

## THE NEW TEACHER PROFILE IN TURKEY

Türkay Bulut<sup>1</sup>  
Cem Can<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract:** This article presents a descriptive study that examined the influence of “Research Methods” courses offered at the English Language Teaching Departments. The overall aim of such courses is to support student-teachers to become teacher-researchers in their professional lives. It has been advocated in the fields of Education and Applied Linguistics that prospective teachers must learn to reflect on the implications of their actions in the classrooms and act in positive ways. As part of the teacher education program, YÖK (Higher Education Council) in Turkey has added a “Research Methods” course into the curriculum of ELT departments so that future-teachers can be active participants in the process. This study sought to determine how this course could help them continue their research efforts during their practicum period. The data were collected from a checklist and analyzed in percentages. An analysis of this ordinal data suggests that being aware of the research tools of Action Research, teachers call their horizons in question, and reflecting their opinions and sharing their experiences create collaboration.

**Key Words:** Action Research, Teacher Education

---

**Özet:** Bu betimsel çalışmada, YÖK tarafından öğretmen yetiştirme programına dahil edilen Araştırma yöntemleri dersinin, özellikle bu derste kullanılan “Eylem Araştırması” tekniğinin, etkisi araştırılmıştır. Eğitim ve Uygulamalı Dilbilim alanlarınca öncülük edilen bu yeni tanım, “araştırmacı öğretmen”, gerek dünyadaki gerekse ülkemizdeki pek çok öğretmen yetiştirme programlarına dahil edilmiştir. Sınıfta oluşan eğitim ve öğretim sorunları ile baş edebilmeyi ve mesleki açıdan daha özerk olabilmeyi amaçlayan bu yeni dersin etkilerini incelediğimiz bu çalışmadan alınan sonuçlar son derece olumludur. Öğretmenler ve aday öğretmenler sınıfta yapılanları sorgulayan ve öğretimin daha nasıl iyileştirilebileceği konusunda birbirlerinden yansımalar alarak ortak çalışmalara bilimsel bir bakış kazanarak girmişlerdir.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Eylem Araştırması; Öğretmen Eğitimi

---

### 1. INTRODUCTION

---

<sup>1</sup> Yard.Doç. Dr., Fen ve Edebiyat Fakültesi, Çağ Üniversitesi, Mersin.

<sup>2</sup> Yard.Doç. Dr., Eğitim Fakültesi, Çukurova Üniversitesi, Adana.

In recent years, teachers in developed countries have been encouraged to become teacher-researchers and trained accordingly. The teacher of this new millennium needs to be equipped with the skills to approach the problems systematically and continuously search for answers to questions about their teaching, teaching materials, relevant techniques, their students, and the curriculum design which they are to follow (Hatch & Lazaraton, 1991). The betterment of schools could be attained by active involvement of such teachers in the process of curriculum design. We believe that the improvement in the present schooling system in Turkey entails the active participation of the teachers who are the real practitioners of the syllabi as a part of the national curriculum. First, teachers should view the educational ideas in the curriculum as hypotheses to be tested rather than ready-made curricular specifications of national policy-makers and educational research workers. Second, they should share their findings with their colleagues and extend these to the authorities for a possible development of the curriculum which should be viewed as an ongoing process. In other words, to solve the problems, each class must be a laboratory and each teacher a chemist to conduct the research (Stenhouse, 1993). At this point, the teachers should be equipped with basic research skills in order to carry out research and analyze the findings for an effective and productive contribution to the process of curriculum development. How can such qualified teachers be trained?

We believe that the idea that the failure observed in general in English Language Teaching (ELT) in Turkey springs from the lack of involvement of teachers in this area led YÖK (Higher Education Council) to include a course named "Research Methods" in the curricula of ELT departments of Turkish universities. The aim of the course is to train research-minded English language teachers who are also called "extended professionals" in Hoyle's terms (1972). Hoyle also describes the characteristics of a "restricted professional." According to him, this type of professional:

- has a high level of classroom competence;
- has a tendency towards subject-centeredness;
- evaluates performance in terms of his/her own perceptions of changes in pupil behavior and achievement;
- attends short courses of a practical nature.

An extended professional has some additional characteristics when compared to a restricted one. S/he:

- views work in the wider context of school, community, and society;
- participates in a wide range of professional activities, e.g. subject panels conferences;

- has a concern to link theory and practice;
- has a commitment to some form of curriculum theory and mode of evaluation;
- can be independently innovative at the classroom level.

Moreover, we try to train them as autonomous learners so that they can have a commitment to systematic questioning of their own teaching as a basis for self-development and a concern to question and to test theory in practice by the use of research skills. These are achieved by covering the following topics in the line of Ekmekci's suggestions:

- stating research questions and hypotheses; types of hypotheses;
- avoiding threats to both external and internal validity of their study;
- introducing research variables and types of variables;
- constructing research designs; both the qualitative and quantitative research designs, specifically emphasizing the Experimental designs and Action Research
- reviewing the related literature;
- selecting samples; random sampling techniques;
- choosing the appropriate instrumentation
- checking the reliability and validity of the utilized instrument;
- collecting data;
- analyzing the obtained data by means of descriptive and inferential statistics;
- arriving at conclusions; finally
- sharing their findings with other student-teachers. (Ekmekci, 1997)

While students at the ELT departments study these topics, they observe the schools as a part of their practicum and share their observations and opinions. They are taught the necessity of taking the opinions of their friends so that they can be ready for open classrooms in their future career. All student-teachers contribute to these discussions and try to solve the problems of their peers. Sometimes, the students who practice teaching at the same school observe the peer's class and reflect their observations to their friend. These reflections as a part of action research are very fruitful and very promising for the improvement of their practice of learning, teaching, and professional development ( Zuber-Skerritt, 1992b).

At this stage, we, the instructors, act as process moderators or facilitators and view our students as practitioners. Our aim is to guide them how to form a spiral of the four cycles of action and research: plan, act, observe, and reflect. The plan includes problem analysis; action refers to the implementation of this strategic plan; observation includes an evaluation of the

action; efection means reflecting on the results of evaluation. This last cycle may lead teacher-researchers to form a new spiral. We can explain this type of Action Research by the acronym **CRASP** proposed by Zuber-Skerritt (1992a): Action research promotes a **Critical** attitude, **R**esearch into teaching, **A**ccountability, **S**elf-evaluation, and **P**rofessionalism.

**Critical attitude:** In order to develop critical thinking in students, teachers themselves must be masters of critical thinking.

**Research into teaching:** Teachers should be introduced to theory and practical application in teacher education programs. Action research integrates theory and practice. Action researcher's teaching may be informed by theory, but not be bound totally by the abstract theories and normative prescriptions of curriculum developers.

**Accountability:** Teachers should be personally interested in and felt responsible for justifying the course they are teaching. The extrinsic accountability is necessary as teachers should publish the practices of their work and situation.

**Self-evaluation:** Self-evaluation of teaching performance, of individual courses, and whole programs of the practitioners is at the heart of action research. Teachers justify their practice by anticipating critique from colleagues. This necessitates self-critique, self-evaluation, and self-reflection.

**Professionalism:** All these four requirements lead to professional development. Teachers experience professional satisfaction.

The model we adapt is emancipatory action research in which both the practitioner (the teacher) and the facilitator (process moderator) work in collaboration. The facilitator or the process moderator can be a colleague who is working at the same school and who has been trained as a teacher-researcher. The approach is not hierarchical; rather, all people concerned are equal participants contributing to the process.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

In this study, we observed our 4<sup>th</sup> year students during their practice teaching for a period of a month. We also observed the EFL teachers of the schools to which our student-teachers have been for their practice in order to be able to compare their approaches with those of our students. Although the teachers were informed that the research we had been conducting was on the teaching techniques, they were not given any information on the details of the research lest influence their performance during our observation.

### **2.1 Subjects**

There were two groups of subjects selected by random sampling in this study: student-teachers and teachers at the schools they went for practicum. The first group consisted of 20 fourth-year students in the English Language Teaching (ELT) program at the Faculty of Education, at Çukurova University, Adana. Of these, 15 were female and 5 were male with the mean age of 20. These students had practice teaching for two semesters. The second subject group consisted of 10 English language teachers working at these schools. They were all female with the mean age of 28. Of these, three had only one year experience. Five of them were teachers for three years. Two had been teaching for five or more years. All graduated from different universities and were graduates of ELT departments (not from English Language and Literature departments). None of them took a research methods course during their faculty years.

## **2.2 Procedure**

Our observations for this study took place when the students went to practice teaching for two days for a period of four weeks. At the second week of practicum, we started observing both the student-teachers and the actual classroom teachers for the first time and continued observing these two groups once a week until the end of the practicum. During this non-participant observations, we utilized a checklist prepared by Whitla, Hanley, Moo, and Walter (1970).

## **2.3 Instrumentation**

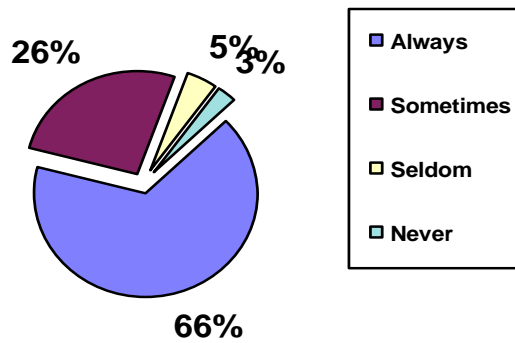
Among numerous checklists for non-participant classroom observation, we selected the checklist mentioned above. This checklist may be crude and simple for many researchers but we believe that it is very effective and serves our purpose. We had modified the schedule before we utilized it. In the checklist, there were fifteen questions (see Appendix 1), each with four ranks (always-sometimes-seldom-never). The first two ranks reflected the characteristics of an "extended professional" and the last two choices reflected those of a "restricted professional" in Hoyle's terms (1972):

- 1) Teacher directs opinion questions to the students.  
*always sometimes seldom never*
- 4) Exchanges are largely student to student.  
*always sometimes seldom never*
- 11) Teacher is physically close to students.  
*always sometimes seldom never*
- 15) Teacher and students work together co-operatively.  
*always sometimes seldom never*

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

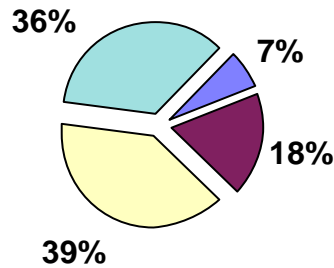
As for the analysis of the data, we were unable to carry out an inferential statistics due to the small sample size to see whether there was a significant difference between the observed performances of the student-teachers and the actual teachers according to the checklist we filled in terms of the characteristics of a teacher-researcher. Instead, we tried to report the findings in percentages as illustrated in pie charts.

When we consider Figure 1, we see that the characteristics of an extended professional have been reflected in classroom performance of student-teachers. The high frequency observed in choices always and sometimes can be taken as a token for this. When assessed on the rating scale of four ranks, from *Always* to *Never*, most of them (66%) proved to have the true traits of a teacher-researcher. The low percentages in terms of Seldom and Never may indicate that the student-teachers are open to innovations in the field and ready to be teacher-researchers when encouraged and supported by the Ministry of Education.



**66 % always; 26 % sometimes; 5 % seldom; 3 % never**

Figure 1. The distribution of the choices of student-teachers



**7 % always; 18 % sometimes; 39 % seldom; 36 % never**

Figure 2. The distribution of the choices of teachers

As for Figure 2, we see all the characteristics of a “Restricted Professional” in the assessment of actual teachers. Only 7% of them were assessed with the Always choice and 18% with the Sometimes choice; whereas 37% of them received Seldom and 36% with Never choice. Although they may be dedicated EFL teachers, they were applying the imposed curriculum specifications without questioning. Since they were not trained as teacher-researchers, such a questioning cannot be expected. As we stressed earlier, an evaluation and a contribution to the curriculum development can only be achieved by qualified teachers as action researchers.

Most of our fourth-year students, after the completion of the practicum, admitted that teacher-generated classroom research may end the passive role of the teacher in the classroom and create enthusiastic teachers as they observe the betterment of their teaching.

We agree with Goswami and Stillman in terms of the certain common characteristics among those teachers who conduct research in their own classrooms:

1. Their teaching is transformed in important ways: They become theorists, articulating their intentions, testing their assumptions, and finding connections with practice.
2. Their perceptions of themselves as writers and teachers are transformed. They step up their use of resources; they form networks; and they become more active professionally.
3. They become rich resources who can provide the profession with information it simply does not have. They can observe closely, over long periods of time, with special insights and knowledge. . . .

4. They become critical, responsive readers and users of current research, less apt to accept uncritically others' theories, less vulnerable to fads, and more authoritative in their assessment of curricula, methods, and materials.
  5. They can study writing and learning and report their findings without spending large sums of money (although they must have support and recognition). . . .
  6. They collaborate with their students to answer questions important to both, drawing on community resources in new and unexpected ways. . . .
- (Goswami and Stillman, 1987, preface)

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

Being devised with research tools, teachers are able to observe classrooms in their fullness. They are able to observe their teaching and their students' learning and to reflect productively on the relationships between that teaching and that learning. When teachers observe at a local level the situations of concern for them in their own lived worlds, they call their own horizons into question. By first looking critically at their particular experiences as teachers in particular classrooms and then by reflecting on recurring themes in those particular experiences in order to make sense of the complex world that exists in their classrooms, teacher-researchers prepare themselves to create worthwhile learning environments, to develop purposeful curricula, and to devise productive methods of teaching.

To sum up, we believe that there is a lack of communication between teachers and curriculum developers. When trained as researchers, teachers could critically analyze one major problem they share with other colleagues, plan a strategy of action, implement and evaluate the program, and reflect on the results. Furthermore, they can analyze these reflections and proceed to a continuation of another cycle in the action research spiral until a satisfactory solution has been found. They can give a critical response to organizational constraints. Teachers must be actively involved in educational research and participate in the process of curriculum development instead of leaving the framework of educational specifications to outside experts.



**REFERENCES**

- Ekmekci, F. Ö. (1997). Research manual for social sciences: Volume 1. Istanbul: Sürat ELT.
- Goswami, D. & Stillman, P. (Eds.). (1987). Reclaiming the classroom: Teacher research as an agency for change. Upper Montclair, NJ: Boynton/Cook..
- Hatch, E. & Lazaraton, A. (1991). The research manual: Design and statistics for applied linguistics. New York: Newbury House Publishers.
- Hoyle, E. (1972) "Facing the difficulties". Unit 13, Open University Second Level Course: The Curriculum: Context, Design, and Development (Problems of Curriculum Innovation I, Units 13-15). Milton Keynes, Open University Educational Enterprises.
- Stenhouse, L. (1993) The teacher as researcher. In M. Hammersley (Ed.), Controversies in classroom research (pp. 222-234). Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Zuber-Skerritt, O. (1992a). Action research in higher education: Examples and reflections. London: Kogan Page.
- Zuber-Skerritt, O. (1992b). Professional development in higher education. London: Kogan Page.

**APPENDIX**

- 1) Teacher directs opinion questions to the students.  
always sometimes seldom never
- 2) Students give lengthy responses.  
always sometimes seldom never
- 3) Questions are mostly from the students.  
always sometimes seldom never
- 4) Exchanges are largely student to student.  
always sometimes seldom never
- 5) Students initiate topics of discussion.  
always sometimes seldom never
- 6) Teacher has a non-participant role.  
always sometimes seldom never
- 7) Students have a clear sense of purpose.  
always sometimes seldom never
- 8) Almost all students participate.  
always sometimes seldom never
- 9) Student interest is high.  
always sometimes seldom never
- 10) Class is noisy.  
always sometimes seldom never
- 11) Teacher is physically close to students.  
always sometimes seldom never
- 12) There is much teacher movement in the classroom.  
always sometimes seldom never
- 13) Teacher makes efforts to draw out students.  
always sometimes seldom never
- 14) Teacher is permissive.  
always sometimes seldom never
- 15) Teacher and students work together co-operatively.  
always sometimes seldom never