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Community Service Practices: Prospective Teachers' Views on Its Implementation Process and Outcomes

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate the opinions of prospective teachers enrolled at the Department of English Language Teaching (ELT) concerning the implementation process and the outcomes of Community Service Practices (CSP) course. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used in different phases of this descriptive study. To collect data, researchers made use of a questionnaire and interview questions. As for data analysis, the data obtained from the quantitative part of the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics. For the qualitative part of the research, content analysis was applied to analyze the views of prospective teachers about the ways of increasing the efficiency of CSP course in ELT. The results revealed that most of the prospective teachers performed the projects within the scope of CSP by experiencing/doing themselves. They believe that volunteering is essential; however, they faced some problems while carrying out the projects. They emphasized that this course would provide them the opportunity to apply the experiences they obtained in their future English teaching profession. Moreover, they also pointed out the CSP course drove them to be more sensitive to social problems. Bearing these findings in mind, some implications were drawn at the end of the study about the ways of increasing the efficiency of the CSP course. A final suggestion was that the faculty administration should support the works of the prospective teachers, solve the problems they faced, and **meet their needs**.

Key words: Community Service Practice, Projects, Teacher Education

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Introduction

Education has a vital role in shaping both the individual and the society. One of the main goals of education is to educate responsible individuals who can search and find information, learn and process the information that he/she has found, and use the information especially for the benefit of society. As education programs are expected to equip individuals with social responsibility and sensitivity to social problems, Community Service Practices (CSP hereafter) has been of great prominence in university education in Turkey. In this respect, to make the education faculties more functional, CSP started to take place as a course in the curriculum of teaching programs at education faculties of universities in Turkey in 2006.

The inclusion of Community Service Learning which is sustained more systematically than volunteerism and cooperation to the teacher training program is fairly new (Öğülmüş, 2006). In the CSP course guideline issued by the Council of Higher Education, it is mentioned that the prospective teachers who take this course are sensitive to local and universal problems and find solutions to these problems. They are active participants in solving local and global problems and they generate new projects against these problems. They also work in cooperation, establish effective communication both within the project and outside the projects while executing projects, participate to the scientific activities such as panels, conferences, congress, symposia as an audience, a speaker or an organizer, enhance self-assessment skills, and use creative thinking skills in all these events.

With the help of this course, prospective teachers could both improve their social relations patterns and learn more about themselves by becoming aware of their affective characteristics; in a way, they could get a sense of affective satisfaction. In addition, as well as social and emotional development, the skills which are gained through the active roles taken in the community will facilitate the academic growth and ultimately, will give individuals the skills and habits that will meet their career prospects more. It is reported that community service learning brings new life into the classroom, enhances academic performance, increases the interest of students in the subject and teaches them how to deal with problems (Hatcher & Erasmus, 2008).

Prospective teachers are at the heart of teaching/learning process. Their views on the course are quite important to implement a sound English Language Teaching (ELT hereafter) program. However, the research covering CSP course in the field of ELT in Turkey is limited (Boran & Karakuş, 2017; Hişmanoğlu, 2011; Külekçi, 2014; Tülüce, 2014).

Purpose of the Study

This research is significant in that it will contribute to the literature about CSP as a course in ELT that will build the cooperation between the community and universities. Moreover, it is of great importance for prospective teachers, instructors and educators to assess the CSP which has been involved in ELT Program since 2006 in depth, to determine in what extent the activities and/or projects carried out within the framework of CSP achieved the expected outcomes. It is also thought that this research will contribute to determining the existing problems and to eliminating these existing problems related to the CSP course carried out at the department of ELT. In this respect, this study aims to draw attention to the prospective teachers' views about the CSP course itself, the implementation process and outcomes of activities/projects they complete within the scope of the course in the department of ELT by investigating the following research questions:

1. What are the prospective teachers' views regarding the implementation process and the outcomes of the CSP course at the ELT Department?
2. What are the prospective teachers' views regarding the ways of increasing the efficiency of CSP course?

Methodology

Research Design

To get benefit from the strengths and to minimize the weaknesses of both quantitative and qualitative research in a single study, both methods were used in this descriptive study (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993). Firstly, prospective teachers were asked to state their expectations from the course through open-ended questions at the beginning of the term. In the light of their responses to the open-ended questions, a questionnaire which was originally adapted from Arcagök's (2011) study was formed to obtain the views of prospective teachers regarding the implementation process and outcomes of CSP in ELT. The questionnaire involved both the items that are formed from the responses of the prospective teachers to the open-ended questions and the ones adapted from Arcagök's study. In the second part of the questionnaire, they were asked to express their views about what should be done to increase the efficiency of CSP in ELT. Moreover, prospective teachers were interviewed to clarify and explain the results obtained from the questionnaire items.

Research Sample

The researchers made use of purposeful sampling while choosing the participants of the study. 158 third year prospective teachers who were taking CSP course at a state university, department of ELT involved in the study. 118 of participants were female (74.7 %) and 40 of them were male (25.3 %).

Research Instrument and Procedures

The questionnaire was administered to 158 prospective teachers. Furthermore, in order to explore and interpret the statistical findings of the quantitative part of the study through broad perspectives, prospective teachers were also interviewed. To clarify the results emerged from the quantitative part, semi-structured interview questions were asked to the 20 interviewees. Their responses to questionnaire items and open ended part of the questionnaire, and to the interview questions helped the researchers to assess CSP course in the department of ELT. The researchers conducted the questionnaire under the supervision of the lecturers who taught or were teaching CSP course.

Validity and Reliability

Before forming the questionnaire to be used in the pilot study, three instructors and one expert who supervise CSP courses were asked to express their opinions about the questionnaire and some of them believed that the questionnaire items had been very long. Hence, the researchers revised the items of the questionnaire and some items were changed or omitted in the light of their ideas. The questionnaire was limited to the 40 items and three parts. To gather the data needed, the questionnaire was first piloted to avoid any difficulties, it was then utilized in the main study. The researchers analyzed the internal consistency of the questionnaire items. The reliability of the modified and proofread questionnaire revealed a Cronbach's alpha score of $\alpha = .92$. This score indicated high reliability for the survey to be used in the study (Büyükoztürk, 2006). In order to ensure the validity of the study, interview questions were checked by three ELT experts, and the final form of the questions was reached under the direction of experts' opinions and suggestions.

Data Analysis

The data obtained through the questionnaire were analyzed through descriptive statistics by using SPSS 20 version. For the qualitative aspect of the study, 117 prospective teachers gave suggestions about how to teach the course in ELT more efficiently. Content analysis was employed to analyze their opinions about the ways of increasing the efficiency of the course. Data were collected and transcribed. Then, the researchers analytically developed and identified codes in the data. Then, they transformed the codes into categorical themes. Finally, prospective teachers' answers were sorted by these categories (Lune & Berg, 2017). To form these categories, the researchers made use of Microsoft Excel program writing each participant's responses in one column and the researchers' interpretations to them in the next column (Meyer & Avery, 2009). Second, a semi-structured interview was utilized to get a deeper understanding related to prospective teachers' views about the implementation process and outcomes of CSP course placed in the ELT program. Similarly, the data obtained from the

interviews were content analyzed. The interview results were used to support and to countercheck the findings from the questionnaire (Creswell, 2003).

Results

Findings Related to the Implementation Process of the CSP Course

Table 1 displays the highest mean values of the questionnaire items regarding the implementation process of activities/projects carried out within the scope of CSP course. Table 1 demonstrates that 87.3 percent of the prospective teachers learned the projects mostly by participating themselves ($\bar{X} = 4.34$, $SD = .76$). 82.3 percent of them also claimed that they did projects/activities voluntarily ($\bar{X} = 4.28$, $SD = 1.0$).

Table 1

Mean Values of Participants' Responses regarding the Implementation Process

		\bar{X}	SD	% Agree
Carrying out the projects through experiencing/doing	158	4.34	.76	87.3
Carrying out the projects/activities voluntarily	158	4.28	1.0	82.3

The interview results support this finding. 12 prospective teachers indicated that volunteering is essential in community service. A participant shared her views about the issue as follows:

I.8: Most importantly, we were joining the activities fondly because this course was very different from other courses. For one thing, you expect something in return from other courses. You do not feel any pressure from anybody. For me, it was a great experience. As you know, we were always forced to do something in other courses. There was no teacher pressure in this course, actually.

In Table 2, it can be seen that though 64 percent of the prospective teachers agreed the allocated time was sufficient enough to complete the projects, a considerable number of them ($n = 39$) were undecided about the practicality of the time allocated.

Table 2

Frequency Distribution of Participants' Responses regarding the Implementation Process

The Projects implemented at the "CSP" course ...	Disagree		Neutral		Agree	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
are practical enough in terms of the time allotted.	18	11.4	39	24.6	101	64
cover the topics of my interest.	25	15.8	40	25.3	93	58.8
caused me to have some difficulties during the implementation phase.	32	20.3	47	29.7	79	50

A few interviewees emphasized the inadequacy of the practice hours.

I.1: We do not have enough time to carry out our works and to work together and to solve these problems; first we should have more opportunity to meet with the project advisor and more time should be given to accomplish the project. More importantly, bureaucratic obstacles should be removed to begin the projects as soon as possible.

As for the attraction of project topics, 25.3 percent of prospective teachers also did not find the project topics interesting. The interviewees gave their suggestions about how to get more benefits from the projects.

I.7: Preservice teachers must decide where he would like to work and what project(s) he would like to do by themselves. For example, I would love to work with young learners at a kindergarten but I was asked to work in a different place. In this course, students should be certainly let to decide for themselves about what to do. Otherwise, the desired results cannot be produced from the course.

Additionally, half of the participants indicated that they experienced some difficulties while they were carrying out their projects.

I.10: *Transportation costs* could have been covered by the university. We had to spend our own pocket money to go to the school or the institution.

I.5: We had great problems because we were *lack of the official permits* approved by the faculty and the institutions were reluctant to let us do the projects without certificate of approval. Therefore, I think faculty administration should have previously received permissions to overcome such kind of problems.

Another participant mentioned about the *problem they experienced arising from the institutions*:

I.3: Institution employees exhibited negative behaviors towards us. Especially we experienced some problems frequently in state institutions. First of all, they do not want us to get involved in their works and they see this work as a chore.

Besides some prospective teachers experienced *communication problems*:

I.7: There was a mismatch between the times of the institutions and us. Our timing did not correspond to the institution's timing. Besides, the employees did not respect us and our work. They did not help us.

Findings Related to the Gains of the CSP Course

Based on the findings in Table 3, it can be inferred that the vast majority of the prospective teachers (82.3 %) were able to apply the experiences they gain through CSP on their teaching profession ($\bar{X} = 4.15$, $SD = .88$). They also stated that the projects/activities they implemented at the CSP course allowed them to be competent at their teaching profession. Additionally, such practices were useful for their ELT career ($\bar{X} = 4.01$).

Table 3

Results of the Participants' Responses to the items regarding the Career Development

Career Development Items		\bar{X}	SD	Agree %
Allowing to apply the experiences gained through CSP on one's teaching profession	158	4.15	.88	82.3
Allowing to be competent at one's teaching profession	158	4.01	.91	80.4
Being useful for one's teaching profession of English	158	4.01	1.0	74.7

Related to the professional outcomes of the course, some interviewees claimed that the course provided a lot of opportunities for prospective teachers to gain teaching experience.

I.2: Thanks to this project, I believe that I gained such a great teaching experience that I will never get in any practicum, perhaps.

I.18: I had the chance to practice my knowledge that I learned theoretically. It was a very beneficial experience for my future profession.

As for the social outcomes of CSP, the statistics demonstrate that the projects/activities conducted at the CSP course provided most prospective teachers the opportunity of being more responsive to social problems ($\bar{X} = 4.15$, $SD = .88$). One substantial finding is that the projects/activities enabled them to identify the needs of the community ($\bar{X} = 4.13$, $SD = .83$).

Table 4

Results of the Participants' Responses to the items regarding Social/Community Development

Social/Community Development Items		\bar{X}	SD	Agree%
Allowing to be more responsive to social problems	158	4.15	.88	79.7
Helping to identify the needs of the community	158	4.13	.83	79.8

Prospective teachers said that the projects they performed enabled them to realize their responsibilities towards the society.

I.11: I noticed that if I, as a teacher candidate, know a variety of features of the society, I could solve the problems caused by social features in the institution that I'm going to serve in the future more easily.

Based on the findings illustrated in Table 5, it can be indicated that there are a large number of benefits of CSP course in ELT in terms of their self-improvement. Primarily, it is apparent that most of them highlighted the projects/activities they implemented within the framework of CSP made them feel good about themselves since they participated them on a volunteer basis.

Table 5

Results of the Participants' Responses to the items regarding Self- Improvement

Self- Improvement Items		\bar{X}	SD
One's feeling good about himself/herself as he/she participated voluntarily	158	4.38	.95
Developing one's self-confidence	158	4.34	.84
Developing one's consciousness of social responsibility	158	4.27	.84
Contributing to one's being more sociable	158	4.23	.82

An interviewee made positive comments about this issue as the following:

I.1: To make new circles of friends, exert efforts to achieve something on our own and to taste that sense of achievement when we made it happen, all of them, worth all the fatigue and labor we experienced.

Undeniably, with the second highest mean value, the statistics display that CSP course develops their self-confidence. Prospective teachers emphasized that the projects/activities carried out within the framework of the course increased their self-confidence.

I.2: CSP course allowed me to taste me the feeling of being able to make something useful by myself for a purpose. So, my self-confidence has increased.

Third, a great many of them became more conscious and responsible against the society they are a member of.

I.13: When I look at my environment, I can notice many cases that need to be improved. By spreading the idea of serving to the community both to my kin and students, I'm trying to increase their awareness and to find solutions to the unresolved problems of our country together.

Fourthly, a considerable number of prospective teachers (86.1%) admitted that they became more sociable after they took part in the projects/activities at CSP course.

I.3: To be frank, at first I was not a social person. I contacted with officials there on my own. In this way, I think I've made great strides in terms of socialization.

I.9: Thanks to this course, we socialized with our group of friends and we know each other better. This course was useful in having good relationships with the people in the institutions, sharing something with them, doing something together with a purpose.

Findings Related to the Ways of Increasing the Efficiency of CSP Course

To detect prospective teachers' perspectives concerning the ways of increasing the efficiency of CSP in the ELT Department, content analysis was used. Table 6 displays the most five outstanding suggestions that are put forward by prospective teachers with regard to the ways of increasing the efficiency of the course.

Table 6

The Frequency and Percentage Table of Five Striking Suggestions

Five Striking Suggestions	F	%
The activities/projects should be done voluntarily.	27	24.5
Preservice teachers should be educated and guided by the course instructors about the objectives and outcomes of the course clearly.	14	12.7
The course instructor should guide the prospective teachers about what useful projects they can perform specifically and how they can serve the community better.	14	12.7
Student teachers should be encouraged to perform different and fun projects.	13	11.8
This course should be conducted in a more organized and planned way; students' duties and responsibilities should be determined well by the course instructor.	13	11.8

When Table 6 is examined, it can be seen that 27 (24.5%) prospective teachers claimed that the activities/projects carried out within the framework of CSP should be based on voluntariness. They should not be forced upon to do projects. Some of them implied that they do the projects unwillingly. They even call it as "obligatory volunteering". The second striking suggestion offered by 14 prospective teachers is that they should be informed about the objectives and outcomes of CSP well. They stated that they do not know exactly what the course objectives are, and what outcomes are expected to obtain from this course. Again the same number of participants remarked that they do not know what to do within the framework of this course and they added that they would like to perform useful projects for the benefit of society and they need to be guided by their supervisors in this respect. In the same vein, 13 prospective teachers emphasized that they should be encouraged to implement different and entertaining activities/projects so that the course can become more functional and they will be able to address to the different sections of society. Another main issue is that there is a big problem in organizing and planning stages of the course. 13 prospective teachers stated that the curriculum of the course is not determined well at the very beginning of the term. They complained that at the beginning of the course, a problem arises about the distribution of their duties and responsibilities. They believed that if the course instructor cannot assign the roles very well for each student or group, this situation creates chaos among themselves about the distribution of tasks.

Discussion

Participants' responses to first research question regarding the implementation process of activities/projects carried out within the scope of CSP in the ELT Department indicate that most of prospective teachers conducted the projects through experiencing/doing by themselves. Zimmerman (2010) argues that the basic philosophy of education depends on students' producing tangible products by doing and experiencing themselves. Thus, the results verify Zimmerman's statements. Students learn mostly by doing and experiencing themselves. Similarly, Arcagök (2011) and Gökçe (2011) stated that CSP offers pre-service teachers the opportunity to learn by doing and experiencing.

A large number of participants mentioned that they carried out the projects voluntarily. Volunteerism, as one of the basic principles of CSP, is an important factor in conducting projects properly by pre-service teachers (Çuhadar, 2008). In the studies of Acer, Şen and Ergül (2012), Ayvaci & Akyıldız (2009), Elma et al. (2010), Kocadere and Seferoğlu (2013); it was concluded that to carry out an event successfully, the individuals who attended the activities believed that the activities should be performed in a voluntary manner. Therefore, volunteer works must be supported to get full benefit of this existing significant student potential. Though participants believe that CSP course has some advantages, they have had some difficulties during the implementation phase of the projects such as transportation costs, lack of official permits, negative attitudes of the people working at the project institutions and communication problems. Similar problems were found in the reflective journals of the teacher candidates participated in Küçüköğlu, Ozan and Taşgın's (2016) study.

With regard to the impact of CSP course on their career development, an overwhelming number of participant prospective teachers highlighted that CSP course allowed them to apply the experiences

they gained to their teaching profession. In the studies of Hişmanoğlu (2011), and Strage et al. (2002), prospective teachers indicated that CSP course provided them with opportunities to gain early field experiences and thus they would become competent at their teaching profession of English since they got the required tactics and strategies to become successful in their future teaching career. This finding also corroborated with the studies of Akçay and Ensar (2014) and Küçüköğlu (2011) in which prospective teachers thought that they would make use of the skills, attitudes, values and knowledge they gained via CSP course in their future professional lives. The prospective teachers who participated in CSP actively also asserted that they obtained more information and opportunities about their careers than their peers who could not participate in this process actively did. Similarly, Gallego (2001), Hasırcı and Sarı (2013), Kesten (2012), Shumer, Lam, and Laabs (2012), Uğurlu and Kırıl (2013) pointed out that CSP course developed teacher candidates' professional skills related to their fields. Consequently, research suggested that the activities performed within the scope of CSP improve the professional knowledge and skills of prospective teachers.

In regard to social development of prospective teachers, participants remarked that they became more sensitive to social problems after they carried out the projects. Likewise, there are studies that express CSP course enables pre-service teachers to be more sensitive to social problems (Arcagök, 2011; Ayvaci & Akyıldız, 2009; Giles & Eyler, 1994; Hasırcı & Sarı, 2013; Keleş & Aydın, 2011; Kesten, 2012; Kocadere & Seferoğlu, 2013). Another important finding was that pre-service teachers denoted that CSP course enabled them to identify the needs of the society. This finding is also parallel to the findings of the previous studies. In the relevant literature, it was emphasized that the aim of this course was to make prospective teachers be aware of the existing social needs and they were expected to prepare projects to meet these needs (Coşkun, 2009; Özdemir & Tokcan, 2010; Tanrıseven & Yelken, 2011).

When the contributions of CSP course to the personal development of prospective teachers were examined, prospective teachers of English stated that CSP affected their personal development positively. First of all, the majority of them highlighted that CSP course improved their self-confidence. In Gökçe's (2011) study, prospective teachers mentioned that CSP had important contributions in improving their self-confidence, accordingly. In other studies carried out in this area, it was agreed that this course increased prospective teachers' self-confidence as well (Akçay & Ensar, 2014; Elma et al., 2010; Küçüköğlu, 2011). ELT teacher candidates' awareness of taking responsibility towards the society they live in increased as a result of their experiences. In line with this finding, Sönmez (2010) maintained that to develop responsible and considerate behaviors on students, they should be provided the opportunity to participate in CSP. The prospective teachers who faced with social problems, reflected on, and discussed about those problems posed a more responsible attitude towards social problems (Allen, 1997). Prospective teachers of ELT also admitted that the community service practices they performed developed them socially. This finding was congruent with the findings obtained from the studies of Dinçer, Ergül, Şen, and Çabuk (2011); Erkan, Uludağ, and Burçak (2012); Kılınç and Dere (2014).

With respect to the second research question, prospective teachers were asked to state their views about how to increase the efficiency of CSP course and they made valuable suggestions for the betterment of it. First of all, as a key fact, the overwhelming number of prospective teachers stressed that the activities or projects within the framework of CSP should be done on a voluntary basis. The result obtained from this research is similar to the results of the studies conducted by Acer et al. (2012), Çetin and Sönmez (2009), Tomkovick, Lester, Flunker, and Wells (2008), in which prospective teachers emphasized that volunteering must be a basis in CSP. Secondly, prospective teachers declared that they should be informed about the aims and outcomes of the CSP course explicitly. Likewise, the teacher candidates in the studies of Arcagök (2011), and Arcagök and Şahin (2013) stressed that to make CSP course more efficient, the aim, scope and quality of the projects that will be carried out within the scope of CSP course should be distinct. The third mostly favored suggestion made by them was that they should be guided and informed about the useful projects that they can perform for the benefit of the society. (Acer et al., 2012; Elma et al., 2010; Gökçe, 2011; Küçüköğlu, Korkmaz, Köse, & Taşgın, 2014; and Çuhadar, 2008). They claimed that instructors must offer students the projects that are capable of opening new horizons to them. The results obtained from

prospective teachers' opinions also showed that they should be promoted to participate in and carry out distinctive activities or projects. In the same direction, Kesten (2012) suggested that the prospective teachers who carried out creative projects should be rewarded. In the study of Hasırcı & Sarı (2013), participants suggested that the number of projects implemented should be increased and diversified and special attention should be paid to develop original and useful projects. Another inference that can be made based on the prospective teachers' opinions is that the activities or projects should be organized in a more organized and planned manner. Similarly, it was remarked that the planning and implementation of projects must be scheduled appropriately in the studies of Gökçe (2011), and Küçüköğlu (2011).

Conclusion and Suggestions

Prospective teachers' suggestions regarding community service practices are important as they reflect the problems they faced. In order to carry out CSP more effectively and successfully in the targeted period and organize the necessary works, the responsible people who will coordinate the entire process of the CSP course should be identified and announced in advance. The division coordinators should get detailed information about the institutions and organizations; should examine the activities of institutions and organizations carefully and should observe the functioning of institutions and organizations. Moreover, they should prefer the institutions and organizations which have adequate opportunities for CSP and acquired enough experience and knowledge on CSP. It must be ensured that the institutions and organizations which give importance to the development of prospective teachers' social and personal skills rather than their own institutional needs and bear the understanding that can contribute to the socialization of the prospective teachers should be chosen for CSP. Constant cooperation and communication with the partner institutions should be provided in the application, reflection, and evaluation phases of the course.

The instructors should inform the prospective teachers about the purposes and stages of the course. They should also be informed about the issues such as the definition of the project concept, the stages of projects, the project specifications before the applications. Another important point is that they should be provided with the opportunity of selecting projects that give them rich learning experiences; provide them learning through doing and experiencing so that they can meet their interests and expectations and social needs, and can improve their professional knowledge.

The projects that will be implemented within the context of CSP should have a content that increases prospective teachers' level of social responsibility and awareness; develops their understanding of empathy, social and personal skills; contributes to their cognitive development; strengthens their consciousness of active citizenship; encourages them to be community volunteers. Most important of all, to carry out the projects within the scope of CSP comfortably, efficiently and effectively, the faculty administration should support the works of the prospective teachers; solve the problems they faced; and meet their needs. Only then, a successful implementation of the CSP course is possible.

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