

What ICT Teachers Think About Their Profession and the Course They Teach: A Case Study

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Abstract: The purpose of this research is to investigate ICT teachers' opinions about current and future status of their profession and the ICT course they are teaching in Turkey. It was carried out based on the case study approach within the qualitative research context. Using a convenience sampling method, the participants were made up of 10 ICT teachers selected on a voluntary basis from the "Informatics Teachers Platform" group on Facebook. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using descriptive content analysis. According to the findings, participating ICT teachers think that they are seen as technical staff and thus they are not given sufficient and necessary value. This causes professional anxiety among the participants. They find the current ICT course insufficient in terms of content and quantity and consider an update on these issues. Some also worry that the course will lose its importance in the future. Moreover, they think that the role of ICT teachers in the context of technology integration in education is not given enough importance.

Keywords: ICT teachers, Opinions, Profession, Case study

Introduction

Over the years, there have been many political and practical changes made in the Turkish educational system about teaching children information and communication technologies (ICT) in terms of related course's name, credit, curriculum, textbooks and teachers. In addition to the reasons for the changes made in education, it is also important how the practitioners feel about and responds to these changes and specifically how these changes affect their professional identity. Recent studies shows that political changes affect the emotional status of teachers and they might have feelings of anger, sadness, boredom, desperation, insurgence, disappointment, pessimism and burn out. (Köysüren & Deryakulu, 2017). In fact, such feelings may result in disruptive consequences on their professional identity and behaviors.

Emerging on social identity studies, professional identity is generally known as a conscious awareness of oneself as a worker and it has three dimensions: how much one cares about his/her professional roles (centrality), how interesting he/she finds them (value), and how compatible he/she views them with his/her other roles (consonance) (Moore & Hofman, 1988). Likewise, Kelchtermans (1993) states that professional identity has five dimensions: self-image, self-esteem, work motivation, task perception and future perspective. Professional identity is known as one of the important factors affecting many worker behaviors such as job satisfaction, dedication, burnout, desire to continue the profession and coping with changes (Day & Sachs, 2004).

Knowles (1992) identified the professional identity of teachers as the images and concepts that teachers have about themselves. On the other hand, Beijaard, Meijer and Verloop (2004) recognized the sum of other people's expectations and ideas, perceptions of the concept of teacher and its roles in society, and the characteristics teachers attach importance to in their professional life. As aforementioned as an effect of professional identity, teachers' perception about their profession has an impact on their teaching methods, the way they develop themselves, and their attitudes towards educational changes (Volkman & Anderson, 1998).

The review of the related literature suggests that many empirical studies approached important factors in constructing teacher professional identity with specific lenses (Hsieh, 2010). One group of studies examines the importance of personal factors such as emotional experiences of learning and teaching and self-image (description of individual characteristics). The second group of studies focuses on the context of teacher education programs including establishing and promoting aspects of being a "teacher", conceptualizing curriculum and instruction and pre-service teaching experiences. One another group highlights the importance of site/school context consisting of classroom practices (instructional design, teacher-student relationships etc.) and colleague and administrative staff relations. The last group of studies emphasizes external factors such as theoretical and empirical works, state and national policies, and reform initiatives and changes. According to Day, Kington, Stobart, and Sammons (2006), emotional feelings have also forming effect on teacher professional identity.

Since the target population of this study includes ICT teachers, it is necessary to share brief background information and historical development of these teachers in Turkey. The Departments of Computer Education and Instructional Technologies (CEIT) were established in 1998 in higher education. These departments have been offering pre-service education to train ICT teachers. Ministry of Education assigns as many as needed among graduates to public schools. Since 2013, they have been teaching "Information Technology and Software" course in 5th and 6th grade as a compulsory course and 7th and 8th grade as a selective course. A plenty of regulations/changes have been performed by Ministry of National Education over years regarding the title of the IT courses, course hours, grade levels, status of the course as elective or compulsory, curriculum and resources. Additionally, ICT teachers were assigned with various duties and responsibilities as a result of a need of working staff guiding technology use in education. They are responsible for teaching students IT knowledge and skills, leading technology integration in the schools, helping teachers use educational technologies, being a

model for the ethical use of technology and keeping technical tools working properly (Çakır, Çebi & Özcan, 2013). They experience problems about the changes and regulations germane to their occupation. Review of previous research indicates several factors affecting them negatively such as increasing work-overload coming with reforms and changes, vague job definition, varying perception of others about them and their course, technical problems in ICT labs, inefficiency of the curriculum, problems in teacher education (Köysüren & Deryakulu, 2017). Of course these factors may eventually bring about emotional burnout as well as occupational stress impacting their professional identity. Therefore it is important to examine their perspectives towards teaching profession. In this manner, this study aimed to investigate ICT teachers' feelings and opinions about current and future status of their profession and the ICT courses they are teaching.

Method

This study was designed as a case study within the qualitative research paradigm. Case study is known as a detailed study of a specific subject, such as a person, group, place, event, organization, or phenomenon. It helps to understand situations resulting from a new policy initiative or service development (Yin, 2009). Therefore, such an approach was suitable for the aforesaid specific purpose of examining feelings and opinions of ICT teachers about their profession.

Using a convenience sampling, the participants were made up of 10 ICT teachers selected on a voluntary basis from the "Informatics Teachers Platform" group on Facebook. Of the participants, 7 were male and 3 were female. They have been working in junior high schools (5-8 grades) with teaching experience between 2-11 years. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect the data. Due to the COVID lockdown situation, the researchers could not meet face-to-face but rather they sent participants interview questions and asked them to return with their written answers. An inductive data analysis procedure was employed. The researchers first carefully read interview transcripts to allow participant's opinions to emerge from the data. Then they identified significant statements and coded them by suitable and meaningful concepts. After that, they determined which codes could create categories through sorting and combining. Finally, they generated the major themes under which findings were presented. The followings were the framing interview questions:

- What are your feelings about your occupation as an ICT teacher?
- Do you have concerns about the future of your profession?
- Do you think that ICT teachers are given sufficient value?
- How do you see your role in technology use in education?
- What do you think about the curriculum of the courses you are teaching?

Results

The first theme was named as "perceived themselves as technical staff". Most of the participants (80%) think that they are seen as technical staff by others in the schools. Of these, 80% are uncomfortable with this situation

whereas 20% state that they are not bothered. Some representative comments include:

“The task of ICT teachers is to teach their students IT. Having a good command of technology and problem-solving skills should not make them technical service.”

“I think we are seen as technical staff. Perhaps, we are seen as such because we have more technological knowledge than other teachers but this undermines our status.”

“...I am not really bothered about this issue because I like to spend time with computers.”

The second theme was named as “difficulties of ICT teachers”. The majority of the participants (90%) think that ICT teaching is not a comfortable profession or even a difficult branch. Some comments related to this theme include:

“It is not a comfortable profession. The fact that some teachers allow children to play games in class degrades the value of our profession.”

“We are a more difficult branch than other branches because we need to constantly improve ourselves and we always deal with technical problems.”

“We are in the age of informatics and informatics teachers have a lot of work to do, so I think it is wrong to consider it as a comfortable profession.”

The third theme was named as “under appreciation”. All participants think that ICT teachers are not given the value they deserve. Their comments were aligned with the notions of value and importance:

“I don’t think it is given much value on the basis of public schools and there really doesn’t seem to be much expectation. But if we look at private schools, ICT teachers are expected to constantly produce something, and as such, it improves the teacher. This increases the value of our teachers. We must also do our best, learn new things and pass them to our students so that our value is better understood.”

“If importance was given to us, the number of appointments would increase and informatics laboratories would be established in every school.”

The fourth theme was named as “role in technology integration”. Half of participants think that their assigned role and authority in technology integration in education is insufficient. Representative comments for this theme include:

“I think that we should be the leader in this regard, but I do not think that the authority given to us is sufficient.”

“We need to be the leading branch in this regard and I am not satisfied with the position of our role.”

“I can say that mostly the administration is planning something and if they can’t get out of the way, they consult me.”

The final theme was named as “the status of IT curriculum”. Most of the participant teachers (80%) do not find the course hours sufficient. Some of them elaborated their opinions as follows:

“I do not find the lecture hours sufficient. I think that at least 2 lesson hours should be extended.”

“I think that the lesson hours are few and insufficient. In my opinion, courses should be added

gradually for 4 hours in the 5th, 6th and 7th grades, and 2 hours in each of the 2nd, 3rd and 4th grades.”
“Coding education should be started from younger age thus ICT courses should be started in primary schools. We should do this if we want a youth that produces our own national technology”

A little more than half of the participants (60%) are not satisfied with the curriculum’s current state. Representative comments on this issue included:

“Our curriculum needs updating. In particular, I think that robotics and coding should be more emphasized.”

“There is too much verbal content, programming and project work can be increased”

“I am not satisfied with the curriculum; I think it is an outdated program. It should be updated and developed according to the present”

Almost half of the participants have concerns about the importance of IT course. The following are the sample comments on this issue:

“I do not think that the IT course is given enough importance and that it has a future because there are no questions in the university exams.”

“I think that this course will be removed from the school curriculum and it will be given in a place independent from the school.”

“I am worried now, but I think the value of the information technologies course will increase in the coming years.”

Conclusion

This study shows that participating ICT teachers are quite worried about the future of both their profession and curriculum of the courses they taught. They expect that their role in technology integration or digital transformation in teaching and learning in the schools is appreciated. They do not want to be seen as pure technical personnel in the schools. They want to fulfill their professions in a more esteemed, valuable and trouble-free way and that they desire to feel themselves as teacher. Therefore this research suggests that necessary support should be provided to overcome negative emotions of ICT teachers as well as to prevent their possible disruptive consequences on teachers’ professional identity.

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