department preferred their STs to prepare materials at home and bring it to the university/school for receiving feedback from UTs. Due to the limited time of the practice program, the special education department integrated 'the material preparation course' into the teaching practice course considering the most pragmatist way of the training programme. Hazir's (2019) findings showed that this department's material preparation was well-organized comparing the other two special education departments.

Even so, some of the participants stated that they did not know how to prepare effective material because of the lack of theoretical knowledge, and said '... *I would not combine the material preparation module and teaching practice*' (participants 6). Participant 8, 9 and 10 also had a similar explanation with participant 6. However, spending more time in the associated schools might also reduce opportunities to acquire research-based knowledge in the department and to learn non-instructional duties (Henry & Weber, 2010) rather than increasing their experience and integrating with the actors and resources in the associated school (Burn & Mutton, 2015). This might not facilitate the STs to acquire new ideas related to the classroom environment or to reflect them in their practice considering the student needs because a basic knowledge as a mediator in most cases would be necessary for reflecting theory into practice and for investigating, criticizing and developing the existing arrangements.

The participants raised another issue, which was that the cost of materials was too much for STs and they could not afford it (participants 3, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14). Meegan et al., (2013) discussed this issue in the context of Ireland and suggested that STs needed to be paid during their supervised teaching practice. Because of this financial issue, the department encouraged STs to use recycled materials, nonetheless, *STs who used recycled materials get a lower score than those who prepared the materials from newly bought items* (participant 3). There is therefore unfairness in this case as well.

As discussed, the partnership was the core element for the STs' training (Fancourt et al., 2015; Henry & Weber, 2010), but the supervisors did not have any collaborative understanding with CTs and did not even have a well-organized partnership in their departments, and this allowed the UTs to behave independently. Therefore, UTs' professional agency was also shaped dominantly by their colleagues' evaluation criteria and mostly individual interpretation on the process of evaluating the materials. Because of this understanding, their perception of one another could not be developed collectively at this level and the resulting unfair situations in practice affected the ST's motivation unless the department acted to increase the participants' professional agency which also helps to create a positive environment by learning from and increasing others' professional agency actively (Pietarinen et al., 2016). Although this special education department was better at preparing materials than the other departments (Hazir, 2019), the trainees stated that there were some problems. This shows that rather than comparing this department with other departments and defining it as better or worse, it should make its evaluation in itself. In this case, even if the stated problems are minor, such differences are important reasons that affect the perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes of individuals. Therefore, alternative teaching approaches should be implemented in order to overcome this issue and further research needs to be conducted for understanding what requires clearly.

3.4. Personal Context

The aim of teaching practice is not only to increase their professional development but also to nurture STs' personal growth (EANI, 2018) because personal and professional development affects each other. The reflection of new models, techniques and preparations is also a process which is the result of the combination of personal and professional development. Therefore, UTs are expected to care about STs' needs and characteristics during the practice programme, and their supervision needs to be based also on respect for the individuals (Ergenekon et al., 2008). Failure to do so affected STs' motivation negatively (participants 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 12, 14), because the past experiences of individuals mostly enabled them to shape their future actions.

Some of the trainees' statements under this context showed that they added their negative feelings (because of challenging times and intensity in the teacher training programmes [Yücesoy-Özkan et al., 2019]). For example, they [UTs]...*ignore our individual differences (Participant 3) and behave as if we are not human!* (participants 9). These participants might have had personal discussions with their UTs. As discussed, teaching is a difficult and complex process, especially teaching to teach which involves various dimensions such as; professional, relational, organizational and individual. The team who provided participant 3 and 9 also affected each other in their team, because learning takes place in the form of transferring the information affected by the social environment to the individual. That new information is the product of one's with their experiences in their environment. Therefore, this training process needs to be taken into consideration carefully considering the STs' personal needs as well as professional needs.

Lastly, whenever STs had any problems or criticized the system, they were afraid to discuss their concerns with UTs. The supervisors took STs' argument personally and threatened to give them lower grades. Moreover, both Participant 3 and 7 stated that discussing the unfairness were resulted in getting penalised of STs and the supervisors' attitudes towards them change for

the worse during the practice programme. Further, sickness or parental problems of STs were not taken into consideration by some of the UTs and this could cause more problems between supervisors and STs. Although these were individual actions, UTs learnt how to behave in this department by experiencing from their colleagues' practices, ideas and approaches to communicating with STs (Edwards & D'Arcy, 2004). But some of UTs were missing some key points; the aims of the programme cannot be achieved unless the STs' personal and professional growth develop constructively. They can graduate the STs by looking at their preparations and teaching sessions, but after graduation, the new teachers might simply not care about what they have learned in the practice programme because of their supervisors' disrespectful behaviour. It is the same for the CTs in the associated schools; they are required to take STs' personal issues and values into consideration and draw boundaries respectfully during the practice programme (Henry & Weber, 2011).

4. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study showed that the sample of STs was mostly aware of the process of teaching practice and their roles within it. Moreover, they made constructive suggestions for creating more developed teaching practice. We, therefore, suggest that the opinions of STs and newly graduated special education teachers should be taken into consideration in special education departments in order to make the whole teaching practice process more beneficial for everyone involved in it. The findings of this study also highlight the fact that UTs and CTs must be trained in every part of the teaching practice process (Ergenekon et al., 2008), as was also recommended by Vuran et al. (2014). In particular, UTs who are inexperienced in teaching practice can be trained by experienced supervisors in a master/apprentice model (Vuran et al., 2014). However, the existing UTs first need to be analysed in detail for their practices, behaviours, understandings. Then, they can be trained to create a transparent collaborative model in the university environment in order to increase their level of agency professionally and collectively which involves associated schools to collaborate in the teaching practice programme (Furlong et al. 2000).

Also, the STs interviewed stated that they mostly delivered their teaching practice sessions in certificated teachers' classrooms, which means that they were under the guidance of non-professionals (in special education) for their professional development. The negative impact caused by this situation can be minimized by using alternative quality enhancement methods. For example, starting from before the training programme, special education departments can organize a regular mentoring training process for cooperating teachers. However, this programme cannot be sufficient within the teaching practice programme unless the partnership between the university and associated school is created. Especially, a collaborative environment needs to be created between the UTs and the CTs to develop the STs' teaching skills.

While researching the practice programme in the special education department, the individuals' interaction is one of the most important components for understanding where their practices, and ideas come from, because their reflective practices are the interpretation of the relations with the organizational actors, the organizational environment and their individual agency (Edwards & D'Arcy, 2004; Edwards & Mackenzie, 2005; Pietarinen et al., 2016). It is clear that further research is needed because this study was carried out with only STs in one special education department. Further research will also create possible ways to develop their professional and collective agency considering their existing practices holistically in an organization. Examining the organizational structure, the opinions, ideas, approaches and behaviours of individuals and the relations between all the participants of teaching practice in the same contexts by using educational theories would be very beneficial for the literature and for the special education departments. Applied research conducted with UTs, CTs and STs will help to find ways of doing this which are practical, and which will result in positive outcomes.

A number of limitations were present in this study is that we only collected data from the STs. Considering this point, researchers can collect data using more than one data collection technique for their future work. Because, while we were analysing the data, we understood exactly what kind of psychological intensity the trainees had gone through and experienced a very intense teaching practice period. This has led to the conclusion that we should be more careful when analysing the teaching practice system. Otherwise, we could have incorrectly criticized the teaching practice system. To avoid such consequences, it would be more beneficial to collect data from people with different roles; for example, UT, CT and ST in the programme which possibly results in more reliable data from the practice programme.

In future studies, also different data collection techniques; Using observation, document analysis, focus group interviews, the connections between the STs', UTs' and CTs' perceptions and their implementations in the teaching practice programme can be examined. Also, the headteacher, head of the special education department and practice coordinators from both environments can be involved in future studies. Thus, researchers can obtain multi-dimensional research data.

At the practice level, based on the research data, it is suggested that cooperation between UT, CT, and ST need to be more effective and constructive. Furlong et al's (2000) collaborative partnership model can be a good guide in developing this collaboration. In order to create more collaborative environments in the programme UTs in special education departments are recommended to be trained (Vuran et al., 2014) for increasing their level of agency, and other supervisory skills. Besides, STs' voices need to be heard in the departments for creating a more constructive learning environment. Finally, in the Covid-19 process, teaching practice programmes that were run only online posed enormous difficulties in putting theory into practice. Therefore, UTs and CTs should regularly set online meetings with the STs and support STs on how to make adaptations that will increase the level of their creative, constructive, and interactive teaching performance both physically and online.

Research and Publication Ethics Statement

All information in this paper has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical concerns.

Contribution Rates of Authors to the Article

The second author had interviews with the participants. Both authors contributed equally to the process of data analysis and writing the introduction. The methodology, discussion and conclusion sections were written by the first author. The necessary corrections in these sections were discussed with the second author, and the final version of the manuscript was decided.

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Statement of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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