

A Comparative Analysis of Practicum in English Language Teacher Education: Turkey, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Azerbaijan Cases

Ceylan Yangin Ersanli

*Department of English Language Teaching, Faculty of Education,
Ondokuz Mayıs University, Turkey*

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ABSTRACT This study aims to compare Turkey, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Azerbaijan with respect to their practicum in English language teacher education programs and making suggestions about their practice. The data is collected using a questionnaire. The data is evaluated through content analysis and a qualitative research method. The findings show that the four countries share commonalities in terms of factors such as the contents of reports created in the course of education, passing requirements and performance evaluation while there are some differences in the semester and duration of practicums and in some of the responsibilities and tasks of the teacher trainees. The most frequently encountered problems cited by the practicum supervisors vary with the country. It is believed that the parties in the present study can benefit from the comparison of practices and their results and from mutually shared experiences.

INTRODUCTION

International comparative and evaluative studies in education enable countries to compare and contrast their practices with those of others. Moreover, while countries produce educational policies to satisfy different and authentic needs in their education systems, examining and interpreting how successfully education systems of other countries work and adopting them as a model is more likely to provide a useful perspective. In this sense, comparative education "...is a field examining the education systems of other countries to analyze and describe their own education-related problems" (Demirel 2000: 1). Comparative education is a research field intended to help identify similarities and differences between other countries' education systems and the researcher's own, to determine and evaluate present educational problems and their causes in consideration of similar factors in other countries (Varis 1998; Demirel 2000). Several studies compare educational systems and practices in different countries to draw conclusions and make suggestions for improvement. Wiczorek investigates the educational systems of American and Japanese schools (2008). Ingersoll's study focuses on a comparative study on teacher preparation and qualifications in six nations (2007), and the report written by Wang et al. (2003) investigates international comparisons on education and teacher education. After the

dissolution of the Soviet Union and the secession of Turkic Republics in Central Asia as independent countries, these countries underwent a sudden and quick change and innovation process. Education is a way of actively getting integrated in the rapidly globalizing world and of socially, culturally, and economically developing. To this end, one of the things to do is to mutually share experiences so as to become more experienced in educational practices.

In Turkey, recently more and more MA theses and PhD dissertations have been dealing with comparative research on education systems, particularly European and Turkish systems. Uygun and Akinci (2015) study the teacher training systems of Turkey and England. Kuzu and Akin (2011) compare teacher-training programs in Finland and Turkey. Topsakal (2003) investigates education policies of European Union in terms of goals and objectives of education systems, teacher-student mobility, foreign language teaching, use of education technologies, collaboration, European Union citizenship education, and the Turkish education system's harmony with these policies in consideration of MEB, YOK, universities, and NGOs. Sahiner (2000) examines Turkish and European primary school education systems in terms of programs, structure, and operation. Pökön (2003) makes a comparative analysis of French and Turkish preschool education systems, and makes some suggestions, such as free preschool education in state schools

and the necessity to invest more in education systems. As a result of his comparison between Turkish and German primary education institutions, their methods and curricula, Duran (1999) reveals the primary causes of differences to be political and administrative structures of these countries. Duran makes an emphasis on Turkey's unitary and Germany's federal structure. Moreover, the way students are oriented towards the next step of education has been compared according to their academic achievements and interests in order to pinpoint similarities and differences.

Outlined next are some studies based on the comparison of a single course. Böke (2002) comparatively examines goals and objectives, contents, teaching methods, and evaluation systems of mathematics classes in Turkey and England. In this study, it has been observed that England's goals and objectives are more flexible, and information and communication technologies are used more efficiently. Durmuşçebi (2007) compares native language education in Turkey and Germany to find similarities in terms of overall goals, and finds that in Germany some specific goals are determined in consideration of regional characteristics. Durna (2007) compares contents of the social studies classes in Turkey and Germany and discovers that German states have more to say about education systems than the central government, and finds out differences between the subjects handled in classes.

In consideration of the comparative studies on foreign language teaching, Camgöz (2000) compares German primary and secondary school education with Turkey's 8-year compulsory education system in terms of the needs required by an earlier start for foreign language teaching. Nasman (2003) compares English language teaching programs of the 4th and 5th grades in Turkey and France in terms of goals and objectives, content, education and testing. In comparison with Turkey, it has been observed that France attaches more importance to communicative skills, and uses such linguistic aspects as grammar and vocabulary to achieve those communicative goals. Tan (2009) makes a comparison between second language acquisition programs in Turkey and France. As a member of the European Council, both countries aim to teach a second language till the end of high school education. However, Tan expresses that most of the French students achieve this goal, and suggests some

solutions to sort out the causes of Turkish students' failure. The comparative study by Böge (2005) deals with the similarities and differences between foreign language teaching programs at Turkish and Finnish primary schools. The study reveals that the Finnish system offers the desired behaviors in a clear, measureable and observable manner and in a way to include four linguistic skills and learning strategies. On the other hand, Böge finds that the Turkish system relies on teaching of grammatical rules and use of these rules in given cases.

The following are among the studies on the comparison of teacher training programs in the EU members and Turkey. Mermut (2005) compares German, Austrian, Italian, Finnish and Turkish ELT programs in terms of contents, education duration and registration requirements, and suggests a model to train English language teachers in Turkey. In the study comparing English language teacher training programs in Holland and Turkey, Alagöz (2006) focuses on the differences among admission conditions, contents, teacher training approaches and practice teaching. Gölcük (2003) compares foreign language teaching systems in Turkey and Germany to determine the shortcomings and to suggest some relevant solutions. Gölcük administers a questionnaire to investigate the present condition of foreign language teaching with particular reference to the teachers' roles and contributions to academic achievement. Sahin (2006) draws a comprehensive framework to investigate the similarities and differences among the teacher training programs in England, Belgium, Spain, Poland, Greece, and Turkey. Çankaya (2007) compares teacher training systems in Turkey and England in terms of their historical development, fundamental principles, goals and organizational structures to investigate some major differences. Demir (1997) proposes a teacher training model for Turkey by comparing secondary school teacher training programs in France and Turkey and making use of France's experiences. In the comparative study on teacher training in Turkey, England, Germany, Italy, and France with a specific emphasis on the training of physics teachers, Polat (2005) suggests a teacher training model for prospective Turkish physics teachers. Kilimci (2006) compares primary school teacher training programs in Germany, France, England, and Turkey, and discovers that these programs should be revised and reformed in terms of content, school

experience, and practice teaching. Kalkanli (2009) compares education faculties and teacher training institutes of higher education in Turkey and France, and points to the differences in schooling rates and education systems, the length of teacher training process and operation and organization of higher education institutions.

Aldemir and Er (2012) investigate pre-service English language teacher training systems in Turkey and Japan in terms of higher education programs including the entry requirements, the courses served and the certificate programs. Saracaloglu (1992) compares Turkish and Japanese teacher training systems in terms of student admissions, program diversity and contents. Aldemir also discovers in Japanese programs that the local governments are more dominant in educational decision-making processes over the central government, high school teachers are required to hold an MA degree, and the teachers' teaching certificates should be renewed every ten years. Uçar and Uçar (2004) compare the Japanese education system with the Turkish one in terms of compulsory education, middle and higher education, teacher training, educational management and funding, education duration and overall problems. They highlight the inspiring features of the Japanese system developed in collaboration with schools, families, industries and society for a higher development level. Demir and Demir (2009) list the contributions of school experience courses among the experiences and socio-cultural gains of education faculty students who have undertaken some of their study abroad within the framework of Erasmus student exchange program. Uygun et al. (2011) compare practice teaching in teacher training programs in Turkey, Germany and France, and make some suggestions for the programs in Turkey.

The literature review reveals that almost all the studies focus on education systems in the European countries and comparative research on Turkic Republics is exiguous. Peker (1999) examines Azerbaijani, Kazakhstani and Turkish education systems in terms of goals and formal and mass education, and detects some similarities and differences in terms of educational activities, length of education process, diversity of education institutions and higher education. Social factors affecting education systems in these countries are investigated. Yilmaz (1996) examines science teaching at primary schools in Azerbaijan, Bulgaria and Turkey in terms of their

weekly schedule and specifically deals with the teaching of "pressure" subject covered by the books produced in accordance with these programs. Kircaalili (2001) compares preschool education in Turkey and Azerbaijan with consideration of historical development, staff, used programs, institutions' physical structures, and institutions training preschool teachers. Ýbrahimova (2002) analyzes social studies education programs in Azerbaijan and Turkey in terms of their structures and contents, which have been determined in accordance with the changing goals and objectives, and makes suggestions for improvement. Yildirim (2006) makes a comparison between the social studies courses of 6th and 7th graders in Turkey and the history course offered to the same age group in Azerbaijan. Likewise, in consideration of these two countries Aladdinov (2006) compares the curricula of geography classes at secondary schools, and Aslanov (2007) comparatively analyzes the content of history classes for the 9th, 10th and 11th grades to find the similarities and differences.

Ulas (2007) adopts a wider perspective to comparatively examine Turkish and Azerbaijani education systems in terms of their developmental stages and educational relationships after the secession of Azerbaijan, and concludes that Azerbaijan can inspire from Turkey's education system in its renovation process. Boobekova (2001) examines the primary school educations in Turkey and Kyrgyzstan and compares these systems in terms of their historical developments, goals and principles, course books, teacher training and in-service training.

As is indicated above, not much educational research has been conducted to compare Turkey with other countries, and the literature review has yielded no noteworthy study pertaining to English language teacher training and practice teaching in the Turkic Republics in Central Asia.

Objectives

National education systems have always been expected to meet the need resulting from globalization, multiculturalism, fast-developing information and communication technologies. Therefore, it would be beneficial to examine the education systems of other countries and pinpoint useful practices and solutions to analyze and describe educational problems. Turkey plays

a key part in spreading and sharing its accumulated body of experiences thanks to its relations with Turkic Republics and through reforms and harmonization efforts in education as a part of the process of integration into the European Union. Further, it seems important for these countries, which are connected to each other with socio-cultural and historical ties to cooperate especially in educational practices. Every year, Turkey admits undergraduate and graduate students from Turkic Republics and makes efforts to increase the number. Conducting research comparing education systems of these two parties as a result of the strategic cooperation and each party benefitting from the other's education systems is likely to yield more successful outcomes. Therefore, the primary concern of the current study is to comparatively analyze the practicums in English language teaching programs in Turkey, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan and to reveal similarities and differences among these programs. Plus, it is also intended to make suggestions for better practices that can be achieved through shared experiences.

From this viewpoint, the first part of the study focuses on the related literature on comparative research concerning teacher training programs in Turkey. The second part emphasizes the place and importance of practicum in these programs, and summarizes the process and development of practicum teaching in Turkish teacher training programs. The third part contains the *ad hoc* method and research design. The obtained data has been put into tables and comparisons have been made in relation to methods and contents of the practicums. The last part features conclusive and evaluative remarks.

Importance of Practicum in Teacher Training Programs

Teachers are among the most important figures determining the quality of an education system, which can be improved with professional education. The primary aim of successful teaching training programs is to train teachers equipped with specialized professional knowledge and skills along with everyday knowledge. Theoretical knowledge comprises one domain of education process. Practice teaching, on the other hand, is intended to help trainee teachers acquire professional skills and behaviors. Theo-

retical knowledge becomes meaningful only when prospective teachers come to use knowledge and skills that they will need in real-life settings (Azar 2003; Price 1987; Saglam et al. 2004). Teaching skills can only be acquired when teachers are actively engaged in a real teaching act (Shulman 1987).

Munby et al. (2001: 897) express that recent research has revealed that teaching skills can be acquired and developed from personal teaching experiences. Trainee teachers can discover how to teach by teaching and reflecting on their teaching experiences (Eisner 2002). Moreover, teaching experience is the first step for trainee teachers to develop their own teaching approaches and beliefs. It is speculated that trainee teachers regard school experience and practicum as the most valuable part of teacher training and as a way to acquire the skills they will need in actual classes (Guyton 1989; Haigh 2001).

Practicum has always been helpful for trainee teachers to reflect upon their beliefs and to realize their weaknesses and strengths (Numrich 1996). They find practicum useful to acquire professional skills and experiences (Alakus et al. 2005; Gürbüz 2006). Besides, there is much research on problems and solutions concerning practice teaching. Conditions of practice schools, attitudes of practicum supervisors or lecturers and expert teachers, cooperation between faculty and practice school are important factors for practice teaching to be able to achieve its intended goals. However, problems such as failure of the practice teaching staff to offer adequate help due to their loaded programs, the failure of trainee teachers to effectively benefit from the experiences of expert teachers, and their lack of knowledge about the process, reduce the efficacy of practice teaching (Uslu 2001; Dönmez 2001; Gürbüztürk 2000; Saglam et al. 2004). This is true not only for Turkey, but many international studies state that lecturers cannot spare adequate time for the practice teaching of trainee teachers due to the fact that they are overloaded, short of time, or they have to/want to spend more time on scientific research (Borko et al. 1995; Goodlad 1994; Slick 1998).

Practicum in English Teacher Training Programs in Turkey

Practicum in Turkey has been a part of teacher training since 1848, when the College of Teach-

er Training for Secondary Education (then *Darülmüallimi-i Rüşdi*) was opened, which used to train teachers by adopting a Western perspective (Akyüz 2007). Over time, teacher training programs have undergone some changes and as a result, practicums have been diversified. The most drastic change was made with the “Pre-Service Teacher Training Project” within the framework of the World Bank National Education Development Project in 1997. The aim of this project, which was implemented with the collaboration of the Ministry of National Education (MEB) and The Turkish Council of Higher Education (YOK), was to restructure education faculties which were founded in 1982 and to help them serve their purposes, namely training highly qualified and specialized teachers who can keep up with the rapidly changing world (YOK 2007).

This project was intended to train well-rounded graduates not only theoretically but also practice-wise. In this sense, YOK entered into a protocol with MEB to reinforce and sustain the relationship between education faculties and practice schools in order to increase the number of practicums (YOK 2007). This radical change has enabled trainee teachers to observe expert teachers while teaching and to practice teaching for short times. In the reformed education program, the “School Experience” course was designed to allow prospective teachers to get to know about school organization and administration, to observe daily routines of a school, to participate in extracurricular activities, to observe and learn from expert teachers, to work with students individually or in groups, to do teaching for a while, and to better understand the teaching profession (MEB 1998; Tebligler Dergisi 1998: 2493). The course is also expected to allow trainee teachers to analyze the school, the students inside and the teaching profession from various perspectives and to find a basis for their undergraduate courses. At the end of this practice, prospective teachers are supposed to have learned about the practice school, its programs and students, and its academic and administrative staff (Sands vd. 1997).

On the other hand, the “Teaching Practice” course helps teacher trainees acquire teaching skills in a specific field in real classroom settings and allows them to teach a given course in a well-planned fashion. It is also thought to set the ground to discuss and evaluate teaching

activities (MEB 1998; Tebligler Dergisi 1998: 2493).

In the teacher training program reformed within the framework of YOK/World Bank National Education Development Project (1997), more emphasis is laid on practicum (Ataman 1998; Duman 2005; Kavcar 2002; Dönmez 2001:20; Aykaç 2004:38). The previous program used to contain only one-semester practice teaching and after 1998 three courses focusing on faculty-school cooperation, namely (School Experience I (3 credits), School Experience II (3 credits) and Teaching Practice (5 credits)), which were integrated into the program. After the implementation of the program, studies have been conducted to investigate the efficacy of those courses and to what extent they have achieved the intended goals and been useful to trainee teachers, which resulted in dissenting opinions on their usefulness (Aksu 2000; Ari et al. 1999; Azar 2003; Gürbüz 2006; Kavcar et al. 1999; Korkmaz et al. 2000; Harmandar et al. 2000; Köroğlu et al. 2000). Expert teachers at practice schools regarded this increase (from one semester to three semesters) as an increasing burden in their workload (Gürbüz 2006).

Gürbüz (2006) conducts a study on perceptions of senior ELT students in relation to School Experience I and II and suggests in the study that offering School Experience I in the first year causes problems although the overall perception concerning practicum is positive. Trainee teachers describe these challenges as “the feeling of incompetency caused by the lack of adequate knowledge of teaching methods and techniques (as of the term the course is offered)” and “identity problems of trainee teachers in classrooms” (Gürbüz 2006: 69). Further, the study suggests that because the course is solely based on observation, trainee teachers feel inactive, neither like a teacher nor a student, and feel like going back to school years they have just finished. On the other hand, trainee teachers have a more positive perception concerning School Experience II. The study also shows that trainee teachers are able to observe and practice teaching more efficiently soon after they take teaching methods courses.

In the 2006 amendments to the programs of the education faculties, failing sides of the renovation process initiated in 1997 were revised with consideration to the feedback from administrative and academic staff of education faculties

(YLK 2007). High numbers of students visiting practice schools, especially in larger cities and education faculties, have caused some coordination and operation problems (Kavcar 2002). One of the modifications to the revised program concerns practice teaching. Because of the problems encountered at practice schools and due to the view that students visit these practice schools without acquiring the necessary theoretical teaching background, the hours allocated for practicum have been reduced and the School Experience course has been switched to a further term (that is, the 7th term), in which prospective teachers supposedly hold more advanced professional knowledge. During the course of practice teaching, trainee teachers spend one day a week (6 hours) at practice schools as required by the School Experience course in the first term and by Teaching Practice course in the second.

METHODOLOGY

Research Model

In this study, descriptive model has been used to reveal similarities and differences by comparing the practicums in English teacher training programs of the countries in question. For the purpose of the study, the techniques such as demonstration, definition and analysis have also been employed, which are quite common in comparative educational studies. The

qualitative data have been obtained using a questionnaire on the teaching processes. Practicums in these countries have been compared partly with a vertical but mostly a horizontal approach. Previous studies and results have been compiled by conducting a literature review, and it has been concluded that such a comparison will be fruitful to help countries share their experiences. The data has been obtained through a questionnaire administered on the lecturers teaching practicum in the foreign language teacher training programs in Turkey, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan. The teaching methods of experienced lecturers teaching the courses intended to help students acquire pre-service teaching experience have been analyzed and as a result the similarities and differences in practice have been laid down.

Participants

In this study, the questionnaire on practicums has been sent via e-mail to the departments in Turkic Republics in Central Asia. Four countries that satisfactorily responded to the questionnaire have been included in the study. Practice teaching methods of three lecturers each from Turkey and Azerbaijan and two each from Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan have been compared. The data has been obtained through face-to-face interviews in Turkey and via a questionnaire and e-mail in the others. Table 1 shows lecturers, institutions, and their professional experiences.

Table 1: Practicum lecturers

<i>Lecturers</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Institution</i>	<i>Professional experience (year)</i>
Tr_1	Turkey	Gazi University, Gazi Faculty of Education, English Language Teaching	15
Tr_2	Turkey	Gazi University, Gazi Faculty of Education, English Language Teaching	27
Tr_3	Turkey	Gazi University, Gazi Faculty of Education, English Language Teaching	25
Azr_1	Azerbaijan	Azerbaijan University of Languages	23
Azr_2	Azerbaijan	Azerbaijan University of Languages	20
Azr_3	Azerbaijan	Baku Slavic University, English Language and Literature	28
Krg_1	Kyrgyzstan	International Ataturk Alatoo University, English Language and Literature	20
Krg_2	Kyrgyzstan	International Ataturk Alatoo University, English Language and Literature	18
Trkm_1	Turkmenistan	Devletmamet Azady Turkmen National Institute of World Languages	15
Trkm_2	Turkmenistan	Devletmamet Azady Turkmen National Institute of World Languages	22

Data Collection Tools

Open-ended questions in the questionnaire are determined in consideration of the Project of Faculty-School Cooperation and have been improved by reviewing the related literature and in the data collection session in Turkey in accordance with the suggestions of expert practicum lecturers. In the current research, the contents of the responses by the participant lecturers have been analyzed and described for the purpose of the study. In addition, the participants have been asked via email to provide extra data.

Data Analysis

In this study, mainly a qualitative research method has been adopted. Themes and codes achieved via content analyses of the lecturers' responses to the questionnaire items have been comparatively described. The data obtained through comparisons have been compiled to reveal as many similarities and differences as possible. Then this data has been put into tables. The detected similarities and differences have been evaluated to make solution-oriented suggestions about practice teaching.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Practicum teaching in all countries follows the process of observing expert teachers and the school setting and then the teaching practices. However, there are differences in the duration of practicum classes and in semesters in which they are offered. Data on practicum classes, semesters and frequencies are presented in Table 2.

Semesters and frequencies of practicums vary across countries. In Turkey, teacher trainees go to practice schools once a week every week in their last academic year. Trainee teachers in Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan participate

in teaching practice for about two months in the last two academic years whereas practicum classes in Kyrgyzstan are offered in different semesters (5th, 7th, and 10th semesters) for shorter periods of time. In Kyrgyzstan, practice teaching starts earlier than for the others. On the other hand, Turkey has adopted a long and extensive practice teaching process rather than a short and intensive one. Practicum offered in the last year is likely to allow teacher trainees to visit schools as equipped with specialized knowledge and thus to more efficiently observe and appreciate the practice in the light of theoretical knowledge. Table 3 outlines the various duties and responsibilities of the trainee teachers during their practicum in the respective countries.

What trainee teachers have to do during practice teaching is quite similar in all countries. Regular and long visits to schools, observation reports, discussion, and ultimately participation in education process by practicing teaching are required for the development of teaching skills. Thus, all trainee teachers are expected to attend practicums regularly. Reporting or keeping journals is an integral part of each country's practicum teaching and their contents aim at helping students better understand the school's administrative and academic procedures, classroom management, efficient teaching methods and techniques, students' characteristics and evaluation processes. In Kyrgyzstan, it has been observed that it is very important for practicum lecturers to observe trainee teachers communicate with students and get to know them. Each trainee teacher is asked to prepare a report about a student and to give information about him/her, for example, about his/her character, interests and the likes, if possible. Moreover, the trainee teacher is expected to organize activities such as staging a short play in English or organizing an out-of-class activity. This requirement suggests that the responsibility of trainee teachers is not only

Table 2: English teaching practicums

	<i>Turkey</i>	<i>Azerbaijan</i>	<i>Kyrgyzstan</i>	<i>Turkmenistan</i>
Name of the course	-School experience -Teaching Practice	-Teaching observation -Practice	-Passive pedagogical practice -Active pedagogical practice	- Observation - Practice
Practice semester/ year and frequency	7 th and 8 th semester (fall and spring in the last year) Every day in a week	3 rd year 1 month 4 th year 1 month everyday	5 th semester – 2 weeks 7 th semester – 2 weeks 10 th semester – 8 weeks (3 days a week)	4 th and 5 th year 5/6 hours every day during 7-8 weeks

Table 3: Duties and responsibilities of trainee teachers during practicum

<i>Duties and responsibilities of trainee teachers during practicum</i>	
<i>Turkey</i>	Trainee teachers report and file their observations as determined within the context of practicum courses. They are expected to attend practicums regularly. They work with a practice supervisor and fulfill their duties without delaying the schedule. Firstly, they observe daily activities and course planning processes and then practice what they have learned under the control of the practice supervisor and with consideration of his/her feedback. They help the teacher of the observed class with preparations. They observe and learn about such aspects as administrative and academic procedures, teaching plans, teaching processes and activities, course materials and classroom management. They also familiarize themselves with students and communicate with them, evaluate them and actively participate in the process under the guidance of practice supervisor.
<i>Azerbaijan</i>	Trainee teachers begin teaching practice after observing experienced schoolteachers for a week. They are required to keep observing and practicing on a regular basis. They prepare daily reports about their observations. Some of the report contents include details about the students' behaviors, academic achievement, classroom management, methods, use of portfolio in assessment and collaborative learning. Trainee teachers are required to prepare course documents for at least two or three lessons for practicum lecturers to be able to evaluate their performances. Apart from lesson plans, they observe and report the students' activities and psychological moods individually and in groups. Feedback meetings are held with practice supervisors and lectures after practices. Trainee teachers also observe each other's lessons.
<i>Kyrgyzstan</i>	Trainee teachers are required to attend practicums. They regularly keep practice diaries (about teaching methods, in-class activities and behaviors, students' individual behaviors, and teachers' teaching methods). They thoroughly observe lessons of experienced teachers and produce reports on their observations. They help teachers with material preparation and the likes. They are expected to organize a social activity with students (for example, drama). Trainee teachers are required to prepare lesson plans and expected to prepare such lesson plans for 15 to 20 lessons in the course of practice. They keep diaries during the practice and prepare reports on their lessons. They are expected to observe and analyze a student, to describe his/her in-class habits, and to write a character reference letter about him/her. They are expected to organize out-of-class activities. Finally they should submit a report concerning their pedagogical gains. Moreover, they are supposed to give a seminar to share their experiences with junior classes.
<i>Turkmenistan</i>	One teacher at the practice school supervises two trainee teachers. Commitment and regular attendance to observations and practices is obligatory. Trainee teachers visit practice schools every weekday, observe lessons and take notes. When in classroom with the teacher, they write down about their observations on issues such as grammar teaching, materials used, classroom management, students, and evaluation. After observing lessons in company with different teachers in different classes for the first two weeks, trainee teachers are assigned to different practice classes. After trainee teachers have experienced teaching practice in the rest of practicum, the practicum lecturer observes them at least twice and then provides them with feedback.

to effectively employ and transfer his/her skills but also to know each student well. In Kyrgyzstan, trainee teachers' evaluating the practice process and sharing their experiences with junior classes is believed to be useful.

The criteria for trainee teachers to be successful are similar in all the countries being considered. Trainee teachers are required to regularly visit schools both, for observation and practice periods. The final grade is calculated on the basis of observation reports, final gains reports, teaching performances, and practice teacher's opinions (Table 4).

It is evident that lecturers in these countries have made their own suggestions to overcome

problems of top priority. Overpopulated classes and problems resulting from the lack of coordination are among the most common problems. Due to busy schedules, practicum lecturers have difficulty observing teaching practices in crowded groups more than once and giving effective feedback. Furthermore, it has been stated that trainee teachers also go through problems in the event that coordination with the practice schools is not ensured (Table 5).

Lecturers in Azerbaijan note that the duration of the practicum is insufficient and trainee teachers should stay longer at practice schools, and that practicums should start from the first year itself. In Turkey, this suggestion was put

Table 4: Criteria for passing practicum course and performance evaluation

	<i>Criteria for passing practicum course and performance evaluation</i>
<i>Turkey</i>	Apart from regular attendance, all observation reports should be delivered and practice tasks should be fulfilled. The practicum lecturer together with the practice teacher calculates the final grade, after reports are examined and practice performances are observed.
<i>Azerbaijan</i>	Apart from regular attendance, all observation reports should be delivered. For grading, trainee teachers are expected to prepare for two or three lessons. The practicum lecturer and the practice teacher calculate the final grade. In addition to the practicum lecturer, a pedagogue or a psychologist may also observe the trainee teachers.
<i>Kyrgyzstan</i>	During the 3 rd and 4 th year of the training, observations and reports are evaluated. On the other hand, in the last year trainee teachers are evaluated on the basis of their teaching performances. Apart from the practicum lecturers and the practice teachers, sometimes principals, other English teachers, and co-heads of departments observe performances of trainee teachers.
<i>Turkmenistan</i>	Apart from regular attendance, all observation reports should be delivered and practice tasks should be fulfilled. The practicum lecturer and the practice teacher calculate the final grade.

Table 5: The most frequent problems of practicum lecturers and solution-oriented suggestions

	<i>The most frequent problems in practicum</i>	<i>Solution-oriented suggestions for a better practicum</i>
<i>Turkey</i>	- Lack of cooperation and coordination with practice school's administrative staff and teachers and their unwillingness to allocate their classes for practice teaching. - Disappointment of trainee teachers as a result of the fact that practice teachers who are non-field graduates or who suffer from burnout cannot exhibit the behaviors the trainee teachers have been expecting to see.	- As the number of trainee teachers per practice teacher decreases (for example, 1 or 2), they will surely be more willing to spare some of their courses for visiting trainees and to be a more dedicated mentor. - If in-service training becomes widespread, in-class practices of expert teachers may not become obsolete. - Teacher training certificate programs offered to non-ELT graduates should include teaching methods and practicums peculiar to foreign language teaching.
<i>Azerbaijan</i>	- Exiguous practicum- Trainee teachers' difficulty earning respect as a teacher and establishing authority.	- It can produce more fruitful results to offer observation-based classes as of the first year in order for prospective teachers to better know real school settings. - Content of classroom management courses can be made more comprehensive and more time can be allocated for this particular course. Expected problems and probable solutions can be discussed.
<i>Kyrgyzstan</i>	- Practicum lecturers face difficulty monitoring 25-30 trainee teachers more than once due to his/her busy programs. school. - Problems due to lack of coordination with practice - Trainee teachers' problems in managing teenagers.	- If trainee teachers are divided into smaller groups, mentoring and guidance will surely become more effective and organized. - It can be useful to provide more detailed information about classroom management and to encourage practice school teachers to offer more guidance and help for trainee teachers.
<i>Turkmenistan</i>	- Trainee teachers' lack of motivation to participate in practice teaching and their tendency to avoid practice courses for a variety of excuses- Intensive programs of practicum lecturers	- Meetings can be held in order to increase cooperation with academic and administrative staff at practice schools.- The number of trainee teachers per expert teacher at practice schools is not high (2 trainee teachers) but to increase their motivation levels, it should be helpful to increase the opportunities of teaching profession to make it more attractive.

into practice but the efforts failed. Because trainee teachers are unable to make effective observa-

tions without theoretical background, transferring observation practice from the first to the

last year may prove useful and exemplary for Azerbaijan. This case may be taken into consideration to reorganize the practicum teaching.

Lecturers in Kyrgyzstan express that it is likely to be efficient to provide more detailed theoretical knowledge, a more dedicated mentorship and support, and a well-planned orientation especially in classroom management. Moreover, lecturers also note that they are encumbered by the observations as of the 3rd year of the five-year teacher training and the practice in the last year. They are of the opinion that the process can effectively be implemented with smaller groups.

The most significant problem according to Turkmen lecturers is that majority of the prospective teachers do not wish to do teaching but better paying jobs after graduation, which makes them reluctant to participate in practicums. They express that this situation can be improved by bettering the working conditions of teachers.

Turkish lecturers point out that practice school principals and teachers might be reluctant due to the excessive number of trainee teachers simultaneously visiting practice schools especially in overcrowded cities and departments. The lecturers have associated their reluctance with the number (that is, around 6) of the trainee teachers allocated to each expert teacher and suggested that this problem can be solved with smaller groups.

Trainee teachers state that discrepancies between requirements of their training in foreign language education and practices they observe are demoralizing. They note that inappropriate practices of the expert teachers they have visited are disappointing. The lecturers in Turkey state that in-service trainings should be conducted and teachers who graduated earlier than the changes in the recent training program should also attend in-service trainings to catch up on how to teach young learners.

In this respect, they point out that non-ELT graduates are employed as English teachers due to the fact that the number of ELT graduates cannot satisfy the need for foreign language teachers. Therefore, they suggest that pedagogy education offered to non-ELT graduates should include and focus on foreign language teaching, in particular foreign language teaching to young learners.

CONCLUSION

As the need for integration into the rapidly developing world rises, comparative education-

al studies have become increasingly important. From this viewpoint, because Turkey has been going through a process to become an EU member, it has taken for granted for the Turkish academia to carry out studies concerning the EU countries and their education systems. However, there is exiguous comparative research on education systems of Turkic Republics with which Turkey holds historical and cultural bonds and is socio-economically and strategically getting more connected. Therefore, educational cooperation with Turkic Republics is as important as an economic partnership. Thus, it would be beneficial to pinpoint the similarities and differences in practicums being an integral part of English language teacher training programs in the aforementioned countries.

The present study aims to investigate how expert lecturers organize and coordinate the practice teaching in Turkey, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan, to reveal similarities and differences in practicums, to pinpoint the most frequently encountered problems, and to make some solution-oriented suggestions. Qualitative data on practices have been collected using a questionnaire. Although practices are centralized and supposed to be standardized in these countries, individual approaches of lecturers can be quite effective indeed. Therefore, the results are limited to the lecturers' practicum teaching approaches, their views about the problems they have encountered and probable solutions. In other words, it is limited to one-to-one practices and lecturers' approaches. The questionnaire is administered face-to-face in Turkey and through e-mail in Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan. Data is assumed to be reliable.

Once the findings of the study are made comparable through the qualitative analysis methods, it becomes easy to find similarities and differences. Practicum courses can be performed more effectively as a result of systematic interaction among the parties to inform each other about their own practices, gains and problems. For instance, lecturers in Azerbaijan emphasize the importance of practicum and note that practice teaching and observation should begin in the first year. Similarly, in the previous reconstruction process in Turkey (1997), the School Experience I was included in the first year program. Nevertheless, due to the problems faced during the implementation of the program, this course was removed from the revised program in

2006 and a new practice was introduced in the last year when trainee teachers were supposed to have already acquired background knowledge and could benefit from the process more effectively. It will be useful that lecturers in Azerbaijan are informed about this once-practiced-then-abandoned program. Likewise, thanks to shared experiences, practices considered to prove useful can be generalized. Mini seminars, which are organized by lecturers in Kyrgyzstan wherein trainee teachers share their experiences with junior teacher trainees, can be included in the training programs by lecturers in other countries. It will be useful for junior teacher training students to learn about experiences, difficulties, or suggestions of the senior trainees at a meeting or seminar that the seniors will organize before their graduation. Even if not indicated in the program, practicum lecturers can take initiatives to introduce such activities in the practice teaching programs of other countries. A trainee teacher's getting to know a student, writing a report about his/her character and interests, and organizing (out-of-class) social activities can be counted among "the best practices". Practices of this kind, which primarily indicate that trainee teachers hold the responsibility arising from the very nature of teaching profession rather than mere background knowledge, can be incorporated in their practicum classes by lecturers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The researchers expect the results obtained in this study to establish the ground for a more comprehensive study with the participation of a larger corpus of countries and via official institutions. Moreover, student and lecturer mobility programs between Turkey and Turkic Republics like the ones with European countries are believed to prove fruitful to compare and develop education programs, share experiences, and improve intercultural communication.

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