

THE IDEAL PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHER

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The qualities that an ideal primary school teacher has to have according to the view of 109 teacher trainees were investigated. Data were collected from an open-ended question in which the participants' views about the ideal primary school teacher and the reasoning behind those views were explored. Content analysis, frequency analysis, and percentage techniques of the collected data resulted in 6 themes: ethical and humanistic values; teaching skills; cultural and scientific knowledge; personal qualities; interaction with society, environment, and parents; and self-values.

Keywords: ideal teacher, primary school, prospective teacher, desirable qualities.

Education is needed for the development of societies, and teachers are significant elements of an education system. Kavcar (1999) emphasized that teachers are crucial to the education system and only qualified teachers can provide good and effective education, so that schools are only as good as the teachers in them. Teachers have major responsibilities in educating individuals and supporting effective societies. Good teachers are always needed (Smith, 2008). Researchers have observed a relationship between educational success and quality teaching (Hopkins & Stern, 1996; Smith, 2008). Wayne and Youngs (2003) also found a relationship between the teacher's characteristics and the student's success. The quality of the teacher is an important factor in explaining differences in student successes in a school. That is, a good teacher makes an observable difference, but what is not clear is what makes a good teacher (Goldhaber, 2002).

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Global developments and improvements are continually changing the qualifications required of teachers. It is emphasized in the literature that whether teachers are cultural workers (Freire, 1998) or intellectuals (Giroux, 1988), they must be professional (Glasser, 1993). In terms of the different types of qualities that teachers should have, Erden (1998) listed personal qualifications of being tolerant and patient, open minded, flexible and adaptive, loving and understanding, having a sense of humor, having high expectations of students, and being encouraging and supportive. In another study, the authors listed the qualities and attributes of a qualified teacher as having “commitment, love of children, mastery of subject didactics and multiple models of teaching, the ability to collaborate with other teachers, and a capacity for reflection” (Hopkins & Stern, 1996, p. 501). When they asked trainee teachers for their views on what made a good teacher, Ubuz and Sari (2009) found that the trainees based their definition of themes of personal characteristics, knowledge of the subject and how to teach it, skills, professional improvement, appreciation, and commitment to the mission. Arnon and Reichel (2007) found that there were two important categories in terms of perceptions about an ideal teacher; the first was personal characteristics and the second was knowledge of the subject and how to teach it. Minor, Onwuegbuzie, Witcher, and James (2002) conducted a study with 134 preservice teachers at South Georgia University in order to ascertain their views about the characteristics of a good teacher. Seven themes were derived from this study: “student-centered, effective classroom and behavior manager, competent instructor, ethical, enthusiastic about teaching, knowledgeable about subject, and professional’ (p. 116).

Students have close interactions with their classroom teachers during the early years of their education. In addition, the cumulative learning experiences of primary school students have crucial impacts on their future education.

This research was conducted in order to form conceptual themes based on teacher trainees’ actual concrete experiences and their ideas about what kind of characteristics an ideal primary school teacher should have, and to find out whether there are differences in the order of importance assigned to these themes according to gender of the trainee teachers.

METHOD

In this descriptive study (Borg, Gall, & Gall, 1993), teacher trainees were asked for their opinions about what makes an ideal primary school teacher based on their personal experiences. In order to obtain the data, a qualitative research strategy was used (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). This enabled me, as suggested by Creswell (2003), to develop an in-depth understanding of the actual experiences of the participants in my research. The data obtained from answers to an

open-ended question were analyzed and divided into themes using qualitative data analysis.

PARTICIPANTS

This research took place in the Primary Education Department at Pamukkale University, Turkey. The 109 participants (69 or 63% women and 40 or 37% men) were final-year students from the Classroom Teaching program who took part in this research in the spring term of 2009-2010. As universities in Turkey have two groups of students working at different times during the day in the same department I chose to conduct my study with both these groups to support its validation. Therefore, 73 (67%) of them were from morning classes and 36 (33%) of them were from evening classes. The average age of the participants was 22. The maximum variety sampling method was applied (Patton, 1990).

DATA COLLECTION

The data in this study were collected using a two-part questionnaire prepared by the researcher. In the first part, participants supplied information on their gender, age, and program type. The second part contained an open-ended question about the participants' vision of the ideal primary school teacher and their reasons for choosing the qualities and attributes they listed. The aim of the open-ended question was to lead the participants to share their different ideas (Seidman, 1998) and at the same time to enable them to express their feelings and opinions easily (Babbie, 1992; Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989; Patton, 2002).

During the data collection process a relationship of trust was built up with the participants who were informed that participation in the study was voluntary and were asked not to write their names on the questionnaires. In addition to this, the participants were informed that the data would not be given to any person or institution and would be used only in this research. The participants were also asked to be completely honest in giving their views in order to produce reliable results from the study. The questionnaires were distributed to the participants by the researcher who also sat in on the session during which the participants filled in the questionnaires.

DATA ANALYSIS

The questionnaires collected from the participants were first numbered from 1 to 109. The SPSS program was used to analyze the personal information data collected in the first part of the questionnaire. These data were entered into the program sequentially and the results obtained were analyzed using frequency analysis and percentages.

In the second part of the questionnaire, all participants were asked to write their answers to the open-ended question "In your opinion, who is an ideal primary

school teacher based on your experiences?” and to explain the reasons for the views they expressed. Qualitative data may be analyzed either by categorizing responses into realities and experiences, or by the treatment of the data by means of narratives (Silverman, 1999, 2000). In this study, coding and categorizing was used. Firstly, each of the answers given to the open-ended question was read by the researcher and all the meaningful parts were underlined. The answers were then reread, after which the data were coded. Finally, themes were identified by evaluating the codes using an inductive analysis approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). This approach was also helpful in understanding the details in the data (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995).

At the end of the process, six themes were identified. To ensure reliability, an expert in the program development field from the Faculty of Education at Pamukkale University independently assigned all the data to the determined themes. The reliability of the research was measured by using the formula $\text{reliability} = \frac{\text{agreement}}{\text{agreement} + \text{disagreement}}$; a level of 94% agreement indicating adequate reliability (Miles & Huberman, 1994). During the review, differences in coding were corrected and reliability increased to 97%. Afterwards, the frequencies of the codes and the themes in the answers to the open-ended question were arranged in tables. The data were presented with direct quotes of participants' ideas and experiences. Direct quotations have been found to be important as they reflect the experiences and the ideas of the participants in a more effective way than paraphrasing (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). The number that had been assigned to each of the questionnaires was displayed in parentheses after the quoted material taken from that questionnaire.

RESULTS

The results of the analysis showed that the participants defined the features of an ideal primary school teacher as follows: (1) ethical and humanistic values, (2) teaching skills, (3) cultural and scientific knowledge, (4) personal qualities, (5) interactions with society, environment, and parents, and (6) self-values. The total percentage of each of these six themes is shown in Figure 1.

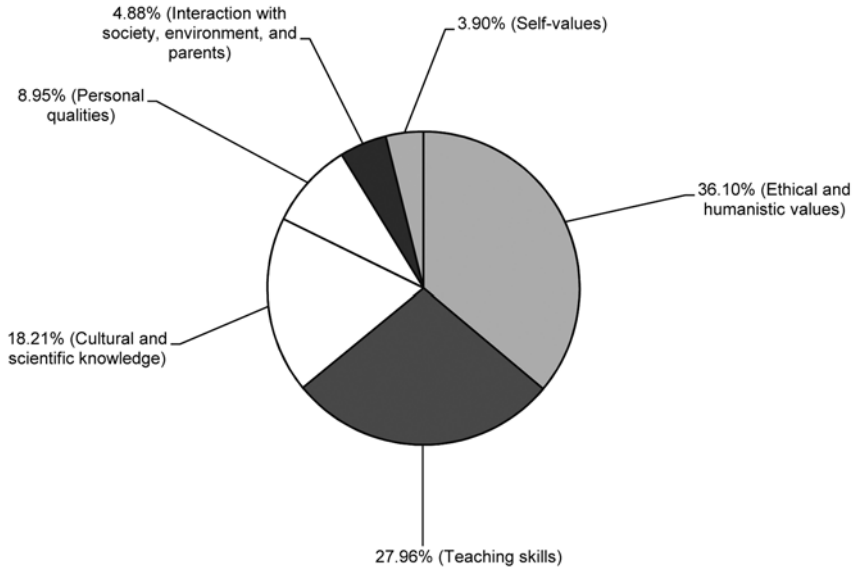


Figure 1. Percentages of the themes, in terms of how often each was mentioned in the questionnaires.

The collective themes shown in Table 1 show gender differences and subthemes as expressed in the questionnaires.

TABLE 1
FREQUENCY AND PERCENTAGE RANGE OF THEMES RESULTING FROM THE VIEWS OF THE PARTICIPANTS ABOUT AN IDEAL PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHER

	Women		Men		Total	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Ethical and humanistic values						
Loving children and profession	68	11.06	20	3.26	88	14.32
Appreciating and respecting people and students	44	7.16	18	2.93	62	10.09
Honest, fair, and conscientious	16	2.60	7	1.13	23	3.74
Tolerant and patient	15	2.44	6	0.98	21	3.42
Unselfish	10	1.63	3	0.49	13	2.11
Sensitive to students' problems	4	0.65	1	0.16	5	0.81
Helpful and sharing	2	0.32	2	0.32	4	0.64
Compassionate	3	0.49	0	0.00	3	0.49
Peaceable	3	0.48	0	0.00	3	0.48
<i>Subtotal</i>	165	26.83	57	9.27	222	36.10
Teaching skills						
Pedagogical knowledge	30	4.87	9	1.46	39	6.33
Knowledge of students' interests and needs	23	3.73	9	1.46	32	5.20
Being a model and guiding the students	16	2.60	15	2.44	31	5.04

Table 1 continued

	Women		Men		Total	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Operating in a suitable and democratic teaching environment	12	1.95	13	2.11	25	4.07
Powerful interaction skills	10	1.63	6	0.98	16	2.60
Good knowledge of subject matter and effective use	9	1.46	6	0.98	15	2.44
Awareness of technology	6	0.98	1	0.16	7	1.14
Success in classroom management	7	1.14	0	0.00	7	1.14
<i>Subtotal</i>	113	18.37	59	9.59	172	27.96
Cultural and scientific knowledge						
Openness to change, modern outlook	41	6.67	27	4.39	68	11.05
Awareness of current issues	8	1.30	11	1.79	19	3.09
Interest in arts, theatre, and literature	5	0.81	5	0.81	10	1.63
Searching and questioning	7	1.14	3	0.49	10	1.63
Respectful of nature and the arts	3	0.49	2	0.32	5	0.81
<i>Subtotal</i>	64	10.41	48	7.80	112	18.21
Personal qualities						
Positive (in attitude), optimistic	10	1.63	3	0.49	13	2.12
Hardworking, determined	8	1.30	4	0.65	12	1.95
Well-groomed, clean, tidy	8	1.30	3	0.49	11	1.79
Natural in interaction with students	3	0.49	3	0.49	6	0.98
Creative	5	0.81	0	0.00	5	0.81
Consistent	3	0.49	1	0.16	4	0.65
Social	3	0.49	0	0.00	3	0.49
Happy	1	0.16	0	0.00	1	0.16
<i>Subtotal</i>	41	6.67	14	2.28	55	8.95
Interactions with society, environment, and parents						
Sensitive to duty owed to society	7	1.14	10	1.63	17	2.77
Effective collaboration with parents	7	1.14	4	0.65	11	1.79
Respected and liked by other people	2	0.32	0	0.00	2	0.32
<i>Subtotal</i>	16	2.60	14	2.28	30	4.88
Self-values						
Self-confident	7	1.14	8	1.30	15	2.44
Takes criticism well	4	0.65	0	0.00	4	0.65
Unprejudiced	3	0.49	0	0.00	3	0.49
Self-critical	1	0.16	1	0.16	2	0.32
<i>Subtotal</i>	15	2.44	9	1.46	24	3.90
TOTAL	414	67.32	201	32.68	615	100.00

ETHICAL AND HUMANISTIC VALUES

The data showed that the participants felt it was most important and most necessary that an ideal primary school teacher would have ethical and humanistic

values. It was found that the participants' views were affected most by negative experiences in their lives. For instance, one of the participants said:

My sister was afflicted with subacute sclerosing panencephalitis during the first semester of the first grade. As she was diagnosed with the disease in its later stages, we didn't understand why she acted as she did in the beginning. She was treated roughly by her teacher because she couldn't write and she had difficulty in focusing. Her teacher showed her no compassion. Because she gradually lost the ability to walk, we had to take her away from school. Her teacher didn't like her anyway, and she didn't want such a student to be in his class. During the final phase of her disease, my sister unconsciously mentioned her teacher's name a lot. Her teacher didn't come to see her even once despite our pleas. My sister passed away last year. I hate that teacher and ones like him, I will not be like him, and I will never fail to show compassion to children. I think it is not only about teaching something to the children, one should also love the children and be compassionate (59).

This participant cited love and compassion as essential qualities for a teacher to have but another participant emphasized the necessity of a teacher's being fair as seen in the following transcript:

I studied in a village during my primary school years. Afterwards, our school was closed, and I started to go to a school in the town. As a child coming from the village, I always believed that I had been discriminated against. Because of that, the first, and maybe the only, important matter for me is that whatever the religion, language, race, sex, or family status of the teacher is, he or she should be fair, and s/he should accept the students as they are. Is it possible for us to choose the family we are born into? So why should we be discriminated against? (24).

A number of participants said that the ideal primary school teacher should love children and her/his profession, and appreciate and respect people and students. The participants' views and reasons in relation to these concepts are presented in the transcripts below:

A teacher who fulfils his work quite willingly is ideal. Because loving the work means dedicating much effort to the job, trying to make what you have better and improved. When s/he looks at the other students, an ideal primary school teacher feels as compassionate as in her/his own children's case (69).

First of all an ideal primary school teacher is one who loves children. Everything starts with love (3).

An ideal primary school teacher realizes the fact that today's children will be tomorrow's prominent figures and behaves accordingly; s/he makes them feel that they are invaluable and treats them in a humanistic way (21).

...Who believes in peace in the country and in the world; who doesn't discriminate because of religion, language, or race; who values and respects people (55).

A primary school teacher is a person who has the love of human beings, values humanity, doesn't treat people as "others", and has the notion of "us" (37). I think, first of all, an ideal primary school teacher should love her/his job, because it is very difficult for people to do things they do not like. The unhappiness arising from not loving the job affects both the teachers' performance and the students (2).

Participants also stated the importance of tolerance and patience:

Since the primary school teacher will be in the same environment as the children, patience and tolerance in their relationships are important (68).

The following transcripts are examples of the importance placed on teachers' conscientiousness and ability to be critical of themselves.

The teacher should be able to feel that s/he is comfortable with her conscience while doing, and after completing, the work (57).

Briefly, a primary school teacher should be conscientious. This is what we need most of the time (37).

TEACHING SKILLS

Teaching skills were the second most commonly mentioned of the six themes was teaching skills. For example, some of the participants expressed their views about teaching skills as follows:

Teachers should provide real knowledge, that is, learning at school should not be different from life. As far as I remember from my own student life we never actually carried out experiments in science lessons, we were just reading through them. At that time I thought the things I learned were quite different things. I couldn't realize the relationship with life itself. But now I can see that knowledge is not independent from real life. So we have been taught so many unnecessary things (31).

The words of one of my old teachers, while comparing the old and the new programs, have affected me so much: "In the past during the procedure of teaching the role of the teacher was acting. Today students are the actors while teachers are directors...let the students take their roles freely in their films. Watch it like a director and if you see something goes wrong, tell them and start again", he said. If someone wants to change the world, he needs to begin with himself (38).

S/he should organize the necessary conditions according to the needs and the interest of the students rather than waiting for the students to reach that level (22).

CULTURAL AND SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE

The third most commonly mentioned theme was cultural and scientific knowledge. One of the participants who believed that change was inevitable said:

The primary school teacher should be open to change. S/he can't say "I am this, I can't change". S/he shouldn't be narrow-minded. Everything is changing rapidly (56).

The following sentiments were also important:

An ideal primary school teacher should keep up with changes and be open to innovations. As I was taught parrot fashion, it affected me badly. The fact that I studied in a town prevented me from developing myself. I first saw computers when I was at university. The future of the country is in the hands of teachers, they have this responsibility, so lots of things to do (1). A teacher should be one who visits art galleries, participates in concerts, goes to the theatre and the cinema, reads the local and international magazines and newspapers, and follows developments in the fields of science and arts (55).

If a teacher is not culturally embedded, it seems to me that s/he is alienated from society. As we aim to make students become more part of society, this is a problem (57).

PERSONAL QUALITIES

Some aspects of individual qualities of an ideal teacher were related to physical appearance. For example;

With her/his appearance, a teacher should be clean and neat to show her/his respect for the job (19).

Teachers should be elegant because students observe such things and see their teachers as models (2).

The other aspect of individual qualities related to personal characteristics. For example;

...should smile at students every time. Since the individual's personality begins to develop during primary school, a teacher should be a good role model, what s/he says should be consistent with what s/he does (30).

An ideal primary school teacher shouldn't just be the one who transfers the knowledge and shouldn't be inconsistent (76).

An ideal primary school teacher should make students come to school willingly, make them love lessons rather than make them fearful. S/he should use humor to teach (73).

INTERACTIONS WITH SOCIETY, ENVIRONMENT, AND PARENTS

The fifth most commonly mentioned theme was interactions with society, environment, and parents. Examples of comments were as follows:

The teacher should give importance to interaction with parents. I think it is beneficial to have some knowledge about the environment the student grows up in to be able to know the student and understand her/his behaviors (33).

The primary school teacher should be the one who has a good relationship with the students' parents and strives to improve not only the development of the school but also society (25).

The teacher is the one who has strong ties with the school and also environment and parents; s/he continuously shares what s/he has with the parents (45).

An ideal primary school teacher is one who is loved and respected by society (101).

SELF-VALUES

Some of the participants' thoughts on self-values were:

An ideal primary school teacher should have high self-esteem. I say s/he should love her/himself otherwise I don't think that s/he can give love or happiness to others (4).

The person who will be a teacher should not have any prejudice. S/he should embrace the students in the east and the ones in the west. S/he should fulfill her/his work teaching everywhere without having any preference or choice (63).

In fact before coming to this university, I hadn't thought about how important a primary school teacher was and what kind of a person s/he should be. While reading this part, I learned how a teacher can change a child; therefore s/he can shape society. I started to ask myself whether I would still have problems with self-esteem and confidence if my teacher had been different (37).

DISCUSSION

In general, the better educated people are, the more a country develops. It is beyond doubt that in the education of individuals, teachers have an important role. Teachers need certain qualities to accomplish their role. Therefore, it is important both to educate trainee teachers so they become well-qualified practitioners and to know how these people define the ideal teacher.

All of the participants in this study stated that the ideal primary school teacher firstly should have ethical and humanistic values. However, there was a difference in the ranking of the importance of these values according to participants' gender. Male participants ranked teaching skills first and ethical and humanistic values second, whereas females ranked ethical and humanistic values first and teaching skills second. Regarding ethical and humanistic values, participants

emphasized that an ideal primary school teacher was one who loves children and the profession, appreciates and respects all human beings and not just children, who is conscientious and honest, fair, tolerant, and patient. These results showed similarities to those gained in the study conducted by Ng, Nicholas, and Williams (2010), in which it was found that good teachers are those who respect students, have a sense of humor, and are supportive. Vogt (2002) also emphasized ethical considerations and moral values as part of primary school teachers' role.

The emphasis of the participants on teaching skills shows that they believe in the importance of professional work. The third most commonly mentioned theme was cultural and scientific knowledge. The participants emphasized that an ideal primary school teacher should be open to change and have a modern outlook, and should keep up with the changes and developments in education and society. The fourth most commonly mentioned theme was personal qualities, which encompassed both physical and personal characteristics. Participants thought that an ideal primary school teacher needed to be positive and in terms of physical appearance s/he should be well-groomed, clean, and tidy. Many researchers (Darling-Hammond, 1998; Kutnick & Jules, 1993; Noddings, 1999; Reichel & Arnon, 2009) have emphasized that teachers' personalities are significant in that skill in teaching is not the only skill needed to teach discipline. The fifth ranking was assigned to interactions with society, environment, and parents, and the theme with the lowest ranking of the six was self-values. Here, it was emphasized that a teacher should believe in him/herself, be open to criticism, be unbiased, and be self-critical.

Participants' views about the ideal primary school teacher in my study were expressed in dimensions similar to those identified in previous studies (see, for example, Harley, Barasa, Bertram, Mattson, & Pillay, 2000; Minor et al., 2002; Miron, 1983; Murphy, Delli, & Edwards, 2004; Ng et al., 2010) that deal with the different qualities of teachers. This similarity is significant in that it shows that an ideal primary school teacher should have the qualities needed to follow global developments and improvements.

However, my findings showed that participants emphasized the importance of ethical and humanistic values and it was clear from their experiences in the past that they believed that there were problems in this area. Thus, appropriate training should be given to practicing teachers so any existing problems can be identified and tackled. In addition to this, trainee teachers' affective characteristics can be supported and enhanced by their interactions in their teaching training institution. As a result of these initiatives, the qualities and attributes identified as ideal can be nurtured in teacher trainees.

Finally, the results of my study can be summed up in the words of one of the participants:

Whatever I write about an ideal primary school teacher, whatever I say about an ideal primary school teacher, there is still a lot to say, it seems something is missing every time (108).

In this study I investigated Turkish teacher trainees' views through open-ended questions. Further research could be done in which both teachers and trainee teachers are participants. This would provide more comprehensive feedback. Similar studies could also be conducted in other countries to provide different perspectives to my findings.

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