ERPA 2014

Evaluation of preschool education program according to the views of prospective teachers (A case of Ankara University)

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to evaluate Pre-school Teacher Education Program (PSTEP) according to the views of prospective teachers. Study group of the research consists of eight senior prospective teachers in the pre-school teaching department. The participants were asked to express their views on specific questions regarding PSTEP. Semi structured interview was chosen to obtain participants’ views on specific questions regarding PSTEP. The data was analyzed with content analysis technique. According to the results of the study, prospective teachers are not satisfied with the rate of the content categories in general. Considering the content of the courses, it is recommended that some courses should be removed; some of them should be combined; the content category of some courses needs to be revised; some new compulsory and elective courses should be added; and some elective courses should be compulsory. In addition, it is stated that most of the courses in the program are not appropriate for pre-school teaching subject area; thus the content of these courses should be reorganized. Moreover, credit hours of the practice of the courses should be increased so that prospective teachers can transfer their theoretical knowledge into practice effectively. Results of the study suggest that PSTEP needs to be reorganized in some aspects to be more beneficial for the students.

Keywords: pre-school program, courses, education program, prospective teachers

1. Introduction

Human life is divided into different stages according to their ages. And it is expected from one to do some developmental tasks that most people do at a certain age range. If these milestones aren’t reached healthily, it can have irreversible negative effects throughout a person’s life. Although each milestone is important, early childhood
stage is of vital importance as the first steps of intellectual, social, physical and emotional developments are taken in this period. A very high proportion of learning takes place in early childhood and personality is mostly shaped until the age of six.

As the number of working mothers is increasing day by day, children need teachers who have competency enough to meet their developmental and learning needs (Aldemir and Sezer, 2009). When the aims of early education are taken into consideration, it can be asserted that the primary goal is enabling the child with skills that he/she will use in the future. It provides good opportunity for children to improve their skills so that they can begin schooling on an equal footing with their more advantaged peers. As one of the fundamental goal of preschool program is to raise people have healthy personality and character, are able to think independently and scientifically, are respectful to human rights, feel responsibility for the problems of society (MEB, 2006). For this reason, high quality personal care and learning experiences should be provided to a child which is the prerequisite of success for the rest of life and their holistic development and reach goals.

Early childhood education and the child’s physical and social environment play a significant role in his/her development. Children learn the most important things by playing with other children and constructing the knowledge while in interaction with the physical environment; not by saying them what to do (Haktanı, Turaslı, Doğan, Dağlıoğlu, Şen, Güleç, Gül, Alat, Dereobalı, Aslan, Acer ve Guler, 2007). That’s why the experiences enabled for children should be given with a systematic and scientific program (Ari, 2003). Moreover, it is necessary that children are supported with a program which serves for the purpose of this stage. As the program has effect both on children and the teachers, the regulation of the program plays a significant role in realizing the aims mentioned above. The aim of this study has therefore been to reveal the opinions of prospective teachers about early childhood teacher education program categories which are pedagogy, subject, general culture and elective courses and to put forward some suggestions in this regard. Together these results provide important insights into the implementation process. Thus, these suggestions should be taken into consideration in reorganizing the program to respond to the needs in the field and adapting the courses for the students.

2. Method

2.1 Participants

Data were collected from senior prospective teachers in Ankara University during spring term of 2013/2014. Focus group interview was conducted with 5 female and 3 male participants who were recruited on the basis of willingness. When the data’s repetition of itself is taken into account, the number of participants is accepted as sufficient.

2.2 Instruments

Semi-structured interview form has been prepared. The questions are prepared based on the aim of the research and they are mainly related with the opinions of prospective teachers about the rate of content categories, courses in the content categories, distribution of the courses, the problems prospective teachers encounter in teaching-learning process and solution offers of prospective teachers for the problems they encounter in teaching-learning process. In order not to miss any information, the interview was recorded with video camera after asking participants’ for permission.

2.3 Data analysis

The data collected from the participants was analyzed with content analysis technique. Content analysis is a technique in which the study is categorized as headings based on some grounds and used to gather objective and systematic findings (Büyüköztürk, Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz and Demirel, 2013). For the purpose of conducting content analysis, participants’ views about the questions are collected under specific themes.
3. Results

3.1. The opinions of prospective teachers about the rate of content categories (Pedagogy, subject, general culture and elective courses)

The themes identified from prospective teachers’ responses related to the rate of content categories are summarized in Table 1.

| Table 1. Prospective teachers’ opinions about the rate of content categories |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The rate of the subject courses is adequate. |
| The rate of the pedagogy courses is inadequate. |
| The rate of the general culture courses should be reduced. |
| The rate of the elective courses should be increased. |

As shown in Table 1, prospective teachers find the rate of content categories inadequate except subject courses. According to the results of the study of Küçükoğlu and Küzültas (2012) which PSTEP was compared in UK, Germany, France, Italy, Russia, Turkey, although Turkey had more courses in the program, the number of ECTS credits was less than the others.

The study of Küçükahmet (2007) reveals that it is expected from teachers to be more proficient in pedagogic courses than subject courses. However, the number of subject courses are more than pedagogic ones in Turkey.

3.2. The opinions of prospective teachers about the courses in the content categories

The themes identified from prospective teachers’ responses related to the courses in the content categories are summarized in Table 2.

| Table 2. Prospective Teachers’ Opinions About The Courses In The Content Categories |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Content and scope of the subject courses are seen poor. |
| Content and scope of the pedagogy courses need to be adjusted. |
| Improvement should be done in general culture courses. |
| The number of elective courses from different disciplines should be increased. |

As can be seen from Table 2, generally prospective teachers consider that contents of the categories need to be adjusted and improved. One prospective teacher stated that some of subject courses were too theoretical and far from current knowledge. For instance, as he indicated that they drowned in medical terminology in the course called “Human Anatomy and Physiology”. Also another student pointed out that some of subject and pedagogy courses were overlapping. Moreover, according to opinions of prospective teachers, elective courses should develop not only knowledge about specific domains but also one’s self-esteem, intellectual level etc. From this point of view, they think elective courses should show variety in terms of scope. Furthermore, choosing elective courses should depend on students’ interests, not on faculty board’s decisions.

3.3. The opinions of prospective teachers about the distribution of the courses

The themes identified from prospective teachers’ responses related to distribution of the courses are summarized in Table 3.

| Table 3. Prospective Teachers’ Opinions About The Distribution Of The Courses |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Drama Course should split into two terms. |
| Psychology courses are more preferable than Human Anatomy courses. |
| Game Instruction course should be in the fourth term. |
| The terms of some courses in the program are required to be changed. |
| Courses related with special education should be consecutive. |
| There are unnecessary courses related to computer education. |
Table 3 presents that according to prospective teachers; the scope of some courses should be adjusted. For instance since Human anatomy courses are not interesting and useful for prospective teachers, they prefer psychological courses which are considered beneficial in the field work. Furthermore, they indicated the program should be adjusted in terms of some courses’ terms. These results show that the quality of curriculum is needed to be improved according to prospective teachers. As Hyson, Tomlinson and Morris (2009) study revealed, of early childhood education program administrators attached particular importance to “Implementing quality curriculum effectively”.

Hence, when results of the study are taken into consideration, it would be wise to adjust the program by replacing courses, abandoning unnecessary courses, changing the terms of the specified courses and adding more related courses with little children to the program.

3.4. The opinions of prospective teachers about the problems they encounter in teaching-learning process

The themes identified from prospective teachers’ opinions related to the problems they encounter in teaching-learning process are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Prospective Teachers’ Opinions About The Problems They Encounter In Teaching-Learning Process

| Problem Description                                                                 |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Some of courses’ task or homeworks are not related with the scope.                    |
| The content of some courses are overlapping.                                         |
| As PSTEP is too intensive when compared with other departments’ program, it causes depression in senior students. |
| Material projects cost too much.                                                     |
| Restriction of choosing electives courses result in unproductivity.                  |
| Evaluation of some of the courses is result-oriented whereas it needs to be process-oriented. |

As shown in Table 4, prospective teachers see some problems regarding PSTEP. Intensiveness of PSTEP may be the most important problem among others, as these prospective teachers would be teacher in profession in upcoming years. Another important issue is evaluation process in PSTEP. Since evaluation is the fundamental part in programs quality, it should be as efficient as much as it can. Hence, the evaluation of some courses may be done in a more reliable way.

3.5. The solution offers of prospective teachers for the problems they encounter in teaching-learning process

The themes identified from prospective teachers’ solution offers related to the problem they encounter in teaching-learning process are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5. Prospective Teachers’ Solution Offers About The Problems They Encounter In Teaching-Learning Process

| Solution Offer Description                                                                 |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| There may be a pool of elective courses across different faculties.                       |
| Profession ethics course should be compulsory.                                          |
| Used materials can be left in faculty for upcoming students.                            |

As can be seen from Table 2, prospective teachers have some solution offers for problems in PSTEP. As one prospective teacher stated “Graduated students in PSTEP can leave materials in faculty and these collected materials can be used in next years.” So that the financial burden of materials can lessen some. Another one also commented about elective courses, some elective courses can be added and collected in a pool so that everyone can choose elective courses depending on their own choices. Moreover, prospective teachers find it crucial to have a compulsory course about profession ethics.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

There are many reasons why PSTEP is so important for raising children effectively. Firstly, when children leave their families and go to schools, they face teachers as their guides in their education life. Secondly, in this point view it is clear that PSTEP plays an important role in children education and it shapes the qualification and competence of
teachers in pre-school education. Another importance of PSTEP, if teachers are not able to do things in order to educate children for future, the consequences of this incapability may be irreversible for children’s future. Because of these mentioned reasons, it is important to evaluate PSTEP for effective pre-school education. This present study has investigated the opinions of prospective teachers related some issues of PSTEP. Results of this study have shown that there are several problems according to prospective teachers. One of relevant problem is about rate and distribution of theoretical and practical courses in PSTEP. Since quality of courses is more significant than quantity, solving the problem of overlapping courses would be beneficial. The other critical finding from this study is the problem with elective courses. Elective courses create opportunities for one to develop himself/herself in personal, social, intellectual and in educational aspects. That’s why the students should be free to make their own choices. In other words, the number of elective courses should not be restricted. On the contrary, the number and diversity of the field should be increased.

4.1 Recommendations

This study was limited by 8 prospective teachers in Ankara University. In spite of its limitation, this study has thrown up many questions in need of evaluation of PSTEP. Future research may be done in other universities with more participants. It can also be beneficial to ask for opinions of academicians in the universities about PSTEP. Interviews also can be made with early school teachers to learn their views about the lessons they took at university. Thus, the efficiency and usefulness of the lessons can be revealed.

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