Professional Competencies of Teachers and the Qualitative Evaluation

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Abstract

This research studies the relationship between professional competencies of Iranian teachers and their perspectives about qualitative evaluation project. Research type is pragmatic, its methodology is descriptive and in respect of data collection sample survey method was used. Data was collected from 191 teachers through observation by use of two researcher-designed questionnaires about qualitative evaluation and teachers’ professional competencies (general and specialized). Findings show that there is a significant relationship between teachers’ professional competencies and their perspectives about qualitative evaluation.

Keywords: professional competencies; descriptive evaluation; elementary schools; Iran.

1. Introduction

There has been a lot of discussion about educational reform and improving the educational quality of schools in recent years. National evaluation of students is known as one of the key elements of regenerating the schools and improving the quality of education and learning (Stiggins, 2004). Therefore, teachers, by changing their minds and methods in educational evaluation, can use evaluation to improve students’ learning (Hasani, 2009).

Evaluation in its new meaning (Qualitative Evaluation), is part of education and a decent means to correct the purposes, plans, and ways of teaching (Mirtazai et al, 2009). Therefore, education planners always try to improve it.

Iranian education system has developed a new method of evaluation called “the descriptive- qualitative evaluation” and has made some changes in textbooks in order to meet the real needs of students, parents and the society in recent years (Hasani & Ahmadi, 2010). This plan is used in first, second and third grade of elementary schools. But the results show that despite many attempts, this plan was not successful. The question is what factor or factors are effective on the successful execution of this plan. Generally, of those factors we can call teachers, students and society. As the teacher is the main factor in education plans, researchers like to study the role of teacher’s professional competencies in successful execution of these plans.

In qualitative evaluation teacher must know his students completely, therefore in this new method teacher has different tools, so that he can use them properly in order to recognize students’ weakness, strength and problems in learning (Nazary and Ghorbanian, 2010). Therefore teachers, by changing their minds and methods in educational evaluation, can use evaluation to improve students’ learning (Hasani, 2009). So the question for researchers is,
whether there is a relationship between teachers’ professional competencies and their perspective about qualitative evaluation? This question has two reasons, 1) because this phenomenon is completely new in Iran’s education system, there has not been yet a reliable research about it, and therefore there is a fundamental need for such a research. 2) Studying the research literature, researchers have not seen any international research which shows the relationship between these two variables. Hence, considering all these factors, this question has been asked.

Since all attention in Iran’s education system is focused on execution of qualitative evaluation and its success or failure, it is necessary to know the effective factors.

- What are the professional competencies of the teachers?
- How are these competencies?
- What do teachers think about the necessity of executing qualitative evaluation?
- Is there any relationship between teachers’ professional competencies and their perspective about qualitative evaluation?

2. The Necessity and Importance of Research

In a wisdom centered age one of the education duties is to equip people with science, skill and art, so that they can live in this developed world as successful citizens. So the education system must change with the world to meet this end. Since Iranian education system is administered traditionally, it must go through some general changes to satisfy students and equip them with skill to face the world. One of these changes that can influence other aspects of education is evaluation. The quantitative evaluation only increases the negative competition and anxiety, and prevents students from learning the subject matters deeply and exceedingly. So we need to replace it with qualitative evaluation which examines all aspects. To carry out the qualitative evaluation we need to know different variables that can facilitate or accelerate the qualitative evaluation, and their reinforcement can lead to successful execution of qualitative evaluation. Because the researchers themselves are involved in execution and teaching of qualitative evaluation in education system and recognize that the success of education plans in all countries needs teachers armed with scientific competence and professional skills, it was decided to conduct a field study on teachers’ professional competencies and its effect on their perspective about changing evaluation method of the students.

After studying the previous researches, the researchers found out that such a research has not been yet conducted, so this research is creative.

3. The Research Background

After an extensive study on previous researches about teachers’ general competencies and specialized competencies, we came to the conclusion that in order to be qualified, teachers need to gain and improve some competencies, such as: Intellectual ability; Management; Interpersonal skills; Being professional (Hong et al, 2008); Proper contact with the audience (Huntley, 2003).

If a teacher gains general competence and specialized competencies it may have great results, such as:

1. More job satisfaction (Jalali, 2002); 2. More educational improvement of students (Marashi, 1996); 3. Emerging strong rapport between teachers and students (Wayne and Young, 2004).

Field studies about qualitative evaluation show that executing qualitative evaluation leads to:

- Knowledge growth (Rezaie, 2007),
- Better learning (Haghighy, 2006);
- Increased mental health (Karimi, 2006 and Shokrolahi, 2007);
- More students involvement in the classroom (Mohammadi, 2006);
- Increase of student efficiency (Van Evera, 2007).

As you can see variables of qualitative evaluation and professional competencies have been studied a lot, but there is no research about the relationship between these two variables. This research is to study the relationship between professional competencies of teachers and their perspective about the productivity of qualitative evaluation. The purpose of this research is to show what teachers – having professional competencies or not - think about qualitative evaluation and whether they consider it useful.
4. Professional Competencies of Teachers and the Classification of these Competencies

Success of educational plans in each country depends on the teachers armed with scientific competencies and professional skills. Researchers in education have done many researches to find out the competencies of a good teacher and an impressive teaching and have divided those competencies into different categories, but these researches have not been coherent and practical. Each of these categories considers a specific aspect and we explore three of them in here.

Fathivajargah (2003) believes that when we are hiring teachers, we must hire those who have cognitive, emotional and practical competencies. Cognitive competency here means self-cognition, learners-cognition, and cognition of teaching-learning process. Emotional competency is the competence based on interests, values and attitudes. And practical competency refers to teacher’s competence in relation with the students, classrooms, schools and the society.

Bloom imprecisely divides teachers’ competencies to emotional, cognitive and practical (quoting Seif, 2003). Aghaie (2006) thinks that the most important competencies of a teacher are:
1) Familiarity with different thinking skills and applying them.
2) Familiarity with new learning and teaching methods and using them
3) Class management and specific skills of communicating with the students
4) Familiarity with communication and information technologies, and being capable of employing them in teaching
5) Research skills
6) Skillful in evaluating academic achievements
Shabani (2006) also divides teacher’s competencies into characteristic and scientific. By characteristic competencies he means: student oriented authoritarian, student oriented and intimacy oriented, subject oriented and intimacy oriented, subject oriented authoritarian; By scientific competencies he means: awareness of psychology, teaching methods, new communication methods, social psychology, teaching psychology and communicating.

Taghi Pour Zahir (2010) divides teacher’s competencies into two categories; vocational and personal. Personal competencies include: mental and physical health, adherence to the values, having good mental abilities, and vocational competencies include: general knowledge, vocational knowledge and communication skills.

After studying and discussing experts’ theories in this field, and consulting with some of the greatest professors of education science, researchers of this paper decided to give a practical categorization and evaluate teachers’ professional competencies based on that. The categorization is as the following:

We can study teacher’s professional competencies in two groups: A) General competencies, and B) specialized competencies.

General competencies of a teacher includes: familiarity with development and learning psychology, awareness of the teaching- learning process, class management, teaching methods, controlling and evaluation.

Specialized competencies of a teacher in this research include: content mastery, providing the content in a proper order, organizing the content, mastery in employing training tools in practice, keeping accurate records, giving feedback to the students.

If teachers have professional competencies, they will regard following points:
1) Emphasis on human relationship and cooperation in improving the learning conditions
2) More emphasis on the consequences of learning than on its products
3) Emphasis on learners’ self-evaluation, and their responsibility for their learning and also other students’ learning
4) Making opportunities for internal motivation development
5) Increasing judgmental sources and data validity
6) Giving descriptive feedback to bring improvement and performance development
7) Modulation of evaluation system with social system of schools

5. Qualitative Evaluation: A Fundamental Change in Iranian Education System

Evaluation has two aspects, quantitative and qualitative. Since the establishment of education system up to the year 2007 only the quantitative method was used in Iran. Since 2007 the qualitative method that deals with the quality of evaluation has been introduced. This method is used in first, second and third grade of elementary school and in future years it will be applied also in higher levels and grades.
The qualitative evaluation is an innovative event in the Iranian education system and it sets to make various widespread changes in different areas. This kind of evaluation by giving qualitative patterns and figuring out some educational standards, despite all other evaluation systems tries to focus on depth and quality of learning instead of the quantitative aspects of it and then it produces the description of their statuses (Mohaghegh Moen, 2007).

Qualitative evaluation: replacing distance scale (0-20) with categorical descriptive rating scales (very good, good, acceptable, needs more training and attempt) and giving descriptive report cards and using measurement tools appropriate with the categorical rating scale.

Qualitative Evaluation Competencies:

1) Dynamism (Guskey,2003)
2) Feedback (Inoue,2005)
3) Qualitative attitude
4) Performance oriented (Farestad,2004)
5) Process based (Stiggins,2005)
6) Multidirectional

Qualitative Evaluation tools:

1) Descriptive report card
2) Tests
3) Paperwork
4) Self-assessment and peer-assessment (Shokouhi&Gharedaghi,2010)
5) Feedback (Black et al,2004)
6) Portfolio
7) Observation ( kazemi,2003)

Teacher as the main element of this fundamental change must be armed with necessary skills to execute this plan properly; here we mention some of these skills:

1) Portfolio management and analyzing its information
2) Making check list and using it
3) Assigning proper homework to students then checking it
4) Giving descriptive feedback to students
5) Making and using different means of observation recording
6) Preparing functional tests for students
7) Employing self-assessment and peer-assessment methods
8) Giving final descriptive feedback such as academic achievement report (Nazary & Ghanbarian,2010)

8. Methodology

This research has pragmatic goals. Type of the research is descriptive and from the aspect of data collection, it is scaling.

The samples are 400 teachers of first, second and third grade of elementary school in Pakdasht.

We choose samples randomly and referring to Morgan table we have 191 samples.

Data collecting tools: Two researcher-designed and observing questionnaires, one of them is used to measure professional competencies of teachers and the other one is used to ask teachers’ perspective about profitability of the qualitative evaluation plan. And through standard professional behavior check list, teachers’ behaviors are observed directly.

The reliability of the questionnaires is measured using Cronboch’s alpha, the reliability for professional competencies is 92%, and for qualitative evaluation is 97%.

Education experts have confirmed the content and face validity of questionnaires.

The data is analyzed by SPSS in two levels of descriptive and inferential statistics. In this research inferential and descriptive statistics (tables, frequency, average, and standard deviation) are used to analyze the data. In inferential statistics Spearman correlation is used.
9. Findings

Answering the first question asked in the abstract and studying different texts about teachers’ competencies, and omitting identical competencies, eventually twelve distinctive competencies are recognized. We categorize them in two main groups of general and specialized.

General competencies:
1) Familiarity with development and learning psychology
2) Awareness of the learner and the teaching-learning process
3) Class management
4) Teaching methods
5) Controlling
6) Evaluation

Specialized competencies:
1) Content mastery
2) Providing the content in order
3) Organizing the content
4) Mastery in employing training tools in practice
5) Keeping accurate records
6) Giving feedback to the students

Research findings are consistent with Huntley (2003) and Hung and others (2008) researches.

Table 1. The average of teachers’ professional competencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>1-1/75</th>
<th>1/76-2/5</th>
<th>2/51-3/25</th>
<th>3/25-4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>unpleasing</td>
<td>fairly pleasing</td>
<td>pleasing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1  Teachers’ general competencies</td>
<td>3/26</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2  Teachers’ specialized competencies</td>
<td>3/27</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As you can see in the table above, from teachers’ perspective their competencies are in good condition.

As mentioned before, another data collecting tool in this research is observation. Based on observation results we see that the average of teachers’ professional competencies is 3/17 which is 10% less than what they claim. So we can conclude that the teachers under the study have the needed competencies.

These findings are mostly consistent with other researches. The result of other researches like the research by Jalaly (2002) also shows that teachers in elementary grades have great competencies.
Table 2: the utility rate of qualitative evaluation’s components, from teachers’ perspective

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Teachers’ perspective about the effect of evaluation plans on the increment of teaching-learning environment mental health</td>
<td>3/01</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Teachers’ perspective about multidirectional help to students by evaluation plans</td>
<td>3/60</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Teachers’ perspective about the effect of evaluation plans on teaching-learning process</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Teachers’ perspective about the necessity of executing qualitative evaluation plans</td>
<td>3/01</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

As you can see in the table above, qualitative evaluation’s components are in good condition. In order to answer the third question of the research, a questionnaire with qualitative evaluation’s components was prepared. So, according to the averages, generally teachers’ opinions about qualitative evaluation’s components are in good condition.

As there is no similar research in this field, we cannot say that it aligns with some researches or not. But indirectly we can say that it aligns with the results of some researches like, Mohamady (2006), Haghghi (2006), Karimi (2006), Shokrolahi (2006), and Van Evra (2004). These researches in accordance with our research show that qualitative evaluation in some extent has reached the increase of environmental mental health and it has provided the necessary condition of learning and development.

Table 3: correlation coefficient between teachers’ general competencies and their perspective about qualitative evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Result variable</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Correlation coefficient</th>
<th>The significance rate</th>
<th>Measured sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ general competencies</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>0/29</td>
<td>0/05</td>
<td>0/00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspective about qualitative evaluation</td>
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According to the table 3, with 95% confidence we can say that there is a positive and significant relationship between teachers’ general competencies and qualitative evaluation.
Table 4: Correlation coefficient between teachers’ specialized competencies and their perspective about qualitative evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Result variable</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Correlation coefficient</th>
<th>The significance rate</th>
<th>Measured sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ specialized competencies</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspective about qualitative evaluation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>

According to the table 4, with 95% confidence we can say that there is a positive and significant relationship between teachers’ professional competencies and qualitative evaluation.

In response to the fourth question, through two questionnaires about professional competencies and a survey about qualitative evaluation we can conclude that there is a positive and significant relationship between teachers’ competencies and their perspective about qualitative evaluation.

10. Discussion and Conclusion

Through measuring the correlation coefficient between teachers’ competencies and teachers’ perspective about qualitative evaluation, we obtain following information:

We can say with 95% confidence that there is a positive and significant relationship between teachers’ general competencies and qualitative evaluation.

We can say with 95% confidence that there is a positive and significant relationship between teachers’ specialized competencies and qualitative evaluation.

These findings show that there is a significant relationship between teachers’ professional competencies and qualitative evaluation.

The more general and specialized competencies they have, the more likely it is that they employ qualitative evaluation tools, and eventually they can achieve all its desired goals more easily. In other words, professional teachers can guarantee students’ academic achievement, teacher-student rapport, students’ efficiency, improvement of students’ mental health, better learning, and extended knowledge. Therefore if we want to guarantee at least one of the reasons and factors of successful execution of qualitative evaluation we need to focus on developing and reinforcing teachers’ professional competencies. We can relate the findings of this research to teachers who professionally study qualitative evaluation and participate in workplace trainings.
References