

The Opinions of Liberal Arts Professors about the Teacher Education System (An Example of Uludağ University, Liberal Arts Faculty)*

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Abstract

The place of liberal arts faculties in teacher education is a much debated topic. After the 1980s, liberal arts faculties are more involved in teacher education. The purpose of this study is to determine the opinions of those professors working at liberal art faculties about the teacher education system. This research is a case study in which embedded single-case design was used. 12 professors working at Uludağ University, Liberal Arts Faculty participated in this research. The data have been obtained via semi-structured interviews and were analyzed with the inductive content analysis. Most professors in this study stated that liberal arts faculties are supposed to prepare scientists and teachers, they prepare teachers for high schools, these teachers should have the pedagogical certificate courses, and these courses should be given during undergraduate education. There is no joint opinion about the course of special teaching methods. In addition, faculty who have had their background from liberal arts are perceived to be inefficient and as a result of this educational faculties are perceived negatively by the participating professors.

Key Words

Liberal-Arts Faculty, Teacher Education, Pedagogical Certificate Courses.

The main functions of liberal arts faculties are to make scientific research in the areas of science, produce new knowledge, and prepare scientists and researchers in related areas. Although liberal arts faculties have these important functions, they have had to involve in teacher education since high schools have become more common and the need for high school teachers has rapidly increased. Liberal arts faculties mostly prepare teachers for high schools rather than elementary schools. Liberal arts and teacher education are considered equivalent in some universities (Borrowman, 1965). Although those professors working at liberal arts faculties accepted teacher education (Subcommittee on Teacher Education in Liberal Arts Colleges

of the Committee on Studies [STELACCS], 1963), some of them criticized it by thinking that it will decrease the number of scientific research in liberal arts faculties (Daly, 1986).

The first teacher education in liberal arts faculties started at New York University in 1922 (Meyer, 1957). However, teacher education has become common in liberal arts faculties after the increasing critiques that the students in educational faculties were graduating without sufficient subject matter knowledge. These critiques have increased especially in the USA since the 1950s (Bestor, 1953; Conant, 1963; Flexner, 1930; Koehler, 1985; Koerner, 1963; Lynd, 1950; Lyons, 1980; Nelson, Palonsky, & Carlson, 1990). National Committee and Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF) (1996), summarized these critiques as follows:

- 1) Four year undergraduate education is not enough for teacher education.
- 2) The relationship between schools of education and schools, and schools of education and liberal arts faculties has been broken.

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- 3) The courses in schools of education are superficial and do not relate to real school life.
- 4) Traditional tools are used while teaching courses in educational faculties.

After these critiques towards schools of education, it has been proposed that teacher education should be given to liberal arts faculties. For example, Robert M. Hutchins, the president of University of Chicago, pointed out that liberal arts faculties can meet all the needs of teacher candidates (Brubacher, 1966). Petrie (1986) summarized the contribution of liberal arts faculties to teacher education in four dimensions. According to Petrie, liberal arts faculties; (1) increase students' general culture, (2) develop students' high level thinking abilities such as questioning, analyzing, critical thinking, and decision making, (3) enable students to have strong subject matter knowledge, and (4) help give the course of teaching methods more effectively.

Various reports which have been written in the USA after 1980 clearly states that undergraduate teacher education should be abolished. According to them, students should have a strong liberal arts education in order to become elementary or high school teachers. These reports stressed that teachers must know their subject matter very well and only liberal arts faculties can deliver this type of knowledge (Carnegie Forum, 1986; Holmes Group, 1986; NCTAF, 1996).

As a result of the effects of these reports, elementary and high school teachers are prepared by graduate education in many institutions in the USA although there are some universities giving these kinds of education at the level of undergraduate education. Similar practices are seen in the European Union countries (EURYDICE, 2005).

In Turkey, teacher schools had been preparing teachers until 1982. However, the students in Istanbul University, Liberal Arts Faculty and Ankara University, Literature, History, and Geography Faculty were given opportunity to become teachers by giving them pedagogical certificate courses which were taught by pedagogy department in these universities (Altunya, 2008; Peters, 1952; Widmann, 2000). Similar structure has continued after transferring teacher education institutions to universities in 1982. Teachers were prepared by both schools of education and liberal arts faculties in which pedagogical certificate courses were given to their students by liberal arts faculties. The practice of pedagogical certificate was abolished by the restructuring in 1997 and instead of this practice,

the students graduating from four year liberal arts faculties were given 1,5 years of non-thesis master (NTM) education. Students are able to take educational courses in this NTM program for one and a half years after being successful at the exam done by these graduate institutions (Yüksek Öğretim Kurumu [YÖK], 1997). The time of this program was reduced to one year in 2008 by reducing the credits of the courses (YÖK, 2008).

The Higher Education Council (HEC) made a controversial decision in 2009 and gave permission to the liberal arts students to take pedagogical certificate courses during their undergraduate education (YÖK, 2009). Later, the HEC announced that these students must have 2.5 grade point average out of 4 (YÖK, 2010). This research has done to determine the opinions of professors working at a liberal arts faculty about the system of teacher education.

Method

Research Model

Case study, which is one of the qualitative research methods, was used in the study (Yin, 2003). Embedded single-case, which is case study design, was selected for research design (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). The single case which was studied in this research was the ideas of the professors about teacher education. The sub-analysis cases in the study are the departments of science (physics, chemistry, mathematics, and biology) and social sciences (history, psychology, philosophy, and Turkish language and literature).

Participants

12 professors and associate professors (8 science and 4 social sciences), who were working at Uludağ University, Liberal Arts Faculty in the 2009-2010 fall semester, participated in this research. The participants were determined via maximum diversity sampling (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). According to this sampling, title, sex, department, and graduated institution (Higher Teacher School or Liberal Arts) were taken into consideration while selecting participants (Ekiz, 2009).

Data Collection Instrument

The data in this study were collected with a semi-structured interview form. The related literature was reviewed and preliminary interviews were made with 3 science faculties and 2 social science

faculties in order to prepare the interview form. This form was also reviewed by two faculties whose expertise are curriculum development and instruction and educational administration. According to this review, the form was revised and 10 open-ended questions were determined.

Data Analysis

Inductive content analysis was used to analyze the data obtained from this study (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yıldırım & Şimsek 2005). QSR NVivo 8 was also used in order to analyze and design the research data.

Validity and Reliability

Some precautions were taken to ensure the validity and reliability of the study.

a) While preparing interview form, the related literature was examined to create a contextual frame in order to increase the internal validity of the research. Member checking was also done. Moreover, participants were able to express their opinions freely and sincerely since they are professors and associate professors.

b) Research process was explained clearly in order to increase external validity. The design of the research, study group, data collection instrument and process, and analysis and interpretation of the data were stated in detail.

c) All of the data were written without any interpretation to ensure internal reliability. In addition, another faculty who has experience on qualitative research coded the information obtained from interviews. This code was compared with that of the researcher and the consistency was calculated (82%).

d) Research process was explained clearly in order to increase external reliability. The raw data and coded data have been preserved by the researcher and other researchers are welcome to examine them.

Findings

The findings of the research are as follows:

1) All professors who graduated from higher teaching school and two faculties who graduated from liberal arts faculties stated that pedagogical certification courses were seriously and intensively given to them. In contrast, those professors who gradu-

ated from liberal arts faculty and had their pedagogical certificate courses at the undergraduate level stated that pedagogical formation was done in inappropriate conditions and those courses were not taken seriously. These professors claimed that pedagogical certification courses were disorderly given in crowded classrooms.

2) All participants agree that the main function of liberal arts faculties is to prepare scientists. However, 8 professors argued that liberal arts faculties need to prepare teachers for high schools since all of the graduates cannot be scientists. These faculties hope that high quality students will come to their faculties because of high school teachers who had pedagogical certificate courses.

3) In respect to the teacher education system, the participants argued that liberal arts and school of education should prepare high school and elementary school teachers respectively and liberal arts and school of education professors should give subject matter and educational courses, respectively.

4) All liberal arts faculties think that pedagogical certificate courses are necessary for teaching. However, five participants have doubts on the benefit of pedagogical certificate courses although they agree that these courses are necessary. Most of the participants ($n = 9$) point out that these courses should be given at the level of undergraduate education since giving these courses at the graduate level can be time consuming for students and bring financial burden to the students and their parents.

5) There is no joint opinion about the course of special teaching methods According to the participants; this course should be given by either the school of education or the experienced academicians from liberal arts faculties.

6) Eight professors claim that those faculties who graduated from liberal arts faculties and working at school of education are inadequate. Most of these faculties having this opinion are working in science departments. Three professors stated that these faculties satisfied an important need while establishing school of education, they have completed their mission, and they need to leave the school of education. Only one professor objected to the discrimination on the grounds of the academic background of the faculties.

7) The perception of the professors working at liberal arts faculties towards the school of education is usually negative. Only two professors had positive opinions and three professors did not make any

comments about this topic. Those having negative perceptions claimed that the quality of the teaching staff in the school of education is low*, the school of education is attributed a low status by rectorate, and the school of education has a disorderly and undisciplined structure.

8) The professors working at the liberal arts faculty were asked their opinions about the courses in pedagogical certificate program. Six professors made suggestions which are that lessons should be practical rather than theoretical, high school subjects should be stressed, at least one course should be taught by a high school teacher, and there should be diction and computer courses.

Conclusion

The place of liberal arts faculties in teacher education, teaching certificate for the graduates of liberal arts faculties, and non-thesis master (NTM) programs have always been discussed in Turkey and many research studies were conducted about these programs. Those research studies on the NTM programs and teaching certificates could not produce clear findings that would enable to reach certain results. In contrast, conflicting results were obtained from research in this area. While some researchers state that those students who are attending to teaching certificate programs do not have adequate level of attitudes towards teaching (Sözer, 1991; Şenel, 1999; Temel, 1990), others state that the students attending to these programs have positive attitudes towards teaching and these students are more enthusiastic about teaching (Özgür, 1994; Sözer, 1996). These conflicting results are also seen in research studies which were done to measure the effectiveness of teaching certificate programs. Although there are research studies claiming that these programs increase teaching attitudes (Sürücü, 1997), there are other research studies claiming that these programs do not increase teaching attitudes (Saracaloğlu, 1991; Şenel, 1999). The conflict in results can also be seen in research studies on the effectiveness of NTM programs. The research studies on this issue express that NTM programs do not have any effect on students' attitude towards teaching (Yüksel, 2004) and there is no difference between the attitudes of these students and the students studying in school of education (Şimşek, 2005). On the other hand, there are research stud-

ies stating that the students in school of education have positive perception and attitudes to teaching profession (Öztürk, Doğan, & Koç, 2005; Yumuşak, Aycan, Aycan, Çelik, & Kaynar, 2006).

Those research studies about the ideas of the students participating in NTM programs reveal that the students think that pedagogical certificate program is more successful than the faculties working in that program (Kocabatmaz, 1998), the students approve NTM program, and they nonetheless doubt about the effectiveness of this program to attain its goals and the future results of this program (Semerci & Çerçi, 2005). Another research found that some students have very low expectation of the program and male students are more hopeless than female students although most students are generally hopeful about the program (Ceyhan, 2004).

As can be seen, the research studies on both the NTM and certificate programs to which the graduates of liberal arts faculties attend have reached conflicting results. An important point in these research studies that should be kept in mind that these studies were conducted by the academicians in school of education. The academicians in liberal arts faculties are not interested in this topic and do not publish any scientific articles about this issue although this issue concerns their students too. Another point is that only those students attending these programs participate in these research studies done by the academicians in school of education. There has been no research in which the academicians of liberal arts faculties participated. The opinions of these academicians were never asked before. In fact, this situation confirms Conant's (1963) critique that there is a wall between the academicians in liberal arts faculties and school of education. Researchers study the topics or people in their institutions. While the academicians in liberal arts do not reveal their ideas about teacher education with scientific publications, the researchers in school of education tend to ignore liberal arts faculties.

The decisions that HEC made in 2009 and 2010 increased the discussions. While the academicians in school of education have severely criticized these decisions (Baki, 2009; Kavak, 2009), the academicians of liberal arts faculties have not stated their ideas in scientific platforms. These later academicians only stated that they are willing to give pedagogical certificate courses by expecting that high quality students would prefer liberal arts faculties (Uludağ Üniversitesi Rektörlüğü [UÜR], 2009).

* These professors stressed that they have made this comment for those faculties who graduated from liberal arts faculties and are working at the school of education.

The broken relationship between liberal arts faculties and school of education can cause some misunderstanding and prejudices. For this reason, this research is important to learn the opinions of the academicians working at liberal arts faculties. As a matter of fact, the findings of this research revealed that some facts are wrongly known by the academicians of school of education. For example, all the professors in liberal arts suggest that all students who want to be a teacher must take pedagogical certificate courses. Although these academicians state that pedagogical certificate courses are important, they do not pay enough attention to the pedagogical certificate courses. There are also professors who argue that these courses should not be overvalued, they doubt the effectiveness of these courses, and teachers do not use what they learn in these courses. As Baki (2009) stated, many people think that pedagogical certificate courses are mean just taking a few courses to complete formality. When the opinions of the participants are examined, it can be seen that they have similar ideas about these courses.

Another notable result is that the professors of liberal arts faculties have negative perceptions about school of education. While some of them clearly stated these negative perceptions, others pointed out that school of education was given little value by rectorate instead of explicitly expressing their ideas about this issue. While interpreting this result, it should be noted that the reason for this negativity is the faculties who are working at school of education and graduated from liberal arts faculties. Professors did not make any comments by stating that they do not know the characteristics of education professors. In fact, working at school of education is wrong for an academician who has spent most of his academic career at liberal arts faculties. It cannot be accepted if these academicians are to give educational courses or special teaching methods course in school of education. If these academicians are to give subject matter courses in school of education, there is already a liberal arts faculty in almost all universities and the teaching staff of liberal arts faculties can give such courses. For this reason, hiring academic staff whose background is liberal arts is wasting resources. It is important that this reality has also stated by the professors of liberal arts faculties.

In conclusion, this study is important to reveal the opinions of the academicians working at liberal arts faculties. There must be a communication between liberal arts faculties and school of education that they are detached from each other and there

seem to be conflict between them. The role (helping students learn their subject matter) of liberal arts faculties to prepare teachers for high schools should be accepted. For this reason, the academic staff working in both faculties should communicate with each other.

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