The Macrotheme Review

A multidisciplinary journal of global macro trends

Teachers' Perceptions Related to the Guiding Skills within the Application Courses: An Example of Anadolu University Open Education Faculty

Seçil KAYA and N. Gizem KOÇAK

Anadolu University Open Education Faculty, Turkey
secilk@anadolu.edu.tr

Abstract

In Turkey, both formal education and distance learning opportunities are used in teacher training. Anadolu University Open Education Faculty (OEF) Preschool Teacher Training Program (PSTTP) is the first and only institution in Turkey that trains preschool teachers via distance education. Within PSTTP practical courses are available as well as the theoretical courses. Practical courses aim to improve the skills of teacher candidates in a school environment. Teacher candidates attend kindergarten classes under the supervision of a teacher. In this context, the guiding skills of teachers gain importance in terms of shaping candidates' perceptions about teaching profession. In this study, the teachers' perceptions related to the guiding skills within the practical courses were determined. Also, the perceptions and applications related to guiding skills were compared. A likert scale questionnaire and an open-ended question were used to determine perceptions and applications. 118 questionnaires were taken into consideration and analyses of data were performed by using percentage distribution and QSR Nvivo-8 program.

Keywords*: Teacher training, guiding skills*

1. Introduction

Nowadays, technology is considered to be the most important tool for changes and developments in educational era. As a result of developments in educational technology, distance education become one of the world's fastest growing and the most important approach that can be applied to many different areas and levels. Teacher training is one of these areas. On the other hand, there are some discussions about training teachers via distance education like "Can teachers develop practical teaching skills through distance education? How can these be assessed on distance education courses?" and "Is open and distance learning effective in education and training teachers?" (Latchem and Robinson, 2003, p.22). At this point, integrating practical courses to distance education can be considered as an important and necessary issue. Practical courses within the teacher training programs give an opportunity to teacher candidates to learn about their profession.

Throughout the history of distance education one of the major challenges has been the provision of meaningful interaction between learners and teachers (Andrews, 1994). In the manner of meaningful interaction between learners and teachers, distance teacher training programs provide practical courses that enable an efficient interaction between candidates and teachers. These courses can be considered as important and supportive elements for training teachers via distance education.

Also attitudes and behaviors of teachers are very important and effective on shaping the professional lives of teacher candidates. However, there are no detailed job descriptions for teachers and this has led to some organizational problems in the practical courses. In the manner of finding solutions to organizational problems, it is important to determine perceptions and applications of teachers related to guiding skills within the practical courses.

2. Teacher Training and Teacher Qualifications

Training of teachers, which are one of the cornerstones of education systems, always keeps its importance in the field of education all over the world. Both training sufficient number of teachers and improving the existing teachers continuously are the main preoccupations in many countries. Because it is known that, a well-functioning education system is only possible by the existence of sufficient number of qualified teachers (Özer, 1993, p.1).

There is increasing need for educators that can perform both learning and teaching. Role of the trainer is not only to transfer the educational materials. Especially trainers who are involved in adult education must play a facilitator or a consultant role (Barutçugil, 2002, p.81-82). Thanks to evolving information and communication technologies, access to information is no longer a problem, so the role of teachers especially related with the dimension of interaction with students are gaining more and more importance. In parallel with this idea, Ceyhan (2003) points to the importance of teachers' personality, professional qualifications and attitudes towards the teaching profession and refers that being a teacher is not only being teaching technicians; it also have humanitarian dimensions like being enamored of his/her work as a profession. However teachers haven't received any training on how a counselor or psychologist reacts; they must be sensitive observers of human behaviors. When the teachers faced with behavioral problems that prevent the students' learning and development, they should be brace themselves for these unexpected situations and should be aware of what must be done. In other words, the teacher's role and responsibilities cover all aspects of the student development like physical, social, emotional and intellectual.

Students are more influenced by teachers' attitudes, behaviors, emotional reactions and expressions than the teachers' role of providing information. In other words, for the teaching profession, individuals are expected to have some special qualities such as having positive attitudes towards the profession and the students. Teachers' educational characteristics are closely associated with their personal characteristics and attitudes; so it is admitted that students are mostly influenced by teachers' attitudes.

3. Application Courses and Teacher Qualifications

Küçükahmet (1995, p.8) stated that knowing is not enough for the profession of teaching; the important thing is to convert knowledge into action. Therefore making teaching practice before being appointed as a profession is very important for teacher candidates. Özdayı (1995) denoted that the practical courses in actual classroom environment are the first level of professional experience for candidates and the effects of this first meeting are considered to be

very effective on their professional motivation. These prior teaching experiences within the practical courses are also very important for encountering future challenges at the beginning of their professional life. Teachers who are appointed as a guide within the practical courses play an important and decisive role in achieving the purpose of these courses.

Ceyhan (2003) stated that teacher candidates have important force to increase the quality of the teaching profession, and therefore it should be provided to gain positive attitudes about the profession in the process of pre-service training. Teacher candidates trained with positive perceptions about the teaching profession will affect their students with their attitudes when they become a teacher. Thus, from generation to generation it can be possible to improve the quality of education by training teachers with positive attitudes and perceptions.

On the other hand, in the context of practical courses teachers have also some responsibilities as (Selçuk, 2000):

- Informing candidates about the school, program, assessments and the rules
- Giving written and oral feedback
- Guiding for lesson planning and classroom management
- Allowing the candidate to make self-assessment
- Taking precautions to increase development and success of the candidates
- Supervising the candidates about acting according to the rules set by Ministry of National Education
- Evaluating the candidates at the end of the practical course

4. Anadolu University Open Education Faculty Preschool Teacher Training Program

Besides formal education, distance learning opportunities are used in teacher training in Turkey. Anadolu University Open Education Faculty (OEF) Preschool Teacher Training Program (PSTTP) is the first and only institution in Turkey that trains preschool teachers via distance education. PSTTP has founded in 2000-2001 academic year with the cooperation between Anadolu University and Ministry of Education. It is completely a distance education program. The main purpose of the program is to train required amount of teacher via open and distance learning in a certain time without making concessions about quality.

Training teachers about how to teach has a great importance. Therefore, the application courses to be included in addition to theoretical courses in PSTTP are become inevitable. Practical courses aim to improve the skills of teacher candidates in a school environment and students attend kindergarten classes under the supervision of a master teacher, create lesson plans and conduct activities with young children. Also candidates expected to write a report for each activity. Since 2000-2001 academic years, approximately 26.000 teacher candidates registered to PSTTP and 17.000 of them were graduated. In 2011-2012 academic years, approximately 7.700 students are evolved to practical courses and 250 teachers are assigned in.

5. Aim of The Study

In this study, teachers who are assigned within the Open Education Faculty PSTTP "School Experience" and "Teaching Practice" are asked about their perceptions and applications. This study is a descriptive study to detect the current situation. The aim of this study is determining the teachers' perceptions and applications related to the guiding skills within the application courses.

6. Study Group

This study covers the opinions of teachers who are assigned within the Open Education Faculty PSTTP "School Experience" and "Teaching Practice" courses in 2011-2012 academic years. The analysis for personal information about the participants is given in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Personal Information Related to Participants

Application Courses	f	%
School Experience	43	36
Teaching Practice	57	49
School Experience & Teaching Practice	18	15
Gender	**f**	**%**
Female	108	92
Male	10	8
Title of Staff	**f**	**%**
Permanent staff	111	94
Contract staff	7	6
Educational Background	**f**	**%**
Associate degree	8	7
Bachelor's degree	105	88
Degree completion	2	2
Graduate degree	3	3
Professional Seniority	**f**	**%**
2-6 years	47	40
7-11 years	33	28
12-16 years	22	18
17-21 years	9	8
22-26 years	7	6
Serving Situation for Application Courses	**f**	**%**
Voluntary participation	79	67
Participation as an assignment	39	33

As seen in Table 1, only 15% of the teachers are assigned more than one practical course. 92% of the teachers are female and 94% are permanent staff. Also it is seen that nearly half of the teachers (40%) have professional career between 2-6 years. Only 6% of the teachers have professional career between 22-26 years. When the educational background of teachers is considered, it is seen that most of the tutors (88%) have a bachelor degree. Finally it is seen that more than half of the teachers (67%) participate these courses as a volunteer.

7. Methodology

In this study, a questionnaire has prepared by researchers to determine teachers' perceptions about the guiding skills within the application courses. Questionnaire consists of personal information and 26 likert scale statements about the teachers' guiding skills. Questionnaire also has an open-ended question which aims to determine applications related to guiding skills. The answers for open-ended question and likert scale statements were compared to determine the differences between perceptions and applications.

118 questionnaires were taken into consideration during the data analyses. Analyses of data are performed by using percentage distribution. On the other hand, open-ended question was answered by 46 participants and coding of data has been analyzed with QSR-Nvivo 8 program.

8. Findings

Findings related to the likert scale statements that aim to determine the perceptions of teachers are given in Table 2.

Table 2. Perceptions of Teachers Related to the Guiding Skills within the Application Courses

		5	4	3	2	1
1	Planning activities with the candidates at the beginning of the school year	92	3	4	1	0
2	Guiding the candidates about planning daily activities	75	20	3	1	0
3	Giving opportunity to perform creative activities	91	8	2	0	0
4	Providing necessary conditions to apply theoretical knowledge into practice	80	15	5	0	0
5	Not leave the candidates in the classroom alone and be easily accessible when needed	81	14	5	1	0
6	Guiding the candidates about classroom management	92	7	1	0	0
7	Making provision for the candidates to use time efficiently	84	9	7	0	0
8	Guiding the candidates to develop their self-regulation skills	84	14	3	0	0
9	Providing a better understanding of the principles of teaching	78	19	3	0	0
10	Attaching value to the ideas and outputs of the candidates	86	13	2	0	0
11	Ensuring the necessary tools, resources and environment	81	13	6	1	0
12	Promoting school environment	66	24	9	1	0
13	Informing the candidates about the school rules	76	19	5	0	0
14	Supporting the candidates to contribute school activities	66	27	6	1	0
15	Guiding the candidates about outside class activities (ceremonies, meetings, etc.)	57	30	11	2	1
16	Monitoring the candidates' studies	92	7	1	0	0
17	Reviewing the candidates' weekly reports	92	5	3	0	0
18	Giving descriptive and constructive feedback	97	3	0	0	0
19	Helping the candidates to see their own strengths and weaknesses	88	9	3	0	0
20	Assigning a grade and evaluating the candidates at the end of the application	70	20	9	0	0
21	Checking the candidates' attitudes compliance with the rules on the teaching profession	76	19	5	0	0
22	Having the ability about concepts related to IT and being a model for the effective usage	77	18	4	1	0
23	Encouraging the candidates about the educational opportunities inside/outside of the school	78	20	1	1	0
24	Do not reflect negative experiences on the learning and teaching process	82	15	2	1	0
25	Having problem-solving skills and guiding the candidates to develop theirs	89	8	2	2	0
26	Acting in accordance with regulations and legislation	78	15	3	3	0

* (5) Very Important, (4) Important, (3) Secondly Important, (2) Unimportant, (1) Doesn't Matter

In Table 2, importance levels of all items are over 85%. When the answers are classified as "very important-important" and "unimportant-doesn't matter", all of the teachers mentioned that "giving descriptive and constructive feedback" is important. So "giving descriptive and constructive feedback" can be accepted as the most important guiding skill according to the teachers. Also "giving opportunity to perform creative activities", "guiding about classroom management", "appreciating the ideas and outputs of the candidates" and "monitoring the candidates' studies" can be considered as other factors come to the fore with a high degree of importance (99%). On the other hand, the percentage of teachers who think these items are unimportant is very low.

The analyses related to open-ended question which was answered by 46 participants has been made and visualized by QSR-Nvivo 8 program. Two main themes are determined as "Problems" and "Applications". Sub-themes of "Problems" are given in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Problems
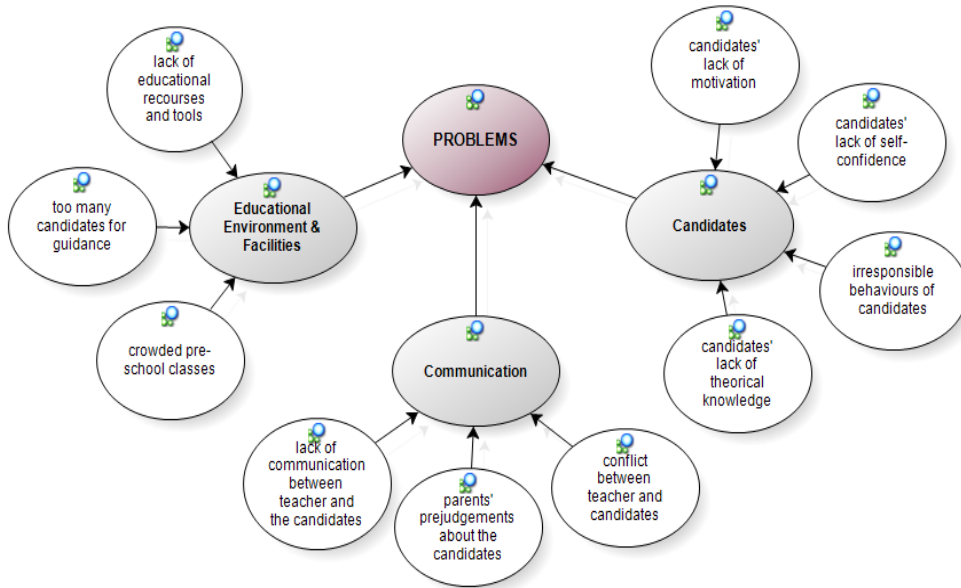
As seen in Figure 1, within the "Problems" theme, participants refer to problems related to "Educational Environment and Facilities", "Communication" and "Candidates". Lack of educational resources and tools, having too many candidates for guidance and crowded pre-school classes are the important points that the participants mentioned about problems related with educational environment and facilities. On the other hand, participants refer to lack of communication between teacher and candidates, parents' prejudgments about the candidates and the conflict between teacher and candidates about the communication problem. Finally, participants focused on some problems about the candidates like lack of motivation, self-confidence and theoretical knowledge, also irresponsible behaviors. The second main theme mentioned by the participants is "Applications" and it has six sub-themes as seen in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Applications
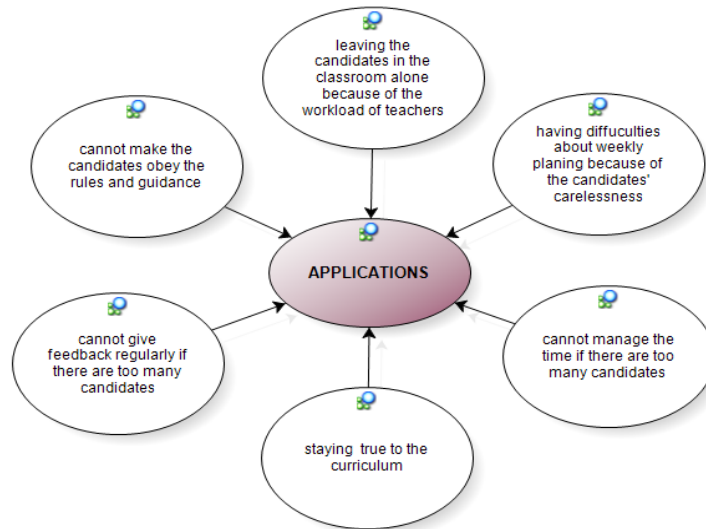
When the sub-themes related to the "Applications" are examined, it is seen that the participants mainly focused on the issues like time management, planning, feedbacks, curriculum, workload, rules and guidance. Although all the participants mentioned that "giving opportunity to perform creative activities" is an important guiding skill, they are staying true the curriculum which has a specific framework. In some cases, the candidates' suggestions for creative activities can be refused because of not being suitable for the curriculum. From this point of view, being more flexible about the activities within the curriculum can be considered as an educational need. Also even though all the participants think that "making provision for the candidates to use time efficiently" is important, they stated that they cannot manage the time if there are too many candidates. Similarly, although all the participants think that "giving descriptive and constructive feedback" is important they stated that they cannot give feedback regularly if there are too many candidates. So it can be said that the number of candidates is a significant point that effects the applications related to feedback and time management. For this reason for effective and qualitative guidance, it is important for teachers to have manageable number of candidates. Another important point that participants focused on is "not leaving the candidates in the classroom alone". But they also mentioned that because of workload, sometimes they can leave the candidates alone in the classroom.

Another difference between applications and thoughts is related to the rules and regulations. Although almost all the participants think that "planning activities with the candidates at the beginning of the school year" and "guiding the candidates about planning daily activities" are important guiding skills; they have difficulties about planning because of the candidates' carelessness. On the other hand, teachers complain about not being able to make the candidates obey the rules and guidance.

9. Conclusion

In this study, statements related to teachers' perceptions about the guiding skills were asked and it is determined that almost all the teachers agreed about the importance of these statements. On the other hand, how these guidance skills are applied by teachers is also queried with an open-ended question. Finally, thoughts and applications related to guidance skills were compared to each other. Based on this comparison, it is seen that there are some differences between the thoughts and applications especially related with time management, planning, feedbacks, curriculum, workload, rules and guidance. It can be said that some guidance skills cannot be controlled only by teachers. For example, candidates' motivation, attention, population and educational environment are also determinative factors for effective guidance. In summary, it is necessary to have prior conditions for teachers to apply these idealized guidance skills for training more successful candidates to pre-school education era. At this point, organization of practical courses by the faculties gains importance and in this context it is crucial for faculties to revise their applications based on more detailed researches.

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