



What Do Teacher Candidates in Turkey Think About Their Teacher Education? A Qualitative Study *

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Abstract

Teachers have a significant role to provide the education that societies need. Therefore, the content and quality of teacher education is quite important for educating successful and competent teachers. Teacher candidates admitted to teacher education are expected to gain certain skills during their education. Moreover, the dimensions of teacher education should have an effectiveness to foster the development of these skills. This qualitative study aims to evaluate teacher education from the perspectives of teacher candidates in terms of student admission, gaining teaching skills and 21st century skills, and the dimensions of teacher education (faculty environment, program and courses, teaching practice, teaching staff). Interview schedule was used in the study and totally 43 teacher candidates selected from seven different faculties in Turkey were interviewed by the researcher. The qualitative data were analyzed using descriptive analysis. The results indicated the existence of agreed problems in relation to ineffectiveness of student admission to faculties through only an exam, not gaining certain teaching skills such as teaching under diverse conditions, ineffectiveness of teaching practices and not having enough practice. The necessary suggestions were made by the researcher based on the findings at the end of the study.

Keywords

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Introduction

Teachers' knowledge, skills, and characteristics affect students' learning, motivation, and success; therefore the literature contains many studies on these skills and characteristics (Cruickshank, Jenkins, & Metcalf, 2009; Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium [INTASC], 2011; MEB, 2008; NCATE, 2008; Senemoğlu, 2011; TED, 2009). Moreover, teachers have been seen as one of the strongest factors influencing students' mental, emotional, and social development (Bandura, 1969; Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002), so the societies have many expectations from teachers. On the other hand, these expectations increase when the knowledge and skills required in 21st century are considered. In this age, as the reflections of the innovations and changes in many fields, it is a requirement to have certain skills such as using technology and media effectively, creative and critical thinking, global awareness, environmental knowledge and consciousness, and economical awareness.

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From all over the world, the researchers came together to research on how to teach students in 21st century about different ways of thinking and working, different tools of working, and life skills (Schleicher, 2012). In this study, certain skills have been emphasized such as creativity, problem solving, communication and collaboration, effective use of information and communication technologies, citizenship, personal and social responsibility. Teachers need to have these skills, be role-models, and know the ways on how to teach them in order to furnish their students with these skills (Schleicher, 2012). At this point, we encounter with the issues of teacher candidates' characteristics and the quality of teacher education they have in the faculties of education. As we all know, the teacher education provided in the faculties has a critical role with all its aspects in terms of preparing teacher candidates with essential knowledge and skills and support their professional development. For that reason, the characteristics of needed teacher candidates to educate competent and effective teachers, aspects and quality of teacher education are examined and discussed by educational institutions and researchers in Europe and America (Buchberger, Campos, Kallos, & Stephenson, 2000; INTASC, 2011; OECD, 2011; OFSTED, 2012).

In this context, teaching and teacher education in Turkey has always been a debatable issue. According to the National Education Fundamental Law of Ministry of National Education (no. 1739), "teaching is a specialized profession taking the responsibility of state's educational, instructional and related administrative duties." In this law, it is also emphasized that teachers are prepared through higher education to able to gain necessary competency on the three areas, general culture, teaching knowledge and skills, and content-area knowledge (MEB, 2010). It is an agreed notion that effective teachers can only be trained through effective teacher education programs which also respond to the needs of the age (Senemoğlu, 2011). Regarding this, there have been certain reform actions by Higher Education Council in Turkey to increase the effectiveness of teacher education and revitalize the faculties of education. Starting from the year of 1982, when teacher education has been put under the responsibility of universities, the curricula and the content of teacher education have been changed or restructured for several times (Şimşek & Yıldırım, 2001; YÖK, 2007). To start with, the Higher Education Council and Ministry of National Education collaborated between the years 1998-1999 for working on standards and accreditation in teacher education to "educate every child through a qualified teacher" in Turkey. It was then considered that these efforts would increase the quality of teacher education and help to sustain the increased quality. In those years, the standards were determined on different dimensions of teacher education such as teaching staff, physical environment after examining the international studies as well (Kavak, 1999). In relation to the programs, the most radical changes were done in 1997 and 2007. In 1997, the restructuring attempts aimed to overcome the existing problems of Education Faculties in terms of quality and quantity. The structure of the secondary teacher education programs were changed and the graduates of Science and Letter faculties were given the opportunity to get teaching certificate to able to teach (YÖK, 1998). In that year, some renovations were made in relation to physical environment and human resources of the faculties. The major purpose of reform acts in 2007 was to update the changes done in the programs in 1997 and to overcome persistent problems. The content, descriptions, credits of the courses in the programs were updated and teacher candidates were provided with the opportunity to practice teaching in different contexts. The community service lesson was also added to the programs (Kavak, 2009; YÖK, 2007). Later, Ministry of National Education developed and published the teaching competencies in 2008 (MEB, 2008). The general teaching competencies were declared as professional development, knowing about students, learning and teaching process, monitoring and evaluating learning and development, school-parent and society relations, and knowledge about program and content. These competencies were expected and planned to be used while making decisions about teacher education policies and programs. However, the needed program-based changes and revisions were not emphasized in later years and the study conducted by Turkish Education Association revealed that teachers graduated from their programs without effectively gaining all these competencies (TED, 2009). The reasons should be investigated

considering not only the program-related aspects and student characteristics but also the other aspects of teacher education.

The discussions on reforming teacher education are still continuing in these days. Among the issues debated are also certifying graduates of science and letter faculties as teachers, providing teacher education through evening classes (secondary education), and educating only elementary teacher candidates through education faculties. Besides all these, the issues such as decreasing the age to start elementary school, administering constructivist elementary school curricula at schools, and changing the school system (4+4+4), changing the elementary school curricula again in these days require educational researchers to reconsider and evaluate teacher education as well. On the other hand, despite all these reform and restructuring efforts, the studies point out some important problems in relation to teacher education. Some of the problems mentioned mostly in the literature can be listed as following (Ankara University, 2005; Çakıroğlu & Çakıroğlu, 2003; Çetin, 2005; Eret & Ok, 2010; Kavak, 2009; Okçabol et al., 2003; Senemoğlu, 2011; Şimşek & Yıldırım, 2001; Üstüner, 2004; Yıldırım, 2011a):

- Admitting students to education faculties using only a multiple-choice university exam,
- Problems in terms of characteristics and readiness of teacher candidates,
- Not providing enough teaching practice and school experience during education,
- Problems in relation to curricula and content of the courses,
- Inadequate physical environment of faculties,
- Lack of quality of some teaching staff,
- Lack of enough cooperation and communication between MONE schools and education faculties,
- Ignoring major needs of the MONE schools in the teacher education programs,
- Constant changes of the decisions and applications in relation to teacher education.

Apart from these, Küçükahmet (2007) stated that the teacher education does not respond the educational problems of Turkey. At this point, there is a need to mention the findings of some current studies on teacher education in a more detailed way. Senemoğlu (2011) evaluated the effectiveness of elementary teacher education programs in terms of preparing candidates for teaching based on the views of teacher candidates, teaching staff, and newly graduated teachers. In the study, the participants agreed that the programs were generally effective to prepare teacher candidates for teaching competencies. However, it was also reported that there was a need to include more practices, case studies on teaching content area and working with students with special education. In other studies conducted on the perceptions of teacher candidates, the teacher candidates were in agreement with respect to providing more experiences and practice in the programs, revising the programs regarding needs of the century, having more qualified teaching staff who can be role-models with their personal and professional characteristics, renovating the physical, social and technological facilities (Kaya, Polat ve Karamüftüoğlu, 2014; Özçakır Sümen ve Çağlayan, 2013). On the other hand, Doğanay et al. (2015), in their more recent study, conducted focus groups interviews including 27 academicians from the area of Curriculum and Instruction on the evaluation of teacher education. The findings of their study indicated problems in relation to the quality of teaching staff, entry requirements, and programs. Moreover, most of the academicians pointed out that the pedagogic certificate programs were ineffective in terms of preparing candidates for essential knowledge and skills.

As seen, there are many studies and publications on teacher education, however, the number of studies evaluating the effectiveness of teacher education are still limited in Turkey; and there is a need for new studies on evaluating different aspects of teacher education (Yıldırım, 2011b; Yücel-Toy, 2015). Furthermore, the studies are mainly based upon the researchers' views and quantitative research methods. In this study, different dimensions of teacher education were evaluated based on one-to-one interviews conducted with teacher candidates. In their study, Selçuk, Palancı, Kandemir, and Dündar (2014) analyzed the content of one of the popular educational journals in Turkey, *Education and Science*, and they concluded that most of the studies published in the journal were done using quantitative research methods and more qualitative studies were needed to enrich the journal. Within this respect as well, this study is considered to be significant. Also, as mentioned before, there have been different reform actions at different times and the most recent one was done in 2007 including renovation of content and structure of teacher education. Therefore, there is a need to provide up-to-date data to decision makers such as Higher Education Council and Ministry of National Education concerning the effects of these changes. The effectiveness of the dimensions and process of teacher education should be determined through new studies in the field (Yıldırım, 2013). Last of all, different from the other studies, the teacher education was evaluated in terms of preparing candidates with twenty-first century skills.

It is only possible with competent teachers who have quality teacher education to educate human power needed in such a rapidly-changing world, so the studies on teachers' education are really vital. Within this respect, the purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of teacher education in Turkey from the views of teacher candidates in terms of student admission, preparing candidates for teaching and 21st century skills, and dimensions of teacher education (including faculty environment, curricula and courses, teaching practice, and teaching staff). In line with the purpose of the study, the audience of this study are teacher candidates, academicians, researchers, administrators and other decision makers in the field of teacher education. Considering that the participants were selected from different contexts in Turkey as well, valuable ideas and experiences of teacher candidates could be reflected to the audience through this study so that they can use them as bases in their future practices, studies, and decisions. Lastly, it should be noted that although teacher candidates are one of the important stakeholders of teacher education, it is the limitation of this study that it only included teacher candidates' views. In further studies, the perceptions of other stakeholders, teaching staff, teachers, and even students in MONE schools should be gathered; and those views should be supported with observations when needed.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- 1) What are the views of 4th grade teacher candidates in terms of student admission to education faculties?
- 2) What are the views of 4th grade teacher candidates on their teacher education in terms of preparing them for teaching skills and 21st century skills?
- 3) What are the views of 4th grade teacher candidates in terms of dimensions of teacher education (faculty environment, program and courses, teaching practice, and teaching staff)?

Method

Research Design

This study had a survey design with qualitative research methods. In survey design, the needed data are collected from the participants and the researcher generally use a data collection tools such as questionnaire or interview form to get participants' views (Creswell, 2012). In this study, interview schedule was preferred to collect the views of teacher candidates in relation to education.

Participants

The participants of the study was 43 fourth grade teacher candidates having education in the elementary teaching programs of the education faculties of the state universities in Turkey. While determining the participants, first of all, education faculties and teaching programs to be included in the study were decided. Considering that teaching skills are more emphasized in elementary teaching program and to limit the context of the study, only elementary teaching programs were included. These programs are elementary mathematics teaching, elementary science teaching, classroom teaching, social sciences teaching, Turkish language teaching, English language teaching, and computer education and instructional technologies teaching. While selecting education faculties, being under state university, academic success, and region were taken into consideration as selection criteria. First of all, all education faculties under state universities were ranked using University Ranking by Academic Success prepared by Informatics Institute in Middle East Technical University. Then, the faculties which did not include all teaching programs as specified above were removed from the list. The faculties in the list were divided into three equal groups using percentile analysis. From each group, faculties to be included were determined considering its region, student capacity, and accessibility; and seven faculties in total were selected. After this point, using purposive sampling, teacher candidates from each faculty were determined considering the voluntary and information-rich ones who could provide much information during the interviews. The suggestions of the faculty were also considered while selecting teacher candidates. Only senior class/fourth grade teacher candidates in their last semester were invited to the study, as they could provide more ideas and experiences in relation to their programs. Their gender and volunteerism were also taken into considered while inviting them to the interviews. As a result, 43 teacher candidates from seven education faculties and departments were interviewed. The demographic information about the teacher candidates was displayed in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Demographic Information on Participants

Demographics	Frequency (f)
Gender	
Female	24
Male	19
Type of High School	
General High School	12
Anatolian High School	4
Anatolian Teacher High School	16
Science High School	1
Vocational and Technical High School	2
Super High School (Foreign-Language Weighted)	8
Teaching Programs	
Classroom Teaching	7
Social Sciences Teaching	6
Elementary Mathematics Teaching	6
English Language Teaching	6
Elementary Science Teaching n	6
Computer Education and Instructional Technology	7
Turkish Language Teaching	5
The City Where the Faculty is Located	
İzmir	8
Konya	6
Ankara	7
Sakarya	5
Malatya	7
Bursa	4
Bolu	6

The age of the interviewees ranged from 21 to 28, however, most of the interviewees were at the age of 22. Their cumulative grade point average (CGPA) changed from 2.15 to 3.58 (out of 4). To learn about the satisfaction with choosing the teaching, teacher candidates were asked "which university and department they would choose if they had a second chance." Of all interviewees, (N = 43), 15 of the teacher candidates stated they would choose teaching again if they had another chance again while 25 of them stated they would choose another department other than teaching. There are 3 teacher candidates who were not sure about choosing teaching again or not. The main reasons for choosing teaching profession as their future profession were love/desire for teaching (n = 17), having a lower score from the university exam than expected (n = 12), and the effect of the family/environment (n = 12). Lastly, most of the participants (n = 36) planned to work as a teacher after graduation.

Data Collection Tool

The interview protocol was developed parallel with the aim of the study and examining the literature. Expert opinions were taken for the interview schedule and pilot study was done to assess the validity and reliability of the data collection tool. After the pilot study, some of the interview questions were revised or removed from the form based on the feedback taken from the students. When necessary, some questions or items were added. Moreover, the pilot study also helped the researcher about the needed procedures while collecting the data. For instance, the approximate length of interviews or the possible problems during interviews were determined previously and handled during interviews. After revising the interview schedule, it was again submitted to experts. There were such questions in the form: "As you know, students are admitted to the faculties of education based on their exam scores obtained from university entrance exam, what are your opinions about the positive and negative sides

of this system?" To the end of the interview form, a part was added on demographic information and teaching-related questions.

After the completion of the data collection instrument, the approval of the Human Subjects and Ethics Committee at the university and the permissions from the faculties were obtained for the administration of the interviews. Lastly, the Scientific Research Project Coordinator was applied to get a financial support and the study was supported by the coordinator as a scientific research.

Validity and Reliability

As stated by Seale (1999), the trustworthiness of scientific study is related to the validity and reliability issues. While validity is defined as the reflection of reality as far as possible by the research findings, reliability is the consistency and repeatability of data (Golafshani, 2003; Yıldırım ve Şimşek, 2011). In this qualitative study, besides expert opinions and pilot study, the following strategies were followed: 1) chatting with interviewees briefly before the interviews to relax them, 2) avoiding personal comments and inferences during interviews, 3) providing enough time for the responses of the interviewees, 4) recording all interviews fully using a voice recorder, 5) transcribing all of the data, 6) asking other researcher to examine the transcriptions and codes, 7) reporting the research procedures in detail. Other than these, randomly selected interviews were given to five different researchers and they were asked to code these interviews. In this way, as Krusaki (2000) also pointed out, the intercoder reliability was checked and it was found that there was parallelism among the codes and the coders. Lastly, direct quotations were used to support the findings.

Data Collection Procedures

The interviews were performed by the researcher herself in seven different teaching programs of the faculties in the context of the study. The role of the researcher at this point of the study could be described as an interviewer. In the context of this role, the researcher was objective and versatile as much as possible to be able to approach the participants without bias and to conduct interview without having personal tendencies. During this period, the researcher spent one week in each faculty to complete data collection. The teacher candidates selected for the interviews were firstly informed about the study. The length of interviews was between 25-30 minutes. The interviews were recorded upon the permission of the interviewees. During the interviews, the interview form prepared by the researcher was used; and the interviewees were given enough time for their additional opinions. For the interviews, available classes in the faculty were preferred and the silence and suitability of the setting were taken into consideration. The interview recordings were directly transferred to the computer and labeled appropriately after the interviews were completed in each day. The process of data collection lasted approximately two months.

Analysis of Data

The analysis of the qualitative data collected through the interviews was done using the procedures for descriptive analysis. As described by Yıldırım and Şimşek (2011), "the obtained data are summarized and interpreted based on predetermined themes" (p. 224). In this study, first of all, all interviews were transcribed on a MS word document word by word by the researcher using a transcription software. Then, themes were determined using the dimensions specified in research questions and interview form. A framework was created based on these themes and sub-themes. The qualitative data belonging to each interviewee were coded under the relevant these separately. For instance, "university entrance exam" and "ability exam" codes were created under the theme of "student admission." As appropriate to the nature of descriptive analysis, direct quotations were included during the presentation of findings to reflect the views of participants as much as possible. Finally, the teacher candidates were labeled as TC1 (Teacher Candidates 1), TC2, TC3, etc. while quoting.

Results

The findings of this qualitative study were presented under the relevant themes created based on the purpose and research questions of the study. Within this framework, the results on the views of the teacher education were examined below with the titles and subtitles in relation to student admission/selection, gaining skills (teaching skills and 21st century skills), and dimensions of teacher education (physical environment, program and courses, teaching practice, and teaching staff).

Student Admission/Selection

As known, students are admitted to the teaching programs of the faculties of education based on their exam scores obtained from university entrance examination and their preferences. The students graduating from Anatolian Teacher High Schools got additional scores when they ranked teaching programs in their first five choices. The teacher candidates participating in the study were also asked to evaluate the effectiveness of this system considering positive and negative aspects. First of all, almost all of the teacher candidates (n = 41) criticized the current system of university entrance exam for admitting students to teacher education institutions negatively and they claimed that this system was inadequate for teacher candidates' admission. The major reasons for this inadequateness were reported as the exam's not assessing tendency/aptitude and attitude for being a teacher candidate and not determining the basic skills and characteristics to become a teacher. About the issue, one of the teacher candidates stated: "The university exam is not adequate alone to assess the skills and competency, because teaching is not for everyone (TC6)." On the same subject, another teacher candidate claimed:

The multiple-choice exams we solve only assess our theoretical knowledge unfortunately. After we came to university, we realized that we have a friend with the problem of stammering. She/he has a problem of speaking in front of a group. And she/he is now having education for being a Turkish Language Teaching. (TC20)

Similarly, most of the teacher candidates criticized admitting students from Anatolian Teacher High School to teaching programs by giving additional scores negatively (n = 31). The teacher candidates stated that (n = 21) the profile of the students coming from these high school were not suitable for having education in a teaching department. Some of the teacher candidates coming from these high schools were characterized as being unwilling and having negative attitude towards teaching. The teacher candidates described this situation in the following way: Students entering these high schools are generally admitted based on their exam scores without testing their tendency/desire for being a teacher; and the main reason for entering these high schools was their academic success coming after Science High Schools (TC39). A teacher candidate graduated from Anatolian High School pointed out:

I think that teacher high schools are useful for education faculties. However, most of the students graduating from my teacher high school preferred other departments than teaching. Our first choice was not definitely a teaching department. My and all of my friends' major thought was we would become a teacher by preferring teaching and getting additional points if we obtain low scores from the university entrance exam. Even if we did not study, we had an additional scores. We came to our department with these thoughts. I think this is an undesirable situation. (TC4)

On the other hand, 30 of the interviewees also indicated that the university entrance exam should be used to eliminate/select students and assess their academic success and provide objectivity while doing these considering the conditions of Turkey. The nation-wide exam provides all students an equal opportunity to be assessed. Lastly, 20 of the interviewees specified that teacher high schools could be an effective system for preparing teacher candidates for the faculties of education if the conditions and status of these high schools are improved. The teaching-related courses, quality of education and teachers, and practice teaching conducted at schools could contribute to teacher education.

Preparing for Skills

The teacher candidates participating in the study were asked to evaluate the effectiveness of teacher education with regards to preparing them for certain teaching skills and 21st century skills. The results were reported below.

Preparing for Teaching Skills. The analysis of the qualitative data showed that the teacher candidates were generally prepared for understanding students and their individual needs and communicating with them (n = 30). About this, one of the teacher candidates stated: "I already know about situations in relation to students very well, as we are extensively furnished with individual differences along four years" (TC33). Of the teacher candidates, 15 of them also mentioned getting prepared for having enough content-area knowledge, classroom management skills, and preparing and using various instructional methods and techniques. Some of the teacher candidates stated that they were adequately prepared for having motivation and enthusiasm for teaching (n = 12) and using various instructional technology during instruction (n = 9). In relation to technology use, a teacher candidate asserted:

There are some teachers in our practice schools. They cannot turn on even a projector... However; we are making PowerPoint presentation using projectors every week. Or we used the smart board today. We are using. I will be better than those teachers about these. (TC10)

On the other hand, almost all of the teacher candidates (n = 40) evaluated the teacher education as being inadequate with respect to preparing them for working under different conditions with different groups (such as villages, mixed-level classes, inadequate physical conditions, students and families speaking different languages and having different cultures). One of the teacher candidates explained the issue as following:

As if all of the schools in Turkey were like the schools in this city, as if they all had projectors, as if the transportations were easily done, as if there were no winter or snow, as if there were an air conditioner in each class... As if all students were thoughtful... (but) there are students going to the schools, but they do not know any Turkish. This should also be taught.... there are cities or towns in which the teachers are exposed to violence by the families. We are told nothing in relation to these. In fact, we did not cover anything even in relation to relationship with parents in general. We were not told about how to behave to parents or how to communicate with them. As if everything would be ready (when we graduated) and we would teach in that way. (TC9)

The teacher candidates also claimed that the teacher education was ineffective in terms of preparing them for teaching in classes with inclusive students and students who need special education (SEN students) such as retarded, dyslexic, hyperactive children or wunderkinds (n = 39), classroom management (n = 24), relationship/communication with parents (n = 12), knowledge and experience on official tasks, regulations, and rights (n = 11), and relationship with school management (n = 10). Related to working with SEN students, one of the interviewees stated: "...about this (issue), I have deficiencies. At least, there would be a trip (to such schools) so that we could see in a way" (TC4). Another teacher candidate (TC10) gave an example about their educational deficiencies in relation to inclusion: "When I was in the fourth grade, an inclusive student was sitting next to me and I regarded him as a stranger. Since I don't know about an inclusive student." At the same time, the teacher candidates added that the Special Education course they took in their last year at least provided them with theoretical knowledge and awareness.

Preparing for 21st Century Skills. The teacher candidates were asked to evaluate the effectiveness of teacher education in terms of preparation for the 21st century skills, which are often mentioned in the literature. The candidates were presented totally 14 skills to evaluate. When the interview results were examined, it was seen that 33 teacher candidates mentioned not gaining media literacy adequately. About the 21st century skills, one of the interviewees stated:

We did not get most of these skills here except for thinking skills....For instance, media literacy... Turkish language teachers were giving this skill as a lesson in elementary level, but I have no education in relation to media literacy. If they put this lesson in front of me, will I learn this by reading? (TC10)

Other than media literacy, the teacher candidates mentioned not gaining universal thinking skills (n = 22), research skills (n = 20), openness to intercultural communication (n = 20), and communication skills (n = 20) adequately as part of their education. Concerning communication skills, one of the candidates pointed out: "For instance, communication skills...We lose what we have due to the behaviors of the instructors (TC26)." About openness to intercultural communication, a teacher candidate said:

Actually, openness to intercultural communication is very important for us. You know that there are different cultures in the East (of Turkey). However, about these, there isn't anything enough included in our education... But, certainly there must be such education in Turkey where there are different ethnic groups. (TC16)

Dimensions of Teacher Education

The main dimensions of teacher education were also evaluated by the teacher candidates through the interviews. They were asked to evaluate the effectiveness of faculty environment (physical and social), curricula/programs and courses, teaching practices, and teaching staff. The interviewees were mainly asked about the problems they had in relation to these aspects to be able to make specific suggestions at the end of the study. The results obtained from the qualitative data were presented below.

Faculty Environment. Faculty environment was evaluated by the teacher candidates as being more effective than the other dimensions. Of the interviewees, 29 of them did not report any problems. Only 14 teacher candidates mentioned the problems related to physical and social environment of their faculties. Nine of them stated that there were inadequacies with respect to technological materials, classes, library and resources. About the issue, one of them specified:

...in some universities especially with Medicine faculty, I think Education faculties are step-children. For instance, this faculty is physically very inadequate. We cannot find classes for doing our lessons, we cannot find place to sit in cafes. You have to go to the library very early in the morning and put your bag. And you cannot find publications you want. (TC14)

Similarly, another teacher candidate from another education faculty affirmed: "Our environment is not adequate. We will be English teachers, but we don't have a listening class, laboratories, or sound system (TC26)." Lastly, a teacher candidate (TC41) claimed that they had a lesson on using instructional technology, but there did not use any technology.

The lack of enough social facilities and socialization opportunities was reported as a problem of faculty environment affecting the quality of their preparation negatively (n = 6). The other reported problems were lack of democratic environment (no expression of ideas freely) (n = 3), de-motivating (negative) environment for teaching (n = 3), and lack of enough number of specialized area instructors (n = 3). On the last problem, one of the interviews said:

Now, we are taking the Inclusive Education and Teaching in Mixed-Level Classes courses in this term. And we took the following lessons from the same instructors: Guidance, Measurement and Evaluation, or Educational Philosophy. We took all our courses from the same instructors. I really don't know in which area these instructors had their graduate degree or in which area they developed themselves, and on what bases they are offering these lessons. In my opinion, the lessons are opened and, because of lack of instructors, these instructors are offering them. (TC13)

As a summary, although most of the candidates did not state any problems in relation faculty environment, the stated problems were about the physical deficiencies, lack of social environment, and lack of specialized area instructors.

Curricula and Courses. This dimension of the teacher education was evaluated by most of the teacher candidates (n=38) as having problems deterring the adequateness/quality of their education. The main problematic areas were reported as theory-based lessons and lack of enough practice component in curricula (n = 17). While a teacher candidate (TC22) expressed that they did not have any opportunities for practices in lessons, another claimed: "We only have theories but there is a lack of practicing (TC2)." Other than these, the stated problems were lack of some lessons in the curricula such as research skills, curriculum development, speaking skills and diction, communication, and first-aid (n = 15). For instance, about the necessity of a first-aid lesson, one of the interviewees commented: "...if we had a child with epilepsy and this child had a crisis during the lesson, I don't know what to do. So, we should a first-aid lesson (TC10)."

In the curricula, some of the lessons were reported as being unnecessary due to being too advanced/theoretical, very simple, overlapping due to having similar content (n = 9). Also, the teaching methods and techniques used in some of the lessons were criticized for being traditional and teacher-centered (n = 11). In this respect, one of the teacher candidates stated:

The methods and techniques used in our education are not constructivist. We are still having lessons based on old way, memorization. Indeed, we are still passive and the lessons are always teacher-centered. Instructor teaches and we listen. (TC1)

Besides the problems mentioned above, a few teacher candidates criticized the curricula and courses for lack of authentic environment (n = 5), not reflecting real school/classroom environment (n = 5), and inappropriate application of measurement and evaluation (n = 5).

In conclusion, four of the interviewees indicated that the courses in the programs and the general structure of the program was generally appropriate for teacher education, however, they expressed that the problems were relating to the lack of practice or quality of instructors, but not the teacher education program itself. One of the teacher candidates stated: "There are deficiencies related to the courses. Actually, this is again about lack of qualified teaching staff. If the instructor is qualified, then the courses are effective" (TC31). Another claimed that all lessons were useful on condition that qualified instructors offered them (TC14). Lastly, another one said that the real problem about the courses was lack of enough practice (TC20).

Teaching Practice. When the teacher candidates were asked to evaluate the effectiveness of the teaching practices, totally 37 of them mentioned the existence of some problems on this issue. Parallel with the stated problems in relation to the program, the problems can be listed as lack of teaching practice with different teachers, grade levels, and students in different types of schools (n = 21), having practice teachings in the last semesters (n = 16), and lack of enough practice teaching throughout teacher education (n = 14). A teacher candidate asserted about teaching practice:

We are having education from first grade to fourth grade, but we don't know why we are having this education, what we will face with, about which things we should be careful. Besides, in the 4th grade, there are graduation issues, KPSS, or job applications, so the practice teaching is not our major concern. We don't want to go to schools. Actually, we were curious and excited about teaching practice in the second or third grades, but in the fourth grade, we say: "I wish we did not have this (practice teaching) and how we will allocate time for this". (TC23)

Besides these, the teacher candidates also expressed the problems related to the teachers, administrators, and conditions of the schools they had their practice (n = 16). Among the problems reported were negative attitude of school staff -teachers and school principals-, lack of systematic selection of schools, lack of quality/competency of mentor teachers, overloaded work given to teacher candidates, and poor physical conditions of schools. About the school selection and teachers, one teacher candidate asserted:

I have seen the same teacher (during the school visits) during the whole semester. In all of them, the same observation, as the teacher is always doing the same things. Indeed, I am lucky, as the teacher is at least doing something. There are teachers who do not lecture in lessons at all and say to teacher candidates: "Open your books and solve KPSS questions" and my friends are visiting their classes. When I ask my friends what they are doing during practice teachings, they tell me that they would observe lessons but their teacher lets the class free, so they solve tests (for KPSS). Is this a practice? Is this an observation? Nothing happened, there is no use. We are wasting our time. (TC5)

From another education faculty, another teacher candidate suggested that previous experiences of the teacher candidates should be taken into consideration during school selection and various opportunities should be offered to teacher candidates to be able to observe different conditions and different people (TC39).

About the quality of teachers in the practice schools, one teacher candidates stated: "We aren't learning who a teacher should be; but how a teacher should not be. Teachers are so bad" (TC31). Moreover, in relation to attitude of teachers and principal of practice schools, a teacher candidate pointed out:

When we go to schools and meet school principals, they are telling us not to come. They say: "The school is very crowded, do not come!"...but, this is the protocol between the Higher Education Council and Ministry of Education, how can they tell us that? ...We're actually facing with very interesting things during practice teaching. They hate us, because we are coming for practice. There are teachers humiliating us in front of students. Instead of motivation, they tell us "go and sit down at the backside of classroom!" However, they could have introduced us to students as new teachers; they could have stated that we were also their teachers. But...They treat us like a primary school student. (TC2)

Other than these concerns, the interviewees specified problems concerning lack of guidance/follow-up and evaluation of performance (n = 8), negative attitude of teacher candidates towards practice teaching (n = 6), outdated/unnecessary tasks of teaching practice course (n = 4), and lastly student teacher-mentor teacher ratio (many students for one mentor) (n = 3).

Teaching Staff. As an important dimension of teacher education, teaching staff/professorate in the faculties of education was mentioned by totally 32 interviewees as the questionable aspect of teacher education program. Others did not report any problems. Most of the teacher candidates reporting the problems claimed that they had very valuable instructors at their faculties, however, they also experienced certain problems with some others. Regarding this, mostly-cited problems focused on instructors' using ineffective teaching methods and techniques (n = 25). Under this issue, instructors were reported using PPT presentations all the time, not lecturing but leaving lecturing to students, not allowing for discussions, not using technological materials in lessons, and not using constructivist or student-centered approaches. A teacher candidate (TC12) indicated that few instructors at the faculty make students discover the knowledge rather than using traditional approaches. About the same issue, another teacher candidate expressed:

They (instructors) tell us to conduct constructivist lessons. But they are not conducting constructivist lesson, they use lecturing. Even when instructors say to us: "Do not speak with the same tone of voice," ... they are using the same tone of voice. (TC31)

With regards to teaching staff, other problems cited by some of the interviewees were instructors' negative attitude towards teaching and teacher candidates (n = 10), not providing guidance, feedback, or follow-up on teaching (n = 9), being incompetent in their areas (n = 9), being inactive/old/unwilling for teaching (n = 8), not giving freedom of expression in lessons/being opposed to different ideas (n = 6), not having systematic and objective ways of assessment and evaluation (n = 6), not being open to personal development (n = 6), not having teaching experience at schools (n = 5), and not sharing their academic works or experiences in lessons (n = 5). About the assessment and evaluation techniques of instructors, one of the interviewees gave the following example:

In the last midterm, one of the instructors asked this question in the lesson: "how would you teach the concepts of abstract and concrete in 45 minutes, please explain." Okay, I can explain it but it is not clear, I don't know about my student group. There is no information about students' level of readiness. If students do not know anything before, we use different technique. If students know something about it, then we use other activities. We are aware of everything. (TC20)

Moreover, one of the teacher candidates mentioned the conflict they experienced by stating that some of the instructors lecture about how to be a good teacher, however they do not model it.

Lastly, four of the teacher candidates mentioned that the effectiveness and usefulness of a lesson were changing based on the instructor offering the course. While some instructors offer lessons very effectively, some of them do not. About this issue, one teacher candidate told that she did not want to attend the lessons of some instructors and she added: "I have some other instructors, and I really admire them. So, I want to go to that lesson and I want to talk to them (TC43)."

Discussion, Conclusion and Suggestions

In the study, the teacher education in Turkey was evaluated based on the views of teacher candidates. In the context of the study, when the findings were generally examined, it was found that the teacher candidates had some negative views in relation to student admission to teaching programs; they did not gain some of the important teaching skills and 21st century skills adequately; there were certain problems identified with respect to the dimensions of teacher education. In this part, the findings were discussed in detail and implications for practice and research were presented.

Initially, the teacher candidates mostly stated that using only university entrance examination was not enough and effective in terms of selecting students for teaching. In the current system, as known, candidates are admitted to teacher education programs regarding their preferences they made based on their scores from a nation-wide university entrance examination (Çakıroğlu & Çakıroğlu, 2003). This system was criticized by the interviewees for not assessing students' general tendency, attitude, and psychology for being a teacher but only their academic success in a multiple-choice exam. Moreover, although teacher training high schools were converted to other types of high schools upon the decision of Ministry of National Education, the teacher candidates coming from teacher high schools were reported for not necessarily being more inclined to be a teacher. As also revealed in the literature, students' characteristics have a substantial importance for any teacher education reform/program to reach success (Applegate, 1987; Bilir, 2011; Ok, 2007; Uygun, 2010). As suggested by Uygun (2010), student admission to the teacher education institutions is very crucial to train teachers effectively. Therefore, student admission to teacher education programs should be evaluated with respect to the quality of teacher education. Furthermore, the findings of this study showed parallelism with the findings of the previous studies. The researchers and the previous studies evaluated the student admission/selection to teaching programs as being inadequate and ineffective in some points (Binbaşıoğlu, 1995; Doğanay et al., 2015; Ok, 1992; Okçabol, 2004; Okçabol et al., 2003; Senemoğlu, 2003; Şendağ & Gedik, 2015). For instance, in the study conducted by Doğanay et al. (2015), academicians in the field indicated using a nation-wide centralized exam for admitting students to teacher education programs as one of the strongest aspect of teacher education; on the other hand, they pointed out certain problems. The problems were about validity and reliability issues and not selecting suitable students for being a teacher. In these days, the effectiveness of the university entrance exam in terms of student admission to higher education and the format of the exam were among the educational issues discussed. Taking the findings of these studies into consideration, it is suggested that teacher candidates should be selected for teacher education by also assessing their abilities, interests besides their academic achievement. Throughout their educational lives, students' academic, social, and psychological developments should be monitored regularly, teachers' views about students should be recorded, and the students who have an aptitude to become a teacher should be guided in earlier times. In the literature, there are differing viewpoints. Even if Anatolian High School were converted to other high school types in 2014, Uygun (2010) stated that the main human resources of education faculties should come from teacher training high schools. However, regarding the teacher candidates' views on the effectiveness of these high schools as revealed in this study as well, it should be considered well before any attempts to revive such high schools and necessary detailed planning should be made. About determining the appropriate methods for student admission or selection, further research is needed. Through studies, the content and format of assessment tools and characteristics or skills to be assessed should be determined carefully; and the views of different stakeholders should be taken in relation to the necessity and functioning of teacher training high schools.

Another crucial issue besides the student admission to the programs is preparing teacher candidates for the needed knowledge and skills during their university education. In the study, it was revealed that the teacher education was not evaluated by the teacher candidates as being adequate in terms of making students gain certain skills. The teacher candidates stated that even if they felt more prepared for some of the teaching skills, they were not prepared adequately for some of the teaching skills; and the dimensions of their education had certain problems. Before discussing these skills and problems in more detailed way, it would be better to present the relevant findings of some of the similar studies in the literature. The most current one of them was conducted by Senemoğlu (2011). Senemoğlu (2011) examined the preparedness of classroom teacher candidates for teaching. When compared with the findings of this study, there exist both similarities and differences. While primary teacher candidates felt more prepared for most of the teaching skills, the teaching staff claimed that they were not prepared well for communicating with parents, colleagues and larger society. Moreover, the teacher candidates also asserted the existence of inadequacies in relation to teaching practices. Mehmetlioğlu (2010) also studied the Mathematics teacher candidates' readiness for the general teaching skills and she found that

the teacher candidates did not regard their readiness at a high level, but there were some skills which they felt better as similar to the results of this study. Turkish Education Association (TED, 2009) researched the degree to which the primary school teachers have the general teaching skills determined by the Ministry of National Education. Although the sample of the study was the teachers as different from this study, the findings of the study showed that even in-service teachers did not have the general teaching skills such as communicating with parents as adequately as expected. When the results of this study were evaluated together with the findings of above studies, it can be concluded that these aspects of teacher education in Turkey should be renovated in terms of preparing teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills.

When the findings were examined in detail, it was revealed that although the teacher candidates stated more readiness for understanding students and communicating with them, they needed more knowledge and skills in relation to working under different conditions such as mixed-level classes and village schools and under various physical conditions. Whereas, in Turkey, the presence of economic, social, cultural, and physical diversity among the regions or schools are apparent; and it is indispensable for teachers to work in various settings with various groups especially in the first years of the profession. Teacher candidates should certainly be informed about teaching under different conditions through the courses, e.g. Turkish Education System and School Management and Practice Teaching, in the curricula. Moreover, teacher candidates should be prepared for teaching profession through practical activities such as communicating with working teachers, visiting schools like regional primary boarding schools or village schools, inviting the teachers working under different settings to education faculties. Senemoğlu (2011) also reached similar findings in her study and she claimed at the end of her study:

The findings show that it is necessary to allocate more time for school-based experiences and teaching practices as the heart of teacher education. Moreover, it not enough for teacher training only to increase the time allocated for such courses but there is an evidence that it is also important to increase the quality of teaching services to effectively use the allocated time.

School-based experiences could provide teacher candidates with real settings and prepare them for different contexts in earlier times before starting teaching. Due to not being ready for different conditions and experiences, there are considerable number of teachers not willing to work in certain regions or quitting their profession even in the first year of the profession. It is suggested in this study that there is a need for more detailed study conducted with both teacher candidates and teachers about this specific issue. The results of such studies need to be shared with future teachers in the faculties of education.

On the other hand, while some of the teacher candidates reported that they were prepared for classroom management skills, the other part of the candidates stated that they did not have enough knowledge and skills on classroom management. Since classroom management skills are among the important skills that a teacher need to have, the Classroom Management course in the curricula should be reexamined and its content should be enriched through practical activities. Furthermore, the teacher candidates also need further practice related to communicating with parents, organizing parent meetings, and working together with parents. Similar results were achieved in the literature and the importance of developing relations with parents was emphasized (Dotger, Harris, & Hansel, 2008; Mehdinezhad, 2008; Senemoğlu, 2011). Such experiences/practices can be offered to teacher candidates at practice schools. Also, Walker and Dotger (2012) regarded communication with parents as one of the central aspects of teaching profession and they observed in their study that simulated parent-teacher conferences increased the awareness and self-efficacy of teacher candidates towards parent relations. At this point, it is suggested to practitioners that activities, case studies or methods such as drama on communicating with parents, colleagues, and other stakeholders should be integrated into the relevant courses –e.g. classroom management- in the program.

Other than these, the study also put forward the finding that the teacher candidates require more knowledge and skills with respect to working with inclusive students and students who need special education. In Turkey, although Special Education was integrated as a must course in the curricula of teacher education (YÖK, 2007), the teacher candidates stated that the lessons were theoretical and not adequate. As also revealed in other studies, the role of teachers and teacher education are significant (Leana-Taşçılar, 2014). Moreover, nearly 12% of the whole population in Turkey was comprised of disabled citizens (TÜİK, 2002), so the content of the relevant courses should be reconsidered and improved through more effective methods and techniques. Besides these, it was found that the teacher education did not adequately equip candidates with the knowledge and skills on administrative duties and rights of teachers, planning extra-curricular activities at school, and providing discipline in the classroom. The duties and responsibilities of teachers other than instruction should also be emphasized in the curricula.

In addition to these, the findings of the study proposed that teacher candidates should also be furnished with the 21st century skills by means of integrating these skills into the content of the courses or by adding new courses into the teacher education curricula. When the results were overviewed, especially media literature, which is emphasized nowadays and presented as a course at schools, is not gained adequately by the teacher candidates in their opinions. Together with media literacy, universal thinking skills, scientific thinking, and research skills should be developed during teacher education and reflected in the content of the lessons.

With the purpose of investigating the effectiveness of teacher education with respect to preparing teacher candidates for teaching, the teacher candidates were also asked to evaluate the four important aspects of their education in the study. The critical problems found in the study have been discussed in this part. First of all, about the faculty environment, the teacher candidates stated that it did not involve social activities enough to improve the social skills of them. Özçakır-Sümen and Çağlayan (2013) investigated the educational setting that the teacher candidates dreamed of in their study. They discovered that teacher candidates desired for more social environment and social activities. Eret and Ok (2010) also reached the similar results in their study. As known, teaching is a social profession and most of the teaching skills require the social development of candidates as well. Considering this issue, the environment of education faculties should be reexamined from this perspective and teacher candidates should be provided with activities, settings, clubs so that they can enhance their social skills. Moreover, seminars on personal and professional development and cultural and art facilities could be planned in the short term. When the teacher candidates' views were examined in relation to program and courses, it was seen they agreed that there was not enough practice in the context of lessons and real classroom settings were not reflected in the courses adequately. According to the teacher candidates, some of the courses in the curricula were found to be too advanced or too simple; or there were not courses on communication, curriculum development, first-aid, and research even if they were seen necessary. Similarly, the studies in the literature indicated that teacher candidates generally regarded pedagogy courses as essential for becoming effective teachers but there were problems such as being too theoretical (Beşoluk & Horzum, 2011; Kılıç, 2007). However, Beşoluk, and Horzum (2011) found that teacher candidates' attitudes towards teaching profession, their motivation and choosing their departments willingly or not affected their views with respect to the courses. This finding should also be considered while making any improvements in relation to program and courses besides the findings of this study and similar studies on student admission.

In relation to practice teachings as another dimension of this study, the existence of problems was revealed especially about the quality of practice schools, teachers and administrators. Having field experiences in the last year, lack of enough practice, and lack of enough guidance before, during, and after the practices were among the other deficiencies concerning the teaching practice. When these views of the teacher candidates were examined, it can be suggested that teaching practice should be carried out continuously in the contexts of all relevant lessons starting from the first years of education in the cooperating schools of each faculty. This model is believed to increase the quality and effectiveness of teacher education. In such a model of teacher education, not only teacher candidates would find opportunities for practicing teaching but also the cooperating schools of each faculty would find an opportunity to develop their education through continuous cooperation with universities. The needs and expectations of both sides should be determined firstly for the development of such a model based on practice and continuous faculty-school relationship. Needs analysis to be done in the field might be used for this purpose. It is already accepted by educators that the most effective learning takes place when it is experiential and based on practicing. On the other hand, the practice should be supported with the theory and integrated into the teacher education programs properly (Caires ve Almeida, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2007; Senemoğlu, 2011). Lastly, with respect to some instructors, the teacher candidates reported problems such as not having enough teaching experience at school, not having positive attitude towards teacher candidates and teaching, using traditional methods or student presentations in lessons most of the time. Doğanay et al. (2015) concluded that academicians also shared similar ideas and there were problems related to the qualifications of teaching staff. All these cited deficiencies might be the sources of the reasons why teacher candidates could not gain certain skills. Moreover, Russell (1997) explained that how teacher educators behave and teach has more impact on teacher candidates than what they teach. Therefore, the teaching staff dimension of teacher education needs to be re-analyzed carefully by researchers, member the profession, and decision makers.

Evaluation of teacher education requires the evaluation of the teacher education programs as well (Küçükahmet 2007; Williams & Alawiye, 2001). Through curriculum evaluation and development studies with the participation of academicians and field experts, the programs might be evaluated more comprehensively so that the knowledge and skills that teachers would need throughout their professional life might be emphasized more in courses or new courses might also be added into the curricula. The contribution of each lesson in the curricula on teacher candidates' development should be studied further as also reported by the participants of this study. Furthermore, there is a need for additional research on each aspect of teacher education independently, faculty environment, curricula and courses, teaching practice, and teaching staff. However, for any possible restructuring action on teacher education in the future, all these dimensions should be taken together by also considering the accreditation dimension, since they all have total effect on the effective preparation of teachers. After all, instead of perceiving teacher education as a part, it should be regarded as a sustainable continuum to be able to furnish our future teachers with the essential knowledge and skills needed on both national and international platforms.

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