

Full Length Research Paper

Primary school pre-service teachers' self-assessed competency level of teaching how to read in Turkey

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Learning to read is an important step for a child's academic and social success. Meaningful and fluent reading skills are linked to children's progress in their thinking and criticizing abilities. The knowledge and skills required for effective reading are initially taught in primary schools. The main responsibility of primary school teachers' is to teach pupils how to read. The purpose of this study is to analyze primary school pre-service teachers' self- assessed competency level of teaching reading. For this purpose, teaching reading contents are analyzed in two dimensions: theoretical background and practice. Results show that pre-service primary school teachers are competent in the theoretical background dimension. In this dimension, the parental involvement activities were found in the lowest competency level. Their competency level was moderate for teaching reading practices dimension. For teaching reading dimension, the use of different teaching methods in one activity was found in the lowest competency level. Besides, the results showed that evaluation skills of pre-service teachers in reading activities need to be supported.

Key words: Reading, teaching reading, literacy skills.

INTRODUCTION

The necessity of acquiring strong literacy skills to live a productive life is increasingly being recognized (Kosnik et al., 2006). Literacy is defined as a fundamental human right and the foundation for lifelong learning. For individuals, families, and societies alike, it is an instrument of empowerment to improve one's health, one's income, and one's relationship with the world (UNESCO, 2006).

Teaching first grade students to read is one of the essential elements of a primary school education program. Learning to read is an important step on a child's route to success (Vaughn et al., 2015; Carbo and

Cole, 1995).

Fluent and meaningful reading skills are related to students' progress in criticizing, discussion, and thinking abilities. In primary schools, first grades to third grades, successful reading is mainly considered as a skill in itself. This skill is expected to be achieved by students. However, reading is a skill that students need to obtain information in the fourth and fifth grades. It has been explained that children learn to read from kindergarten to third grade and after that, they read to learn (Green, 1995). Thus, after students graduate from primary schools, it is crucial that they have high level of reading

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skills to be able to do well in literature, social studies, science, and other subjects.

It is a teacher's role and responsibility to provide and plan an effective reading program that will enable the beginning readers to become skillful readers (MEB, 2005). The challenge is to make available the best learning methods to every student. Strong dedication to the implementation of educational standards requires constant reflection upon the academic performances of all categories of students.

The subject of teaching reading often revisits past issues in search of effective practices to positively impact students' reading abilities. Educational reformation constantly seeks instructional strategies, and practices for better teaching. At this point, the education of teacher candidates is an important subject. Their education is expected to have instructional strategies and practices because they are still in the process of learning. The Ministry of National Education also stresses intensive teacher training to raise the academic success of primary school students.

Knowledge and skills required for effective reading are initially taught in primary schools. The curriculum of the Turkish course states that primary school students should be able to use Turkish effectively, read and comprehend correctly, and think creatively as entrepreneurs of researching and questioning (MEB, 2005). Primary school teachers are required to have all the necessary qualifications in order to educate students to have these abilities. Therefore, teacher education programs need to be structured in a way to provide teacher candidates with knowledge and skills concerning reading (Karadağ, 2015).

New beginners of reading basically read to learn reading. Teachers prepare the students and environment for the upcoming reading activity. Teachers make sure that the students are attending to reading activity. At this stage, children begin to recognize words and comprehend their meaning. They also start reading sentences and they have to understand the meaning as well. At this stage, reading speed becomes an important indicator for successful reading. Students should be able to organize the text, analyze the information and summarize it (Figure 1).

Teachers should also provide an opportunity to elaborate on the activity by provoking the students to draw connection with previous experiences and knowledge as well as drawing conclusion and viewpoints about the recent tasks.

Poor levels of academic literacy are a matter of concern and reading intervention campaigns have been put in place all around the world especially in America and the United Kingdom (Mgqwashu and Makhathini, 2017).

In Turkish education system too, literacy teaching is seen as the obligation to raise the academic achievement (Baştuğ and Demirtaş, 2016; Akyol, 2005). As a part of

this progress, European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning is recognized and established nationally (MEB, 2017).

One of the key competencies of lifelong learning in the framework is communication, using native language. In accordance with the key competencies, Turkish literacy program is updated and different teaching methods were adapted last year. Besides the teaching programs, researchers should focus on how to prepare classroom teachers to work with primary school students who are in the stage of learning reading. It has been proven that students who do not develop age appropriate literacy skills by the end of third grade are at high risk of being failed (Snow and Matthews, 2016).

Pre-service classroom teachers may not be able to help students read effectively because of their inadequate experience level. There is relatively little known information about how pre-service classroom teachers manage reading activities. The purpose of this study is to determine primary school pre-service classroom teachers' self-assessed evaluation of teaching reading in theoretical and practical phases.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

One of the qualitative methods scanning model was used in this research. Screening model is a research approach that aims to describe the past or existing situation as it is (Karasar, 2005). This study aims to describe pre-service classroom teachers' self-assessed competency levels in teaching reading. Data were collected using Teaching Reading Survey (TRS). TRS was developed using a content analysis approach. The steps of content analysis were followed as explained by Bailey (1982) and Yecke (2005):

1. Determining the sampling
2. Developing categories
3. Determining the unit of analysis, and
4. Quantification.

The studies of pre-service teachers' courses and assessment approaches related to teaching reading were analyzed (Akyol, 2005; Güneş, 2014; Nargül, 2006). During this process, guidelines and program achievements of Ministry of National Education regarding teaching reading were listed.

Pre service classroom teacher should be able to achieve dimensions and contents of teaching reading subjects. Studies showed that parental involvement is one of the key factors affecting children's reading performance (Kurtulmuş, 2016; Gilleece, 2015; Peissig, 2002).

Accordingly, parental involvement also was in the Ministry of Education's kindergarten level program achievements (MEB, 2013). Finally, the dimensions were established as 'theoretical background' and 'practice' with six items for each. The dimensions and their items were sent to three specialists and final corrections were made. The finalized form of TRS was applied to 10 pre-service classroom teachers to verify whether there was confusion with the overall meaning of the content. TRS was employed as five-point scale (1-the least confident; 5-the most confident) and was completed.

The participants were 60 senior students from the public university of Aksaray City and 60 senior students from one of the

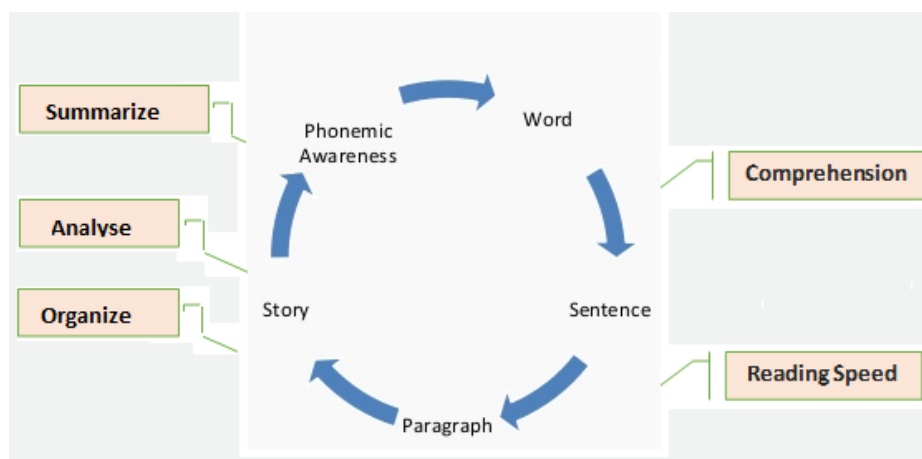


Figure 1. Reading cycle.

public universities of Ankara City. 120 students representing both rural and suburban schools completed the TRS. Before completing the survey, the participants received a cover letter explaining the purpose of the study. The participants worked independently to provide chosen responses and there was no time constraint for the completion of the survey. The arithmetic means and standard deviations of answers were analyzed descriptively using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) 15.

RESULTS

Primary school pre-service teachers reported their self-assessed competence level of teaching reading. Their responses were analyzed in two sections: The theoretical background of teaching reading and teaching reading practices. Means and standard deviations of theoretical background of teaching reading are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 presents primary school pre-service teachers' self-assessed competence level in teaching reading. Results indicated that pre-service primary school teachers found themselves competent in the theoretical background of teaching reading ($\bar{x}= 3.58$). When we analyze the theoretical background's items, pre-service teachers reported that they were competent in having the *knowledge of different teaching methods* ($\bar{x}= 3.97$), *preparing the child to read* ($\bar{x}= 3.91$), *planning peer tutoring in reading* ($\bar{x}= 3.85$), *reading effects on child's development* ($\bar{x}= 3.77$) and *psychology of children in reading process* ($\bar{x}= 3.57$).

Results show that primary school pre-service teachers had only one moderate level competence in planning *parental involvement activities* ($\bar{x}= 2.45$). Their overall self-assessed competence level in the theoretical aspect was competent. The means and standard deviations of practices for teaching reading are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 presents primary school pre-service teachers' self-assessed competence level in teaching reading practices. The results indicated that pre-service primary

school teachers found themselves moderately competent in teaching reading practices ($\bar{x}= 3.30$). When the theoretical background items were analyzed, pre-service teachers reported that they were competent in *supporting children's word recognition skills* ($\bar{x}= 3.95$). They also reported that they were moderately competent in *evaluating children's fluent reading skills* ($\bar{x}= 3.25$), *supporting children's reading comprehension skills* ($\bar{x}= 3.22$), *evaluating children's reading comprehension skills* ($\bar{x}= 3.15$), *supporting children's fluent reading skills* ($\bar{x}= 3.14$) and *using different reading teaching methods in an activity* ($\bar{x}= 3.12$).

Results show that primary school pre-service teachers had only one competence level in supporting children's word recognition skills ($\bar{x}= 3.95$). For the other items and overall self-assessed competence level, teaching reading dimension was moderately competent.

Results indicated that primary school pre-service teachers' competence level in the dimension of theoretical background was competent while in the section of teaching, reading practices was moderately competent. Results show that pre-service teachers did not feel competent as regards subject in classroom teaching practices.

DISCUSSION

The current study indicated that primary school pre-service teachers were competent in the theoretical knowledge of teaching reading dimension. The moderate level of competence was reported for planning parental involvement activities in this section. Parental involvement in child's education has been accepted as a crucial element. Studies on parental involvement do not only prove their positive effect on child's development, but also present specific links among the structure of the involvement and children's academic achievement and

Table 1. Theoretical background of teaching reading.

Theoretical background	\bar{x}	σ
Knowledge of different teaching methods	3.97	0.36
Preparing the child to read	3.91	0.32
Planning peer tutoring in reading	3.85	0.16
Reading's effects on child development	3.77	0.24
Psychology of children in the reading process	3.57	0.35
Planning parental involvement activities	2.45	0.27
Overall mean	3.58	-

Note: 5-point scale (1=the least confident, 5=the most confident).

Table 2. Practices of teaching reading.

Practice	\bar{x}	σ
Supporting children's word recognition skills	3.95	0.37
Evaluating children's fluent reading skills	3.25	0.32
Supporting children's reading comprehension skills	3.22	0.31
Evaluating children's reading comprehension skills	3.15	0.31
Supporting children's fluent reading skills	3.14	0.30
Using different teaching methods in an activity	3.12	0.30
Overall mean	3.30	-

Note: 5-point scale (1=the least confident, 5=the most confident).

social emotional outcomes (Kurtulmuş, 2016).

Home-school relationship refers to the formal and informal connections between parents and their young children's educational settings. Planning parental involvement for children's reading activities would enhance the reading skills of children. Consequently, knowledge and techniques of planning parental involvement for children's reading activities should be known to primary school pre-service teachers. During pre-service teachers' education, this subject could be more elaborated and practiced. These practices may be directly related to schoolwork, including assisting in reading, responding to children's book choices, and talking about the fiction of the book for comprehension.

The study showed that primary school pre-service teachers had moderate competence level in teaching reading practices dimension. Pre-service teachers state that they are only competent in supporting children's word recognition skills. Comparing with other items in this section, word recognition skills of children are easy to follow and intervene. When the reading skills become non-presentational such as comprehension, pre-service teachers' competence level becomes moderate.

In addition, they reported the lowest moderate level of competence for using different teaching techniques in one activity. Improving the effectiveness of reading practices for the new readers requires different approaches and practices. Informed and effective

classroom instruction, especially in the early grades, can prevent or at least effectively address and limit the severity of reading and writing problems.

Research shows that with appropriate, intensive instruction, all but the most severe reading disabilities can be ameliorated in the early grades and students can get on track toward academic success (Moats et al., 2010). The practices emphasize planning, organization, attention to task, critical thinking, and self-assessed management. Improving primary school pre-service teacher's competency level in using different teaching techniques is essential to enhance the children's reading experiences.

It is important to investigate how each student learns, the processes involved and how learning can be strengthened (Lunt, 1993; Duman, 2017). This investigation involves noticing, representing, and responding to children's literate behaviors, rendering them meaningful assistance for a particular purpose and audience (Johnston and Costello, 2009).

It can be seen that assessment is not only about measuring performance of learners in reading, but also considering how the teaching process is impacting on the children. Primary school pre-service teachers stated that they had moderate level competence in evaluation. It can be suggested that increasing the evaluation skills of pre-service teachers would lead to effective teaching and learning.

The current study provided some preliminary information on the competency level of primary school pre-service teachers, as regards teaching how to read. The results suggested that teacher educators should design practicum periods, which cover all types of intervention strategies for teaching reading. Pre-service primary school teachers are in need of being supported to address the needs of new readers. Further research on effective methods for teaching how to read is also needed.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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