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Perception of Ideal Teachers' Figure among Ethiopian Immigrant Pre-Service Teachers

Dr. Eti Gilad

Lecturer, Department of Education and the Department of Educational Systems Management,
Achva Academic College, POB Shikmim, Israel

Dr. Shosh Millet

Lecturer, M.Ed. programmes, Achva Education College, POB Shikmim, Israel

Abstract:

This study aims to display the ideal teachers' figure as it is perceived by Ethiopian immigrant pre-service teachers [hereafter – "students"]. The study was conducted in an interpretive-qualitative approach. The sample population comprised 44 students who studied in a unique teacher education programme. The programme is based on a multicultural concept which encompasses pluralistic and particularistic principles. It is designed for an immigrant minority population that experience social difficulties. The research tools consisted of an open-ended questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The findings illustrate that the students have similar perceptions of the ideal teachers' figure, some of which are associated with their cultural identity. The expansion of knowledge and comprehension of findings of this study can have an impact on the building of unique programmes which respond to real needs of learner populations from different cultures. From a future aspect, it can prepare students from various sectors for a high multicultural awareness which facilitates inculcation of equality, justice and democracy values to the pupils.

Keywords: *ideal teachers, Ethiopian immigrants, teacher education, teachers' figure.*

1. Introduction

This paper discusses an issue which preoccupies teacher-educators, parents, teachers, head teachers, educators and pupils at all ages and on all levels, the main focus being the cultural aspect of Ethiopian immigrants. This issue relates to teachers' image in society, in their own eyes, in the eyes of their peers, learners and education leaders. The question underpinning this issue throughout the generations is: Who is the good teacher? Who is the worthy teacher? Many studies were conducted among various populations, even in populations with cultural differences. This paper aims to present the complexity of teachers' image in general and that of ideal teachers as they are perceived by students from the Ethiopian community. These students express it through metaphors and interviews about their ambition of becoming ideal teachers to their learners. This paper is divided into theoretical background, methodology, findings, discussion and summary.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. The Ideal Teachers

The discussion which philosophers and theoreticians have conducted regarding ideal teachers' figure usually relates to an ideal prototype representing worldviews about the essence of teaching. The discussion has been linked to the time and place where it has taken place. Lamm (1987, 1996) bases his theory on many studies from the beginning of the 20th century and defines four ideal teacher prototypes: inculcating culture, acting as a social-valued agent, shaping each and every pupil and inculcating disciplinary knowledge. A rich variety of characteristics and emphases are embodied within these four prototypes, e.g. teachers who conduct a dialog with their learners, orient pupils to think, inculcate culture, relieve and criticise and stimulate studiousness. Moreover, teachers are educating, creative, social, mediating, reflective, constructivist, building knowledge and driving pupils to choose personal values.

Studies discussing ideal teachers' figure as seen by the learners display various and numerous qualities. There are two prominent components of ideal teachers which affect promotion and excellence: professional disciplinary knowledge and personality features. Teachers' disciplinary knowledge is the feature which is salient in ideal teachers. They know and are versed in the material, teach in an interesting manner, succeed in presenting the learnt material clearly and instruct pupils how to solve problems (Friedman & Korngold, 1993; Milgram, 1988). Studies in which teachers' personality is the noticeable characteristic of ideal teachers depict the latter as being respectful to the pupils, understanding, supportive, promoting personally, caring, humane, creating an atmosphere of openness in class and develop personal and warm inter-relations (Kobovy, 1997, Reichel & Mor, 2007; Tadmor, 2008).

In recent years the research literature has discussed two additional characteristics of ideal teachers: a sense of self-efficacy (teachers' belief in their ability to promote their pupils' attainments to excellence) and a sense of efficacy of teaching (professional teaching can enhance and affect pupils' attainments) (Friedman & Kass, 2000). Good and ideal teachers have a high self-image, self-resilience and belief in their ability to fulfill their role whereby pupils' knowledge is at the centre (Friedman & Lotan, 1993).

Ideal teachers are also described in classic literary novels (Camus, 1995; Oz, 2002; Shalev, 1999) as believing that teaching as a mission, vocation and way of life. These teachers establish an outstanding personal relationship with their pupils, are enthusiastic in and about their practice, charismatic and highly knowledgeable.

The uniqueness of exceptional teachers was characterised by the fact that they were caring, involved and committed. Even when the learning method is not exceptional, the teachers demonstrate a real interest in the learning material and an authentic passion for teaching themselves. They are willing to 'risk' themselves in favour of their learners' interest and are highly appreciated by their excelling pupils as grownups (Yair, 2006, p. 185).

Yair (2006) analyses key powerful experiences with an educational effect which have turned into a turning point in the pupils' life. The special figure of the teachers who generate these key experiences constitutes a symbol of excellence. When teachers demonstrate a warm and personal attitude and invest a lot in the pupils far and beyond other teachers, "... in fact one can argue that a personal attitude is the educating attitude or as Buber said, the attitude of I and Thou, an authentic, sincere and direct attitude" (Yair, 2006, p. 192).

2.2. Teachers' Figure – Knowledge Components

Teachers' figure is connected to definitions of teaching and to teachers' knowledge formed by a process of life-long education and learning. Shulman (1987) stipulates that the basis of knowledge for teaching has specific components which construct the picture of knowledge for teaching. The flexible combination of the five knowledge types - subject-matter content knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, curricular knowledge, knowledge of the context and environmental conditions – create the special and unique knowledge for the teaching profession, namely pedagogical content knowledge (PCK). The researchers Connelly & Diens (1987) and Shulman (1982) decomposed teachers' personal and practical knowledge and the basis of knowledge for teaching into six components: 1. Subject-matter knowledge – understanding the structure of the area of knowledge, ideas, principles, key concepts of the discipline and the learning content, acquaintance with the ways of organising and investigating the discipline and the methodology; 2. Knowledge of the learner – acquaintance with the pupils' background, understanding the learning processes and the pace of the pupils' development, difficulty levels and adjustment of the materials to pupils who are different from each other; 3. Knowledge of the school background and milieu – comprehending the connections, norms and relations between the school, community, parents and the authorities; 4. Curricular knowledge - being familiar with the existing curricula and learning materials, alternative learning materials and acquaintance with the relations between the areas of content of the various disciplines as well as reference to the different levels in the same age group; 5. Didactic knowledge – being familiar with various teaching strategies and the use thereof, class organisation and management in a diversified way and different alternatives for teaching; 6. 'Self' knowledge – personal goals, values, awareness, thoughts, beliefs and positions which affect the planning of learning and teaching.

When discussing the teachers' figure, Zeichner (1994) highlights the teachers as experts in the area of knowledge and in teaching, as putting the pupil at the centre and as a tool for the promotion of social justice. Hence, teacher education programmes should underscore the teaching skills and competences, aspects associated with children's development and the capabilities of criticism and commitment to experience various situations in the community. It is easy then to understand in-service and pre-service teachers' perceptions which are manifested with different emphases and in different measures.

2.3. Teachers' Professional Identity and Its Development

The following questions entailed the development of the professional identity concept: Who am I, the teacher? How do I see my role as a teacher? What kind of teacher do I want to be? How do others perceive me?.

Philosophers and researchers have referred to people from various aspects. For example: In what way do novice teachers think about themselves? How do novice teachers undergo personal changes while becoming teachers?. These aspects as well as questions of professional self-image and people's characteristics have led to the expansion of the 'teachers' professional identity' concept and to the understanding that including the topic of professional identity in teacher education programmes is highly essential (Kagen, 1992; Knowles, 1994). Kozminsky (2008) underscores the professional identity components (how are teachers perceived by themselves and by others). She presents four fundamental assumptions for building professional identity: 1. Identity is contextual; 2. There is a negotiation about identity; 3. Identity is dynamic and is undergoing a moral-social-emotional-physical process; 4. The identity narrative encompasses re-structuring of meanings and creation of coherence with the 'personal voice' and the 'self-awareness'.

In parallel to their pupils' development, teachers shape a professional identity characterised by challenging experiences which facilitate growth. They learn to adjust to a new knowledge, establish new contexts and structure innovativeness in a supportive environment (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Teacher education courses should enable a process whereby deep levels of change (identity and vocation) affect the external levels (milieu, behavioural patterns, competences) and vice versa. According to the onion model (Korthagen, 2004, 2007), teachers should not settle for cognitive awareness of their core characteristics. Rather, they should be in emotional contact with them, try making informed decisions about the way of applying these characteristics and execute their decisions. In this process of structuring teachers' figure and professional identity, the help of teacher-educators is usually required.

2.4. Teacher Education as a Means of Developing Ideal Teachers

There are several approaches to teacher education, each stemming from different perceptions of teaching and from ideal teachers' figure which matches these perceptions. Guber (1996), whose starting point is social-ideological, proposes four models: 1. Behavioural model – shaping teachers who teach centralised curricula, have teaching skills and are versed in delivering public knowledge and social concepts; 2. Rational-Platonic model – shaping autonomous and rationale teachers with broad horizons; 3. Hermeneutic model – shaping reflective teachers who interpret and decode teaching situations; 4. Critical model – teachers who believe that their work is a moral vocation and fostering of social justice. Feiman-Nemser (1990) specifies categorisation into five directions of teacher education: personal – teachers are at the centre of education; critical – teachers are social change agents; technological – teachers have professional knowledge, know to teach, implement scientific principles; practical – artist teachers who are flexible and inventive; academic – experts in the learning materials. Zilberstein (2005) indicates the two perceptions of teaching which affect teacher education: perception of teaching as an applied science versus the perception of teaching as a reflective practical occupation. Based on the last perception of the essence of teaching which is increasingly growing, education of ideal teachers is associated with viewing the ideal teachers as having reflective perceptions and skills on a high level and a personality which is at the centre.

When seeking good teachers according to the holistic approach to teacher education, Korthagen (2004, 2007) suggests the onion model which is an elaboration of the Bateson's model. The onion model illustrates that people embody different levels which are subject to influence and behavioural change. If we draw a circle within a circle like the layers of an onion, the layers that go from the outside inwards will be: milieu, behaviour, competences, beliefs, identity and vocation. The layers are levels based on which we can examine the way teachers function. On any level the answer to the main question presented above 'Who are the good teachers?' will be different.

2.5. Teacher Education Programme for Ethiopian Immigrants

The teacher education programme for Ethiopian immigrants studying at the college was conceived out of needs emerging from the field. The programme aims to educate students of Ethiopian origin for working in the education system. These students have unique needs. Consequently a unique education programme should be introduced, aiming to foster and grow pre-service teachers from the Ethiopian community while being sensitive to their various collective and personal needs (Millet, 2001).

The main objective of the programme was offering members of the Ethiopian community an opportunity to be integrated into the Israeli society by acquiring an acknowledged profession while responding to immigrant students' unique needs and their difficulties of absorption in Israel. Picture of the situation in 2000 illustrated that there were no Ethiopian students who complied with admission prerequisites or learnt in pre-service education pathways at the college. Moreover, no Ethiopian teachers work in any of the schools located around the college in which Ethiopian pupils are learning. The numerical-statistical gap indicated cultural gaps and deprivations which necessitated a change in the situation (Millet & Gilad, 2004).

The programmes was based on learning in a flexible education pathways of two study frameworks: a separate group of Ethiopian immigrants (according to the particularistic approach) and a group integrated with all the other students (according to the pluralistic approach). Furthermore, unique admission prerequisites were defined and an emphasis was put on developing the self-professional image as well as a personal and group tutorials. The programme comprised contents and sources from the Ethiopian immigrants' heritage and these topics were studied in the different courses. The goal was to draw the students nearer to their legacy, reveal new aspects of their life being, form being identified with their heritage and being proud of it, hoping that they will inculcate their heritage to learners in the education system. The process of empowering the students was implemented throughout all the stages of the education period (Achva Academic College, 2013).

Members of the teaching staff involved in the education programme were carefully chosen. They were aware of the multicultural perception in education and of the differentiation between the students learning at the college. The programme lecturers underscored the need to change and adjust the teaching methods to the Ethiopian students. Unique courses and exclusive initiatives such as a trip to Ethiopia at the completion of the studies were added. As part of the multicultural discourse in the entire college, a learning centre - "Heritage of Ethiopian Jewry" – was established. The centre organised workshops, educational activities and focused activities for displaying the community legacy (Millet & Gilad, 2004, 2015).

After ten years of operations, the programme graduates numbered approximately 150 and 65% of them were well integrated into the formal and non-formal education system. About 5% of the graduates continued their studies towards a M.Ed. degree (Achva Academic College, 2013).

3. Methodology

The research objective was to expose the ideal teachers' figure as perceived by Ethiopian students. The research was conducted according to the qualitative-interpretive approach of a case study type. A case study allows thorough examination of occurrences in a small group (Shkedi, 2012). The sample population consisted of 44 students and the research tools included open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The categories were defined on the basis of previous studies which had investigated pedagogical perceptions (ETIC) as well as on the collected data (EMIC) (Sabar Ben-Yehoshua, 1990). The categories were formulated following a concurrence of at least 67% between the researchers. The data were analysed on the following levels: the single questionnaire and interview level and the group level (Shkedi, 2012).

4. Findings

4.1. Who Are the Good Teachers?

The data obtained from the open-ended questionnaire display common assertions for the item **who are the good teachers** according to the students' perception. For example: "Knows the material and demonstrates a humane attitude", "Teaches the material and loves her pupils", "Listens to the pupils' problems and is attentive to them", "Leads the children to attainments", "Inculcates values of Judaism", "Knows to distribute assignments", "The teacher has good relations with the pupils and she pays attention to them", "Is respectful, loving, caring and relates individually to every pupil", "Knows what children need and delivers the material in an appropriate manner".

It seems then that the data illustrate two key perceptions in the context of good teachers. Almost all the students indicated that on the one hand good teachers know the material, are versed in it and teach it properly and on the other they understand the pupils, listen to their problems, involve them in the lessons and treat them like equals. Furthermore, several students referred to teaching strategies such as: "A teacher should identify mistakes and correct them" or "A good teacher teaches with good examples...". Few others emphasised that teachers should inform pupils of the importance of education and schooling. One female-student expressed herself: "I want pupils to succeed, to understand that succeeding in one's studies means a source of livelihood".

4.2. What Is a Good Lesson?

Characteristics	No. of Student
A teacher involving pupils in the lesson	34
Pupils should understand the learnt material	32
The lesson should be interesting	28

Table 1: A good lesson according to the students' perception (N=44)

The table illustrates three main characteristics in the context of a good lesson: pupils are involved, pupils understand the material and the lesson should be interesting. Most of the students (34 out of 44) indicated that a good lesson is a lesson whereby most of the pupils are active and involved. Other students pointed out: "A good lesson is a lesson in which all the pupils take part", or "A good lesson is a lesson in which pupils are involved and answer the teacher's questions". Moreover, according to the students' perception, it is essential that at the end of the lesson they pupils understand what the teacher has taught. For example: "Pupils understand", or "Pupils came out of the lesson feeling good", or "Pupils are satisfied". The students also maintain that in addition to involving the pupils in the course of the lesson and striving to make them comprehend the studied material, the lesson should be interesting. It is noteworthy that no definitions or characteristics of an interesting lesson were found.

4.3. A Teacher Is Like... - The Ideal Teachers' Figure Portrayed through Metaphors

Students No.	Teacher's figure	Characteristics	Teaching characteristics
22	Parents and family members	Caring, concerned, nurture, guard, show the right way and do not deviate to the wrong way, serve as a good example	Teachers who take care of their pupils in an equal way. Teachers who are a role model
10	Occupations (instructor, shepherd, gardener, farmer, tour guide, actor, social worker)	Attentive, leading, caring, understand the needs of others	Teachers who lead, care and understand the needs of their pupils. Teachers who are in touch with their pupils and demonstrate interest in them
8	Flora (flower, tree)	Grow, flourish, are being cultivated, water, fertiliser	Teachers who see to it that their pupils develop and grow, inculcating knowledge in them. Teachers who maintain and safeguard the pupils
4	Fauna (ant, lion, white bear)	Ants – work diligently for their offspring or for a rainy day. Lions – lead, guide, are strong. White bears – sleep well without pressure, are clean, pure, white	Teachers who work diligently in order to deliver knowledge to their pupils. Teachers who are authoritative, leading the pupils and preparing them to function in society. Teachers who educate without pressure and transmit a sense of relaxation and serenity
44			

Table 2: The Ethiopian students' perception of the ideal teachers' figure by means of metaphors

The data indicate that the students have similar perceptions of the teachers' figure. Twenty-one students considered their family members – father, mother or older sibling – as the figure of the ultimate teacher. One of the female-students mentioned: "My parents serve me as a role model for the pupils... they have to study and acquire a profession or a full matriculation certificate...". Another student pointed out: "Just as parents know the needs of their children, so should teachers be aware of their pupils' needs". Ten students perceive their teachers as instructors and social workers, as the ideal figure they should strive to achieve. One student said: "A teacher is like a shepherd who shows the way and does not deviate to improper ways". Eight students view the teachers as a flower or free from the world of flora in the context of pupils' growth and development. Others, however, used metaphors from the world of fauna e.g. ants, lions and white bears for describing their perception of the teachers' figure.

4.4. *I as a Teacher*

Most of the students related to the item how I will conduct myself as a teacher in future by answering from two aspects. One aspect was attitude towards the children and the other was the aspect of teaching. Almost all the students stipulated that as teachers in future they will respect the pupils, understand them, listen to them and care about them. This motive of caring was recurrent in different contexts and was indicated in the different answers to the questionnaire items. From the aspect of content teaching and teaching methods most of the students pointed out that as teachers they would try to teach in an interesting, comprehensible, organised and orderly manner, manifesting sensitivity and love. One female-student expressed herself with the following words: "I will inculcate knowledge, be organised, arrive on time and will not be a boring teacher...". Another female-student who sees the teachers' image similarly to her parents' image indicated that: "I will understand the pupils and relate to them as equals...".

Another aspect which emerged from the findings was the importance of making the lesson interesting to the pupils. The students emphasised that the lesson should be interesting for the pupils, that pupils would feel good and comprehend the learnt material. For example: "... that my pupils understand the message", or "... the pupils should learn out of interest", or "... pupils should be involved in the lesson, ask questions...".

5. Discussion and Summary

Teacher education students perceive teachers' figure by means of the following components: subject-matter knowledge, knowledge of the learners' background, knowledge of the school background and milieu, curricular knowledge, didactic knowledge and self-knowledge (Millet, 1997; Shulman, 1987; Zeichner, 1994). Moreover, in their perception of the teachers' figure, these students highlight personality qualities as compared to cognitive qualities. Students as adult learners join the teacher education programme with beliefs and knowledge about teaching, school and teachers (Kagen, 1992; Thomas & Beauchamp, 2011).

Teacher education is a process of professional socialisation which consists of learning and assimilating norms and values associated with the future world of work. Hence, students undergo a change process of consolidating a personal and professional perception which includes educational positions, beliefs and perceptions which might change upon meeting the teacher education environment. The Ethiopian immigrant students who attend the teacher education programme in the first academic year, perceive the teachers' figure as based on sources of knowledge and beliefs from their studies at school and on the culture in which they grew up. (Gilad & Millet, 2014).

As mentioned above, the students' perception of teachers' figure was explored through metaphors. The students' liken the teachers' perception as a mother or father to that of a shepherd. This finding is in line with the finding of De-Leone (2007): Students' perception of good teaching: observing the rules, obedience and adherence to the curriculum. Good teachers are perceived as teaching what is dictated in interesting ways and comply with the academic approach to teaching conceived by Zeichner (1994).

Other students underscored the issue of a role model, indicating that the parents served as a good example for working with children in class (Thomas & Beauchamp, 2011). The students' perception of teachers as parents matches findings of other studies which view teachers as a bird caring for its chicks, a lifeguard on the beach or a tour guide. All these highlight care and concern as principal components of teachers' role (Zimt, 2001). Giving is a common motive indicated by the students. Apparently all of them grew up in families which nurtured the value of giving as part of the culture of the Ethiopian immigrant community and they saw in front of their eyes their parents as figures who gave and took care of the children and of others. These findings support the study of Ben-Ezer (1992), namely that most of the Ethiopian immigrant students reconstruct parent-child relationships in the family and that the parents serve as a role model in building the personal identity. Moreover, the students reconstruct their being as pupils at school: "Most importantly, pupils should feel that teachers care, that they follow the pupils' progress, consider their difficulties, require that they exert a reasonable effort and believe in their ability to advance" (Ben-Ezer, 1992, p. 171). The majority of the students emphasised that they believed teachers have to deliver the material in a good way and allow pupils to be involved in the lesson. Furthermore, most of them indicated that as future teachers they would try respecting, helping, listening, relating to the differentiation, inculcating knowledge, maintaining order and observing rules and regulations (Golan-Cook, Horowitz & Shfatia, 1987). These researchers argue that Ethiopian pupils deem it important to have teachers who show interest in them, understand their difficulties and demonstrate empathy and patience. Hence, the process of consolidating their perception of teachers' figure and role is affected by their cultural perception and by their interaction with the environment.

Investigation of unique teacher education programmes and exposure of Ethiopian pre-service teachers' perception of the role of teaching will facilitate a better learning of teacher education. Learning from the aspect of building unique programmes which respond to real needs emerging from the field as well as learning from a future aspect, preparing students from different sectors to high multicultural awareness which enables teachers to inculcate values of egalitarianism, justice and democracy. Education for multiculturalism grounded in an intellectual education and moral-valued education will encourage and develop: getting acquainted

with the beliefs of another culture; understanding its collective narrative; acknowledging the legitimacy of the right of others; clarifying critically the other's perception; conducting a constant discourse and demonstrating empathy to the other's learning.

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