Professional Teaching Standards: The Case of Turkish Teacher Candidates

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Abstract: This study aimed at investigating the extent to which teacher candidates believe they possess the teacher competencies specified by the Turkish Ministry of Education. The study was conducted with senior year students from several departments in a Faculty of Education in Ankara, Turkey. The data were collected through a questionnaire which included 14 categories with 206 competency items. The students were asked to evaluate their own competencies with reference to the given items in the instrument on a 4 point Likert type scale ranging from "poor" to "excellent". The instrument used had a 0.98 reliability coefficient. Data were analyzed through a t-Test and one way Anova tests. The findings indicate that in most of the competency areas, students find themselves "good" or "excellent". The participants' evaluation of their competencies do not show any significant differences based on gender, high school graduated, or GPA; but the undergraduate department.

Key words: Faculty of education · teacher candidates · teacher competencies

INTRODUCTION

If a society wants to develop and progress, it is necessary that its schools offer good education. In order to give good education in schools, the quality of the instruction needs to be improved and improving the quality of instruction can only be possible with qualified teachers [1-4]. During the last 2-3 decades, improving the quality in the teaching profession has been a central concern not only in Turkey but in several other countries as well. For instance, in The Holmes Group [5] report in the USA, it was stated that in order for students to be successful in schools, the quality of the instruction needs to be improved. It is also acknowledged that without having qualified teachers success in schools cannot be achieved. In other words, in order to have good students we need to have good teachers. As Darling-Hammond *et al.* [6] highlight:

" teachers' qualifications, based on measures of knowledge and expertise, education and experience, account for a larger share of the variance in students' achievement than any other single factor, including poverty, race and parent education. (p. 10)"

If this is the case, then, it is necessary to establish "a coherent system that can provide well-trained teachers in all communities so that all children can be skillfully taught and ultimately successful in a knowledge-based economy" [7]. Since teachers are trained in schools of education, it is clear that those institutions have huge responsibilities [8, 9].

Expecting teachers to have certain qualities requires developing/adopting some sort of standards. In recent years, substantial efforts were made by professional bodies around the world to set standards in the teaching profession. In the US:

" these included the creation of new standards and a performance assessment for certifying accomplished teaching by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, the related standards for licensing beginning teachers developed by the 30 states associated with the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium and the move to incorporate these standards into new performance-based approach adopted by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education for accrediting teacher education programs [7]"

In England professional standards for teachers which identify the professional characteristics that a teacher should be expected to demonstrate at each career stage are defined. New teachers are expected to meet the core standards and then they are required to broaden and

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deepen their professional attributes, knowledge, understanding and skills as they become experienced teachers [7].

In the US, teachers who hold a baccalaureate degree, have taught for a minimum of three years in a public or private school and hold a valid state teaching license for those three years can get the National Board Certification if they successfully demonstrate their knowledge and skills in a rigorous certification process which takes 200-400 hours to complete. As Petty *et al.* [11] state:

"National Board Certification is a symbol of professional teaching excellence. Certification attests that a teacher was judged by his or her peers as one who is accomplished, makes sound professional judgments about students' best interests and acts effectively on those judgments. National Board Certification complements–but does not replace–state licensing and is offered to teachers on a voluntary basis. While state licensing systems set entry-level standards for novice teachers, National Board Certification establishes advanced standards for experienced teachers."

In as study on National Board Certification, Petty *et al.* [11] reported the following key findings:

- Ninety-eight percent of the respondents stated that National Board Certification had affected their professional careers in positive ways.
- Ninety-four percent of the respondents stated that National Board Certification had impacted their students' learning.
- Forty-five percent of the respondents indicated that they planned to renew their National Board Certification.
- Fewer than nine percent of the respondents indicated that they did not plan to renew their National Board Certification for what could be considered a negative reason.

Professional standards for teaching in Turkey: Restructuring the teaching profession has been a main public discussion since the beginnings of the foundation of Turkish Republic. Specifically, the restructuring activities that have been going on during the last 30 years have brought a lot of new changes into the educational system. The recent restructuring on teacher training which was implemented by Higher Education Council is one of the last rings of this chain [12].

The different reorganization activities which took place in the Turkish teacher training system have made it difficult to get standardization in teacher education [13].

Particularly, as a result of the teacher shortage in the 1980's and late 1990's, a large number of new teachers joined the teaching force without having the basic teaching competencies. Because of this, the Ministry of National Education (MONE) had to offer extended in-service training courses to get those teachers ready to teach at least with minimum teaching competencies.

According to the National Education Basic Law (Law Number 1739, article 45 which deals with teachers' competencies and appointment), teachers' competencies and standards for pedagogic training are determined by the MONE [14]. As part of this responsibility, MONE founded a "Teaching Competencies Commission" in 1999. This commission included representatives from universities as well. The competencies prepared by this commission were finalized after getting some feedback from various individuals and institutions in 2002 [14]. The teacher competencies determined by this commission have three main sections: "instructional competencies", "general social knowledge and skills competencies" and "field-specific knowledge and skill competencies". According to MONE, those competencies should be used for the following purposes:

- Determining teacher training politics
- Pre-service training of teachers
- Selecting and appointing teachers
- Supervising and evaluating teachers
- In-service training
- Professional development of teachers [14]

After the teaching competencies were determined, teacher training institutions were asked to train teacher candidates based on those teaching competencies determined by the MONE [15]. However, there has been little research on how those teaching competencies were embedded into the curricula and how teacher candidates are trained under those new competencies.

Purpose of the study: The purpose of this study was two fold: (1) to investigate the extent to which teacher candidates believe they possess the teacher competencies specified by the Ministry of Education and then (2) to examine their departments' contribution in acquiring those competencies.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study, which investigates opinions of senior year students at Faculty of Education of Hacettepe University, in Ankara, Turkey, is a descriptive study. It

aimed to examine candidates' opinion on the extent to which they believe they possess the teacher competencies and their departments' contribution in acquiring those competencies.

Participants: The participants consist of students from Department of Computer Education and Instructional Technology (N=45), Early Childhood Education (N=35), Elementary Education (N=33), Science Education (N=20) and Mathematics Education (N=30), in the Faculty of Education at Hacettepe University.

Those students have already finished their student teaching practices. Therefore, they can be considered as teacher candidates. In addition, during their four years of study they have taken a number education courses in which they have examined different aspects of teaching and what teaching is all about. Thus, they can evaluate their future performances and their levels in terms of teaching competencies.

The distribution of the participants in terms of gender shows that 65% of them are female and 35% are male.

The distribution of the participants in terms of their departments indicates that department of Computer Education and Instructional Technology (27.6%) has the highest and Science Education (12.3%) has the lowest number of participants.

Data collection instrument: The teaching competencies developed by a commission in MONE consist of three main categories including "instructional competencies", "general social-cultural knowledge and skills" and "field-specific knowledge and skills" [14]. In this study only "instructional competencies" are considered. This category has 14 sub-categories with 206 competency items. Those competency items were turned into an instrument by Mahiroglu [15]. This instrument included a 4 point Likert type scale with a 0.98 reliability coefficient. The participants in this study were asked to evaluate their own competencies with reference to the given items in the instrument using a scale ranging from "poor" to "excellent". In addition, the candidates were asked to evaluate their department's contribution in gaining those competencies. They also were asked to report how they think they could improve their teaching specifically in the areas they think they are weak.

Data analysis: Findings were analyzed by using the SPSS statistical package. For every teaching competency, in 14 competency categories, percentages and means were calculated. t-Test and one way Anova tests were also conducted to look for significant relationships between

competency scores and different variables such as candidates' gender and the department.

Since reporting all the results for the 14 categories is not possible because of space limitations, only significant points will be mentioned under each category.

Findings: Findings are presented under the following 14 teaching competency categories:

- Competency Items
- Knowing the Students
- Planning Instruction
- Materials Development
- Instruction
- Managing the Instruction
- Measurement and Evaluation
- Guidance
- Developing Basic Skills
- Helping Students with Special Needs
- Teaching Adults
- After School Activities
- Personal Development
- School Improvement
- Developing School-Environment Relations

Competency 1: Knowing the students: It is important that teachers provide their students teaching-learning opportunities appropriate to their level for effective learning to occur. However, in order to know students' level, the teacher should know their developmental characteristics and how those characteristics should be taken into consideration in teaching-learning.

Distribution of the answers about the competency levels in "knowing the students" (10 items) category indicates that the mean of the answers fall into the "good" category ($\bar{x}$=3.09) indicating that participants felt that they were quite competent in knowing the students. Among the competency items, "observing students' interests and skills" got the highest mean ($\bar{x}$=3.26) and "recognizing students' learning style" competency item got the lowest mean with 2.97.

Competency 2: Planning instruction: In order for teachers to be successful in class, they need to know about learning theories, curriculum development and student development. An effective teacher not only does the plans but also knows the importance of implementing these plans. In this category, there are competency items about things teachers' need to know when planning.

Distribution of the answers about the competency levels on "planning instruction" (11 items) category

Table 1: Distribution of the participants by department

Departments	f	%
Computer Education and Instructional Technology	45	27.6
Early Childhood Education	35	21.5
Elementary Education	33	20.2
Mathematics Education	30	18.4
Science Education	20	12.3
Total	163	100.0

Table 2: Distribution of Candidates' Competencies in Terms of Knowing the Students

Competency items	Poor	Average	Good	Excellent	$\bar{x}$
1. Knowing students' physical characteristics		5.5	69.3	25.2	3.07
2. Knowing students' social-economics characteristics	1.8	7.4	72.4	18.4	3.07
3. Knowing students' relationships within groups		11.0	63.2	25.8	3.15
4. Knowing students' mental characteristics	1.2	11.7	69.9	17.2	3.03
5. Knowing students' emotional characteristics	0.6	21.5	49.7	28.2	3.06
6. Knowing students' motor characteristics		14.1	57.1	28.8	3.15
7. Determining students' readiness	0.6	15.4	60.5	23.5	3.07
8. Recognizing students' learning style	1.2	19.6	60.1	19.0	2.97
9. Observing students' interests and skills		9.2	55.2	35.6	3.26
10. Coordination with others in knowing the students	1.2	14.9	55.9	28.0	3.11

Table 3: Distribution of Answers on the Role of Undergraduate Teacher Education Departments in Developing Teaching Competencies

Competency Items	1	2	3	4	5	$\bar{x}$	sd
1. Knowing the Students	.6	7.5	14.5	42.8	34.6	4.03	0.924
2. Planning Instruction	.6	3.8	18.2	37.7	39.6	4.12	0.881
3. Materials Development	.6	3.8	14.4	31.9	49.4	4.26	0.885
4. Instruction	.6	3.8	9.5	44.9	41.1	4.22	0.819
5. Managing the Instruction	1.3	3.8	12.0	45.6	37.3	4.14	0.863
6. Measurement and Evaluation	1.3	6.3	21.4	38.4	32.7	3.95	0.953
7. Guidance	1.3	2.5	15.3	38.2	42.7	4.18	0.876
8. Developing Basic Skills	1.3	1.9	14.5	45.9	36.5	4.14	0.826
9. Helping Students with Special Needs	13.9	15.2	27.8	28.5	14.6	3.15	1.251
10. Teaching Adults	12.7	13.9	27.8	29.7	15.8	3.22	1.240
11. After School Activities	5.0	6.9	20.1	39.0	28.9	3.80	1.090
12. Personal Development	1.9	4.4	8.2	37.7	47.8	4.25	0.921
13. School Improvement	3.2	6.3	19.0	48.1	23.4	3.82	0.968
14. Developing School-Environment Relations	1.9	8.2	21.4	37.7	30.8	3.87	1.005

indicates that the mean of the answers fall into the "good" category ($\bar{x}$=3.05) as well. Among the competency items, "selecting the material for instruction" ($\bar{x}$=3.52) and "determining the content of the instruction" ($\bar{x}$=3.44) items got the highest mean while preparing "annual"($\bar{x}$=2.75) and "monthly plans" ($\bar{x}$=2.88) got lowest mean scores.

Competency 3: Materials development: Materials development has a very important role in teaching-learning processes. Therefore, it is important that a teacher knows the effects of good materials on student learning, how to develop materials which can address

students with different needs and how to use those materials appropriately.

There are 20 competency items in this category. Mean of all the answers fall into the "good" category ($\bar{x}$=2.96) again, where preparing "homework" and "worksheets" have the highest mean scores (3.59 and 3.39, respectively). It is interesting to see that "preparing video cassettes" got the lowest mean ($\bar{x}$=2.48). It was also noticeable that "poor" was selected by a lot of participants in this category.

Competency 4: Instruction: This is the largest teaching competency group with 35 items. The competencies in

this group are about what is going on in the classroom including "how students learn, how students acquire skills, which strategy, method and techniques to use for effective instruction, the advantages and disadvantages of those strategies, methods and techniques." The mean of the answers ($\bar{x}$=3.15) indicates that participants see themselves as competent in this area. The participants, however, think that it is relatively difficult to teach with video ($\bar{x}$=2.64) and through lecturing ($\bar{x}$=2.81).

Competency 5: Managing the instruction: It is important that students participate in their own learning so that meaningful and effective learning occurs during teaching-learning processes. The teacher has to find ways for students' effective participation and get responsibilities for their own learning. In order to make these happen, a teacher needs to organize individual and group work and provide students learning situations where they interact.

Distribution of the answers in the "managing the instruction" (21 items) category indicates that the mean of the answers ($\bar{x}$=3.14) fall into "good" category. Among the competency items, "motivating students" ($\bar{x}$=3.40) and "reinforcing positive behaviors" ($\bar{x}$=3.36) items got the highest mean. It is interesting to see that "first-aid to students" ($\bar{x}$=2.80) item got the lowest mean score.

Competency 6: Measurement and evaluation: Evaluation is a very important part of teaching-learning processes. Effective teachers know whether students gain expected behaviors. Good teachers also know the degree to which those behaviors are gained, the problems faced during those processes and the solutions that can be implemented to overcome those problems. Teachers, therefore, need to use different evaluation strategies. Thus, measuring students' development continuously and using appropriate evaluation strategies are important for teachers.

There are 21 competency items in this group. Mean of the answers ($\bar{x}$=3.03) fall into the "good" category again while "evaluating their own teaching", "preparing matching type tests" have the highest mean scores with 3.21 and 3.17, respectively. Giving feedback to students ($\bar{x}$=3.14) also got a high mean score. It is notable to see that "determining the reliability and validity of the tests prepared" got the lowest mean ($\bar{x}$=2.60).

Competency 7: Guidance: Teachers should guide their students in finding appropriate solutions for the problems that could occur during the learning process and should create appropriate learning situations for

them. Therefore, teachers need to know how to motivate students and how to guide them in studying. Teachers also need to know how to guide students in selecting a profession.

The mean of the answers ($\bar{x}$=3.10) showing the participants' competency levels regarding "guidance" (20 items) category indicates that the participants feel quite competent in this area. Among the competency items, "guiding parents about their children (students)" ($\bar{x}$=3.36) and "listening to students and helping them to express themselves" ($\bar{x}$=3.31) items got the highest mean while "guiding students with drug addiction problems" ($\bar{x}$=2.82) got the lowest mean score. Drug addiction problem is not a wide-spread problem in most Turkish schools. Therefore, the low mean score for this competency item can be considered as normal.

Competency 8: Developing basic skills: Students who developed basic skills could be more effective as individuals. Teachers who know this fact could take necessary precautions and help their students to develop basic skills.

In this category (13 items, $\bar{x}$=3.09), the participants' mean scores were high on "helping students to develop Mathematics skills" ($\bar{x}$=3.25) and "helping students to develop skills which needed to be a successful member of the society" ($\bar{x}$=3.20). The lowest mean score in this category was on "helping students to develop esthetic skills" ($\bar{x}$=2.93). This could be explained by the fact that teacher training programs do not include courses on esthetic skills.

Competency 9: Helping students with special needs: Teachers may have students in their classes with special needs in terms of emotional, physical and cognitive characteristics. Therefore, teachers need to be equipped with knowledge and skills about how to deal with students with special needs. This means that teachers should know about special education, know the characteristics of students with special needs and know how to design their instruction according to the specific situations.

There are 11 competency items in this category in which mean scores ($\bar{x}$=2.76) of the participants fall into the "good" category. The highest mean score was on "helping students with special needs to develop planning their professional life skills" item ($\bar{x}$=2.99). Participants found themselves inadequate in "using appropriate teaching techniques for students with special needs" ($\bar{x}$=2.55).

Competency 10: Teaching adults: School is a social institution which aims at addressing all type of educational needs. Therefore, teachers have additional responsibilities other than teaching in the classroom, such as working with adults and teaching and evaluating adults. Therefore, teachers are expected to know how adults learn, how to provide learning situations for them where they can improve their personal and professional lives. With respect to competencies about teaching adults (8 items), teacher candidates found themselves good enough to work with them ($\bar{x}$=2.91). "Determining personal educational needs ($\bar{x}$=3.00)," and "being ready to work with adults ($\bar{x}$=2.99)" items can be given as examples with high mean scores.

Competency 11: After school activities: Teachers are expected to have active roles outside of their classrooms as well. For effective instruction in the classroom, one needs to have good relationships with the school administration as well. An effective teacher plans, manages and evaluates after school activities. The participants reported that they were good ($\bar{x}$=3.02) in competencies about after school activities (10 items). Mean scores for some items are as to follows: "participating PTA meetings ($\bar{x}$=3.37)", "cooperation with colleagues about students ($\bar{x}$=3.22)" and "getting responsibilities in official commissions such as purchasing ($\bar{x}$=2.74)".

Competency 12: Personal development: Good teachers develop themselves personally and professionally and they look for opportunities that could lead them to be better teachers.

The mean score of teacher candidates' responses ($\bar{x}$=3.20) about personal improvement (9 items) indicate that they consider themselves in an excellent position. For example, they believe that "attending activities such as seminars, symposiums, conferences, etc. ($\bar{x}$=3.37)" and "sharing experiences with others ($\bar{x}$=3.33)" are very important.

Rauth and Bowers [16] claim that the basic characteristics which qualified people need to have are "performing well on the job", "learning to live with information" and "developing themselves continuously". The participant teacher candidates display competencies which are compatible with Rauth and Bowers' definition.

Competency 13: School improvement: Teachers' responsibilities are not limited to the ones they face in the classroom. Teachers are also expected to be sensitive to

school's problems and to make suggestions about the way school system works. In order to be able to do these, teachers need to know how the educational system and schools work. There are 12 competency items about school improvement. According to the participant teacher candidates, their competency level about school improvement is "good" ($\bar{x}$=2.97). They believe that they are good on "effective use of school properties ($\bar{x}$=3.27)," and in "helping administration on school-environment interaction ($\bar{x}$=3.20)". They also think that they are not as good in "creating financial resources ($\bar{x}$=2.66)".

Competency 14: Developing school-environment relations: In order to be effective in the classroom, teachers observe their students' individual development closely. Teachers also know the effect of socio-economic structure of the environment, where school is located, on students' learning. Because of this and other reasons, teachers know the importance of cooperating with parents and other related people. On the 5 competency items in this category, candidates put themselves in the "excellent" category ($\bar{x}$=3.19), with the highest mean in "introducing school to its environment ($\bar{x}$=3.41)" and the lowest mean score in "cooperation with professional associations ($\bar{x}$=3.01)".

The Contribution of BA programs in developing participants' teaching competencies: Besides self-assessing their instructional competencies, the participants were also asked to rate their undergraduate teacher education departments' role in their developing these competencies, using a likert type scale from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest).

The means of the responses indicate that in terms of "materials development", "instruction" and "personal improvement" participants' departments have contributed a lot. On the other hand, in terms of "helping students with special needs" and "teaching adults" the participants think, the departments' contribution is average.

It is observed that the answers displayed in Table 3 and the participants' answers to the 14 main competency categories are parallel. The reason for why the departments' role was found high in "materials development", "instruction" and "personal improvement" can be explained with the fact that departments' academic programs support those competencies. On the other hand, the low mean scores of "helping students with special needs" and "teaching adults" items could be explained with the departments' academic programs which don't support those areas.

Participants evaluation of themselves in terms of different variables: Findings were also analyzed to see whether there are any relationships between different variables and the competency scores. t-Test and one way Anova tests were conducted to look for significant relationships. The participants' evaluation of their competencies do not show any significant differences based on gender, high school graduated, or GPA; but the undergraduate department. With regard to departmental differences, participants from the Early Childhood Education department seem to outscore participants from the Computer Education and Instructional Technology department in the categories of "knowing the students" and "planning instruction."

Although there is some variation, in general the participants evaluated themselves as "good" or "excellent" in most of the competency items. It was a positive finding that in at least half of the items, "poor" was not selected by any of the participants.

CONCLUSIONS

"There is growing recognition that investments in teacher knowledge are among the most productive means for increasing student learning" [17]. Darling-Hammond [7] reports that in their study of exemplary teacher education programs, they "witnessed the importance of [the] standards in shaping practice as they were translated into courses, performance tasks and assessment tools used to guide prospective teachers in developing much stronger teaching skills for a much wider range of students than was once expected." (p. 19).

It is hoped that the findings of this study will guide various institutions, (which mainly are Faculties of Education, the Higher Education Council and Ministry of National Education) in terms of current situation in teaching competencies of teacher candidates. The participants see themselves unqualified in some competency items such as "helping students with special needs" and "teaching adults". The reason why they found themselves unqualified is probably that their departments' academic program simply does not include courses about those competencies. Therefore, either MONE needs to revise those competency items, or academic programs of teacher education programs need to be revised.

The findings of this study also can be a guide for the designers of the in-service training activities in terms of the type of personal and professional improvement programs they can offer. As Cochran-Smith (2006, p.8)

points out, "with clear goals, more evidence and more light, practitioners and policy makers at all levels will make better decisions and teacher preparation will improve."

As Mayer *et al.* [19] highlight, "it is not the standards per se, but the uses to which they are put that should be the central policy issue and that uses focused on ways in which professional standards support and extend professional learning should be vital to their purpose"(p. 160).

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