REDEFINING A TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM:
CLINICAL SUPERVISION MODEL AND ULUDAGKDM

Assist. Prof. Dr. Sehnaz BALTACI-GOKTALAY
Uludag University, Faculty of Education
Department of Computer Education
and Instructional Technologies,
Bursa- TURKEY

Assoc. Prof. Dr. John KESNER
Georgia State University, College of Education
Department of Early Childhood Education
Atlanta, Georgia-USA

Assist. Prof. Dr. Adem UZUN
Uludag University, Faculty of Education
Department of Computer Education
and Instructional Technologies,
Bursa- TURKEY

Assist. Prof. Dr. Nermin BULUNUZ
Uludag University, Faculty of Education
Department of Elementary Education
Bursa- TURKEY

Assist. Prof. Dr. Esim GÜRSOY
Uludag University, Faculty of Education
Department of English Language Teaching
Bursa- TURKEY

Assist. Prof. Dr. Mızrap BULUNUZ
Uludag University, Faculty of Education
Department of Elementary Education
Bursa- TURKEY

ABSTRACT

Teaching practice develops three-way partnerships among the university, cooperating school, and the teacher trainee to improve trainees' performance in the classroom. The partnership becomes meaningful when stakeholders are fully engaged in mutual cooperation. In order to facilitate collaboration and communication among the stakeholders, a web-based Learning Management System, entitled UludagKDM was developed as part of a Tübitak-EVRENA project. This study, qualitative in nature, was conducted with university supervisors and teacher trainees to examine the effectiveness of UludagKDM regarding its organizational and communicational aspects. The data, analyzed through categorization of themes, revealed that the existing system needs to be re-examined or another social media should be considered for the purposes of communication and feedback.

Key Words: Teacher training, Clinical Supervision Model, Teaching practice.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of teaching practice in teacher education is to give an opportunity for teacher trainees (TT) to experience a real life classroom environment. In this environment they are likely to face authentic classroom issues and get feedback from their peers, cooperating teachers (CT) and university supervisors (US) in order to be more effective educators. Dwindling financial resources have forced many university teacher training programs to explore alternative supervision models. Advances in technology have enabled these alternative models to utilize web based techniques for communication with the TT and CT. These new techniques have enhanced teacher training by not requiring as much in person, face to face interaction.

Thus, the use of this type of technology in teacher training is increasing and educational researchers have begun to study this phenomenon. Some of the researchers investigated the teaching environment in general such as online and blended. As an example of investigations of the platforms, King (2002) advocated that online courses, especially hybrid courses, designed with a format offering a flexible, content rich, and personalized learning environment provide benefits not only for knowledge and practice in teacher education but also developing a lifelong learning perspective and professional development. Similarly Caner (2010) stated that a blended learning environment would improve the effectiveness of teaching practice by providing more feedback opportunities among pre-service teachers and the university supervisors. Also that environment increases contact hours among pre-service teachers and their supervisors. Cheong (2010) also conducted a study to investigate the change in pre-service teachers' teaching efficacy by using "Second Life" as a virtual learning platform. He stated that "Second Life" platform can offer valuable teaching experiences to pre-service teachers by collaborative teaching practice opportunities.

In addition to the studies mentioned above, there are some studies focusing on the effect of specific technologies used in these environments to teacher training. For example, Wu and Lee (2004) prepared a computer-mediated communication environment in a teaching practicum course for computer science pre-service teachers and experienced computer teachers. They found that this environment was helpful for supporting pre-service teachers' learning. They stated that a video-enhanced environment provided the opportunity for pre-service teachers to increase reflection on their teaching. They also found that the skills of experienced teachers in using such technology-oriented learning environments were enhanced. In another experimental research study Whipp (2003) investigated the effect of an online discussion platform on pre-service teachers' level of reflection in their writings. Prospective teachers were inclined to write more detailed reflections and the online platform became more effective when there were more possibilities for online collaboration, discussion of relevant readings, and questioning from teachers and peers. Moreover Koç, Peker, and Osmanoğlu (2009) studied the effect of online video case discussions among pre-service and in-service teachers. They reported that there was a positive interaction between the video cases and discussion participants. Further they found that pre-service and in-service teachers were able to achieve theory-practice connections. In addition, the online forum discussion of video cases supported professional development of pre-service teachers because of collective engagement of pre-service and in-service teachers in that environment. In a different study, Hramiak, Boulton and Irvin (2009) investigated the use of blogs as an alternative to reflective paper-based diaries in teacher training. They stated that blogs were more beneficial than paper-based diaries because blogs provided continuous opportunities for supervisors to assist pre-service teachers in their reflective practice. While these studies demonstrate the effectiveness of online technologies in enhancing the teaching practice, they are generally dyadic in nature (USs and TTs). In order to achieve maximum effectiveness, the use of these technologies in the teaching practice must be triadic, and include CTs as well. This approach stands in stark contrast to the traditional teaching training practices in Turkey.

Teacher Education in Turkey
Teacher education programs in all Faculties of Education in Turkey follow a prescribed sequence of courses as determined by the Ministry of National Education. These courses are designed to provide the TTs with knowledge of their field, educational methodologies and class management techniques. The single most important aspect of teacher training is the teaching practice. Teaching practice enables the TT to combine their

2

knowledge and skills into effective teaching practice (Gürsoy & Damar, 2007; Özkılıç, Bilgin & Kartal, 2008). In most faculties this course is conducted with traditional face to face meetings. This top-down model does not promote collaboration between USs and TTs. It also does not encourage TTs' reflection on own teaching practice. In this traditional model, the US is only an evaluator usually providing feedback to the TT about deficiencies in their teaching performance. Communication and feedback are important components of the teaching practice process (Eraslan, 2009; Erdem, 2008).

This idea triggered a collaborative research project between Faculty of Education at Uludağ University in Turkey and the College of Education at Georgia State University in the USA. The project goal was to develop, implement, and evaluate a "Clinical Supervision Model" (CSM) for the teaching practice. This model provides a framework for continuous, systematic and constructive feedback to TTs. The project involves the development of a unique education course that can be used by USs, CTs and TTs. The aim of this new teacher training course is to develop three-way partnerships among the university, cooperating school, and the teacher trainee to improve trainees' performance in the classroom. In order to facilitate easier collaboration and communication among the three stakeholders, the project developed a web-based Learning Management System, UludagKDM.

The main objective of the project is to implement a clinical supervision model to establish a triadic cooperation between USs, CTs, and TTs. A learning management system called UludagKDM was designed to support the teaching practice course during 2012-2013 academic year. As a part of this project, current study briefly describes and gives examples of how teacher trainees used UludagKDM, identifies perceptions of teacher trainees in terms of the use of the system. This project is original in terms of being the first offering a hybrid teaching practice course in elementary teacher education programs in Turkey.

Clinical Supervision Model

The Clinical Supervision Model (CSM) is a five-stage model to help teacher trainees' professional development through observation and three-way feedback (Acheson & Gall, 2003). The CSM cycle includes pre-conference, observation and data collection, data analysis, post-conference, and reflection stages (Figure 1). The CSM requires the cooperating teacher and the supervisor to give systematic feedback to the teacher trainee for her/his professional development during the teaching practice process. The three stakeholders, supervisor, cooperating teacher and the teacher trainer, cooperatively work via three-way conferences before and after the observation of the teacher trainee's teaching. The model gives opportunities for reflection and enhances cooperation.
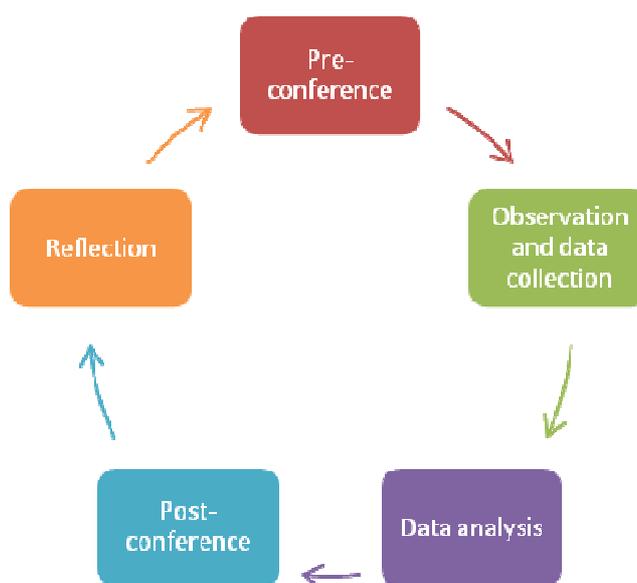

Figure 1: Clinical Supervision Model Cycle

UludagKDM System

As part of the project, a learning management system on Moodle platform was designed to include information about the CSM. This included an online version of the teaching practice manual developed for this project. The system has also included weekly course information, example videos of pre/post conferences, and evaluation forms and surveys. Teacher trainees were required to submit their course requirements using UludagKDM system. The unique feature of this system was to include all stakeholders of teaching practice course.

METHOD

The overall goal of the project was to evaluate the effectiveness of the CSM in improving TTs performance in the classroom. Thus a quasi-experimental design was utilized where TTs were randomly placed in either the group that use the CSM and UludagKDM (experimental group), or the group that experienced the traditional teaching practice (control group). This paper describes and analyzes the CSM group's use of the UludagKDM via interviews of 20 randomly selected TTs in the experimental group.

Participants

A random group of ten TTs were interviewed at the end of the fall term and a different random group of ten TTs at the end of the spring term. Participants were 4th year TTs at 2012-2013 academic year at a large public university at western Turkey. They were almost exclusively female and 21-24 years old.

Data Collection

An interview technique was employed for data collection. In order to allow the participants' flexibility in their answers, open-ended questions were prepared. In the first step of data collection process, selected TTs were contacted via e-mail. All the interviews were conducted in the researcher's office which is a quiet and comfortable place for the interviews. Reflective listening techniques (Jentz & Murphy, 2005) were employed during face-to-face interviews. The interviews were carried out in fall and spring semesters of 2012-2013 and were voice recorded. Interviews took almost half an hour. All the voice recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researchers.

The current paper reports on a qualitative study examining TTs' and USs experiences with the UludagKDM system. Specifically how the use of the system impacted collaboration during the teaching practice process. TTs were asked to answer below questions:
1. How often did you use UludagKDM?
2. How did you contact/get feedback from your US/CT through UludagKDM?
3. What do you think about the navigation of UludagKDM?
5. What else do you suggest to be included in UludagKDM?

USs were asked to answer below questions:
1. How often did you use the UludagKDM and for what purposes?
2. How did you contact your TTs (through UludagKDM/phone/email)?
3. How did you give your feedback to your TTs (through UludagKDM/phone/email)?
4. What kept you from using UludagKDM?
5. Would you prefer using Facebook instead of UludagKDM?

Data Analysis

Data collected in face-to-face meetings were put in a standard format for data analysis using the "descriptive analysis" technique. The aim of the descriptive analysis is to arrange data and report it to readers by interpreting findings (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). A descriptive analysis, the model developed by Strauss and Corbin (1990) was employed: (i) coding, (ii) determining themes, (iii) arranging data according to codes and themes, (iv) interpreting the findings and (v) reporting. In order to ensure confidentiality, a pseudonym was given to each participant.

Reliability

In order to ensure reliability of the study, some precautions were taken, such as (i) data were used as direct quotations from the interviews without making any comments on them, and (ii) a random sampling method was used in order to get opinions and experiences of TTs with UludagKDM. The interview questions were asked in a similar manner. Data were analyzed by two independent researchers to confirm the themes found. In addition, consistent records were kept of the interviews and the same steps in coding and analyzing data were used by each researcher.

RESULTS

Fall Semester

In response to the first research question, most TTs reported that they only used UludagKDM during the first and final week of the semester. Only two TT reported that they logged in UludagKDM every week to submit course requirements and check if there is an announcement or message from their USs. Two TTs reported that since they did not have an internet connection at home, they submitted all course requirements at the end of the semester and did not use the UludagKDM until then. One TT stated that "If there had been announcements we would have to check UludagKDM more often."

In response to the second research question, it was reported that none of the TTs received feedback from their supervisors through UludagKDM system. Rather, they communicated with their USs via face-to-face, e-mail, or phone. TTs preferred either face-to-face meetings (four out of ten), phone calls (two out of ten), email (two out of ten), or both face-to-face and email (two out of ten) communication for getting feedback for their lesson plans and teaching. One TT said that "I would like to receive instant feedback for my lesson plans and my teaching. That is why I preferred to visit my professor at her office and talk face-to-face. UludagKDM would be so formal and not adequate to get decent feedback." Another TT, email user, preferred using email to get feedback since she was able to make the changes and send newer version to her US as much as she needs until her US is satisfied with the result. She stated that "I am more familiar with email than UludagKDM. It was easier and faster for me to email my modifications through email and get feedback from my US."

The third question was about the navigation and usability of UludagKDM system. Although four TTs had concerns with the navigation, six were able to figure out how to use the system at the beginning of the semester. Positive comments included statements such as "Even a novice Internet user can use this system with no help" and the other was "Since I am an active Internet user, I had no problem with UludagKDM." The first interviewee was satisfied with the system and she was using it more than once a week. Although she received help with the registration with the system, she used the rest without any help. There were some negative perceptions of especially two TTs. One of them reported that the navigation of the system was confusing. She couldn't even register by herself until the last week of the semester. She contacted to her US via phone and CT face to face at school in order to get feedback. She submitted her course requirements and lesson plans in person to her supervisor. Three other TTs had negative feelings about the system and they reported that they prefer to get face to face feedback and discussions instead of using an online platform. They also had problems while uploading their files to the system.

When TTs were asked about their suggestions to improve UludagKDM, one suggested including chat sessions to get instant feedback from her US and CT, and also to share experiences with her friends. She also suggested putting a document into UludagKDM homepage consisting of examples of educational materials to use during teaching and some suggestions for course management. She said that she would use the system more if we provide more useful documents to TTs. Another TT offered to include a forum so that all TTs can share their experiences during the practicum and they can suggest solutions to problems related to UludagKDM. One of the TTs suggested not using UludagKDM at all since he does not see it useful and prefers face to face feedback and discussions. Another one suggested including a guide for using the system at the homepage.

The experimental group (48 teacher trainees, 10 supervisors and 10 cooperating teachers) were supposed to use UludagKDM to give feedback to each other at least three times during 14-week semester and evaluate the clinical supervision model and each other at the end. Although everybody in the experimental group filled out the necessary forms, TTs reported that they discarded those forms, instead they contacted their USs and CTs face to face.

Spring Semester

During 2012-2013 spring semester, UludagKDM system redesigned to include TTs' suggestions to make it more easy to use and to allow teacher trainees share multiple files with their supervisors. Although the TTs were more positive about UludagKDM, it is reported that their use was mostly limited to homework submission. Out of 10 interviewees only one reported that she and her supervisor were communicating through UludagKDM from time to time. She was the only TT who used the system more than once a week. The rest of them were communicating and getting feedback from their USs by phone, email or face to face. None of the CTs have used the system either. They only used the system at the end of the semester to fill out the evaluation forms and the surveys.

In the spring semester, TTs reported that they found the UludagKDM more user-friendly. They stated that after a semester of use, they got used to use the system and the navigation. All suggested that UludagKDM has to have a forum to share experiences and lesson plans or a chat option to ask questions related to the teaching practice. Two of the TTs did not have internet connection available, so they reported that they had problem using the system and have not submitted any course requirements at all through UludagKDM. They submitted a portfolio at the end of the semester instead of using UludagKDM.

When we asked whether their USs used the UludagKDM for giving feedback or for other announcements, only one reported positively. One said that "since we were having a face to face meeting every week, we did not need to use the UludagKDM for communication. When I need to ask for help after our meeting, I was calling my supervisor by phone." Another comment was "Phoning was easier than using UludagKDM. I was sending my course requirements by email and submitting through UludagKDM just to obey the rule of the course." The other TT reported that "UludagKDM was good for submitting course requirements since when we send them by email, our US might not organize them all. UludagKDM kept them more organized. But, it was not convenient for communication. Phone or email is a better way." One teacher trainee was still not sure how to use the system. She said that "I still don't know how we would communicate through UludagKDM."

When they were asked about their suggestions, all of the interviewees suggested including chat sessions and announcement link, 6 suggested having forum and 2 recommended to make the UludagKDM look like Facebook.

University Supervisors' Interviews

Eight USs were supervising the experimental group of 48 TTs during the project. All USs were interviewed about their experience with UludagKDM at the end of spring semester. While six USs were female, two were male. Four USs had at least ten year of experience on supervising, while three had less experience. They were between 26 to 45 year old.

In response to the first question, USs reported that they used UludagKDM just to check whether TTs submitted course requirements weekly. One US said that "I was using UludagKDM often to check TTs course requirements and lesson plans. Through the end of semester I used the system less and prefer phone or email." For questions about communication and feedback through UludagKDM, USs responded that their preference for communication was email (8), phone calls (7) and face-to-face meetings (2). None of them used the UludagKDM for communication purposes. USs used these methods for feedback as well. One US said that "I gave my written feedback by email and oral feedback by phone. After the observations we did post-conference meetings face to face."

6

For the response to the fourth question, USs reported below reasons for not using the system:

- Navigation was so confusing, hard to use, and time consuming
- Email and phone calls were easier and faster
- It was not a requirement
- USs were not familiar with the system
- TTs had problems using the system so do USs
- The system should be more user friendly
- Menus and sub-menus are so confusing

One US suggested to change the look of the system and use less menus and links so that she might use system. She reported that "I was so confused about finding the right pages to check TTs lesson plans and send TTs messages. TTs were not able to find my course materials, so we had to call each other even at nights." Another US reported that "I am so used to talk face to face with my TTs during teaching practice. I did not need to use another system for communication or feedback."

Because of the low use of UludagKDM, USs were asked whether they prefer to use Facebook or other similar social media instead of UludagKDM. Out of ten TTs, five were positive, 4 were negative and one was not sure. Positive TTs reported that almost everybody has a Facebook account and they use it all day long. It would be easier for them to communicate with their USs. Negative comments were about Facebook being very informal media and should stay like that. One TT said that "Facebook is for fun not for class work" One of TTs had no Facebook account and was not sure if she would like to have one for class work. USs were mostly positive about using Facebook. One of them reported that "It would be useful to share experiences to each other and answer common problems at once." Another US stated that "If it is hard to modify UludagKDM soon, it would be better to use Facebook since everybody knows how to use it." Other US said that "Close groups in Facebook can create a better network between US and her TTs and let them all share ideas and problems in one place faster and easier."

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Overall responses to the interview questions from the fall and the spring indicated that TTs found the UludagKDM system difficult to use and only used it to submit course requirements. It was not used as a means of communication, which was one of its primary purposes, between TTs and their USs and CTs. We believe that the primary reason TTs did not use the system was the lack of its use by USs. Aside from course requirement submission, there were no announcements or document sharing for TTs by USs or CTs on the UludagKDM system. We believe that another issue surrounding the lack of use UludagKDM system is related to the Moodle platform. As mentioned previously TTs found the Moodle platform difficult to navigate and not user friendly. USs chose not to use chat or form option on Moodle as they found it difficult to navigate. All respondents indicated their preference towards more informal ways of communication. We believe that this is due to the emphasis on this type of communication, which is more compatible with Turkish culture. During the registration process it became evident that CTs were not technologically savvy, even two had no email addresses. This may cause CTs not use the UludagKDM system. They gave their feedback through face-to-face discussions during conference sessions following TTs teaching.

Because of the TTs expressed negative opinions regarding UludagKDM, in the spring semester TTs were asked whether Facebook could be an option to replace UludagKDM. While five teacher trainees were positive, four were negative and one was not sure. Positive ones were suggesting that if there is a group created for this course they can share their experiences with their friends, get feedback from everyone and help others. The other one preferred Facebook since it has a chat option and everybody uses Facebook. One response was "If there will be a close group page, Facebook is better. UludagKDM is OK too but I prefer Facebook." Another similar comment was "When we turn on our computers, Facebook is on. That's why it would be easier to use Facebook. We can see posts immediately. We would be following everything updated." One teacher trainee

was undecided. She thought that "Facebook is a different social media. It is not for scientific purposes. We can only share photos and experiences but we should not use it instead of UludagKDM." Two interviewees were not using Facebook and were against the idea of its use. The other two were users of Facebook, but they would like to keep it personal. One reported that "Facebook is for our friends, for fun and to spend our spare time. The course is more serious. Keep the course at UludagKDM but reorganize it to make it more fun to use."

In conclusion, based on the feedback from TTs regarding the UludagKDM, Facebook could be an option for the next semester. Online technology can help to keep the line of communication open between all stakeholders by preventing physical distance from impeding communication. A number of studies have indicated that the successful pedagogical use of technology depends on teachers' attitudes and acceptance towards technology.

BIODATA AND CONTACT ADDRESSES OF AUTHORS

Sehnaz BALTACI GOKTALAY completed her MSc on Instructional Design, Development and Evaluation at Syracuse University, NY and PhD on Instructional Technology at SUNY, Albany, NY. She has been working at Uludag University as an assistant professor of Department of Computer Education and Instructional Technologies. Her research interests are e-learning and integration of Web 2.0 technologies in education

Assist. Prof. Dr. Sehnaz BALTACI GOKTALAY
Uludag University
Faculty of Education
Department of Computer Education and Instructional Technologies
16059, Nilufer,Bursa- TURKEY
E. Mail : sehnazbg@uludag.edu.tr

John KESNER holds a Bachelor's and Master's Degree in Elementary Education from the University of Illinois and a Doctorate in Human Development and Family Studies from The Ohio State University. He is an Associate Professor in the Department of Early Childhood Education at Georgia State University. He has been involved in teacher training for the past 18 years. His research interests include child maltreatment, gifted education and teacher-child relationships.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. John KESNER
Georgia State University
College of Education
Department of Early Childhood Education
Atlanta, Georgia- USA.
E. Mail: **jkesner@gsu.edu**

Adem UZUN has been working at Uludag University Faculty of Education since 2000. His research interests include blended learning environments, web-based learning, technology-based learning materials, learning styles and software development.

Assist. Prof. Dr. Adem UZUN
Uludag University
Faculty of Education
Department of Computer Education and Instructional Technologies
16059, Nilufer, Bursa, TURKEY
E. Mail: adem.uzun@gmail.com or auzun@uludag.edu.tr

Nermin BULUNUZ completed her MSc on Science Education at Uludag University and PhD on Elementary Science Education at Early Childhood Education Department of Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA. She has been working as an Assistant Professor of Elementary Education Department of Faculty of Education since 2006. Her research interests are conceptual development and misconceptions of elementary level students in science and strategies for concept building in elementary teacher preparation clinical supervision.

Assist. Prof. Dr. Nermin BULUNUZ
Uludag University
Faculty of Education
Department of Elementary Education
16059, Nilufer, Bursa- TURKEY
E .Mail: nermin.bulunuz@gmail.com

Esim GÜRSOY is currently an assistant professor at the ELT Department of Uludağ University. She holds an M.A. in teacher education from Ohio University, USA and a Ph.D in English Language Teaching from Anadolu, University, Eskişehir. Her research interests include, teaching English to young learners, pre-service teacher education, and integrating socially responsible teaching to ELT.

Assist. Prof. Dr. Esim GÜRSOY
Uludag University
Faculty of Education
Department of English Language Teaching
16059, Nilufer,Bursa- TURKEY
E. Mail: esimgursoy@yahoo.com

Mızrap BULUNUZ completed his Ph.D on science education in elementary education at Georgia State University. His research interests are: inquiry science education, project-based learning, development of interest and motivation in science, integration of science and play in preschool, argumentation in science education and clinical supervision.

Assist. Prof. Dr. Mızrap BULUNUZ
Uludag University
Faculty of Education
Department of Elementary Education
16059, Nilufer, Bursa- TURKEY
E Mail: mbulunuz@gmail.com

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