

## The Future of Education in Turkey: The Foresight of Language Teacher Candidates

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### Abstract

*The impact of the recent technological developments has been felt in all aspects of life, and the ones who were born in the 50's and 60's have witnessed innumerable changes in the societies in which they live and have tried to keep up with the innovations most of which were unpredicted before. In line with these changes, education throughout the World has been affected drastically because of the current needs and priorities of the societies. Education has become more learner centered and roles of teachers have been redefined. However teachers and teacher candidates are still regarded as change agents as they were in the past. In one hand, most of the teachers who are currently working are busy with fulfilling their teaching responsibilities by familiarizing themselves with the digital technology. Teacher candidates, on the other hand, prepare themselves for the requirements of their future career with their digital literacy. The purpose of this study is to focus on the foresights of the language teacher candidates at Mersin University, in the departments of English and Turkish Language Teaching, as they are going to be the change agents in future educational settings. They have been asked to answer three open-ended questions and write freely about their predictions related to their teaching, learners, and instructional materials and technology, which they will be confronting a decade later. The content analysis of the qualitative data gathered from their writings have revealed their expectations about future classrooms and the roles they are going to play as professionals. The analysis has also provided valuable tips to be taken into consideration by the teacher educators. Consequently, this study has led to new questions to be posed both by the candidates and the teacher educators.*

### 1. Introduction

The impact of the recent technological developments has been felt in all aspects of life, and the ones who were born in the 50's and 60's have witnessed innumerable changes in the societies in which they live and have tried to keep up with the innovations which were unpredictable before. In line with these changes, education throughout the world has been affected drastically because of the current needs and priorities of the societies. First of all, the teacher-centered instruction has given way to the learner centeredness in order to address the new educational demands. The learner-centeredness has been considered the new path to be followed and hence, the focus of instruction has shifted from teachers to learners. Such a shift has brought the necessity of redefining the roles of teachers.

Today's teachers are primarily expected to facilitate their students' learning [1] [2]. According to Brown [3], teachers can play several other roles to facilitate the learning. Harmer [4] states that teacher as a facilitator is the one who fosters learner autonomy by sharing some of the leadership with learners. Fulfilling these roles and responsibilities leads to a more productive learning environment. Hence, it can be said that today's teachers are required to perform much more than they used to by having to play many roles. Teacher education, in this sense, has gained a new momentum since helping candidates prepare for their future career is a challenging issue. Teacher educators, today, may not completely describe what will be required in future teaching settings, however, they are able to make accurate predictions about the technological innovations awaiting for candidates.

Fullan [5] points out that teacher candidates are change agents since they are going to plan, manage and facilitate learning. As change agents, their perspectives and concerns on teaching and learning are of great importance. While taking the courses in ITE (Initial Teacher Education) period, they construct their own preconceptions of teaching, and have their expectations for their future roles and teaching responsibilities. The studies on teacher candidates' expectations and foresights may reveal their way of thinking, professional awareness, attitudes toward the job and the system. The findings of such studies can make contribution to the ITE curriculum evaluation. Moreover, they can give valuable input to the policy makers for future decisions. It is obvious that their positive and negative expectation

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for their future performance can be signaling some clues about the roles they will play, in other words, their efficiency looked for the profession.

This study aims to look at the foresights of the language teacher candidates in the departments of English Language Teaching and Turkish Language Teaching, at Mersin University, since they are going to be the change agents in Turkish schools in the future.

## 2. Methodology

By employing qualitative research design, it can be possible to understand individuals' feelings, values and perceptions which affect their behaviors [6]. As Creswell et al. [7] point out, in qualitative research, the researcher tries to establish the meaning of phenomenon from the views of participants. This study is a qualitative one which asks the candidate teachers to think imaginatively about their teaching performance and learners in a 10 year long time. The participants in this study are 50 teacher candidates who are in the last term of ITE. The candidates have taken two compulsory courses on teaching practicum, and therefore, have taken part in real classrooms by teaching about 6 hours a week, which makes them familiar with the teachers and the learners. The data were collected by asking the candidates the following open-ended questions which allow them to respond in their own terms:

1. How will you be teaching a decade later?
2. What will your students be like?

In order to analyze data, content analysis was carried out since it is the systematic way of understanding the concepts or themes arisen from the respondents' statements. Since open-ended questions have a great variety of answers, the answers of the candidates were coded as the first step. The codes were put into the related categories and the themes emerged from the categories were tabulated and discussed.

## 3. Findings and Discussions

The first question was posed to understand the candidates' foresights about their way of teaching in the future. As the question was not a leading one, their answers showed a great variety including the statements on their role-taking, wishes, self-expectations, and plans. Table 1 shows the account of their responses.

Table 1. "How will you be teaching a decade later?"

Repeated codes	Categories	Themes
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Post graduate studies (2)</li> <li>2. Open to learn more (8)</li> <li>3. A different teacher/ a real professional (10)</li> <li>4. Experienced with ICT based teaching (18)</li> <li>5. Learner-centered/ facilitator (12)</li> </ol>	<p>Personal growth Professional growth Ongoing learning Teacher competence</p>	<p>Continuous professional development</p>

As it can be seen from the table, 36% of the candidates think that they will be experienced teachers in ten years' time as a consequence of their personal attempts and the contribution of several other factors, particularly ICT (Information and Communication Technologies). In their own words, being experienced is explained in different ways:

"I will be experienced since spending 10 years in classrooms will teach me a lot."

"Ten year is quite a long time for me to develop myself."

"I will be experienced and more effective thank to the professional development activities I will be involved."

"Keeping up with the new technology will make me experienced and better."

Another recurred code is being a different teacher or a real Professional (20%). "A different teacher" may imply that they do not want to be like the currently working teachers whom they have met during their practicum sessions:

"Unlike the teachers I met, I do not want to lose my enthusiasm for teaching."

- “If I keep up with the educational technology, I will not look like today’s teachers.”
- “As I plan to develop myself personally and professionally, I will not be a stereotype teacher.”
- “A professional is responsible for his own development, hence, as a professional, I will do my best to develop professionally.”
- “As I am willing to learn more, I will be a better, experienced teacher who can cope with the difficulties in teaching process.”

The candidates’ understanding on being better and experienced teachers can reveal that they have a tendency toward change as a consequence of professional growth. For the code “Learner-centered and facilitator”, the candidates (24%) express their views in the following statements:

- “I will be more hardworking than my students to facilitate their learning.”
- “I will be a facilitator, not a dominant figure in the classroom.”
- “I will have good rapport with my students. I need it for an effective learning environment.”
- “I will make a difference in their lives.”
- “I expect my students to appreciate me because of my teaching skills.”
- “I would like to make decisions with my students as I have to address their learning needs.”

The teacher candidates’ foresight that they will be open to learn in the future (16%). What they state may indicate that they are aware of the importance of ongoing learning:

- “I should be able to follow the innovative ways in teaching via professional courses.”
- “Not only professional growth but also personal growth will be on my agenda.”
- “As a teacher of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, I should develop myself continuously.”

The impact and contribution of technology are often emphasized by the candidates while they make predictions on their future teaching performance. Their expectations on better and preferred teaching are primarily based on the potential of technology. Only 2 candidates (4%) express that they will have completed their post-graduate studies in the given period. As a result, personal and professional growth can be the categories emerged from the listed codes, which leads to continuous professional development as a main theme. Also, it can be said that the candidates have already developed an awareness on why ongoing learning is essential.

The second question was asked to understand the candidates’ predictions about future student profile. Almost all the candidates state that future learners will have technology literacy; however, they hold different expectations about the effects of technology on learners. As it is seen in Table 2, 22 % of the candidates think that technology will be in the center in their lives and its positive effect will be dominant in learning process.

Table 2. *Profile of Future Learners*

Repeated codes	Categories	Themes
1. With technology literacy (11) 2. Different interest areas/ more interested in social matters (6) 3. More responsible for their own learning/ more family care and support (10) 4. Technology addicted/ more problem behaviors (17) 5. Different from today but difficult to predict how (4) 6. More or less the same (2)	Positive effect of future technology Negative effect of future technology Blurred version of future	Expected impact of technology on learners

- “They will ask for technology friendly teachers, classrooms, and schools.”
- “They will be able to access information whenever they need very quickly with their literacy, which will make a difference in the process.”

According to 12% of candidates, learners will have different interest areas and be more interested in social matters with the help of ICT. Technology literacy and new roles of teachers will make them more responsible for their own learning (20%). In addition, they will have positive attitudes toward learning languages because of the global trends. Some candidates predict that they will be better



learners with family support, because “parents with digital literacy will pay more attention to their learning”.

In contrast to the positive impact of technology emphasized in above statements, 34 % of the candidates predict that future learners will display more problem behaviors as they will be technology addicted.

“They have already become technology addicted. I am sure they will be much worse in the future.”

“Because of their addiction, they do not have sound communicative skills, and this will go on, I’m afraid.”

They foresee that learners will get bored quickly and be unwilling to learn, which will be a real challenge for teachers. A small group of the candidates (8%) claim that there will absolutely be changes; however, it is too difficult to make prediction at the moment. Only 4% of them says that learners will be more or less the same like today learners, without making any positive or negative comments. Therefore, regarding their future learners, the candidates have both optimistic and pessimistic expectations. The first three codes indicate that more than half of the candidates (54%) foresee that the achievement of learners will be much higher mainly because of ICT based learning. On the other hand, 34% of them are anxious about teaching technology addicted learners in the future. The ones with blurred vision only points to the inevitable change.

#### 4. Conclusion

The foresights and expectations of the candidate teachers about two main components of their future mission have showed that they have already developed an understanding of being a 21<sup>st</sup> century teacher who has to facilitate their students’ learning. In addition, they think that they should play multiple roles to teach more effectively, and this requires continuous professional development. They also pinpoint the key role of ICT as indispensable part in their profession. As for their learners, most of them hold high expectations because of learners’ technological literacy. Nevertheless, the ones who are concerned about technology addiction draw a more pessimistic picture, which may indicate a need for more focus on classroom management skills. Finally, the foresights of candidates can make contribution to the plans of teacher educators and policy makers in terms of future opportunities and problems.

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