

A STUDY OF INITIAL PRIMARY TEACHER TRAINING IN ENGLAND WITH IMPLICATIONS FOR THE SYSTEM IN TURKEY

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Introduction

Over the last two decades the quality of teachers and teacher training has received increasing attention from the public, parents and politicians. These issues have become a focus of public debate.

In most countries, governments are, therefore, seeking various ways of improving initial teacher training in order to have well qualified teachers. Although teacher training should be seen as a continuous process, the initial teacher training stage ought to help the teacher candidates meet their professional responsibilities.

Initial teacher training has to begin by asking what does the teacher need to know that is going to be relevant and useful, and what kind of professional characteristics must be acquired by teachers in training in order to enable them to help develop each child's full potential. Evidence from research shows that the preschool and primary years of a person's life are very important. As the early years in education have a significant impact on children's future attitudes and achievement (Bloom, 1976), the teachers with whom young children come into contact have a special role to play in influencing the development of future members of society, even though the influence of a child's home and parental contact is crucial in the early years, and other professions may contribute in their own way to the development of future generations.

Generally, development is interpreted as the result of complex and continuous interaction between the developing organism and its environment. The nature of this interaction enhances individual differences and leads to wide variation. Levels of encouragement and discouragement which children experience in their environment may influence their development. Therefore, as far as possible it is necessary to provide a rich stimulating environment for all children to develop well and to remedy deficiencies. This necessitates that teachers should know each child's development and how to foster it. Teachers can foster or limit children's development by preparing appropriate or inappropriate teaching-learning situations. In short, the teacher's task is to provide a stimulating environment that enables children to perform to their maximum potential (Galton, 1990, p.26).

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As it is accepted that learning is a change in behaviour, then teaching is concerned with helping children to learn new skills, to gain information and attitudes (Wheldall and Riding, 1983, p.13). Therefore, desired changes in learning outcomes are a function of changes in teacher behaviour (Tomic,1991, p.182). The effective teacher in the primary school should be well informed about individual pupils, and discriminating in the identification of their needs to help children's learning and to foster development: physical, emotional, social and intellectual (HMI,1987). This requires diagnosing children's needs, potential and ways of learning, organising resources for the teaching-learning process, assessing children's achievement and also communicating with parents and other colleagues (Galton and et al., 1980, pp.45-51).

Bassey wrote of the primary school teacher: It is the primary school teacher who nurtures the cognitive growth of the next generation through the vital years of five to eleven; it is the primary school teacher who sets much of the framework within which attitudes towards the self and towards society and the world outside the self begin to form; and it is the primary school teacher who fosters the skill of communication, enquiry and creation which profoundly influence the patterns of life of the next generation

It follows that the primary school teacher needs to be of high ability, to have high empathy for fellow humankind, and to be effectively trained to carry out the many sides of the job (Bassey, 1989, p. 32).

Wilson suggests three central tasks of being a teacher. These deal with knowing the subject matter, caring about transmitting it, and understanding children. Student teachers should be enabled to learn and try out ways of thinking about content, organising it for learning supporting children to learn and the effects of these efforts. At the same time they learn about children as pupils interacting with a subject. From this point of view, much of teaching is conceptual and learning to teach requires reflection on one's action and its effects (Evans,1987, p. 127).

In summary, taking the responsibility of being a primary teacher requires that candidates for this profession should acquire the following skills:

- . Diagnosing the needs of individuals and their levels of development,
- . Catering for special needs,
- . Fostering children's development, including physical, emotional, social and cognitive,
- . Creating equal opportunities for every child regardless of gender, ethnic and socio-economic status.
- . Having specialist knowledge to help colleagues who are specialist in other subjects and knowledge in national curriculum subjects to teach to pupils,
- . Having knowledge of teaching in appropriate ways: planning, organising, managing and interacting with pupils,

- . Assessing and recording children's achievement,
- . Understanding values and issues in education,
- . Working and communicating in groups or as part of a professional team or with parents and other communities (Winkley, 1990, p. 453; Avalos, 1991, p. 174; Fish, 1989, pp. 94-95; NAIEA publications; DES, 1989; Galton, 1989).

Initial teacher training should enable new teachers to respond surely but adaptably and flexibly to their pupils in particular teaching situations, by finding themselves. How, then should initial teacher training be carried out in order to meet the professional responsibilities attributed to primary school teachers?

The purpose of this study was to investigate English initial primary teacher training system and how the findings might lead to some recommendations for further improvement of the Turkish system.

For this purpose, firstly, the English initial primary teacher training systems are described. Secondly, an investigation was carried out into how well the students were prepared to be primary teachers and through which components of their course, according to the perceptions of trainers and students in their last term. They were also asked for suggestions to improve their training. Finally, the Turkish initial primary teacher training system is described; English and Turkish systems are compared; and some recommendations are given for further development of the Turkish system.

This study was mainly carried out in three institutions which have different kinds of initial teacher training courses. Institution A has only a One-Year PGCE (Post Graduate Certificate of Education); institution B has two routes, a one-year PGCE and BED (Bachelor of Education); Institution C has a one-year PGCE and an Articled Teacher Scheme.

Method

Data were collected by reviewing the literature, conducting interviews and administering questionnaires. Interviews were conducted with six trainers who were responsible for initial primary teacher training courses in each of the three institutions. Questionnaires were administered in two of the institutions given above- institution A (PGCE students) and institution B (BED students). The same questionnaires were given to trainers and students to investigate how well they felt the students had been prepared as primary teachers and which components of the course had helped to prepare them. In this study all trainers in institution A and B, and one quarter of the PGCE and BED students in their last term, were surveyed.

The data have been analysed in order to compare the perceptions of student and trainers and also to examine differences between institutions and courses. In addition interview data have been used to provide more qualitative insights.

Findings

Problems encountered in course design and in the teaching-learning process include lack of time for foundation subjects but not core subjects; controversy about how to teach and how children learn; difficulty in working collaboratively with schools; shortage of good schools; and inadequate resourcing of initial courses. Problems in assessing student achievement were identified in that tutors interpreted criteria differently even though they were defined explicitly.

All the trainers studied are in agreement about the sources of such problems, which are increased public expectations and government requirements; lack of time; shortage of money and the expertise of trainers. There is much general anxiety about the present and future role of initial teacher training departments and the confidence of tutors in the system.

In terms of differences between the one-year PGCE and the BEd course, tutors pointed out that the PGCE course is much more flexible, responsive, quicker and cheaper than the BEd. Moreover they say that students on the PGCE are much more motivated, mature and likely to show initiative as compared with students on the BEd course. However, the weakness of the one-year PGCE course is that it is too short to meet the demanding roles of the primary teacher.

The majority of PGCE, BEd students and their trainers felt that students were prepared adequately with respect to gaining most of the primary teaching skills, although there was substantial variation among the PGCE and BEd students in their perceptions. Areas indicated as perhaps needing greater emphasis included preparation in fostering children's whole potential; organising appropriate learning environments; managing teaching-learning situations; assessing children's characteristics; teaching foundation subjects as well as core subjects; and communicating with parents and all staff.

The majority of the students on the PGCE and particularly on the BEd believed that they gained professional skills more in the Teaching Practice component than in any other component of the course. Trainers felt that all the components had helped to prepare students. These results indicate that components of the course other than teaching practice- on the BEd, other school based experience, mathematics and science- might need further development to achieve their objectives.

Suggestions from students to improve their training were mainly focussed on the content and teaching methods of Professional Studies, Mathematics, English and Foundation Subjects; time allocation and application of Teaching Practice, Early Years Education and First Aid. Trainers' recommendations referred to time allocation of the course, relationships between the institution and schools, commitment to inservice education for newly qualified teachers, audio-visual media and other investment by DES.

In the light of these findings, Turkish initial primary teacher training, which is strongly theory based, might need a greater balance of theory and practice. That is, school based experience should be allocated more time throughout the training years. Hence, students will be able to integrate theory with practice. Curriculum studies, which include National Primary Curriculum subjects and their teaching in primary school

should also be given more priority than Subject Studies which are designed only to extend subject knowledge. In addition, beside current courses which are equivalent to the four-year BEd, it would be appropriate to train primary teachers through a two-year initial teacher training course similar to the PGCE. This should not only result in more well-qualified and motivated teachers but would also provide a more flexible and responsive and quicker system in order to cater for the needs of curriculum development and of the school system.

Conclusion for Turkish System

Theory and Practice Balance

Teaching is a very complex, dynamic and demanding process which includes creative thinking, choice, decision making and exploration. The main components in this process are research, experimentation and evaluation. These constitute teaching competence- reflectivity (Hextall & et al., 1991). Initially, teaching competence is gained through the teacher training process. In the 1970's teacher training moved away from using concepts of the educational sciences to the solution of everyday professional situations. In the 1980's, it was put forward that professional knowledge and competence can be acquired through being the reflective practitioner who observes, analyses, and evaluates teaching-learning situations and develops judgements through experiential- teaching practice and other school based activity (Alexander, 1984; Pollard and Tann, 1987; Galton, 1990). That is, to be a 'reflective practitioner' is to gain understanding of situations holistically, to look at them from a variety of perspectives, to solve problems intelligently in unpredictable and complex, social situations and evaluate their own judgements and problem solutions. Hence, gaining this competence necessitates interacting with real practical conditions.

"The new professionalism" model which can be applied in teacher training also includes the following principles: 1- Worthwhile professional learning is experiential, including the acquisition of appropriate and useful knowledge. 2- The professional learning curriculum should be made up of the study of real practical situations which are complex, problematic and open to a variety of interpretations from different points of view. 3- Professional knowledge should be enriched and supported by pedagogy so that learners can develop to become reflective practitioners. 4- The acquisition of knowledge can be fostered by interacting with real practical situations (Elliott, 1990, pp. 8-9).

From the points of view of the reflective practitioner and the new professionalism models, the experiences which are gained from real practical interactions play an essential role in acquiring professional knowledge and competence. However, Lawrence criticized particularly English one-year PGCE courses, "the theoretical underpinning that should illuminate and enrich the practice is generally neglected" (Lawrence, 1987, p.394). The majority of English one-year PGCE and BEd students' responses seem to support Lawrence's claim. Students indicated that they substantially gained most of the

professional skills and appropriate subject knowledge to teach primary children in Teaching Practice . They also suggested that they need more applicable theoretical course work as well as more practical integration. Moreover, they need to be taught more about planning programmes, the organisation and management of the classroom, catering for children's special needs, the assessment of children's characteristics and first aid before starting teaching practice and during teaching practice. Thus, in teacher training programmes theory and practice should be well-balanced to cater for demanding professional responsibilities and to enable students to obtain professional competence.

In contrast to the English system, in the Turkish teacher training programme, theory is given much more emphasis. 30% of course time is allocated to professional studies, which include separate disciplines derived from the educational sciences. Therefore, there might not be lack of knowledge in the professional subjects such as Primary Curriculum and Development, Measurement and Evaluation, Special Education, First Aid. Nonetheless, school based experience which enables students to integrate theory with practice is given dramatically less time (7%). Bassey pointed out that studying the theory of education without putting the experience into practice is at least ten years out of date, and continued:

"The days of left wing sociology, rats and pigeons psychology, ancient Greek philosophy and chantry school history are long dead. Theory today is about children learning to think, to understand, to create, to communicate, to relate to each other and the world; it is about teaching and learning, curriculum and assessment. The teacher training institutions work hard to integrate theory with practice" (Bassey, 1991).

In the light of these aspects and findings Turkish initial teacher training programmes need to give more time to school based experience and teaching practice which is the heart of the initial teacher training process. Hence, students can be enabled to integrate theory with practice and to become reflective practitioners.

In addition, in the Turkish initial primary teacher training course, Primary School Curriculum and Development and Introduction to Special Education modules taken in the eighth term- after all the school based experiences finish- might need to be repositioned, taking into account the sequence of students' educational needs. Because the Primary Curriculum and Development module includes planning the curriculum, organising teaching-learning process and evaluating curriculum, and the Introduction to Special Education module introduces students to how to cater for the needs of children who are gifted and handicapped, they should be taken before or during teaching practice if students are to apply essential professional knowledge in real practical situations.

In addition, Early Years Education which is taken only as a subsidiary subject ought to be compulsory since most of the primary school teachers and administrators work in early years education. The entire range of primary education, therefore, can be provided from the early years to the middle years.

Subject and Curriculum Studies

The Turkish initial primary teacher training course does not train students as a subject specialist like the English system. The English BEd course is criticized by McNamara (1991) as it focuses on one subject instead of the majority of subjects within the National Primary Curriculum. He put forward that it would be more useful to ensure that primary teachers have a sound knowledge based on basic principles and processes within the subject areas of the National Curriculum, and to focus on children's development and learning and how to teach subject areas effectively. Suggestions from English PGCE and BEd students supported McNamara's ideas

Although the Turkish initial teacher training course covers Primary National Curriculum subjects in subject studies, it is given the biggest proportion of the course time as against learning how to teach these subjects.

In the English teacher training courses, the core subjects, namely English, Mathematics and Science, are given priority in terms of time allocation. Trainers and students reported that other curriculum subjects- foundation subjects- namely History, Geography, Music, Art, Physical Education, Drama, Dance etc., need more time in order to overcome lack of competence in these areas. Even though in the Turkish system, the time allocations for all curriculum subjects are approximately equal, the total time devoted to curriculum studies is less than to subject and professional studies.

The findings indicate that Turkish teacher training courses need to give more time to subject application (curriculum studies), since curriculum studies help students to acquire the professional skills required for each subject area.

Two-Year Post Graduate Certificate of Education

Some of the educators in the English primary teacher training system claim that it can be more appropriate to train primary teachers through a two-year PGCE route, as primary teaching is crucial for the development of future generations of society, and needs dynamic and complex skills (Lawrence, 1987; Basse, 1989, 1990; Elliott, 1990; Ruduck, 1991).

Trainers who taught on the BEd and PGCE one-year courses disclosed that, although the one-year PGCE has very little time, this route is much more flexible, responsive and cheaper than the BEd course. It can be changed easily with regard to needs and requirements from one year to another. Hence, curriculum development can be provided quickly through the PGCE course. Moreover, students who are on the PGCE are substantially more mature, motivated, and responsible and they know what they want to do and why they are asked to do it, compared with students on the BEd. In short, they are aware of the importance of being a primary teacher. However, this route needs more than one year to cater for the needs of a very challenging and crucial job - primary teacher.

The route of the two-year PGCE can be implemented into the Turkish initial primary teacher training system along side the four-year BEd route. People who decide to be primary teachers after having a first degree in one of the Primary National Curriculum areas from the faculties of literature and science can be trained as primary teachers by a two-

year PGCE course. This route would cover knowledge of the basic principles and processes of the National curriculum subjects and their teaching as curriculum studies. Professional studies would consist of how to foster children's whole potential and how to guide children's learning; how to cater for the needs of children who are in special situations; how to design and manage teaching-learning resources; and how to assess children's characteristics. This component would also enable students to be aware of the educational system and relevant issues as well as how to communicate and educate parents and the community. Teaching practice would provide students with professional competence the ability to apply appropriate knowledge in complex, unstable, unique situations. Thus, this route can be more relevant to preparing well qualified, motivated, effective primary school teachers.

Major Recommendations

1. The time allocation to professional studies might be reduced by focusing on helping children learn- to think, to enquire, to create, to solve problem; fostering children's whole potential development; designing and managing teaching-learning resources and processes; assessing children's characteristics- diagnostic, formative and summative- to remedy developmental and learning deficiencies. The time allocation to school based experience, therefore, could be increased to enable students to gain professional competence by interacting with real practical situations including creative thinking, enquiring, problem solving and evaluation of own judgement.

2. In the professional studies components, some modules need repositioning with regard to sequences of subjects and educational needs.

3. In terms of time allocation, curriculum studies which include National Primary Curriculum subjects and their teaching in primary schools would be given more priority than subject studies which are taught merely as subject knowledge without linking with primary teaching or education.

4. It could be more appropriate to train primary teachers through a two-year PGCE initial teacher training course in terms of having not only well-qualified, mature and motivated teachers but also a flexible, responsive and quicker system to cater for developmental needs from one year to another as compared with the BED route.

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