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TEACHER EDUCATION AND FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHER PROFESSIONALISM IN THE 21st CENTURY

Research article

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Abstract

The quality of foreign language teaching improves so long as foreign language teacher education quality is increased. However, it is not easy to measure the quality of Foreign Language Teacher Education (FLTE) programmes due to the factors related not to the programme but to the learner variables. It has been proved by the research (Sutton Trust 2011) that improving teacher effectiveness has a great impact on learner outcomes. In the 21st century, Professional development of the teacher has gained importance due to the precedence given to the learners. For this reason frameworks and models have been proposed to enhance the quality of teacher education (i.e. NIE, VSK Model, 2009). This paper focuses on Teacher Education programme models and the criteria put forward by these models. A comparison of Turkish and other FLTE programmes is given in order to bring clarity to the concept of professionalism. The small-scale research results conducted in Turkish context (n81) to check upon foreign language teacher knowledge and beliefs on efficacy and professionalism are also displayed.

Keywords: Foreign Language Teacher Education (FLTE), English Language Teaching (ELT), Teacher Education (TE), Values, Skills and Knowledge (VSK).

1. Introduction

The quality of foreign language teaching depends on the quality of foreign language teacher education. The vision for 21st century learning P21 (Bellanca, 2010) offers a holistic and systemic view of how we can reconceptualize and reinvigorate public education bringing together all the elements- 21st century student outcomes and 21st century education support systems- into a unified framework (p.xiv). The framework covers life and career skills; learning and innovation skills; information media and technology skills; core subjects, 21st century skills and 21st century education support systems (p.xv). The main purpose is stated to be the preparation of the students for a better learning that would support them in their lifelong struggles. This framework is closely related to the good quality teacher training/ education models suggested by scholars (Sang, 2010), (Kürsteiner, 2016). The belief that doing well in school no longer guarantees a lifelong job or career, as it did in the past. Future learning is highly different from the past. Gardner (Gardner, 2010) also believes that education has to undergo fundamental changes and with the forces of globalization, he suggests it is essential to develop other kinds of minds such as; the disciplined mind, the synthesizing mind, the creating mind, the respectful mind and the ethical mind.

1.1. Related Literature

It has been proved by the research (Higgins, May, 2011) that improving teacher effectiveness has a great impact on learner outcomes. It is not easy to conceptualize teacher professionalism. Teacher resistance can not be ignored. However maintaining high standards of teaching is not dependent on teachers only. We need to create Professional learning communities and support teachers for professionalism.

Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) report, Supporting Teacher Professionalism, based on the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) (OECD, 2018), conceptualizes teacher professionalism as being comprised of: knowledge, autonomy, and peer networks and it emphasizes the importance of these elements to maintain high standards of teaching.

In many countries throughout the World, Pre-service teacher education equips student teachers with the necessary knowledge for the profession, but in many contexts this type of education does not help teacher candidates to possess teacher autonomy. It is left to the novice teacher to decide whether to join the network or to create a network for peer checks and reflection.

In the 21st century, Professional development of the teacher has gained importance due to the precedence given to the learners. For this reason frameworks and models have been proposed to enhance the quality of teacher education National Institute of Education in Singapore for example, reviewed and enhanced their initial teacher training programmes in 2005 and a Value-Skills- Knowledge (VSK) model was developed (NIE, May 2015). According to this model student teachers need to reflect upon their personal and Professional values like; Respect for Diversity, Commitment and dedication to the profession, Collaboration, sharing and team spirit, desire for continuous learning, and excellence and innovation. Student teachers also need to possess 21st Century skills to create better learning environments for learners.

Singapore carried out a Project which could be a good example for all teacher education/ training programmes. Singapore's visionary education framework- *Teach Less Learn More*-was created for the nation's entry into the 21st century (Education, 2004). This part of the framework consists of four components: vision for the whole nation, vision for Singaporean education, vision for implementing school change, vision for the professional learning communities (PLC). The concept of *Teach Less Learn More* is directly related to lifelong, life fulfilling, and life sustaining learning. It is reported that although there is teacher resistance for the concept *Teach Less*, after long discussions teachers realize that it is manageable with a wider and deeper instructional repertoire. In England, Knowsleys, UK Project of student input on the other hand, despite teacher resistance, is another good example which takes learner as the central point and brings in a pedagogical change. The Project created teacher resistance, but the results show that pedagogy has to change to enable 21st century learning. (Birkett, 2001)

Quali-T Project (Quali-T, 2009-2011) funded under the European Commission's Lifelong Learning Grundtwig programme was carried out with the aim of comparing the role of quality management in adult education in general, with special regard to quality in language learning in the various countries and within the different types of organizations involved. One of the products of the Quali-T project was a report based on a survey of learners and teachers carried out in the seven countries within the partnership, the UK, Spain, Czech Republic, Estonia, Sweden, Germany and Austria. The results shown in the report were striking since the learners' and teachers' views on the quality of a teacher did not show

much difference: For learners, the most important aspects of being a good teacher were that they knew their subject well, they were encouraging, supportive and approachable, that they explained things clearly and were well-prepared. Teachers agreed with these opinions although they also felt it was important that teachers were enthusiastic.

A close analysis of the results of this survey show us the correlation between the 21st century students' outcomes mentioned above (Bellanca, 2010). Adapting teaching to suit different abilities in class, requires possession of learning and innovation skills consisting of four Cs (creativity, communication, collaboration and critical thinking). An effective teacher would create real life situations in class for communication and collaboration enabling students for dialogic co-construction of meaning.

1.1.1. Turkish Context: Comparison

In Turkish context, under the influence of above mentioned teacher education models and the 21st Century Learning and Innovation Skills Framework, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education Organization decided to make changes in teacher education programmes in their XVII. Meeting, 2006 (Kavak, 2007). According to article 53, teacher education programmes should be enriched with the courses that require taking social responsibilities and in article 69, it is stated that the teacher education programmes should be designed to enhance student teachers' creativity, critical thinking and oral and written communication skills.

Looking at VSK model, Turkish FLTE programmes are good at educating the teacher candidates on values and pedagogical knowledge, but they fail in enhancing student teachers' learning and innovation skills, soft skills, and life and career skills for future which in return causes failure in professionalism.

Education is a tool to be used to achieve the necessary skills and we have to look for quality in education on at least three levels: learner, teacher/ trainer and institution.

2. Method

We conducted a small scale research and aimed to investigate the ELT teachers' (n81) beliefs and attitudes towards self efficacy and professionalism in the 21st century. Teachers' answers were important for us since we believe they depict their mindset that effects their classroom applications.

2.1. Research Method

In this research, quantitative research method was used.

2.2. Research Questions

Q1: What do we need to possess to become an effective and professional teacher?

Q2: Please write reasons for each item you wrote for q1.

2.3. Sample/Participants

The sample of the study was 81 randomly selected teachers of English as a second language (ELT) from various institutions (kindergarten to university) in Turkey.

45 (55.56%) of the participants were females and 36 (44.44%) of the participants were males. The participants ranged in age from 22 to 50 and up. 22 (27,16%) of the participants were in 20-25 years range; 8 (9,87%) of the participants were in 26-30 years range, 18 (22,22%) of the participants were in the 31-35 years range, 16 (19,75%) of the participants were in 36-40 years range, 7 (8,64%) of the participants were in 41-45 years range, 5 (6,17%)

of the participants were in 46-50 years range. In terms of education level, 37 (45,68%) of the participants had BA degree, 30 (37,04%) of the participants had MA degree and 14 (%17,28) had Phd degree. Regarding the teaching experience, the teachers who have 1-5 years experience constitute %33,34 of the sample while teachers who have 6-10 years experience constitute %22,23 of the sample. *11-15 years of experience; 16-20 years experience and 20 years and up experience* range has the same percentage constituting %14,81 of the sample.

2.4. Research Instruments

How To Be an Efficient and Professional Teacher” Questionnaire: The data were gathered by a questionnaire developed by the researchers to identify the demographic information of ELT teachers as well as their attitudes and beliefs on how to become an efficient and Professional teacher. The questionnaire was prepared by analyzing related literature. The validity of the questionnaire used in this study was verified by the three field experts before the implementation.

It has two parts. First part includes demographic information of the ELT teachers e.g. age, gender, level of education, teaching experience. The second part consists of questions about professional development. The questionnaire was designed in open-ended question format and it has two questions.

2.5. Data collection procedures

In this study, data was collected through the questionnaire from the teachers working in state and private institutions (kindergarten to universities) in Turkey. At the beginning of the research, a pilot study was conducted with 20 teachers. By analyzing the answers, the third question was omitted from the form. Therefore, the final version of the questionnaire has two questions. The implementation of questionnaire forms were distributed by researchers in Istanbul. The participants from other cities filled the form in Word format and sent it back to the researchers by email.

2.6. Data analysis

The demographic data of the ELT teachers’ was analyzed by using the SPSS 23.0 (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) program. The demographic data (age, gender, education level, teaching experience) was described as percentage and frequency. In order to analyze the data obtained from open-ended questions, content analysis was used. Content analysis can be defined as bringing together similar data within the framework of specific concepts and themes and interpreting them in a way that readers can understand (Yıldırım, 2013).

The answers from two open-ended questions from 81 ELT teachers, collected in separate sheets and the texts were thematically coded using an inductive and interpretive approach (Creswell, 2012).

Each researcher has followed this coding process: first frequency calculations of words made and according to the frequency results, categories and themes were identified. Two researchers separately analyzed the data to ensure the validity of interpretation and then gathered to see the similarities and differences on their coding sheets. The reliability of the analysis was made according to Miles & Huberman (Miles, 1994).

Each teacher’s answers were coded as T1, T2, T3, etc.

3. Findings

3.1. Research Question 1: What do we need to possess to become an effective and professional teacher?

Based on the views of teachers, researchers identified **five** themes. These themes are shown below:

Table 1. *Main Themes*

	Themes	f
1	Knowledge	81
2	Skills	57
3	Professional Development	35
4	Technology	9
5	Experience	6

Turkish Ministry of Education established “General Proficiency of Teaching Profession” report in 2017. In this report, teachers’ proficiencies are reported as: Professional knowledge, Professional skills, attitudes and values. In parallel with this report, participants of this study first of all emphasized the importance of knowledge. According to the frequencies of this theme, sub-themes are determined: pedagogical knowledge (55), general knowledge (20) and linguistics knowledge (6) (n81). ELT teachers consider pedagogical knowledge as the most important one that a teacher must possess in order to be an efficient teacher.

Under the skills theme, we identified four sub-themes: General skills (25), Interpersonal skills (18), Patience (9) and Social skills (5) (n57). Regarding ELT teachers’ skills, interpersonal skills are very crucial in order to keep students active and express themselves during FL classes. The frequency (18) of this theme verifies the principle on language teaching.

Comparing with other themes, “*professional development*” seems less important, however, ELT teachers express their beliefs with more precise and detailed sentences such as; reading trend articles, attending seminars and improving language teaching skills as given in the statements below:

T23: “Being knowledgeable about the subjects, the latest developments in language teaching, the latest trends”.

T46: “We need to update our knowledge about language teaching. Take part in seminars/conferences, read articles, improve teaching skills”.

T57: “Reading on current teaching approaches,
Being a member of an association of any teacher group,
Joining any campaign (website/interest)”.

3.2. Research Question 2: Please write reasons for each item you wrote for Q.1.

The participants of the research, wrote their reasons for the first question’. According to the content analysis, **three** themes were revealed as shown below:

Table 2. *Reasons for being an effective teacher theme*

	Themes	f
1	Knowledge	76
2	Values	30
3	Skills	21

According to the frequencies of the theme “**knowledge**”, sub-themes as; pedagogical knowledge (51) and general knowledge (19) and linguistic knowledge (6) were determined which were in line with the answers to the first question. The skills that ELT teachers express as important are gathered under the following sub-themes: Teaching skills (11), communication skills (4), and listening skills (3). The fact that teaching skills are in the first place is not seen as a surprising result. The **values** theme (VSK Model, 2015) has the sub-themes named as; respect for students' individual differences (11), dedication to the profession (16), Collaboration within the scope of 21st century skills (3) These results show us that ELT teachers are not aware of the concepts which describe the need for 21st century skills related with professionalism in the literature.

4. Discussion

These findings urge us to rethink about the FLTE programmes in Turkish context. We need to ask the following questions: Do the courses satisfy candidates that they will be ready for taking a class responsibility and perform the teaching profession properly? Are the requirements of the profession as efficient and professional teachers so complex and difficult to accomplish? If so, how do we need to prepare teacher candidates for this complexity?

Teachers' cognition, knowledge, techniques, methods and styles are the sources behind the understanding and learning process of their learners (Borg, 2006). Teachers need to apply their pedagogical content knowledge and their practical knowledge into their classes. However, if this knowledge is not updated, teachers fall behind their students and the learning process in classes deteriorates. Performing teaching profession properly depends on teachers' continuously updated knowledge. The requirements of teaching profession as efficient and Professional teachers are complex but not that difficult to accomplish. FLTE programmes in Turkish context need to revised and training teacher candidates for skills development needs to be inserted as compulsory courses to be studied. Future teachers need to possess 21st century (hard and soft) skills along with the pedagogical content knowledge.

The codes that form the general knowledge sub-theme emphasize that in order to become an effective ELT teacher, knowledge in the professional and linguistics field is required. Teaching the language effectively is related to having sufficient knowledge in the field of linguistics. The necessities of teaching and learning require some techniques to be employed. However, having the required knowledge doesn't mean that a teacher can put this knowledge into action efficiently. The all participants in this study state the importance of pedagogical and linguistic knowledge for efficacy and professionalism. However, on the other hand, only three of the participants mention the importance of 21st century skills, the four Cs- creativity, critical thinking, communication and collaboration.

Globalization in the 21st century entail major changes in our lives and the need for essential skills development emerge for a better adaptation. 21st century skills are underemphasized in today's schooling due to the lack of Professional development (Dede, 2010). The question “Do teacher education programmes make sure that student teachers are

confident about their own knowledge and abilities?” needs to be discussed. Could formation of Professional learning communities be a solution? (DuFour, 2010) Teacher education programmes throughout the world needs to go under a huge revision to bring the aspired quality in teaching and learning.

5. Conclusion

The quality of foreign language teacher education is determined with the learners' achievement results. The main purpose of the 21st Century Learning Skills Framework is stated to be the preparation of the students for a better learning that would support them in their lifelong struggles and this framework is closely related to the good quality teacher training and education. Future learning is highly different from the past. Therefore, teachers need to be educated according to the needs of future learners.

Generation Z students are in schools today. They are smarter than previous generations and they possess skills and knowledge better than the others. Therefore, it is time for the teachers to change. We need to teach in such a way that, our goal should not be to transfer our knowledge only but to empower our students to become global citizens who embrace lifelong learning. The participants of this study show no knowledge (except for only 3) related to 21st century hard and soft skills to be practiced in classes. They believe in individual differences (11) but they emphasize the teachers pedagogical knowledge which is related more to the whole class instruction than individual tasks. The results indicate that for the participants of this study, being an effective and professional teacher depends on general, pedagogical and linguistic knowledge.

Professionalism is defined as the process of using education and certification to enhance the quality of performance of those within an occupational field (Shanahan, 1994). The participant teachers of this study believe in the necessity for Professional Development but they do not seem to have attended any seminars or conferences. These teachers can be taken as the representatives of the whole ELT teachers in Turkey. Any change brought in towards the education of Generation Z will have an impact on their language teaching skills as well. The quality of foreign language teaching improves so long as foreign language teacher education quality is enhanced. Foreign Language teaching is not linguistic knowledge to the learners. It is not using one's pedagogical knowledge to talk about the language being learnt. It is not showing the learners that the knowledgeable person knows a lot about the structure of the language being taught. It is activating the whole class for meaningful communication, for the use of foreign language both inside and outside the class, going beyond the classroom walls. The results of this study implies that not only the teachers but teacher trainers and educators also need to update themselves to be able to train/educate FL teachers to teach future generations.

6. Conflict of interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

7. Ethics Committee Approval

The authors confirm that the study does not need ethics committee approval according to the research integrity rules in their country.

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