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WHAT IS THE ROLE OF ASSIGNMENTS IN EDUCATING SECONDARY SCHOOL HISTORY TEACHERS IN ENGLAND?

İngiliz Tarih Öğretmenlerinin Yetiştirilmesinde Ödevlerin Rolü Nedir?

İsmail H. DEMİRCİOĞLU

*Karadeniz Teknik Üniversitesi, Fatih Eğitim Fakültesi, Ortaöğretim Sosyal Alanlar
Eğitimi Bölümü, Tarih Eğitimi Anabilim Dalı, Akçaabat, Trabzon,
demircioglu61@yahoo.com*

ÖZET

İngiltere’de Birmingham Üniversitesi’nde ortaöğretim tarih öğretmenlerinin eğitimi ortalama 36 hafta süren üniversite ve uygulama okullarına dayalı çalışmalardan oluşmaktadır. Bu süre zarfında tarih öğretmeni adayları bir dizi farklı çalışma yaparlar. Bu çalışmalardan bir tanesini tarih öğretimi ve genel eğitim konularını kapsayan ödevlerdir. Bu ödevler, tarih öğretmeni adaylarına, tarih öğretimi ve eğitim alanındaki temel bilgi ve becerileri kazandırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Buna ilaveten, bu çalışmalar aracılığıyla eğitim fakültelerindeki öğretim elemanları da öğretmen adaylarının gelişimi izleme şansına sahiptirler. Bu makalede, ilk aşamada, İngiliz ortaöğretim tarih öğretmeni yetiştirme sisteminde ödevlerin yeri ortaya konacaktır. Daha sonra, İngiliz tarih öğretmeni adaylarından yapmaları istenen ödevlerin tanıtımı yapılarak bir ortaöğretim tarih öğretmeni yetiştirme programının ödevleri derinliğine incelenecektir. Son olarak ülkemiz tarih öğretmeni yetiştirme sistemi için bazı önerilerde bulunmaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Yazılı çalışma, Öğretmen Eğitimi, Tarih Öğretmenlerinin Eğitimi

ABSTRACT

In England, secondary school history teacher education courses last around thirty-six weeks and consists of both university and school-based studies at the university of Birmingham. Throughout the 36 weeks, student teachers are required to be involved in a variety of different activities one of which is preparing assignments concerning the teaching of history and general educational issues. In the teacher preparation process in England, assignments are one of the important components because they provide advantages for both student teachers and teacher educators. In this paper, first of all, it is intended to examine the role of assignments in educating secondary school history teachers. Secondly, a general overview is given about the kind of assignments which English secondary school history students are required to undertake and then specifically assignments for a secondary school teacher education course in history are examined in depth. Finally, in the conclusion, some recommendations for Turkey are made.

Key Words: Assignment, Teacher Education, Educating Secondary School History Teachers

1. Introduction:

In the teacher preparation process in England, assignments provide advantages for both student teachers and teacher educators. The benefit of assignments for student teachers can be listed as follows. First of all, they force student teachers to think professionally because in order to write assignments, student teachers have to gather data and then think about this data and process it. Also, they have to draw conclusions from the data gathered. This means that they have to work to meet high academic standards. Another words, they have to demonstrate that they are thinking professionally in their assignments, which is important for a teacher because thinking professional and expressing ideas professionally is a crucial feature of an effective educator (Slater, 1992, pp. 1-2).

Secondly, assignments help student teachers to understand some issues in depth regarding the teaching of history and teaching in general because in order to write them they have to know the literature on the topic of each assignment. This means that they must gather knowledge on different issues before they begin their teaching practice. In addition to this, in England, some of the assignments are designed to encourage the history student teachers to explain what they are doing in the classroom how and why. In other words, they use examples in their assignment from their own teaching. For instance, they prepare assignments regarding visual aids and ICT (Information Communication Technology). In preparing these, they are expected to explain the role of visual aids and ICT in the teaching of history and how they have used their prepared visual aids and ICT in their teaching. In sum, student teachers are expected to show a thorough understanding of the teaching of history and other more general school issues necessary for becoming a competent history teacher. In their assignments they have also the chance to describe how they have implemented what they have learnt. In addition to this, student teachers can learn some educational issues in theory through written assignments before teaching practice, which could help them to develop the latter. In other words, assignments call for an interaction between theory and practice. Finally, student teachers write some of their assignments during teaching practice, which helps develop a 'reflective practitioner' someone who tries to make his or her teaching better in the light of his/her experience. For instance, they have to explain what their teaching was like in the classroom. In doing so, they can recognise their mistakes in the light of a critical perspective and try to deal with them later.

As mentioned above, assignments provide benefits for teacher educators as well because they are the one of the important tools of assessment in teacher education

courses. In addition to this, educators can easily monitor their student teachers progress through assignments.

2. Assignments of history PGCE (Post Graduate Certificate Secondary Education) courses in England:

History student teachers in England are required to write a variety of different assignments throughout their courses. The number of assignments which student teachers were required to write varied from one PGCE course to another between four and eight. According to a recent study the majority of English secondary school history student teachers were required to write some of the following assignments: Assessment, Classroom management, Subject knowledge, IT (Information Technology), Gender, Race, Lesson preparation development, Visual aids, Purpose of national curriculum development, Evaluating and planning lessons, Purpose of school history, Producing, using and evaluating sources, Reflection on the nature of history, How young people learn history, Some aspects of teaching history, The place of history in the national curriculum, Preparing sources and materials, Study units, Writing about specific teaching methodology, Effective teaching and learning, Language and diversity, Curriculum development and assessment and critical reviews of the the teaching of history, Schemes of work, Pupils' activities, Historical knowledge, Curriculum, Preparation and evaluation, Professional studies, Academic history, National curriculum document, Explanation of the aims and objectives of National Curriculum history with reference to History in the National Curriculum, Explanation of the use of visual aids in the teaching and learning history, Putting together a selection of sources aimed at a particular age and ability range with in KS3 (Key Stage 3) or GCSE (General certificate of Secondary Education) and explaining how these could be used to meet the requirements using sources in an historical enquiry (Demircioğlu, 1999, pp.186-187).

As can be seen from the above list, history student teachers were under a requirement to write assignments on different topics in the teaching of history and on general educational issues which are chosen to help student teachers become competent history teachers.

3. Assignments of Birmingham University History PGCE Course:

At the Birmingham university history PGCE course, student teachers were required to write eight assignments in 1998/9 (Grosvenor and Watts, 1998, pp. 9-17). These assignments are as follows:

3.1. Assignment 1:

Assignment 1 is concerned with the explanation of objectives of the National Curriculum history with reference to history in the national curriculum. Through this assignment, student teachers are required to be aware of the regulations of the national curriculum history and its aims and how these regulations are carried out at the schools. This assignment, which must be 2000 words at least and must be handed in just before going on the first placement, is quite important because student teachers have to gain a broad knowledge of what they teach, why they teach it and how they teach before becoming a teacher. Through this assignment, it is expected that they will have assimilated the content and objectives of the history national curriculum in depth.

3.2. Assignment 2:

Assignment 2 is composed of two parts, assignment 2(a) and assignment 2(b). Assignment 2(a) is devoted to the use of visual aids in the teaching and learning of history, and student teachers are required to prepare some suitable visual aids for use in their teaching. Additionally, they must explain how to use these material successfully. In this study, visual aids should consist of three at least of the following: timeline, map, diagram, plan, graph, drawing, cartoon and use of picture or photographs (Grosvenor and Watts, 1998, p. 10). Through this study, student teachers have to present their work before going on their first placement are expected to explain why and how they use visual aids and why they are important in the teaching of history. This study is quite an important one because “Visual Aids are an important dimension of bringing history to life, making the abstract concrete and conveying understating quickly and simply” (Watts, 1997, p. 11). For this reason, student teachers have to learn how to create and use such materials during the course.

Assignment 2(b), is concerned with putting together a selection of sources aimed at a particular age and ability range within KS3 or GCSE and explaining how these could be used to meet the requirement to use sources in an historical inquiry (Watts, 1997, p.8). This part of Assignment 2 is crucial because historical enquiry and using sources, which provides crucial skills for children in understanding and gaining life skills, is required both KS3 and GCSE history. Besides this, student teachers are required to observe how the sources are used in lessons during teaching practice and to describe their ideas regarding their observation in a university seminar (Watts, 1997, p.8). This assignment helps to the student teachers to reflect on ways of using sources effectively and also why

it is important to pitch them at the right level.

3.3. Assignment 3:

This assignment contains two sections, Assignment 3(a) and Assignment 3(b), which concern the major equal opportunities issues and how the teaching of history might help pupils' understanding of them. Assignment 3(a) is about what major equal opportunities issues are considered to be important in teaching. In this study, it is expected that student teachers should explain firstly how history teaching might help pupils' understanding of equal opportunities issues. Secondly, they are asked to report on how they taught about gender and diversity experience in key element 2 of the Programme of Study for the KS3 in at least four different lessons (Grosvenor and Watts, 1998, pp.12-13). These assignments must be about 2500 words in total, and Assignment 3(a) must be handed in by the end of the Autumn term. Assignment 3(b) must be in by the end of the Easter holiday (Watts, 1997, pp. 8-9).

Through these two assignments, student teachers are expected to gain understanding and knowledge regarding the treatment of race, gender and class which are quite important when history is taught, especially in a multicultural society. Also, it makes them aware of the importance of using different sources and ensuring that their material covers pupils of all abilities, races, gender, social class and levels of disability. Further, the assignment aims to make the student teachers examine the importance of history when issues of equal opportunities arise.

3.4 Assignment 4:

This assignment concerns information communication technology and comprises three parts, (a), (b) and (c). They are about using computers to produce suitable material for the teaching of history and developing communication and research skills. In this context, through Assignment 4(a) student teachers are required to explain the implications of the National Curriculum requirements for the use of ICT in history. Additionally, in assignment 4(b), which requires student teachers to compare two examples of software in the previous course, student teachers are expected to build up a history ICT portfolio as directed in their ICT session (Grosvenor and Watts, 1998, pp. 13-14). Through Assignment 4(c) they are required to discuss their experience of the practicalities of using ICT in the history classroom. Together these studies must be about 2000 words long. The Assignments 4(a) and 4(b) must be handed in early in the spring term but assignment 4(c) is done after the second teaching placement (Watts, 1997, pp. 9-10).

These assignments are very important because Information Communication

Technology has become a crucial part of teaching, especially the teaching of history and history teachers are expected to use computers to produce new materials and make history lessons more interesting and comprehensible. Besides this, CD Roms have much interesting information which would be useful for every history teacher and it is important that the history teacher should aware of new CD Roms; and this will also help them to plan their lessons more effectively. For this reason, history student teachers should be taught how to use ICT for the teaching of history, using such skills as word processing, data handling and numeracy which are cross-curricula.

3.5 Assignment 5:

Assignment 5 is concerned with compiling an assessment portfolio demonstrating the application of history assessment criteria to assessment and its recording and reporting at KS3, GCSE (and A level if possible) and it is required to show how these feed into future planning (Grosvenor and Watts, 1998, pp. 14). This assignment is a new one and student teacher have been required to write it since 1998 because these criteria were emphasised by the Standards for the Award of Qualified Teacher Status. Besides this, assessment, recording and reporting are crucial skills for a teacher and every student teacher has to know how to deliver these skills.

3.6 Assignment 6:

The main objective of this assignment is to explain the criteria for GCSE history, and through it, student teachers are required to comment on how some of the criteria have been met in three different lessons they have taught or observed. Student teachers may use one homework or piece of course work instead of one of the lessons if they wish (Grosvenor and Watts, 1998, pp.14-15). This study must be about 1500 words and handed in by the end of the Easter holiday (Watts, 1997, p. 11). Through this assignment, student teachers are expected to gain experiences regarding GCSE which are quite important for KS3, since secondary school history teachers have to be competent concerning GCSE criteria and how to meet these criteria. The student teachers should understand how GCSE is assessed in areas such as level response marking.

3.7 Assignment 7:

Assignment 7 consists of several topics, namely describing and analysing the basic issues of special needs or the basic issues of assessment, the basic issues of classroom management, and especially the basic issues of pastoral care in teaching and learning. One of these has to be chosen by student teachers who should use examples from their own teaching to illustrate their answer. Assignment 7 must be about 2500 words and

handed in just before they begin their extended professional experience (Watts, 1997, pp. 11-12). The above topics are important in teaching. For this reason, student teachers have to possess a knowledge and understanding of these topics and how they will affect their teaching and learning. These are areas which are part of the daily work of a teacher in England.

3.8 Assignment 8:

In Assignment 8, student teachers are required to prepare a teaching pack in collaboration with their peers, which is based on one of the study units for the KS3 and incorporates work prepared for a field trip. In this study, student teachers must pay attention to the following points. First, they must give their own description of how they planned the pack at the beginning of the work. This should include details of who put the material together, what age and ability of pupils is envisaged, what their aims are, which study unit the pack covers and how the objectives of the programme of the study are met. A grid should be added to show the outline of the course with reference to key issues; concepts; content; perspectives; key elements; teaching and learning methods and activities; resources; links with other subjects.

In this teaching pack, textbooks can be used as resources. In addition to this, student teachers use some other resources and their own worksheets which demonstrate clearly that they have thought about both how to address some of the key issues and requirements of the Study Units and Programme of Study (Watts, 1997, pp. 12-13) Through this study unit, student teachers are expected by this assignment to be experienced in producing a teaching pack, which is a quite important skill for a history teacher. Moreover, when the student teachers are preparing their pack, it makes them question concepts and perspectives which allows them to increase their understanding of these issues. It also prepares them for future planning when looking at fundamentals such as key elements. In addition to this, it helps them to learn how to prepare materials effectively and how to collect different resources and use them for the teaching of history.

At this point it should be noted that a recent empirical study suggested that the number of the assignments is very high in some history PGCE courses in England; history student teachers criticised this situation because it put them under a heavy workload and they did not have enough time to do other tasks properly during their course (Demircioğlu, 1999, p. 297).

4. Conclusion and implications for Turkey:

The assignments, as mentioned above, are one of the important strands of the

secondary school history teacher education courses in England. Through the assignments, student teachers are required to research and write about important issues regarding teaching and the teaching of history and the way in which children learn history and by these assignments they are expected to assimilate the above issues into a critical perspective. As mentioned earlier, student teachers are also expected to produce some materials regarding the teaching of history and use them during their teaching practice. At Birmingham University, the number and content of the assignments have been changing in the light of the experiences of course tutors and mentors and the regulations of the government. At this point, it should be noted that constant modification is one of the very important features of the English teacher education system. In other words, the teacher education system in England has been improving itself every year in the light of experiences and research.

In Turkey, there have been changes in the teacher education system in recent years. A further change should be that secondary school history student teachers should be required to write assignments on different aspects of the teaching of history and different educational issues, because of the benefits mentioned above. In addition to this, it should be noted here that the equipment and related documentary resources of every teacher education department should be augmented because at the moment it seems that the majority of Turkish secondary school history teacher education departments lack the technology and appropriate literature for different aspects of the teaching of history.

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