

A STUDY ON TEACHING COMPETENCIES OF TEACHER CANDIDATES

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This study aimed at investigating the extent to which teacher candidates believe they possess the teacher competencies specified by the Ministry of Education. The study was conducted with senior year students from several departments including Computer Education and Instructional Technology, Early Childhood Education, Elementary Education, Science Education, and Mathematics Education, in the Faculty of Education of Hacettepe University. The data were collected through an instrument developed by Mahiroglu. The scale used had a 0.98 reliability coefficient. It consists of 14 categories with 206 competencies 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”. Findings were analyzed by using the SPSS statistical package. t-Test and one way Anova tests were conducted to look for significant relationships between different variables. The findings indicate that in most of the competency areas, students find themselves “good” or “excellent”. It was a positive finding that in at least half of the items, “poor” was not selected by any of the participants. The participants’ evaluation of their competencies show significant differences based on gender and the department.

Keywords: Teacher candidates, teacher education, teaching competencies

1. Introduction

During the last 2-3 decades, the quality in teaching profession has been a central concern not only in Turkey but in a number of other countries as well. For instance, in The Holmes Group¹ report in the USA, it was stated that in order for students to be successful in schools, the quality of the instruction need to be improved. It is also known that improving the quality of instruction can only be possible with qualified teachers². Since teachers are trained in schools of education, it is clear that those institutions get huge responsibilities^{3 4}. On the other hand, expecting teachers to have certain qualities requires developing/adopting some sort of standards. Teaching competencies are one of those standards.

Restructuring teaching profession has been a main public discussion since the beginning of the foundation of Turkish Republic. Specifically, the restructuring activities 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 the last ring of this chain. The different reorganization activities which took

place on Turkish teacher training system have made it difficult to get standardization on teacher education. Particularly, as a result of the implementations on teacher training system during the 1980's, a large number of new teachers joined the teaching force without having basic teaching competencies. Because of this, the Ministry of National Education (MONE) had to offer extended in-service courses to get those teachers ready to teach at least with minimum teaching competencies. According to Turkish National Education Basic Law, teachers' competencies are determined by the MONE⁵. As part of this responsibility MONE founded a "Teaching Competencies Commission" in 1999. The competencies prepared by this commission were finalized in 2002.

1.1. Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the extent to which teacher candidates believe they possess the teacher competencies specified by the Ministry of Education.

2. Method

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.

2.1. Study group

The study group 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), at Faculty of Education of Hacettepe University.

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 department indicates that Computer Education and Instructional Technology (27,6%) has the highest and Science Education (12,3%) has the lowest number of participants.

2.2. 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"⁶. 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 Mahiroglu⁷. This instrument was 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".

2.3. 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 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 14 categories in tables would make this paper very long only significant points are mentioned in each category.

3. Findings

Findings are presented within sub-titles of 14 teaching competency categories.

3.1. Competency categories

3.1.1. Knowing the students

It is important that a teacher provides his/her 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 on "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.

3.1.2. Planning instruction

In order for a teacher to be successful in class, s/he needs to know about learning theories, curriculum development, and student development. An effective teacher not only does the plans but also knows the importance of having 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 indicates that the mean of the answers fall into the "good" category ($\bar{x}=3,05$) as well. Among the competency items, "determining the material of the 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.

3.1.3. Material development

Material development has a very important role in teaching-learning situations. Therefore, it is important that a teacher knows; the effects of a good material in 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 the answers fall into the “good” category ($\bar{x}=2,96$) again, where preparing “homework”, and “worksheets” have the highest mean scores with 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.

3.1.4. Instruction

This is the largest teaching competency group with 35 items. The competencies in this group are about what is going on in 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 ($\bar{x}=2,81$).

3.1.5. Managing the instruction

It is important that students participate in their own learning so that meaningful and effective learning occurs during teaching-learning situations. 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 need 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.

3.1.6. Measurement and evaluation

Effective teachers know whether students gain expected behaviors. Good teachers also know the degree those behaviors gained, the problems faced during those processes, and the solutions that can be implemented to overcome those problems. Evaluation is a very important part of teaching-learning process. 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 his/her 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 ($\bar{x}=2,60$).

3.1.7. 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.

3.1.8. 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.

3.1.9. Helping students with special needs

Every teacher could have students in his/her class with special needs in terms of emotional, physical and cognitive characteristics. 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 about "using appropriate teaching techniques for students with special needs" ($\bar{x}=2,55$).

3.1.10. 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.

3.1.11. 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 ($\bar{x}=3,02$) on 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 ($\bar{x}=2,74$)”.

3.1.12. Personal development

A good teacher is a teacher who develops him/herself personally and professionally, and who looks for opportunities that could lead him/her to be a better teacher.

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.

3.1.13. 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 they way school system works. In order to be able to do those, 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 school properties ($\bar{x}=3,27$)”, and on “helping administration on school-environment interaction ($\bar{x}=3,20$)”. They also think that they are not as good on “creating financial resources ($\bar{x}=2,66$)”.

3.1.14. 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. On the 5 competency items in this category, candidates put themselves in the "excellent" category ($\bar{x}=3,19$), with the highest mean on "introducing school to its environment ($\bar{x}=3,41$)", and the lowest mean score on "cooperation with professional associations ($\bar{x}=3,01$)".

3.2. 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 show significant differences based on gender and the department. Females outscored males in the "managing the instruction" and "personal development" categories. 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."

4. Conclusion

Although there is some variations, in general participants evaluated themselves as "good" or "excellent" for 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.

It is hoped that the findings of this study will guide various institutions in restructuring teacher education programs in relation to teaching competencies.

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.

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