

Department of Primary Education Students' Opinions Regarding the Necessity of Graduate Education

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ABSTRACT Today, increasing importance of knowledge and not considering teacher as the only source of knowledge, changes the role of teacher dramatically. Teachers need to improve themselves continuously to match the demands of the roles future brings them. To improve oneself as a teacher requires pursuing life-long learning as a principle, and attaining professional skills like providing more student-centered educational conditions and environments to students and contributing to their multi-dimensional development. Higher education, especially graduate education has a great role to help the teacher with this task. The aim of this research is to obtain primary teachers' opinions regarding the necessity of graduate education. The sample of the research consists of 82 pre-service teachers who were enrolled to Dumlupinar University department of primary education during the 2010-2011 academic year. The research using the survey analysis methodology is descriptive in nature. Data were collected through the survey, as developed by the researcher. Based on the results, 43.9% of the candidates believe graduate education is somewhat necessary while 35.4% believe the reason for pursuing a graduate education is to continue professional development and 45.1% of them would like to pursue graduate education. On the other hand, 48.8% of the candidates want to pursue graduate education to develop their higher-order thinking skills and 45.1% of them want to receive graduate education to obtain old/new knowledge and skills in their own field. These results are important in terms of understanding the base of the criteria which primary teacher candidates' point of views are being shaped by regarding graduate education as well as measure the level of their desire to pursue graduate education.

INTRODUCTION

Currently, in the face of rapid changes and developments, education systems make effort to train more qualified man power. The fundamental reasons for the increasing importance of education are necessity for life-long learning and its contribution to the training of individuals at a required level. Additional studies have focused on exploring technological creativity (Lin et al. 2013). Since intuitive conceptions are grounded on personal experience, educational environments should expose to re-experiencing (Psycharis et al. 2013). The main function of this contribution is undertaken by the teacher, who is the most strategic element of the system. Teachers and the services provided by them play a quite important role in a country's development. Education systems require considering individual differences while planning learning environment. In this process focus has always been on learn-

ing styles, approaches, strategies etc. So far assessment preferences of students have been ignored (Dogan 2013). The effect of a teacher can be measured by the investments he or she made for his or her development during pre-service or in-service. To obtain better results during the self-development of teachers and improve their service quality, higher education has major responsibilities. Increasing the number of services higher education provide for teacher training and development and the quality of these services will provide a foundation for teachers to develop themselves during the process of life-long learning. Since, scientific advancement and knowledge production lies at the basis of development, the major factor for knowledge production is to adapt the new conditions of changing and developing world.

Primary aspect of this adaptation is that teachers continue individual and academic developments because in order to advance, a society must improve teachers' qualifications who are entrusted with society's next generations (Aytac 2000; George et al. 2002; Guskey 2002; Erden and Anilan 2000). Therefore, teachers who are expected to educate individuals at an expected level should renew their professional development to meet the responsibilities, duties, and

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roles demanded by the developments in every aspect of the society. In Turkey, teachers continue their self-development processes institutionally in two platforms. First one of these platforms is the in-service education provided to teachers by the ministry and the second one is the graduate education provided by the universities before service.

In Turkey, Ministry of National Education organizes the activities (In Service Trainings) regarding teachers' vocational professional education. However, these activities are often institutional, routine and instead of being complementing to each other, they are conducted in an unconnected way (Yasar 2000; Boydak and Dikici 2001; Yilmaz et al. 2004; Seferoglu 2005; Yalin 2005). Therefore, these activities requiring effort, time, energy and money in teacher development cannot meet the requirements and reach the purposes completely. In particular, courses are being provided to limited number of participants because they organized on the central level and indicated in annual activity plans. This makes it difficult, almost impossible, for the participants in different areas of the country working in different schools with different physical and social conditions to benefit from in-service activities conducted by the center.

Teachers receive the necessary education in their fields during their pre-service training at the universities and begin their positions, yet the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they gain during their education cannot keep up with the next generations' changing technology and accumulated knowledge after a while. Therefore, the continuity of education brings out the necessity of scientific functioning and updating for both educators and learners. Graduate education, provided by universities after license programs, has taken on the task to deliver these updates. Graduate education consists of educational activities like master and doctoral programs in addition to proficiency in art and specialization in medical fields. They are open to everyone who would like to improve themselves as professionals. However, this fundamental task of the universities' aims to train scientists follows a path towards the specialization in fields (YOK 1982; Karakucuk 1987; Saban 2000; Sevinc 2001; Alhas 2006).

In graduate education providing deeper understanding of knowledge, skills and attitudes are targeted the given training provides high-level contributions to individuals like the qualifications in their professional fields, improving

their potentials, informing them regarding the new developments in their fields, providing opportunities to realize and correct their shortcomings, helping them approach knowledge in a more scientific manner and improving their knowledge productions and processing skills. People who receive this education are expected to comprehend the problems regarding their basic fields and to produce solutions to these problems and contribute to the education of the type of people in an expected manner. Graduate education aims to train people with high qualifications and provide teachers, who will shape the future of our society, and advance education by exceeding the priority of training scientists exclusively. Teachers have to improve their professional skills. The task of the universities here is that to provide these services at teachers' convenience.

Especially accommodating many different fields, and undertaking the responsibility to get to know the students out of teaching environment, interacting and communicating with them at their own level, and approaching students as a whole to support their development the field of primary teaching is a continuously developing multi-disciplinary field (Kacan 2004; Erisen 1998; Ekiz 2006; Erkilic 2007).

METHODOLOGY

The aim of this research is to put forth the opinions of the primary teachers who constitute the backbone of the basic education and the opinions of the graduate school candidates which are factors in the developments of the vocational abilities determining the quality of the education they provide.

In the research a survey model has been used since the primary teacher candidates' opinions about the necessity of graduate education were described in a quantitative way.

Pattern of the Study

The sample of the research consist of randomly selected 82 primary teacher candidates who were pursuing a degree during the 2010-2011 academic year at Dumlupinar University in the primary education department.

Implementation

In this research, a survey has been used to screen the candidates' opinions regarding the necessity of graduate education. The survey

was developed by the researchers and considering the recent literature and by developing original items, 52 items in the original form were reduced to 33 items. The continuity coefficient was determined by applying the survey to 30 candidates 3 weeks apart and based on the item analysis, items with the correlation lower than 0,30 between total score and item score were removed from the survey (3 items). Finally, the reliability coefficient Cronbach alpha value was calculated as 0.93. It is preferred to reach a Cronbach alpha value of 0.80. The Cronbach alpha value suggests that the survey can be considered as reliable. The 5-point Likert scale was used in the survey question structure.

Data Collection and Assessment

After the survey took its final form, copies of it were distributed to the 82 candidates who had been randomly selected. Data were analyzed, using SPSS 15.0 program. Statistical techniques such as frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation and variance analysis were used during the analysis of the data. Degrees of opinions expressed in the survey questions are "I do not agree," "I agree with a little," "sometimes I agree," "I agree with most of the time," and "always agree." The research is limited to the participants in the sample, 2010-2011 academic year and the survey items.

FINDINGS

The findings regarding the opinions of the sample teacher candidates about the necessity of graduate education are presented. Frequency and percentages of the answers given to the survey items are evaluated.

Table 1 shows that 43.9 percent of the teacher candidates believe the necessity of graduate education "a little." It is observed from Table 2 that 35.4 percent of the teacher candidates think

Table 1: Level of belief in the necessity of graduate education

	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>X</i>	<i>Ss</i>
I do not believe	3	3.7	3.63	0.94
I believe very little	1	1.2		
I believe a little	36	43.9		
I believe	25	30.5		
I believe a lot	17	20.7		
Total	82	100.0		

Table 2: Reason for receiving a graduate education

	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>X</i>	<i>Ss</i>
To pursue a professional development	29	35.4	2.32	1.31
To become an academician	23	28		
To jump status	10	12.2		
To realize an ideal	14	17.1		
Other	6	7.3		
Total	82	100.0		

Table 3: The state of wanting to receive a graduate education

	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>X</i>	<i>Ss</i>
Yes. I want to	37	45.1	1.69	0.71
Undecided	33	40.2		
No. I do not want to	12	14.6		
Total	82	100.0		

Table 4: Priority to receive a graduate degree

<i>To develop higher order thinking skills</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>X</i>	<i>Ss</i>
Never	1	1.2	4.26	0.88
Rarely	3	3.7		
Sometimes	9	11		
Often	29	35.4		
Always	40	48.8		
Total	82	100		

Table 5: Priority to receive a graduate degree

<i>To gain old-new knowledge and skills for success</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>X</i>	<i>Ss</i>
Rarely	5	6.1	4.17	0.91
Sometimes	13	15.9		
Often	26	31.7		
Always	37	45.1		
Total	81	98.8		
M. System	1	1.2		
Total	82	100		

the reason for receiving graduate education is to pursue professional development.

It is found that 45.1 percent of the teacher candidates want to receive graduate education (Table 3). Table 4 reveals that 48.8 percent of the teacher candidates prefer graduate education to develop higher-order thinking skills. From Table 5 it is found that 45.1 percent of the teacher candidates prefer graduate education to gain old-new knowledge and skills for success.

The variance analysis differentiation of priority of graduate education based on candidates

desire to receive a graduate education. There is a statistically significant difference at $p < 0.5$ level between the candidates who would like to receive graduate education to prove their self-confidence, to develop higher-order thinking skills, to practice their profession more fondly, to be more competent with material design and development and to produce a work related to their field compared to the candidates who are undecided regarding to receive graduate education (Table 6).

DISCUSSION

According to the result of this research aiming to determine the opinions of primary teacher candidates regarding the necessity of graduate education, 43.9 percent of the candidates believes in the necessity of graduate education slightly. Only 20.7 percent of the candidates strongly believe. Based on this result, almost more than half of the candidates remain undecided regarding the necessity of the graduate education. Two

Table 6: The differentiation of priority of graduate education based on candidates desire to receive a graduate education

Items	Levels	N	Mean	Std. deviation	Levene statistic	Df	Sig.
<i>To Prove Self-esteem</i>	Yes. I want to	37	4.10	1.04	2.15	2.78	0.12
	Undecided	33	3.39	1.32			
	No. I do not want to	12	4.09	1.13			
	Total	82	3.81	1.21			
<i>To Gain Higher Order Thinking Skills</i>	Yes. I want to	37	4.51	0.69	0.30	2.79	0.74
	Undecided	33	3.93	1.02			
	No. I do not want to	12	4.41	0.79			
	Total	82	4.26	0.88			
<i>To be More Competent With Material Design and Development</i>	Yes. I want to	37	4.08	0.89	0.32	2.79	0.72
	Undecided	33	3.51	0.97			
	No. I do not want to	12	3.33	0.98			
	Total	82	3.74	0.97			
<i>To Produce Work Related to Their Field</i>	Yes. I want to	37	4.10	0.90	1.17	2.79	0.33
	Undecided	33	3.42	1.06			
	No. I do not want to	12	3.91	0.79			
	Total	82	3.80	0.94			
			<i>Sum of squares</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>Mean square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
<i>To Prove My Self-esteem</i>	Between groups		9.867	2	4.933	3.551	.033*
	Within groups		108.355	78	1.389		
	Total		118.222	80			
<i>To Gain Higher Order Thinking Skills</i>	Between groups		6.059	2	3.0294124		.020*
	Within groups		58.039	79	.735		
	Total		64.098	81			
<i>To Practice the Profession More Fondly</i>	Between groups		9.065	2	4.532	3.361	.040*
	Within groups		106.545	79	1.349		
	Total		115.610	81			
<i>To Be More Competent with Material Design and Development</i>	Between groups		7.956	2	3.978	4.511	.014*
	Within groups		69.666	79	.882		
	Total		77.622	81			
<i>To Produce a Work Related to Their Field</i>	Between groups		8.333	2	4.167	4.537	.014*
	Within groups		72.545	79	.918		
	Total		80.878	81			

* $p < 0.05$

reasons can explain this: First, candidates desire to be appointed as a teacher right away and perceive graduate education as a continuation of the license program; second, they do not know much about what kind of benefits graduate education might provide them

Based on the results of this research, 35.4 percent of the teacher candidates think the reason for them to want to receive graduate education is to pursue professional development. This was followed by becoming an academician and 'realizing an ideal' items. It is a satisfactory outcome to observe that most of the candidates perceive graduate education as effective for pursuing professional development. However, this creates a contrasting condition to previously stated result. Even though 43.9 percent of the candidates perceive graduate education necessary for professional development, it is significant that they remain pessimistic about the necessity of graduate education. If they have the understanding that graduate education is for professional development, it would be expected of them not to be hesitant about receiving graduate education. The reasons for this situation need to be researched. It is possible that candidates know the effect of graduate education on professional development while being pessimistic about the necessity of it because they believe they can complete their professional development entirely via in-service trainings.

It is observed that 45.1 percent of the teacher candidates would like to receive graduate education. While almost half of the candidates believe graduate education is necessary, just "a little", again almost half of them want to receive a graduate education. Based on this result, it can be assumed that candidates enter the graduate education either considering priorities like professional development, becoming an academician, realizing their ideals or to jump status or they think graduate education as an alternative in case they were not appointed as teachers.

In terms of teaching skills, candidates prefer graduate education to develop higher-order thinking skills (48.8%) and to gain old-new knowledge and skills to succeed in their fields (45.1%) this result also supports the reason for receiving graduate education (pursue a professional development).

There is a statistically significant difference favoring candidates who would like to receive graduate education, to build their self-esteem, to

develop higher-order thinking skills, to practice their profession more fondly, to be more proficient with designing and developing materials, and to produce work related to their field, compared to the candidates who do not want to receive graduate education or undecided on this subject.

CONCLUSION

When the results are considered, by giving information regarding the graduate education to the prospective teachers before they graduate, helping them to gain competency in scientific knowledge and lifelong learning philosophy prior to service, guiding them regarding to both personal and institutional experiences for their professional development throughout their lives and helping them to understand the inseparable nature of theory and practice the primary teachers, who will provide an academic perspective to their students and provide a foundation for them develop skills to obtain and process knowledge, should be encouraged to receive graduate education especially.

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