

Enacting the National Curriculum in a Rural Elementary School: A Qualitative Study of a Beginning Language Teacher's Experiences

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ABSTRACT. This study explored how experiences in a rural setting shaped a beginning language teacher's identity and practices. The data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, observations, and open-ended questions. The interpretive analysis revealed four elements regarding becoming successful in teaching; appreciation of rural life, passion for rural teaching, aspiration for teaching profession, and readiness for teaching. We found that the stakeholders in this rural elementary school acknowledged the importance of high quality in language education in general terms. But, our analysis also revealed that, in this setting, foreign language education was not situated as an area with a very high level of importance within the curriculum by the participants. Overall, the results explicate the rural challenges that a beginning teacher encountered while enacting the national curriculum.

Key Words: Rural, English language education, curriculum, elementary school, beginning teacher

INTRODUCTION

Many elements of schools and communities distinguish teaching in rural settings from teaching in urban contexts (Çakıroğlu & Çakıroğlu, 2003; Lingam, 2012). While communication networks and globalization have made the rural – urban distinction relatively unimportant (Bonner, 1998), several researchers have argued that places have an impact on identity formation, attitudes toward schools, teachers' work and future decision-making (e.g. Flores & Day, 2006; Goodnough, 2009; Gross, 2008; Haughney & Murphy, 1982). In this study, we investigate how a rural elementary school and community situated foreign language education and how experiences in this setting shaped a beginning teacher's identity and practices in Central Turkey.

In the eyes of general public, rural schools are found weaker in instruction compared to their urban counterparts (Taneri & Engin-Demir, 2011). There have been several studies revealing the rural challenges that might discourage teachers to choose rural schools as working places, and constrain their motives and practices. Miller (1988) outlined the classroom, school, and socio-cultural factors affecting teachers' success and survival in rural communities. These included multigrade instruction, a variety of responsibilities other than teaching in their own areas of expertise, limited resources, lack of professional development opportunities, a greater emphasis on informal and personal communication, invasion of privacy, and cultural, linguistic and geographical isolation. Preston (2006) also listed the same factors. In addition to them, she remarked that rural lifestyle was difficult to cope with in particular for young beginning teachers since they had few peers with whom they could interact.

English as a Foreign Language in the Elementary Curriculum in Turkey

There are many cognitive, social and economic benefits of learning another language (Tochon, 2009). National governments, especially across Europe, promote early foreign language education today (Calabrese & Dawes, 2008). In Turkey, foreign language education used to commence in the fourth grade, at around the ages of 10-11 at public elementary schools. With the new regulations in the compulsory education system, however, this is even brought ahead by two years and foreign language

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education starts in the second grade, at around the ages of 7-8 (T.C. Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2012), thereby promoting early foreign language education nationwide.

With the promotion of early foreign language education at public schools, however, the ultimate step is to decide on a foreign language which will also address to the needs and interests in Turkey. Rural challenges make it difficult to recruit qualified teachers who fit in the rural community and stay in the job (Lemke, 1994). Therefore, preparing quality teachers for the immediate needs of the local appears to be an important issue (White & Reid, 2008). In order to achieve this goal, however, we first need to gain a deeper understanding of rural challenges in Turkey, the function of English for a rural community and a beginning English language teacher's needs in such a setting.

METHOD

The main goals of this study were to understand a beginning English language teacher's identity and practices at a rural elementary school and how members of this particular community situated English language teaching in this village in Central Turkey. In order to achieve this goal, a qualitative case study was conducted. The case studies provide culturally specific and contextually rich data. In this regard, as Moll et al. (1992) stated, "Qualitative research offers a range of methodological alternatives that can fathom the array of cultural and intellectual resources available to students and teachers within households" (p. 132). In this study, the design of an explanatory, single case study was employed since they are characterized by "how" and "why" research questions, address more complex research issues, and seek to explain why certain behaviors have occurred, their causes and effects, in a particular setting (Yin, 2009).

Research Setting and Participants

The study was conducted in a village located in Central Turkey. The pseudonym *Snowflake* was used instead of village's actual name so as to protect anonymity while *Raindrop* was used instead of the city where the village was located. For this qualitative case study, Snowflake was purposefully selected. Two major factors played key roles in deciding on this setting. The first one is easy access to the place. The first author was able to conduct the study for an extended period of time in the research setting. The second one is that community trust had already been established, which is essential to achieve the goals of this qualitative study. The setting is the first author's hometown and she was a student of the village school for four years. Thus, they were comfortable with her presence.

Snowflake is a small place in the east of central Raindrop. There are approximately 350 houses and 1000 people in the village. Most of them make their living from agriculture and animal husbandry. There are also a small number of people who are civil servants such as specialist sergeant, municipal official, etc. or workers. The buildings are similar to shanties. There are few reinforced-concrete houses built in the last 5-10 years, though. The people usually live in nuclear families including a mother, father and children; however, their houses are still very close to their relatives, parents and siblings. The parents are generally graduates of the 5-year compulsory elementary school, and a few of them are graduates of high schools. There are also illiterate parents. In the village, boys, if they continue, go to vocational high schools. Otherwise, they start to work as an apprentice at a cafe or a small shop. As for girls, some might start a high school; however, most of them get married at an early age.

Snowflake Elementary School was first built in 1955 with 2 classrooms, 1 teachers' room, 1 restroom and 1 storehouse for coal. In 2002-2003 academic year, however, they started to use a two-storey new school built in the same area including 12 classrooms and a computer and technology lab. There are approximately 150 students from Snowflake enrolled in the school. In the past, a few students would

also bus to the school from small villages around. Except the grade 4 class, the classrooms are not equipped with a computer and a projector. The school has a meeting hall with these equipments. Thus, the meeting hall is sometimes used in the lessons. The hall is also used as the school's library because there is not another place.

The primary participant of the study was the English language teacher with pseudonym *Eray*. However, based on the goals of this study, other participants holding different roles in the context were also involved. These were 2 school administrators, 4 other teachers, 74 students and 6 parents. The first author was interacting with all the participants during the data collection process.

Data Collection

The data were obtained by means of multiple methods including observations, field notes, semi-structured interviews, and a small-scale survey with open-ended items. Besides, the documents and artifacts demonstrating the students' school success in general and more specifically their performance in English were also collected. Using various kinds of methods and data enabled the researcher to analyze the research questions from multiple perspectives and to provide the minimization of bias, to check and establish reliability and validity in this qualitative case study (Golafshani, 2003). Furthermore, triangulation by data sources (including persons; teachers, administrators, parents and students) enabled the corroboration of the findings (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Data Analysis

The process of data analysis is identified as a complex and challenging part of qualitative research. As Spencer, Ritchie and O'Connor (2003) pointed, "It requires a mix of creativity and systematic searching, a blend of inspiration and diligent detection" (p.199). The analysis procedure for each type of data sources including semi-structured interviews, open-ended questions, and observations is as follows.

The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim for accurate analysis and interpretation. The transcripts were printed out and filed separately as *interviews with the English language teacher*, *interviews with other teachers*, *interviews with school administrators*, and *interviews with parents*. Then they were all read. Interesting passages were marked with brackets and labeled. Important patterns were determined in the light of the research questions and descriptive codes were used. To illustrate, ELT-PDO was used as a code for ideas and experiences of the English language teacher regarding professional development opportunities in rural settings. Furthermore, initial interpretations and further reading led to identify themes. For instance, the theme 'Impacts of Rural Life on Education' was created by combining certain excerpts coded with extension -ERU which stands for education in rural and urban settings according to different participants.

Another data collection method was distributing open-ended survey items to students taking English as a compulsory subject. In order to analyze the data, the sheets were first grouped class by class. The techniques used for analyzing the data collected through interviewing were also used to analyze the responses given to the open-ended questions. The responses were read in order to get the gist. Then student comments were categorized as positive and negative views about the English language teacher and his teaching practices.

The duration of observations was two months. The researcher observed the beginning teacher over a period of 60 hours. His all actions were noted down at 60-second interval. For this purpose, she had prepared an observation form with 60 lines for an hour. This eased the note-taking process. The notes were rewritten in narrative form within two days at most following each observation day. In order to analyze the data, the researcher organized a frequency grid displaying types and lengths of teaching

practices, activities Eray employed during his lessons. Furthermore, the narratives were analyzed by marking interesting situations, coding and interpreting them.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, we present the findings in relation to the main research questions. These were: (i) *How does a rural elementary school and community (administrators, teachers, parents and students) situate first year of foreign language teaching in Central Turkey?* and (ii) *How does a beginning teacher experience first year of teaching at a rural elementary school in Central Turkey?*

How does a rural elementary school and community (administrators, teachers, parents and students) situate first year of foreign language teaching in Central Turkey?

The school administrators believed that most of the people in Snowflake did not give much importance to schooling. The teachers were of the opinion that they at least had respect for teachers, and they were aware of the fact that the schooling was essential for kids. However, they complained that there were also indifferent parents and most of the parents did not collaborate with them. Furthermore, Teacher 2 reported that he found parents insufficient in terms of providing support because of their low education level.

They have respect for teachers. They listen to teachers, yet they are insufficient. For example, I am teaching to the grade 4 now. Last year, the parents did not understand the assignments. They would also check them. There were their signatures on them. However, everything was wrong. I asked the parents. They said they did not understand them. They have love and respect for us. They love the school. They love teachers. Yet, they are insufficient because our parents are at best graduates of high school and they are not more than 1 or 2 people. The rest is graduate of 5-year elementary school. There are even illiterates.

The parents were also interviewed. They were asked their thoughts about their kids' school success, what they wanted them to do in the future, whether they believed they could be academically successful and how they supported their schooling. Apart from Parent 4 and 5, they stated that they were hopeful and believed that their kids would get a good a job. Moreover, they added they tried to provide many opportunities in order not to leave their kids behind their peers. To illustrate, Parent 2 mentioned that he installed internet connection at home because his daughters needed the Internet for school. The situation for Parent 3 was different. Her daughter was disabled. Therefore, she did not know how she could help her to continue her education further. Moreover, she added that she was happy with her performance at school and could not expect more as she is heavily dependent on her even for coming to school. Parent 6 was very interested in her kids' schooling. She was even one of the rare parents who were always in contact with the teachers. Parent 4 and 5 also indicated that they valued their kids' schooling and tried to do their best for them, however, they were not hopeful that their kids could be successful at school and go further in their education. Furthermore, Parent 4 was a young mother at the age of 27, yet she did not know much about schools. Her husband would give decisions about the kids' school life. Hence, she could not tell much about her ideas about the kids' education. As regards Parent 5, she had different problems. First, her son needed special education because he had attention deficit disorder. Second, they did not have much money to provide him better opportunity because they made their living through her husband's disability pension. Thus, she was of the opinion that she would be working as an apprentice when he finished compulsory elementary education.

The analysis revealed influence of the rural context on education in general. The school administrators, teachers and parents drew attention to important factors. The vice principal did not believe that rural schools were weaker in instruction when compared to their urban counterparts. In his opinion, the difference between them was only parents. Parents in urban settings were more conscious. The school principal added that there was a huge difference between rural and urban parents' attitudes and behaviors. To illustrate, the principal mentioned that parents in Snowflake came in a classroom, said that they had forgotten their keys or something else, and got it from their kids interrupting the lesson. However, parents do not interrupt the class in urban schools. They simply wait outside until the break time. Besides, the principal pointed that parents in urban settings could afford to send their kids to private courses or hire a tutor. Besides, the principal highlighted that there were not role models for students, which was an important factor on their success at school. He reported that a prestigious high school did not mean anything to their students. According to the teachers, students did not have the habit of studying. One reason for this is the influence of environmental conditions. For instance, Teacher 1 mentioned that students spent much more time than they did with them at school.

We live in a village. In their free time, it is usual in rural life that people here, men go to the cafe, and women - I am sorry to say but, come together and gossip. Now because kids are always with them until the night ... I mean, they are with us for 6 of 24 hours. And this is only 6 lesson hours. They are with their family and within this environment for the rest, more than 18 hours.

In this regard, Teacher 3 added that students' learning activities were restricted to activities they did at school and they did not add anything to what they learnt when they arrived home. In fact, he trusted his students. He stated that they were intelligent and could be even more successful than those in urban school if they studied hard; however, they contented themselves with what they received at school. The English language teacher, Eray, highlighted that parents' educational background and rural lifestyle had important impacts on the problem with students' habit of studying. He complained about the parents' inappropriate attitudes. For instance, he mentioned that parents didn't turn off the television while their kids were studying and asking them to turn off it. Hence, students had to watch due to physical conditions (houses were stove-heated and there wasn't usually a separate room for kids). The workload expected from kids led to another difference between rural and urban places. In urban life, Teacher 1 said that kids were expected to fulfill only their responsibilities as students and perhaps help prepare meals or bring a glass of water to their parents, etc. However, he emphasized that kids in rural life had serious responsibilities because their parents made their living through agriculture and animal husbandry. Additionally, as the principal underscored, Teacher 1 and 2 indicated that the lack of role models is a significant factor affecting students' success at school. Furthermore, they agreed that a great majority of students did not have goals and the habit of studying. Hence, they said a small number of students who aimed to continue their education and be academically successful could not even find anyone who could force them to study harder. In other words, students in rural settings do not have opponents who would make them feel the need to put more on their knowledge.

The parents found the solution in transferring their kids to urban schools. Apart from Parent 6, they reported that they would send their kids to an urban school if they could afford. The parents highlighted that the village school actually had some advantages such as small class size, and qualified teachers recruited to the school recently. Yet, they complained that it was not as successful as they expected it to be. There are two factors that the parents identified. The first one is teacher turnover. Parent 2 pointed that teachers left the school so soon. That's why, their kids had difficulty adapting new teachers and lessons. The second is the school success. In spite of small class size and better teacher compared to the past, the school was not as successful as the parents expected. One reason, as

mentioned before, is that there is not a competitive environment at the school. In this regard, Parent 1 mentioned that his daughter at the 8th grade was the best and there was not anybody else who she could compete with. In contrast with the other parents, Parent 6 preferred the village school because class size was very small and she was very happy with the teachers. Furthermore, she was of the opinion that students could be successful wherever they were if they studied hard. To sum up, the problems pertaining to education in the rural setting can be counted as teacher turnover, parents' attitudes and economic conditions, lack of role models, students' interest in achieving a success, and their habit of studying.

English was an important foreign language for the rural kids in today's rapidly globalizing world according to all the participants in this study. The principal, for instance, pointed to the global power of the English language and added that quality English language education should be provided these kids for a change although their parents were not well-educated. Teacher 1 also believed that English was important for everyone today, but it was even more important for the rural kids. He said:

English is important in every platform, but I think it is even more important for the rural because there is something called 'ill-fate' waiting our kids, young people, especially girls here. Education is their only chance to save themselves from this village, this environment. I mean, only a good job can save our female and male students from this village and life... I think English is one of the best ways for them to open up to other worlds.

Learning English was also important to follow and benefit technological developments, to gain access to a vast of knowledge as Teacher 2 and 4 underscored. However, the participants agreed that English language education was not sufficient and the process of studying English as a foreign language did not extend beyond exam preparation, resulting in low proficiency in English. English was important at school because a few questions appeared in exams. The vice principal claimed that students could not understand and speak English with the amount of lessons in the curriculum and suggested that it should be given more than 4 hours a week. Teacher 2 and 4 highlighted that English was a compulsory subject at elementary school for 5 years, at high school for 4 years and at university; however, students couldn't command the language. In order to provide better English language education at Snowflake, Teacher 1 drew attention to the need for a permanent English language teacher. He had been teaching at the school for more than 10 years. He reported that the school had had only one permanent English language teacher so far, and she departed after working for 3 years. The others were all temporary teachers or substitute teachers whose job wasn't to teach English. The English language teacher, Eray, underscored the lack of student interest in learning English and how this made difficult for him to teach English in his first year. He said he had only one or two students who were eager to learn English in each class. The kids were not aware of the importance of learning English. On this issue, Eray added that he needed parent support. Since he started teaching in Snowflake, only 2 or 3 parents had come to talk with him. He believed that a majority of parents in Snowflake didn't encourage their kids to study English. In fact, the parents were of the opinion that English had a great importance in today's world. However, Parent 1 and 2 found teaching practices insufficient, especially with an inexperienced and temporary teacher. Parent 3 and 6 didn't comment on the beginning teacher and his lessons, yet they stated that their kids were interested in the English language and told they studied seriously. Additionally, they said their success in English depended primarily on the kids' own efforts and interest. Lastly, Parent 4 and 5 reported they didn't have an idea about the beginning teacher, who he was, how the lessons were going, and whether their kids were interested in learning English or they were successful in the English lessons. The students' comments were also important in understanding how English language education were situated within the rural context. Generally, they reported they

loved the English lessons and the beginning teacher. Moreover, they were aware that English was very important for them. In regard to their English language teacher, the students used these words "warm-hearted, lovely, funny and honest". One of the 6th grade students defined him as follows: "He is a nice, honest, helpful person. He is a person who always wants and does his best to help us. He is possibly one of the best people I have ever met. He does his best for us." Besides, most of the students liked his way of teaching. They usually found the English lessons entertaining because he didn't bore them and made jokes at times. Especially the 5th grade reported they enjoyed his lessons because they had fun watching cartoons on Fridays. One of these students said: "He makes us watch cartoons on Fridays... He teaches the lesson very well, and he speaks very clearly." On the other hand, there were some negative thoughts. A few complained that he got angry with them because he had difficulty managing the classroom. Moreover, some students reported they didn't understand the lesson and found it difficult. Apart from the 4th and 5th grade students, they mostly found the teaching practices insufficient. Therefore, they suggested their teacher to take the lessons seriously and teach intensively. All in all, the participants confirmed the importance of English. In other words, they have general appreciation of learning the language. However, they found the teaching practices insufficient. Furthermore, English wasn't on the top of the list for the community. It was significant only for graduation because it was a compulsory school subject and success on the achievement tests which was essential to get into a good high school.

How does a beginning teacher experience first year of teaching at a rural elementary school in Turkey?

Eray was born in Raindrop. Both his mother and father were retired teachers. He completed his elementary education at schools located in the city centre. Meanwhile, they bought a place in a village. They lived in the city from October to April and moved to the village towards the end of April. In Turkey, schools close in June. Hence, he had to commute from the village to the school by bus every week day for two months until he started university in a different city. Eray went to an Anatolian High School, which is located in between the city centre and Snowflake. Since he experienced rural life throughout his childhood, Eray stated he developed a sympathetic understanding of rural life and community. He went to a university in Western Turkey and studied English language and literature. His faculty was located 10 km away from the city centre. It wasn't a problem for him, though. He would get on the bus in front of his house. He graduated from the university in 2011. He could finish earlier; however, he couldn't go to the university in the fall semester of his second year because of health issues. Thus, he suspended the program for one semester and extended his graduation. Furthermore, he decided to go on abroad with Erasmus exchange program in his last year. He went to Romania and stayed there for 6 months. Eray hadn't been studying in a teacher education program. Hence, he had to attend pedagogical formation courses offered within his university in his third year so as to be appointed as an English language teacher to a public school.

Eray said he had been interested in the English language since his childhood. In fact, his interest is based on his love for planes. His brother would buy him plane-related magazines. However, they were in English. In Turkey, after completing first year at high school, students used to choose one of the four tracks; Turkish language-Mathematics, Science, Social Sciences and Foreign Languages according to their interest and success in the related courses (There is no track anymore as of the 2010-2011 academic year according to the decision of Turkish Ministry of National Education). Eray decided to go to Foreign Languages because he was more successful in English. Namely, Eray was always into English; however, he didn't have a strong aspiration for teaching. He said he liked teaching; however, teaching remained a second option for him. He still had a dream of doing something about flying. Furthermore, he mentioned that he also planned to apply for a graduate

program in International Relations and get a position in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in particular in a consulate. He highlighted that he made attempts to succeed his goals. He said:

My future plans... I wanted to have a master's degree in International Relations a lot. I have applied to a few places; however, I haven't received any positive returns yet. I have received a positive return from one place; however, as I mentioned, I couldn't go there because of financial reasons. I plan to take a score over 70% on ALES (Graduate Examination) and transfer to International Relations. Of course, I want a career in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, or a consulate. I want to go abroad and represent Turkey.

Eray was unable to get a sufficient score required for appointment at a public school as a full-time teacher because he couldn't get prepared for State Employee Selection Exam spending his last year mostly in Romania and dealing with his graduation affairs. Thus, he decided to study one more year. In the meantime, he intended to start his teaching career and gain experience with the encouragement of his parents. He applied for a temporary position in Raindrop to the Provincial Directorate of National Education. They called him back very soon and asked if he liked to work in Snowflake. Eray said he became very happy when he heard he was assigned to a village because his friends shared some unappealing experiences in urban schools. Moreover, his parents had recommended him to begin teaching in a rural setting. He was also of the opinion that this could facilitate a smooth transition to the teaching profession from being a student. He expanded on the reasons why teaching in a rural setting could be better. He said he could establish a stronger relationship with his students. He mentioned the challenges that his friends encountered at urban schools in Raindrop.

Challenges... More crowded. Students, of course, have a better command of English. They might have a better quality of education; however, they cannot manage them. They say they don't have love and respect for their teachers. I saw they had difficulty. Therefore, I wanted to work here. If I had at least a good communication and they showed me love and respect, I thought everything would be easier, otherwise not because of their level.

In addition, Eray mentioned that he didn't like urban life. Thus, he would rather work in a rural setting where both himself and his students could be involved in natural environment. On the other hand, he stated that he planned to work at a rural school for 4 or 5 years. He had 3 major factors forcing him to give this decision. First, he accepted that rural life is limited in terms of opportunities and facilities. He is young and single today; however, he intends to settle down and raise his family in an urban place. Second, he would like to work with a foreign language class. Third, he complained about the physical conditions and lack of resources at the village school. He mentioned:

We can't even find a tape. We find a tape, but this time we can't find the cassette of the book. I didn't have my teacher's book. It even came later. The books are missing. As I said, physical conditions... Why are they insufficient? It would be better if each class had a projector. In the first term, I went to the meeting hall for the projector; however, I couldn't work it. The computer is too old. You can't connect to the Internet. If you can, it doesn't play a video. Nothing.

In short, Eray likes rural life and has passion for teaching in rural settings. If he continues his teaching career after State Employee Selection Exam, he is willing to be assigned as a permanent teacher to a rural school. However, he still intends to transfer to an urban place later because of the aforesaid causes which primarily arise from rural constraints.

Eray is a beginning teacher. He did not have any previous experience except his practice teaching at university, which were not effective and sufficient according to him. Therefore, although he thought a rural setting would facilitate his transition to becoming a teacher, he still went through a difficult process in his first year in Snowflake. He said it took a long time for him to learn about the educational system, the school and his students' background. Above all, he stated that he couldn't decide how he should behave his students.

I couldn't know how to approach to the kids at first. Should I have a good communication or be a strict teacher? Should I be a calm and sweet teacher? I couldn't know. I am trying to find a middle path. If I find, I believe I'll be successful. Now, I seem more easy-going, but I plan to be stricter.

For Eray, it is important to establish a good communication with students. He believed that this increased students' motivation and promoted their concentration on the lesson. In terms of teaching practices, he mentioned that he didn't approve Grammar-Translation method and didn't want to focus on grammar only. Moreover, he thought that it was hard to teach grammar to elementary students because they didn't even know their equivalents in Turkish and how to identify them. Hence, he supported the idea of developing students' listening and speaking skills through making use of computer programs, cartoons and movies in English. There were his ideas; however, he complained that he had to focus on grammar in his lesson and make students write rules because of influences of achievement tests. To illustrate, there are 17 English questions in high school entrance exam. Furthermore, he regarded himself an insufficient teacher in terms of integrating computer technology in the English lesson. Based on all these, he indicated that he was struggling to shape his own way of teaching in his first year. For instance, he mentioned how he realized that making students write grammar rules or new words was more useful than simply distributing photocopies to them. The reason behind his tendency to writing is that he couldn't make students speak or simply read aloud a line. Thus, he gave up the idea of making them speak. Writing at least enabled them to gain self-confidence in using English. The same reason led Eray to use the native language in his lesson. At first, he said he tried to use English with expressions such as 'Good morning class', 'How are you?', etc. However, he realized soon that he couldn't say anything else in English. He couldn't involve his students in the process of using English in class. He decided to start with reading aloud activities so that they could gain self-confidence; however, as mentioned, he couldn't make them read aloud even a line. Thereupon, he gave up uttering even small expressions for greetings because he felt it unnatural and meaningless.

The analysis of the data obtained through observations unveiled instructional activities the beginning English language teacher employed in his lesson. Generally, Eray followed his coursebook step by step and sometimes supported his lesson with additional exercises. Typically, he began a new unit translating the title of the unit with his students and talking about what they would learn. Accordingly, he introduced either a new grammar topic or new vocabulary. Furthermore he sometimes distributed multiple choice tests because he was also supposed to prepare the student to the achievement test. The diversity of activities and their relative percentages varied according to the grades he was teaching. To illustrate, he elaborated his lesson with a variety of activities in the 4th and 5th grade. He focused on vocabulary and pronunciation with them. However, his activities, especially in the 7th and 8th grade, were restricted to grammar exercises and coursebook.

How did it influence Eray to begin his career with rural teaching? In this regard, the other participants except Eray were also interviewed. Both the school administrators believed that beginning teachers

shouldn't be assigned to rural settings for their first year of teaching. The school principal explained his thoughts as follows;

Now it is a bit different here (at the rural school). There is a group of students who have a certain level there (at urban schools). Things are settled. Students' behaviors are settled. Families' educational, cultural and economic level are good. Teachers professionally develop better there... Here, I don't know... It seems they don't develop much. They work here for 2 years and learn a little. Then when they go there... If you conduct a survey, you will see this. Conduct a questionnaire with our teachers working in rural settings, 90% of them abstain from going to urban settings. They worry about whether or not they can do it.

While beginning teachers know how to teach in theory, they are insufficient in practice according to the administrators. Furthermore, they claimed that the biggest problem of beginning teachers was related to communication with their students and other people in rural settings. The vice principal underscored that teachers' attitudes towards people in rural places should be different from those in urban places. The school principal exemplified the way of their conversation with these words " they say what they were supposed to say at the end of the conversation at the very beginning", thereby making it difficult for beginning teachers who grew up in urban settings to establish a healthy communication with them.

As for the teachers, they - except Teacher 2 - didn't have the same opinion with the school administrators. They all stated that teachers should begin with some challenges before better teaching conditions. However, Teacher 1 emphasized that they shouldn't be assigned to schools where there isn't another teacher to guide them. He said that beginning with rural teaching could be effective only if there were at least a few teachers around to support them. Moreover, they added that beginning teachers should be willing to work in rural settings, voluntarily go to these places and be self-sacrificing when needed. Eray was lucky as he had a circle of people who were always ready to help him and encourage him to do his best for the kids. To illustrate, Eray mentioned how the school principal encouraged him to integrate computer technology in his lesson. Furthermore, he pointed that the other teachers provided him with additional sources for English language teaching. They taught him how to use e-school management system, etc.

From a different perspective, Teacher 4 touched upon that beginning teachers would feel more comfortable in their most stressful period of teaching if they began with rural teaching. He explained that there weren't many people who would interfere in their practices, thereby giving them opportunity to individualize their instruction. Besides, the teachers were of the opinion that beginning teachers could increase school success in rural settings because they are more idealist and enthusiastic. Teacher 3 added that beginning teachers could also increase school success because they didn't have anything else, any social activities other than school work. Hence, she said they only cared about what they could do for their students.

Their only social activity is sitting with friends, at least we would do so, and watching series on a TV channel. They weren't many TV channels operating. I mean, this is your only social activity. Besides, (we think) what we can give children... For instance, we didn't have a printer; hence we would write everything. I would prepare practice sheets for my students. I mean, productivity is higher in the first years.

Additionally, Teacher 3 mentioned that beginning teachers built strong relationships with the rural community with time. Based on his own teaching, he added that beginning teachers gained unforgettable experiences in rural settings.

For example, they want to establish good friendship... but then they fall in love with the village. They want to stay in that village. I mean, they can never forget those days... I worked in villages. Those were beautiful days. I don't know. I was the only teacher. We would sit together, chat and eat with the village headman, imam, parents and young people in the garden.

However, Teacher 2 had the same opinion with the administrators. He pointed that beginning teachers didn't have previous teaching experience; therefore, they come to rural settings without knowing exactly what to do, how to behave as a teacher. He was of the opinion that a beginning teacher shouldn't be regarded as a fully-fledged teacher because they are still struggling to build their professional identity. Hence, he suggested that teachers complete their first year in a crowded, urban school and then be assigned to rural settings.

Eray had passion for rural teaching. He was of the opinion that rural schools enabled a smooth transition to the teaching profession and he could establish a stronger relationship with his students. The findings showed that he succeeded to gain their love and respect, too. Yet, the parents didn't get in touch with him at least as much as they did with the previous teacher. He stated that he couldn't develop a feeling of belonging to the place. Furthermore, he agreed that he couldn't develop himself professionally in Snowflake because there was nobody who he could exchange ideas pertaining to specifically English language teaching. Besides, Eray was a temporary teacher and still studying for State Employee Selection Exam. He confessed that he didn't have time to do much for his professional development, either.

CONCLUSION

This study explored how a rural elementary school and community situated teaching and learning English as a foreign language in Central Turkey and how a beginning English language teacher experienced his first year of teaching at a rural elementary school. The findings revealed significant themes and three major conclusions were made.

First, the findings show that there are four keys to being a successful teacher in a rural setting. These include; appreciation of rural life, passion for rural teaching, aspiration for teaching profession and readiness for teaching. In this study, there were two factor leading Eray to work in Snowflake; appreciation of rural life and passion for rural teaching. He had grown up in a village in Raindrop; thus, he had a sympathetic understanding of rural life and community. He himself preferred to work in a rural school as he believed he would be able to establish better relationships with people, his students and parents. However, he didn't have aspiration for teaching profession. To him, teaching was a second option which he could do unless he could get his dream job. Intrinsic motivation, as Flores and Day (2006) claimed, is one of the most important factors to keep idealism in teaching under challenging circumstances. Otherwise, teaching might be perceived as more traditional and teacher-centered as these challenges couldn't be overcome. Eray never dreamed to become a teacher and even attended the pedagogical formation courses just in case. Furthermore, he wasn't happy with the program and believed that it wasn't effective in terms of preparing teachers. He openly stated that theoretical courses didn't help him today because he didn't know how to relate them to his lesson. Then he complained about his practice teaching which lasted for only one term. He pointed that his mentor wasn't a good role model for them and he couldn't find much opportunity to be in front of a real classroom, either. In addition, Eray regarded himself insufficient in terms of integrating

technology in his lesson. Briefly, he didn't seem to be well-prepared for teaching. The findings confirm previous studies claiming that teacher education programs in Turkey didn't seem to prepare high quality teachers for rural schools (i.e. Alptekin & Tatar, 2011; Çakıroğlu & Çakıroğlu, 2003).

Another goal of this study was to understand the place of English language education in a rural setting in Central Turkey. The findings show that Snowflake had general appreciation for quality English language education. However, the participants didn't find teaching practices satisfying in terms of acquiring effective language skills. Therefore, English was valued only for graduation from the school and obtaining success on achievement tests.

Finally, Eray was a beginning English language teacher. Important observations were made regarding beginning career with rural teaching. Eray was enthusiastic. He was eager to do his best for his students and he could have done if he had stepped into the profession well-prepared. However, he reported that he wasn't equipped with necessary skills and knowledge. Furthermore, the biggest challenge that beginning teachers might face in rural settings appeared to be communication-related. They may have difficulty understanding parents and learning about their students' background in rural places. Therefore, the parents preferred homegrown teachers. As a last point, beginning teachers may lose their idealism and stick to traditional methods if they can't cope with rural challenges. Therefore, they should be provided professional mentoring in their first years of teaching in rural settings.

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Kırsal Bir İlköğretim Okulunda Milli Eğitim Müfredatının Uygulanması: Göreve Yeni Başlayan Bir İngilizce Öğretmenin Deneyimleri Üzerine Nitel Bir Çalışma

Öz. Bu çalışma kırsal bir yerde deneyimlerin, göreve yeni başlayan bir dil öğretmenin kimliğini ve uygulamalarını nasıl şekillendirdiğini araştırdı. Veriler yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler, gözlemler ve açık uçlu sorularla toplandı. Yorumsal analiz, öğretmenlikte başarılı olmakla ilgili dört öge ortaya çıkarttı. Bunlar kırsal yaşamın beğenilmesi, kırsal kesimde öğretmenlik için heves, öğretmenlik mesleği için istek, ve öğretmenliğe hazır olmadır. Bu kırsal ilköğretim okulunda katılımcıların genel anlamda kaliteli dil eğitiminin önemini kabul ettiklerini gördük. Ancak, incelememiz yabancı dil eğitiminin katılımcılara göre müfredatta çok önemli bir yeri olmadığını ortaya çıkarmıştır. Genel olarak sonuçlar göreve yeni başlayan bir öğretmenin kırsal bir yerde milli eğitim programını uygularken karşılaştığı zorlukları göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kırsal, yabancı dil eğitimi, eğitim programları, ilköğretim, göreve yeni başlayan öğretmen.

Özet

Amaç ve önem: Öğrenci başarısını etkileyen, sosyo-ekonomik yapı, ebeveyn desteği, toplum, ilgili bir okul gibi pek çok faktör vardır (Applegate, 2008). Aynı değişkenlerden etkilenen kırsal yerlerdeki okulların pek çok sorunlara sahip olduğu (Huang, 2011), bu nedenle de kırsal yerlerde eğitimin kentle kıyaslandığında daha zayıf olduğu düşünülmektedir (Taneri & Engin-Demir, 2011). Ancak, eğitim, sosyal değişimin, toplumun gelişmesi ve tüm çocuklara nitelikli eğitim sağlanarak daha adil bir toplumun oluşturulmasının başlangıç noktasıdır da. Bununla birlikte, araştırmalar yeni bir dil öğrenmeye ne kadar erken yaşta başlanılırsa sonucun da o kadar iyi olacağını göstermektedir (Tochon, 2009). İngilizce'nin bugünün dünyasındaki imajını da düşünürsek kırsal kesimdeki çocukları kaliteli bir dil eğitiminden mahrum etmenin hiçbir gerekçesi olamaz. Öğretmenlerin kırsal yerlerdeki okulların başarısında önemli rol oynadıklarına inanılmaktadır (Applegate, 2008). Bu nedenle, tüm öğrenciler için en iyi öğretmenleri yetiştirmek gerekmektedir (Zeichner, 2003). Bu çalışma ile Orta Anadolu'da kırsal bir ilköğretim okulu ve toplumun İngilizce eğitimini nasıl konumlandığı ve kırsal bir yerin göreve yeni başlayan bir İngilizce öğretmenin mesleki kimliği ve eğitim uygulamalarını nasıl şekillendirdiğini incelenmiştir.

Yöntem: Nitel bir durum çalışması yürütülmüştür. Gerekli veriler, üç ana yöntemle toplanmıştır; yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler, gözlemler ve açık uçlu anket soruları. Tüm görüşmeler ses kaydına alınmış ve kelimesi kelimesine çözümlenmiştir. Gözlemler, İngilizce öğretmenin okuldaki aktivitelerinin kaydını içermektedir. İngilizce öğretmeni hem ders içi hem ders dışında iki ay boyunca gözlemlenmiş ve aktiviteleri 60 saniye aralıklarla not edilmiştir. İngilizce dersini programlarında zorunlu ders olarak alan öğrencilere İngilizce dersi ve öğretmenleri ile ilgili açık-uçlu anket soruları dağıtılmıştır. Veriler düzenli olarak dosyalanmış, kodlama ve yorumlama yoluyla analiz edilmiştir.

Bulgular: Bulgular, araştırma sorularına cevap verecek şekilde iki başlık altında incelenmiştir. İlki kırsal bir ilköğretim okulunun ve toplumun yabancı dil öğretiminin ilk yılını nasıl konumlandığı ile ilgiliydi. Okul yönetimi ve öğretmenler, ebeveynler her ne kadar iyi niyetli olsalar da çocuklarının eğitimi konusunda gerek kendi eğitim durumları gerek maddi meseleler nedeniyle yetersiz kaldıklarını vurgulamışlardır. Çevresel koşullar, ailelerin yaşam tarzı, evlerin fiziksel durumu gibi etmenlerin öğrencilerin çalışma alışkanlığı üzerine olumsuz etkileri olduğu, genel olarak öğrencilerin okulda öğrendikleri ile yetinmek zorunda kaldıkları anlaşılmıştır. Okul yönetimi ve öğretmenler, öğrenciler için rol modellerinin eksikliğinden yakınmışlar. Ebeveynler, öğrenciler için rekabet ortamının olmamasının da başarıyı olumsuz etkilediğini belirtmiştir. İngilizce eğitimine gelindiğinde, tüm katılımcılar İngilizce'nin önemini kabul etmiş ve nitelikli bir dil eğitiminin olması gerektiğini savunmuşlardır. Ancak, İngilizce eğitiminin okulda yetersiz görüldüğü, zorunlu bir ders olduğu için mezun olabilmek ve liseye giriş sınavlarında yeterli puan alabilmek için değer verildiği öğrenilmiştir.

İkinci soru göreve yeni başlayan bir dil öğretmenin kırsal bir ilköğretim okulunda mesleğin ilk yılındaki deneyimleri ile ilgiliydi. Araştırmada İngilizce öğretmeni çalışmanın yapıldığı şehirde doğmuş ve kırsal yaşam tarzına yabancı değildi. İngilizce'ye çocukluğundan beri ilgi duymasına rağmen öğretmenlik mesleği onun için hep ikinci bir seçenek olduğu öğrenildi. Geçici öğretmen olarak çalıştığı için farklı meslek alternatiflerini düşünmeye devam etmekteydi. Bir kaç teşebbüsü olmasına rağmen gerekli sınavlarda yeterli puan alamadığı için hazırlanmaya devam ettiğini bildirdi. Yine de kırsal yaşamı tanıdığı ve öğretmenlik mesleğine daha rahat bir geçiş olabileceğini düşündüğü için bu ilköğretim okulunda görev verildiğine sevindiğini bildirdi. Kentte çalışan arkadaşlarının karşılaştığı sevgi ve saygının eksikliği, kalabalık sınıflar gibi zorlukların ve kent yaşamını olumsuzluklarının kararını etkilediğini ekledi. Göreve yeni başladığı, daha önce kısa süreli bir staj deneyimi hariç okul deneyimi olmadığı için öğrencilere nasıl yaklaşması gerektiği konusunda ve eğitim sistemini anlamada zorluklar yaşadığı öğrenildi. Öğrencilerle iyi bir iletişim kurmanın önemine ve İngilizce eğitiminde geleneksel metotlardan ziyade dinleme ve konuşma becerilerine ağırlık verilmesi gerektiğine inanan bir öğretmen olsa da lise giriş sınavlarında İngilizce sorularının ağırlığı nedeniyle kendini öğrencilerine çoktan seçmeli test çözme alışkanlığı kazandırmak zorunda hissettiğini açıkladı. Ders içi yapılan gözlemlerde de öğretmenin öğrencilere gramer konuları ve örneklerini yazdırma ve çoktan seçmeli test çözdürmeye yönelik aktivitelerinin çokluğu dikkat çekti.

Tartışma ve sonuç: Özetle öğretmenlikte başarılı olmakla ilgili dört etken ortaya çıktı; kırsal yaşamın beğenilmesi, kırsal kesimde öğretmenlik için heves, öğretmenlik mesleği için istek, ve öğretmenliğe hazır olma. Nitelikli yabancı dil eğitiminin önemi kabul görse de müfredatta çok önem teşkil eden bir yere konulmadığı görüldü. Genel olarak sonuçlar göreve yeni başlayan bir öğretmenin kırsal bir yerde ulusal müfredatı uygularken karşılaştığı zorlukları göstermiştir. Kısaca göreve yeni başlayan öğretmenlerin kırsal zorluklarla başa çıkamama durumunda idealizmlerini kaybedip, geleneksel metotlara bağlı kalabileceği görülmüştür. Bu nedenle, kırsal yerlerde öğretmenliğin ilk yılında mesleki destek sağlanmalıdır.