

What Parents Expect From Classroom Teachers and How Classroom Teachers Measure Up to Those Expectations

*Fatma Bıkmaz**, *Duygu S. Güler***
Ankara University

Abstract

The purpose of this research was to *identify the expectations of parents from private and public primary classroom teachers and to determine how well teachers satisfy these expectations. A survey was administered to 195 parents (80 private and 115 public school parents). A vast majority of the both groups expected teachers to be loving, understanding, and compassionate. There were low expectations about teachers' professional characteristics in both parent groups. While the public school parents expected that teachers establish continuing communication, private school parents expected teachers to behave sincerely and objectively. A majority of both groups have voiced opinions of satisfaction related to their expectations.*

Key Words

Parents' Expectation, Characteristics of Teachers, Parent-Teacher Cooperation.

Primary education involves the shaping of children's expectations and hopes while supplying them necessary elements to create a modern individual. It is the most outstanding of all levels of schooling. It is for this reason that the education the child receives during this period should be one of quality. Therefore, teachers must be equipped with certain qualities regarding their personalities as well as their profession in order to meet the needs of their students.

During the review of current literature regarding classroom teachers' personality characteristics, the following characteristics were emphasized. Teachers should be: patient, loving, understanding, open-minded, encouraging and supportive to students, objective, democratic, modern and open to innovation. In addition, teachers needs to have a well-developed sense of self-esteem, to be energetic, healthy and productive (Gökçe & Gürkan, 1999; Kellough, 1997; Şimşek, 2000).

* *Correspondence:* Dr., Ankara Üniversitesi Eğitim Bilimleri Fakültesi, İlköğretim Bölümü, Cebeci Kampüsü, 06590 Ankara.
e-mail: bikmaz@education.ankara.edu.tr

** Dr., Ankara Üniversitesi Eğitim Bilimleri Fakültesi, İlköğretim Bölümü, Cebeci Kampüsü, 06590 Ankara. *e-mail:* guler@education.ankara.edu.tr

Teachers' professional characteristics as well as their personal characteristics are crucial to increase students' achievement and to offer effective instruction. Kellough (1997) identifies four categories regarding professional characteristics. These are a) to demonstrate effective decision making; b) to be committed to the students, to the school's mission, and to the profession; c) to offer effective instruction; d) to fulfill numerous non-instructional responsibilities (knowing the backgrounds of the students, learning the students' interest, learning and understanding the school and district, organizing learning environments, attending professional meetings, planning for and carrying out meetings and conferences with parents, students and colleagues).

The way their parents view the school system and teachers has a great impact on children and their experience at school. Researchers clearly indicate that student achievement, self-esteem, motivation and positive attitudes toward school and school subjects are maximized through parental involvement (Robinson & Fine, 1994; Yavuzer, 1995; Eby, 1997; Kellough, 1997; Lazar & Slostad, 1999; Lazar et al., 1999).

The model teacher is one that is willing to effectively cooperate with the families towards educating students in accordance with the expectations of the family and society. It is vital, at this point, to determine the opinions the families have of the teacher in order to assure a better education for the children. This example of research has successfully created the opportunity to specify the expectations parents have of the classroom teacher and to determine their perceptions regarding whether their children's teacher is sufficient in meeting these expectations. All the information gathered from the families will be used in assisting the reader towards better understanding the educational values considered important by the families and the level of satisfaction they achieve through the Turkish educational system. Although the issue of school-parent relations and cooperation is well documented (Aslan, 1990; Doğan, 1995; Kaşıkçı, 1996; Kazak, 1998; Çayırılı, 1998; Yaylacı, 1999; Oğan, 2000), the issue of parents' expectations from teachers is currently given little attention both in practice and in research in Turkey. The lack of attention to these issues points out the necessity of this research.

The main purpose of this research is to learn the expectations of parents from private and public primary classroom teachers and to determine how well teachers satisfy these expectations. To accomplish this purpose, the following questions were raised:

1. What are the expectations of parents whose children are attending the first level of private and public primary education in regards to teachers?
2. What are the opinions of the parents in regards to the amount of satisfaction they receive from teachers who teach at private and public primary schools?

Method

Participants

The participants of the present study consisted of parents from first through fifth grade students in public and private elementary schools in Ankara. Yet in the study a sample from the population was not selected. On the contrary, the data were collected from the parents of one public and one private school through convenience sampling and applicability to the target population. Parents from all sections of all five grades of the two schools were randomly selected. A total of 195 student parents responded: 80 from the private and 115 from the public elementary school. It can be argued that the results of the study might not be generalized to the population. Nonetheless, the results give some important implications.

Instrument

A questionnaire was prepared through a thorough literature review by the researchers in order to identify the expectations of parents from teachers and to determine how well the teachers satisfy these expectations. A draft of this questionnaire was presented to seven experts who were in the field of testing, assessment, and teacher education. The experts were requested to criticize the questionnaire in terms of whether or not it served the purpose and had any validity. In accordance with the feedback obtained from the experts, the draft was revised and brought to the final form. As a result, the prepared questionnaire is a good representative of the population in terms of the quantity and quality of its questions. All the questions in the form are open-ended. The first three questions are geared towards establishing teacher's characteristics and the last three questions concentrate on determining how successful teachers are in meeting these expectations.

Procedures

Due to open-ended questions in the questionnaire, parents' views in three categories were examined and coded by both researchers. These codifications were compared in order to determine whether or not there were differences in coding. This comparison was seen nec-

essary in order to reach a consensus between the researchers and to assure the reliability of coding. The responses were coded in three main categories: personality-specific characteristics, profession-specific characteristics and parent-teacher cooperation, and they were organized in tables. The analysis of the data was based on frequencies and percentiles.

Results

In regards to the category related to the personality-specific expectations, there was no difference in expectations between the parents of private and public school students. A vast majority of the parents expected teachers to be loving, understanding, and compassionate.

Nearly 50 percent of the parents of public school students expected teachers to be modern, creative and open to innovation, patient, cheerful, sincere and honest. A small number of parents in this group expected teachers to love their jobs, be decisive and be well-organized, and to have a well-developed sense of self-esteem.

More than half of the parents of private school students expected that teachers be cheerful, sincere and honest. Having a well-developed sense of self-esteem, being well-organized and clean, and loving their jobs were relatively less desired characteristics.

In terms of the profession-specific expectations, in both groups parents were found to have low-expectations. In this section, most desired traits for public school parents were to have a background in child development and psychology, the ability keep the class under control, and to provide discipline (44.3%). Having the ability keep the class under control, providing discipline, following technological and current developments, and passing on these developments to students were expectations for more than half of the private school parents.

Finally, there was a significant difference in the expectations on the subject of parent-teacher cooperation. While parents of public school students above all expected teachers to ensure a constant flow of communication, parents of private school students preferred teachers to treat them in a manner of sincerity and objectivity.

The research is established that a majority of both groups of parents are satisfied in regards to their expectations in all three categories.

Discussion

The majority of the parents of both public and private schools expected teachers to be loving, understanding and compassionate. It was found that students also gave these characteristics the highest priority (Gökçe, 2001).

However, that less than half of the group was expecting teachers to be modern, creative and open to innovation, patient, cheerful, sincere and honest etc. was thought-provoking. As a matter of fact, a comparative study carried out by Kağıtçıbaşı (1970) has indicated the structure of the Turkish family which is restrictive but employs love. These values have been passed on to students, and thus, students bring these values to their schools, and as a result, to their teachers. Therefore, as a result of such a family structure we are confronted with parents are in expectations that teachers should show love, understanding and compassionate towards their children. Consequently, the values and expectations that children needs to carry stems from a typical Turkish family structure which starts at home and continues in schools which this may cause some problems in a child's development. As a result, teachers who are modern, creative and open to innovation, patient, cheerful, sincere and honest, etc. are necessary to develop individuals of the future who are modern, creative, sensitive, independent and democratic.

Among the profession-specific characteristics that teachers should possess, nearly 50% percent of the parents of public school students emphasized that classroom teachers should have a background in child development and psychology, the ability keep to the class under control and provide discipline. The rest of the profession-specific characteristics were considered important by a small number of parents. This distribution was quite similar among the parents of private schools students. As a result, it is possible to say the majority of the parents of public and private schools are not aware of profession-specific characteristics that are needed by the classroom teachers. The reason for this might be that both groups of parents do not have enough information about how these schools are operating. During the 1st Parent Council summit in 1990, it was pointed that the majority of parents do not have enough information about formal education system and its functions. Similarly, recent studies prove that parents are lacking in terms of having sufficient knowledge related to schools (Doğan, 1995; Oğan, 2000).

More than half of the public school parents emphasized that a classroom teacher should ensure a constant flow of communication for teacher-parent cooperation. However, one third of the group pointed out that teachers did not possess these skills. In public schools the main factor keeping teachers from establishing constant flow of communication between parents might be overcrowded classrooms. On the other hand, since the parents are expecting teachers to have this skill, this may reflect the idea that a constant flow of communication between parents may have a positive affect on students' academic achievement and individual development. The parents of private school students stressed different views about parent-teacher cooperation than public school parents. More than half of the parents of private school students were also expecting teachers to treat them in a manner of sincerity and objectivity. In this research it was found that nearly all of the parents mentioned that teachers had this skill. Private school parents might have believed that sincerity and objectivity as the prerequisite of establishing and continuing effective communication. For this reason, more than half of the parents were expecting teacher to treat them in a manner of sincerity and objectivity.

Less than half of both groups of parents were expecting teachers to have skills such as advising parents how to deal with problems and establishing cooperation. Also only a small number of both group of parents were expecting teachers to have the skills of desiring to know parents and approaching their different views with tolerance. Thus, this clearly shows that some problems exist between the parents and teachers in terms of having effective communication. As Lazar and et al. (1999) also state, it is important for teachers to have skills of desiring to know parents and approaching their different views with tolerance for sustaining effective communication between teacher and parents. The perceptions of parents and teachers towards schools and their views about school-parent cooperation have been shaped by the present culture, historical background, and the schools' current practices. The knowledge related to parents' perceptions towards schools and teachers will establish a strong basis for effective communication and cooperation for each party.

The findings of the present study point out that parents did not possess the necessary information in determining the necessary characteristics a classroom teacher is expected to have. These findings have made apparent the necessity of holding seminars, conferences, and family participation programs to educate parent regarding the responsibilities and qualities of teachers. In teacher education pro-

grams, the subjects of communicating with families should be covered. In-service training programs about these issues should be conducted for teachers. Finally, further studies should be conducted on the subject of parental expectations with regards to different grade levels.