A Study on Contribution of the Basic Training Course to the Professional Development of Probationary Teachers

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to make an evaluation on contribution of the basic training course to the profes-
sional development of probationary teachers. The study group consisted of 21 probationary teachers and 5 edu-
cation supervisors in Şanlıurfa province. The data were collected through semi-structured observation, focus
group interview and semi-structured interview methods. Descriptive analysis and content-analysis techniques
were applied to analyze the data. The findings showed that the basic training course had a positive effect upon
the professional development of probationary teachers in terms of organizational socialization, enlightenment
and psychological impact. However, it has been determined that there are some problems related to content,
planning and organizing, the learning environment, and teaching and learning process. Therefore, it can be said
that it is necessary to undertake new arrangements related to the basic training course by taking into account
the requirements of probationary teachers and the circumstances that the probationary teachers will face.

Key Words

Probationary Teachers, Probationary Training, In-service Training, Professional Development, Qualitative
Research, Basic Training Course.

According to the human resources management
approach, achievement in organizations signifi-
cantly depends on the development of human re-
sources (Çelik, 1991 cited in Ünal, 2000). One of
basic functions of this approach is the training and
development of staff (Karslı, 2004). Staff develop-
ment has come to be a field of critical importance
for today's organizations (Cooper & Kurland, 2002;
Özdemir, 2010). It is possible to say that teachers
are at the center of human resource in educational
organizations. As Fullan has stated, the effective-

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ness of classes and schools interrelates with the
training of teachers (Fullan, 2007). One of the ways
to improve the professional competences of teach-
ers is through in-service training.

In-service training is the training offered in order to
provide individuals working in private and public
organizations with the necessary knowledge, skills
and attitudes related to their tasks (Taymaz, 1997, p.
4). In the organizational sense, it refers to programs
in which experiences that ensure the learning of
behaviors contributing to the realization of orga-
nizational goals are provided (French, 1990 cited
in Aydın, 2011, p. 16). In-service training includes
training activities aimed at the professional devel-
opment of individuals that continues throughout
their working lives (Aytaç, 2000; Can, Akgün, &
Kavuncubaşı, 1995).

Rapid changes and developments in the fields of
information, technology and related fields have
made it obligatory to train and develop teachers
(Selimoğlu & Yılmaz, 2009; Vemić, 2007). It is not

possible for schools and teachers to be indifferent to changes in information (Özyürek, 1981; Selimoğlu & Yılmaz; Şişman, 2001). In addition, it is a fact that teachers need to be supported with in-service training concerning their continuously changing tasks, roles and responsibilities in the education system (Saban, 2000). The purpose of this training is to fulfill functions such as the accommodation of individuals to their jobs, renewing their knowledge and skills and preparing them for new circumstances (Kayabaş, 2008).

One of the in-service training types arranged by educational organizations and other organizations is probationary training (Aydın, 2011; Çevikbaş, 2002; Taymaz, 1997). No matter how qualified the training received by probationary teachers before service is, in-service training is regarded as a compulsory element of the probationary period. According to Yalçınkaya, teachers encounter various problems as they have just taken office, and they lack adequate experience (Yalçınkaya, 2002). Since probationary teachers encounter various difficulties and go through a transitional stage that may affect their entire professional lives, the probationary period is considered the most critical and difficult period for teachers (Balcı, 2000; Carter & Scruggs, 2001; Hoy & Woolfolk, 1990; Özonay, 2004). This process is regarded as an important stage for the socialization of teachers (Balcı; Güçlü, 1996; Hoy & Woolfolk; Veenman, 1984). It has been determined in previous studies that teachers newly taking office have encountered a wide range of difficulties in areas such as classroom management, student motivation, cooperation with parents (Veenman), the problems of individual students, confusion about theory and practice (Niebrand, Horn, & Holmes, 1992 cited in Friesen, 2002, p. 5), adapting to the profession (Korkmaz, Saban, & Akbaşlı, 2004; Yeşilyurt & Karakuş, 2011), adapting to the school, the differences between undergraduate education and its application (Yeşilyurt & Karakuş) and successful performance in the profession (Korkmaz et al.).

In Turkey, the probationary training of teachers consists of three stages: basic training, preparatory training and applied training. Basic training refers to the training offered to probationary officials in the matter of the common features and qualifications of public officials (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı [MEB], 1995b). The topics included within the scope of the basic training program are as follows (MEB, 1995a): "State Organization, Constitution and Public Service", "Legislation regarding Public Officials", "Turkish, Grammar and Official Correspondence Rules", "Public Relations", "Savings Measures and Effectiveness of Service", "Ataturk's Principles and the History of the Revolution" and the "National Security Information".

On reviewing the literature, it is seen that many studies have been carried out on the in-service training of teachers (Jones & Chronis-Tuscano, 2008; Kıldan & Temel, 2008; Özan & Dikici, 2001; Saiti & Saitis, 2006; Uçar, 2005; Uşun & Cömert, 2003; Wade, 1996). Many studies were conducted on topics such as the probationary training of probationary teachers and the problems encountered within this process (Carter & Scruggs, 2001; Ekinci, 2010; Erkoç, 2010; Friesen, 2002; Kartal, 2006; Okutan & Aydoğdu, 2009; Özonay, 2004; Şimşek, Kılıç, Arkan, & Yıldırım, 2009; Veenman, 1984; Yeşilyurt & Karakuş, 2011; Yıldırım, 2010). It is possible to say that these studies have covered the entire probationary training or basic and preparatory training (e.g. Kartal; Okutan & Aydoğdu; Özonay; Şimşek et al.). In Turkey, no study was found to cover only the basic training of probationary teachers.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to make an evaluation on contribution of the basic training course to the professional development of probationary teachers. In this context, an attempt was made to answer the following questions: *(i)* What are the benefits of the basic training course in terms of the professional development of probationary teachers? *(ii)* What are the problems with the basic training course?

Method

Research Model

The case study model was employed in the present research. The strength of this model is that it allows for an understanding of social processes particularly in organizations and it clarifies situations that cannot be adequately expressed through other models (Altunışık, Coşkun, Bayraktaroğlu, & Yıldırım, 2005).

Study Group

In the present study, the views of 21 probationary teachers from among probationary teachers fulfilling a duty in the "X" district of the Şanlıurfa province, and participating in the basic training course held in the same district between 22 January and 31 January 2010, and of 5 education supervisors fulfilling a duty in the same province, were sought. The probationary teachers in the study group were de-

termined through a maximum variation sampling method. The criterion sampling method was employed for determining the education supervisors. In the present study, the name of the district where the observation was made and the names of probationary teachers and education supervisors whose views were sought were disguised through coding.

Data Collection Instruments

Data were collected through semi-structured observation, focus group interview and semi-structured interview methods. Focus group interview refers to shedding light on events and situations through the interaction of the researcher and participants (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2005; Ekiz, 2009; Karasar, 1995; Punch, 2005). A teacher participated in the focus group interview as an administrator (research) assistant in order to note the opinions of the participants. Within the scope of the present study, a semi-structured observation was made for 20 hours in total in the A and B sections of the basic training course held in the "X" district of the Şanlıurfa province between 23 January and 30 January 2010 (10 hours in each section). Focus group interviews were held in the form of two different sessions, in each one of which 6 probationary teachers participated, between 5 June and 6 June 2010. Semi-structured interviews were carried out through the participation of 9 probationary teachers on 12–13 June 2010 and the participation of 5 education supervisors took place on 5 February 2011.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed by means of descriptive analysis and content analysis techniques. The descriptive analysis technique was employed in determining the study themes. Themes were determined by taking into account the questions used in the interview and observation processes. Sub-themes were determined by taking into consideration the stages of content analysis and by utilizing relevant studies in the literature (e.g. Arkan, Şimşek, Kılıç, & Yıldırım, 2010; Aydın, 2011; Kartal, 2006; Kocadağ, 2001; Okutan & Aydoğdu, 2009; Özonay, 2004).

Validity and Reliability

The following operations were performed in order to increase the validity and reliability of the present study: *(i)* Expert opinions were taken concerning the observation and interview forms. *(ii)* Pilot applications of interviews were conducted. *(iii)* Participation was on a voluntary basis. *(iv)* Neither a tape recorder nor a video recorder was used since the participants did not want such devices to be used. *(v)* The data of focus group interviews were noted by the research assistant. *(vi)* Interview notes were shown to the interviewees to confirm the accuracy of the notes. *(vii)* The researcher and an educationist coded the interviews and observation notes independently of one another *(viii)* Raw data and analyzed data were checked by an educationist. The reliability of the coding was calculated by use of the reliability formula suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) [Reliability = (Agreement / Disagreement + Agreement) X 100]. It was determined that correspondence between the two coders was over 90% in the coding of the interviews and the observation data used in both of the study questions.

Findings

Benefits of the Basic Training Course In Terms of the Professional Development of Probationary Teachers

The benefits of the basic training course in terms of the professional development of probationary teachers were expressed in three sub-themes:

Organizational Socialization: The benefits provided by the basic training course concerning this sub-theme were mentioned under six items. *Firstly*, the basic training course makes the adaptation of probationary teachers to their jobs easy (f=26). *Secondly*, teachers learn their rights and responsibilities regarding the job (f=22). *Thirdly*, through this course, probationary teachers learn hierarchical relations and how communications should be conducted (f=17). *Fourthly*, probationary teachers get acquainted and socialize with each other (f=16). *Fifthly*, probationary teachers exchange information (f=11). *Sixthly*, this course enables probationary teachers to take on the role of teaching (f=6).

Enlightenment: The benefits provided by the basic training course concerning this sub-theme were mentioned under seven items. *Firstly*, the basic training course enables probationary teachers to learn how to conduct official correspondence (f=26). *Secondly*, the basic training course enables probationary teachers to gain knowledge about legislation concerning public officials (f=26). *Thirdly*, probationary teachers learn how to carry out work and transactions related to their tasks (f=25). *Fourthly*, basic training course improves awareness of the task (f=25). *Fifthly*, sample events are narrat-

ed in the course (f=5). *Sixthly*, probationary teachers learn how to establish effective communication with parents (f=4). *Seventhly*, probationary teachers learn how to take savings measures (f=3).

Psychological Impact: The benefits provided by the basic training course concerning this sub-theme were mentioned under four items. *Firstly*, the basic training course has a positive impact on the spirits and psychology of probationary teachers (f=20). *Secondly*, it has a positive impact on the development of relations with school administrations (f=17). *Thirdly*, it has a positive impact on the development of self-confidence (f=15). *Fourthly*, the basic training course enables teachers to be motivated depending on the effective communication established by educators with teachers (f=10).

It was realized that the results of the semi-structured observations concerning the benefits of the basic training course corresponded to the interview results.

Problems with the Basic Training Course

Problems with the basic training course were expressed in four sub-themes:

Content: Problems with the basic training course concerning this sub-theme were mentioned in three items. *Firstly*, the basic training course covers some topics which probationary teachers already know about (f=26). *Secondly*, the teachers do not allocate space to current problems in the course program (f=10). *Thirdly*, adequate time is not allocated to topics related to legislation and application (f=7).

Planning and Organizing: Problems with the basic training course concerning this sub-theme were mentioned in eight items. *Firstly*, the course is not organized at the beginning of the appointment of probationary teachers to office (f=26). *Secondly*, probationary teachers and other officials are subjected to training in the same topics (f=20). *Thirdly*, the course is conducted during the holidays (f=10). *Fourthly*, the course announcement is made too late (f=8). *Fifthly*, probationary teachers coming from villages face accommodation problems (f=6). *Sixthly*, some people who are not competent in their fields are appointed as educators (f=2). *Seventhly*, no activity apart from discussing a topic is carried out in the course (f=1). *Eighthly*, course administrators do not pay adequate attention to the needs of probationary teachers (f=1).

Learning Environment: Problems with the basic training course concerning this sub-theme were mentioned in three items. *Firstly*, course attendees sit on student seats (f=24). *Secondly*, there is a heating/cooling problem in the course environment (f=23). *Thirdly*, the course is not held in an accessible and central place (f=22).

Learning and Teaching Process: Problems with the basic training course concerning this sub-theme were mentioned in four items. *Firstly*, there is a formal communication style between educators and course attendees (f=3). *Secondly*, course attendees are not active enough during discussions of a topic (f=3). *Thirdly,* there is no space for application while covering the topics (f=1). *Fourthly*, the basic training course is only regarded as a matter of form (f=1).

It was realized that the results of the semi-structured observations concerning the problems with the basic training course corresponded to the interview results.

Discussion

The results concerning the theme of the benefits of the basic training course in terms of the professional development of probationary teachers were discussed under three sub-themes:

Organizational Socialization

It was determined that the basic training course had a positive impact on the adapting of probationary teachers to their jobs, the learning of their rights and responsibilities regarding the job, the development of hierarchical relations, the acquaintance and socialization of probationary teachers, the exchange of information between probationary teachers, and to adopting the role of a teacher. Kartal (2006) conducted a study in which the majority of a study group consisted of teachers. In this study conducted by Kartal, it was determined that the basic and preparatory training made a medium-level contribution to probationary teachers' learning of their tasks and responsibilities, and made a high level contribution to probationary teachers' associating themselves with their profession. Çelik (2000, p. 56) defines organization socialization as "the process of learning and adapting to the values, norms, traditions and rules that make up the principles of an organization". When considered from this point of view, it can be said that the basic training course has a facilitating function in terms of the socialization of probationary teachers.

Enlightenment

It was determined that the basic training course enabled probationary teachers to gain knowledge concerning official correspondence, the "Legislation Regarding Public Officials", how to conduct work and the transactions related to the task etc., and their awareness concerning tasks they need to improve. In the study conducted by Okutan and Aydoğdu (2009) supporting these results, it was determined that teachers found topics such as "Legislation Regarding Public Officials", and "Official Correspondence Rules" covered in the basic training course were necessary if they were to meet the requirements of the profession. In the study carried out by Kartal (2006), it was determined that basic and preparatory training enabled probationary teachers, to a great extent, to learn their personal rights.

Psychological Impact

It was determined that the basic training course had a positive impact on the spirits and psychology of probationary teachers, the development of relations with school administrations, the development of self-confidence, and the motivation level of probationary teachers. In the study of Kartal (2006) corresponding to these results, it was seen that the basic and preparatory training made a great contribution towards probationary teachers loving their jobs more.

The results concerning the theme of the problems with the basic training course were discussed under four sub-themes:

Content

It was determined that in the basic training course, some topics already known by the probationary teachers were covered, the current problems of teachers were not allocated space within the scope of the program, and adequate time was not allocated to topics concerning legislation and application. It was found in some other studies that the probationary training program did not have an adequate content (Arkan et al., 2010; Kocadağ, 2001; Özonay, 2004; Yıldırım, 1997; Yıldırım, 2010). O'Sullivan (2001) and Özdemir and Yalın (1998) report that the effectiveness and productiveness of in-service training programs mostly depend on the ability of training programs to meet the requirements of the participants. The basic training course is still conducted according to a regulation issued in 1995 (MEB, 1995a, 1995b). Accordingly, the content of the basic training course should be re-arranged by taking into account today's conditions.

Planning and Organizing

It was seen that the following problems were encountered in the basic training course: the course is not organized at the beginning of the appointment of probationary teachers to office, probationary teachers and other officials are subjected to training in the same topics, the course is conducted during the holidays, the course announcement is untimely, teachers coming from villages face accommodation problems, and some people who are not competent in their fields are appointed as educators. In the study by Arkan et al. (2010) corresponding to these results, it was found that teachers found educators working in the probationary training program to be partially competent. In Yıldırım' study (2010), it was determined that the probationary training program was inadequate in terms of organization. In the study conducted by Uçar (2005), it was realized that in-service training activities were not carried out in appropriate time periods. In contrast to this finding, in the study conducted by Yalın (2001), 70% of the participants stated that the in-service training program was provided in appropriate time periods. The reason for this difference may derive from the fact that Yalın's study included courses conducted at a central level. Accordingly, this course should be arranged within a very short time following the appointment of probationary teachers.

Learning Environment

It was seen that the following problems were encountered in the basic training course: course attendees sit on student seats, there is a heating/cooling problem in the course environment, and the course is not conducted in an appropriate location. It was seen in some other studies that the learning environments where probationary training courses were conducted were not good (Arkan et al., 2010; Okutan & Aydoğdu, 2009), these environments did not have the features to make learning effective, the classrooms were small, the probationary teacher had to remain seated throughout, and these factors decreased the efficiency of the probationary training (Okutan & Aydoğdu). In studies conducted in the matter of in-service training, it was determined that training environments where in-service training activities were carried out were not good (Sezer, 2006; Uçar, 2005). Accordingly, national education administrators should enable basic training courses to be conducted in physically appropriate environments in appropriate locations.

Learning and Teaching Process

It was determined that the following problems were encountered in the basic training course: there is a formal style of communication between the educators and course attendees, course attendees are not active enough during the discussion of a topic, there is no space for application during the discussion of a topic, and the basic training course is regarded only as a matter of form. It was also seen in some other studies that probationary training was not adequate in terms of teaching processes (Yıldırım, 1997), and the teaching methods and techniques used in this training were neither appropriate nor sufficient (Arkan et al., 2010; Okutan & Aydoğdu, 2009; Özonay, 2004; Yıldırım, 2010). These results show the necessity for improving the learning and teaching process.

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