

## A Comparison of the Turkish and European Student-Teachers' Definition of a Good Teacher<sup>1</sup>

Türk ve Avrupalı Öğretmen Adaylarının İyi Öğretmen Tanımlaması Üzerine Bir Karşılaştırma<sup>2</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

*Every student from the elementary to the graduate school has his/her own description of a good teacher. Some of them describe people who lecture continuously, some of them describe people who do little other than facilitate group process, and others describe properties in between. "What makes a good teacher?" becomes a highly complicated one when it is asked to a multicultural group. 67 student-teachers from 12 different countries filled in a questionnaire and defined the qualities of a good teacher. The results of the study reveal some interesting results between the European and Turkish students' understanding of a good teacher.*

**Keywords:** Teacher, Teacher Education, Teacher Qualities.

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**ÖZET**

*Her öğrencinin, ilkokuldan lisansüstü eğitime kadar, kendine ait iyi bir öğretmen tanımı vardır. Kimi öğrenciler, sürekli ders anlatan birilerini tanımlarken, kimisi grup bilincini geliştirmeye yoğunlaşmış birilerini anlatır. Diğerleri için ise, iyi öğretmen, bu iki tanımın arasında biryerlerde dir. 'İyi öğretmenin tanımı nedir?' sorusu çok kültürlü bir gruba sorulduğunda cevap daha da karmaşık bir hal alır. Bu çalışma için 12 farklı ülkeden gelen 67 öğrenci kendilerine verilen anketi cevaplandırarak iyi öğretmeni tanımlamışlardır. Daha sonra t-testi kullanılarak Türk ve Avrupalı öğrencilerin cevapları kıyaslanmış ve sonuçta Türk ve Avrupalı öğrencilerin iyi öğretmen tanımları arasında farklılıklar görülmüştür.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Öğretmen, Öğretmen Eğitimi, Öğretmen Özellikleri.

**SUMMARY**

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the definition of a good teacher both by Turkish and European student-teachers, and to be able to make a comparison between them.

Research on students' definitions of "good teachers" suggests that they are dependent on a number of factors: Culture (Oruç, 2007; Shank, M., Walker, M. & Hayes, T. J. (1996); Twale et al., 1997); gender (Walker et al., 1994); age (Levine, 1993); university type (Shank et al., 1995) and field of study (Stevenson & Sander, 2002). However, the study in hand is an attempt to investigate this issue under the independent variable of culture. To some extent, the study poses reserach questions to answer if culture can be considered as a variable for the definition of a good teacher.

33 European students from 11 different countries, studing at different departments of Education Faculties and 34 Faculty of Education students from Turkey participated in the study. The students participated from Turkey were Dokuz Eylül University, Buca Faculty of Education, ELT (English Language Teaching) Department students.

Data were collected in two steps. First, the European students were given the questionnaire in Braga, Portugal. The second step of data collection was conducted in İzmir by the researcher. Data collection took 25 minutes. The 67 participants were given

the same questionnaire to state their opinions. All the analyses for the study were done with SPSS 1,3 Version.

According to the analyses, it is possible to discuss some common properties and some differences between the two groups. As for comparison, it can be stated that the “Knowledge of subject matter” which is the first most important feature for the Turkish participants, is ranked as the fifth most important feature by the European students. For them, on the other hand, “Enjoys and respects students, motivates and inspires, creative and innovative” is the most important feature of a good teacher.

Another statistical analysis conducted was the t-test. Reseacher wanted to compare the two groups and find out if there is a statistically significant difference between them. However, according to the results of the t-test it is not possible to talk about a statistically significant difference between the two groups. The study in hand has contradicted with the existing literature in the sense that both the European and Turkish students’ preferences and definitions on the qualities of a good teacher match with each other. There might be various reasons of these findings one of which to be the participating students’ departments. All Turkish students participated in the study were from English Language Teaching Department, however, European students came from a variety of departments such as; Preschool Education, Mathematics, etc.

## **1. Introduction**

There are two central questions determining the pedagogy of teacher education:

- (1) What are the essential qualities of a good teacher, and
- (2) How can we help our students to become good teachers?

As professionals in the field of teacher training, we cannot answer the second question without answering the first one. What makes a person a good teacher? The current climate in higher education suggests that students could be seen as primary customers who are increasingly aware of their customer rights, one of which is regularly exercised through formal and informal feedback processes. If teachers in higher education are becoming framed as service providers, then one way to ensure the provision of a quality service is to know the expectations of customers as they enter into the service transaction. Education has typically adopted an ‘inside out’ approach, with those on the inside assuming that they know what students need and what they expect the teacher to give. However, successful service industries have been shown to think ‘outside in’. They research what customers expect of the service and they then work to provide the service that meets those customer expectations (Sander, Stevenson, King, & Coates, 2000).

Hare (1995) asks “Who should teach our children? ” at the outset of his book entitled “What Makes a Good Teacher”. Since Socrates asked the question in the Apology, this question has been, Hare maintains, “one of the basic problems in philosophy of education.” Hare asks: Who has the necessary wisdom and judgment? Who can be trusted with this immensely important task? Who, in Socrates’ words, is the expert in perfecting the human and social qualities? (p. iii). With continuing criticisms of teachers and teacher training institutions, and with increasing calls to strengthen or restructure teacher training programs, the question is as important today as it has ever been.

This article discusses two central questions determining the design of teacher education programs and the work of teacher educators: There are various reasons why such a framework may be important, especially at the present time. The first reason has to do

with the changes in the aims and methods of teacher education taking place worldwide, due in part to the serious shortages of teachers. In many places and in our country, short-track teacher education programs have been introduced and more and more of the actual education of teachers are taking place inside the schools. This raises a number of questions about the quality of these programs, questions that can only be answered when we have some kind of answer to the question “what is a good teacher?” Sometimes, the complexity of this question seems to be overlooked by policy-makers.

The second reason why the two questions may be important is that in teacher education, there is considerable emphasis on promoting reflection in teachers, but at the same time, it is not always clear exactly what teachers are supposed to reflect on when wishing to become better teachers. What are important contents of reflection? The objective of the researcher is not to present a definitive answer to these questions, but to discuss an umbrella model of levels of change that could serve as a framework for reflection and development.

Sander et. al., (2000) in their study asked students to rank order the qualities of a good teacher. Following is the first place ranks’ of teaching qualities across respondents: teaching skills, teacher approachability, knowledge, enthusiasm, and organization.

Research on students’ definitions of “good teachers” suggests that they are dependent on a number of factors: Culture (Oruç, 2007; Shank, M., Walker, M. & Hayes, T. J. (1996); Twale et al., 1997); gender (Walker et al., 1994, Jules, V. & Kutnicks, P. 1997); age (Levine, 1993); university type (Shank et al., 1996) and field of study (Stevenson & Sander, 2002).

As an example, in a study by Warrington & Younger, (1999) reasons of underachieving boys in England and Wales were sought and among the possible reasons definition of a good lesson and a good teacher were also given. After 3 years of single sex group interviews with the participants involved in the study it was understood that boys and girls had different definitions.

**BOYS**

A Good Sense of Humor  
 Fairness  
 Approachable  
 Motivating students  
 Fairness

**GIRLS**

A Good Sense of Humor  
 Approachable  
 Self-motivation  
 Teacher should not be too friendly  
 Self-discipline

In a large-scale survey of pupils' perceptions of a good teacher in the Caribbean Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, an essay-based, interpretative mode of research was used to elicit and identify constructs used by boys and girls (Jules, V; Kutnick, P., 1997). The study explores similarities and differences between boys and girls in their perceptions of a good teacher, in a society where girls achieve superior academic performance (than boys). A total of 1756 pupils and students aged between 8 and 16 provided the sample. Altogether 1539 essays and 217 interviews were content analysed, coded for age development and compared between boys and girls. Results reveal that female pupils identified more good teacher concepts at all age levels than males. There was some commonality between the sexes in concepts regarding interpersonal relationships and inclusiveness in the good teachers' teaching practices and boys showed significantly greater concerns regarding teacher control and use of punishment.

**2. THE STUDY**

As was stated by Oruç, (2007), Shank et al., (1996) and Twale et al., (1997) culture is among the factors that shape students' expectations. Therefore, in a sense it is possible to say that the study in hand is in a way comparing the understanding of a good teacher by European Union (EU) member countries university level students and Turkish students.

**2. 1. Participants**

Three Faculty of Education students studying at different departments from eleven EU member countries participated in the study. These countries were: Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Poland, Portugal, Romania, and

Spain. In total there were 33 European students. Other than the European students, 34 Faculty of Education students from Turkey, as a candidate country, participated. In total 67 Faculty of Education Students participated in the study. The students chosen from Turkey were Dokuz Eylül University, Buca Faculty of Education, ELT (English Language Teaching) Department students. They were all second year students and aged between 19 to 23.

## **2. 2. Instrument**

The questionnaire designed for the study (See Appendix A) has been developed by the researcher. The questionnaire was a five-item-Likert Type scale with 26 statements taken from the literature on teacher education and the properties of teachers. Besides, there was another part about Background Knowledge, Professional Skills, and Personal Qualities where the participants were asked to rank order the given qualities.

A very important consideration of the researcher was the reliability of the instrument developed. Reliability is the extent to which a measurement instrument produces consistent results when administered under similar conditions. However, there are some factors such as measurement error, student fatigue, test setting problems that may contribute to unreliability (Ekmekçi, 1999).

When preparing the instrument, the researcher has considered the list above. Besides, the comments received from the experts in the field (two assistant professor doctors from the department of Educational Sciences) were towards increasing not only the number but also the variety of the statements which contributed to the increased reliability.

Three university students from Dokuz Eylül University were used as another group of participants only to test the reliability and the validity of the instrument. These students did not participate in the real study, they were asked to take the questionnaire in order to increase the validity and the reliability of the questionnaire. These three students were observed for the test time. According to the time they have spent on the test, test-taking time has been decided to be 25 minutes.

The reliability of the instrument was tested on SPSS 1, 3 version and the Cronbach's Alpha value was found to be ,83 which is considered to be reliable.

### **2. 3. Data Collection and Analysis**

Data were collected in two steps. First, the European students were given the questionnaire in Braga, Portugal where the researcher and the participants came together for an IP LORENA Erasmus Project. The name of the Intensive program was LORENA goes EUROPE: From Local, Regional, and National Identities to European Identities. Data collection took 25 minutes. The second step of data collection was conducted in İzmir by the researcher. All the analyses for the study were done with SPSS 1,3 Version.

### **3. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

This study was an attempt to test for the differences and similarities of the European and Turkish students' understanding of a good teacher. The 67 participants were given a questionnaire to state their opinions. The analyses of the data reveal that the European students and Turkish students do not differ very much from each other for the definition of a good teacher. Below the results of some of the questions from the questionnaire are presented.

When we have a look at item 16 which asks for the ability of the teacher to inspire learners, we see that both European and Turkish students agree on the topic. 42,4 % of the European students agree, 57,6 % strongly agree with the statement. The percent of the Turkish students is almost the same. 47,1 % of the Turkish students agree and again 47,1 % of them strongly agree with the statement.

**Table-1** Able to Inspire Learners

		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
<i>(European) Valid</i>	4	14	42,4
	5	19	57,6
<i>Total</i>		33	100,0
<i>(Turkish) Valid</i>	3	2	5,8
	4	16	47,1
	5	16	47,1
<i>Total</i>		34	100,0

As for the statement “excellent communicator” the consistency between the European and Turkish students continues. As can be seen below, the percentages are again almost similar. Both groups agree on the importance of a good teacher’s being an excellent communicator.

**Table-2** Excellent Communicator

		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
<i>(European) Valid</i>	4	16	48,5
	5	17	51,5
<i>Total</i>		33	100,0
<i>(Turkish) Valid</i>	2	1	2,9
	4	16	47,1
	5	17	50,0
<i>Total</i>		34	100,0

Being well-organized was another statement asked to the participants. Here the participants seem to have different views on the topic. For the European students being well-organized does not seem to be a very important characteristics, since only 10 students with a 30, 3 % strongly agree with the statement; however, for the Turkish students this is 76,5 %. 26 Turkish students strongly agree with the statement.

**Table-3** Well-Organized

		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
<i>(European) Valid</i>	2	1	3,0
	3	2	6,1
	4	20	60,6
	5	10	30,3
<i>Total</i>		33	100,0
<i>(Turkish)Valid</i>	4	8	23,5
	5	26	76,5
	<i>Total</i>	34	100,0

Below we see another discrepancy between the European and Turkish students. Being firm but friendly, according to the results obtained, is not a very favorable characteristic of a good teacher for the European students whereas an important one for the Turkish students. None of the Turkish students chose disagree for this statement; however, 2 European students strongly disagreed, 7 students disagreed with the statement.

**Table-4** Firm but Friendly

		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
<i>(European) Valid</i>	2	2	6,1
	3	7	21,2
	4	13	39,4
	5	11	33,3
<i>Total</i>		33	100,0
<i>(Turkish)Valid</i>	3	6	17,6
	4	14	41,2
	5	14	41,2
<i>Total</i>		34	100,0

The second part of the questionnaire was the ranking part where the participants were asked to rank order some features of a good teacher in terms of; background knowledge, professional skills and personal qualities. Below we see the results of the ranking part for each feature. The first number represents the Turkish students and the second one the European students.

**Table-5** Background Knowledge

	1	2	3
<i>Fluency within different academic areas</i>	3-4	1-4	4-1
<i>Experience and ability to relate it</i>	9-10	7-7	6-6
<i>Content knowledge</i>	12-4	8-5	4-6
<i>Cultural sensitivity</i>	2-4	2-6	4-5
<i>Up-to-date information about practice area</i>	2-6	12-2	8-9
<i>Academic background</i>	6-1	3-4	4-1
<i>Personal experiences with L2</i>	-2	1-3	4-3

As for the first part of the questionnaire, there are also similarities and differences between the European and Turkish students. For example, twelve Turkish students have stated the content knowledge as the most important background knowledge. However, only four European students have ranked the same quality as the most important.

**Table-6** Professional Skills

	1	2	3
<i>Class management skills</i>	12-10	6-8	6-5
<i>Knowledge of assessment</i>	2-1	1-	3-4
<i>Ability to respond/ communicate appropriately</i>	9-8	11-11	9-2
<i>Clear expectations</i>	2-5	5-5	5-4
<i>Clear syllabus</i>	-	2-1	3-3
<i>Command of age and level appr. methods and materials</i>	9-5	8-4	7-9
<i>Knowledge about where to find resources</i>	2	1-3	1-4

**Table-7** Personal Qualities

	1	2	3
<i>Respect for individuals</i>	11-9	4-1	3-5
<i>Awareness of others' feelings</i>	5-2	3-2	2-
<i>Enthusiasm/energy/passion</i>	6-8	9-8	4-2
<i>Interest in student motivation</i>	2-4	2-2	-4
<i>Flexibility</i>	2-3	1-8	5-3
<i>Patience</i>	1-2	-2	5-6
<i>Sense of humor</i>	1-2	2-2	5-7
<i>Work ethic/hardworking</i>	4-	1-1	3-
<i>Confidence</i>	2-	8-1	2-2
<i>Organization/time management</i>	-1	3-2	5-1
<i>Interesting personality</i>	-	1-2	-1

A summary of the above tables would be as follows:

#### Top 5 Qualities for European Students

- Enjoys and respects students, motivates and inspires, creative and innovative (4,70)
- Enthusiastic about teaching (4,61)
- Able to inspire young people (4,58)
- Manages behavior well (4,55)
- Knowledge of subject matter, excellent communicator (4,52)
- Top 5 Qualities for Turkish Students
- Knowledge of subject matter (4,91)
- Well-organized (4,76)
- Enjoys and respects students (4,68)
- Enthusiastic about teaching (4,65)
- Manages behavior well, motivates and inspires (4,62)

As can be understood easily, there actually does not seem to be similarities between the two groups. Knowledge of subject matter, for example, is the first most important feature for the Turkish students but the least important for the European students. Below is a list which is a combination of the Turkish and European students' rank orders. When we list the features according to the percentages we see the knowledge of the subject matter as the most important feature followed by "enjoys and respects students".

- Knowledge of subject matter
- Enjoys and respects students
- Motivates and inspires
- Creative and innovative, enthusiastic about teaching
- Manages behavior well

The last analysis conducted was t-test. The researcher wanted to compare the two groups and see if the results obtained were statistically significant. The t-test results

reveal that the two groups did not actually differ from each other in terms of their choices. As the table below presents the results are not statistically significant.

**Table 8** T-test Results of Two Groups

<i>sig.</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>
,981	-1,371	65	,175

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

As was stated above culture is one of the factors that affect the definition of a good teacher among many others. However, the study in hand has contradicted with the existing literature in the sense that both the European and Turkish students' preferences and definitions on the qualities of a good teacher match with each other. There might be various reasons of these findings one of which to be the participating students departments. All Turkish students participated in the study were from English Language Teaching Department, however, European students came from a variety of departments such as; Preschool Education, Mathematics, etc.

No matter what the reasons of the results are, one important thing to consider here is that everything depends on the person who stands in the front of classroom. As Heschel (1983, p. 62 cited in Massousi, 2002) states the teacher is not an automatic fountain from which intellectual beverages may be obtained. He is either a witness or a stranger. To guide a pupil into the Promised Land, he must have been there himself. When asking himself: Do I stand for what I teach? Do I believe what I say? He must be able to answer in the affirmative. What we need more than anything else is not *textbooks* but *textpeople*. It is the personality of the teacher which is the text that the pupil reads; the text that they will never forget.

Several limitations to our study need to be mentioned too. First of all, the items used on the scale were gathered from the existing literature on teacher education. A more varied

scale might have given a more detailed analysis of the participants. In a study by Heckert, T. M., Latier, A., Ringwald, A. & Silvey, B. (2006) the teaching effectiveness were assessed by items using a seven-point response scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The overall evaluation ( $\alpha = .94$ ) was measured with four global items phrased as being glad that the student took the class and the professor and that the student would recommend the class and professor to others. Pedagogical skill ( $\alpha = .90$ ) was measured with five items and included being organized, answering questions clearly, good lectures, knowledgeable, and clear explanations of material. Rapport with students ( $\alpha = .86$ ) was measured with seven items relating to availability during and outside of office hours, enthusiasm, concern, sense of humor, encouragement, and recognition of confusion. Perceived appropriateness of class difficulty ( $\alpha = .70$ ) was assessed with seven items dealing with pace, challenge, amount of reading and writing, weight given to in-class discussion, difficulty, and level of material. Course value/learning ( $\alpha = .93$ ) was measured with four items dealing with perceived learning in general and of new and important information, stimulated interest, and perception of course as worthwhile.

Additionally, apart from the number of participants, our sample was not random and was taken from a rather selective university. The students participating from Turkey were the students of the researcher and the other group of participants –European participants- were a part of an ERASMUS project, in which the researcher herself participated.

On the other hand, as recommended by Marsh (1983), it is likely that the data were collected from students in a wide variety of disciplines. Marsh (1983) also argued that the consistent factor structure across different departments suggested that it was appropriate to use the same teaching evaluation dimensions for instructors in different departments. That said, there is some evidence that the relationships of background characteristics to teaching dimensions may vary by department (Cranton & Smith, 1986; Murray, Ruston, & Paunonen, 1990). As a result, additional research should

examine these relations within various university departments or, where possible, within disciplines.

It is a well-known fact that, knowing and meeting the expectations of others is a daunting task, and considerable disagreement can develop about what expectations are appropriate. We can all think of teachers who did or did not satisfy us or others but who were nonetheless effective teachers.

**APPENDIX A****QUESTIONNAIRE**

**Dear Participants,**

**The following questionnaire has been developed to learn about your understanding of a good teacher. The results will be used for scientific purposes only. You do not need to write down your name but your country is essential.**

**Thank You,**

**A. Country:** \_\_\_\_\_

**B. Which of the following attributes do you think are important qualities of a good teacher? (SA: Strongly Agree, A: Agree, U: Undecided, D: Disagree, SD: Strongly Disagree) Put a tick (✓).**

A good teacher (has/is).....

	<u>SA</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>U</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>SD</u>
Sense of humor	—	—	—	—	—
Manages behavior well	—	—	—	—	—
Knowledge of subject matter	—	—	—	—	—
Enjoys and respects young people	—	—	—	—	—
Adapts to change smoothly	—	—	—	—	—
Motivates and inspires	—	—	—	—	—
Creative and innovative	—	—	—	—	—
Cool in a crisis	—	—	—	—	—
Good with adults and workmates	—	—	—	—	—
Approaches things with variety	—	—	—	—	—

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Well-organized	—	—	—	—	—
Reflective and introspective	—	—	—	—	—
Highly motivated	—	—	—	—	—
Enthusiastic about teaching	—	—	—	—	—
Keen to develop new skills	—	—	—	—	—
Able to inspire young people	—	—	—	—	—
Excellent communicator	—	—	—	—	—
Dedicated	—	—	—	—	—
Positive attitude to professional development	—	—	—	—	—
Both interactive and proactive	—	—	—	—	—
Firm, but friendly	—	—	—	—	—
A perfectionist but not a stickler	—	—	—	—	—
Keeps students' needs in mind	—	—	—	—	—
Examination-oriented but not a corner-cutter	—	—	—	—	—
Gently critical	—	—	—	—	—
Uses a lot of visual aids	—	—	—	—	—

**C. In the following part choose three important items for each section and write them down to the space provided in order of importance.**

**Qualities of a good teacher**

<b>Background Knowledge</b>	<b>Professional Skills</b>	<b>Personal Qualities</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fluency within different academic areas</li> <li>• Experience and ability to relate it</li> <li>• Content knowledge</li> <li>• Cultural sensitivity</li> <li>• Up-to-date information about practice area</li> <li>• Academic background including a number of relevant classes</li> <li>• Personal experience with L2</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Class management skills</li> <li>• Knowledge of assessment</li> <li>• Ability to respond/communicate appropriately</li> <li>• Clear expectations</li> <li>• Clear syllabus</li> <li>• Command of age and level appropriate methods and materials</li> <li>• Knowledge about where to find resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respect for individuals</li> <li>• Awareness of others' feelings</li> <li>• Enthusiasm/energy/passion</li> <li>• Interest in student motivation</li> <li>• Flexibility</li> <li>• Patience</li> <li>• Even-temperedness</li> <li>• Sense of humor</li> <li>• Work ethic/hardworking</li> <li>• Confidence</li> <li>• Organization/time management</li> <li>• Interesting personally</li> <li>• Commitment</li> </ul>

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 1. \_\_\_\_\_ 1. \_\_\_\_\_  
 2. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_  
 3. \_\_\_\_\_ 3. \_\_\_\_\_ 3. \_\_\_\_\_

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