The Effectiveness of a Secondary Teacher Education Graduate Program According to Administrators, Faculty Members and Students

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Abstract

The purpose of this case study is to examine the effectiveness of a Secondary Teacher Education Graduate Program. We collected qualitative data through interviews with two graduate school directors, five department heads, 58 faculty members and five students at Ege University. We conducted a descriptive analysis technique on the data. According to the results, there are many problems concerning the program such as high quotas of students, unsatisfactory selection of students, lack of motivation for the program and the courses both among the students and the faculty members, insufficiency of the faculty members in the areas of knowledge and pedagogy, inefficiencies in the management of the courses (especially of the practical courses), lack of specific institutions and persons responsible for the program. Furthermore, the program does not reflect the innovations in teaching and the changes in secondary education. The participants mainly suggested administrative solutions for the program.

Key Words

Secondary Teaching, Teacher Training, Pre-service Teacher Education Curricula.

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Teacher training is one of the most significant factors that affect the quality of secondary education (Rots & Aelterman, 2008; Volante, 2006). In some countries, secondary teacher education is carried out at undergraduate level (e.g. Poland) and in some others at graduate level (e.g. the Netherlands) (Şahin, 2006). In France, teacher training is examination-focused but at the same time includes more teaching practice compared to its counterpart in Turkey (Foster, 2000). Akyüz (1993) and Eşme (2001) consider 1848-the date when Darülmuallimîn was opened, as a significant start for teacher training in Turkey (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı Öğretmen Yetiştirme ve Eğitimi Genel Müdürlüğü [MEB ÖYEGM], 1995). When secondary teacher training from this date until 1982 is scrutinized, it is observed that many institutions have been opened and closed, such as Darülmuallimîn-i Âliye, Yüksek Öğretmen Okulları, Eğitim Enstitüleri, and that the names of the institutions were changed. The secondary teacher education has been carried out by universities since 1982, first as pedagogical formation then as graduate programs. Secondary Teacher Education Graduate Program (STEGP) was initiated in 1997 (YÖK, 1998a; YÖK, 1998b; YÖK, 2005) constituting a shift to graduate studies, later, in 2007 and 2008 (YÖK, 2006; YÖK, 2008); some alterations were made (based on Resmi Gazete, 1983) to the titles, credits, and descriptions of the courses. Graduates from the faculties of science and faculties of arts can apply for the program and attend teacher education courses for three semesters. This article presents the results of a study that investigates the effectiveness of the 1997 version of this program which includes 14 courses of 45 credits for three semesters.

The studies which assess the program from a general point of view have revealed that STEGP have some benefits for the students (Aycan, Aycan & Türkoğuz, 2005; Çakıroğlu & Çakıroğlu, 2003; Deniz, Görgen & Şahin, 2005; Memduhoğlu & Topsakal, 2009), and most believe that the program has changed their perspectives (Aycan et al., 2005; Başer, Günhan & Yavuz, 2005). On the other hand, Başer et al. (2005), Eryılmaz (2005), Kaya-Şengören et al. (2007) and Ünal and Özsoy (2004) have set forth the insufficiency of the program in providing teaching competency. Additionally, in many studies, students have declared that they find the program duration long (Aycan et al., 2005; Başer et al., 2005; Deniz et al., 2005; Karakuş, 2008; Semerci & Çerçi, 2002, 2005). Karakuş (2008) and Aycan et al. (2005) set put forth that the students consider the program not as a graduate program but as a teaching certificate program (see, Kavcar, 1999).

Purpose

The study is a part of a longitudinal project (Ünver, Bümen & Başbay, 2008) that evaluates all the courses in the program and their effectiveness with regard to the views of the main stakeholders of the program (administrators, faculty members, students). However, this article only includes the answer to the question 'What are the views of the faculty members, students, and the administrators regarding the effectiveness of a STEGP?' Therefore, the aim of the study is to evaluate the effectiveness of a STEGP with regard to the perspectives of the main stakeholders.

Method

In this case study, single-case (holistic) design (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005; Yin, 2002) was conducted. Semi-structured individual and focus group interviews (Creswell, 2002) were carried out. Accordingly, individual interviews were carried out with the graduate school directors and focus group interviews with the other participants.

Participants

This program has been carried out in Ege University between 2005-06 Fall semester and 2006-07 Fall semester involving 308 students in 10 departments, two graduate school directors (Graduate School of Applied Sciences and of Social Sciences), five department heads, and 47 faculty members. 20 faculty members work at the Faculty of Education, 14 at the Faculty of Science, 12 at the Faculty of Arts, and one at the National State Turkish Music Conservatory. At the time of data collection, 11 of the faculty members were professors, eight were associate professors, 19 were assistant professors, and nine were instructors, four of whom held PhD degrees. While all graduate school directors and department heads participated in the study, the faculty members' participation rate average for all courses was 68%. Additionally, five graduate students from different departments were also interviewed.

Instruments

We prepared separate interview guides for administrators, faculty members, and students. The faculty member interview guide is based on the aims, contents, classroom activities and assessment of the courses in

the STEGP and the problems encountered in the courses along with their solutions. This guide is constituted of 14 open-ended questions. We have determined six open-ended questions for the administrator interview guide, taking into consideration their positions and roles in conducting the STEGP. For the student form, we made use of the above-mentioned interview guides and student questionnaires (Ünver et al., 2008).

Data Collection Process

At the end of each semester in which the STEGP was conducted, we conducted semi-structured focus group interviews (n=15) with the faculty members to evaluate the courses from the instructors' perspectives. In forming the focus groups, we tried to keep together the group members who have taught the same course in the related semester. Interviews took one and a half hours on average. For each course, one of the researchers conducted the interview and the other two asked questions when necessary and carried out the audio recordings.

At the end of the STEGP (during the study), we also conducted semi-structured focus group interviews with the department heads employed in the program. Additionally, in the last semester of the program, we made up a table in which there were the name, e-mail address and phone number of one student from every department who volunteered for an interview. Six months after the students graduated from the program (18 June 2007), we tried to contact each volunteer student through the personal information we got. However, only five of the graduates participated in the interview on the designated date.

Data Analysis

We used the *descriptive analysis* technique (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005: 223). At the beginning of the analysis process, we checked the transcriptions of all the audio recordings (a total of 18 interviews). Through the research questions and the interview guide, we made up a frame for the main themes. In order to find whether this frame and the analysis method determined would work, we carried out an analysis of two courses which we had chosen randomly. We discussed the questions and the problems arising in these analyses. We started the analysis of all the courses after coming to an agreement on the theme and method

we had determined. We decided to combine some of the themes and to exclude some of them in line with the quality of the data. At the end of the data analyses, after reconsidering the themes -without changing the content- we combined several of them and came up with two main themes (the problems and suggestions for solutions concerning the STEGP). Then, we reorganized the data for reporting and came to an agreement on the writing style and language. We decided to use "relevancy to the theme", "expressiveness" and "impressiveness" as the criteria in the selection of quotations. We carried out the analysis process by rotation. All through the analysis process, we asked for the ideas and suggestions (concerning method selection, coding and reporting) of a faculty member who was experienced in qualitative analysis but not involved in the research.

Results

Problems Concerning the STEGP

We mostly came up with results in which the participants pointed out problems concerning the program:

1. High quotas are one of the problems encountered at the beginning of the program (stated many times especially by the department heads and the faculty members). While the faculty members point out the difficulties of conducting a graduate program with classes of 40-50 persons, department heads complain of not being effective in decreasing the quotas.

2. According to the administrators and the faculty members, the student selection for the program is not satisfactory. In the interview that is one of the selection steps, the habit of asking questions concerning field knowledge as opposed to questions about teaching is a considerable problem.

3. Since the weekly course schedule is extended to different days of the week, it becomes a factor that hinders attendance on courses for students, most of whom have other jobs at the same time.

4. While the administrators and the faculty members point out the lack of motivation among the students for the program and the courses, the students associate this with the unwillingness of the faculty members.

5. It is remarkable that there are a lot of problems caused by the faculty members who have a significant role in conducting the program. First, the department heads state that they can hardly find faculty members for the courses in the program. Also, the faculty members complain of their weekly workload which causes them to feel inadequate in conducting the courses. Some of the faculty members were self-critical admitting that they do not follow common principles concerning the STEGP and the students. It can be understood from the explanations of some faculty members that since they think students are already in difficult circumstances they are likely to allow the students to pass, hold the exams earlier than on the designated date without following the exam schedule, and also tolerate non-attendance. One of the faculty members asserted that when few faculty members act like this, the students expect the same attitude from all the faculty members. Another self-criticism made by the faculty members is that there is not enough cooperation between the faculty members who teach the same course and between the faculty members and the participants in the teaching practice school.

6. The department heads state that there is a quality problem in the practical courses (School Experience I and II, Teaching Practice) since the selection of the teaching practice school and teachers are not satisfactory. The faculty members assert that the education facilities of the university are influential in conducting the teaching practice, for example the remuneration they receive for these courses is not enough to cover the expenses in carrying out the practice.

7. Students assert that they can fulfill their expectations about *improving oneself on a specific subject of study* with some of the courses but cannot with others. They think that the faculty member who teaches the course or the way the course is taught and the content are quite determinant at this point. In short, all the students think that the faculty member determines whether the course is efficient or not. The students criticize the faculty members not for carrying out some classes (although it is the students who desire this to be so), for their insufficient field knowledge, for not building good communication with the students, and finally for not being a good teaching model.

8. The administrators (graduate school directors and department heads) and the faculty members believe that the program is insufficient for the students to develop positive attitudes towards the teaching profession.

9. According to the students, the program does not reflect the innovations in teaching and the changes in the secondary education programs.

10. The problem which is put forth by the administrators and the faculty members is that the roles and responsibilities of the institutes and the staff in the program have not been identified. For this reason, they complain that it is not clear to which institute or to whom they can apply for solutions for the problems concerning the program.

11. All the participants think that the duration of the program (three semesters) is long.

12. All the participants think that this program is considered and applied as an undergraduate module rather than a graduate program.

13. According to the administrators, secondary teacher training is not taken seriously by the universities.

The Solutions Suggested by the Participants

The study revealed that the participants have offered suggestions that require administrative decisions rather than practical solutions:

1. It is seen that some informal methods (for example, taking the same course from another department, scheduling all the courses for a semester into two days, tolerating non-attendance) are applied for the non-attendance problem. Additionally, while the faculty members suggest that the advisory system be applied more effectively and that the students be asked whether they are going to attend the courses or not in the interview, one student suggests that the program be carried out in the evenings.

2. The administrators and the faculty members assert that that student quotas are not suitable for a *master's program*, that these high quotas decrease the quality of teaching and therefore the student quotas should be decreased immediately and.

3. One of the department heads declared that the faculty members also need professional guidance to increase knowledge about *teaching*.

4. The suggestion that the duration of the program should be shortened is expressed by all the participants. The faculty members consider the

fact that the students attend this program immediately after their undergraduate studies, the insufficiency of their socio-economic conditions and the fact that some courses in the program (for example, School Experience I and II) can be combined, as reasons for this suggestion.

5. Besides, most of the administrators believe that a lot of problems can be solved by establishing a Graduate School of Educational Sciences.

6. Whereas some faculty members (n= 3) stressing the importance of students adopting the program suggest that an '*orientation service*' should be given.

Discussion

The results point out thought-provoking results about the effectiveness of the program. First, the administrators and the faculty members complain about the high quotas of the departments (see, Crawford & MacLeod, 1990; Deryakulu, 1992; Devlet Planlama Teşkilatı [DPT], 2000; Erişti, 1998; Gözütok, 1988; Prosser & Trigwell, 1997). This also raises other problems such as lack of faculty members and classrooms for the courses. Üstüner (2004) also criticizes the implementation of these graduate programs while there are more students in the departments of physics, chemistry and biology in the faculties of education than the existing need for teachers. Therefore, one of the fundamental suggestions offered by the department heads and the faculty members to improve the program is that the high quotas should be decreased. For that reason, as Acat, Balbağ, Demir and Görgülü (2005) suggest, the quotas for the departments which offer fewer opportunities for the students to be assigned as teachers should be re-determined.

According to the administrators and the faculty members, the above-mentioned problems are encountered in student selection. Student selection for teacher education programs is considered to be the starting point for training qualified teachers (Koç, 2007; Öğretmen Yetiştirme Genel Müdürlüğü, 2008). Kavcar (2002) states that students should be selected for teacher education programs by a difficult exam and suggests that this exam should be conducted by the ÖSYM (Student Selection and Placement Center) and the interests and the attitudes of the candidates should also be evaluated (Kavcar et. al. 2007). According to Yenilmez and Acat (2005), personality tests, interest inventories, and

attitude scales that will determine the eligibility of candidate for the teaching profession should be applied in student acceptance.

Today, in the student acceptance for the STEGP, ALES (Academic Personnel and Postgraduate Education Entrance Exam) or LES (Postgraduate Education Entrance Exam) scores, undergraduate grade average, interview score (different grades for different universities) are taken into consideration. The criteria and their proportions can be set out as follows: ALES score minimum 55, which will constitute 50%, undergraduate grade average minimum 70, which will constitute 30% and the interview grade will constitute 20%. Also, in forming the jury for the interview, selecting one member from the faculties of Science or of Arts and two members from the faculties of Education who have taught in the related department can help to determine whether the candidates are eligible to be teachers in that specific field.

The problem of 'non-attendance' on which all participants agree, is caused according to the faculty members by the other jobs that students engage in whilst according to the students it is the weekly schedule being extended to the whole week. The methods of solution carried out with the faculty members' tolerance do not seem to be sufficient or effective. As agreed by the department heads, the faculty members and the students, it seems more appropriate to schedule the courses for two days a week. However, it is thought that the intensity of having courses on the same day might cause tiredness and inefficiency. Conducting the program through evening classes could be a second solution to be considered which could be effective in overcoming the problems of high quotas and non-attendance. Yet, it should be taken into account that this can cause other problems such as bringing up an additional cost for the students and an extra workload that would cause tiredness and low performance for the faculty members besides their workload in the formal education. Thus, Kavak, Aydın and Akbaba-Altun (2007) suggest that evening courses should be reconsidered and aligned the needs.

Another result received from the administrators and the students is the lack of interest and motivation among the students. Thus, activities that would raise interest and motivation towards courses and teaching among the students should be carried out, taking into consideration the aim of training qualified teachers. Training student teachers in an institution where there is enthusiasm for teaching can increase the interest and motivation concerning the program. Yet, such an institution is thought

to work only in '*teacher training*'. In today's institutional structuring, faculties of education are expected to carry out research in education, to train teachers and to carry out social services. However, there is lack of faculty members or the workload of the existing faculty members is too heavy. Students, on the other hand, think that their lack of interest and motivation is because they do not have any aims concerning the program. According to Yenilmez and Acat (2005), principally the students who seem eager to attend the program should be accepted, and more importance should be attached to building up an environment that will increase the students' eagerness in the education process.

Some of the results reveal that the courses in the program are not carried out effectively (see, Bayraktar & Burgul, 2004). In the literature, conducting teacher education programs is associated to a great extent with the faculty members (Kavcar, 2002; Öztürk, 2008; Peker & Tambağ, 2007; Üstüner, 2004). Department heads suggest that professional development programs should be conducted so as to increase the quality of faculty members. One of the strategic aims that have been determined to improve the performance of the faculties of education is '*to improve the quality of education*' and to reach this aim the need for short term training programs that will develop the faculty members' '*teaching skills*' has been emphasized (Yükseköğretim Kurulu [YÖK], 2007). When it is borne in mind that these faculty members teach in teacher training programs, these suggestions build a negative impression.

We have also found out that there are problems caused by the teaching practice school and the teachers in the courses which are conducted with the cooperation of the faculty and the teaching practice school (Demirtaş & Güneş, 2004; YÖK/Dünya Bankası, 1998). This result is also supported by other studies in the literature (e.g. Boz & Boz, 2006; Delice, 2008; Eryılmaz, 2005; Foster, 2000; Sutherland, Scanlon & Sperring, 2005). Thus, it is one of the traditional teacher training problems of developing countries that teaching candidates can hardly find an opportunity for practice in high schools (Aykaç, 2004; Avalos, 2000). One of the changes that were made in 2007 and 2008 in STEGP is the exclusion of the School Experience II course from the program. When it is remembered that one of the reasons for the changes made in 1997 in teacher training programs was the intensity of theoretical courses and the negligence of practice (Kavak et al., 2007), it seems clear that in the 2007 and 2008 programs it is a step back from the aim of training

teachers with programs that are intensive in practice.

Another result on which all participants agree is that the STEGP is not productive for students in developing a positive attitude towards the teaching profession. Also in the project of which this study is a part, it is found that the students' attitude towards the teaching profession has not changed positively (measured four times in total) all through the program (Ünver et al., 2008). As a matter of fact, it is clear that the program can hardly achieve the development by students of a positive attitude towards the teaching profession since effective features can only be achieved over a long period of time. Additionally, since the students have not chosen to be teachers at the beginning of their graduate studies, it becomes more difficult to develop a positive attitude. Under these circumstances, the program that was reduced to one year in 2008 should be implemented more effectively in terms of developing attitudes. For example, an orientation service could be offered to students about the objectives and the courses of the program, related regulations and the facilities of the university. Also, the steps that could be taken for all the stakeholders to adopt the program should be discussed thoroughly. The administrators criticize the fact that the program is not conducted by only one faculty, department or administrator. The administrators seem expectant that most of the problems can be solved by establishing a Graduate School of Educational Sciences. This method of solution can be helpful to carry out bureaucratic procedure. Yet, it would not be realistic to expect this to be a solution for most of the problems indicated in this article. For some of the problems are related to the academic faculty (Palmer, 2001) and the organizational climate (YÖK, 2007) rather than the administrative units.

Furthermore, according to the graduate school directors and the faculty members, neither the instructors nor the students take the program seriously. Also the department heads indicate that teacher training is not taken seriously at the universities. It has been suggested that the institutions that train secondary teachers should be at undergraduate (Hawley, 1987; Zeichner & Conklin, 2005, 2008; Yılman, 1987) or master's (Arch, 1989; Andrew & Schwab, 1995; Arends & Winitzky, 1996; Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, 1986; Darling-Hammond, 2008; Denemark & Nutter, 1984; Holmes Group, 1986; Maandag, Deinum, Hofman & Buitink, 2007; Peker & Tambağ, 2007; Shin, 1994) level but in a different structure compared to the other faculties (Yılman).

On the other hand, the fact that 4+1,5 years STEGP was changed three times in 10 years of implementation shows that there is not a specific vision concerning the training of qualified teachers (see, Ataman, 1998). The program with the changes in 2007 was re-arranged before being put fully into practice. With so many changes it would be unfair to mention "*curriculum development*" conceptually. Making such quick and easy changes in the curriculum also tarnishes the reputation of the teaching profession or the status of teacher training.

In the last decade, some decisions have been taken to train qualified teachers in our country. However, the historical process of teacher training set forth that the decisions could not be put into practice (e.g. Çelikten, 2008; Ulukanlıgil, 2003) because of inconsistent policies (Çelikten, 2008; Kaya, 1984; Öztürk, 1991; Ulukanlıgil, 2003). Therefore, policies should be followed that are more consistent (Duman, 1988; Semerci & Çerçi, 2002), concordant with the realities of the country (Acat et al., 2005), and in which scientific criteria is taken into consideration (Aykaç, 2004) and which provides qualified students of the teacher training programs (Avalos, 2000). A new description of the vision for pre-service teacher education programs (Kavak et al., 2007) could be a significant start concerning teacher training.

Consequently, all the stakeholders consider the program problematic, stating that it needs to be developed in many aspects. It is believed that this study will make significant contributions to the program since it is the first study that examines the program longitudinally and with all the stakeholders (Torres & Preskill, 1999). Along with this, the program needs to be institutionalized to make the program evaluation results more operational and consistent. Moreover, the secondary teacher training models that have been suggested by Tanel et al. (2007) and Yılman (2006) can be scrutinized and new models can be offered. When systematic and continuous (see Eurydice, 2006) research concerning teacher training are thought to be one of the fundamental responsibilities of educators, it becomes clear that the "*decision makers*" should carry out studies based on research results.

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