

*Full Length Research Paper*

# The philosophical dispositions of pre-service teachers and teacher educators\*

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Received 27 September, 2015; Accepted 22 December, 2015

The purpose of this study was to examine and compare the educational philosophical dispositions of preservice teachers and teacher educators. Voluntary participants were 206 preservice teachers and 32 teacher educators from a faculty of education at a public university in central Turkey. The mean age was  $20.2 \pm 1.6$  for pre-service teachers and it was  $33.7 \pm 5.9$  for teacher educators. Data were gathered during the fall semester of 2014–2015. After permissions were attained from the university institutional review board, each participants completed “The Educational Belief Scale”. The scale consists of 40 items with the following five dimensions: Perennialism, Essentialism, Progressivism, Existentialism, Reconstructionism. Cronbach’s Alpha coefficients ranged between .68 and .90 for each subscale in this study. Descriptive statistics and Mann–Whitney U test were used for data analysis. The results showed that the most internalized educational philosophical dispositions were progressivism and existentialism, while the least one was essentialism for both groups. When comparing the mean scores of philosophical dispositions it was found that teacher educators received higher scores on progressivism and existentialism, while preservice teachers scored higher on essentialism ( $p < .05$ ). As regarding gender, males were significantly more essentialist in both group, while females were more progressivist for preservice teachers ( $p < .05$ ).

**Key words:** Educational philosophy, teacher education, philosophical disposition.

## INTRODUCTION

The quality of the education depends directly upon the quality of the educators. It is no longer acceptable for educators to possess only skills and knowledge necessary to teach. It is also a need to have the dispositions to become effective teachers during teaching practices (Da Ros-Voseles and Moss, 2007). It is a fact today that the goal of teacher education programs is to train future educators in such a way to produce highly

qualified individuals so that they have the knowledge, skills and dispositions to become effective teachers to fostering growth and learning for their students (Dottin, 2009; Notar et al., 2009).

Dispositions can be defined as values, commitments, and professional ethics that influence a teacher’s behavior toward his/her students, families, colleagues, and communities. The dispositions affect students’ learning,

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students' motivation, and students' development. They also impact an educator's own professional growth (NCATE, 2006). Eberly et al. (2007) view dispositions as behaviors based on a meaning-making system that results in attitudes, values and beliefs. According to Bandura (1977) and Dewey (1961), dispositions are guided beliefs and attitudes which affect people's manners and behaviors and so, people live according to their beliefs. As Hart (2002) states teachers' beliefs or dispositions should be taken into consideration in order to change and improve their teaching practices. Because, teacher dispositions drive their instructional pedagogy (Pajares, 1992). Because of that, determining teachers' and prospective teachers' educational dispositions is quite necessary and important for understanding their behaviors (Enochs and Riggs, 1990).

According to Rideout (2006), the basic determinant of individuals' educational dispositions is their educational philosophies. Because, educational dispositions are formed based on educational philosophy. A personal educational philosophy is an essential and active element of a teacher. Acquiring a philosophy is powerful, in that it directs and guides a teacher's teaching practices in the classroom as well as how they perceive teaching and learning and the students around them (Soccorsi, 2013). A philosophical view of education involves asking and answering questions about the role and the purpose of education in a society, the role of the student, the role of the teacher, the function of curriculum, best delivery methods. Educational philosophy is a discipline or thinking method that provides a point of view for educators. Indeed, an educator's philosophy impacts perceptions, beliefs, understanding and values to the point where all decisions can be traced back to their educational philosophy. Hence, becoming aware of and making sense of a philosophical stance is important in teacher education. Educational philosophy is arranged into branches of philosophy which can be viewed and recognized as orientations to teaching and education (Ryan, 2008).

In the context of this study, the main five educational philosophies were taken into account. To be brief, *perennialism* refers to the philosophy that education should begin with teaching things that are relevant to all people beginning with personal development (Howick, 1980). It emphasizes rational thought and democracy with priority. *Essentialism* refers to the philosophy that education is a progressive process in which children should be well-founded in basic subjects (Howick, 1980). Essentialism focusses on core subjects instead of students' behavior. *Progressivism* refers to the philosophy that education should be based in interactions with other people in real-life activities (Winch and Gingell, 1999; Howick, 1980). It focuses on the development of the whole child both academically and socially. *Reconstructionism* refers to the philosophy that social injustices should be erased via analysis of world events

and service in the real world and emphasizes social justice and equity. *Existentialism* refers to the philosophy that education is student-centered and focuses on student choice; teachers provide an environment that is consequential in nature (Winch and Gingell, 1999; Howick, 1980).

The construction of a teaching philosophy within a teacher training program does affect the teaching-learning process (Minor et al., 2002). Because it is generally believed that understanding one's philosophical approach would foster evaluation of teaching decisions (Pryor et al., 2007). If a teacher attempts to teach with no purpose or aim other than to impart information, the lessons are not cohesive and ultimately impart no functional meaning to the students. A clear understanding of philosophy can help a teacher grow professionally and create a purposeful direction for teaching in the classroom (Ryan, 2008).

Once dispositions become aligned with professional literature and the education program's conceptual framework, the effectiveness of education and student learning can be improved. Hence, determining educational philosophical dispositions is quite necessary and important for understanding preservice teachers' and teacher educators' behavior to create alignment between their philosophical dispositions for the quality of teaching-learning process.

However, researches on philosophical dispositions, beliefs or orientations in education are considerably few (Edlin, 2013; Ryan, 2008; Soccorsi, 2013). Although there are some conducted with teachers (Dogany and Sari, 2003; Silvernail, 1996), preservice teachers (Alkin-Sahin et al., 2014; Duman, 2008; Duman and Ulubey, 2008; Edlin, 2013; Ilgaz et al., 2013; Minor et al., 2002; Ryan, 2008; Tekin and Ustun, 2008), and administrators (Karadag et al., 2009), there is a lack of study with teacher educators. Especially, knowing dispositions of teacher educators and preservice teachers at the same time will enable to make some adjustments on teaching process. As a result of alignment between educational philosophies of preservice teachers and teacher educators quality of teacher education faculties will be strengthened.

The purpose of this study was to examine and compare the educational philosophical dispositions of preservice teachers and teacher educators. Specifically, it was aimed to answer these three research questions:

1. What is the most prominent educational philosophical dispositions of pre-service teachers and teacher educators?
2. Is there any differences between educational philosophical dispositions of preservice teachers and teacher educators?
3. Is there any differences on educational philosophical dispositions of preservice teachers and teacher educators with regard to gender?

This research study represents a starting point for

engaging preservice teachers and teacher educators in self reflection for purposes of examining and confronting their beliefs and values they hold regarding various aspects of the practice of teaching in education.

## MATERIALS AND METHOD

This quantitative study was designed with the survey model (Bryman & Cramer, 1990) in aiming to determine preservice teachers' and teacher educators' philosophical dispositions on education. One way to determine dispositions is to conduct a survey to the stakeholders such as faculty members, preservice teachers and cooperating teachers.

### Participants

The study was conducted during the fall semester of 2014–2015 in the Faculty of Education at a young public university which was founded eight years ago in central Turkey. Voluntary participants were 206 preservice teachers and 32 teacher educators from a faculty of education at a public university founded eight years ago in central Turkey. The mean age was  $20.2 \pm 1.6$  for pre-service teachers and it was  $33.7 \pm 5.9$  for teacher educators. The majority of the sample was female (58,7%) for pre-service teachers, while it was male (53,1%) for teacher educators. Because of the lack of seniors at faculty of education yet, preservice teachers were either freshman, sophomore or juniors who had completed educational foundations course during their first year in different majors (Science Education  $n=18$ , Turkish Language Teaching  $n=17$ , Physical Education and Sports Education  $n=65$ , English Language Teaching  $n=11$ , Social Studies Education  $n=50$ , Primary Education  $n=45$ ).

### Measurement and analysis

After permissions were attained from the university institutional review board each participants completed "The Educational Belief Scale" (Yilmaz et al., 2011) to reflect their philosophical orientation. The scale consists of 40 items and configured as 5 Point Likert Type ranging from strong disagreement to strong agreement with the following five dimensions: "Perennialism, Essentialism, Progressivism, Reconstructionalism, and Existentialism". Each item was connected to one of five educational philosophical dispositions based on the role of the student, the role of the teacher, the function of curriculum, best delivery methods, and the purpose of education. Essentialism-focussing on core subjects instead of student behavior; Perennialism-emphasizing rational thought and democracy; Progressivism-focussing on the development of the whole child (both academic and social development); Reconstructionism-focussing on social justice and equity, Existentialism-focussing on student choice. As the scale consists of independent five subscales, total score cannot be reached. As there are different numbers of items in each factor, it is essential to divide each person's factor score into the related factor's item number and convert the result into a range of 1-5 for comparison. Thus, the individual's prominent philosophy or philosophies are found and the individual can be appointed to the related philosophy. A high score from a factor shows that the participants believe and internalize the educational philosophy in the factor, whereas a low score shows that they have a weak disposition to the related philosophy.

Findings of the exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis showed valid scores for teachers and pre-service teachers. KMO

was found as 0.93 and Barlett's Test of Sphericity was found [ $\chi^2=7521.998$ ,  $df = 780$ ,  $P<.01$ ] to conduct exploratory factor analysis. Item factor loadings ranged from 0.42 to 0.74, corrected item-total correlations from 0.22 to 0.90, and reliability coefficients from 0.69 to 0.86 for sub-scales. Total variance explained by the five factors was about 50%. As a result of confirmatory factor analysis,  $\chi^2/df$  ratio was 2.23 ( $\chi^2/df=1621.67/728$ ), GFI was 0.85, AGFI was 0.83, RMSEA was 0.046, RMR and SRMR were found as 0.065, CFI was 0.97, NFI was 0.95 and NNFI was 0.97, PGFI was 0.75.

As the findings of the validity and reliability of the data were sufficient for preservice teachers and teachers, it was used in this study. For the current study, Cronbach's Alpha coefficients were .68 for perennialism; .69 for essentialism; .90 for progressivism; .81 for reconstructionalism; .79 for existentialism. Descriptive statistics and Mann-Whitney U test were used for data analysis.

## RESULTS

The results showed that the most internalized philosophical dispositions of preservice teachers were progressivism ( $M=4.11$ ,  $SD=.76$ ), existentialism, reconstructionalism, perennialism, and essentialism ( $M=3.06$ ,  $SD=.61$ ), respectively. While existentialism ( $M=4.64$ ,  $SD=.32$ ), progressivism, reconstructionalism, perennialism, and essentialism ( $M=2.39$ ,  $SD=.61$ ) for teacher educators (Table 1).

As compared the mean scores of philosophical dispositions, there were significant differences among essentialism ( $U=1776.0$ ,  $Z=-4.206$ ,  $p=.00^*$ ), progressivism ( $U=2441.0$ ,  $Z=-2.363$ ,  $p=.02^*$ ) and existentialism ( $U=1465.0$ ,  $Z=-5.077$ ,  $p=.00^*$ ). Teacher educators' mean scores were higher than preservice teachers' on progressivism and existentialism. However, preservice teachers' mean scores were higher than teacher educators' on essentialism ( $p<.05^*$ ) (Table 2).

As the mean scores of preservice teachers' philosophical dispositions compared according to gender it was seen that males got higher scores on perennialism and essentialism, while females got higher scores on progressivism, reconstructionalism, and existentialism. But the differences on mean scores were significant ( $p<.05^*$ ) only for essentialism ( $U=3085.0$ ,  $Z=-4.897$ ,  $p=.00^*$ ) and progressivism ( $U=4028.0$ ,  $Z=-2.650$ ,  $p=.01^*$ ) (Table 3).

As the mean scores of teacher educators' philosophical dispositions compared according to gender it was seen that males got higher scores on perennialism, essentialism, and reconstructionalism; while females got higher scores on progressivism, and existentialism. But the difference on mean scores was significant ( $p<.05^*$ ) for only essentialism ( $U=71.00$ ,  $Z=-2.148$ ,  $p=.03^*$ ) (Table 4).

## DISCUSSION

The results showed that the most internalized educational philosophical dispositions were progressivism and existentialism, while the least one was essentialism for

**Table 1.** Educational philosophical dispositions of pre-service teachers and teacher educators

The Educational Philosophy	Group	N	Mean	SD
Perennialism	PT	206	3.86	.67
	TE	32	3.87	.45
Essentialism	PT	206	3.06	.83
	TE	32	2.39	.61
Progressivism	PT	206	4.11	.76
	TE	32	4.43	.39
Reconstructionalism	PT	206	3.96	.75
	TE	32	3.96	.52
Existentialism	PT	206	4.08	.75
	TE	32	4.64	.32

PT: Pre-service Teacher, TE: Teacher Educator.

**Table 2.** Comparison of educational philosophical dispositions of pre-service teachers and teacher educators

The Educational Philosophy	Group	n	Mean rank	Sum of ranks	U	Z	P
Perennialism	PT	206	120.52	24827.0	3086.00	-.581	.56
	TE	32	112.94	3614.0			
Essentialism	PT	206	<b>126.88</b>	26137.0	1776.00	-4.206	<b>.00*</b>
	TE	32	72.00	2304.0			
Progressivism	PT	206	115.35	23762.0	2441.00	-2.363	<b>.02*</b>
	TE	32	<b>146.22</b>	4679.0			
Reconstructionalism	PT	206	120.87	24898.5	3014.50	-.780	.44
	TE	32	110.70	3542.5			
Existentialism	PT	206	110.61	22786.0	1465.00	-5.077	<b>.00*</b>
	TE	32	<b>176.72</b>	5655.0			

\*p<.05.

**Table 3.** Comparison of educational philosophical dispositions of pre-service teachers with regard to gender.

The Educational Philosophy	Gender	N	Mean rank	Sum of ranks	U	Z	P
Perennialism	Male	85	107.56	9142.5	4797.5	-.821	.41
	Female	121	100.65	12178.5			
Essentialism	Male	85	127.71	10855.0	3085.0	-4.897	<b>.00*</b>
	Female	121	86.50	10466.0			
Progressivism	Male	85	90.39	7683.0	4028.0	-2.650	<b>.01*</b>
	Female	121	112.71	13638.0			
Reconstructionalism	Male	85	98.71	8390.5	4735.5	-.970	.33
	Female	121	106.86	12930.5			
Existentialism	Male	85	96.73	8222.0	4567.0	-1.373	.17
	Female	121	108.26	13099.0			

\* p<.05.

**Table 4.** Comparison of educational philosophical dispositions of teacher educators with regard to gender.

The Educational Philosophy	Gender	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	Z	P
Perennialism	Male	17	17.56	298.5	109.50	-.682	.50
	Female	15	15.30	229.5			
Essentialism	Male	17	19.82	337.0	71.00	-2.148	.03*
	Female	15	12.73	191.0			
Progressivism	Male	17	14.68	249.5	96.50	-1.179	.24
	Female	15	18.57	278.5			
Reconstructionalism	Male	17	16.53	281.0	127.00	-.019	.99
	Female	15	16.47	247.0			
Existentialism	Male	17	13.71	233.0	80.00	-1.826	.07
	Female	15	19.67	295.0			

\*  $p < .05$ .

both group. As compared to the mean scores of philosophical dispositions it was found that teacher educators got higher scores on progressivism and existentialism, while preservice teachers got higher scores on essentialism. As compared regarding to gender, males were significantly more essentialist in both group, while females were more progressivist for preservice teachers.

Although educational philosophical dispositions were examined and discussed under different dimensions depending on the scales or designs used in researches, findings are usually similar to each other regarding the precedence of dispositions toward educational philosophies. The results conducted with preservice teachers (Alkin-Sahin et al., 2014; Duman, 2008; Duman and Ulubey, 2008; Ilgaz et al., 2013; Tekin and Ustun, 2008), teachers (Altinkurt et al., 2012; Doganay and Sari, 2003; Silvernail, 1992) and administrators (Karadag et al., 2009) revealed that the most internalized were contemporary educational philosophies like progressivism, reconstructionism and existentialism, while the least were essentialism and perennialism.

When Ryan (2008) examined philosophical orientation of Canadian pre-service teachers, it was revealed that 96% of his respondents had results indicating that they were progressivists. Similarly, Edlin (2013) determined the philosophical orientation of pre-service teachers at Middle Tennessee State University with a causal-comparative study. Her study results showed that slightly more than three fourth of the preservice teachers selected the progressivist philosophy as identified by their responses to the survey instrument, while less than one fourth identified with the essentialist philosophy.

Progressivism, in direct contrast to essentialism and perennialism, advocates a student-centered education. It is based on John Dewey (1961)'s theory of education, which explores the relationship between democracy and

education. Dewey believed that democracy is a way of life. In a democratic society, people should work cooperatively to solve the problems and schools are responsible for equipping students with the problem-solving ability. Progressivists argue that schools are miniature societies and should focus on real-life problems students face in school or will face in the future. Therefore education should revolve around authentic activity in a social setting and cater to student needs. According to Witcher and Travers (1999), progressive educators tend to view school as a social institution and seek to align school programming with contemporary needs in order to make education meaningful and relevant to the knowledge, abilities, and interests of their students. That is, these individuals tend to base curricula on their students' personal, familial, and social experiences, with a goal of providing a continuous link between students' school-based learning and their lives outside the school context. As such, progressive teachers tend to view themselves as facilitators, guides, or motivators. Moreover, these teachers tend to present curricula holistically and in an open-ended manner to help students develop problem solving skills. Using more student-centered teaching techniques, students of progressive educators tend to engage in active learning, both independently and cooperatively, which focuses on solving learner-generated problems. Examples of progressive philosophies, theories, and tenets include constructivism, experimentalism, and naturalism. In this context, it can be said that there is an alignment between educational philosophical dispositions of preservice teachers and teacher educators and the curricula in schools and teacher education programs which are based on constructivist approach for the last decade in Turkey.

However, teacher educators' mean scores were higher than preservice teachers' on progressivism and existentialism; while preservice teachers were higher

than teacher educators on essentialism. Advocates of essentialism believe that schools should equip students with the basic academic skills to survive in society. Teachers are supposed to transmit knowledge to students who usually play a passive role in the process of learning. Standardized testing is seen by essentialists as an ideal benchmark for assessing students and holding teachers accountable for student achievement (Bagley, 1938). Compatible with the results of Minor et al. (2002), slightly more than one fourth of the preservice teachers considered themselves as transmissive, while only a minority of were progressive. As noted by Witcher and Travers (1999), transmissive philosophies include idealism, realism, perennialism, and essentialism. According to Witcher and Travers (1999), transmissive educators are often referred to as being traditional or conservative. They believe that the purpose of school is to develop the intellect. Thus, they view their role as one of dispensing important knowledge to students, and they prefer lecture, demonstration, and recitation as teaching methods. Teachers who represent this paradigm tend to advocate curricula that are subject centered, organized and sequenced, and focused on mastery of specific skills and content. Consequently, their classrooms tend to have a business-like atmosphere in which students are passive learners who generally work independently.

In this context, preservice teachers' personal philosophy of education can be formed during their years in a teacher education program by understanding of their dispositions before graduation. As preservice teachers move through their degree and interact with different teachers and students, it is expected that their philosophical dispositions will be developed and changed. As noted by Soccorsi (2013), a personal teaching philosophy is developed throughout a pre-service teacher's studies, career and teaching experiences and is best evident in pedagogical practice. Doyle (1997) investigated the influence of education programs on preservice teachers' beliefs, and found that pre service teachers' beliefs changed from viewing teaching and learning as passive acts of teachers giving the information to students to a belief that teaching and learning are active processes in which teachers should act as facilitators. Two important influences on the changes in preservice teachers' beliefs were experiences gained while teaching in the field and the preservice teachers' abilities to reflect on and analyze their experiences. As Dewey (1961) and Bandura (1977) stated all people act and behave according to their beliefs and that a person's thinking should not be separated too greatly from their experiences. Therefore, the influence of observation and practical teaching experiences is inextricably linked to the development of a teaching philosophy. A pre-service teacher's personal teaching philosophy, which they have actively defined, shapes how they will orchestrate their classroom in the future. Teacher educators also should monitor the evolution of these dispositions to determine the extent to which they

are becoming more aligned with the teacher education standards, as well as other pedagogical and curricular tenets and frameworks.

Even though there was not revealed significant gender differences in many studies conducted with preservice teachers (Tekin and Ustun, 2008; Bicer et al., 2013; Ilgaz et al., 2013; Alkin-Sahin et al., 2014), teachers (Doganyay and Sari, 2003; Altinkurt et al., 2012) and administrators (Karadag et al., 2009) it was highlighted that mean scores of males were higher on traditional educational philosophy like essentialism and perennialism, however, mean scores of females were higher on contemporary educational philosophy like progressivism, reconstructionalism, and existentialism. As noted by Minor et al. (2002), by demonstrating that preservice teachers' dispositions may have a gender and cultural context, findings from this study suggest that teacher educators should develop and use activities that deal specifically with gender issues and multicultural education. Such activities include encouraging preservice teachers to identify their beliefs, as was undertaken in this study, and to link these beliefs to curricula and pedagogy in their respective disciplines while considering gender and cultural issues.

## CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

The findings revealed that the most internalized educational philosophies were progressivism and existentialism, while the least one was essentialism for both preservice teachers and teacher educators, even though teacher educators got significantly higher scores on progressivism and existentialism, while preservice teachers on essentialism. Although males were significantly more essentialist in both group, females were more progressivist for preservice teachers.

These results might be useful to strengthen the quality of teacher education faculties by making an alignment between educational philosophies of preservice teachers and teacher educators. Once dispositions become aligned with professional literature and the education program's conceptual framework, the effectiveness of student learning can be improved. For this, preservice teachers should be placed in situations to observe and work with model teachers who exhibit positive dispositions as much as possible during their time in the teacher education program in order to improve their decisions about students, the classroom, teaching and the school. Because, the development of a personal educational philosophy has important implications for teaching practices of both preservice teachers and teacher educators. Regarding the results of this study, pre-service and in-service training programs can be arranged towards improving the personal educational philosophies of preservice teachers, teachers and teacher educators.

This study was limited to the teacher education program

at Nevsehir Haci Bektas Veli University in central part of Turkey. The educational philosophies identified by the survey were limited to perennialism, essentialism, progressivism, reconstructionism, and existentialism. It can be examined deeply and supported by qualitative studies the reason why gender is an effective factor in philosophical dispositions in education.

Sample size might be larger for the future studies and also educational philosophies can be expanded.

### Conflict of Interests

The author has not declared any conflicts of interest.

### Acknowledgment

\*This study was presented at ECER 2015, European Conference on Educational Research, 7-11 September 2015, Corvinus University Budapest, Hungary.

**Note:** Thanks to Canberk ÖZLÜ for his contribution in the process of data collection of this study.

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