



The Impact of Field Practice on the Self-Efficacy of Prospective Psychological Counselors

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to investigate the effect of field practice on prospective teachers' self efficacy perceptions. One group pre test - post test design was used. A researcher made Self-Efficacy Perception Scale consisted of 20 items was administered to a group of counseling students (N=59) in a public university, before and after their field practices in schools. After collecting the data from the group they were subject to statistical analysis. The results showed that school field practices in counseling department that were done in two academic semesters as the requirements of School Experience I and School Experience II courses were effective in general. This shows that guidance and counseling field experiences have a significant impact on the self-efficacy perceptions of the prospective school counselors. However, there was no difference in self efficacy perceptions of prospective school counselors in terms of the gender. Discussion and Conclusion: These findings confirmed two hypothesis in this study. These results are also similar to the related literature. The effectiveness of the practice based activities can be examined with a larger sample size throughout the country.

Keywords: Self efficacy, field practice, school guidance and counselor training, field practice

Introduction

This study aims to determine if any improvement has occurred in the self-efficacy perceptions of the last year students of Psychological Counseling and Guidance with the help of field practice activities that these students have attended. It is believed that these school field practice activities carried out in the field of psychological counseling and guidance are very important in assisting the counselors internalize their duties and fulfill these duties with self-confidence. So, this study tested the hypothesis that with the help of practice based activities the self-efficacy of guidance teachers and psychological counselor candidates will improve and people who work in this area will have more confidence and better self-conception.

Field Practice of Counseling Education

In Turkey, school counselors are assumed as the guidance teachers serving as the other teachers in schools. However their primary duty is to help and guide students with severe discipline problems or handicapped ones. Therefore they do not have responsibilities in instructing as others do have. Prior to functioning as school counselors, they need to attend to a four year undergraduate university program in several universities. The importance of field practice activities in teacher education has been increasing every day. It is widely known that what is learnt theoretically can easily be forgotten. Yet information supported by practice can prevent forgetfulness and help teachers fulfill their tasks more effectively. Practice based activities are observed being beneficial for the implementation of theoretical knowledge and construction of professional efficacy.

We believe that people who provide guidance and psychological counseling services in schools face many problems and the self-efficacy perceptions of these people are effective in overcoming these problems. It is a great problem in our country that there are limited studies on the problems of Psychological Counseling and Guidance Education in universities. For this reason we believe that it is necessary to investigate effectiveness of what we do rather than what we simply do.

Alkan (1987) discusses the contribution of practice based studies in three main headings:

1. They provide an opportunity for the application of theoretical knowledge
2. They help the candidates see their needs and deficiencies.
3. They provide an opportunity for candidates to manage the real teaching-learning situation and work with students. They also help the candidates improve their functionalities.

Looking at the findings of this study it will be appropriate to add also “4.They provide improvement in self-efficacy” to the above list.

Self Efficacy of Teachers

If studies, which test the role of practical activities in the transformation of knowledge into skills, are conducted it is believed that there will be more demand for practice based activities especially in vocational education. It is also believed that the individual's self-efficacy will help him/her act more contentedly in fulfilling his/her duty and be more successful. The main reason for emphasizing self-efficacy perceptions in this study comes from our firm belief in its functionality for individuals.

Self-efficacy is described as the belief that related to individual's need to cope with contingency situations. Self-efficacy emphasize that it affects the individual's right or wrong activities behaviour, at the same time how much effort the individual will spend when faced with a problem and insist on (Alabay, 2006).

Indicating that there are four basic sources to determine self-efficacy, Bandura (1995) emphasizes that the most effective one among these is the information gained by the individual through his own experience; other sources include the observations related to successful or unsuccessful practices of individuals, the community effect concerning achievement and psychological conditions related to success. According to Bandura (1982), self-efficacy have an impact on emotional intensity, and in social conditions and social changes it plays a role as stimulating for success, effectiveness, career, etc. such situations.

Bandura (1995), in his study ‘Self-Efficacy in Changing Societies’, analyzes the effect of self-efficacy on shaping the lives of individuals in social and cultural networks. This process begins in childhood, occurs during the life, examines the human adaptation in family and educational role and cross-cultural restructuring.

According to Schunk (1990), self-efficacy belief is the most important predict of human behaviours. If the individuals believe that they have the needed skills and control power, they become more willing to choose this task, express their deteminity; act in a particular manner (Eaton and Dembo, 1997; Sharp, 2002). In comparison with the students having doubts about their learning capacity and capability, those who has high level self-efficacy beliefs adapts more easily, studies hard, looking for challenging learning experiences, more resistant to difficulties that hey encountered and successful (Pajares, 2002; Schunk, 1990, 1998; Zimmerman, 1989, 2000). Wigfield and Ecless (2000) suggests that learner's belief in achieving an activity and their evaluation for the activity can affect their individual choices, insistence in performing the activity and their performance (Cited in Üredi and Üredi, 2006).

According to Schunk (1990) satisfaction of reaching a goal doubles the self-efficacy belief and one determines more forcible targets. This process enhances the achievement of the individual.

Sharp (2002) stresses that self-efficacy beliefs provide a basis for human motivation, prosperity and personal achievements. Because, if one does not believe his actions will not

lead to desirable results, he becomes reluctant in struggling against difficulties and making response.

Zimmerman (2000) emphasizes that self-efficacy is sensitive in mediation of detailed changes in context of student's performance disciplined as an individual with communication and students' academic achievement. In other words, performance changes, learning methods and academic achievement affect self efficacy.

According to Bandura (1977, 1984, 1995) self-efficacy perception involves individual's beliefs in his/her efficiency that influences the outcome of a given task. The self-efficacy perceptions and the expectations about outcomes may not always coincide. The self-efficacy of individuals can be high but outcome expectations can be low. Outcome expectations can also be positive despite low self-efficacy perceptions.

As Kuzgun (2000) also stated self-efficacy perception is the combination of the individual's successes as the result of his/her capacity, motivations and the other elements that form the self. Self-efficacy perception also determines the individual's willpower on whether to continue these attempts or not.

According to Bandura (1995) the sources of the self-efficacy perception are as follows:

- a) Direct experiences
- b) Social models
- c) Verbal persuasion
- d) The physical and emotional state of the individual

If we intend to deal with to what degree these sources influence the individual's self-efficacy we can see that "direct experiences" is the most influential factor. In our study we expect to find that practice based activities have a similar influence on the self-efficacy perception.

Bandura (1995) lists the influences of Self-efficacy perception as follows:

- a) Cognitive processes
- b) Motivational processes
- c) Affective processes
- d) Selection processes

Zimmerman (1995) lists the basic characteristics of the self-efficacy perception as follows:

1. It involves the individual's judgment of performance accomplishment
2. It is related to multi-dimensional and different domains
3. It depends on the situation, it is not stable
4. It is measured based on the criteria determined for an expected performance rather than norms and other criteria
5. It must be measured before starting an activity or a task (cited in Bıkmaz, 2004, pp290-295)

Despite the fact that studies on teachers' self efficacy generally focus on searching the self efficacy belief, as the self-efficacy belief based on private education, self efficacy belief is also being investigated nowadays. A teachers' self efficacy belief may not reflect their abilities in teaching about a definite field, besides, it is important to determine the teachers' self efficacy belief on special field. For instance, in special fields, such as, science and biology teaching and computer use, self-efficacy can be studied (Yılmaz et al. 2004)

Guidance and Psychological Counseling

It should not be denied that having these characteristics the self-efficacy perception is multi-functional in educating counseling teachers. For this purpose there should be more room for practice based activities in the curriculum of Psychological Counseling department. It can be argued that the negative outcomes in the field of Psychological guidance and counseling which is one of the most important catchment area stem from the fact that the administrators and teachers have negative attitudes towards practical activities and the quality of education offered is poor (Ültanır, 2000,pp12-13).

After 1960s psychological counseling profession has improved. In 1970s and 1980s psychological counselors were motivated to make a difference in students' achievement and performances. Guidance and Psychological Counseling is a helping process by the experts for individuals to recognize themselves, their environment and to solve their problems by using their concealed power. Guidance and Psychological Counseling services provides help for individuals to satisfy their needs, implement their plans, solve their problems and increase self-awareness and live a healthier life. (Ok 1995i, p.52) states that it is an indispensable necessity to allow for guidance services in schools in order to prepare new generations for life. The increasing discipline problems in schools expanded the importance of the staff who offers psychological counseling and guidance services.

It is more appropriate to evaluate the results obtained from research studies on the improvement of the curriculum used for training Guidance Teachers and Psychological Counselors in schools. This way the services provided by the staff can improve (Yeşilyaprak, 2000). The school counselors should embrace their roles. It is a fact that people whose self-efficacy level is low cannot satisfactorily accomplish their roles (Kuzgun,2000). The clinical dimension of the Psychological counseling education is defined as practicum and internship. Clinical education and practicum focus of both psychological guidance education and psychological counseling profession. The standards in this area involve laboratory experiences under supervision, and practices and internship.

Psychological Counseling and Guidance (PCG) Program suggests 140 hours of individual psychological counseling under the supervision of instructors, 140 hours of group counseling and guidance, 70 hours of career guidance and counseling which make total 350 hours internship. Besides it requires a total of 140 hours of internship; 70 hours in school and 70 hours in guidance center (Doğan, 2001, 347-350).

It is inevitable to shift to developmental guidance program if more effective and sufficient services are planned for students despite all estimated problems. The flexible structure of comprehensive guidance programs enables arrangements in accordance with the needs of students and available resources (Erkan, 1995, p.44). It is more appropriate that the curriculum designed for training candidates to meet contemporary and daily needs covers practice based activities.

This study was carried out to investigate the effectiveness of field practices as part of Psychological Counseling Field Study I and II courses which are taught over two semesters, once a week in schools. In this study the effectiveness of these activities were

examined through the self-efficacy perceptions of the Psychological Counselors/Guidance teachers.

For this purpose answers to the following research questions were sought:

1. Do the Psychological Counseling and Guidance internship courses affect the self-efficacy perceptions of the candidates of psychological Guidance and Counseling?
2. Are there differences in the self-efficacy perceptions of the candidates in terms of gender?

Hypothesis

1. The Psychological Counseling and Guidance and Group Psychological Counseling practice based activities affect the self efficacy perceptions of the candidates.
2. There are no differences in the self efficacy perceptions of the candidates in terms of gender.

Method

In this study pretest-post test one group design was employed.

Population and Sample

The population of this study constitutes the Psychological Counseling and Guidance students studying in the Department of Education Faculty in Atatürk University. The sample of this study includes 59 fourth-grade students (31 female and 28 male students) studying in the Department of Psychological Counseling in the 2003-2004 academic year in the Kazım Karabekir Education Faculty, Ataturk University.

Data Collection Instruments

In the study a 20-item Likert Type “Self-Efficacy Perception Scale” developed by Ilgar and Cosgun (2001) was utilized. In development of the scale, Bandura’s theory was used as the theoretical base. 28-item test form was prepared and applied to 210 students of 3th and 4th year students of PCG and factor analysis was done with these students. As a result, ‘Guidance Counselor Self-efficacy Perception Scale’ was obtained. Cronbach alpha coefficient was found .84 and test-retest reliability was calculated as .79. This scale was administered to students in a classroom environment at the beginning of the academic year (pretest) and after students attended the practice based activities (posttest)

Data Analysis

After data collection data obtained were analyzed in SPSS-11. T test and MANOVA (Multiple Analysis of Variance Analysis) was done in analyzing the data.

Findings and Discussion

The Effect of Practice Based Activities on the Self-Efficacy Perceptions of the Prospective School Counselors

Data obtained from the pre-test administered to students at the beginning of the academic year and the post-test administered at the end of the academic year are presented in the Table 1:

Table 1. *The Arithmetic Mean Standard Deviation and F Value Table*

Variable		N	Mean	S.D.	df	t	p
PCG Experience	Pretest	59	42,8667	7,0746	58	8,774	0.000*
	Posttest	59	50,5833	5,4533			

Looking at the table, it can be seen that there are differences between the pre-test and post-test scores of the candidates obtained in the practice based activities in Guidance and Psychological Counseling Internship I and II courses. This result shows that guidance and psychological counseling field experiences that were carried out in elementary and secondary schools by the 7th semester students have a significant impact on the self-efficacy perceptions of the candidates.

When the effects of school experience and teaching practice activities are examined, it can be said that similar results are found. Aytunga (2006) asserts that the course, School Experience I, affected the candidates of teaching profession positively; Şişman and Acat (2003) in their study, reveal that teacher practice activities change the perception of candidates significantly. Yiğitbaş and Yetkin (2002) argue that completing the studies in their schools and starting to practice, social service students' self efficacy level is found high. In the study of William and Kobb (2002), it is stated that social service students completing the studies in their school and starting to practice have an important increase in their perceived self efficacy level. In a similar study (Veznedaroğlu, 2005), it is emphasized that Scenario Based Learning Model cause an increase in self efficacy perception level related to teaching profession of teacher candidates.

Due to our research interest in the benefits of the practiced based activities carried in different formats in Education Faculties within the framework of School Experience or Internship courses, with this study we also found an opportunity to analyze the effectiveness of our own program. This result draws attention to the significance of the practice-based activities.

The Effect of Practice Based Activities on the Self-Efficacy Perceptions of the Prospective School Counselors with Regard to Gender

We aimed to analyze if gender had an impact on these activities. We dealt with this issue in this research due to the close number of female and male students. Looking at the Table 2, it can be seen that although there is no significant difference between male and female students the differentiation between the pretest and post test scores is still obvious.

Table 2. *Mean and Standard Deviation Scores Regarding the Gender on the Self-Efficacy Perception*

	Gender	N	Mean	s.d.
Pretest	Female	31	42,7813	8,1784
	Male	28	42,9643	5,7056
	Total	59	42,8667	7,0746

Posttest	Female	31	50,5937	5,7857
	Male	28	50,5714	5,1527
	Total	59	50,5833	5,4533

In order to determine whether or not there are differences in the self-efficacy perceptions of male and female students in terms of taking or not taking the Counseling Field Study course, MANOVA was conducted. The findings showed that there are no differences in the self-efficacy perceptions of male and female students before and after taking the course (Wilks Lambda(Λ)=1.000, $F(2, 58)= 0.013$, $p>0.05$). This finding shows that the self-efficacy perceptions of male and female students do not change in terms of attending and not attending the Psychological Guidance and Counseling Internship programs.

The idea that gender has no effect on self efficacy perception supports this result. In the study, 'The investigation of guidance counselors' self efficacy perception related to counseling and guidance in private education' by Aksoy and Diken (2009), whether the scores obtained by Guidance counselor – private education self Efficacy Scale differ according to gender is examined with Independent Samples t-Test [$t(275)=0.51$, $p>0.05$] and it is indicated that the gender of guidance counselor does not have significant difference. In another study, (Akbulut, 2006) it is concluded that between women and men music teacher candidates' self efficacy belief related to music courses no meaningful difference is found statistically In another study by Keskin and Ogun (2006), no meaningful relation is found between gender of students and total scores and all subscale scores of self efficacy sufficiency scale.

Conclusion and Implications

The findings of this research are as follows:

- * Guidance and Psychological Counseling Internship I and II programs which are offered in our Faculty but practiced in Basic Education Schools in the 7th semester and in High schools in the 8th semester created a significant change in the self-efficacy perceptions of the candidates.

- * Gender of the candidates did not have any impact on the self-efficacy perceptions of the candidates.

These findings confirmed the hypothesis in this study.

- * The effectiveness of the practice based activities can be examined with a larger sample size throughout the country.

- * Guidance and Psychological Counseling Services Executive Board and other boards such as Guidance and Psychological Counseling Services Province Board) as part of the National Education system should be made more functional in order to improve education.

- * More practice based activities should be allowed in Guidance and Psychological Counseling education programs and more activities devoted to improving the self-efficacy perceptions of the candidates should be practiced.

- * The self-efficacy perceptions of the candidates in this field should be examined and in-service training should be offered to overcome the deficiencies.

- * Practice-based courses to be offered in the last two years of the program should be more emphasised in the process of curriculum development.

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