

# A STUDY OF STUDENT TEACHER EXPERIENCES AND EXPECTATIONS OF TEACHING PRACTICE

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**Abstract** – *The aim of this study is to explore the differences in student teachers' experiences and expectations in teaching practice. For this purpose four questions were formulated to examine student teachers' experiences and expectations in general and according to gender, type of partner school they attend for teaching practice, and number of sessions they teach during teaching practice. A total of 230 fourth year (senior) prospective teachers from English Language Teaching departments of different Faculties of Education participated in the study. A bipolar 33 item (five-point Likert-type) questionnaire with an attached short information sheet was used for data collection. One-way ANOVA and t-test were the main statistical procedures utilized for data analysis. Findings of the study revealed that there was a statistically significant difference between student teachers' experiences and expectations, that there was a difference between male and female student teachers' experiences, but that there were no statistically significant differences according to the number of sessions they teach at practice school they attended.*

## Introduction

**A**long with efforts to improve and professionalize teaching, how beginning teachers learn to teach has been the focus of considerable amount of research since Dewey, who emphasized learner-centered instruction and who was a strong advocate of experiential teacher education (Huling, 1998). Since the act of teaching during teaching practice (practicum) sets the scene for teaching across the life span (Mc Dermott, Gromley, Rothenberg & Hammer, 1995; Zahorik, 1988), school experience components of teacher education programs contribute a lot to the process of learning to teach. Tomlinson (1995) draws attention to the general belief that teaching needs to be learned through engagement in the practice of teaching and suggests that student teaching serves prospective teachers with the opportunity of putting theory into practice and experiencing decision-making under the supervision of experienced practitioners: cooperating teachers (mentors) and university instructors (supervisors). Furthermore, Woods-Mays & Weasmer (2003) state that student teaching plays an important role in shaping pre-service teachers' values, beliefs, and teaching skills.

Mayer & Goldsberry (1992, cited in McGlenn, 2003) also believe that the professional development of student teachers depends on opportunities to consider their beliefs in the light of experiences they encounter, where they will student teach, and with whom (Lemlech & Kaplan, 1990). Under supervision, student teachers develop skills in classroom management, learning process, planning, selecting teaching materials and strategies, and assessing pupil progress. During student teaching, a new pattern of thinking and knowing emerges with respect to understanding self as a teacher with the help of broadening pedagogical knowledge, applying and sharing new knowledge with cooperating teacher (mentor). Johnston (1994) emphasizes this by asserting that student teachers and supervising teachers require a clear understanding of the learning process in student teaching so they can actively take a role in making most of the often limited time spent in the classroom.

However, as Doreen (2000) states, for many reasons related to contexts and persons, the quality of teaching practice varies greatly in different settings that may not be designed to prepare teachers and may be beyond the control of institutions (McIntyre, 1990 in Sikula, Buttery & Guyton, 1996). For some student teachers, all the time spent in teaching practice will be meaningful and educative, for others that may be true only some of the time; still others may have several difficult or frustrating teaching practice experiences. Although the literature generally emphasizes the importance of teaching practice, its role in initial teacher education (pre-service education), responsibilities of all parties involved in the process and some of the problems encountered during the process, few studies address student teachers' experiences and expectations in relation to some personal and contextual variables.

## **Background of the present study**

In Turkey, it is common practice in teacher training programs for students to follow school experience studies that last two academic semesters and to be engaged in teaching practice for one academic semester—this in addition to following educational theory, subject area and teaching methods courses. The first school experience is scheduled in the second semester of the freshmen year or in the first semester of sophomore, and the second one is in the seventh semester of the four-year undergraduate program. Prospective teachers (students who study at faculties of education) are also supposed to attend a semester of teaching practice in the last semester in the program.

The focus of the present study is on teaching practice—an element of field experience which covers both school experience and teaching practice—of

student teachers in English language teaching departments that takes place in the second semester of the senior (8<sup>th</sup> semester) year. English Language Teaching is a four-year program in which students are admitted on the basis of a nation-wide university entrance exam. All teacher training colleges (Faculties of Education) follow a similar program for the training of English Language Teachers. Prospective teachers in their senior year are assigned to schools (practice schools/partner school) for teaching practice, after these schools are determined in a district meeting held among faculty coordinators, province director of education, and school coordinators.

Student teachers start teaching practice after successfully completing the courses on teaching profession, teaching methods, planning instruction and evaluation, learning and development, and classroom management. In addition, student teachers are informed about the responsibilities they will take on and the tasks they will fulfill in teaching practice. A teaching practice guide book also covers the roles and responsibilities of all parties involved in teaching practice. They have a cooperating teacher at school, and a supervisor (university instructor) at the university, responsible for guiding and leading student teaching. As it is stated in the regulations and rules of the Turkish Ministry of National Education (MONE, 1998), during the field experience, a cooperating teacher can accept up to 6 student teachers for monitoring in school experience or teaching practice. Every student teacher is expected to spend six hours at the partner school each week for 14 weeks (The Council of Higher Education, 1998). Student teachers also meet with their peers every week to share the observations they have noted in different schools during teaching practice under the guidance and supervision of their supervisors.

However, although regulations and rules are clearly stated regarding ‘field experiences’, there are some variables that influence the expectations and experiences of student teachers. Although understanding the expectations and experiences of student teachers is in itself of importance since understanding the relationship between the two would add to our knowledge about practice teaching, there are some other variables that mediate between each of these dimensions. Thus, this study focuses on student teachers’ experiences and expectations in relation to gender, number of teaching sessions (although 14 weeks are proposed, it can vary), type of partner school where teaching practice takes place (such as general public, private, and Anatolian high schools where the opportunities vary in terms of facilities, structures, and school climate in general), as well as an overall portrait of experiences and expectations of student teachers. In order to understand the role of these variables in experiences and expectations of student teachers, the following questions were explored:

- Is there a difference between what student teachers experience and what they expect in teaching practice?
- Do student teachers' experiences and expectations about teaching practice differ in terms of gender?
- Do student teachers' experiences and expectations about teaching practice differ in terms of type of practice school attended?
- Do student teachers' experiences and expectations about teaching practice differ in terms of the number of teaching sessions they realize?

## **Method**

### *Participants*

The participants of this study were 228 (174 female and 54 male) student teachers from six Departments of English Language Teaching at six universities located in five different geographical regions in Turkey (out of seven geographical regions). These universities are among the large size ones in their region and each year admit between 60 and 140 students to the English Language Teaching Department. The participants were in their 4<sup>th</sup> year in the program and volunteered to participate in the study. Other than 19.1% of missing CGPA scores the rest had satisfactory ( $CGPA \geq 2.00$ ) or higher scores. The participants represent 35% of senior English Language students from these six universities attending their teaching practice. The selection of universities was based on a set of criteria that included (a) institutions followed similar teaching practice procedures, (b) they offered an English Language teaching program, and (c) they were willing to cooperate.

### *Data collection instrument*

For the present study a five-point Likert-type questionnaire, ranging from 5 = 'always' to 1 = 'never', was designed to measure student teachers' experiences and expectations separately. As a result two scores for each item were obtained: one for the experiences and one for the expectations.

In the development of the questionnaire, first, items were written based on the literature review of conceptual framework on student teaching, clinical experience, learning to teach, field experience as well as the rules and regulations regarding teaching practice in the manuals prepared by MONE (1998) and The Council of Higher Education (HEC) (1998) as guides for student teachers, cooperating teachers, and supervisors. A list of draft items was formed and then

was given to two faculty members from the department of English Language teaching who were involved in student teaching for the revision of these items. Based on the feedback received from the faculty members the number of items was reduced from 38 to 33. Five items were eliminated because they were not clearly stated and there were items that tested the same aspect. Then, the questionnaire was sent to five faculty members including the two faculty in the first step. Two of the new faculty were from education sciences and one from an English Language Teaching Department, from a different institution, who were actively involved in student teaching activities or indirectly interested in field practice. Expert judgment and advice regarding the clarity of items was sought. In addition the questionnaire was administered to a group of 37 student teachers (not included in the group of participants) from a university other than the six included in this study. This was an attempt to ensure the validity of the questionnaire. After the data was collected, a further attempt to ensure validity was made by running a principle component analysis with Kaiser Normalization. Factor analysis carried out with the data obtained from 228 student teachers indicated that for both experience and expectation the instrument was one-dimensional. Most of the loading was on the first factors. The initial eigenvalues for the first factors were 14.64 and 15.39, and explained 26.28 % and 20 % of the total variance respectively. Even though there were other factors with eigenvalues greater than one, the scree plots (Green & Salkind, 2003) for experiences and expectations indicated one-dimension. The total variance explained by the three factors was 62.79 % for experiences and, 42 % for expectations.

The internal consistency coefficient was .96 for both experience and expectation indicating a high degree of reliability in this aspect. On the other hand the correlation between experience and expectation scores was 0.32, indicating that student teachers assessed their experiences and expectations rather independently.

An information sheet was also attached to the questionnaire for collecting data regarding student teachers' gender, type of practice school attended and, the number of realized teaching sessions.

### *Data collection procedures*

As for the data collection procedures the researcher contacted one faculty member from the English Language Teaching Department of each university selected for the study who then received, administered, and sent back the questionnaires to the researcher. Before the instrument was mailed for implementation, the necessary clearance from the institutions was obtained and the department heads were informed about the purpose and the contact person.

The questionnaire was administered to student teachers in a weekly colloquium session regularly held with student teachers under the supervision and guidance of their university instructors. Completion of the questionnaire by student teachers, as it was reported by the contact individuals, lasted approximately 40 minutes.

### *Data analysis*

One-way analysis of variance and t-test was used for the comparison of subgroup means. As for the overall portrait of experiences and expectations descriptive procedures were utilized. Following one-way analysis of variance the pot-hoc multiple comparison test was used to determine the sources of differences if any. The type of post-hoc multiple comparison tests was decided on the bases of variance equality test. Experiences and expectations were treated as continuous variables; type of partner school attended and the number of teaching sessions were treated as limited category variables, and gender as dichotomous variable. The statistical analysis was carried out by using the SPSS for Windows 10.00 package (Green, Salkind & Akey, 2000; Green & Salkind, 2003).

## **Results**

Findings of the present study are reported in two major parts, the overall descriptive portrait regarding student teachers' experiences and expectations, and the influence of different variables on student teachers' experiences and expectations. The sub-titles of the second part are formed by using the key words of the research questions.

### *Student teachers' experiences and expectations*

Descriptive analysis of the data indicated that student teachers had a higher expectation score than an experience score, indicating a gap between experiences and expectations in teaching practice. Data analysis revealed that student teachers were 'rarely' or 'never' informed about classroom measurement and evaluation procedures (35.5%, always = 42.1%), guide about lesson planning (31.7%, always = 49.6%), provided with written feedback (64.3 %, always = 21.7%), guided about keeping student records (55.8%, always =25.6%), guided about classroom management activities (26.2%, always = 51.5 %), supplied with copies of lesson observation forms (55.1%, always = 30.8%), guided about classroom activities (57.3%, always = 17.7%), guide about planning personal daily activities (40 %,

always = 40.4%), and informed about how to evaluate teaching practice activities (25.6 %, always = 57.3%) by the supervisors. On the other hand when student teachers' expectations were examined in relation to the same items it was seen that they had high expectations for the same issues from their supervisors (94.7%, 86.9%, 73.2%, 74.5%, 87.2%, 79.1%, 70%, 77.4%, 84.9% respectively) (see Table 1).

A very similar result was found in student teachers' experiences and expectations in relation to their work with cooperating teachers. Data analysis revealed that student teachers were 'rarely' or 'never' informed about how they were going to be evaluated in teaching practice (33%, always = 52.6%), informed about classroom evaluation procedures (28.3%, always = 44.8%), guided about selecting and using teaching materials (33.2%, always = 43.3%), provided with written feedback (68,7%, always = 19.6%), guided about lesson planning (36,3 %, always = 42.1%), guided about evaluation of teaching practice (28.5 %, always = 52.2%), helped to planning individual daily activities (40 %, always = 36.6%), informed about teaching methods and techniques (42.6%, always = 34.3%), guided about out-of-class teaching practice activities (61.3%, always = 22.2%), and provided with a copy of classroom observation form (64.5%, always = 26.8%) by cooperating teachers (see Table 1). In contrast to the low level of student teachers' experiences they reported a higher level ('generally' or 'always') of expectation for the activities listed above (88.2%, 88.7%, 86.9%, 64.4%, 83.1%, 81.0%, 79.5%, 84.8%, 69.8%, 78.0% respectively) from the cooperating teachers.

It was interesting to observe that student teachers did not have a high expectation for written feedback from the cooperating teacher. This might be due to an assumption of student teachers that the cooperating teachers were responsible for such feedback. Furthermore, although the responsibilities of cooperating teachers were clearly specified in the partnership guide book (HEC, 1998), cooperating teachers might still not be well aware of the requirements. A parallel argument could be made for the supervisors regarding the provision of written feedback. The discrepancy between experiences and expectations may be related to how clearly supervisor and cooperating teacher roles are defined and fulfilled. As Dagmar (1992) emphasizes, the problem of role clarity could be a barrier to effective supervision.

A paired sample t-test was conducted to compare the mean scores of students' experiences and expectations. The result indicated that there was a significant difference between experience and expectation mean scores of student teachers  $t(229) = 18.11, p = .00$ . The student teachers' expectation mean score was ( $M = 141.05, SD = 20.05$ ) significantly higher than the mean score for experiences ( $M = 105.41, SD = 29.54$ ). The mean difference between the scores of experiences and expectations was 35.64. This is an expected result because student teachers

TABLE 1: Student teachers' experiences and expectations

Items	Experience			Expectation		
	M	% Never	% Always	M	% Never	% Always
1. Supervisor informed me about behaviors at partner school.	4.02	13.9	76.1	4.59	3.5	93.5
2. Supervisor informed me about the aim of teaching practice.	3.93	14.8	70.0	4.59	2.2	94.0
3. Supervisor informed about teaching methods and techniques	3.66	17.8	63.5	4.62	5.8	94.3
4. Supervisor clarified the evaluation procedures for teaching practice	3.89	20.0	70.4	4.68	2.2	94.8
5. Supervisor informed me about classroom measurement and evaluation procedures	3.13	35.5	42.1	4.52	3.1	94.7
6. Supervisor informed me about rules I have to obey at partner school	3.90	14.8	70.0	4.36	6.6	85.5
7. Supervisor guided me on lesson planning	3.27	31.7	49.6	4.49	1.8	86.9
8. Supervisor has given me written feedback	2.20	64.3	21.7	4.03	7.0	73.2
9. Supervisor has given me oral feedback	3.57	24.8	59.4	4.44	1.8	88.6
10. Supervisor guided me about keeping students records	2.44	55.8	25.6	4.00	10.1	74.5
11. Supervisor guided me about classroom management	3.51	26.2	51.5	4.35	4.4	87.2
12. Supervisors supplied the copies of lesson observation forms	2.47	55.1	30.8	4.13	8.4	79.1
13. Supervisor guided me about classroom activities	2.43	57.3	17.7	3.96	9.3	70.0
14. Supervisor guided me about planning my daily activities	2.91	40.0	40.4	4.14	7.8	77.4
15. Supervisor informed me about teaching methods and techniques	3.49	23.0	53.9	4.45	3.1	90.0
16. Supervised told me how to evaluate teaching practice activities	3.44	25.6	57.3	4.23	4.4	84.9
17. The cooperating teacher (CT) informed me about the partner school	3.72	18.8	62.4	4.35	2.2	85.4
18. CT guided me about teaching methods and techniques	3.49	23.9	55.2	4.39	3.5	88.7
19. CT clearly explained how I will be evaluated about teaching practice	3.29	33.0	52.6	4.47	3.5	88.2
20. CT informed me about classroom evaluation procedures	3.24	28.3	44.8	4.44	2.6	88.7
21. CT informed me about rules I had to obey at partner school	3.58	21.7	58.2	4.23	5.7	80.4
22. CT guided me about teaching skills	3.56	19.6	60.9	4.41	2.2	91.2
23. CT guided me about selecting and using teaching materials	3.17	33.2	43.3	4.35	3.5	86.9
24. CT guided about relationship and communication with people?	3.54	19.6	55.2	4.40	2.6	88.7
25. CT give me written feedback	2.05	68.7	19.6	3.84	14.8	64.6
26. CT give me oral feedback	3.65	18.1	57.9	4.49	2.7	89.1
27. CT guided me about lesson planning	3.08	36.3	42.1	4.24	5.8	83.1
28. CT guided me about classroom management	3.54	17.9	56.3	4.38	2.2	87.7
29. CT guided me about the evaluation of teaching practice	3.38	28.5	52.2	4.18	6.2	81.0
30. CT helped me in planning my daily teaching learning activities	2.91	40.0	36.6	4.15	6.6	79.5
31. CT informed me about new teaching method and techniques available	2.88	42.6	34.3	4.31	3.9	84.8
32. CT guided me about out of class activities (ceremonies, meetings etc.).	2.28	61.3	22.2	3.88	12.7	69.8
33. CT handed in me a copy of observation form and the necessary feedback	2.28	64.5	26.8	4.13	8.3	78.0

\*In this table percentages of 'generally' and 'always' and, the percentages for 'rarely' and 'never' are treated as 'always' and 'never' respectively. 'CT' stands for 'Cooperating teacher'. Percentages for 'sometimes' are not included in the Table.



generally express high expectations for teaching practice. This difference could be also considered as a desire in student teachers to develop better skills in teaching. Student teachers high expectations could be a good incentive for cooperating teachers and supervising instructors to advance quality of supervision.

### *Gender differences in experiences and expectations*

The second question addressed the difference between female and male student teachers' experiences and expectations. There were 174 female and 54 male student teachers. The independent samples t-test was run for experiences and expectations separately. The independent samples t-test for experiences was significant,  $t(82.18) = -2.09$ ,  $p = .04$ , (when equal variance was and was not assumed). Male student teachers' experiences mean score was higher ( $M = 113.09$ ,  $SD = 31.31$ ) than female student teachers experiences mean score ( $M = 103.1$ ,  $SD = 28.54$ ), indicating that male students were satisfied with what happened during teaching practice. Though statistically it was not significant a similar difference was observed in expectation scores of male and female student teachers ( $M = 144.00$ ,  $M = 140.05$  respectively).

The independent samples t-test for expectation was not significant,  $t(80.92) = 1.19$ ,  $p = .23$  (when equal variance was and was not assumed). Male student teacher's expectations mean score ( $M = 144.00$ ,  $SD = 21.82$ ) was not significantly different from female student's expectations mean score ( $M = 140.05$ ,  $SD = 19.48$ ). The mean difference between female and male student teacher's expectations was  $-3.94$ . That is, both female and male students had similar and relatively high expectations from teaching practice. This might be a reflection of the belief that teaching practice prepares students more adequately for the teaching profession. Similarly, Dagmar (1992) reports that 77% of university supervisors and 70 % of cooperating teachers support the same notion.

### *Practice school differences in experiences and expectations*

The third question addressed the difference in experiences and expectations of student teachers in terms of the type of practice school where they realized their teaching practice. Since the practice schools included in this study were all secondary level schools, three groups of schools were formed: general high schools, Anatolian high schools, and private high schools. The general high schools are free of charge and open to all students who successfully complete the primary education. Anatolian high schools, also public, admit students on the basis of a nation-wide selection and placement exam. Private high schools also accept students' through a nation-wide exam, but they also use additional institutional

criteria. In addition they charge students tuition and fees. In this study there were 161 student teachers attending general high schools, 52 attending Anatolian high schools, and 15 attending private high schools. Differences among the three types of practice schools were compared separately for experiences and expectations.

The one-way ANOVA test for experiences was significant,  $F(2, 225) = 6.36$ ,  $p = .002$ ,  $\eta^2 = .054$ . Because the overall  $F$  test and the Levene's test of equality was significant, Tukey's test of multiple comparison was used. The follow-up test results indicated that there was a difference between the experiences of student teachers attending private high schools ( $M = 126.67$ ,  $SD = 29.23$ ) and those attending general high schools ( $M = 101.72$ ,  $SD = 26.45$ ), the difference was in favor of those attending private schools. There was no difference between the experiences of student teachers realizing their teaching practice at general high schools and Anatolian high schools ( $M = 110.93$ ,  $SD = 35.01$ ) as well as between Anatolian high schools and private high schools. The difference between private practice schools and general high schools may be attributed to differences in context and in the quality of cooperating teachers. Private schools employ teachers based on a screening process including portfolio, experience and interview. As Guyton & McIntyre (1990, in Sikula, Buttery & Guyton, 1996) suggest, the quality of student teaching can be affected by classroom sites that are not designed to prepare teachers.

As for the differences in expectations of student teachers in terms of the types of practice school attended, the result of ANOVA test was not significant,  $F(2, 225) = 1.64$ ,  $p = .19$ ,  $\eta^2 = .014$ . Because the overall  $F$  test was not significant multiple comparison tests was not applied. That is, regardless of the type of practice school, student teachers had high expectations from teaching practice ( $M = 143.96$  for Anatolian high schools,  $M = 139.49$  for general high schools, and  $M = 146.73$  for private schools). Consistent with what the relevant literature suggests, student teachers perceived teaching practice as an important aspect of initial teacher education, and the mean scores provided in the parenthesis for each subgroup might support this perception.

### *Teaching sessions experiences and expectations*

The fourth question addressed the difference in experiences and expectations in terms of the number of sessions student teachers realized in teaching practice. For this purpose data on the number of teaching sessions were grouped first into four categories; one to five sessions constituted category one, six to ten sessions constituted category two, 11 to 15 sessions constituted category three, and 16 or more sessions constituted category four. Number of student teachers in each category was 101, 81, 17 and 6

respectively. Since the number of students in category four was low, it was combined with category three, so there were 23 student teachers in this category involving 11 or more sessions.

In order to examine the differences in terms of the number of teaching sessions one-way ANOVA was run for experiences and expectations separately. The results yielded no significant mean differences either for experiences,  $F(2, 203) = 1.48$ ,  $p = .23$ ,  $\eta^2 = .014$  or for expectations,  $F(2, 203) = 1.47$ ,  $p = .23$ ,  $\eta^2 = .014$ . Since the overall  $F$  tests were not significant multiple comparison tests were not conducted. The number of teaching sessions realized by student teachers in teaching practice, for this particular study, does not appear to affect student teachers' experiences and expectations. This is contrary to the idea of expanding field practice. It is necessary to consider possible barriers to this result. These barriers might be invariability of the teaching practice school and sometime the classroom. In addition, descriptive data on number of teaching sessions indicated that 44% ( $n=101$ ) of student teachers realized one to five sessions in teaching practice and 35% ( $n=81$ ) realized six to ten sessions. In sum 79% ( $n=182$ ) realized up to ten sessions. This might have diluted the real effect of more practice because only 21% of student teachers realized more than ten sessions.

## Discussion

Overall, the results of the present study suggest that the student teachers who participated in the study rated expectations from teaching practice at a higher level than their experiences. This result pointed to a gap between expectations and experiences indicating that teaching practice does not meet the quality criteria student teachers had in mind.

Male student teachers were more positive about their teaching experiences than female student teachers, whereas both female and male students had similar expectations about teaching practice. Although no significant difference appeared in expectations, the experience mean scores of student teachers attending private high schools for teaching practice were higher than those who attended general high schools. Finally, it was found that neither the expectations nor the experiences differed in terms of the number of teaching sessions realized.

The differences between experiences and expectations seem to suggest the difficulties that the student teachers encounter in exercising theoretical knowledge at practice schools. As Tomlinson (1995) point out, student teachers bring consciously espoused ideas and informal theories about teaching. Student teachers also bring some explicit ideas about how one learns to teach. Such an orientation

might have influenced students' perceptions regarding teaching experiences. Furthermore, student teachers' rating of their experiences may imply that cooperating teachers and supervising instructors need to invest more time and energy in their work, particularly in giving written feedback. The gap between experiences and expectations may be a clue. Barriers to effective student teaching like lack of substantive communication among cooperating teachers, supervising instructor and student teachers, incongruent role expectations by both, and lack of collaboration might be hampering the process. However, holding higher expectations also seems to suggest the question of whether we should evaluate these discrepancies in teaching practice activities or the roles of cooperating teachers and supervisors in shaping the attitudes of student teachers toward teaching practice, since 'the attitudes of student teachers are, perhaps, the variable most strongly shaped by cooperating teachers' (McIntyre, Byrd, & Foxx, 1996, p. 177). It is the responsibility of the cooperating teacher, as Doreen (2000) states, to facilitate the development of pre-service teachers through assigning teaching tasks, providing resources and feedback, and making an ongoing evaluation. As Woods-Mays & Weasmer (2003) indicate, this is particularly important in ensuring the acculturation of the student teachers in the field of learning, not only in terms of formal classroom techniques, but also in terms of 'the myriad of other more subtle awareness reflective of a professional'. As Darling-Hammond (2005) notes, in the classroom setting student teachers want problem solving to be about learning of students not just the implementation of rules and routines, so the quality of cooperating teachers and supervising instructors is an important factor. Another question might be the selection of supervising instructors and cooperating teachers: this might require some time to reach optimum conditions in the context of this study. It could also be suggested that there is a need to train cooperating teachers as teacher educators and instructional supervisors.

The gender difference regarding the experiences of teaching practice seems to support the notion that gender plays an important role on student teacher perception of the teaching practice. However, the more positive perception of teaching practice by male students appears to be inconsistent with the notion that female teachers are more optimistic about their teaching experiences. The level of criticism placed upon experiences may be influenced as well. However, student teachers, once they choose teaching as a profession, might be more motivated to receive maximum benefit from such an experience. This may lower their satisfaction level about experiences.

In the present study, although no significant difference appeared in expectations regarding the type of practice school, the experience scores of student teachers attending private high schools were found to be higher than those

who attended general high schools. This finding indicates that some factors—such as school climate, for instance—might have an effect on the teaching experience of student teachers related to the facilities and infrastructure that private schools have. Although not specifically evaluated in this study, student teachers might be attracted by the circumstances that private schools offer to the school personnel. If this is the case, then it can further be argued that not only for student teachers but also for teaching professionals, school climate has a profound effect on teaching experience.

Finally, the lack of evidence regarding the role of the number of sessions in the expectations and experiences of student teachers could also be attributed not only to the quantity but also to the quality of teaching practice. Although it is referred as a traditional approach by Edwards & Protheroe (2003), it appears that student teachers consistently need to be motivated, instructed, guided, and provided with continuous oral and written feedback to develop their professional identity.

The effect of practice schools and the number of sessions realized could have been diluted by the fact that the placement of student teachers in classroom sites and schools was mainly based on convenience. Appligate (1985) and Goodlad (1990) (in Sikula, Buttery & Guyton, 1996) suggest that the placement process often falls outside the control of many faculties of education. As pointed out by Lemlech & Kaplan (1990), the shaping of future teachers should begin by considering where they will teach and with whom.

It is important to acknowledge that the present study had certain limitations. Student teachers' achievement levels as well as the quality of their relationships with their supervisors may affect their evaluations. Second, the results are only applicable to those who participated in this study. Despite these limitations, however, the present study does nevertheless strongly suggest that there is a difference between expectations and experiences of student teachers regarding their teaching practice and some factors mediated in the experiences of student teachers' such as gender and types of schools attended.

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