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EVALUATING LEARNING OBJECTIVES OF THE PRE-SCHOOL TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN TERMS OF SPECIAL FIELD COMPETENCIES: A CURRICULUM ALIGNMENT STUDY

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Abstract

In Turkey, as in other countries, candidate teachers are expected to achieve the teaching qualifications and competencies outlined by the ministries of education. In Turkey's case, the Ministry of National Education of Turkey (MoNE) (Yüksek öğretim Kurulu (YÖK), 1998; MoNE, 2006) has developed the general competencies for the teaching profession including six-main competency domains called A-B-C-D-E-F, associated thirty-one sub-domains, and 233 teaching performance indicators for knowledge, skills, and attitudes for the teacher education programmes. More specifically, special field competencies for pre-school teachers have been developed to bring effective-teaching and learning to both public and private schools. This study analysed general competencies and related special field competencies with the aim of determining the extent to which there is a correlation between the general competencies of Pre-School Teacher Education Programmes and the courses' learning objectives and sub-competencies. Qualitative content analysis methods yield the descriptive frequencies presented. This exploratory approach of these important elements of a teacher education programme will be useful to determine and seek to eliminate the intended and enacted gap between the learning objectives and the special field competencies. This study is offered as an example comparison among these elements that might also be helpful in the evaluation of teacher education programmes in other contexts.

Keywords: Competency, curriculum alignment, teacher education

Introduction

The term competence is defined in a different way in literature. Deakin-Crick (2008) defines it as “a complex combination of knowledge, skills, understanding, values, attitudes, and desire, which lead to effective, embodied human action in the world, and even in a particular field”. According to Bandura (1982), competence is ‘his or her own judgment’ over his/her competencies to organise and successfully enact educational activities (Cited in Senemoğlu, 1997: 42). In that vein, Bandura (1982) evaluates competence in terms of behaviour, which is organised and enacted by cognitive mechanisms (cited in Wertheim & Leyser, 2002). According to MoNE (2006), the competency is knowledge, skill, value, and attitude expected by the teachers to be able to perform the teaching profession effectively and productively. It is therefore different from skill, which is coined as the ability to perform complex tasks effectively and efficiently.

The best way to determine whether the competencies have been realised in practice is to evaluate the relationship between competencies and teaching. Teaching is an utmost indicator in education. This motto is written in the Basic Law for Turkish Education of 1973 and Guerriero (2013) as a profession of special expertise and professionalism, expected to achieve general pedagogical knowledge, content

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knowledge and pedagogical content education. However, the teaching profession has never been limited to the view of the delivery and assessment of a course or learning. In other words, the teaching profession includes a broader view of embracing the whole world. In modern times, according to Akyüz (2012), the teaching profession, as a distinguished status in all of society, is a lifespan developmental period from the ethical principles of the pupils, to the codes of professional conduct in teaching and learning. As Conway, Murphy, Rath & Hall (2009) pointed out, teaching is, of course, much more than a 'task' or 'profession', but discussions are generally about the competencies for the teachers over how they could be developed over time and how their professional implications are evidenced. The concept of competence in teaching thus encompasses the following features upon the clarifications above:

- it includes of tacit and explicit knowledge, cognitive and practical skills as well as dispositions or traits (such as motivation, beliefs, value orientations and emotions) (Rychen & Salganik, 2003);
- it empowers teachers to adjoin the complex demands; catalyses the psycho-social resources in context, deploys them in a coherent way;
- it capacitates teachers to perform professionally and appropriately in an educational milieu (Koster & Dengerink, 2008);
- it supports teachers to undertake the tasks effectively (achieving the desired outcome) and efficiently (optimising resources and efforts); and
- it can be indicated to a certain level of achievement along a continuum (González and Wagenaar, 2005).

It is also practical to distinguish between teaching competencies and professional (teacher) competencies (OECD, 2009). Teaching competencies are focused on the role of the teacher in the classroom, which is directly linked with the 'craft' of 'art' of teaching with professional knowledge and skills for performance (Hagger & McIntyre, 2006), but professional competencies pinpoint a wider and systemic perspective of teacher professionalism on multiple levels, such as pre-service, in-service, individual, school, local community and professional settings. Moreover, the report of OECD (2011: 27) has stated teachers need to help students to achieve ways of thinking (creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving, decision-making and learning), ways of working (communication and collaboration), instruments for working (including information and communications technologies), and skills around citizenship, life, career, personal and social responsibility for success in modern democracies. According to Gibson and Dembo (1984), the teacher with a high sense of competence exerts a greater effort for teaching-learning activities when compared to his/her colleagues with a low sense of competence. Consequently, there is a significant relationship between student achievement and teacher quality/performance (Kaplan & Owings, 2002).

Based on the above reasons and relationship, Ministries of Education are driven to much more standardisation of outlines in teacher education, teachers' professional development areas and educational activities, which are multidimensional and complex structures in the class. Similarly, in Turkey, MoNE has developed the general competencies for the teaching profession (MoNE, 2006). In the following years, it has aimed to re-determine the competencies for teachers to make those compatible with the European Union countries. In this context, after vigorous efforts and input from all stakeholders, the "General Competencies for Teaching Profession", was composed of the following six main competency domains, associated 31 sub-domains and 233 teaching performance indicators (MoNE, 2017). Then, MoNE aimed to evaluate all teaching-learning processes and teachers' teaching performances, and their impact over the students.

Method

This study is mainly of an exploratory nature. Determining the competencies in terms of student and school success is easier, but not the teacher's knowledge and competencies which is more difficult to measure. Instead, such knowledge is always integrated with the pre-service teacher education and the courses there. In this approach, it is decided to determine the concordance between the courses' learning objectives in a pre-school teacher education programmes, and the pre-school teachers'

special field competencies before the candidate teachers are appointed officially for in-service. This exploratory approach between these important elements of a teacher education programme will be useful to determine the intended and enacted gap. This comparison will also be helpful to eliminate the gap between the learning objectives and the special field competencies. In this context, this study is aimed to determine to what extent there is a correlation between the courses' learning objectives of the pre-school teacher education programmes and the special field competencies of the programme with the help of the qualitative content analysis to yield the content analysis methods (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005).

Data analysis

Data collected from the table was analysed using the content analysis method to yield the descriptive frequencies to see the correlation between the courses' learning objectives of pre-school teacher education programmes and the special field competencies of the programme. The inter-rated reliability of the coder is found to be .78 (Reliability=agreement/agreement+disagreement) (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The special field competencies' frequencies are determined using the SPSS statistical packet programme.

Findings

The following table summarises the alignment between the courses' learning objectives of the four-year pre-school education programme and the special field competency of it.

Table 1: The frequency distributions of special field competency to the courses' learning objectives of the four-year of the programme

Special Field Competency	Competency Indicators	First		Second		Third		Fourth	
		f	Total	f	Total	f	Total	f	Total
1. Development	1. Able to organise the education activities in order to support the field of development	6	30	11	46	-	47	1	19
	2. Able to organise the educational environment	3		9		21		4	
	3. Able to choose, prepare, and use the educational material	10		16		16		2	
	4. Able to carry out the educational activities	11		10		10		12	
2. Communication with family, family participant and family education	1. Able to communicate with family and assure the family participant	1	1	-	3	1	2	5	10
	2. Able to carry out the family education activities	-		3		1		5	
3. Assessment	1. Able to assess the curriculum	6	23	8	22	10	20	7	12
	2. Able to assess the child's development	17		14		10		5	

Special Field Competency	Competency Indicators	First Year		Second Year		Third Year		Fourth Year	
		f	Total	f	Total	f	Total	f	Total
4. Communication	1. Able to develop the active listening skill	-	25	1	4	4	16	-	1
	2. Able to develop the empathy skill	3		1		5		-	
	3. Able to develop an expressing skill by verbal, body language and drawing	15		1		6		1	
	4. Able to develop the awareness for usage of information technologies in daily life	7		1		1		-	
5. Creativity and aesthetics	1. Able to develop the research, discover alternative solution skills	6	9	-	6	24	35	21	30
	2. Able to develop the ability to create authentic materials	3		5		8		8	
	3. Able to develop a sense of aesthetics and selectivity ability	-		1		3		1	
6. Cooperation with school and society	1. Able to provide students to recognise the importance and participate in the national holidays and ceremony	6	12	-	4	-	10	-	2
	2. Able to manage the administration and organisation of national holidays and ceremony	6		1		1		-	
	3. Able to cooperate with society to make school be cultural and learning centre	-		3		9		2	
7. Professional development	1. Able to provide professional development to?	8	8	10	10	1	1	7	7
Total			108		95		131		81

When analysing the frequencies of Table 1, the distributions are fields of Development (f=30), Communication (f=25), Assessment (f=23), Cooperation with School and Society (f=12), Creativity and Aesthetics (f=9), Career Development (f=8), and Cooperation with Family, Family Participation, and Family Education (f=1) in the first year. The frequency of the first year courses of pre-school teacher education in the field of Development is *able to carry out the educational activities* (f=11) as the highest, and the lowest, *able to organise the education environment* (f=3). In the field of Communication with Family, Family Participant, and Family Education, the highest is *able to communicate with family and ensure the family participant* (f=1); but there is no any findings in *able to carry out the family education activities*; in the field of Assessment, the highest is *able to assess the children development* (f=17). In the field of Communication, the highest is *able to develop the expressing skill via verbal, body language and drawing* (f=15). In the field of Creativity and Aesthetics, the highest is *able to develop the research, discover alternative solution skills* (f=6), but

there is no any findings in *able to develop the sense of aesthetics and selectiveness ability*; in the field of Cooperation with School and Society, the highest is both *able to provide students to recognise the importance and participate in the national holidays and ceremony*, and the lowest is *able to manage the administration and organisation of national holidays and ceremony* (f=6). Lastly, in the field of Career Development, the highest is *able to provide career development* (f=8).

In the second year, the distributions are fields of Development (f=46), Communication (f=4), Assessment (f=22), Cooperation with School and Society (f=4), Creativity and Aesthetics (f=6), Career Development (f=10), and Cooperation with Family, Family Participation and Family Education (f=3). When analysing the frequency of the second-year courses of pre-school teacher education in the field of Development, the highest one is *able to choose, prepare, and use the educational material* (f=16); the lowest is *able to organize the education environment* (f=9). In the field of Communication with Family, Family Participant, and Family Education, the highest is *able to carry out the family education activities* (f=3); in the field of assessment, the highest is *able to assess the children's development* (f=14). In the field of Communication, all frequencies are in the line of equal distribution (f=1). In the field of Creativity and Aesthetics, the highest is *able to develop the ability to create the authentic materials* (f=5); in the field of Cooperation with School and Society, the highest is *able to cooperate with society to make school be a cultural and learning centre* (f=3). Lastly, in the field of career development, the highest is *able to provide career development* (f=10).

In the third year, the distributions are the fields of Development (f=47), Communication (f=16), Assessment (f=20), Cooperation with School and Society (f=10), Creativity and Aesthetics (f=35), Career Development (f=1), and Cooperation with Family, Family Participation, and Family Education (f=2). When analysing the frequencies, the highest one is *able to organise the education environment* (f=21); and the lowest is *able to choose, prepare, and use the educational material* (f=16). In the field of Communication with Family, all frequencies are in the line of equal distribution (f=1); in the field of assessment, all frequencies are in the line of equal distribution (f=10), as well. In the field of Communication, the highest is *able to develop the expressing skill by verbal, body language and drawing* (f=6). In the field of Creativity and Aesthetics, the highest is *able to develop the research, discover alternative solution skills* (f=24); in the field of Cooperation with school and society, the highest is *able to cooperate with society to make school be cultural and learning centre* (f=9). Lastly, in the field of Career Development, the highest one is *able to provide career development* (f=1).

In the fourth year, the distributions are field of Development (f=19), Communication (f=1), Assessment (f=12), Cooperation with School and Society (f=2), Creativity and Aesthetics (f=30), Career Development (f=7), and Cooperation with Family, Family Participation, and Family Education (f=7). Based on the frequencies in the field of Development, the highest is *able to carry out the educational activities* (f=12); the lowest is *able to organise the education activities in order to support the fields of development* (f=1). In the field of Communication with Family, all frequencies are in the line of equal distribution (f=5); in the field of Assessment, the highest frequency is *able to assess the curriculum* (f=7); the lowest is *able to assess the children development* (f=5). In the field of Communication, the highest one only is *able to develop the expressing skill by verbal, body language and drawing* (f=1). In the field of Creativity and Aesthetics, the highest is *able to develop the research, discover alternative solution skills* (f=21); in the field of Cooperation with school and society, the highest is *able to cooperate with society to make school is a cultural and learning centre* (f=2). Lastly, in the field of Career Development, the highest is *able to provide career development* (f=7).

Conclusion and discussion

Analysing the correlation between the first year courses' learning objectives (Ataturk's Principles and History of Turkish Revolution I, Computer I, Introduction to Educational Sciences, Human Anatomy and Physiology, Introduction to Preschool Education, Psychology, Turkish Written Expression, Foreign Language I, Mother and Child's Health and First Aid, Ataturk's Principles and History of Turkish Revolution II, Computer II, Philosophy of Education, Education Psychology, Turkish Verbal Expression, Foreign Language II) in Pre-School Teacher Education and the special field competencies, it is seen that the courses' learning objectives support the development of the special field

competencies of the Pre-School Teacher Education in Development, Communication, and Assessment. This is supported by the study by Erdemir, Bakırcı & Eyduran (2009) with the importance of the educational material selection, preparation, and usage in terms of special field competencies and a study by Kök, Çiftçi & Ayık (2011) with the importance of the ability to carry out the education activities in pre-school teacher education in faculties of education in Turkey. Moreover, the high frequency in the Development in the first year is not a surprising finding for pre-school teacher education, because this pre-school education programme prioritises teacher education in the intellectual development of pupils. This finding aligns with a study by Kazima, Pillay, and Adler (2008), who have noted that intellectual development is not only important for instruction, but also for the specific meanings across topics and different approaches to teaching. Using the effective communication of a pre-school pupil would be developed and enhanced further if a pre-school teacher used the realia, authentic materials, and authentic interaction with peers as a pedagogical tool. In turn; a pre-school pupil could think more effectively and qualitatively both within and outside the educational milieu. (Kazima, Pillay, & Adler, 2008). This utterance is aligned with the high frequency of communication between the learning objectives and the special field competencies. This finding is also supported by the studies of Meintjes, Henrico & Kroon (2015) and Krüger & Yorke (2010) that the curriculum could have the advantage that learners would be challenged to recognise and solve problems in different scenarios, which would enable them to apply their competencies in a wider range of practical situations. Vygotsky (1978) emphasises the contribution of language to social learning, and to the process of thinking. When analysing this in the Pre-School Teacher Education Programme in Turkey, the courses' learning objectives overlapped with the special field competencies, which will contribute to preparing the candidate teacher for the teaching profession (Meintjes, Henrico & Kroon, 2015). This is also determined with the frequency of communication with the family, family participant, and family education as is expected, for the pre-school period is one of the most intense periods with regards to the communication with the family. The family has an indisputable role to play in the child's language, social skills, and emotional development (Krüger & Yorke, 2010). Therefore, the fact that the teacher is in close relationship with the family will affect the communication with the child positively, and in turn, this will bring success.

Analysing the frequencies of the second year courses' learning objectives (Mother and Child Nutrition, Play Development in Children, Sociology of Education, Early Childhood Development I, Teaching Principles and Methods, Elective Citizenship Knowledge, Creativity and Development, Children's Literature, Child Mental Health, Drama, Development in Early Childhood II, Mathematics Education, Instructional Technology and Material Design and History of Turkish Education) in Pre-School Teacher Education and the special field competencies, it is seen there is an alignment between the development areas, evaluation and professional development and special field competencies. In terms of learning objectives of the courses in the second year, candidate teachers will be able to choose, use, and prepare the educational materials; organise the teaching-learning process to support development areas and carry out educational activities. It is also necessary for a teacher to be able to prepare the educational materials in accordance with the children's interests. Gündüz and Odabaşı (2004) have emphasised the importance of the courses of Instructional Technology and Material Development in the information age. Şahin (2003) has also pointed out the necessity to have the appropriate technology laboratories in the faculties, develop the candidate teachers' creativity in the educational materials. Teachers in well-equipped education faculties and laboratories will be able to provide similar support to their students (Şahin, 2003). It is also necessary for the competency of planning during the education process to be an effective teacher. Planning will provide achievements in the teaching-learning process through structuring the instructional design and experiences, and the measurement and evaluation activities. Bowne, Yoshikawa & Snow (2016) are in the same vein as studying in a planned programme will make a positive contribution to the pre-school teacher. Similarly, Berman-Young (2014) has emphasised effective planning and conducting will assist students to be successful in the education process. This is supported by the study by Lemmer, Edwards, & Rapule (2008) in which a high quality of content knowledge and appropriate pedagogical knowledge are essential requirements for the ability to select, evaluate, and use these competencies for the teacher education programme. Demirkaya & Bakkaloğlu (2015) have also emphasised the primary responsibility of the teacher is to encourage students in both independent learning and higher

thinking processes. Smart (2014) has pointed out the communication between teacher and student is important in the teaching-learning process, but the lower frequency is found surprisingly in 'Cooperation with School and Society' and 'Family Communication, Family Participation, and Family Education'. As pointed out by Oktay & Unutkan (2003: 152), co-operation with the Family and more commonly family participation construct an important part of the pre-school education the programme, and the continuity of education depends on the family, in order to better know and understand pupils.

Analysing the frequencies of the third year courses' learning objectives (Physical Education and Play Teaching, Science Education, Visual Arts Education, Statistics, Music Education I, School Experience, Special Teaching Methods I, Classroom Management, Scientific Research Methods, Effective Communication, Educational Material Development, Music Education II, Measurement and Assessment, Special Education, Special Teaching Methods II, and Community Service Practices) in Pre-School Teacher Education and the special field competencies, it is seen there is development in some fields, such as 'Development Areas, Creativity, Aesthetics, Assessment, Communication', and 'Co-operation with School and Society, and Special Field Competences'. Development areas in the special field of competences include organising the educational environment; choosing the appropriate educational material, adapting, using, and practising them in the educational milieu. Therefore, it is found that the learning objectives of the programme support these competencies. This is aligned with the study by Kurbanoğlu & Akkoyunlu (2002), who have emphasised both the importance of literacy in such a period and the value of design and practicum activities during education. Creativity and aesthetics are other important areas, where pre-school teachers ought to provide guidance to the students. It is important to understand and use the phenomena of creativity, aesthetics, and freedom in the pre-school classrooms, where, in turn, this will positively affect the creativity and production of the pre-school pupils (Oktay & Unutkan, 2003: 152). This is the reason why candidate teachers' guidance of pupils to the aesthetics and creativity is so important to the overall skills of the pupils. This is pointed out in the study by Yaşar & Aral (2010), who have emphasised that pre-school education has an important influence on the development of creative thinking skills, and they have suggested the related learning objectives also should take place in the programme. Macy & Bagnato (2010) and Stoddard, Tieso & Robbins (2015) have emphasised the importance of the evaluation in the programme to provide the feedback and the development for the teachers, who will, in turn, find the opportunity to be constantly updated with the latest professional knowledge. Further, the frequencies of Communication and Co-operation with School and Community are high as expected. It is found that family participation and the importance of communication become even more prominent in the courses' learning objectives. Lastly, there is a low frequency in the Professional Development in the third year. The term 'professional development (PD)' is so important and so commonly used for the development of one's professional status. Specifically, teacher professional development is meant for teachers' professional growth through gaining more and elaborated experience with the help of other teachers' examining their teaching and learning systematically (Glatthorn, 1995: 41; cited in Villegas-Reimers, 2003; Rosenholtz, 1985; cited in Seferoğlu, 2004). However, while the course's learning objectives aiming to develop the skills to identify the personal needs for the professional development are expected to increase during this year, it seems that there are no sub-competencies that support the professional development of candidate teachers. Bümen, Ates, Çakar, Ural & Acar (2012) have also indicated that the teacher's professional development has an important influence over students. As Özer (2004) has pointed out, the most important among these is the teachers' professional development needs and subjects they are interested in.

Lastly, as for the fourth year, we found the fields of Creativity and Aesthetics, Development, Assessment, Communication with Family, Family Participant, and Family Education, Career Development, Co-operation with School and Society, and Communication. These courses' learning objectives improved the Creativity and Aesthetics of the candidate teachers which will also contribute to the development of the independent learning skills of the pre-school aged children. As Vygotsky (1978) has emphasised, there is no doubt the importance of the aesthetics over the child's intellectual development and emphasised that the social interaction environments are of undisputed importance for the teachers as a cognitive coach. Similarly, Wood (2003) emphasised creativity to be a

fundamental higher thinking process and skill, which began to develop from the pre-school ages and such a process and skill emphasises that teachers, who provide the guide to learning, ought to be educated in the appropriate teaching environment.

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