

Review of Teacher Competency Studies in Turkey

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to review teacher competency studies conducted both in Turkey and in the world to deal with this topic from different perspectives to constitute a policy on it. To achieve the purpose a survey of literature is conducted. The studies about teacher competency in Turkey and the other countries have been searched through online databases and analyzed comparatively. As a result, it has been found out that, social and economic context of a country, and the needs of the teachers and the new trends in the world are taken into consideration when determining the competencies for teachers. Findings of this study are expected to provide a meaningful feedback for both MoNE and teacher training institutions leading to the revision of competencies set by MoNE and curricula run by teacher training institutions both in Turkey and the countries in the world.

Key words: pre-service teacher education, teacher competencies

Introduction

With the importance of teaching profession, there are increasing numbers of studies in teacher education. Every country is trying to find the best teacher education program for themselves. From this point of view, there appeared a need to provide standardization in teacher education. For that reason, both in Turkey and in the other countries, some studies on teacher competencies have gained an increasing importance.

Teacher education policies are one of the issues that have been discussed for years in Turkey. The reason is that, as a developing country, it is tried to decide on what type of teacher is wanted to be trained and what type of competences it is thought they should have. In order to question the quality of teachers in Turkey, MoNE (Ministry of National Education) and CoHE (Council of Higher Education) started to determine teacher competencies in 1999 and continued their studies in 2002. However, there is a need to recognize the studies conducted both in Turkey and in the world to deal with this topic from different perspectives and to constitute a policy on it. Findings of the study are expected to provide a meaningful feedback for both MoNE and teacher training institutions leading to the revision of competencies set by MoNE and curricula run by teacher training institutions.

To this end, the following research questions are formulated:

1. What are the similarities and differences between teacher competency studies in Turkish context and the other countries?
2. How do these studies affect teacher education policies in Turkey?

Review of Literature

In this part, first, the history of teacher education in Turkey is briefly introduced. Then, the studies of teacher competencies abroad and in Turkey are reviewed.

A Brief Summary of Teacher Education in Turkey

With the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, there appeared the need of training qualified teachers in great numbers to educate the citizens of the Republic of Turkey. For that reason, "Schools of Teachers" have been opened. Then, in 1940 "Village Institutes" were established to educate and help the people living in villages. In 1950's, Education Institutes were training teachers with some pedagogical knowledge. In those years, Ministry of Education (MoNE) was responsible from these institutions. However, in 1982 teacher education was left to the universities as education faculties with the establishment of Council of Higher Education (CoHE) (Okçabol, 2005). In 1997, World Bank and CoHE presented a model for teacher education.

In this model, in addition to 4 years of teacher education, 1,5 years of non-thesis master's program and educating the students of the Departments of Science and Literature as teachers was accepted (Okçabol, 2005; Altunya, 2008). Lastly, in 2006, the curriculum of education faculties was revised. The reason of this revision was stated as the need for educating teachers with the competencies required for our current era ("Öğretmen Yetiştirme ve Eğitim Fakülteleri", 2007). Also, as it was stated, the changes in the curricula of primary schools and secondary schools were reflected in the teacher education curriculum. In addition, the courses were divided into three as related to content knowledge in 50-60%, pedagogical content knowledge in 25-30 % and general culture 15-20%. Also, the faculties of education had the 25 % flexibility to determine their courses in these areas.

Teacher Competency Studies in Turkey

Between the years 1998-2001, a project has been conducted on teacher competencies by MoNE. For this reason, 13 teachers from Education Faculties have been selected to determine teacher education standards and accreditation programs. The project was based on the standards and accreditation programs of USA and England. Then, some accreditation studies have been conducted in different universities and at the end of the studies a book was written on "Standards and Accreditation on Teacher Education in Turkey" to explain the process of accreditation (Kavak, Aydın and Altun, 2007).

In 1999, MoNE and CoHE started to determine teacher competencies as for the teacher education standards by the establishment of Turkish National Committee of Teacher Education. These were included in seven headings as "planning, application and evaluation of teaching", "instructors", "students", "faculty-school cooperation", "facilities, library and equipment", "management" and "quality assurance" and in three groups as "introduction", "process" and "product". In line with these standards, the faculties were required to meet these standards for the accreditation (Adıgüzel, 2008).

Moreover, in 2002, MoNE has conducted a study on teacher competencies and finalized it in 2006. The project has been supported by European Union as part of the Support to Basic Education Programme for the quality of education in Turkey. Some academicians from the universities, some members of MoNE, superintendents of the schools, and some teachers have established a committee to determine teacher competencies. The committee has also analyzed the teacher standards in the other countries as USA, UK and Australia to this end.

The determined competencies are divided into two as "generic" and "specific". The generic teacher competencies include six main competencies as "Personal and Professional Values-Professional Development", "Knowing the Student", "Learning and Teaching Process", "Monitoring and Evaluation of Learning and Development", "School-Family and Society Relationships", and "Knowledge of Curriculum and Content". Generic teacher competencies also have 31 sub-competencies and 233 performance indicators" ("Generic Teacher Competencies", 2007). The specific competencies are determined for each field such as English and mathematics. These generic and subject field competencies are determined for teachers and the teacher candidates to be acquired through pre-service and in-service teacher education.

On the other hand, there appeared an increase in the research of teacher competency studies. Akpınar, Turan, and Tekataş (2004) studied the opinions of prospective teachers about the competence of classroom teachers. They prepared a questionnaire based on the standards of teacher competencies determined by MoNE for the survey. As a result, the prospective teachers found the classroom teachers competent in general, but in the areas of material development and knowledge of profession, they found them less competent.

In his study, Özdemir & Uşun (2007) studied English teachers' competencies regarding their use of methods, techniques and instructional technology in the learning and instructional processes from the perspectives of English language teachers. She also explored the differences between the ELT graduates and the graduates from the other departments in addition to examining the effects of in-service training on their perceptions of competencies. She conducted a survey with the 4th and 5th grades primary school teachers in Çanakkale. In conclusion, it was found out that the teachers found themselves more successful in their use of methods and techniques than their use of instructional technology. In addition, no difference was recognized between the teachers in different departments.

About teacher education standards, Adıgüzel (2008) conducted a survey research with academic teaching members of 50 education faculties. He studied the achievement level of teacher education program standards in education faculties regarding the standards determined by CoHE.

As a result, he found out the achievement level moderately adequate. In addition, as a result of the survey, it was recognized that the achievement level of the standards differed according to each area. While “faculty-school cooperation” standards were achieved adequately, “teaching planning, application and evaluation”, “academic teaching members”, “students”, “facilities, libraries and equipment” and “administration” were achieved moderately. “Quality assurance” standards were also found inadequate by the academic teaching members.

On the other hand, Çopur (2008) studied the competencies of the graduates of foreign language education program set by CoHE in 1998-99 focusing on the effectiveness of the program. It was a case study conducted at METU in the Department of Foreign Language Education investigating to what extent they perceive themselves competent as FLE teachers and how the program help them to gain this competencies. As a result, it was found out that the teachers found themselves competent in most of the competence areas. Also, although some parts of the program require revision, it helped the teachers to gain professional competencies.

Numanoğlu & Bayır (2009) conducted a study on the opinions of computer teacher trainees on generic teacher competencies. They conducted a survey based on the generic teacher competencies determined by MoNE and CoHE, and as a result, it was found out that, the opinions of the computer teacher trainees were high for the competency of “Knowing the Student”.

Later, Karacaoğlu (2008) studied on determining teacher competencies required in Turkey in the European Union Harmonization process with a Delphi technique. 37 experts were attended the study and at the end, four competency areas and 137 sub-competency areas that a teacher should have were determined. These areas were “competencies regarding professional knowledge”, “competencies regarding field knowledge”, “competencies regarding improving oneself” and “competencies regarding national and international values”.

As it can be recognized from the literature, with the beginning of teacher competency policy studies, the research on this issue has also increased. The research includes some studies focusing on general teacher competencies and also the competencies specific to a field.

Teacher Competency Studies Abroad

The other countries in the world also conducted some studies about teacher competencies. In 1986, a report was prepared for the preparations of the teachers for the 21st century in the USA. Then, in 1987, National Boards of Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) was established. There were 24 areas determined for the standardization and effective learning in schools as a framework for teacher competencies in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes (AASCU, 2007; cited in Şişman, 2009).

In England, teachers are grouped into five categories according to having performance standards. For each category there are different standards. These standards have been redefined in 2006 based on life long learning. In England teaching standards are grouped into three categories as professional qualities, knowledge and skills (TDA, 2007; cited in Şişman, 2009).

The studies of teacher education also in European Union have been presented in the “Green Paper on Teacher Education in Europe”. In the report, they emphasized the importance of the research in teacher education. Also, TNTEE (Thematic Network of Teacher Education in Europe) studies the teacher education policies to develop new perspectives in teacher education in European Union. In 2010, the Council of the European Union emphasized the importance of Education for Sustainable Development for achieving a sustainable society. Education for sustainable development is defined as a learning process based on the ideals and principles that underlie sustainability and is concerned with all levels and types of learning to provide quality education and foster sustainable human development – learning to know, learning to be, learning to live together, learning to do and learning to transform oneself and society.” (“Definition of ESD”, 2011, para.1)

The Council recommended ESD for all levels of formal education and training. They considered focusing on awareness raising and the development of key competences of ESD at primary and lower-secondary levels. The members recommended equipping the teachers and the trainers adequately to teach issues of ESD through initial and in-service training (CCESD, p.6). For this reason, the CSCT (Curriculum, Sustainable development, Competences, Teacher training) Project was developed as a request of the UNECE Ministers of the Environment in 2003. The aim of the project was to provide curriculum models integrated with education for sustainable development to teacher training institutes.

According to the CSCT project, a “dynamic model for ESD competences in teacher education” (“Competencies for ESD Teachers”, p.26) was developed. The model accepts teachers beyond instructors. Teachers are the “individuals who are in dynamic relationship with their students, their colleagues and the wider society” (p.27). Furthermore, there are five domains of competencies in the model as knowledge, systems thinking, emotions, ethics and values, and action. The report also related the competence fields with the four pillars of education of 21st century as “domain competences” for “learning to know”, “methodological competences” for “learning to do”, “personal competences”, for “learning to be” and “social competences” for learning to live together.

Method

The method of the study is survey of literature. The studies about teacher competency in Turkey and the other countries have been searched through online databases and analyzed comparatively.

Results

From the literature it can be seen that there is an increase in the studies of teacher competencies for teacher education both in Turkey and in the other countries. As for the first research question, it can be said that the studies conducted in Turkey show that for the quality of teachers both MoNE and CoHE work and try to find common competencies. In that way, they want to establish standardization for teacher training and effective learning. Especially, the final study conducted on determining generic and specific competencies is a comprehensive study stating six competencies with 31 sub competencies and 233 performance indicators. With the help of the performance indicators, it is thought to make it easy to assess the performance of the teachers. However, the number of the indicators is so many that it is difficult to assess the level of the accomplishment of them easily in practice.

On the other hand, the other countries in the world also emphasize teacher competency studies. As it is stated in the literature, the policy makers in both the USA and England consider that for an effective learning in schools some standards for teacher competencies should be determined. In addition, the countries in Europe have also the same need for the standardization in European Union.

However, there are also some differences among countries about teacher competency policies. The competency studies in Turkey generally focus on the knowledge of the teacher. This knowledge may be related to subject matter, students, teaching and planning. However, the studies especially in European Union countries are more holistic, and they are related to long life learning strategies and affective skills. They are about systems thinking, emotions, ethics and values, and action in addition to knowledge. They also focus on developing “learning to know”, “learning to do”, “learning to be” and “learning to live together” considering the four pillars of education. This also shows their perspectives about the concept of a “teacher”. They think that teachers are not just the individuals in the classes; they feel, they act, and they also have the dynamic relationships with their colleagues and the society. For that reason, the competencies are determined accordingly.

In addition, the concept of sustainable development is also emphasized in the development of teacher competencies. As education for sustainable development is related to environmental, economic and social aspects, the Commission of European Union wants to reflect these aspects in the competencies of the teachers.

As for the second research question, it can be said that both the studies about teacher competencies conducted in Turkey and the world affect the teacher education policies in Turkey. As a result of globalization, Turkey is affected by the economies and the politics of the other countries in the world. As a result, the models and the policies of teacher education are changing rapidly. For instance, with the economic and social needs of the country, the model of Village Institutes were established to train teachers for the education of literate people and the people who can improve the economy and social activities of the villages. However, the changing economies and the ideologies of the country and the world also were the reasons of the change in the model of teacher education. Moreover, as a result of the changing politics, education faculties and the Council of Higher Education were established, too. Although the quality of teacher education was considered and it was the reason of the changes of the models such as increasing the years of education in faculties, there were times that the term of quality was not taken into consideration. For instance, teachers were trained by letters in a short time and the people who have content knowledge but less knowledge on pedagogy became teachers in the past for the reason of quantity.

In addition, as a result of globalization and internationalization, the European Union is another factor that affects Turkey's teacher education policy. To be a member of the Union, the studies conducted in Europe are followed and taken as a sample. For instance, the determination of the generic and specific teacher competencies has been supported by European Union. Also, some certificate programs in Turkey for teacher education are given through different countries. Lastly, some studies are launched about the teacher competencies for education for sustainable development in Turkey, too. As a result of the studies, it is expected to add some effective competencies to the programs.

Conclusion

In the world, there is an increase trend for the determination of teacher competencies to provide higher quality in education. For that reason, Turkey also takes its place in this information age in a globalized world. The studies conducted in Turkey and the other countries affect each other mutually.

In conclusion, for the determination of teacher competencies, in addition to following the research in the other countries, the economic and social context of our country should also be recognized. By just changing the names of the models, the competencies of the teachers cannot be changed. The importance should be given to the needs of the teachers and the society.

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