

Eğitim ve Bilim
2009, Cilt 34, Sayı 153

Education and Science
2009, Vol. 34, No 153

Prospective Teachers' Thoughts on Characteristics of an "Effective Teacher"

Öğretmen Adaylarının "Etkili Öğretmen" Nitelikleri Konusunda Düşünceleri

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Abstract

This paper proposes to determine the thoughts of Turkish prospective teachers about characteristics of effective teachers. Moreover, the study investigates the issue in terms of the variables as gender and field of study. In this descriptive study, the data was gathered by using a questionnaire based on quantitative research method. The questionnaire was conducted to 221 prospective teachers at a university in Ankara, Turkey in the 2007-2008 academic terms. The results of the study revealed that 'being objective' has the highest mean whereas 'gets students to do presentations (projects, etc.) in lessons' has the lowest mean according to prospective teachers' responses. Furthermore, there is a significant difference in participants' responses according to the variables of gender and field of study.

Key Words: Effective teacher, prospective teachers, characteristic, teacher education.

Öz

Bu çalışma, Türk öğretmen adaylarının etkili öğretmen nitelikleri konusunda düşüncelerini belirlemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Ayrıca, çalışma konusu, cinsiyet ve öğretmen adaylarının devam ettikleri program değişkenleri açısından da incelenmektedir. Betimsel nitelik taşıyan bu araştırmada veriler, nicel araştırma metotlarına uygun bir biçimde anket kullanılarak toplanmıştır. Anket Ankara'da bulunan bir üniversitede 2007-2008 öğretim yılında 221 öğretmen adayına uygulanmıştır. Araştırmada öğretmen adaylarının görüşlerine göre en yüksek ortalamaya sahip öğretmen özelliği 'objektif olma', en düşük ortalamaya sahip özellik ise 'derste öğrencilere sunum yaptırma' olarak bulunmuştur. Buna ek olarak, öğretmen adaylarının etkili öğretmen özelliklerine yönelik görüşleri ile cinsiyetleri arasında ve yine bu özelliklerle devam ettikleri program arasında istatistiksel olarak anlamlı bir farklılık bulunmuştur.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Etkili öğretmen, öğretmen adayları, nitelik, öğretmen eğitimi.

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Introduction

Vries and Beijaard (1999) state that good teaching is effective teaching, that is, teaching that leads to high student achievement. Effective teaching is highly dependent upon the nature of the educational outcomes and goals that the teaching is aiming to foster (Haris, 1998, p.179). According to Johnson (1997), effective teaching involves a two-way communicative process initiated by a teacher who is well versed in the subject matter, caring, and able to establish and maintain classroom control and in such a setting students are continually attentive and progress in their learning. Parpala and Lindblom-Ylänne (2007) also indicate that the quality of teaching is related to the student's learning outcomes. Haris (1998), for example, provided an overview of the research findings concerning effective teaching. In a similar way, Poindexter (1998) presented a model for effective teaching and learning based on a case study. Teachers have crucial roles in realizing effective teaching. Even though some researchers (e.g. Buchel and Edwards, 2005) state that trying to define exactly what comprises an effective teacher is difficult; Ramsden et al., (1995, p. 24; cited in Trigwell, 2001) states that researchers generally list some characteristics of good teaching as follows:

- Good teachers are also good learners
- Good teachers display enthusiasm for their subject, and a desire to share it with their students.
- Good teachers know how to modify their teaching strategies according to the particular students, subject matter, and learning environment.
- Good teachers encourage learning for understanding and are concerned with developing their students' critical thinking skills, problem-solving skills, and problem-approach behaviours.
- Good teachers demonstrate an ability to transform and extend knowledge, rather than merely transmitting it.
- Good teachers set clear goals, use valid and appropriate assessment methods, and provide high quality feedback to their students.
- Good teachers show respect for their students; they are interested in both their professional and their personal growth, encourage their independence, and sustain high expectations of them.

All this suggests that teaching is a very important issue. From this point, it can be inferred that teachers have crucial role in effective teaching and learning process. As mentioned in the study conducted by Rushton, Morgan and Richard (2007), the single most important factor in determining student academic success is the classroom teacher. Many studies have investigated effective teacher or good teacher characteristics. As Korthagen (2004) pointed out that trying to put the essential qualities of a good teacher into words is a difficult undertaking. Nonetheless, many researchers (Brophy, 1979; Guskey, 1985; Beishuzien, Kutnick and Jules, 1993; Hof, Van Putten, Bouwmeester and Asscher, 2001; Kızıltepe, 2002; Korthagen, 2004; Buchel and Edwards, 2005; Yates, 2005; Elnicki and Cooper, 2005; Küçükahmet, 2006; Kelly, 2007) have also investigated this issue. Most of the research regarding the perception of the good teacher has pointed to two important components of the ideal teacher: professional knowledge, both of the subject taught and of didactic knowledge and an appropriate personality (Arnon and Reichel, 2007). On the other hand there are also some researches investigated effective or good or ideal teacher characteristics. Minor, Witcher; James and Onwuegbuzie (2002), for example, purposed to examine preservice teachers' perceptions of characteristics of effective teachers. They gathered data from 134 prospective teachers through a questionnaire. The results showed that many of the

prospective teachers considered to reflect on effective teaching and the following seven themes emerged from these characteristics: student centered, effective classroom and behavior manager, competent instructor, ethical, enthusiastic about teaching, knowledgeable about subject, and professional. In another study, Parpala and Lindblom-Ylänne (2007) purposed to analyse university teachers' conceptions of what they consider important in their teaching and their conceptions of good teaching in the high quality units of education in Finland. 20 teachers from four disciplines at the University of Helsinki, Finland were interviewed. After analysing what teachers considered important in their teaching and what their conceptions of good teaching and the ideal teaching situation were, five dimensions emerged: teaching practice, teacher's role, student's role, atmosphere and physical environment.

Objectives of the study

The basic aim of this study is to determine the thoughts of Turkish prospective teachers' of the topic of the "effective teacher". In line with this basic aim, the study also has these sub-goals:

1. What are prospective teachers' thoughts of the "characteristics of effective teachers"?
2. Do prospective teachers' thoughts of the "characteristics of effective teachers" differ according to the gender variable?
3. Do prospective teachers' thoughts of the "characteristics of effective teachers" according to the field of study?
4. Which are the characteristics that prospective teachers find the most important and the least important among their views about the importance of the "characteristics of effective teachers"?

Method

This is a descriptive study in the nature of qualitative research. The fundamental reason to utilize this approach in this study is to be able to make a general inference related to the views of teacher candidates on this topic. Data was collected through a questionnaire in this study. A series of procedures were carried out for the validity and reliability of the instrument. In the first stage of the study, the researcher asked the prospective teachers in the classes that the researcher taught the courses "Planning and Evaluation in Instruction" and "Introduction to the Teaching Profession" in the first semester of 2006-2007 academic year to make a list of characteristics of effective teachers. The lists that were prepared by prospective teachers individually were discussed during the instructional period. The researcher collected the lists that were prepared by the prospective teachers in all the classes. Then, the researcher identified the characteristics that the prospective teachers would like to see in an "effective teacher" or the characteristics that describe an "effective teacher" in their opinion, after which the researcher identified the common points among these characteristics. In this process, qualitative analysis techniques were used (Strauss, 1990). The researcher reviewed the related literature (MEB, 2006, Kan, 2009, Kyriacou, 1995, Buchel and Edwards, 2005, Cakmak and Bulut, 2005) and added a few items to the list that had not been mentioned by the prospective teachers. As a result, a total of 70 items were collected as the characteristics of "effective teachers". In the next stage, an effective teacher scale was developed with all these items. A 5-point Likert type was used in the scale: (5=very important, 4=quite important, 3=relatively important, 2= a little important, 1=not important). To test its reliability, the instrument was presented to the evaluation of four experts in the field. As a result of this examination, two items were decided to be unsuitable so the number of items in the instrument was decreased to 68.

Following this stage, the scale which was considered to be ready for use, was administered to a total of 220 prospective teachers from various departments in the faculty of education at a university in Ankara, Turkey during 2006-2007 academic year. This indicates that purposeful sampling (Kaptan, 1995, p.119) was used in the study. Following the administration, first Reliability Analysis procedure was completed and items 8, 14, and 23 were discarded from the scale as their corrected-item-total coefficients were below 0.20. The remaining total of 65 items yielded values generally above 0.50. The reliability study on the 65 items showed a reliability coefficient (Cronbah alfa= 0.947) above the lowest limit value of 0.70, with the result that the scale was decided to be reliable. The KMO value of the tool was above 0.60 (KMO= ,911) and the Barlett test was significant. It was decided that factor analyses could be run on the data. As a result of the factor analysis procedure, it was found that the scale had a single factor characteristic. As a result, the prepared scale was added into the questionnaire. The questionnaire also included questions about personal information.

The data collection procedure was carried out in the summer semester of 2007-2008 academic years. The procedure was conducted on 221 prospective teachers enrolled in the Faculty of Education at a university in Ankara, Turkey. The gender distribution of prospective teachers in the sample was 51,1 % female and 48,9 % male. The participants' distribution to their field of study was processed according to verbal and mathematics-science fields of study. Based on this, 65, 6% of the prospective teachers in the sample are enrolled in mathematics-science fields and 34, 4 % are enrolled in verbal fields of study. On the other hand, all statistical analyses were performed using SPSS pocket program in order to analyze data in this study.

Results

This section presents the findings of the study. The first research question was: (1) What are prospective teachers' thoughts of the "characteristics and behaviors of effective teachers"?. Table 1 shows prospective teachers' thoughts regarding the importance of effective teacher characteristics and behaviors.

Table 1.
The Distribution of Prospective Teachers' Views Regarding Effective Teacher Characteristics and Behaviours.

The characteristics of effective teacher	Levels of importance					M	SD
	(5)	(4)	(3)	(2)	(1)		
	%	%	%	%	%		
1. States the aim of the lesson	61,5	29,4	7,7	,5	,9	4,50	,73
2. Informing about the requirements of the lesson	37,1	38,0	20,8	4,1	-	4,08	,85
3. Using appropriate teaching methods based on lesson content	62,0	29,9	7,2	,5	,5	4,52	,69
4. Using appropriate teaching aids and materials	37,6	44,8	12,7	3,6	1,4	4,13	,86
5. Using the new educational technologies.	31,2	41,6	21,3	4,5	1,4	3,96	,91
6. Keeps students active in the lesson	55,7	33,5	6,3	2,7	1,8	4,38	,86
7. Gets students to do presentations (projects, etc.) in lessons	10,4	24,9	41,2	14,9	8,6	3,13	1,07
8. Using subject matter and pedagogical knowledge effectively	46,2	41,6	10,0	1,8	,5	4,31	,76
9. Using various teaching resources	17,2	35,7	33,5	10,9	2,7	3,53	,98
10. Suggests a source material list to students to follow in the lessons	12,7	34,4	34,8	14,5	3,6	3,38	1,00
11. Using practical activities	33,5	41,6	18,6	4,5	1,8	4,00	,93
12. Using various evaluation methods	29,0	40,7	24,0	4,5	1,8	3,90	,93
13. Teaches with consideration of students' interests and talents	52,0	37,1	8,1	2,3	,5	4,38	,76
14. Guiding students towards research	34,4	47,1	14,5	3,2	,9	4,10	,82
15. Developing themselves continually	54,3	32,6	10,9	1,8	,5	4,38	,78
16. Being open criticism	51,1	32,6	12,7	2,3	1,4	4,29	,87
17. Using body language effectively	40,7	38,0	17,6	3,6	-	4,15	,84

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18. Establishes good rapport with students	66,5	28,1	3,6	1,4	,5	4,58	,67
19. Makes jokes	19,0	28,5	37,6	10,9	4,1	3,47	1,04
20. Providing effective class management	48,9	38,9	10,0	2,3	-	4,34	,75
21. Being dynamic during the lesson	43,0	44,8	10,9	1,4	-	4,29	,71
22. Motivating the students	55,2	39,4	5,0	,5	-	4,49	,61
23. Using voice effectively	44,8	41,6	11,8	1,8	-	4,29	,74
24. Likes his/her job	57,0	23,1	12,7	5,0	2,3	4,27	1,01
25. Establishing a good classroom environment	42,5	45,2	10,0	1,4	,9	4,27	,76
26. Using time effectively	41,2	43,4	12,7	1,8	,9	4,22	,80
27. Using group work	16,3	32,1	37,6	10,0	4,1	3,46	1,01
28. Utilizes various seating arrangements (group, etc.) in the teaching process	11,3	21,3	43,0	19,0	5,4	3,14	1,02
29. Take the advantage of new teaching approaches	20,8	49,8	24,4	3,2	1,8	3,84	,84
30. Relating the subject with the real life.	38,9	45,7	13,6	1,8	-	4,21	,74
31. Giving feedback the students	39,8	45,7	13,6	,9	-	4,24	,71
32. Spending time with students out of the lesson	19,9	35,7	34,4	8,6	1,4	3,64	,94
33. Being careful about his/her appearance	18,1	29,4	37,1	12,7	2,7	3,47	1,01
34. Not reflecting personal problems to students	51,1	30,3	14,0	2,7	1,8	4,26	,92
35. Giving chance the student to express themselves effectively	47,1	44,3	6,3	1,8	,5	4,35	,72
36. Is authoritative	14,9	29,9	31,7	14,9	8,6	3,27	1,14
37. Making students take notes	14,5	29,9	38,5	13,1	4,1	3,37	1,01
38. Handing out teaching materials	18,1	41,6	32,1	5,9	2,3	3,67	,91
39. Presenting lesson effectively	43,9	45,2	9,5	1,4	-	4,31	,70
40. Giving examples related with the real life situations	47,5	37,1	14,0	1,4	-	4,30	,76
41. Being clear and understandable	54,8	38,5	5,9	,9	-	4,46	,69
42. Making students be preapred for the class	28,5	45,2	21,3	4,1	,9	3,96	,86
43. Renewing teaching materials regularly	25,3	40,7	28,1	4,1	1,8	3,83	,91
44. Being model for the students	46,2	35,3	13,6	4,1	,9	4,21	,89
45. Being prepared for the lesson	53,4	36,2	8,1	1,8	,5	4,40	,75
46. Using a wide range of examples	38,0	41,2	19,9	,9	-	4,16	,76
47. Using suitable terminology for the lesson	26,7	46,6	21,7	3,2	1,8	3,93	,87
48. Speaking effectively	45,2	41,2	12,2	1,4	-	4,30	,73
49. Lecturing with enthusiasm	46,6	38,0	13,1	1,4	,9	4,28	,81
50. Arousing students' interest towards the class	49,8	42,5	6,8	,9	-	4,41	,65
51. Being open towards students' critics	39,8	44,3	13,1	2,7	-	4,21	,77
52. Providing interaction in the classroom	32,6	48,4	17,2	,5	1,4	4,10	,79
53. Being guide	39,4	43,9	15,8	,5	,5	4,21	,75
54. Allocating time for students problems	28,5	44,3	21,7	4,1	1,4	3,94	,88
55. Using appropriate terminology for the students' level	37,1	45,7	14,9	1,4	,9	4,16	,79
56. Using appropriate reinforcements	35,3	47,1	16,3	,9	,5	4,15	,75
57. Being understandable and patient	48,4	34,8	14,0	1,4	1,4	4,27	,85
58. Being competent in his/her subject area	62,9	29,4	5,9	,5	1,4	4,52	,74
59. Being consistent	56,6	33,5	7,7	1,8	,5	4,43	,75
60. Making students participate the lesson	38,5	45,7	12,7	1,8	1,4	4,18	,82
61. Using board as a teaching aid effectively	23,1	38,5	29,0	8,1	1,4	3,73	,95
62. Using class time efficiently	38,0	46,2	12,7	2,7	,5	4,18	,79
63. Making the class enjoyable for the students	37,6	42,5	16,7	2,7	,5	4,14	,82
64. Giving concrete examples related the subject	40,7	46,2	10,9	1,8	,5	4,24	,75
65. Being objective	67,9	22,2	7,7	1,4	,9	4,54	,77

5= Very important, 4= Quite important, 3= Partly important, 2= Less important, 1=Not important

As seen also in the Table 1, the arithmetic means showed in the study that "is objective" characteristic in item 65 had the highest mean ($M= 4.54$, $SD= .77$) and "gets students to do presentations (projects, etc.) in lessons" characteristic in item 7 had the lowest mean ($M= 3.13$, $SD=1,07$). It can be inferred from this result that prospective teachers would like to see objectivity, which is a fundamental characteristic of science, in their profession as well, and thus they view this item as very important.

The second research question was: Do prospective teachers' thoughts of the "characteristics of effective teachers" differ according to the gender variable? Table 1 shows the results of analysis related to this research question.

Table 2.

Independent Samples T-Test Results of According to Gender Variable.

Gender	N	M	SD	df	t	p
Female	113	4,19	0,45	219	2,86	,005
Male	108	4,02	0,43			

p<0.05

As the table illustrates, a difference was found between genders regarding their thoughts on the importance of characteristics of effective teachers at the significance level of 0.05. The arithmetic means show that the females participants' mean ($M=4.19$, $SD=0,45$) is higher than male participants' mean ($M=4.02$, $SD=0,43$). T test result also shows that the effect size is 0.04 ($\eta^2=0.04$) and this indicates that it has small effect size (Büyüköztürk, 2007, p.48).

This result implies that female prospective teachers find effective teacher behaviors more important than male prospective teachers. This result differs from the some other results of the studies. Kelly (2007), for instance, found that gender had no effect on the perceived effectiveness of any teaching skill of behavior. Third research question in the study was: Do prospective teachers' thoughts of the "characteristics of effective teachers" according to the field of study? Table 2 shows the results related to this question.

Table 3.

Independent Samples T-Test Results According to Field of Study Variable.

Program	n	M	SD	df	t	p
Math-science	143	4,06	0,44	215	-2,36	,019
Verbal	74	4,21	0,46			

p<0.05

As the table shows, a difference was found between the thoughts of the importance of effective teacher behaviors to the field of study variable at the significance level of 0.05. Arithmetic means show that the mean of the participants from the departments that are mainly verbal ($M=4,21$) is higher than the mean of the participants from the departments that are mainly analytical ($M=4,06$). T test result also shows that the effect size is 0.03 ($\eta^2=0.03$) and this indicates that it has small effect size. Based on these results, it can be inferred that the prospective teachers from the verbal departments find effective teacher behaviors more important than those from math-science departments. The last sub-research question was: Which are the characteristics that prospective teachers find the most important and the least important among the "characteristics of effective teachers"? Table 4 and Table 5 show the results on this topic.

Table 4.

Effective Teacher Characteristics That are Marked as the Most Important by Prospective Teachers.

1. States the aim of the lesson (Item 1)
2. Keeps students active in the lesson (Item 6)
3. Likes his/her job (Item 24)
4. Teaches with consideration of students' interests and talents (Item 13)
5. Establishes good rapport with students (Item 18)

The results in Table 4 show consistent results with those presented in Table 1. Prospective teachers listed the following as the most important five characteristics of an effective teacher: 'states the aim of the lesson', 'keeps students active in the lesson', 'likes his/her job', 'teaches with consideration of students' interests and talents', and 'establishes good rapport with students'. As can be seen from the table, the items reported by prospective teachers are interesting since each of them stress different aspect of effective teachers' characteristics. As seen from the table, 'stating the aim of the lesson' is considered by prospective teachers as one of the important five characteristics among 65 items given them. This finding also consistent with other studies' findings. Devar (2002), for example, indicated that all good teaching starts with specific, clear and measurable goals and objectives. Another characteristics prospective teachers considered as one of the five characteristics was that "Establishes good rapport with students". This suggests that they are sensitive about this aspect of effective teacher behaviors. In fact many researchers note that establishing a good relationship with students is important for effective teaching atmosphere. Vries and Bejjard (1999), for example, stated in their research that most of teachers think that having a good relationship with students is a prerequisite for teaching and learning. Similar finding was found in the study conducted by Pozo-Munoz, Reboloso-Pacheco and Fernandez-Ramirez (2000). According to the research of Pozo-Munoz et al. (2000) the characteristics students think the 'ideal teacher' should have teaching competency and should have some features such as the relationship between teacher and student. On the other hand, effective teacher characteristics that are described as the least important by prospective teachers in this study were given in the Table 5.

Table 5.

Effective Teacher Characteristics That are Marked as the Least Important by Prospective Teachers.

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1. Utilizes various seating arrangements (group, etc.) in the teaching process (Item 28)
 2. Makes jokes (Item 19)
 3. Gets students to do presentations (projects, etc.) in lessons (Item 7)
 4. Suggests a source material list to students to follow in the lessons (Item 10)
 5. Is authoritative (Item 36)
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As seen from the table above prospective teachers listed the points as the least important five characteristics of an effective teacher: 'utilizes various seating arrangements (group, etc.) in the teaching process', 'makes jokes', 'gets students to do presentations (projects, etc.) in lessons', 'suggests a source material list to students to follow in the lessons' and 'is authoritative' as shown in the Table-5. In another study conducted by Pozo-Munoz et al. (2000) adjectives related to the teacher's physical appearance are irrelevant in the definition of the 'ideal teacher'.

Discussion and Conclusion

The main results of the study can be summarized as follows:

It was to found out whether the thoughts of prospective teachers on effective teacher characteristics differed according to gender and found between genders regarding their thoughts on the importance of characteristics of effective teachers at the significance level of 0.05.

Another question for which an answer was sought in the study was whether the thoughts of trainees on effective teacher characteristics differed according to the program of field of study they pursued. It was found that was found between the thoughts of the importance of effective teacher behaviors to the field of study variable at the significance level of 0.05.

Finally, the characteristics that were found the most and the least important among the views towards the characteristics of effective teachers were tried to be identified. Prospective teachers listed the 'states the aim of the lesson', 'keeps students active in the lesson', 'likes his/her job', 'teaches with consideration of students' interests and talents', and 'establishes good rapport with students' as the most important five characteristics of an effective teacher whereas 'utilizes various seating arrangements (group, etc.) in the teaching process', 'makes jokes', 'gets students to do presentations (projects, etc.) in lessons', 'suggests a source material list to students to follow in the lessons' and 'is authoritative' as the least important five characteristics.

Characteristics or behaviors of teachers are important aspect in studies about teachers. Many studies focus different aspects of teacher and teacher professionalism. This paper mainly purposed to determine prospective teachers' thoughts about the characteristics of teachers. The results of the study can inform teacher educators who develop and evaluate teacher education programs (Özgün-Koca and Şen, 2006) since the results of the study might provide some important clues to teacher educators. In other words, to know what prospective teachers' thoughts in this issue can be helpful for them to revise some points in teacher education programs. In addition, to share the results of the study with practitioners who study on effective teacher might be another implication of this present study.

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