

Domain of Communication Skills in Generic Teachers' Competency: England, Ireland, Australia, Canada and Turkey

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Abstract

Teacher is one of the most essential and significant component of education. The competency of teacher affects the quality of education. The developments in communication technology have provided uninterrupted communication at any moment in all areas in a globalizing world. In this context, communication skills have gained importance. The Educational approach that has undergone important changes in the last century is based upon interactive classroom environment, which directly requires teacher's communication skills. Therefore, we decided to study educational environments where skills expected from teachers can be used effectively. Furthermore, this study reviews comparatively generic teacher competency studies conducted in England, Ireland, Australia, Canada and Turkey. The main concern is to reveal how communication as an important domain of education is handled in these countries contexts. Document analysis through a survey of literature is conducted to investigate the similarities and differences between their standards set for generic teachers about the communication skills. Online databases were analyzed comparatively for documentation. As a result, this study revealed what dimension reviewed countries handled communication skills and at what levels they considered them essential. Moreover, both similarities and differences were found between the main domains of the countries' generic teacher competencies.

Key Words: Teachers' competency, communication skills, communication skills for teachers.

Introduction

In today's world, rapidly developing technology affected communication skills. Communication is a psychosocial process in which at least two people exchange knowledge, feelings, opinions and experiences through various channels. In fact, life of an individual is the process and the adventure of making contact with others. Communication means sharing and it is a requirement for people to stay together and be a social being because human beings survive by communicating. In this context, the improvement of communication skills in a globalizing world has become more essential. Knowing the rules and regulations that organize the relationships among individuals and acting accordingly depend on the effective communication among each other. Closed doors between individuals are an obstacle for living together. The only key to open these locked doors is communication. Communication skills can be collected under three headings as oral, written and non-verbal.

Communication skills can be defined as the transmission of a message that involves the shared understanding between the contexts in which the communication takes place (Saunders and Mills, 1999). Communication process starts with a sender who has a message. Sender (*the source*) sends this message (*the message*) to the receiver (*the recipient*) by encoding it in an understandable way using a preferred channel (*the channel*). When the receiver gets the message, he opens the code of transmitted message, perceives it, understands and interprets it. Subsequently, by encoding his response to the message, sends it back to the sender (*the feedback*). According to the result obtained from a study conducted with the purpose of examining award-winning instructor's communicative practices to assess and to refine a definition of instructional communication competence, the consensus among participants was that the soft skills—communication skills—were more important than content in evaluating various skills (Worley, Titsworth, Worley & Cornett-DeVito, 2007).

The role of communication skills in teaching

Effective communication skill is considered significant in terms of teacher's professional and personal characteristics since the learning is a communication process in the most general sense. During this process, having meaningful exchange of messages is related to the teacher's competencies (Pehlivan, 2005:17). According to the Concise Oxford Dictionary the word means 'the act of imparting, especially news', or 'the science and practice of transmitting information'. These definitions clearly show the link between 'teaching' and 'communication': teachers are constantly imparting new knowledge, or transmitting information (www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov). Communication skills are the most important when we talk about winning the hearts. The tone, volume, rhythm and emotions of the communicator play a vital role while dealing with students (<http://searchwarp.com>). The art of communication involves listening and speaking as well as reading and writing. Teachers need to be highly skilled in all these areas to excel in their profession. Proficient communicators receive information, understand and synthesize it and express themselves at a high level. They make excellent teachers because they are able to transmit knowledge, skills and values at the same time they communicate their caring for the students entrusted to their care. They help motivate students to learn (work.chron.com).

Designing the education process involves in building the architecture of teaching and learning process (Mete, 2013:43). Teacher is the most basic element of this process. It is always necessary to examine and improve the duty of the teacher and the qualities that this duty requires in this process. "The most important school variable that affects student success is "the competency of teacher" (World Bank Report, 2011). According to Leigh and Mean, knowledge and skills of teacher are the most important factors that influence the learning process of students (Leigh and Mean, 2005:1). In this context, increasing the competency of teacher can have a direct positive influence on the quality of education. Every country has set some standards that are expected from teachers in accordance with their approaches and needs. Surely, teacher's communication skill is one of the qualities that can affect education process the most because the teacher is the source that transmits the message that he creates in educational environments and receives feedback through various channels. In this study, the aim is to examine how these countries set general teaching standards in terms of main domains and what dimensions of communication they associated with these standards.

Method

For this study, document analysis was performed after surveying the literature. Documents related to communication aspects of teacher competency in the countries and were located by using online databases and subsequently analyzed comparatively. Documents of public and private records were used for qualitative studies to obtain data about a site or participants in a study. These documents were valuable sources for understanding phenomena central to qualitative studies (Creswell, 2005). The government websites of national educational institutions or ministries of the countries and Turkey were also analyzed. A descriptive analysis technique was used to analyze all documents.

Results

Communication skills and teachers' competency

Rapidly changing world conditions primarily affects educational areas. Conducted researches agree on the recognition that the quality of education is parallel with the competency of teacher. Therefore, with the purpose of increasing the quality in education, countries have conducted studies on the competency of teachers who are entrusted to educate modern individuals for today's world. Teaching standards are the qualities that are expected from teachers in accordance with each country's education policies and needs. Recently, the developments in communication technologies have provided uninterrupted communication in a globalizing world in every area at any time. In this context, communication skills have gained importance. When it is considered that learning-teaching process is a communication environment and teachers' communication with the school and outside environments except for their students affect their professional attitude, it can be assumed that teachers' communication skills can be effective for solving professional issues and achieving professional goals (Pehlivan, 2005:19). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to determine the educational environments in which communication skills expected from teachers can be effective. With the significant rise in the findings that proved the importance and effect of teacher competency on students since 1980s, the number of studies on teacher competency has increased in all countries (Mete, 2013:93).

Within that period, every country established the framework of the qualities expected from teachers and set the teaching standards in accordance with the country's needs.

When teaching standards were examined, it can be seen that they were set according to the issues like the stages of learning process, personal and cultural differences, content knowledge, domain knowledge training, the issue of assessment and evaluation, educational philosophy, learning environment, collaboration and professional development. The main domains of teaching standards in England, Ireland, Australia, Canada and Turkey were given below.

Table 1: The generic teachers' main domains of standards according to the countries:

England	Ireland	Australia	Canada	Turkey
A) Professional attributes	1. Professional Values and Relationships	1. Professional Knowledge	1. Commitment to Pupils and Pupil Learning	A. Personal and Professional Values - Professional Development
B) Professional knowledge and understanding	2. Professional Integrity	2. Professional Practice	2. Professional Knowledge	B. Knowing the Student
C) Professional skills	3. Professional Conduct	3. Professional Engagement	3. Teaching Practice	C. Teaching and Learning Process
	4. Professional Practice		4. Leadership and Community	D. Monitoring and Evaluation of Learning and Development
	5. Professional Development		5. Ongoing Professional Learning	E. School, Family and Society Relationships
	6. Professional Collegiality and Collaboration			F. Knowledge of Curriculum and Content

As seen in Table 1, different main domains were formed as competencies expected from teachers in the countries. However, when sub-domains and performance indicators of the main domains are examined it is understood that in the whole countries have expectations about the standard of communication skills of the teachers. Communication skills of the teachers' are in the main domain A. *Professional attributes* in England, 3. *Professional conduct* in Ireland, 2. *Professional practice* in Australia, and 3. *Teaching practice* in Canada. However, in Turkey there are three main domains about the communication skills of the teachers'; A. *Personal and Professional Values -Professional Development*, B. *Knowing the Student*, E. *School, Family and Society Relationships*. Considering living conditions and learning environments of the country, communication skill has become prominent in Turkey because of young population and crowded classrooms so placing it in three main domains is an understandable situation. Below, the sections about communication skills were examined.

England

England Professional standards are statements of a teacher's professional attributes, professional knowledge and understanding, and Professional skills. They provide clarity of the expectations at each career stage. The standards are not to be confused with and do not replace the professional duties contained in the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document, which sets out the roles and responsibilities of teachers. Teachers should meet the following core standards (C) at the end of the induction period and continue to meet them throughout their teaching career (Professional Standards For Teachers, www.tda.gov.uk). The framework of standards below is arranged in three interrelated sections covering: a. professional attributes b. professional knowledge and understanding c. professional skills. When examining the standards in this section, effective communication skill expected from teacher is placed in Section A) Professional attributes, Standard 3: It can be seen that it is arranged as communicating and working with others and the standard is explained as follows: Communicating and working with others (a) *Communicate effectively with children, young people and colleagues.* (b) *Communicate effectively with parents and carers, conveying timely and relevant information about attainment, objectives, progress and well-being.* (c) *Recognize that communication is a two-way process and encourage parents and carers to participate in discussions about the progress, development and well-being of children and young people.*

(www.tda.gov.uk). England discussed teacher's effective communication skill with all school stakeholders in Communicating and Working with others standard and professional attributes domain.

Ireland

Ireland placed effective communication skill expected from teachers in Standard 3 and main domain of Professional Conduct and explained it as follows:

3.6. *communicate effectively with pupils/students, colleagues, parents, school management and others in the school community in a manner that is professional, collaborative and supportive, and based on trust and respect*

3.7. *ensure that any communication with pupils/students, colleagues, parents, school management and others is appropriate, including communication via electronic media, such as e-mail, texting and social networking sites* (www.teachingcouncil.ie).

It is seen that Ireland expects teachers to have effective communication with pupils, colleagues, parents, school administration and other school stakeholders using all communication channels including electronic mail.

Australia

In Australia, in Professional Standards for Teachers formed by Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, effective communication skill is included in standard 3, Plan for and implement effective teaching and learning and main domain of Professional Practice and explained as follows:

3.5 *Use effective classroom communication*

- *Graduate: Demonstrate a range of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies to support student engagement.*
- *Proficient: Use effective verbal and non-verbal communication strategies to support student understanding, participation, engagement and achievement.*
- *Highly Accomplished: Assist colleagues to select a wide range of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies to support students' understanding, engagement and achievement*
- *Lead: Demonstrate and lead by example inclusive verbal and non-verbal communication using collaborative strategies and contextual knowledge to support students' understanding, engagement and achievement* (www.nswteachers.nsw.edu.au).

Australia considered teacher's communication skill as verbal and non-verbal, and expected teachers to know the strategies and have an effective communication with the pupils.

Canada

While setting teaching standards, Canada explained teachers' effective communication skills in Standard 3, main domain of Teaching Practice: *Teachers communicate effectively with pupils, parents, and colleagues* (www.edu.gov.on.ca). The competency expected from teachers in Canada is having effective communication with the pupils, parents and colleagues in the process of implementing teaching.

TURKEY

In the context of Generic Teacher Competencies determined by Turkish Republic, Ministry of National Education, General Directorate of teacher training, Turkey's expectation from teachers about effective communication skills explained as follows.

Main Domain A. Personal and Professional Values -Professional Development

Sub-domain A1. *Valuing, Understanding and Respecting the Students*

Performance Indicator A 1. 5. Listens to his/her students effectively.

Sub-domain A6. *Following and Making Contribution to Professional Developments* Performance Indicator A6. 2. *Makes use of information and communication technologies in order to support his/her professional development and increase his/her efficiency.*

Performance Indicator A6. 9. Makes use of information and communication technologies (online journals, package software, e-mail...etc.) in order to share information.

Main Domain B. Knowing the Student

Sub-domain B2. Considering Interests and Needs Performance Indicator B2. 3. Provides proper learning environments for students with different experiences, abilities and backgrounds by using information and communication technologies.

Main Domain E. School, Family and Society Relationships

Sub-domain E5. Ensuring Family Involvement and Cooperation Performance Indicator E5.2. Performs written/verbal communication with families by means of continuous exchange of information about student progress (MEB, 2006).

When we examined teacher competency standards set in Turkey, it can be seen that teachers are expected to communicate more effectively in three main domains (A-B-C).

Discussion and Conclusion

According to the picture revealed after examining countries' general standards for teachers, it is found out that they all included communication skill. England set teaching standards under three main domains and discussed them under the headings, A) Professional attributes B) Professional knowledge and understanding and, C) Professional skills. England stated that teachers must have effective communication with all school stakeholders in the standard, Communicating and working with others that was included in the main domain of Professional attributes. Ireland set and discussed teacher standards under (1) Professional Values and relationships, (2) Professional Integrity, (3) Professional Conduct, (4) Professional Practice, (5) Professional Development, and (6) Professional Collegiality and Collaboration main domains. It can be seen that Ireland expects teachers to communicate effectively with the pupil, colleagues, parents, school administration and other school stakeholders using all communication channels including electronic media channels within the context of Professional Conduct domain. Australia set and discussed teacher standards under (1) Professional Knowledge, (2) Professional Practice, and (3) Professional Engagement main domains. Australia expects teachers to know verbal and non-verbal strategies and have an effective communication with the class under the heading of Use effective classroom communication based on the standard 3, Plan for and implement effective teaching and learning included in Professional Practice main domain.

Canada set and discussed teacher standards under (1) Commitment to Pupils and Pupil Learning, (2) Professional Knowledge, (3) Teaching Practice, (4) Leadership and Community, (5) Ongoing Professional Learning main domains. Canada expects teachers to communicate effectively with pupils, parents, and colleagues within the context of Teaching Practice. Turkey set and discussed teacher standards under (A) Personal and Professional Values-Professional Development, (B) Knowing the student, (C) Teaching and Learning Process, (D) Monitoring and Evaluation of Learning and Development, (E) School, Family and Society Relationships, (F) Knowledge of Curriculum and Content main domains. It can be inferred that Turkey expects teachers to communicate more effectively in three domains (A-B-E). There are performance indicators about effective communication in sub-domain A1 (Valuing, Understanding and respecting the Student and A6 (Following and contributing to Professional Development. There are also performance indicators in the Considering Interests and Needs as sub-domain of second main domain B (Knowing the Student) and in Ensuring Family Involvement and Cooperation as the sub-domain of main domain E (School, Family and Society Relationships).

Who and how to communicate is very important for effective communication. Moreover, deciding on the method and the level of communication is important. Therefore, while determining the competencies for teachers, countries also discussed communication skills. However, it can be seen that each country deals with communication skill in different sections. In Turkey, with the 04.11.1997 dated and 97.39.2761 numbered decision of Turkish Higher Education Council, reconstruction process started and within this framework, reorganized teacher training programs were put into practice starting from 1998-1999 Education Year (Higher Education Council, 2007:7). One of the reasons of updating the program is the tendency to have least common standards for expected competencies in the field of higher education in which our country has been included starting from 2003. One of the most significant attributes of new programs, which have been put into practice since 2006-2007 academic year is the increase in the rates of general culture courses. For this purpose, general culture courses like History of Science, Scientific Research Methods, and Introduction to Philosophy, Effective Communication, and Turkish History of Education were added in the list of courses of teacher training programs (HEC, 2007:8)

Considering major educational processes as planning, teaching and evaluation process, dealing with communication in the teaching process is an understandable result. However, it is known that expectations from teachers form a wider domain than these processes. As stated by Dökmen (1989), education is a communication activity that he described as the process of impressing the other and as the conductors of education process, teachers must have effective communication skills. Ergin and Birol (2000) stated that learning is a product of communication and unless communication is achieved, there will be no learning. Effective communication skill, which is functional for people, it has become more essential for teachers whose duty is to educate people. Although competencies expected from teachers are dealt with in different main domains, it can be seen that in each country's standards, there are expectations about teacher's communication skill. If we recognize the teacher as the conductor and the leader of teaching process and if this process is related to effective communication, communication skills of teachers are expected to be at the highest level.

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