



Original article

How do Faculty Members Experience and Perceive Curricula Changes in Teacher Education?

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Abstract

The current study aimed to reveal faculty members' perceptions on curriculum change in pre-service teacher education and the factors influencing their perceptions. From 13 different departments and 13 different Faculties of Education representing the seven geographical regions of Türkiye, 41 faculty members participated in the study. A semi-structured interview protocol was developed subsequent to expert opinion and piloting procedures, and utilized as the data collection tool. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and subjected to content analysis via MAXQDA 2022. The findings indicated the faculty members tended to demonstrate double-edged professional stance by either resisting or embracing curricula changes. The factors behind these differentiating perceptions emerged in the data as the characteristics including need, quality, clarity and complexity of curricula changes; contextual factors as physical infrastructure, human resources, and leadership at faculties; and external factors pointing out the Higher Education Council [HEC]'s approach to curricula changes and delegation of authority, which has been a recent decision assigning all the curricular work of pre-service teacher education programs to Faculties of Education in Türkiye. Therefore, these findings are believed to shed light on smoother curriculum change processes in teacher education along with the faculty members' insights and critical reflections on their lived experiences.

Keywords: Curriculum Change, Pre-Service Teacher Education, Faculty Members, Delegation of Authority.

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INTRODUCTION

Educational change may arise in different facets, such as in the “hardware” indicating new educational equipment, classrooms, or instructional tools; in the “software” showing new curriculum or instructional methods; and in the “interpersonal relations” referring to administrators, teachers, and students who undertake new roles (Huberman, 1973). Therefore, educational changes may reach a large spectrum encompassing goals of national education, government policies, curriculum approaches and designs besides instructional practices, assessment and evaluation, and professional development of teachers (Towndrow et al., 2009). As Reimers (2020) also affirms, any educational change must possess an intricate network of cultural, psychological, professional, institutional, and political elements and associates so as to be in effect; however, a comprehensive combination of all is generally missing during educational reforms, which focus mostly on institutional and political aspects by disregarding the others. Fullan (2007) touches upon the dynamics of the change process, and attracts change agents’ attention to the danger of knowing “all the right answers” (p. 40) since the success of a change process is not simply subject to knowing the right answers, but involving individuals’ perspectives on what is wrong or right. Otherwise, educational changes have the greatest tendency to rise and fall quickly, especially after the very first years of the implementation. Thus, many great ideas may become doomed to failure and stay episodic (Fullan, 2007; Hargreaves, 2001; Hargreaves et al., 2005).

As a part of educational change, curriculum change may encompass curricular goals, objectives, instructional resources, teaching and learning activities, teacher beliefs concerning latent pedagogy, and teacher competence development (Cheng, 1994; Fullan, 2007), or all of these together like the whole curriculum. Hargreaves (1989) also concludes that curriculum change strongly demands changes in implementers who shoulder the responsibility of bringing curriculum policies into implementation since they may need to alter their existing curricular practices or adapt their educational ideologies to the new program (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018).

At the time of a curriculum change, these change agents sometimes play the dual role of curriculum implementers and developers (Henard & Rosevare, 2012), and the same principle similarly applies to faculty members at Faculties of Education (or Colleges of Education) since as teacher educators, they need to fulfil multiple roles in an effective way such as leadership, curriculum or course design, curriculum implementation and evaluation under ever-changing circumstances of educational contexts (Kala & Chaubey, 2015; Kitchen, 2009). As declared by Sloan and Bowe (2015), serving as curriculum designers, they also need to analyse, implement, and evaluate the curriculum in terms of its multiple components by demonstrating a sense of responsibility and professionalism, reporting back to academic management, staying within the boundaries of policy directives, institutional missions, sequence and modularisation of the courses at tertiary level. What is more, curricula often experience random and fast changes rather than slow and well-planned ones (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018), which

may easily bring about resistance and unease in implementers (Chimbi & Jita, 2019; Maimela, 2015; Mathura, 2019; Mutch, 2012) since such changes are considered as additional work bringing no gain or restriction of professional space in certain time constraints (Carless, 1998; Kasapoglu, 2010). Implementers might also feel insecure and discouraged due to the unpredictability of change, and thus, demonstrate reluctance (Dilkes et al., 2014; Kgari-Masondo, 2020).

Despite all these challenges, curricula are in need of constant revision to meet the educational necessities of the era because only high-quality teacher education curricula could raise high-quality teachers and teaching (Flores, 2016; Saka, 2020; Wang et al., 2010). For this reason, in Türkiye, not only primary, secondary, or high school curricula, but also teacher education curricula have been revised many times since 1848, when the “institutionalized” teacher education story started with the establishment of “Darülmüallimin”. However, in 1982, Faculties of Education were placed under the roof of universities, and they started to be supervised by the Higher Education Council (HEC). Subsequent to this decision, the main teacher education curricula changes were initiated in 1997-98 and 2006-7 academic years (HEC, 2007), and finally in 2018-19 (HEC, 2018), but curriculum development or revision have always been questioned in Türkiye due to the lack of prerequisite needs assessment, piloting, and curriculum evaluation studies, the absence of vivid communication and cooperation among Ministry of National Education (MoNE), the HEC, and Faculties of Education, unsettled curriculum adaptation from European countries, insufficient recognition of curriculum experts and their propositions, or limited briefings for implementers, and inconsistent political forces causing stress, burnout, or resistance in implementers after frequent curricular changes (Gokmenoglu & Eret, 2011; Karakas, 2012; Saylan, 2014; Sendag & Gedik, 2015; Sert et al., 2018; Sever et al., 2019).

Depending on the centralized educational policies in Türkiye (Gozutok, 2014), before Faculties of Education or Faculties of Educational Sciences were entrusted with the task of teacher education curricula development or revision by the HEC, implementers had been expected to adopt a fidelity perspective in accordance with policymakers’ goals during curriculum change and implementation (Altinyelken, 2011; Erdem, 2015; Fullan, 2007; Güven, 2015; Basaran et al., 2022). Nevertheless, the recent decision of the HEC, which has been depicted as “historic”, has delegated the authority of curriculum making to Faculties of Education and Faculties of Educational Sciences and made faculty members responsible for their teacher education curricula in addition to their original role of an instructor-researcher (Gaff & Simpson, 1994).

In the light of these issues and advances, this study aims to faculty members’ perceptions on curriculum change together with the underlying factors relating to their resistance to or embrace of those curricula changes. These perceptions and experiences are believed to guide the forthcoming curriculum development or revision studies at teacher education institutions. This study might also put forth the

reflections of HEC's latest decision creating both suspense and relief in teacher educators of Turkish higher education (Basaran et al., 2022) after years of centralized curriculum making.

MATERIALS and METHODS

Design of The Study

The qualitative paradigm aspires to develop understanding and meaning in relation to everyday life of key informants (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007), and to unveil underlying issues of their actions (Cohen et al., 2011). Inspired by this approach, the current study focused on purposefully selected informants, and gave room for them to share their meaningful experiences with the employment of a phenomenological design (Creswell, 2007). Through in-depth interviews reflecting the multiple aspects of the target phenomenon (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006), the researcher not only aimed at "seeing the world through participants' eyes and empathically understand the meaning of their experiences", but also investigated their own subjectivities via self-reflection (Lodico et al., 2010, p. 149).

The reason for the employment of this design was to shed light on curriculum change that is a common and complicated phenomenon encountered in nearly all educational environments and interlocked with many other variables; and to interpret curriculum change in pre-service teacher education from different angles enriched by the faculty members' vigorous experiences and motives behind their professional standpoints and decisions.

Participants of The Study

For a phenomenological study, key informants who have closely experienced the phenomenon and been capable of mirroring it are of high importance (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006; Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2015; Yildirim & Simsek, 2016). Therefore, depending on their strong traditions and academic staff specialized in teacher education, 13 Faculties of Education or Faculties of Educational Sciences, which represent at least one different geographical region of Türkiye and have at least 15 years of experience in offering teacher education programs, were initially selected as the research settings.

Forty-one faculty members possessing lived experiences on pre-service teacher education curricula change participated in the study. The distribution of the faculty members in regard to their currently affiliated departments was as follows: Educational Sciences (EDS, n=8), Elementary Education (EE, n=5), Computer Education and Instructional Technology (CEIT, n=4), Science Education (ScE, n=4), Turkish Language Teaching (TLT, n=4), English Language Teaching (ELT, n=3), Elementary Mathematics Education (EME, n=3), Social Sciences Education (SSE, n=3), Geography Education (GE, n=2), Physics Education (PE, n=2), Chemistry Education (CE, n=1), Mathematics Education (ME, n=1), and German Language Teaching (GLT, n=1). The informants' experience in teacher education ranged from five to ten years (n=11), 11 to 20 years (n=21), 21 to 30 years (n=8), and more than 31 years (n=1). Moreover, 11 of the faculty members were working as

lecturers or assistant professors; 17 of them were associate professors, and 13 of them were full professors.

Data Collection Instrument

Following an extensive literature review and examination of available instruments, the researcher formed a semi-structured interview protocol primarily in line with Fullan's (2007) theoretical framework for the implementation of curriculum change. Informants' demographics were asked in the first section (department/university where degrees obtained, academic title, years of experience in teacher education, courses offered, research interests, administrative duties, experience in curriculum development) to generate thick descriptions of them. In the second section, faculty members' perceptions on whether they tend to embrace, modify, or resist curricula changes were explored along with the reasons. This part was comprised of 12 interview questions except their prompts.

The researchers also used metaphors through an interview question: "If you were expected to depict your position/attitude/approach to curricula change in teacher education, what would be your metaphor? Why?" The reason behind this metaphorical question is that metaphors are accredited as a unique and creative strategy to examine a phenomenon because they have the strength of enlightening informants' experiences and awakening their emotions (Carpenter, 2008; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

With an extended abstract of the study, the first draft of the interview protocol was sent to five experts specialized in the fields of Elementary Education, English Language Teaching, Chemistry Education, and Social Sciences Education so that they could check the alignment between the research and interview questions. When the protocol was revised thanks to their recommendations, it was piloted with two different faculty members holding a PhD degree in the field of Curriculum and Instruction. During the pilot interviews, sequence and clarity of the interview questions and probes were tested by one of the researchers, and necessary adjustments were made afterwards such as the division of an interview question into two parts and the addition of a prompt regarding the program competencies after the Bologna process.

Data Collection Procedure

After receiving the approval of the METU Human Research Ethics Committee (Protocol Nu: 337-ODTU-2021) on August 6th, 2021 and official clearances from the 13 different universities, the researcher started the data collection process. The researchers investigated educational backgrounds and research interests of the faculty members on academic websites of the faculties. Consequently, the academicians who were experienced in both teacher education and teacher education curricula changes were contacted via e-mails. When they declared their willingness to participate, invitation links to Zoom meetings were sent. All interviews were carried out by one of the researchers and recorded to prevent data loss and enable a more credible analysis. Each interview lasted approximately 65 minutes, and the

researcher tried to stay neutral without steering the informants (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006).

Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

The interview data transcribed verbatim, and the researchers read the transcripts several times to get more familiar with the data. Then, member check strategy was employed and the researchers shared the transcripts with the informants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) so that they could have a chance to review, clarify, and confirm what they meant. Adding to internal validity of the study, the researchers also made use of direct quotations (Maxwell, 2012). Moreover, to assure inter-coder congruence via analyst triangulation (Patton, 2015), the derived codes, categories, and themes were crosschecked by three experienced qualitative researchers. On a sample transcript, one of the researcher's agreement was calculated and estimated as 85% with the first coder, 83% with the second coder, and 81% with the third coder, which indicated an acceptable reliability (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

After that, relevant codes and themes were developed, which was still open to change or expansion depending on the nature of the emergent data. MAXQDA 2022 (VERBI Software, 2021) was utilized in the analysis. While presenting the findings through the direct quotations, the informants' anonymity was protected through the labels and numbers derived from their participant numbers, affiliated departments, and university types. In this way, the researchers aimed to make more sense of the informants' experiences without separating them from their contexts. (e.g. I29-S-GE: Informant 29, State University, Geography Education; I16-F-EME: Informant 16, Foundation University, Elementary Mathematics Education)

RESULTS

The faculty members' perceptions of teacher education curricula change were described herein as a response to the main research question of the current study. To provide a vivid picture for the first sub-question, the faculty members' metaphors defining what curricula changes meant to them, and how they positioned themselves both academically and emotionally in the event of such changes in pre-service teacher education were displayed along with their metaphors and varying perceptions based on the presence of top-down and bottom-up curricula changes. Table 1 displays these metaphors and perceived positions of the faculty members in the event of curricula changes. Furthermore, certain factors emerging in the interview data and leading the faculty members to either resist or embrace curricula changes were also depicted in detail. These factors were namely the characteristics including need, quality, clarity and complexity of these changes; contextual factors referring to physical infrastructure, human resources and leadership at faculties; and finally, external factors covering the HEC's delegation of authority and approach to curricula changes.

Table 1. Faculty Members’ Metaphors for Curricula Changes and Positions

Top-down Curricula Changes	Faculty Members’ Positions
Quidditch games in Harry Potter	letting perfect be the enemy of good
Russian dolls	doing patchwork
an eddy	flying with brooms, but where?
expired medicine sent to third-world countries	running on a treadmill
sprigs under ice/snow	rowing against the tide
disappointment	a sage among tyrants
eggs in moonlight	beating the air
treading water	waiting for a bus ignorant to its passengers
	kids holding their mother’s hand not to get lost
	a chameleon
	a spectator having no initiative
Bottom-up Curricula Changes	Faculty Members’ Roles/Positions
a phoenix: recreation from the ashes	not feeling trapped or in prison
a snowdrop	riding a bicycle on a bumpy road
origami	planting flowers as a gardener
a puzzle	serving as a catalyser
a navigation system/road map	a change agent
sailing in high-seas	a pinpoint/sign
a time machine	a sage on the side
robotic or algorithmic design	a free bird
medicine	teaching how to fly
	adding something new into an uncooked meal

As evidence of the faculty members’ negative perceptions in the event of top-down curricula changes by the HEC, I33-S-ScE voiced the ambiguity and triviality of curricula changes with these words: “The HEC’s curricula changes are like Quidditch games in Harry Potter series. We [faculty members] fly with our brooms, but don’t know where to go. Ambiguities and anxiety are everywhere because the HEC tries to deal with a-day-long policies.” I32-S-TLT also shared a similar perspective with a different metaphor, “Curricula changes are like Russian matryoshka dolls. The HEC says, *I am changing it*, but we encounter with the same thing.” Furthermore, I26-S-EME and I4-S-ELT drew attention to the efforts of the HEC providing no concrete results, and declared that,

I feel that I am running on a treadmill. I run, and run, but go nowhere. There is no final destination to be arrived. We [faculty members] make efforts, but we can reach nowhere. It sticks in your throat; it never works. (I26-S-EME)

I am rowing against the tide; I feel that. There is a kind of power that forces me to go somewhere, but I try to resist and do something else. (I4-S-ELT)

I39-S-TLT gave this example, “We have a concept in creative drama: pretending. We pretend to change curricula without actually focusing on how to achieve better outcomes.” Moreover, I18-S-GLT and I23-S-CEIT felt ignored during the top-down curricula changes:

I feel like a sage among tyrants; I am in pain, but nobody listens to me. I believe that I make reasonable suggestions, and produce solutions to problems. However, we are treading water. I feel distressed. (I18-S-GLT)

We can liken curricula changes to waiting for a bus at the bus stop. Buses come and go whether you get on them or not. Nobody asks you about anything, or when I don't get on one of them, they don't wait for me. They close their doors and go without saying, “Why don't you get on? What happened?” (I23-S-CEIT)

The randomness and frequency of such curricula changes created a kind of desperation in I30-S-ScE who stated, “Curricula changes seem like we are in spring, and waiting for summer with sprigs, but suddenly it starts snowing. We feel intervened and disturbed without any notice.” At this point, some informants expressed their disappointment by stating that,

I always feel excited about a curriculum change because I think we will be able to raise pre-service teachers better in a more contemporary way. After that, a big disappointment comes. I look at my colleagues and say, “Is this really the curriculum proposed by the HEC for us?” (I22-S-GE)

I27-S-CEIT voiced the faculty members' need for constant adaptation in the event of curricula changes by stating, “We feel like chameleons, and we just adapt to them.” The challenges during curricula changes in teacher education were also emphasized by I2-S-ScE who said, “I think curriculum change is like an eddy. ... You would like to be freed from it; you struggle a lot in it. You have concerns and fears.”

Contrary to these views on top-down curricula changes, bottom-up ones tended to create more positive perceptions in the faculty members. I38-S-SSE and I35-S-TLT who participated in curricular studies at their faculties exemplified their feelings of freedom with the following statements:

I feel myself on a solid ground after our new curriculum. Now, nobody is going to whine ... I don't feel trapped, or in prison where I am forced to be because I was trying to protect my sanity before. Now, I am in a faculty environment where I really want to be because we can say, “We have created this [the curriculum] by ourselves.” (I38-S-SSE)

I feel myself freer while working in our bottom-up change study relating to my own field. Maybe like a bird... I feel more independent and happier because I have seen that I am able to manage it. I also think this study has strengthened my belongingness to my field. (I35-S-TLT)

Another faculty member experiencing curricula revisions at faculty also had a positive understanding of change efforts as these words depicted, “I feel myself as if I was planting flowers as a gardener.” (I40-S-TLT). Similarly, I28-S-SSE said, “Just like a phoenix does, we are experiencing our rebirth. Bottom-up curricula are like recreation from the ashes for Faculties of Education because this time, they utilize their own faculty members and infrastructure. They feed themselves.”

The following informants focused on the challenges and musts in the curriculum change process by likening curricula changes to “a puzzle” (I5-S-EDS) or “origami” (I29-S-GE) besides their optimism about bottom-up curricula change studies at faculties:

I am thinking of a snowdrop now. It is a very beautiful flower, but it only blossoms under very difficult conditions like our bottom-up curriculum studies. ... It is a very challenging process, but when you overcome all these, a snowdrop will be seen with its beauty. (I31-S-EDS)

I feel like sailing in high-seas. If everyone does what is required, we can take this ship to a harbour safe and sound. (I10-S-EDS)

Analysis of the interview data also put certain factors forward showing the faculty members’ resistance to or embrace of curricula changes. These two were handled under the characteristics of the curricula changes: need, quality, clarity and complexity of these changes; contextual factors: physical infrastructure, human resources, and leadership at faculties; and finally, external factors as the HEC’s delegation of authority and approach to curricula changes.

The Characteristics of The Curricula Changes

Need

Some faculty members declared that there were changes in the society, expectations, and needs of the education sector such as 21st century skills for prospective teachers, regulations in ECTS and Bologna procedures, updates in MoNE’s school level programs, which called for a revision of teacher education curricula. Therefore, top-down curricula changes made by Higher Education Council were seen legitimate by six faculty members to determine standards for teacher education in terms of keeping the balance in the offered courses at a variety of faculties. I29-S-GE rationalized top-down curricula changes thanks to uniformity, quality assurance, and risk-free student transfers.

It is an urge to have a common ground for subject matter and pedagogical courses supported by electives and general knowledge courses. There is a mess at faculties. Such changes are made to resolve this mess, and reach certain standards. (I34-S-EME)

I16-F-EME claimed that pedagogical aspects were highly incorporated through certain courses in the 2018-19 curriculum change by the HEC: “We were covering how to teach numbers, geometry, algebra, statistics and probability in two four-credit courses only. It sounds unbelievable to me now. ...

When I saw these pedagogical content knowledge courses in the new curriculum, I liked the idea a lot.” Moreover, a wide range of electives and courses like Educational Sociology, Educational Philosophy, Inclusive Education, Character and Values Education, Open and Distance Education, English Language Teaching Curriculum were mostly appreciated in terms of expanding pre-service teachers’ skills and vision in the profession.

On the contrary, 14 faculty members advocated that they did not feel the need for the 2018-19 curricula change, and questioned its rationale as exemplified below:

As the implementers, we need to know the rationale of the change, and believe in it. I don’t know why the HEC changed the previous curriculum personally. We have been raising teachers for years with that curriculum, but still, I don’t know why. (I30-S-ScE)

The faculty members seemed to appraise curricula changes positively when they tended to keep up with the contemporary advances and bring pre-service teachers in more pedagogical content knowledge rather than pure subject matter. Nevertheless, when the faculty members felt hesitant about the need for a new curriculum, they seemed to develop resistance to it.

Quality

Six faculty members specifically underlined their embracement of curricula changes resulting from the studies of genuine professionals who focused on the consistency in the curriculum, the essentiality of teaching practice, and certain standards in teacher education. Additionally, some faculty members appreciated curricula changes complying to curriculum development principles in respect to gathering in commissions, conducting workshops, and collecting feedback from stakeholders. Furthermore, I27-S-CEIT approved the update of the course names and the use of accurate terminologies in the new curriculum as given below:

The course names were transformed into more field-related and contemporary ones. For instance, Special Teaching Methods became more exclusive to the field when it was named as Information Technologies Teaching. When I investigated the course content and objectives, I saw that correct terms had been used there. (I27-S-CEIT)

On the other hand, eight faculty members emphasized that certain knowledge or competence areas in teacher education curricula were always neglected such as arts, aesthetics, philosophy, logic, mathematics, and foreign language knowledge. These areas were seen as a must in order to raise more contemporary and global teachers, and in their absence, the faculty members tended to develop resistance to the curriculum change as quoted here:

Logic and philosophy show us what is valid and right. ... If a pre-service teacher says, 'I am going to take a philosophy course', s/he cannot find one. ... Logic and philosophy courses are missing at all faculties in Türkiye, so all teacher education curricula are deficient to me. (I23-S-CEIT)

The quality of curricula changes was criticized by 22 of the faculty members with regard to being more theoretical rather than practical since pre-service teachers were reported to have experienced difficult situations after graduation such as teaching disadvantaged or immigrant students from low socio-economic status in suburbs, building their teacher identities in different organizational climates of schools, communicating and cooperating with parents. Therefore, the curricula changes in teacher education were problematic to fill in such professional gaps:

We mostly taught the theory, and talked through our hat. The tricks of the trade are classes, schools, and the realities over there. ... Therefore, our graduates go through a floundering phase when they are appointed; this is inevitable. (I13-S-CE)

We send our pre-service teachers to practice schools before they become well-equipped for teaching. ... How to talk to a parent or how to handle a student having trouble at school... How much do we focus on these issues at faculty? Maybe faculty members talk about them, but it is not enough. We need to let pre-service teachers practice. (I15-F-CEIT)

The faculty members' criticism on the credits and content of subject matter courses and course sequencing might also be a matter of quality as described by I9-S-EE and I19-S-PE:

Pre-service teachers take my Teaching Literacy in Turkish course in the fall semester before Instructional Principles and Methods course without knowing what planning, assessment-evaluation, and main components of a curriculum are. When I mention instructional principles, e.g. from simple to complex, my students do not know them at all. We were like teaching them how to write sentences before the alphabet. (I9-S-EE)

Physics is a comprehensive field. You try to explain mechanics, electricity, magnetism, etc. in two hours, and cover the topics that took four or six hours in the previous curriculum. It is impossible to catch up, and pre-service teachers do not comprehend well. You cannot solve enough problems, or demonstrate enough examples. (I19-S-PE)

These findings highlighted that when the faculty members believed in the quality of a curriculum change proposed by groups of experts according to the principles of curriculum development, scientific advances, and updated terminologies in relevant fields, they tended to embrace that change in teacher education more. However, ignorance of certain knowledge areas and professional aspects, problematic course hours and sequences in a teacher education curriculum might lead to the faculty members' resistance.

Clarity and Complexity

I29-S-GE stated a level of satisfaction regarding the clarity and complexity of the change by saying, “When course descriptions were provided by the HEC as in the 2018-19 curriculum change, faculty members could not make distinctions in terms of course content since the HEC gave us a distinct path to follow.” Short course descriptions were regarded as an opportunity for faculty members’ own initiatives, which enabled their embracement.

Short course descriptions of the HEC are important in two ways. They provide a considerable extent of freedom for faculty members when they form the course content, so faculty members can be more flexible. (I25-S-SSE)

Seven faculty members clarified that they did not face any troubles in implementation of curricula changes thanks to certain qualities of their faculties and faculty members and they were not hesitant about what was expected from them as seen in the following quotations:

Our department is really rich regarding faculty members’ professional competencies and perspectives. It is also rich in number and quality. Therefore, we never had problems in adapting the courses into the new curriculum, updating electives, or opening new courses. (I2-S-ScE)

Each faculty member at our department took an area course relating to their field of specialization or dissertation, and they professionally developed themselves there. For instance, mine was algebra, so I selected Linear Algebra and Abstract Mathematics. ... Since we had such a diversity, frankly, we did not encounter any difficulties in implementing the new courses. (I34-S-EME)

On the contrary, some faculty members had difficulties in comprehending what was expected from them. I11-F-EE touched upon this issue by saying, “While making efforts to understand the program guide, we were struggling and fighting it out. We were becoming interpreters, and assuming what the HEC meant.” The complexity of course descriptions and course conduct were emphasized by some faculty members who were in need of more clarity regarding what to do while offering new courses.

In the 2018-19 curriculum change, I asked for help from the head of the Sociology department while preparing this course profile. The HEC gave us a one-paragraph description, but even that department head could not understand what was demanded there. (I41-F-ELT)

It is not enough to write Values Education there. How am I going to relate it to Physics Education? It is not given in the documents. (I2-S-ScE)

Another faculty member seemed worried about the standardization of courses at different faculties since faculty members might fill in the gaps themselves and this could lead to differentiated course conduct in the same curriculum as I10-S-EDS explained:

What does the HEC expect from faculty members? Course descriptions were too narrow, so it is at the mercy of faculty members. ... I am sure that there are differences between my course outline and another faculty member's outline at a different faculty. Mine did not even comply with a colleague from this faculty, either.

There was a course called Literature Review, for example. Its content was not clear enough, and every faculty member presented something they fancied. Some lectured on research methods and citing sources, and some just extended a single topic for weeks. ... How is it going to be taught? It is not an easy task. (I36-S-EDS)

Consequently, clear program guides, professional autonomy, and smooth implementation seemed to facilitate the faculty members' embracement whereas ambiguous expectations, limited descriptions and guidelines about course content and conduct might cause resistance.

Contextual Factors

Physical Infrastructure and Human Resources

To embrace a curriculum change, 14 faculty members declared that they could have an access to what they had technically and professionally needed. The faculty members from the foundation universities voiced no trouble with physical and technical infrastructure as below:

We have a Maths class with specific materials for the pedagogical area courses in Mathematics Education. (I16-F-EME)

After the 2018-19 change, our physical and technical infrastructure was so good that I could also use all the opportunities from the Distance Education division, including a professional TV studio. (I27-S-CEIT)

Some faculty members reported no problems at their faculties regarding the presence of qualified faculty members to offer new courses proposed whereas some considered this as an obstacle to the embracement of curricula changes as seen below:

It is easier for us to overcome such challenges because we are in a much better condition in terms of quality academic staff, the number of faculty members, and technological and physical infrastructure than other faculties or departments that have been newly established. (I22-S-GE)

In 2018-19 curriculum, there was a course named Educational Anthropology. I think there was no faculty member to offer such a course requiring specialization. Even if you found someone, s/he had to offer it in English. There is at most one or two faculty members having all these qualities in Türkiye. (I41-F-ELT)

Nonetheless, 23 of the faculty members stressed problems in physical or technical infrastructure as a hindrance when curricula changes were on the agenda, which might cause them to resist. These

shortcomings were the absence of Internet connection, limited numbers of laboratories or classes, overcrowded classes, and obsolete instructional opportunities at the faculties like lecture halls preventing faculty members from group works as illustrated below:

I think we are going to have difficulties while implementing our new curriculum. ... Classrooms allowing for more practice are going to be required; our computer labs are going out of date; smartboards are becoming dysfunctional. (I28-S-SSE)

For Micro-teaching course, we demanded a specific classroom with a well-operating computer, camera, and PowerPoint software from our Dean's Office. We wanted course capacity expanding no more than 15 to 20 pre-service teachers. Nevertheless, these prerequisites were never taken into consideration. (I17-S-EDS)

As seen above, physical facilities and human resources at departments or faculties were adequate at the time of a curriculum change in teacher education, this situation led to the faculty members' embracement of changes while drawbacks might cause them resist.

Leadership and Effective Management of Curriculum Change

Three faculty members were serving as department heads in the event of the 2018-19 curricula changes, and this position influenced the way in which they perceived the change. While one of them actively examined the HEC's course descriptions to build course profiles, others specifically adapted the new courses to their faculties as explained by I1-S-CEIT, "I was the department head at that time, and we cooperated very well. Our research assistants and even PhD candidates were also involved in our studies. They all made a great contribution."

Furthermore, the interviewed faculty members highlighted briefings and meetings organized for the clarification of the curricula changes in 2018. As an example, I34-S-EME said, "Our Vice-chancellor in charge informed us about the balance in the percentages of electives, and increase in practical hours of courses, and preparation for the oncoming accreditation processes at the faculty." A similar instructional leadership example was also voiced below:

We formed information packages for the 2018-19 curriculum change, paid a lot of attention to ECTS equivalents, and worked together. I am also a curriculum specialist, so I have taken the responsibility of the curriculum. I have been sharing my experience and informing my faculty through the meetings where I have been talking about what we need to do step-by-step. (I14-F-EDS)

Some faculty members appreciated the leadership of their faculty in terms of fair division of labour during bottom-up curricula changes, and denounced that:

We try to make an equal division of labour systematically. For example, some faculty members have been assigned to conduct needs assessment, collect stakeholders' views, and organize meetings with external advisory committees. Some have been investigating the Bologna procedures, teacher competencies, and international approaches to teacher education. It is a nice distribution because everyone is included. (I28-S-SSE)

However, most faculty members expressed certain complaints about the absence of effective leadership and management of curricula changes at their faculties. Some informants critically appraised the merit of educational leaders as reported here:

We are at Faculty of Education, but our department head has no background in education, or there are others whose professorships are in a variety of areas. Unfortunately, they could not indicate any leadership behaviours. Only the faculty members from the Department of Educational Sciences, or pedagogical area specialists could serve as a leader here. (I22-S-GE)

I have never seen an actual leadership approach. We just sign some things approving that a notice has arrived at the faculty. Nevertheless, no faculty administrator tells us its importance by internalizing the rationale behind, or looks for our opinions. Curriculum change is never seen as a significant concept by them. (I18-S-GLT)

At this point, owing to oppressive leadership approaches, faculty members started having pretentious acts as I24-S-EE explained with these words, "Our superiors want us to do something, and as subordinates, we have to do it without making our own decisions. ... Is it right leadership? I question this, but we all pretend to do it."

External Factors

The HEC's Delegation of Authority and Approach to Curricula Changes

The centralized curriculum-making policy was openly criticized by 14 faculty members whereas the delegation of authority was seen as a reasonable decision since faculties of education are autonomous higher education institutions. For this reason, some faculty members highlighted the need for flexibility just like I28-S-SSE who said, "After this delegation, I think faculties of education could reflect their own dynamics to their own curricula." I17-S-EDS asserted that, "We have been demanding autonomy since we always think and say that the HEC has been restricting the freedom at faculties. Now, the HEC has done something good and let us make our own curriculum."

Another faculty member appraised this decision as a means of achieving better standards in teacher education: "I think it is a valid step because we need a competitive environment at faculties of education. Rivalry means elegance because you strive for doing the best." (I13-S-CE). I14-F-EDS indicated their increased responsibilities as teacher educators:

Faculty members have been responsible for the development of teacher education curricula. You may simply teach, but where has your course been placed in the curriculum? ... How do these course objectives fit into the general competencies of teaching? What do you actually do to let pre-service teachers reach the attainments? You need to be conscious of all these now. ... It made us think, and increased our awareness. (I14-F-EDS)

On the contrary, 22 faculty members thought this decision could cause a deadlock in teacher education curricula. For instance, I4-S-ELT felt insecure about the randomness and timing of the decision: “It was so unexpected and we caught unprepared. What are we going to do next term? We cannot do something from scratch now.” This approach to curricula changes was also found parallel to the political structure of Türkiye where political cliques had the power to direct others. Herein, 16 faculty members mentioned urges of certain people who were loyal to their kith and kin as exemplified below.

Normally, specialists in the field are invited to curricula studies, but they [HEC] first choose one or two names. Then, these people invite their own acquaintances from their milieus. (I35-S-TLT)

Some of the interviewed faculty members also disapproved the steps taken in curriculum development or revision studies due to unsystematic approaches or academicians in charge as seen in the following quotations.

Did they [the HEC] ever evaluate the courses in the previous curricula before changes? Now, how can we develop our own curriculum now? We have no idea about which courses are more effective than the others. (I7-S-EDS)

Sometimes there is no curriculum specialist in the commissions or workshops of the HEC. At those times, curriculum development turns into an add-drop of courses. (I21-S-EE)

The faculty members disclosed the fact that the HEC gave no place for their initiatives in their curricula change efforts, “The HEC makes curricula changes as a desk job, and manages us in a chain of command.” (I18-S-GLT). Therefore, most faculty members asserted that they did not feel any responsibility or ownership of such curricula changes because of being regarded as technicians of the imposed curricula and neglected as professionals.

DISCUSSION

The current study showed that the faculty members’ metaphors depicting how they perceived curricula changes both academically and emotionally and how they situated themselves in the event of these changes in teacher education tended to cluster on the two ends: their embrace of or resistance to curricula changes. To exemplify, the interviewed faculty members felt either like “rowing against the tide, beating the air, running on a treadmill, being a prisoner or a chameleon”, or “a gardener planting a new flower, a sage on the side, teaching birds how to fly, sailing in high-seas devotedly, a pioneer, or

change agent”. These results were congruent with the literature underlining if implementers internalize whatever a curriculum change brings, they embrace and implement it as it is. Nevertheless, if a curriculum change doesn’t comply to their professional or personal standing, implementers develop resistance by either totally ignoring the change or modifying it as much as they can (Brøgger, 2014; Jenkins, 2000). This seems usual especially in higher education which is stable and conservative (Louvel, 2013). Also, curricula changes may not always be appreciated by implementers who are skeptical about its prospect and characteristics (Mathura, 2019; Maimela, 2015).

The faculty members often felt uncertain and anxious about curricula changes depending on ambiguous policies of the HEC which was believed to be done to save the day with no concrete philosophy or model and scientific research ground. Some stated the challenge of keeping up with all these changes like “a chameleon” or “a kid trying to hold his/her mother’s hand not to get lost” because of the frequency of curricula changes (Ozudogru, 2021; Sert et al., 2018; Sever et al., 2019). Under such circumstances, Annala et al. (2021) and Jenkins (2020) similarly reported academicians’ oppositional or reactive agency emerging when they didn’t believe in the change at all. These emotional reactions might also be explained through Jenkins’ (2020) definition of passive agency including implementers’ adherence to the previous curriculum or modifications on the new curriculum.

This resistance might take its roots from the fact that teacher education curricula are mostly criticized for its quality as being inflexible and incapable of enacting teaching skills, neglecting arts, general knowledge, critical thinking and problem-solving of pre-service teachers (Karabacak, 2022), lacking courses designed after course evaluation, and having a technicist perspective of teacher education rather than a well-grounded philosophical foundation (Erdem, 2015; Güven, 2008; Sahin, 2014). For these reasons, within this study, the interviewed faculty members’ negative orientations towards curricula changes came as no surprise. These feelings and experiences of the faculty members were in line with the description of “the cynics” in Dilkes et al.’s study (2014) where implementers had a tendency to criticize the change for being political, unwise, or ineffective.

Such reactions might also stem from their negative change history beliefs (Zayim, 2015), or from the novelty of the change process, which is more likely to make the faculty members go beyond their professional comfort zone (Fullan, 2007; Guhn, 2009) since they need to adapt to what is new in the curricula by changing or improving their already-existing knowledge, skills, values, or beliefs in teacher education (Nation & Macalister, 2010; Zhidon, 2012). It might also be meaningful to underscore that the faculty members from different departments and fields of study reflected different perspectives on curriculum change and implementation. That is why, implementers’ self-efficacy beliefs may opt into the equation here because if implementers have high self-efficacy, they can cope with the expectations coming alongside the new curriculum (Peskova et al., 2019; Putwain & von der Embse, 2019).

Contrary to these perspectives, some faculty members taking part in curriculum revision or development studies at their own faculties after the delegation of authority seemed to have a more positive attitude towards curricula changes by declaring their academic freedom and ownership of the change. These faculty members looked like “the enthusiasts” or “the leaders” who have faith in the change and its benefits (Dilkes et al., 2014). In other words, they seemed to demonstrate “proactive agency” (Jenkins, 2020), and might even lay claim to the change (Mathura, 2019). Herein, bottom-up curricula studies might make faculty members expectant concerning the development of a “teacher-proof curriculum” promoting pre-service teachers’ greater learning regardless of other factors during implementation, or they can be seen as a chance to raise “curriculum-proof teachers” who are able to utilize each and every curriculum given to their best advantage (Taylor, 2013).

As a factor increasing the quality of a teacher education curriculum and facilitating the embrace of a curriculum change, a professional team developing a curriculum in accordance to the principles of curriculum development, evaluating the previous curricula, and conducting needs assessment studies was also underlined since curriculum change always requires well-grounded planning and hard scientific work throughout its development phase (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018; Ulubey & Basaran, 2019; Uztosun & Troudi, 2015).

When the interviewed faculty members fell back upon their own interpretations and assumptions, which gave birth to standardization issues among different faculty members, the complexity of implementation became one of the biggest obstacles to the embrace of curricula changes. Time constraints, workload and curricular restrictions on implementers might also restrict faculty members because they could not get ready for their new responsibilities (Aeria, et al., 2018; Cooper, 2017; Meij & Merx, 2018; Lunenberg et al., 2014). Herein, “change knowledge” comes to the forefront (Fullan et al., 2005), which is essential since only when the change is comprehended well and faculty members know which roles to play, all stakeholders share the same motivation, purpose, and belonging to the process (Anakin et al., 2018; Ling, 2002).

The significance of adequate physical infrastructure and human resources at faculties were highlighted in the results of the current study. Similarly, Louvel (2013) asserted that curriculum design should not be restricted due to financial barriers, lack of academic staff, or instructional resources. Precisely, if faculties fall short of resources, materials, and instructional technologies or competent faculty members to offer specialization-required courses (Isiksal et al., 2007; Karabacak, 2022), these challenges might cause faculty members’ resistance in return (Altinyelken, 2011; Chimbunde & Kgari-Masondo, 2020; Zimmerman, 2006). Apparently, some of these frequently encountered drawbacks inevitably occur in the developing countries (Steinbach, 2012).

Leadership and effective management of the change process could serve as another catalyst concerning the embracement of curricula changes in teacher education. As also stressed by Hopkins et

al. (2021) and Walker-Bethea et al. (2021), dedication and qualities of educational leaders matter to a great degree since they need to undertake the role of a guide aspiring to satisfy the needs of the whole faculty, distribute the resources efficiently, revise the curriculum tirelessly, and overcome obstacles during the change by creating a collaborative atmosphere. While doing all these, they are expected to provide continuous monitoring, support for faculty members' professional development and motivation, and institutionalize the change by making it more understandable and approachable through a collective lens (Ahtiainen et al., 2021; Clasquin-Johnson, 2016; Cooper, 2017; Fullan, 2007; Ling, 2002; Wedell & Grassick, 2018). Moreover, if faculty members have trust in their administrators, they tend to have more faith in what they are planning to do and demonstrate affective change commitment (Zayim, 2015).

The top-down approach of the HEC to curricula changes might be another factor bringing about resistance in faculty members who may claim that standardization of course syllabuses or curricula confine them to a pre-determined way of work by impeding their autonomy (Barman et al., 2016). In this way, policy-makers might make endeavors to establish a hegemony over teacher education. Nonetheless, despite such constraints, faculty members sometimes stay reluctant to change the status quo at teacher education institutions where there is an absence of a scholarly culture, and the effect of politics on teacher education curricula is quite obvious (Steinbach, 2012). Leite et al. (2016) similarly underlined teacher educators' limited deliberations and considerations on the teacher education programs they were affiliated to. In the same vein, some faculty members may demonstrate a certain degree of indifference to curricula changes in their own teacher education programs by not reading the whole curriculum in detail, but learning about their own course content, goals and objectives, and assessment practices (Banegas, 2016). Maybe for this reason, academicians in higher education may not fully grasp their roles in curriculum development because they either mention adding new content into syllabi, and offering electives, changing textbooks, or developing PPTs for instruction with a very limited perspective (Fraser & Bosanquet, 2006). Therefore, formation of a curriculum development vision in teacher education and opportunities for faculty members' contribution to changes are vital for high-quality teacher education curricula (Banegas, 2016).

Conclusion

To ensure faculty members' ownership, curricula changes need to be planned thoroughly in the way that they could facilitate greater learning outcomes for pre-service teachers and promote their professional readiness. Nevertheless, this is not solitary work for any stakeholder in the change process. A genuine cooperation between faculties of education and MoNE is highly required to achieve a better alignment of teacher education curricula to school level programs. Herein, a solid philosophy in teacher education and scientifically well-grounded reasons for the change need to be presented for all stakeholders. Evidently, a systematic curriculum development taking its roots from needs assessment and curriculum evaluation are of key importance for the prospect of change efforts.

Considering regional disparities in Türkiye, faculties of education need to be equipped with required human resources to capably offer new courses and technical infrastructure of the educational environments. What is more, faculty members may question the “why”, “what”, and “how” of curricula changes, and hence, as a precaution against any kind of misconception or miscommunication, faculty administration needs to organize workshops and briefings to assure that everyone is on the same page.

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