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Finland and Northern Cyprus Primary Teacher Training Policies

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to make suggestions for the development of primary school teacher training in Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). In the collection of research data, document analysis was employed. In this context; as one of the most successful countries in international exams such as Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), the structure of the institutions that train teachers for primary education, programs, teachers' selection and appointment processes in Finland were examined. The study also examined the teacher training policy in primary education in TRNC, and presented the differences and similarities. In the light of this contrast found in primary teacher training policies applied in Finland and TRNC, certain suggestions have been made for teacher training policies in TRNC.

Keywords: Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus; PISA and TIMSS;

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1. Introduction

The need for highly qualified teachers in developing countries is a vital need and many national and international organizations conduct several comprehensive studies in this regard.(UNESCO 2012)

The reason is, when the teacher's qualification and success increase, the qualification and success of education system increase as well. The success of countries in every area, depends on the quality of education, on the other hand education quality depends on the teachers' qualifications. In terms of student performance, the most common feature of the education system was found to be qualified teachers in very successful countries. (Barber and Mourshed 2007 trans. - Mete 2013). Teacher training systems in the evaluation process must be constantly questioned and continuous improvement is needed in the quality and quantity required for today and future. In this context, following the applications in developed countries will shed a light to the work on development efforts. (Baskan, Aydın and Madden, 2006).

The aim of this study is making suggestions to improve the policies of teacher training that are applied in Turkish Republic of North Cyprus (TRNC). For this reason, the structure of the institutions that train teachers for primary education, programs, teachers' selection and appointment processes were examined in Finland which is one of the most successful countries in international exams as PISA and TIMMS. Also there have been suggestions about teacher training policies in TRNC in the light of similarities and the differences found in primary teacher training policies applied in two countries.

2. Acceptance criteria to teacher training programs in Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus

In North Cyprus, to be a class teacher, the candidates should be graduated from the Ataturk Teacher Academy (Teachers' Law, article 16). The Ataturk Teacher Academy is a higher education institution that trains pre-school teachers and class teachers for primary schools.

To be accepted to this school, the candidates should pass two exams (Özder, Konedralı and Zeki, 2010).The exam is comprised of two parts; written and oral. The written exam is amde of 5 subtests; maths, Turkish, science, social sciences and English. The content of the tests is limited according to the current program. Each test consists of 25 questions so the exam consists of total 125 questions. In the exam each incorrect answer 0.25 of the correct answers are deducted. The participants should answer at least 5 questions from each section otherwise the correct answers are not included in the total scoring. Calculated written exam score of candidates is ranked from high to low and announced accordingly. Then the successful candidates are called in for oral exams which aims to evaluate the candidates' attitudes and behaviors towards teaching (ATA Foundation, Law of Duties and Working Principles). During the interview certain questions are asked to the candidates and their behaviours are observed related to teaching. However, since the validity and reliability studies of the oral exam questions have not been conducted yet, the real performance of the candidates cannot be understood (Özder, Konedralı &Zeki, 2010) Every year, the ministry and the board of directors determine the number of students who will enter the academy with regard to the need of teachers in primary schools. (ATA Foundation Law, article: 11).

3. Primary school teacher training programs in Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus

Ataturk Teacher Academy has only one department called Teacher Training Department. There are two kinds of programs in this department. One is for class teachers and the other one is for pre-school teachers. In this department the lesson programs are executed in parallel with the Higher Education Council programs.

The teaching language in the academy is Turkish. In return for compulsory service, Turkish Cypriots get free education at the academy. Each academic year consists of two terms. Credit hour system is

applied in teaching. The class teacher program consists of 163 credits and the pre-school teacher program consists of 168 credits. After the graduation Turkish Cypriots have compulsory service (ATA Foundation Law, article: 28). Lectures, laboratory and practical work are compulsory to attend; the candidates who do not attend 20% of the classes are considered unsuccessful. The graduates are awarded with a certificate or diploma and they can continue post-graduate studies.

4. The appointment processes of teachers in Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus

5. In order to work in the public schools, the teachers are expected to pass the exams by Public Services Commission; this also applies to primary school teachers. The beginning teachers are given a two year trial period, if they are successful, they are assigned to their actual and continuous duties (Teacher's Law: 10). Acceptance criteria to teacher training programs in Finland

The teaching is an integral part of Finnish culture and society. They give great respect to teachers and teaching is considered a prestigious profession (Barber and Mourshed, 2007; Ekinci and Oter, 2010).

Teacher training in Finland is applied within the European Higher Education program (Sahlberg, 2007; Mete, 2013) The most important feature of the program is keeping the teacher education quality high by accepting motivated and talented students to the program (Malaty, 2006; Mete, 2013)

The teaching in Finland is a high-status profession with high and middle-income and it is preferred by the most successful students graduating from high school (Westbury, 2005; Mete, 2013) Popularity rate of employment among young people is as follows: 26% Teaching, 10% Medicine (Ekinci and Oter, 2010). One high school graduate who wants to become a teacher in Finland, first must be successful in "the Finnish Matriculation Exam"; then must be successful in the other exam which consists of 3 stages.

For a person who complete general or vocational Secondary Education institutions and succeed in the Matriculation exam, the terms of entering teacher training programs vary from university to university. They are subjected to certain tests like writing, group discussion, personal interview and ability test (Aras and Sozen, 2012; Polat and Arabacı, 2012).

Malaty (2006), states that acceptance test consists of book exam, interview and sample lectures. The target in the book exam is to look at how the students research information, how they think critically and interpret, if they can distinguish between relevant and irrelevant information. Their capabilities about creating their own ideas and defence and synthesis capabilities are also measured. On the other hand at an interview stage, they look at the characteristic structure of the candidates the suitability of the program is checked in terms of learning and development capacity. In the last stage, lectures and group discussions are required to be managed so their speech, presentation and management capabilities are measured. At the end of this process 10% of the applicants are accepted to the teacher training programs.

6. Primary school teacher training programs in Finland

In Finland, primary school teacher training is only given in 8 faculties and it takes 4 years (Westbury, 2007). Primary school teacher candidates receive training on three major issues; Educational theory, pedagogical content knowledge and teaching practice (Sahlberg, 2007; Westbury, 2005; Mete, 2013). Pedagogic thinking skills are essential to establish a balance between educational knowledge and practice (Westbury, 2005; Mete, 2013). Practical lessons are as intense as the theoretical lessons of educational process (Delibaş, 2007). According to European credit transfer and accumulation system, primary school teacher training includes 60 pedagogical credit and the other lessons in educational

sciences include at least 60 credits (Ministry of Education-2007). Every teacher training institution is a practice point; this is one of the remarkable point of Finland faculties. Practice schools usually take place in the university campus, close to the related departments.

First 3 years of teaching, teacher candidates must do training for 4 weeks and last year of teaching they must do training for 5 weeks under the guidance of training teachers and school teacher (Malaty, 2006; Mete, 2013). During training practice teacher and university teacher work together and they share their observation after each lesson so this contributes to the development of prospective teachers. Besides, each student should write a master's thesis. This thesis includes independent research, participation in research seminars and presentation of educational work (Sahlberg, 2007).

7. The appointment processes of teachers in Finland

In Finland teachers who successfully complete the training school, cannot be confronted with unemployment because teacher training institutions regulate quotas according to the teachers need every year. For this reason both qualified teaching staff and a social perception of the profession with job guarantee develop across the country (Ekinci, 2010)

All of the teachers are civil servants in Finland (Özoğlu, Gür & Altunoğlu, 2010). Teachers who graduate from the Faculty of Education apply in person to the school they want to work. Teacher selection and appointment powers and responsibilities are left to the state and local governments (Ekinci and others, 2010). Decision-making on teaching authority belongs to the local authorities and school principals. Candidates who successfully complete teacher training institutions are not subjected to national exams (Ekinci and others-2010). In selection of teacher the effective topics are master's thesis, courses taken during training, practical training achievements and performance in sample lecture.

8. Conclusions and Recommendations

Taking Finland's PISA and TIMMS achievement scores can be a good guide for future education policies for TRNC. There are many differences between Finland and TRNC about the acceptance of teachers training policies, training and the appointment processes. The important points of these differences are quality of students admitted, field knowledge, the distribution of the training programs of teaching practice studies on professional development of teachers assigned. When these elements are taken into consideration appropriate studies to the structure of Cyprus, pilot applications should be tried and evaluated at short, middle and long term.

There are similarities in the acceptance of the teacher training programs in Finland and TRNC. The difference in accepting applications is about measurement which measure teacher candidate's behaviour in teaching.

There are also differences about field knowledge and practice lessons between Finland and TRNC. Practice lessons are intense and their distribution and efficiency in programs can be evaluated and adapted to TRNC teacher training programs.

To be employed by TRNC state schools it is enough to be successful in the exam conducted by Public Service Commission. This situation prevents teachers' self-development and also the teachers cannot sustain the professional development. In Finland master's thesis and practical training achievements have an important role in the process of appointment of teachers. In TRNC in order to create a cadre of qualified teachers, training seminars should be done which effect personal and professional development positively. Teachers and teacher candidates must be supported by laws and should be encouraged to participate in the post-graduate programs.

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