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Teachers' perceptions on their awareness of social roles and efforts to perform these roles

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As in the rest of the world, teachers' roles have been changing in the Turkish educational system. In this process, their roles have been redefined as technical and social roles. In their technical roles, they focus on regular educational core tasks while in their social roles they dwell upon a wide range of social tasks besides teaching. However, there is a tendency to restraining their technical roles, which limits them to dealing with their social roles. As a result, they may lose interest and awareness of their social roles. Therefore, in the research reported on here we aimed to determine teachers' perceptions of their awareness of their social roles. We also aimed to discover teachers' efforts to realise these roles. For this purpose, we employed a qualitative phenomenological research design. The data were collected through interviews with 30 participant teachers chosen using the maximum sampling method. The data were analysed with the content analysis method. The results of this research reveal that teachers were mostly aware of their social roles. It was also found that participating teachers strove to realise their social roles. It is recommended that teachers' social roles are emphasised more during their pre-service education and while performing their roles.

Keywords: social roles; teachers; technical roles

Introduction

Education is a social phenomenon which requires an analysis of social relations before, during or after delivery. In this regard, knowing the importance of social responsibilities of the teaching role can contribute to learners' academic and social development. Teachers' roles have been changing recently. In this process, their roles and responsibilities have been redefined as a technical or clerical work. In their new role definition, they are supposed to meet academic demands such as distributing, collecting, and scoring tests or other materials, entering grades, recording pupil progress, accounting for texts, and other work of a clerical nature. Fraser (2018) underlines that the expert roles were drawn from the major roles that teachers normally engage in on a daily basis. However, apart from their teaching, teachers also have social roles to fulfil. As teachers' roles have become more important than ever, this research can not only shed light on the teacher training process in the Turkish educational system, but it may also provide a new look at teachers' work in other countries.

Theoretical Framework

Roles of a teacher

Teachers have both technical and social roles, which are considered as critical. Research has shown that teachers are essentially white-collar technicians rather than professionals with social roles. However, in both cases, teachers' roles are highly professional (Laux, 1965). With the new flux of the professionalism movement, teachers' roles are considered as solely delivering lessons (Smilie & Smilie, 2014), while social interaction between teachers and students should be significant. However, neither teachers nor decisionmakers have done much to understand these responsibilities adequately.

Recently, a number of studies have focused on teachers' professional identity regarding teacher-student relationship (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop, 2004). Teachers play several roles while teaching, ranging from being an interpersonal expert who interacts and builds a relationship with students to an instructor teaching a specific subject, referred to as their role identity (Burke & Stets, 2009). Teachers' interpersonal role identities emerge in three specific situations such as starting a lesson, reacting to students' misbehaviour and reacting to positive student behaviour. In this role, they should be steering, friendly, understanding, accommodating, uncertain, dissatisfied, reprimanding and enforcing (Van der Want, Den Brok, Beijaard, Brekelmans, Claessens & Pennings, 2015).

Teachers interact with their students in two different ways. Firstly, some indifferent teachers maintain a certain social distance from their students which is called as dictatorial attitude. Secondly, some teachers attempt to associate with their students as a companion and helper in a democratic way by maintaining friendliness, congeniality, helpfulness and fairness, which results in desirable learning (Brookover, 1943).

As far as teaching and learning environments are concerned, it is necessary to mention pedagogical ecology, which contains a set of defined social roles and normative expectations concerning behaviour performed by the actors of social processes and events taking place in class. Institutionalisation of the social space, namely the pedagogical ecology, is related to some social practices, which are universally called pedagogical isomorphism (Jaffee, 2003; Juszczyk & Kim, 2015).

Teachers' responsiveness in classrooms and their professional commitment are highly influenced by their ability to perform socially and emotionally to provide positive social-emotional learning environments for students, which is defined as social and emotional capacity. Here, a teacher's current and potential capability to create warm and supportive teacher-child relationships, effective and attentive classroom management, and emotional responsiveness, consistent and stable classroom routines are essential in problem solving and emotional awareness (Buettner, Jeon, Hur & Garcia, 2016; Denham, Blair, DeMulder, Levitas, Sawyer, Auerbach-Major & Queenan, 2003; Dowsett & Livesey, 2000; Rubin & Rose-Krasnor, 1992).

Meyer (2018) states that teachers want students to learn to make decisions, and to learn science through decision making. Uluçınar and Aypay (2016) underline that enhancing students' decision-making abilities is the most essential component of developing critical thinking skills in the 21st century and, therefore, this enhancement should be an intentional educational aim for all teachers. Harden and Crosby (2000) refer to teachers as role models in the way they communicate, perceive their students, dress or give feedback. Similarly, Cakir (2006) and Gibson, Rimmington and Landwehr-Brown (2008) claim that developing an awareness in students may have good effects on students and society as well.

Turkenburg (2008) discovered that although school boards appeared to consider social tasks as their mission, schools and teachers did not have to respond to all these requests and demands put to them. Rothi, Leavey and Best (2008) spotted that although teachers felt responsible to fulfil social missions, they were concerned by the changing nature of their responsibilities, as they felt inadequately prepared and supported for this evolving role.

Smilie and Smilie (2014) underline that teachers fulfil dual roles – their life outside of school and their roles at school. In this age, teachers are considerably more visible within their social environments by visiting their students' homes, and interacting with parents and their students (Coleman, 1988; Smilie & Smilie, 2014). Berge (1995) and Hussein (2010) have identified four dimensions of a teacher's role: pedagogical, technical, social and managerial. In their social roles they are responsible for creating a friendly and social environment to promote learning (Beezer, 1974; Umar & Rathakrishnan, 2012).

Teachers' social roles

Teachers play a key role with regard to social mission. Kořenský, Hoffmanová and Müllerová (2013) define a social role as the position of the subject in the social group. In addition, Pahta, Nevala, Nurmi

and Palander-Collin (2010) perceive social role as communication by which people build and maintain social relationships and also influence other people in various ways. According to Leška (2005), social role refers to standardised behaviour expected of people with a certain social status. Straková (2013) reminds us that the teaching process requires handling many different roles during and out of a lesson and one of these roles is their social role. Achinstein (2002) defines teachers as a group of people who have common work; share a set of values and norms towards teaching students, and operate collaboratively. Their role is to improve students' emotional and social capabilities and provide in students' needs of a balanced set of cognitive, social and emotional capabilities to adapt to today's demanding, changing and unpredictable world. These are known as 21st century skills that teachers can help students to gain. Research acknowledges the importance of interpersonal relationships and social interaction among teachers and students (Carmichael, Fox, McCormick, Procter & Honour, 2006; Ciarrochi & Scott, 2006; Hopkins & Reynolds, 2001; James, Dunning, Connolly & Elliott, 2007; Kingston, 2008; Moolenaar, Slegers, Karsten & Zijlstra, 2009; Tsay & Brady, 2010).

According to Martínez (2016), students learn from how their teachers manage frustration, deal with conflict, or maintain control in the classroom and they model the way their teachers behave in these situations. In this respect, teachers' social and emotional skills may help students translate intentions into actions (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2015). Therefore, teachers' social roles are considered a crucial area. However, under heavy teaching workloads, teachers may neglect these roles from time to time.

As social skills are imperative for teachers, not only for their personal well-being but also to improve student learning (Zakrzewski, 2013), we purposed to determine teachers' perceptions of their awareness of their social roles and their efforts to perform these roles. Since little is known about teachers' perceptions about their social mission, this study can be important to help administrators and policymakers balance their technical and social roles. This research was guided by the following research questions: What are teachers' perceptions of their awareness of their social roles? Are they able to perform their social roles? Are they able to perform their social roles efficiently?

Method

Our research was conducted using a phenomenological research design. Phenomenological research can provide in-depth knowledge on any topic (Cresswell, 2012; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Marshall & Rossman, 2006) and can be used for describing,

analysing, and interpreting a culture-sharing group's common behaviour patterns, beliefs and language, which develop over time among teachers.

Study Group

The participants in this study were 30 teachers selected through the maximum variation sampling method in the 2017/2018 school year in Turkey. When using a maximum variation sampling method, the researcher selects a small number of units or cases that maximise the diversity relevant to the research question. The idea behind this method is

to view a subject from all available angles, thereby achieving greater understanding. This sampling method is also known as heterogeneous sampling, which involves selecting candidates across a broad spectrum relating to the topic of study (Bailey, 1994).

The research was conducted at relatively socio-economically disadvantaged schools in which students were mostly from disadvantages families. Therefore, students encountered both social and economic problems. The participants' demographics were as follows:

Table 1 The participant teachers' demographics

Age	<i>n</i>	Gender	<i>n</i>	Total experience	<i>n</i>	Education	<i>n</i>
25–35	12	Male	12	1–5 years	9	Graduate	20
36–46	10	Female	18	6–10 years	11	Masters	8
47–57	3			11–15 years	8	Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)	2
58+	5			16–20 years	2		
				21 +	0		
Total	30		30		30		30

As presented in Table 1, most participating teachers were young and middle-aged ($n = 22$); only eight participants were older than 47 years, and most were experienced teachers ($n = 21$). Most participants held graduate degrees ($n = 20$), while 10 held master's degree and only two held PhD degrees ($n = 2$).

Data Collection and Analysis

The data were collected by using the constructed interview method, which is known as characterising a semi-structured interview. By using this method, the participants are confronted with a triad of elements and after that asked to indicate some important ways in which two of the elements are alike and, thereby, different from the third (Bailey, 1994; Van de Kerkhof, 2006). In this method, participants express their thoughts freely around particular topics. The teachers were informed about the purpose of the study and they were asked whether they would voluntarily participate in the research via e-mail. Thirty teachers agreed to participate in the research.

After being assured of the confidentiality of the data to be obtained from them, the participants consented to participate. They were promised that their identities would be kept secret and that their names would not be mentioned in any part of the study or shared with anyone else. Interviews were then arranged with all participants. The interviews were both recorded and noted with the participants' permission and each interview lasted approximately 30–40 minutes.

The data were analysed using the content analysis technique in which similar data on a topic were analysed and commented on it (Mayring, 2000). We organised the data by listening to the recording while reviewing the transcript of each

interview to ensure the accuracy of the data. Each interview transcript was later analysed according to the data analysis procedures described by Bogdan and Biklen (2007), which call for development of coding categories, mechanical sorting of the data, and analysis of the data within each coding category. Each interview was coded separately according to the teachers' views on their social roles. Emerging and repeated themes were grouped into coding categories according to three steps, namely category definition, exemplification, and codification regulation. The answers to each question were first separated into meaningful categories, named, and coded. Secondly, the conceptualised statements were gathered. Thirdly, we tried to eliminate repetition. Lastly, the defined results were explained and related to each other. We also aimed to develop a cause-effect relationship among the existing parts. Each teachers' views were coded using a numbering system, namely T1 (Teacher 1), T2, T3, et cetera.

The constant comparative approach was used in the data organisation and analysis process, which resulted in the saturation of categories and the emergence of theory. Theory may emerge through continual analysis and doubling back for more data collection and coding (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Glaser, 1992). By using this method, each set of data was re-examined regarding key issues, recurrent events, or activities. Data from each respondent were reanalysed several times in order to confirm and contradict statements until the data were organised into satisfactory categories and sub-codes to address the research question. The following questions were raised during the semi-structured interviews:

- How aware are teachers of their social roles?
- How do they perceive their work? Do they regard

- teaching as a technical or social role?
- How do teachers perceive developing an awareness among their students about the problems that their students encounter and how do they perceive providing solutions to these problems?
 - How do teachers perceive supporting their students regarding the social, family and economic problems that they encounter?

The research was conducted in Turkish and the questions and responses to the interview questions were translated into English.

Validity and Reliability

A number of actions were taken to ensure trustworthiness and rigour in the study. Firstly, we acted as both facilitators and listeners by simply asking the questions and recording the answers without leading the respondents. Secondly, the final versions of the questions were the result of a review thereof by four field experts. Thirdly, the respondents were satisfied with the confidentiality of the research to provide in-depth answers to the questions without any hesitation. To avoid possible influence of power relations, the interviews were held in locations other than the school.

While preparing the interview form, the related literature was re-examined to establish a contextual frame to enhance the internal validity. Member checking was also done. Moreover, the participants were able to explain their opinions freely and sincerely as they knew that their identities would remain confidential. Furthermore, the research process (the design, working group, data collection, and data analysis) was described in detail to increase external validity. The raw and coded data were preserved for future use. The data were transcribed without any interpretation to provide inter-

nal reliability. The coded data were compared to the raw data and consistency was calculated as 88% (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Limitations

This research had a number of limitations regarding transferability to the population. Firstly, the sample was composed of volunteers and they were not necessarily representative of other teachers at other institutions. Therefore, the results are limited to this group and caution should be exercised in inferring the results. Secondly, the researcher was the main instrument of data analysis. The analyses and comments are a product of the researcher's interpretation of the data and a different researcher might have identified different features within the same data set (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2012).

Results

This study was conducted to investigate teachers' awareness about their social roles and their efforts to perform these roles accordingly. It was discovered that in general most teachers liked their profession ($n = 27$), while two claimed ($n = 2$) that they were forced to be teachers by their families. The other findings are presented according to the main themes below.

Teachers' Perceptions of Their Awareness about Teaching

The participants were asked whether they regarded the teaching profession to be technical or social work. They were also asked about their own awareness of their work. Their responses are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Teachers' views and awareness about teaching

	Sub-theme	F
Teaching work	Technical work	2
	Social work	18
	Both technical and social work	10
Teachers' awareness	Aware of the role expectations	30
	Not aware of the role expectations	-
Total		30

As shown in the Table 2, most teachers considered teaching as social work ($n = 18$). They underlined that teaching was crucial to transfer cultural, social and moral values to the next generation. One-third of them accepted the work as both social and technical work ($n = 10$). Only two of them considered it as technical work ($n = 2$).

In this respect, the participants responded as follows: "... teaching is not just teaching courses. In addition to teaching courses, I must be a model socially, morally and also guide them, because we are the most effective group to influence kids ...". (T3). Teacher 7 said: "... A doctor may kill one person with his/her mistake, an engineer may kill

100 people, but a teacher may kill a generation ...". Teacher 9 claimed, "... for me, social side of the work is more important, but unfortunately, these days technical side is valued more ...". Teachers 12, 13 and 15 indicated that they were responsible for training good citizens and teaching them good values, which is the social part of the work.

On the other hand, those who regarded the work as being both social and technical ($n = 10$) commented as follows. Teachers 2, 3 and 7 said that the technical and social features were crucial, as, apart from teaching courses, teachers played an important part in training human resources and

transferring societal values. Teacher 11 emphasised: “*Our basic role is to develop our students’ qualifications. We also train good citizens, teach moral values ...*.” Teacher 15 pronounced: “*It is our duty to adapt students to the society in which they live by being role models as well as improving their technical skills ...*.” Teachers 1 and 2 claimed that the work was technical and required technical knowledge.

Most participants indicated that teaching was social work. The participants emphasised that their social roles required transferring moral values and preparing their students for the society they lived in. In this respect, teachers were considered as role models for their students. However, a few teachers considered the work as both technical and social

work, while a few others regarded the work as purely technical. With regard to their awareness of the work, all participants indicated that they were aware of their social roles and behaved accordingly ($n = 30$).

Teachers’ Views on Developing an Awareness against Problems and Provide Solutions to Them
 Teachers are expected to perform their technical or pedagogical role, which is known as instructing, in class. However, apart from instruction, teachers are expected to perform some social roles. In this section we discuss whether teachers had developed an awareness among their students about the problems in society, and whether they had provided solutions to these problems.

Table 3 Teachers’ views on developing an awareness about problems and providing solutions

Main theme	Sub-theme	F
Developing an awareness and providing solutions	Developing different points of view	12
	Developing critical thinking	5
	Being a practical guide in life	10
	Making them adapt to change	2
	Developing and awareness of environmental problems	1
Total		30

As shown in the Table 3, most teachers ($n = 12$) tried to develop different points of views in their students. One-third of teachers ($n = 10$) believed that they were also practical guides for their students. Teachers 3, 4, 13, 25 and 30 indicated that their basic role was to develop students’ awareness about problems in society by changing their points of view. Furthermore, they indicated that they could provide solutions to such problems by informing the students about actual things. Teachers 6, 7 and 9 underlined that by developing students’ awareness, they could help the students to adapt to changes by developing critical and reasonable thinking in students. They also indicated that they could develop creativity, sensitivity and good behaviour in students.

Teacher 11 emphasized that “*... it is expected that we should improve our students’ academic development, but our unique role cannot be limited to this one. We have some social roles as well ...*.” Teachers 14 and 16 said that it was their role to develop an awareness in students of the problems they faced by connecting real-life problems to

classroom settings and developing an awareness of environmental, technological, economic and social problems. Teachers 16, 17 and 29 indicated that they could guide learners and provide solutions to the problems that they faced.

It is clear that most teachers accepted that they could develop an awareness in their students by developing different points of view and critical thinking skills by letting them question issues. Teachers believed that once students’ critical thinking skills were developed, they could analyse the problems they faced and provide solution to them. Moreover, teachers also tried to be practical guides for their students, and they strove to adapt their students to the changes – a social role that a teacher should conduct carefully.

Teachers’ Views on Supporting Their Students’ Social, Economic and Family Problems

It is expected of teachers to support their students with the social, economic and family problems that they encounter. How the participants supported their students in this regard is discussed below.

Table 4 Teachers’ views on supporting their students regarding their social, economic and family problems

Main theme	Sub-theme	F
Social problems	Following student attendance	8
	Providing interaction among different students	6
	Providing their participation in social life	5
Economic problems	Following their diets	1
	Informing them about opportunities (loans/financial)	2
	Helping them find business networks	1
Family problems	Negligence	3
	Violence	3
	Keeping them away from crime	1
Total		30

Teachers are the ones who can support their students with regard to the social, family and economic problems that they encounter. As can be seen in Table 4, in this respect, teachers 10, 11, 12, 19 and 25 claimed that, apart from students' academic development and although it was not their direct responsibility, they also assisted students to cope with social, family and economic problems. They even followed their students' attendance. When they noticed that certain student were regularly absent, they informed their principal and sometimes they visited the families to learn the reasons for the student being absent.

Teacher 4 said:

I am especially careful about my students' social interaction problems. Sometimes students from different ethnic and religious backgrounds or genders have prejudices about each other. At this point, I organise group gatherings among students from different genders and backgrounds to get know each other better. I am happy to see that they developed better relationships.

Teacher 7 said the following

I am aware of poor students and provide solutions to their problems. For example, I had a female student and her family was conservative and they were against the girl's educational goals. I went to the girl's house and I convinced them to send her back to school. Now she is attending to school.

Teachers 8, 9 and 18 indicated that they requested their principal to bring famous business executives to their school. They also indicated that as a result, some of their students were now undergoing training at these companies thanks to the opportunities that they had provided.

Teacher 14 stated follows:

... I had a student who had a tendency to commit crime. I wanted to help him. At first, he refused my proposal, and then provided him a part time work. Now he works and earns his pocket money. His behaviour has changed completely.

Teachers 19 and 29 proclaimed that they worked in a disadvantaged environment and that their students need more care because they were neglected. They added that they were social workers there and spent too much time to help their students find their way. However, teacher 16 emphasized: "... *I have a lot to do and I cannot overcome all these problems by myself. It is the government's responsibility to solve these kinds of problems ...*."

In general, most teachers supported their students regarding their social, family and economic problems as part of their social role. They helped their students to find their way by helping them to overcome social, family and economic problems. Moreover, they accepted that teaching was not a simple role, but a more complex issue that required sensitivity and care.

Discussion

In this qualitative research we aimed to determine teachers' awareness about their social roles and

their efforts to perform these roles. The results show that all participant teachers ($n = 30$) were not only aware of their social roles, they also performed many duties accordingly. Teachers' awareness of their social roles seems quite high. This finding is valuable as Yavuzer (1997) found that children's social development was basically supported by teachers' caring social and academic behaviour. In fact, schools are places in which students socialise formally and informally. In this sense, teachers are the ones who can provide this socialisation process by being aware of their social roles and behaving accordingly. In the current school system, only academic expectations are prioritised, and students' social development is usually neglected.

Participant teachers believed that teachers should be more aware of their social roles. Hooge, Honingh and Langelaan (2011) found that although teachers were aware of a "normative pedagogical social mission" and a "broad social mission," the majority were not aware that they were expected to also perform a "broad social mission." Korthagen (2013) found that teachers were neither aware of their pedagogical role nor their social role.

The result in this study show that most teachers tried to develop an awareness of the problems that students experienced by helping them to adapt to change and environmental problems that they encountered. They did this by developing different points of view and critical thinking in their students, and by being practical guides in life. As a result of teachers' efforts, students' points of views were changed, and they started to analyse problems more critically. In this respect, teachers became role models in students' struggle with their problems, which is also a social role.

The results further show that most teachers performed their social roles by supporting their students with their social, family and economic problems. In this regard they even worried about their students' attendance problems. At the disadvantaged schools in which they worked, there were some conservative families who did not want to send their female children to school. In this case, teachers paid visits to families to convince them to send their girls to school. By performing these visits, teachers ensured that many girls returned to school.

From this research it also emerged that most teachers organised academic and social gatherings for their students from different genders and economic and social backgrounds in an effort to overcome social interaction problems and developed understanding among different groups and genders. As most participants worked at disadvantaged schools, some of their students were on the edge of becoming involved in crime. Teachers helped their students turn away from crime by directing them to take part in sports and social and cultural activities,

which is also considered as the social side of the work. In this regard, some of the participants regarded themselves as being social workers. However, Edwards, Daniels, Gallagher, Leadbetter and Warmington (2009) and Le Roux (2016) found that on the individual level, teachers needed support and training in inter-professional collaboration and skills to refer students to the appropriate services.

A final result shows that teachers provided some social and business networks for their students by bringing different business executives to schools and taking their students to some companies. As a result, their students developed a vision to find work in such big companies. Furthermore, teachers also informed their students about many issues ranging from daily diets, smoking habits and physical and physiological violence that they encountered. By doing so, teachers influenced their students' lives in a positive way. Hart (1996) found that 80% of 3,725 high school seniors considered their best teachers as those who helped with schoolwork, were good-natured, had a sense of humour, and were human, friendly, and companionable.

Conclusion

Teachers are leaders in a society. They develop the leaders of the future through their roles and responsibilities inside or outside of school. This shows that they have a dual role in the society – to meet students' academic expectations and to meet students' social expectations. From the results of this study it can be concluded that participating teachers were mostly aware of their social roles and that they did their best to realise these roles. It can also be concluded that through their responsible and caring social behaviour teachers helped many students socially and even saved the lives of the ones who were on the brink of becoming involved in crime.

Teachers encounter many challenges while performing their roles as educators, which is as important as their teaching role (Banda & Mutambo, 2016). According to Pavelová (2017), there is a clear connection between teacher's social roles and student's academic and social behaviour.

Based on the results of this study we recommend the following:

- Teachers' social responsibilities should be emphasised during their pre-service education.
- The Ministry should allow more room for teachers to perform their social roles.
- Students' social development and their academic performance should be emphasised while the problems that they experience should not be neglected.

Authors' Contributions

Conceptualisation, AB and KÖ; methodology, AB and KÖ; conducting the interviews, AB and KÖ; validation, AB and KÖ; formal analysis, KÖ; investigation, AB; resources, AB; data curation, KÖ;

preparing original draft, AB; review and editing, AB and KÖ.

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