

## Pre-Service Efl Teachers' Reported Concerns and Stress for Practicum in Turkey

### Türkiye'deki İngilizce Öğretmen Adaylarının Uygulama Dersinde Yaşadıkları Endişe ve Kaygılar

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#### *Abstract*

Teacher training institutions need to identify the stress-generating aspects of the practicum so as to take necessary precautions to minimize their occurrence, intensity and influence, and consequently, make practice experiences as effective and beneficial as possible for pre-service teachers. The study examined the concerns that 133 Turkish pre-service EFL teachers experienced during practicum. A questionnaire consisting of 40 statements tapping concerns and stressful experiences was applied to the pre-service teachers. The potential stress areas were analyzed under six categories: personal, communication-centered, evaluation-based, external, lesson preparation and teaching related. The results indicate that nearly half of these stress areas are at the medium level, that personal concerns generate the highest level of stress, and that evaluation-based concerns lead to the lowest level of stress.

*Keywords:* practice teaching, concerns, stress, teacher education

#### *Öz*

Öğretmen yetiştiren kurumların, öğretmenlik uygulamasında ortaya çıkabilecek endişe ve kaygıları tespit etmeleri, bu kaygıların azaltılması ve uygulamanın etkili ve yararlı olması bakımından gereklidir. Bu çalışma, 133 uygulama öğrencisinin yaşadığı endişe ve kaygıları inceler. Öğrencilerin muhtemelen tecrübe edebileceği endişe ve kaygı alanlarını saptamayı hedefleyen 40 maddelik bir anket uygulanmıştır. Potansiyel huzursuzluk alanları, altı başlık altında incelemeye tabi tutulmuştur: Kişisel, iletişimsel, değerlendirme, dış kaynaklı, ders hazırlığı ve öğretim. Sonuçlar, huzursuzluk kaynağı olabilecek alanların yaklaşık yarısının orta seviyede gerçekleştiği, kişisel etkenlerin en yüksek kaygı ve huzursuzluğun kaynağı olduğunu ve değerlendirme ile ilgili olan alanın en düşük düzeyde huzursuzluk doğurduğunu ortaya koyar.

*Anahtar Sözcükler:* Öğretmenlik uygulaması, endişe, kaygı, öğretmen eğitimi.

#### Introduction

It has long been accepted that practice teaching (practicum) in teacher education constitutes a major component of the professional education and the development of pre-service teachers before they go on to the actual teaching profession. Because of its sensitive nature, which is affected by many factors including those stemming from the student teacher, teacher educator and co-operating teacher, practicum has received considerable research interest in recent decades. One highly studied issue is the sources of concerns and stress experienced by pre-service teachers (Guillaume & Rudney, 1993; Mau, 1997; D'Rozario & Wong, 1998; Kyriacou & Stephens, 1999; Murray-Harvey, et al., 2000).

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*Reasons to Examine Student Teachers' Concerns*

There are several important reasons that make the sources of practicum stress a major concern for teacher educators. One reason is, as Murray-Harvey, Silins and Saebel (1999, p. 32) discuss, that stress influences teacher behavior and consequently classroom effectiveness, especially leading to lower pupil achievement and increased pupil anxiety. Similarly, Payne and Manning (1990, p. 261) warn that teacher anxiety may interfere with student performance. Another impact of stress can be drawn from Preece (1979, p. 18) that student teachers' anxiety may be a cause of the discipline problems in classrooms they teach.

Another reason to study trainees' concerns is that these concerns can help promote a better understanding of the transition period from student teacher to (beginning) teacher. Concerning this, Guillaume and Rudney (1993) postulate that examining student teachers' perceptions and concerns can give insight on the problems teachers face and the knowledge they find most worth, whereas attending to pre-service teachers' concerns can provide further understanding of the processes they undergo to become teachers (p. 65). To this end, Fuller (1969, pp. 211-213) found that student teachers were self-concerned at the beginning of and during most of their student teaching semester, and while becoming more concerned with what they can do for students only toward the end.

Moreover, examining trainees' stress can be useful in finding ways to help trainees become more self-confident in their future teaching life. Teaching is viewed as one of the leading stress-generating occupations (Kaunitz, Spokane, Lissits & Strein, 1986, p. 169; Kyriacou, 2001, p. 29). Due to its stress, people aiming to enter the teaching profession get surrounded by questions, problems, and worries during the preparation period (Payne & Manning, 1990, p. 261). Hence, this inevitable characteristic of teaching (i.e. stress) should be dealt with during the practicum so as to obtain the first insights into the issue, and accordingly, take necessary precautions to support/teach trainees to handle their stress successfully and become more self-confident teachers in their future teaching careers.

Finally, student teachers can make use of the benefits of the practicum at its best when their stresses are addressed and reduced to a minimum level. One of its profitable aspects is that it is through the practicum that teacher candidates put into practice the theoretical knowledge and practical skills they have acquired throughout their coursework. Besides, as Ryan, Toohey and Hughes (1996, p. 373) argue, practicum can help students integrate into the work environment (which is "the school" in the teaching practicum context). Lastly, they can see what actually occurs in real teaching settings and circumstances, which can be different from what they imagine.

*Practicum-related Concerns*

Firstly, the student teacher himself can raise some personal concerns, which may result from their own personality, expectations, problems, and responsibilities, the stress-generating side of which can differ from trainee to trainee. To illustrate, "having high expectations of one's teaching performance" and "striking a balance between the practicum and personal commitments (e.g. family)" (Murray-Harvey, et al., 2000, p. 25), and "expenses that the student teacher incurs" (Fogarty & Yarrow, 1994, p. 6) can be deemed as personal concerns.

Secondly, the co-operating teacher and the teacher educator can act as sources of anxiety. Although they differ in that while the former deals almost exclusively with actual classroom activities, the latter focuses on both the classroom and academic settings (Guillaume & Rudney, 1993, p. 67), they both need to meet trainees' important needs, such as help to adapt (McNamara, 1995, p. 59), support and encouragement (Ohlsen, 1974, pp. 62-63; Smith & Lev-

Ari, 2005, pp. 298-299), counseling and feedback (Kwan & Lopez-Real, 2005, p. 285) in order for trainees to minimize their stress. However, their evaluation and observation can cause stress in trainees (Kyriacou & Stephens, 1999, p. 25; D'Rozario & Wong, 1998, p. 43, Murray-Harvey, et al., 2000, p. 25).

Additionally, students being taught in practice classes, and their individual differences can lead to stress in student teachers. In regards to this, dealing with disruptive behaviour, maintaining appropriate classroom management, and meeting the needs of unmotivated learners and learners with different levels of achievement can be noted as sources of stress (Kyriacou & Stephens, 1999, p. 22; Mau, 1997; Swennen, Jörg & Korthagen, 2004, pp. 279-280). Besides, the principal/vice-principal may cause anxiety in trainees. Although they have been reported to produce least stress (Murray-Harvey, et al., 2000, p. 25), some findings (e.g. Smith & Lev-Ari, 2005, p. 300; Lee, Walker & Bodycott, 2000, p. 59) suggest that the communication between the principal and student teachers is not as it is ideally supposed to be, and thus needs to be examined.

Furthermore, peer student teachers can be a cause of stress. Although peers have generally been examined regarding their provision of support to the student teacher (Talvitie, Peltokallio & Männistö, 2000, p. 80; Smith & Lev-Ari, 2005, p. 296), it is still likely that their observation of the student teacher can cause stress since being observed, no matter who the observer is, can be stress-provoking. Finally, some teaching-related responsibilities and opinions too can play a crucial role in the emergence of stress in trainees. For instance, "not being regarded as a real teacher" (Kyriacou & Stephens, 1999, p. 22), "heavy workload", "number of assignments and activities", and "different expectations from teachers, school administrators, and lecturers concerning the preservice teacher's performance" (Fogarty & Yarrow, 1994, pp. 6-7) are among the common concerns of trainees.

#### *Aims of the Study*

The sources of trainee teachers' concerns have been examined in various studies. However, the results that emerged appeared to be relatively different regarding the degree of concerns. Therefore, this significant aspect of the practicum needs to be dealt with from different perspectives in order to provide new insights with respect to the development of pre-service teacher education. Thus, this study aims to (1) identify and present the practicum experiences that generate concerns in student teachers, and their level of intensity (i.e. from the most anxiety-generating to the least), (2) help teacher educators promote a much improved understanding of the sources of trainees' stresses, and (3) provide support for trainees to manage their practicum-based stress successfully, become more self-confident, and consequently, benefit from the teaching practice experiences as much as possible.

#### Method

Of the many research designs aimed at unearthing the concerns and stress levels of teacher trainees, the self reporting appears to be the most productive. As the number of participants is relatively high, we decided to administer a questionnaire through whose items pre-service teachers could indicate how they felt about their experience. This technique of data collection is expected to supply relatively reliable information regarding the problem as it provides a comfortable avenue for the participants to share their concerns with the researchers.

The participants in this study were 133 fourth grade pre-service teachers of EFL attending English Language Teaching (ELT) Department at the Faculty of Education in three universities,

Hacettepe (67), Gazi (24) and Middle East Technical (METU) (42), Turkey. The questionnaire was administered, following the practicum in May, 2005. It consists of 40 items that describe practicum experiences which the pre-service EFL teachers can go through during their teaching practice. It was adapted from D'Rozario & Wong (1998) through adding new items and removing/changing some of the already-existing ones so that it includes experiences which fit the context of the student teachers in this study.

The pre-service teachers were asked to indicate a stress level for each experience in the items by checking 1 = "none", 2 = "low level", 3 = "medium level" and 4 = "high level". The data obtained through the pre-service teachers' answers in the questionnaire were analyzed through SPSS for Windows 11.0. The frequency of each practicum experience was identified through descriptive statistics, and the categories of these experiences were computed. Next, the means were compared to find the frequencies of the responses according to the university the pre-service teachers are attending. The age range is 22-26. The Cronbach Alpha is .95, which shows that the internal consistency of the statements are very high.

### *Findings*

It is important to note that when the results were being presented, student teachers' practicum experiences with the mean score between 0,5 – 1,49 were considered to lead to low level of concern (L), 1,5 – 2,49 to medium level of concern (M), and 2,5 – 3,00 to high level concern (H). In order to offer a general picture of the concerns and stress areas, it is useful to overview the 6 categories anticipated to map the areas in question (see the questionnaire in Appendix for the items of each category). Table 1 not only gives the descriptive statistics for all the participants but also for their universities. It is clear from Table 1 representing the six categories of practicum-related concerns that while personal concerns generated the highest level of stress in the preservice teachers (M=1,52), evaluation-based concerns led to the lowest level of stress in both the total results (M=1,26). The former, according to the classification, reveals a medium level of stress whereas the latter a low level of stress. Participants from METU appear to have the lowest stress while those from HU and GAZI shared similar levels of stress, (M=1,50) and (M=1,63), respectively.

Table 1.

*Six Categories of Practicum-Related Concerns*

Categories	Total		Hacettepe		Gazi		METU	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1. Personal concerns	1,52	,55	1,63	,41	1,79	,47	1,19	,62
2. Communication-centered concerns	1,39	,79	1,54	,76	1,63	,64	1,02	,81
3. Evaluation-based concerns	1,26	,72	1,40	,58	1,45	,70	,93	,82
4. External concerns	1,33	,67	1,44	,60	1,61	,70	1,01	,66
5. Concerns for lesson preparation	1,38	,71	1,49	,60	1,66	,82	1,04	,71
6. Teaching related concerns	1,42	,65	1,52	,55	1,61	,63	1,13	,72
TOTAL MEAN	1,38	,68	1,50	,58	1,63	,66	1,05	72,3

In what follows, each of the 6 categories of concern and stress are examined individually by presenting means and the descriptor levels for the stress, where M stands for "medium", and L refers to "low". (Note: There is no H for "high" since none of the experiences was found to cause high level concern.). The practicum experiences in each category (Tables 2-7) are listed from the most stress-generating to the least according to their mean scores in total results.

The first category corresponds to personal concerns (Table 2). When we look at the overall totals, we see that it is the first 5 items that receive medium level of concern. These center around the following: trying to strike a balance between practicum and personal commitments probably because of the fear of failing in practicum; the use of different methods in class as well as the expectations from the pre-service teacher. Addressing the individual variables of affiliation, METU students do not worry as much as the candidates from other two universities. This can also be taken to mean that participants from METU are better in handling personal concerns during practicum.

Table 2.  
*Personal Concerns*

Item Statements	Total			Hacettepe			Gazi			METU		
	Mean	SD	Level	Mean	SD	Level	Mean	SD	Level	Mean	SD	Level
1. Striking a balance between the practicum and personal commitments (e.g. family).	2,08	,93	M	2,17	,81	M	2,41	,65	M	1,73	1,14	M
2. Fear of failing the practicum.	1,72	1,10	M	1,88	,89	M	2,25	,94	M	1,19	1,27	L
3. Fear of using superior approaches to regular class teacher.	1,68	1,01	M	1,76	,88	M	1,87	,94	M	1,45	1,19	L
4. Using different methods, approaches, and techniques.	1,63	1,06	M	1,65	,97	M	1,91	1,05	M	1,45	1,17	L
5. Having high expectations of my teaching performance (personal pressure).	1,60	1,00	M	1,79	,87	M	1,66	,81	M	1,26	1,21	L
6. Having a better or worse pronunciation/fluency than the teacher.	1,41	1,08	L	1,49	1,03	L	1,62	,92	M	1,16	1,20	L
7. Coping with other responsibilities (e.g. other courses, projects, graduation thesis).	1,11	,92	L	1,28	,81	L	1,37	,82	L	,69	1,02	L
8. Having to finance resource materials.	,93	,74	L	1,04	,61	L	1,20	,72	L	,61	,85	L

Another source of concern and stress could be to do with the communication problems between the pre-service teachers and the related parties such as the supervisor, learners, school administration and so forth (Table 3). The highest source of stress appears to stem from the possible communication breakdown with the supervisor, followed by the difficulty to establish a friendly communication with the learners.

Table 3.  
*Communication-Centered Concerns*

Item Statements	Total			Hacettepe			Gazi			METU		
	Mean	SD	Level	Mean	SD	Level	Mean	SD	Level	Mean	SD	Level
1. Communicating with and relating to my supervisor.	1,75	1,08	M	1,89	1,01	M	1,95	1,04	M	1,40	1,16	L
2. Establishing rapport with my students.	1,71	1,05	M	1,91	,99	M	1,95	,95	M	1,26	1,08	L
3. Communicating with and relating to Principal/Vice-Principal.	1,19	,92	L	1,23	,83	L	1,62	,82	M	,88	1,01	L
4. Communicating with and relating to the class teacher.	,91	,86	L	1,11	,86	L	1,00	,65	L	,54	,86	L

Evaluation is another domain in which pre-service teachers could have been seriously concerned (Table 4). However, it did not turn out to be so. If we consider M level of concern as serious, we see those from Hacettepe are only stressed out by the observation of their supervisors, whereas those from Gazi think that being evaluated once may not be sufficient to reveal their true teaching skills. Overall, supervisors from Gazi are friendlier to the pre-service teachers while supervisors from Hacettepe are harsher in their evaluation of pre-service teachers.

Table 4.  
*Evaluation-Based Concerns*

Item Statements	Total			Hacettepe			Gazi			METU		
	Mean	SD	Level	Mean	SD	Level	Mean	SD	Level	Mean	SD	Level
1. Being observed by my supervisor.	1,33	1,10	L	1,52	1,03	M	1,29	,99	L	1,04	1,22	L
2. Being evaluated by my supervisor once or insufficiently.	1,30	,92	L	1,40	,73	L	1,50	,88	M	1,02	1,15	L
3. Being evaluated by my supervisor.	1,16	,93	L	1,28	,83	L	1,58	,82	M	,73	,98	L

4 external concerns or sources of stress are considered (Table 5). Of these, the item that maps peer observation received a medium level of concern. This is the case throughout all participants regardless of their universities. The rest of the items do not appear to be serious sources of concern.

Table 5.  
*External Concerns*

Item Statements	Total			Hacettepe			Gazi			METU		
	Mean	SD	Level	Mean	SD	Level	Mean	SD	Level	Mean	SD	Level
1. Being observed by my peers.	1,78	1,03	M	1,74	,97	M	2,04	,95	M	1,69	1,17	M
2. Others expecting me to perform tasks beyond my current competency.	1,44	1,01	L	1,59	,83	M	1,45	,97	L	1,19	1,23	L
3. Striking a balance between class teacher and supervisor expectations.	1,21	1,03	L	1,32	,94	L	1,58	,92	M	,83	1,12	L
4. Being timely for the lesson because of transportation problems.	,90	,86	L	1,08	,79	L	1,37	,87	L	,33	,65	L

One inevitable area of testing the strength and expertise of the pre-service teachers is the lesson preparation (Table 6). The highest level of stress stems from the task of writing detailed lesson plans and marking students' written work. Interestingly, participants from METU, yet again, do not seem to be bothered by carrying out such tasks.

Table 6.  
*Concerns For Lesson Preparation*

Item Statements	Total			Hacettepe			Gazi			METU		
	Mean	SD	Level	Mean	SD	Level	Mean	SD	Level	Mean	SD	Level
1. Writing detailed lesson plans.	1,57	1,03	M	1,67	,89	M	1,91	,97	M	1,21	1,17	L
2. Marking students' written work.	1,52	1,04	M	1,62	,86	M	1,70	1,08	M	1,26	1,23	L
3. Managing practicum related assignments.	1,45	1,08	L	1,62	,99	M	1,75	1,07	M	1,02	1,11	L
4. Provision of the needed equipment for the lesson (e.g. tape-recorder, video-recorder).	1,33	,98	L	1,41	,87	L	1,54	1,06	M	1,09	1,07	L
5. Preparing sources for my lessons (e.g. transparencies, worksheets, charts, etc.).	1,03	,95	L	1,13	,85	L	1,41	,92	L	,64	1,00	L

The final area we looked at is the dynamics provided by the interactions taking place in the classroom, the arena for teaching and learning. Table 7 shows that more than half of the items received a medium level of concern and stress.

Table 7.  
*Teaching Related Concerns*

Item Statements	Total			Hacettepe			Gazi			METU		
	Mean	SD	Level	Mean	SD	Level	Mean	SD	Level	Mean	SD	Level
1. Helping students with emotional/behavioural problems.	1,90	1,18	M	1,92	1,14	M	2,33	,91	M	1,61	1,32	M
2. Making the lesson interesting and motivating for students.	1,75	1,11	M	1,76	1,03	M	2,00	1,02	M	1,59	1,28	M
3. Getting excessive remarks about personal life and physical appearance.	1,74	1,14	M	1,83	1,00	M	1,91	1,13	M	1,50	1,32	M
4. The feeling that I am not in full control of class (unlike the regular teacher).	1,71	,45	M	1,76	,42	M	1,58	,50	M	1,71	,45	M
5. Managing groupwork.	1,66	1,05	M	1,74	,95	M	1,83	,96	M	1,45	1,23	L
6. Over-crowded classes.	1,61	1,02	M	1,73	,91	M	1,91	1,05	M	1,26	1,10	L
7. Being unable to guess the level of students.	1,59	,65	M	1,67	,63	M	1,62	,57	M	1,45	,70	L
8. Teaching mixed ability classes.	1,51	1,02	M	1,56	,92	M	1,91	1,10	M	1,21	1,07	L
9. Managing the individual seatwork.	1,27	1,02	L	1,38	,96	L	1,50	,93	M	,97	1,11	L
10. Not being respected as much as the regular class teacher.	1,26	1,05	L	1,40	,90	L	1,45	1,02	L	,92	1,21	L
11. Helping students with learning difficulties.	1,25	1,04	L	1,43	,87	L	1,50	1,14	M	,83	1,12	L
12. Managing the class and enforcing discipline.	1,22	1,06	L	1,35	,99	L	1,37	1,05	L	,92	1,13	L
13. Communicating concepts to students.	1,21	,95	L	1,34	,86	L	1,33	1,00	L	,95	1,03	L
14. Delivering the lesson.	1,09	,95	L	1,26	,86	L	1,33	1,04	L	,66	,92	L
15. Managing time.	1,00	1,02	L	1,19	1,01	L	1,29	1,04	L	,52	,89	L
16. Giving appropriate feedback to students.	,87	,82	L	1,08	,75	L	1,00	,83	L	,47	,80	L

The foremost of these is the need felt by the pre-service teachers to help out their students' emotional problems. This is very interesting indeed in that though they are there in class for only a short period of time they are expected to do something for these students. The second highest source of stress, as anticipated, is the challenge for the participants to produce interesting materials and techniques to be able to motivate the learners. Almost equally important is the fact that they cannot avoid receiving remarks about their physical appearance as well as their personal lives. This is the second area pre-service teachers feel challenged given the description of their tasks in practicum. In contrast to other sections in the questionnaire, participants from METU appear to be very close to other participants in these areas of concern and stress.

What is presented so far brings us to a conclusion about the examination of the specific areas of concern and stress identified in the questionnaire. In what follows, we identify the ten most stressful items as well as the ten least stressful items in an attempt to summarize what has been said (see Table 8).

The experience that more than three-fourths of the trainees (76,69%) reported as either at the medium or high level is "striking a balance between the practicum and personal commitments (e.g. family)". It is followed by helping students with emotional/behavioural problems, being observed by my peers, communicating with and relating to my supervisor, making the lesson interesting and motivating for students, getting excessive remarks about personal life and physical appearance, fear of failing in the practicum, the feeling that they are not in full control of class (as opposed to the regular classroom teacher), establishing rapport with their students, and fear of using superior approaches to regular class teacher.

Table 8.

*Ten most and least stressful practicum experiences*

Most Stressful	Least Stressful
1. Striking a balance between the practicum and personal commitments (e.g. family)	1. Giving appropriate feedback to students
2. Helping students with emotional/behavioural problems	2. Being timely for the lesson because of transportation problems
3. Being observed by my peers	3. Communicating with and relating to the class teacher
4. Communicating with and relating to my supervisor	4. Having to finance resource materials
5. Making the lesson interesting and motivating for students	5. Managing time
6. Getting excessive remarks about personal life and physical appearance	6. Preparing sources for my lessons (e.g. transparencies, worksheets, charts, etc.)
7. Fear of failing the practicum	7. Delivering the lesson
8. The feeling that I am not in full control of class (unlike the regular teacher)	8. Coping with other responsibilities (e.g. other courses, projects, graduation thesis)
9. Establishing rapport with my students	9. Being evaluated by my supervisor
10. Fear of using superior approaches to regular class teacher	10. Communicating with and relating to principal/vice-principal

When the least stressful experiences are examined, "giving appropriate feedback to students" was reported as either no level or low level by more than three-fourths of the trainees (78,94%). Besides, being timely for the lesson because of transportation problems, communicating with and relating to the class teacher, having to finance resource materials, managing time, preparing sources for my lessons (e.g. transparencies, worksheets, charts, etc.),



delivering the lesson, coping with other responsibilities (e.g. other courses, projects, graduation thesis), being evaluated by my supervisor, and communicating with and relating to principal/vice-principal are also the experiences which resulted in least anxiety in the pre-service teachers.

### Discussion

The trainees from Gazi University find practicum experiences more stressful when compared with the students from the other two, and Hacettepe University trainees follow them. Trainees from METU find these experiences least stressful. Although there is not a considerable difference between Gazi (27) and Hacettepe (21) in terms of the number of medium level stressors, METU (6) shows a great discrepancy. This can stem from many sources such as the attitude and expectations of the supervisors.

As far as the six categories are concerned, personal concerns (i.e. concerns which result from the student teachers themselves) generated the highest level of stress. One possible argument for this is that everybody can develop these concerns in different circumstances and times (e.g. when being unable to strike a balance between one's job-related and private life responsibilities or having a fear for something), and that such concerns are an indispensable part of persons' life. So, it may be deemed as normal that they have personal concerns at such a degree. On the other hand, evaluation-based concerns brought about the lowest level of concern. This is probably because the pre-service teachers may have progressed to a certain extent in the practice process and adapted to the practicum-related applications, one of which is being evaluated. As a result, they may regard the evaluation as a routine implementation of the practicum, and thus may not feel stressful for it.

At the top of the experiences resulting in the highest level of concern comes "striking a balance between the practicum and personal commitments (e.g. family)". This can suggest that either practicum or personal commitments place a great amount of responsibility on the trainees, or both at the same level, a level which is adequate to lead the trainees to feel under pressure. The exact situation cannot be estimated without asking the trainees which commitments cause more pressure for them. The second stressful experience is helping pupils with emotional/behavioral problems. The probable explanation for this is that these pre-service teachers may strongly feel inadequate regarding how to help such students and thus may develop such a concern. Another experience which caused most stress in the student teachers is being observed by peers. It is surprising that peer observation has given rise to more stress on the part of the student teachers than the supervisor's observation has done. Although the significance of peer students as a source of support has been reported by many studies, the possible effect of their observation of the student teacher has probably been missed. So, it can be concluded that being observed, as argued before, can result in anxiety regardless of the observer. Another most stressful experience is communication with the supervisor, which may probably result from the negative attitudes of the supervisors. Making the lesson interesting and motivating for students is also listed among the most stressful experiences. The anxiety related to this situation is probably due to the student teachers' being inexperienced, and will possibly diminish while becoming more experienced.

The issue of the sources of stress experienced by pre-service teachers has been examined in various studies until now. The overall result of these studies is that the practicum brings about stress-producing experiences on the part of pre-service teachers. However, given the responses of the pre-service EFL teachers in this study, it can be deduced that the practicum-related experiences are not highly stressful. In relation to this deduction, two possible explanations, as argued in

Murray-Harvey, et al. (2000, p. 25, p. 21 respectively), can be put forward. One is that the student teachers were doing their third (and last) practicum, and their first two (previous) practicum placements may have helped them adapt to the teaching practice and reduce their concerns. The other one is that the pre-service teachers may have had successful experiences during their previous practicums, which may have declined the level of their anxiety in their last practicum.

Besides, it is normal that trainees experience stress to some extent since “an optimal dose of stress can be a very important and powerful motivator” (D’Rozario & Wong, 1998, pp. 39-40) and is “a normal, even inevitable part of the process of developing from an inexperienced to a competent, confident beginning teacher” (Murray-Harvey, et al., 2000, p. 21). Also, as Head, Hill and Maguire (1996, p. 71) note, “too little stress can cause apathy and boredom while frequent or excessive stress can lead to mental and physical illness, lack of sleep, poor concentration and general under-performance”. For these reasons, it is reasonable to claim that low level or slightly medium level stress experienced in/for practicum situations can influence the effectiveness of practice teaching positively and be a driving force for student teachers to carry out their responsibilities more successfully.

#### *Conclusion and Implications*

This study aimed at investigating the concerns and stress levels experienced by pre-service EFL teachers during their practicum. The results indicate that the experiences are not considered as highly stressful, a conclusion that is not meant to categorically reject the existence of stress. At this point, it is believed that the pre-service teacher himself/herself and the supervisor have the most important role with regard to reducing, or preventing the emergence of these concerns and stresses.

Firstly, every supervisor is suggested to apply a questionnaire in the first or second week of the practicum about the sources of their student teachers’ concerns to take appropriate actions. According to the results of the questionnaire in terms of which part of the practicum creates most concerns, the supervisor can determine where to focus on. Another possible suggestion is related to the student teachers’ concern about communication with the supervisor. The supervisor, as argued above, has an important role in meeting the basic needs of the trainees. In this context, the communication between the supervisor and student teachers assumes significance. Therefore, the supervisor needs to improve her communication with student teachers in order to make them feel secure enough to consult her about the particular situations for which they seek help. One suggestion can be giving trainees a note at the beginning of the practicum, which expresses that the supervisor sincerely wants to help them about any topic, and which aims to consolidate the communication, and encourage and support them.

Moreover, considering that student teachers are not experienced enough to handle problematic/difficult situations which generate many concerns, the teacher educator can help student teachers develop “instantaneous problem-management strategy” so that they become experienced before the practicum. Actually, this new strategy type is introduced by the authors of this paper inspired by a widely applied management type, “crisis management”, which includes four phases, including identifying, planning how to act in response to, and confronting and resolving a crisis, respectively.

Besides, student teachers can reduce their teaching-related concerns through effective preparation. As known, there are two main parts of the teaching that make it effective: one is a good preparation, and the other is a good application. Student teachers need to be advised to get prepared effectively before their lessons considering every detail so as not to cause any problem in the pace of their lessons. Through this way, they can reduce the possibility of emergence of problematic situations in the lesson, which can directly diminish the number of their concerns.

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## Appendix

*Questionnaire – 40 Items*

Item Statements	Stress Levels			
	None	Low	Medium	High
Personal concerns				
1. Fear of failing the practicum.				
2. Striking a balance between the practicum and personal commitments (e.g. family).				
3. Having high expectations of my teaching performance (personal pressure).				
4. Coping with other responsibilities (e.g. other courses, projects, graduation thesis).				
5. Having to finance resource materials.				
6. Using different methods, approaches, and techniques.				
7. Having a better or worse pronunciation/fluency than the teacher.				
8. Fear of using superior approaches to regular class teacher.				
Communication-centered concerns				
9. Communicating with and relating to my supervisor.				
10. Communicating with and relating to principal/vice-principal.				
11. Communicating with and relating to the class teacher.				
12. Establishing rapport with my students.				
Evaluation-based concerns				
13. Being observed by my supervisor.				
14. Being evaluated by my supervisor.				
15. Being evaluated by my supervisor once or insufficiently.				
External concerns				
16. Others expecting me to perform tasks beyond my current competency.				
17. Striking a balance between class teacher and supervisor expectations.				
18. Being timely for the lesson because of transportation problems.				
19. Being observed by my peers.				
Concerns for lesson preparation				
20. Writing detailed lesson plans.				
21. Managing practicum related assignments.				
22. Preparing sources for my lessons (e.g. transparencies, worksheets, charts, etc.).				
23. Provision of the needed equipment for the lesson (e.g. tape-recorder, video-recorder).				
24. Marking students' written work.				

Teaching related concerns				
25. Delivering the lesson.				
26. Communicating concepts to students.				
27. Giving appropriate feedback to students.				
28. Managing groupwork.				
29. Managing the individual seatwork.				
30. Managing the class and enforcing discipline.				
31. Helping students with learning difficulties.				
32. Helping students with emotional/behavioural problems.				
33. Teaching mixed ability classes.				
34. Over-crowded classes.				
35. Managing time.				
36. Making the lesson interesting and motivating for students.				
37. Getting excessive remarks about personal life and physical appearance.				
38. Not being respected as much as the regular class teacher.				
39. The feeling that I am not in full control of class (unlike the regular teacher).				
40. Being unable to guess the level of students.				