Mentor Teachers in Turkish Teacher Education Programs

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ABSTRACT The role of mentor teachers in teacher education programs is regarded as the most significant role in guiding students' work during student teaching. This paper focuses on the selection and training of those mentor teachers in Turkish teacher education programs during the 2010-2011 academic year. It is based on evidence from an on-line survey of program coordinators in teacher education programs at 22 universities across the seven regions of Turkey. The researcher found that the procedures for selecting, educating, and compensating mentor teachers are, in general, given little or no attention at most Turkish institutions, and are often not even known or understood by the program coordinators.

INTRODUCTION

Recently, there has been a perspective change about the practice teaching component in teacher education programs. This change requires allocating more time to integrated theory and classroom experience rather than separate theory coursework followed by classroom practice (Azar 2003; Tok 2012b). In this approach, student teachers spend more time in practice schools under the guidance of a qualified and trained mentor teacher who expertly helps the student teacher to draw on theory to make teaching choices with her students. Mentor teachers thus play a critical role in the practicum experiences of these field-based teacher education programs. They guide student teachers by providing supportive teaching materials, feedback and reflective discussions about the teaching the student teacher has done and will do in with her students. If student teachers do not get this strong support from their mentor teachers, they may not only fail to develop the necessary theory-based thinking skills about teaching, but they also may lose enthusiasm, ambition, and idealism at the very beginning of their career. This may contribute to their departure from the profession before they even begin.

If mentors are so important in student teaching, there is need to clarify the definition of mentoring. Murry and Owen (1991) viewed mentoring as "a deliberate pairing of a more skilled or experienced person with a lesser skilled or experienced one, with the agreed upon goal of having the lesser skilled person grow and develop specific competencies" (p. xiv). Barczyk et al.

(2011) point out that a mentor interacts in ways that bring about learning skill development, and growth of the student teacher. Both definitions focus on the experienced person facilitating the growth and development of the less experienced, not just overseeing skills training. This calls for a helping teacher who sees the supervisory role not as a teller and corrector but as a thoughtful questioner and encourager. Careful selection of those individuals mentor is, therefore, necessary. The research was originally motivated by the research's interest in better understanding the state of the mentor's role in teacher education programs in Turkey. The researcher hoped to collect baseline information about what institutions across the nation were expecting mentor teachers to do in his teacher education programs, and what the institutions were doing to select, prepare, and compensate individuals for the important role of mentor. Ultimately, the researcher believes that if he wants to offer effective practice teaching to student teachers, he needs to start examining what he is doing now in relation to where he wants to go in teachers' education programs.

In this study, the researcher examined the role and functions of mentor teachers and how they are selected and trained in teacher education programs of Turkey. An important goal was to determine if there were any selection rules and training programs for mentor teachers and by whom they are selected. So people involved in teacher training programs could be able to understand better how different teacher education programs deal with this issue. The researcher described the situation of mentorship in teach-

er education programs in Turkey by asking academic program coordinators to answer open ended-qualitative questions.

Context of the Study and Literature Review

The most important objective of pre-service teacher education is to educate qualified teachers. This objective is found in every pre-service teacher training programs all over the world. Field experience is one of the factors that play a significant role in educating qualified teachers. The blue ribbon of NCATE (2010) (The National Council for accreditation of teacher education in the U.S.A.) underlines ten design principles for clinically based preparation and emphasizes that clinical educators and coaches must be rigorously selected and prepared and drawn from both higher education and the p-12 sector in order to educate qualified teachers. In Turkey, clinical educators include not only mentor teachers, but also university supervisors, coordinators of academic programs, coordinators of school of education, coordinators of schools and coordinators of local education directorate. In this initial study, the researcher narrowed his focus to mentor teachers and their situation in Turkish teacher training programs.

In Turkey, practice teaching is considered a course taken in the last semester of teacher education programs that serves to provide opportunities to student teachers, under typical school conditions in selected practice teaching schools, to gain experience in observing and participating actively in all the diverse educational activities of teachers at school.

According to the YOK documents of 1998, faculty-school coordination is not only about placing and supervising student teachers in practice schools, but also a process for serving the development of both the school and its faculty. The idea is, apparently, that at minimum the student teachers will bring fresh ideas into the schools to which they are assigned, and the University Supervisor will likewise bring new practices to the attention of the mentor/cooperating teachers (Tok and Gehrke 2012a).

Student teaching has long been recognized as one of the most important parts of teacher education program in some countries (Zeichner 1980). Recently, its value is being recognized more in Turkish teacher education programs, but the lack of research on the mentor teachers' role,

selection and training has been an obstacle to the improvement of procedures. Research elsewhere has shown that mentor teachers play a significant role in practicum experiences and have a deep effect on whether student teachers become good prospective teachers. Hicks (1974) claims that no other single individual has so direct an influence as the cooperating teacher in shaping the attitudes, skills, and ideas of a prospective teacher. Parallel to this idea, Smith (1991) states that mentor teachers/cooperating teachers help convert student teachers into teachers, taking full responsibility for instruction of the student teachers. Guyton and McIntyre (1990) found much the same, as did Blocker and Swetnam (1995). As early as 1988, Brodbelt stated that one of the neglected aspects of the student teaching program is the process of selecting the mentor teacher. He maintained that: One has only needed the satisfactory teaching recommendation by a principle and several years of teaching experience to be selected as a supervising teacher. The act of volunteering to supervise a student teacher has been accepted as a qualification for receiving placement of a student teacher (p. 87). Bloker and Swetnam (2011) and Hudson and Hudson (2011) lament that the identification procedures currently used by many institutions to select cooperating teachers are lax. Zeichner (2010) agreed, but also declared that states should require university and school-based mentors and supervisors to be formally prepared for their work and develop standards that define an acceptable mentor training program. His call for training followed earlier recommendations by Didham (1992), Guyton and McIntyre (1990) Giebelhaus and Bowman (2002), Koerner (1992), Upson et al. (2002). More recently Schwille (2008) offered 10 clear forms of action that could be taught to mentors including coaching, stepping in, teaching together, demonstration, brief- informal conversation or mentoring on the move, mentoring sessions, debriefing sessions, co-planning sessions, videotaping sessions and writing.

Providing mentor teachers with incentives and financial support are also believed to have a significant effect on good mentoring efforts from mentor teachers. Zeichner (2010) asserted that schools and teachers who agree to provide support for clinical experiences should be provided with reasonable incentives and financial support for their work.

In contrast with the recommendations from researchers, in Turkey, five general selection criteria for mentor teachers are presented by the Higher Education Council (YOK 1998) and the Council specifies that mentor teachers should be selected by both the coordinator of practice school and the coordinator of the school of education. The criteria include that those chosen should: 1. Volunteer to contribute to training student teachers and developing their professional skills; 2. Have graduated in the academic field in which they teach; 3. Have at least three years teaching experience; 4. Be successful at using teaching methods and techniques; 5. Serve as a model to student teachers in their attitudes and behaviors. These mentors are provided with basic remuneration for their work, but no indication is given that these mentors, once chosen, should be trained in any particular way.

In a critique of Turkish teacher education presented recently, Tok and Gehrke (2012a) emphasized that to implement clinically based teacher education in Turkey's teacher education programs, there must likely be some radical changes in the system, the curriculum, and the preparation of field-based teacher educators. But they also recognized that without baseline data on what is currently being done in representative teacher education programs across the country—not just what documents claim should be done—any strong recommendations for reforms were weakened.

So, this study set out to identify the actual criteria and procedures for selecting and training mentor teachers, and the payment given for mentoring service in a sample of Turkish teacher education programs.

METHODS

During the spring of 2011, with the support of TUBÝTAK, under the guidance of a visiting scientist invited to the School of Education of a southeastern university in Turkey, the researcher initiated a research project to be based on data gathered from a sample of 63 public and private universities in each of the regions of Turkey. A simple eight-question survey was developed and piloted to gather data through an on-line method. The researcher used the data gathering tool from the Internet website known as Survey Monkey. With this tool, individuals can be invited to complete a survey from their local computers, the results of which can then be compiled for qualitative analysis or simple descriptive statistical analysis. An e-mail message was sent to each Coordinator of the school experience course of the sample (number) teacher education institutions to invite them to respond to the survey. After sending an email message, the researcher phoned the Coordinators in the teacher education departments as well and urged them to complete the survey on line. When the deadline for the survey was approaching, the researchers also sent a reminder message to the coordinators. The data were received from teacher education programs of 22 universities in the seven region of Turkey that is approximately 35 % of the sample. Of these 22 universities, 19 were from public, 3 were private.

As this research involved survey monkey and e-mail contact with, and gathering data from and about school personnel, appropriate and rigorous procedures for participant consent, data collection, and protection of privacy and confidentiality were followed. The participants who answered the questions were voluntary, according to the evaluation research requirements. The proposed data collection approach, data collection measures and questions, and processes for obtaining consent and protecting the privacy of natural persons. The identities of the institutions were comprehensively reviewed and fully approved by Zirve University Human Ethics Committee. Ethics protocols guaranteed confidentiality to individual participants from the schools, so that their identity would neither be revealed in the publication, nor would their schools be able to associate data with particular persons. All data were kept according to strict ethical guidelines in locked and password-protected files at Education Science Department at Zirve University.

Participants

The participants were the coordinator of school experience courses of 22 teacher education institutions in universities in seven regions of Turkey: South-eastern Anatolia; Eastern Anatolia; Central Anatolia; the Black Sea; Marmara; Aegean; and Mediterranean. Name some of the programs that the coordinators were in Primary Education, Mathematics, Education Science, Preschool Education, Social Science, and Natural Science

The Survey Instrument

While preparing the questionnaire, the related literature was examined to create a contextual frame in order increase the internal validity of the research. In addition to this, the research process was explained clearly in order to increase external validity and reliability. The design of the research, study group, data collection instrument and process, and analysis of the data were stated in detail. The data have been preserved by the researcher and other researchers are welcome to examine them.

In addition to demographic information, we asked the following questions on the survey. (The questions were presented to the participants in Turkish.)

1. How are mentor teachers selected and by whom?
2. Is their service voluntary or non-voluntary?
3. What are the selection criteria?
4. What tasks are mentor teachers expected to do?
5. What professional development/training do you offer the mentor teachers?
6. What payment is provided to the mentor teachers?
7. Do you have a planned curriculum for that training? If so, please describe it.
8. What would be the ideal training you would like to offer the mentors?

Survey Respondents: Twenty-six practice coordinator of teacher education programs of 22 universities responded to the above questions in survey. Respondents filled the questionnaire form and wrote down their opinion in open ended question box.

Data Analysis

Qualitative analysis was done on the 26 responses. This approach enabled us to look at patterns in the responses and identify singular and common threads (Merriam 2001). The responses were clustered and put together under the same theme. Frequencies and percentages (%) were also calculated.

RESULTS

The findings are presented in tabular and text forms under the research questions and obtained data are discussed as required.

The data were collected from 26 teacher education program coordinators of 22 universities in seven regions of Turkey, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: The number of universities in each region

Regions	The number of universities
Middle Anatolia	4
South Eastern Anatolia region	2
Eastern Anatolia	4
Black Sea	4
Marmara	4
Aegean	2
Mediterranean	2
Total	22

At the beginning, the researcher determined to collect at least ten percent of universities from each region, but some universities did not respond completely to the survey. So the researcher had to extract them from the research. Data were collected approximately from ten percent of universities in each region. The largest percentage of universities was located in Marmara region. 3 out of 22 universities are private foundation universities, the others are state universities. Some teacher education institutions have one academic program, some have more than one.

Twenty-six respondents of programs such as Elementary School Teacher, Mathematic Teacher, Science Teacher, English Language Teacher, Counseling and Guidance and Preschool Teacher Education programs replied to the following questions.

1. How are Cooperating Teachers Selected and By Whom?

As indicated in Table 2, fourteen, or over half of all respondents, replied that mentor teachers were selected by the school principles. Three

Table 2: Mentor teachers are selected by

School principals		University supervisor		Practice coordinator of academic program		No comments	
n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
14	54	3	11	6	24	3	11

respondents said that university supervisor selected the mentors, and 6 said that mentor teachers were selected by practice coordinators of the university academic programs. Three respondents said they did not know.

2. Is Their Service Voluntary or Non-voluntary?

As indicated in Table 3, twelve respondents (47%) said that mentor teachers were volunteers for the mentoring service, 8 respondents (30 %) said mentor teachers were non-voluntary. Six respondents (23 %) said that they did not have knowledge about this.

Table 3: The number of voluntary and non-voluntary mentor teachers

Voluntary		Non -voluntary		Do not know	
n	%	n	%	n	%
12	47	8	30	6	23

3. What are the Selection Criteria?

As shown in Table 4, 20 respondents out of 26 said that there are no criteria for selection of mentor teachers. One respondent commented: *"There are no criteria for selecting, but school principals distribute student teachers to every teacher at school. Sometimes this is a problematic situation."* Another one said: *"There are not any criteria for that, they prefer teachers who had pedagogical formation courses"*. Another said *"mentor teachers should not be novice teachers."*

Table 4: The percentage of selecting criteria

No criteria		Professional experience	
n	%	n	%
20	77	6	23

Twenty-three percent of respondents said that cooperating teachers were selected according to their professional experience.

One said: *"Cooperating teachers are selected according to teaching experience, and who feels a responsibility for teaching."*

4. What Tasks Are Mentor Teachers Expected to Do?

As shown in Table 5, 20 respondents answered this question. 6 participants did not answer this question. The primary task mentors teachers are expected to do is "conference with student teachers and give feedback" (90%), "observe student teachers and complete observation forms" (85%), and evaluate student teachers and complete evaluation forms (85%). Relatively high percentage of respondents marked most of the tasks. Meeting with supervisors was, however, only included by half of those responding (11).

Table 5: The tasks mentor teachers are expected to do

Tasks	N	%
Conference with student teachers and give feedback	18	90.0
Observe student teachers and complete observation forms	17	85.0
Evaluate student teachers and complete evaluation forms	17	85.0
Instruct student teacher on certain teaching skills	15	75.0
Guide student teacher reflection	15	75.0
Meet with university supervisor	11	55.0
Other, for example,	4	20.0
Total	20	100.0
Skip	6	No answer

5. What Professional Development/Training Do You Offer the Mentor Teachers?

As indicated in Table 6, 4 respondents stated that "a two hour seminar" is given at the beginning of each term, 9 said that there is not professional development, a majority of respondents, (50%) said that they do not have any idea about that.

Table 6: Professional development/ training

A seminar at the beginning of the school term		No professional development/ training		No comment	
n	%	n	%	n	%
4	15	9	35	13	50

Considering the date collected from the survey from 22 universities, there is a big problem in selecting appropriate mentor teachers. This significant part of mentoring is overlooked and was not paid attention. There is no difference among the opinion of respondents in terms of region, state/private foundation and size of institution.

The majority of the teacher education institutions does not require or even offer mentor

teachers in-service training or any professional development course. But the institutions do provide mentor teachers with a student teaching handbook which is sent by higher education council. It does not give much information about how to mentor student teachers in terms problem solving and reflective thinking. The data reinforce that teacher education programs need to scrutinize the processes for selection and evaluation of mentor teachers.

6. What Payment is Provided to Mentor Teachers?

As shown in Table 7, mentor teachers are paid for their mentoring service. This is 6 hourly wage per week, the amount of which is determined by National Education Ministry. Now, its rate is 9 TL for each hourly wage, 54 lira per week for three months. This is a fix payment given to mentor teachers by every teacher education programs in Turkey. 2 hourly wage per week is given to school coordinators as well. 6 respondents stated that they do not know the amount of payment for mentoring in schools.

Table 7: The payment provided to mentor teachers

Answer	n	%
Per week 6 hourly wage is paid to teachers	20	76.9
Do not know	6	23.1
Total	26	100.0

7. Do You Have a Planned Student Teaching Curriculum for the Training? If So, Please Describe It.

Given in Table 8, 19 teacher education program directors responded that they had a planned curriculum for field experience. 7 of them said that the curriculum for field experience is not available.

Table 8: A planned student teaching curriculum

Curriculum	Available		Non- available	
	n	%	n	%
Planned curriculum	19	73	7	27

8. What Would Be the Ideal Training You Would Like to Offer the Mentors?

Fourteen respondents answered to this question. Here are some different answers given to this question. For example: one respondent said: *"I think the last terms of academic programs should be spent completely in schools."*

Another one said: *"mentor teachers should be trained in in-service education programs organized together with universities, teachers should be encouraged by economic incentives"*

"Mentor teachers should be trained in terms of giving guidance, making lesson plans in schools of education at least for a week".

"....every year at the beginning of new education term, a series of seminar should held and there must be meetings with coordinators every month."

"the sessions about field experience should be given by faculty of education and the expectations of mentor teachers should be identified and met".

".....periodically workshops should be given by experience faculty staff"

".... Student teachers send the last term of their education period completely in practice school"

DISCUSSION

The data from the research indicate that mentor teachers are selected mostly by school principals. It seems that teacher education program coordinators do not concern in selecting mentors. Only six respondents stated that mentor teachers are selected by the coordinator of academic programs. This result shows similarity between USA and Turkey in terms of selecting mentors. Blocker and Swetnam (1995) report in their study that teacher education programs relay on principals to recommend the cooperating teachers. Azar (2003) found the same results in his studies "Student teachers and supervisors mention that no criteria is held in assignment of mentors, in the case that mentors are selected by the director of the school and they are selected from the ones who are close to the director" (p. 187). These ideas are counter to what requires in the guidelines from Higher Education Council (YOK 1998).

Nearly half of the mentor teachers are volunteers. However, 30 % of respondents stated that mentors are non-volunteers for supervising the student teachers. The explanations in literature state that if the mentor teachers are not volunteers, they will not be supportive and they will not do their job effectively. Being volunteer men-

tors has positive affects on   student teaching. Gaffey (1994) claims that the most commonly reported factors facilitating cooperating teachers' work as cooperating teachers was their own enthusiasm for the role. Gehrke (1988) also acknowledges that a successful mentor-*protégé* relationship requires desire by both parties.

As for the selection criteria, respondents amazingly stated that they did not have selection criteria. They seem unaware of selection criteria from the HEC. A high percentage (54%) of the respondents claimed that the mentor teachers were selected by school principals. This differs from HEC requirements, because higher education council does not mention anything about school principles in terms of selecting mentor teachers. It is possible to say that this is a cultural and a practical way of selecting mentor teachers. Vertical/hierarchical management system is dominant in Turkish education system, particularly in management of school.

Mentor teachers do not get training for being mentors. This is another negative point for teacher education programs. It is suggested that professional training programs should be held and mentor teachers should be trained in terms of supervising and creating good communication with student teachers. This is supported by NCATE's (2010) report which declares that "cooperating teachers should be specially certified, accountable for their candidates 'performance and student outcomes, and commensurately rewarded to serve in this crucial role" (p.6). Therefore, In order to motivate mentor teachers, they should be rewarded for doing mentoring work. Because mentor teachers spent some of their valuable time supervising student teachers, so they need to be financed for their mentoring service.

Most (35%) of the teacher education programs do not offer professional development programs (PDP). PDP is an important issue in terms of getting positive results at the end of practicum. It is not possible to obtain a satisfactory guidance from mentor teachers who did not inform about the process of practicum, the goals of teaching practice. 15% respondents stated that they offer a seminar at the beginning of the school term. Seminars usually are given in two sessions and take two hours. The researcher himself has been in those seminars several times. Mentor teachers are not informed about types of mentors, such as *absent mentor, indulge mentor, authoritative*

mentor and educative mentor (Tok 2012b) and the other important activities such as action research, reflective thinking, and feedbacks.

In terms of remuneration, mentor teachers are paid 6 hourly wages per week for their mentoring services. This payment is a fixed payment determined by National Education Ministry and HEC. It is decided at the beginning of education term every year.

One of the most important components of the teaching student teachers is the curriculum. 19 respondents stated that they do not have a planned curriculum for field experience. Some respondents see the guideline as a planned curriculum. They follow the guideline in practicum supervision process. Programs coordinators depicted the guideline called "Partnership between faculty of education and school" as a planned curriculum. This guideline include the roles of staff (university supervisor, mentor teacher, practice school coordinator, coordinator of school of education) in field experience and the task student teachers are to do. It also includes observation and evaluation forms. This guidance book/report was formed by Higher Education Council and World Bank in 1998 in the frame work of National Education Development Project for Initial Teacher Education. But, we cannot say that it is exactly a field experience curriculum. It is a kind of report for teacher education programs. Below given tasks are not curriculum tasks. They can be seen as the goals/objectives to be reached, but they do not constitute a full curriculum description at all. A curriculum document has in it besides goals/objective, learning activities, a scope and sequence chart, written resources for the student and mentor, and evaluation strategies. According to the guidance book (YOK 1998), student teachers must do the following tasks: 1. Student teachers have responsibilities and duties against institution, practice school, students and his or her own self. 2. To have good communication and cooperation with mentor teacher and school directors. 3. To do the tasks assigned by mentor teacher in time and as planned. 4. To obey the rules of practice school. 5. To use materials effectively and keep them in save. 6. To be tolerant with students and have good commend of managing the class. 7. To guide and lead students to work in collaboration manner. 8. To use time affectively and develop his or her teaching skills and knowledge. As seen, those recommendations for student teachers in

the supervision handbook are superficial explanations. The guidance book does not give concrete samples of communication with students and how to cooperation with students and mentor teachers. There is needed a deeper explanation for student teachers and mentors.

Fourteen out of 22 respondents proposed some suggestions for ideal training such as spending the last term of academic program in schools, offering in-service training to mentor candidates. Accreditation agents such as NCATE (2010) propose a long time in practicum process. It underlines that student teachers learn teaching in the field well and effectively. "Intern teacher" term is nowadays being expressed by education experts in Turkey, which includes full participation of student teachers in teaching activities in the last year of the their undergraduate education, completely in practice school under the guidance of supervisor.

CONCLUSION

It is important to emphasize that the results of the study provide a baseline to understand what the current practices are in a sample of teacher education programs in Turkey in order to better understand how teacher education programs select and train mentor teachers in relation to the student teaching curriculum. Though the response was relatively low, it does give us sufficient data to form a picture of mentor's work and learning in teacher education programs in Turkey. It is possible to conclude that teacher education programs are not doing well in relation to either the national program expectations or the best practice literature when it comes to selecting, preparing, and situating mentor teachers in the student teaching component of the programs. If field experience is, indeed, the most important component of a teacher education program, and mentor teachers play a vital role in shaping prospective teachers, it is imperative that the selection and training of mentor be systematized. Teacher education program coordinators should be partners in selecting and training mentors along with school principals. Selection criteria should be used that are in keeping with the results of research done in this area, that is, far more rigorous than current practice. This research found out that, in practice, principals are the most influential persons in the selection of mentor teachers and often they act on the basis of criteria other than those that would best serve the student teachers.

According to the data, considerable part of mentor teachers are not volunteers. This a problematic situation for offering an effective guidance and mentoring service. So being a volunteer is significant point for mentors. Mentors should be selected among volunteers, otherwise it will be difficult to get a good result from mentors.

The data from this study of a sampling of teacher education programs across Turkey reinforces the belief that teacher education institutions need to scrutinize the curriculum of their school experience course, their selection and professional development programs for mentors, and their compensation of mentors. If teacher education in Turkey is to remake itself around a clinical practice model, teacher educators cannot afford to continue business as usual. That change will not be easy, but the success of future teachers demands it.

The researcher recommends that some research be done about practice schools, university supervisors and their roles, and development program for supervisors.

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