

# Selecting Students for a Program for Excellent Student-Teachers in Israel — Another Perspective

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**Abstract** This qualitative case study elicits personal attributes of applicants who wish to enroll in the Program for Excellent Student-Teachers in colleges of education in Israel. As a democracy, which bases its education system on democratic values, Israel considers itself as part of the Western world. A set of qualitative tools and methodology were used to elicit each individual's personal attributes and to determine their strength. Tools that are currently in use, which are based on the existing standardized tools that focus mainly on cognitive competencies, do not supply a sufficiently detailed foundation to differentiate between applicants. When tools are interesting, meaningful, and taken from real life, tacit knowledge is easily revealed. Applicants in this study document their reflection and their academic, vocational, or personal growth as a major part of the raw data for analysis. The study included 68 participants aged 20–25. The model presenting detailed differentiation between individuals is the major theoretical contribution of this study. The practical contribution of this study is the positive impact that these students had on the climate of teaching and learning in the college and the absorption of excellent teachers to enhance the teaching force. These procedures can easily be applied by teacher education faculty members.

**Keywords** Excellent-students, Teaching, Admission-committee, Personal-attributes, Lifelong-learning, Meta-cognition, motivation, Competence

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## 1. Introduction

There is a general consensus that the quality of teachers and teaching are undoubtedly both among the most important factors shaping the learning and growth of students [1]. Moreover, there is general agreement that serious problems exist with the quality of teachers and teaching. Beyond that, there appears to be little consensus and much disagreement over what teacher quality entails, and over who should and should not be allowed to teach [2]. Sociologists of work, organizations, and occupations have traditionally characterized teaching as a relatively complex form of work, characterized by uncertainty, intangibility, and ambiguity, and requiring as high a degree of initiative, judgment, and skill for a high standard of performance as in some of the traditional professions [2]. However, sociologists of work, organizations and occupations have also traditionally characterized teaching as a relatively easy in/easy out occupation, with a relatively low entry bar, and a relatively wide entry gate, especially in comparison to the traditional professions [2]. There are not occupational gatekeepers who have a large say in choosing new members,

so usually those who desire to enter the teaching occupation and have passed the entry bar are free to do so [2]. Ingersoll (2008) points out two main problems, which are relevant also in Israel: a shortage of teachers and underqualified pre-service system:

### 1.1. The Problem of Teacher Shortages

One explanation for the problem of low quality teaching in American schools, according to Zumwalt & Craig (2008), is teacher shortages. The supply of new teachers is insufficient to keep up with the demand. This results in the hiring of underqualified people, ultimately lowering school performance. The prevailing policy response to this problem has been to attempt to increase the number of teachers supplied through a wide range of recruitment initiatives, such as loosening entry requirements, overseas recruitment, and financial incentives. The data raises serious doubts about the success of these kinds of initiatives [3].

In his research, Ingersoll (2008) has shown that the main source of teacher shortage is not driven by student enrollment or teacher retirement increases, but from pre-retirement teacher turnover—too many existing teachers leaving their jobs. The data portrays a "revolving door" occupation in which there are relatively large flows in and out of a significant portion of schools each year. It is also an occupation that loses many of its newly trained members very early in their careers. The data indicates that as many as

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half of those trained to be teachers never enter teaching, and another 40–50 percent of those who do enter leave the teaching occupation either temporarily or permanently in the first five years on the job [2]. Moreover, the data tells us that the overall amount of turnover accounted for by retirement is relatively minor when compared to that resulting from other causes, such as teacher job dissatisfaction and teachers seeking better jobs or other careers. These findings have far-reaching implications for current policies. Recruiting more teachers will not solve the teacher crisis if large numbers of these teachers do not remain in the profession [2].

Why do teachers leave? One reason is low pay and another is unsatisfactory working conditions. These reasons combined underscore the currently low status of teaching in Western society today. Israel views itself as part of the western world as a democracy that bases its education on democratic values. There is evidence that compensation is a factor in non-entry, dissatisfaction, migration, and attrition. The career opportunities competing directly with classroom teaching today have certain advantages. Law offices, architecture firms, and advertising agencies, for example, typically provide more comfortable and attractive work environments than schools and usually offer greater support for their employees' work.

Recruits can expect much higher entry salaries than they would in teaching, and they can anticipate far higher wages over time than the standard salary scale promised by teaching. In addition, the prospect of high income in other lines of work brings a level of status that classroom teaching lacks. Other fields also offer a job candidate the possibility of expanded responsibility and recognition within a relatively short time [4, 5]. According to research in Israel, teacher shortage has been on the increase since 1990 and is now even worse than in other Western countries [6].

### 1.2. The Problem of under Qualified Teachers

Another prominent explanation for low-quality teaching is underqualified teachers. In response to this problem, the higher education committee in the United States raised the cutting off point grade of the ability/achievement exams for the entrance to studying teaching [2]. In Israel, the cutoff point of the Psychometric Test—the standardized test used for university and college entrance—was also raised [6]. Upgrading applicants' achievements certainly may be necessary and helpful. However, this effort alone will not solve the problem of underqualified teachers. The data suggests that if we wish to understand fully and address these problems, we must also examine the character of teaching as an occupation and the quality of the teacher as an educator.

The issue of teacher quality is currently one of the most pressing concerns expressed by policy makers, the media, the public at large, and by educators themselves. Concern has been expressed that teacher applicants from the top quartiles of SAT/ACT scores in the United States are less likely to take teaching jobs since they are more likely to

continue with graduate education or to pursue more attractive career options. Once teaching, those in the top quartile are more likely to leave [3, 5]. However, with the impending retirement of such a large segment of the teaching force, it is not clear if public education can attract and retain a new cohort of teachers sufficiently skilled and committed to meet the growing demands on schools [5]. This raises questions about realistic expectations for the ability profile of teachers. What would an appropriate profile for teaching look like? Should the ability distribution of teachers match the distribution of college graduates going into medicine, law, architecture, social work, journalism, or nursing? The lack of comparable data with other professions limits our ability to interpret appropriate expectations for the ability profile of teachers. We look at background characteristics including demographics, such as gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, age, and other characteristics that have been used as indicators of teacher quality, such as standardized tests. In essence, these background characteristics are what teachers bring to teacher preparation programs [3].

Ingersoll (2008) argued that a primary source of low-quality teaching has been a lack of depth, rigor, and breadth in the pre-service teaching system, which means that we have simply had too few requirements and too low standards [2]. Accordingly, proponents of this view seek to upgrade and expand the education training and certification standards required of new teachers.

Another popular viewpoint considers content or subject knowledge as sufficient to be a qualified secondary school teacher in that subject. Final training in teaching and pedagogy is considered less necessary [2]. The data suggests that if we wish to understand fully and address these problems, we must also examine the character of teaching as an occupation and the quality of the teacher as an educator.

### 1.3. Teacher Quality

Within the educational discourse, a multitude of opinions are voiced regarding how teacher quality should be defined, and these opinions are not only varied but often contradictory. We are immersed in debates regarding what teachers should be able to do, and the qualities they should have [7, 8]. Much of the research on seeking to identify predictors of teacher quality has focused on describing what candidates know or the characteristics and skills they do or need to possess before certification [1].

Recent interest in quality characteristics of teachers has focused on intellectual competence and the most frequently used measures have been academic ability as measured by the SAT or ACT college entry tests, which are called measures of academic ability/achievement [3]. Very similarly, the Psychometric Test used in Israel plays the same role by measuring academic ability. Lately, as part of teacher education reform efforts, our academic council has raised the minimum scores for admission into teacher education programs [6]. Nevertheless, not enough

academically able students are attracted to teaching. Research indicates that the most academically able are less likely to enter teaching and more likely to leave sooner than their peers [3]. Evidence based on teachers' test scores shows that schools experiencing turnover tend to lose their more able rather than their less able teachers [5].

Although the general picture is improved, particularly in regards to the finding that lower ability students exit the teacher pipeline at higher rates at each successive stage, concerns still exist. Whether raising the minimum required academic ability/achievement scores has an impact in terms of student learning is not as definitively clear from research evidence as it might seem from the policy initiatives. It just seems to make sense that a larger number of academically able teachers would be desirable [3]. The perceived intellectual inferiority of teachers and education as a field of study has helped make standardized test scores the most used indicator of quality. Intellectual competence would not be sufficient for quality teaching. Some prospective teachers from the highest quartile decide not to teach after struggling in student teaching with learners for whom school is not as easy as it was for them. Some, encouraged by others because they are "good with kids," find the organizational and intellectual challenges of teaching overwhelming. The reality is that teaching requires a mix of intellectual and personal qualities [3].

Given the complex, interactive, and moral nature of teaching and the rapid changes and diversity in schools and in society, we maintain that the professional preparation of teachers should have, as its basic goal, the development of teachers as persons whose conceptual systems are characterized by the qualities of being adaptable, questioning, critical, inventive, creative, self-renewing and oriented to moral principles [3]. Profiles based on assessment of all these qualities do not exist. Figuring out how to collect valid measures of such data about large numbers of college students would be a major challenge. Given these challenges and the public's less complex vision of teaching, it is likely that quality, as measured by test scores, will continue to dominate research and policy [3]. For understandable reasons, student learning is most frequently limited to the kind of learning that is measured on standardized tests—an important but narrow view of the intended outcomes of public education. What is needed are large longitudinal studies, using quantitative and qualitative methods, which take into consideration multiple variables, such as knowledge, beliefs, and behavior, as well as more robust definitions of student outcomes. The research challenge is substantially beyond anything we have been able to do. We also need to remember that we will never be able to provide definitive criteria for policy makers in relation to recruitment of teachers because teaching is such a complex, value-laden social and political activity [3]. The need to rethink teacher capability is essential because recent data from student academic outcomes informs us that many of the attributes of current teacher capacity are falling terribly short of helping all students learn [9]. We have to be very creative in

recruiting the best people for teaching [5].

#### 1.4. Current Changes that Influenced this Research

Many changes over the last 50 years have influenced the nature and development of education policy, practice, and research in general. Three of these have had a particularly strong impact on teacher education research in general and on this study in particular: shifts in the major research paradigms and methods used to study educational issues; changes in our understandings of teacher learning and teacher development, and changing notions of educational accountability [10].

The first change was in research. Research on teaching began to focus on pedagogy as a social exchange among participants rather than simply the transmission of information from teacher to students. The same general shift was evident in the research on teacher education. Research on teacher education shifted from teacher behavior to teachers' knowledge, learning, thinking, and ideas. Researchers explored how teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and values either changed or not over time. Therefore, exploration of teachers' attributes, such as sociability, empathy, affect and meta-affect competences, was needed [11].

The second change was in teacher learning. Major changes took place in how the educational community came to understand teacher learning, teacher development, and the roles that teachers could and did play in educational reform. New images of professional development were informed by research about how teachers thought about their work, and emphasis shifted from what teachers did to what they knew, their sources of knowledge, and how those sources influenced their work in classrooms. The orientation was more constructivist. Constructivism views learning as an active process in which learners construct new ideas/concepts based upon their current/past knowledge. Like all learners, they brought prior knowledge and experience to all new learning situations, which are social and contextually specific. In addition, it came to be generally understood that teacher learning took place over time rather than at isolated moments in time, and that active learning required opportunities to link previous knowledge with new understandings. Here also, the need to explore attributes, such as curiosity, self-efficacy, and self-regulation becomes important.

The third large development that influenced this research on teacher education was a major change in the way that educators, policy makers, and the public understood educational accountability. The shift in teacher education research and policy from inputs to outcomes and standards was part of a shift in notions of educational accountability writ large [10]. Quality assurance organizations have been developed in Western countries to meet higher standards in higher education since 2003, such as NCATE or BALDRIGE in the US or EFQM in Europe [6]. Debates about what makes a good teacher and what capabilities teachers need to be good teachers have, for decades,

flourished both inside educational institutions and in society at large. As time and context have changed, as events with wide-ranging consequences have occurred, and as developments in science have led to technological advancements, society and government have made demands for standards and accountability that require teachers not only to keep pace with but to lead the change. This has required the definitions of teacher capacity to be altered and amended; teachers' knowledge has had to become deeper and more flexible. The focus has been put on teacher knowledge, skills, and dispositions [11].

Katko (2011) outlined two main perspectives to predict success in teaching: the quantitative model that looks for the teacher academic cognitive function, and the qualitative model that seeks a combination of the teacher cognitive and personal-behavioral function. Since there is not much research on which of the two is better, we have to address both [12]. This trend in Israel has created the need for creative programs, one of which is the special program for excellent applicants who wish to study teaching [13]. The Israeli Ministry of Education's definition views the excellent students as a combination of "gifted" and "talented" students. This includes academic competence, intelligence, creativity, motivation, self-regulation, affective competencies, and social contribution [14]. The aim of the program is to recruit excellent applicants, enhance their excellence and train them to be the best educational leaders who will be able to effect changes. This program is shorter, cheaper, and has more attractive content than the regular programs [13]. Recruiting applicants for the program has become an important goal.

Data that call into question the reliability and predictive validity of standard admission procedures in higher education has increasingly emerged [15]. Assessing teacher applicants' content knowledge and achievement through tests is no guarantee that they will be successful in the teaching profession because a wide range of skills was required. It is easy to see how decisions about fitness and readiness to teach rely on simple formula, such as exam results [16].

While teachers' academic ability/achievement has dominated public discussion and research, other indicators of teachers' background quality characteristics also require attention. The purpose of this study is to elicit other personal traits in addition to the academic ability/achievement-related characteristics and to take them into account during selection of applicants.

The research question was as follows: What are the personal attributes of excellent applicants?

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Participants

The research population consisted of 68 girls aged 20–25, who applied to study teaching at a college of education in the north of Israel up until the end of June. Most of them came from average socioeconomic backgrounds and had average

grades in high school. Fifteen were married. They had applied to study teaching in all the college departments, from kindergarten to high school.

### 2.2. Design

This was a qualitative case study that used qualitative tools and methodology. These methods consisted of systematic yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing data, to construct abstractions. The flexibility and the openness of the qualitative approach enable the revelation of tacit knowledge [17]. For example, interviewers were supposed to write briefly their opinion on the applicant's answers and score the answer on a five point scale. When collecting the data, we asked the interviewers to add as many comments as they could to the structured interviews on papers we gave them. We gained a huge amount of data. Before analyzing, we decided upon a sentence as a unit of analysis, but we got a variety of objects like pictures, cakes, certificates, works of art, gifts, drawings, and other creative items so we decided that any item given to us was a unit of analysis in addition to the sentences. We used criteria-oriented methodology frame for the analysis.

### 2.3. Research Tools

In addition to the existing Psychometric Test and the interview, we constructed a set of five tools:

#### 2.3.1. Portfolio Task

The applicants were asked to prepare a written narrative describing four successful experiences in their lives, including photocopy evidence or documents, and to reflect on what each of those stories discloses about their personalities. The task was performed at home. Following the interview, the applicant then met with the researcher to openly discuss the portfolio, to obtain the applicant's interpretations. The objective of the portfolio task was to tap authentic personal experience and reveal as much tacit knowledge as possible [18]. The participants said, both orally and in writing, that the portfolio task was interesting and enjoyable to perform.

#### 2.3.2. Intuitive Task

Applicants were asked to list intuitively the personal attributes of an excellent teacher on a blank sheet of paper. They were not provided with examples

#### 2.3.3. Cognitive Task

Applicants were asked to rank the attributes they had written, from most to least important, and to add their comments.

#### 2.3.4. Written Open Reflection

Applicants were asked to write about their own teacher attributes and about their perceptions, feelings, and thoughts on entering teacher-program processes.

### 2.3.5. Field Notes

The researcher took field notes on the applicants' behavior and comments, following the time they spent together. Interviewers were encouraged to write as many comments as possible in addition to providing interview scores. The interview was one of the existing structured tool to which we added qualitative comments, those were considered field notes – This shows flexibility.

### 2.4. Procedure and Analysis

The qualitative methodological frame used for analysis was the criteria-oriented methodology, which assumes that open analyses are often influenced by perspectives and views that researchers hold [19, 20]. Charmaz (2006) argued that preconceived theoretical concepts may provide starting points for looking *at* the data, but they do not offer automatic codes *for* analyzing these data [21]. Of all qualitative frames, criteria-oriented methodology is closest to quantitative methodology.

An applicant profile of personal attributes was generated using constant comparative analysis and grounded theory techniques [22, 23]. The unit of analysis was an idea or an object. The units were coded into categories in three phases: initial coding, axial coding, and selective coding [20, 24, 25]. Each unit was compared with other units or with properties of a category. Analyses began during data collection and continued after its conclusion. Recurring themes were examined, gathered under criteria, and the criteria were gathered under categories. Core constructs were formed according to the restrictive qualitative rules of the constant comparison analysis methodology. A core construct is a category, which contains dense descriptions of evidence supporting it. The constant comparison of units was adapted, changed, and redesigned as the study progressed, and resulted in a refined list of categories that were developed into conceptual abstractions called constructs. The concept map was sampled only when repetition of the same constructs was obtained from multiple cases and when new units did not point to any new aspect. At this point, the list of constructs became theoretically saturated [20], (See Table 2).

The researcher remained in the setting for a long period of time, thus enabling interpretation of the meaning that individuals attributed to their lives [26].

This methodology produced a profile of personal attributes for each subject. The profiles were scored on a 5-point scale holistic rubric:

This assessment device consisted of one scale on which each dimension is related to at each point of the scale. It provides an overall description of what is expected at each level [11]. In the light of the literature review and the excellent students' visions and goals, we decided that the profile score of an excellent applicant would be  $\geq 5$  scale points.

**Table 1.** Holistic Rubric for Assessing an Applicant Profile

|  |
|--|
| <b>Dimension:</b> % of evidence in category  |
| <b>Criteria:</b>   |
| A profile containing > 12.5% evidence in any category will have a 1 point in the 5-point scale rubric. |
| If the category is negative it will have a minus 1 point in the 5-point scale rubric.                  |
| <b>Benchmarks:</b> A profile will score <b>1</b> if it contains > 12.5% evidence in any category       |
| A profile will score <b>2</b> if it contains > 12.5% evidence in 2 categories                          |
| A profile will score <b>3</b> if it contains > 12.5% evidence in 3 categories                          |
| A profile will score <b>4</b> if it contains > 12.5% evidence in 4 categories                          |
| A profile will score <b>5</b> if it contains > 12.5% evidence in 5 categories                          |
| A profile will score <b>6</b> if it contains > 12.5% evidence in 6 categories                          |
| A profile will score <b>7</b> if it contains > 12.5% evidence in 7 categories                          |

**Note 1:** The rubric was built according to a theoretical profile containing the 8 positive attributes that were elicited from the data.  $100\% : 8 \text{ (categories)} = 12.5\%$

**Note 2:** The result of the analysis is a list of themes classified in constructs. Then the numbers and the percentages of the themes/criteria on every construct are calculated and demonstrated in a Table. This constitutes an applicant profile.

Trustworthiness was achieved: a) by comparing the profiles elicited from the existing interview against the profiles elicited from all other tools [26], and by comparing two profiles of each of the applicants who handed in two portfolio tasks. (We asked volunteers to do the portfolio task one more time, and five people agreed), and b) by comparing the researcher's results with those of an external rater ( $n = 10$ ) [27]. Member-checking was performed by obtaining the participants' responses to the researcher's interpretations. The profiles were put in coded envelopes on a table. We then held member-checking group sessions. Most of the participants were satisfied with the results; five participants did not like their profile but said that it was accurate; seven participants said that the profiles showed attributes that they could not have seen before; there was one disagreement on my interpretation, and that participant was hurt, and two participants attributed the results to their lack of attention during research procedures.

### 2.5. Ethics

All participants gave written informed consent to participate after being informed about the aims and methods of the study. They volunteered to participate in the hope, as they said, of benefiting future applicants. This was said and written by them. Privacy was protected by using code numbers. Applicants were offered the opportunity to read the manuscript. The evidence they handed in with the portfolio task included very creative and interesting items, such as delicate works of art, drawings, photographs, presents, cakes,

letters, and certificates, all of which were returned to them on completion of the analysis.

### 3. Results

The data contained 9,108 units of evidence. The units

were classified into 45 criteria that were later placed in 16 categories/constructs, which formed the concept map: 14 personality constructs and two position constructs. This paper is concerned only with the personality constructs. Eight constructs of personality were positive and six constructs were negative, as presented in the following table:

**Table 2.** Personal attributes concept map of applicants for teacher education programs (n=68)

Eight positive personality construct attributes:

1. **Cognitive and resource management competencies:** problem solving, formulating questions, searching for relevant information, efficient use of information, conducting observations, investigating, inventing, creating new theses, analyzing data, oral and written expression, time and environment management.
2. **Meta-cognitive competencies:** self-reflection, self-evaluation, self-regulation, transfer, lifelong learning, abstract thinking.
3. **Social competencies:** leading discussions, leading people, persuading, cooperating, working in groups.
4. **Motivation:** curiosity, interest in people and in learning, self-efficacy, responsibility, resilience.
5. **Values:** value orientation, personal maturity, educational positions, personal integrity, moral values, loyalty to the nation, modesty, humility, capability of handling ethical problems.
6. **Affect:** empathy and sensitivity to human needs, volunteering.
7. **Meta-affective competencies:** coping with frustrating and stressful situations.
8. **Motor skills:** drawing, playing music, sports, dancing, skiing, hiking.

Six negative personality construct attributes:

9. **Lack of cognitive and resource management competencies**
10. **Lack of social competencies**
11. **Lack of Motivation**
12. **Lack of values**
13. **Lack of empathy and sensitivity to human needs**
14. **Lack of Meta-affective competencies**

The two position constructs were:

15. **Positions towards the teacher education programs**
16. **Positions towards the tools and procedures used in the Study**

Here are two examples taken from portfolio tasks 7 & 31:

"I couldn't work with her so I left my job." – An item put in the category of "Lack of social competencies".

"I told my husband I know we need money, but teaching you do for your country, so what's more important?!" - An item put in the category of "Values"

### 3.1. Emergent Findings

1. The core constructs containing the densest descriptions of evidence were *Motivation* (21%), *Sociability* (19%), and *Cognition* (16%). The participants invested much effort in collecting evidence showing high motivation to be excellent teachers. They might have believed that, as excellent students, they were expected to demonstrate their motivation, social abilities and cognition.

2. A unique personal attribute profile for each subject emerged showing a divergent pool of personal attribute profiles and fine levels of differentiation between applicants. Two examples are presented below:

**Table 3.** Personal Attribute Profile 21

|                   |
|-------------------|
| Metacognition 20% |
| Values 19%        |
| Sociability 18%   |
| Motivation 15%    |
| Cognition 14%     |
| Affect 10%        |
| Meta-affect 4%    |

Note: The quantity of research criteria in a construct is presented in percentages

This profile scored 5 according to the holistic rubric. Therefore, this applicant was accepted to the program. The following is an example of a research unit put in the construct of "Values:"

"There is no doubt that whoever decides to become a teacher should take on responsibilities. He should know that he can save a human soul but he can also kill it."

(Taken from Portfolio 21)

**Table 4.** Personal Attribute Profile 28

|                 |
|-----------------|
| Affect 33%      |
| Sociability 24% |
| Motivation 22%  |
| Cognition 11%   |
| Meta-affect 6%  |
| Values 4%       |

Note: The quantity of research criteria in a construct is presented in percentages

The second profile scored 3. This is a profile of an applicant who was not accepted to the excellent student program but was accepted to study at the college.

Affective Competencies is the densest construct of Profile 28:

"I volunteered to help the needy at the "Golden Age Home" I gave them my heart." (Taken from Portfolio 28)

3. Five applicants handed in a second portfolio task. The two portfolios from the same participant were compared and emerged as identical. The second portfolios actually had more evidence, yet the percentages of the criteria in the categories of their profiles did not change. (Spearman rank order correlation,  $r = .90$ ).

4. Attitudes to the research were positive and supporting,

as in the following example:

"This process is a wonderful idea that highlights the successes I experienced; it gives me strength and motivates me to act. I enjoyed learning through the narratives and rediscovered myself. I gained new insights." (Taken from a written note, Applicant 56)

5. Five out of 68 applicants were accepted to the excellence program. Three years later, we checked their Mean scores at the college courses (95, 89, 92, 92, 88). After another two years, we checked their function as teachers by conducting short interviews with their principal, inspector, students and parents, and found out that they had accomplished the goals we had set five years previously. They became successful and well-loved teachers.

"Inspector: D. is very good in kindergarten. She is well-loved"

(Taken from field notes)

6. Qualitative validity of data gathering was checked by comparing the profiles elicited from the interview against the profiles elicited from the new tools. The profiles were assessed by a holistic rubric scored on a 5-point scale (Table 1). These scores corresponded with the interview scores,  $r = .711$ ,  $p < .01$  (1-tailed), indicating the extent to which data gathering was a true description of reality. For the qualitative validity of data analysis, 10 cases were randomly chosen for analysis by an external rater. Inter-rater agreement was 85%. Dense descriptions provided for transferability; dependability was enhanced by 68 replications of the analysis, which provided a constant refinement of the category structure [19]. Confirmability was achieved by the researcher's and applicants' agreement on research interpretations of empirical material. Experience showed that our procedure of profiles elicitation was easily taught and applied by faculty members.

## 4. Discussion

The goal of this study was to elicit personal attributes of applicants who applied for the program for excellent students. A detailed personal profile for each applicant was found using the qualitative analysis. The use of the open qualitative tools enabled openness and accuracy. The profiles differentiated between people. We found not only the highest academically competent applicants but also those who had vision, capacity for communication, and for leading and effecting change. Five out of 68 applicants were accepted to the program. This number, as found in research and as expected by the Ministry of Education, matched the annual percentage of excellent students (3%) in the entire student population [13]. The students who were accepted attained high achievements during their studies, and two years after graduation, were found to be very successful teachers. Hence, the following issues will be discussed: the methodology used for selecting applicants, the ideal profile, applicants' attitudes towards the study, the interview as a process of elimination, and the applicant's cognitive and non-cognitive characteristics.

#### **4.1. Selecting Excellent Students through Qualitative Methodology**

This study was a concept analysis report [28] proposed for selecting students for the Excellent Student Program. It analyzed and reconstructed reality as a profile that provided an accurate and authentic description of the applicant. It enabled selection according to predetermined standards of excellence. The use of open tools, the opportunity to reflect and comment whenever one wished to do so during the process, and the use of the portfolio task all enabled a broad view of the applicant's personality across a wide range of contexts. Thus, the model provided a method for comprehensive portrayal of the applicants as future teachers, pointing out their strengths and weaknesses. Hence, portfolios fulfilled the requirements of good assessment, i.e., authenticity, dynamism, multidimensionality, interactivity, and richness of evidence.

Applicants documented their reflections and their academic, vocational, or personal growth as a major part of the raw data for analysis. The different qualitative tools produced a variety of authentic contexts to give applicants a fair chance to present themselves as they saw fit, and as such, that assessment procedure best suited its purposes and therefore shows promise. The applicants appreciated the openness and the authenticity of the tools and the process, which facilitated the revelation of tacit knowledge. Regarding the applicants who were asked to write a second portfolio task, the fact that both profiles of each of them contained the same personal attributes, had the same percentages, and were in fact identical is proof that this analysis provides a valid description of the same person.

#### **4.2. An Ideal Profile of an Excellent Applicant**

The most important finding of this study was a detailed personal profile of attributes, with percentages that reflected each individual's strengths. The college education department possesses a profile pool reflecting 68 different personalities. The profiles show fine differentiations among applicants. The college education admission committee may now find this extremely useful in the decision-making process of selecting the best applicants according to the predetermined standards of excellence. There is great interest in ensuring that those selected are best suited to the program. We considered a profile rating to be excellent if it showed five or more of the eight positive constructs, and hence more than one ideal profile can exist. Kalvir et al. (2009) reviewed results that might show correlation between students' possession of multidimensional competencies and their chance of becoming excellent teachers in the future: the higher their academic level, the higher were their students' achievements, and the more competencies they possessed, the better they communicated with their students and planned their pedagogic work [13]. However, further research in this direction is needed.

#### **4.3. Positive Applicants' Attitudes toward the Study**

The applicants in this study responded positively and were willing to collect and present evidence of their achievements, actions, personalities, and experiences. The applicants' attitudes towards the study were supportive. They expressed their criticism and frustration towards the psychometric tests orally and in writing. We could feel their resistance to the existing selection system that focuses on the Psychometric Test and considers standardized tests as crucial for entering teacher programs. In fact, they were eager to reveal their whole range of competencies, not only the cognitive competency, which they said would not make an excellent teacher. They encouraged us to proceed with investigating the subject and continued to claim that the selection system should be multidimensional.

#### **4.4. Limitations of the Study**

As applicants who registered after the end of June were not included, the number of applicants who participated in the study was small. As the registration period progressed, we continued with this selection process, but this stage was not included in the present study.

#### **4.5. The Pre-existing Interview as a Process of Elimination**

Correlation between the existing interview and the other tools ( $r = .71$ ) shows that the interview successfully identified problem cases, but did not supply a sufficiently detailed database to discriminate between individuals, and thus could not predict future performance. Therefore, although the interviews effectively did what they set out to do, the need for a new set of discriminatory tools was clearly demonstrated in this study.

#### **4.6. Cognitive and Non-cognitive Characteristics for Selecting Applicants**

We used multiple observations across contexts to provide an accurate picture of constructs and their strengths. We developed a valid, cost-effective, and easily applicable admission system model for selecting excellent students to the excellence program. It is acceptable to assess skills, knowledge, and understanding that are imparted in training and that derive from the established knowledge base of education. It is appropriate to examine beliefs that are directly related to the applicant's capacity and motivation to teach. It is reasonable to assess personal characteristics that are essential to the task of teaching [29].

The tools currently in use do not provide a sufficiently detailed database to differentiate between applicants. This new model provides a personal attribute profile for each individual. We believe that our findings show promise for selecting excellent students. We checked the achievements of these five students in the program on completion of three years of study and their function as teachers two years later.



The results were high. Selection that is based on multidimensional criteria raises the hope that teaching will attract excellent candidates who will raise the quality of teaching and effect change in the future. However, further research is needed to establish its predictive validity. These procedures may require longitudinal trials. There is a need to study those who were not accepted to the program but who were accepted into the regular teacher-training programs.

## 5. Conclusions

This research targeted one major area related to readiness for admission to programs for excellent students. The question of who is fit to teach leads us across university sites to examine the role that excellent teachers play as gatekeepers for the teaching profession.

We hope that the preceding discussion will inform ongoing empirical research, analysis, and dissemination of information about how we can establish a comprehensive and critical conception of teacher capacity for teaching diverse learners. This is a great challenge, as millions of schoolchildren depend on educators to help them reach their full potential in every aspect of their development as citizens. This has consequential effects for the very fabric of democracy and the greater global community as well [9].

We must help our candidates develop the capacity for a vision that exhibits humility, courage, tolerance, patience, and the joy of living. These teachers love their job and continue to work in their schools, year after year, because they can see their students as successful adults. As opposed to those who do not persist in the job, are not oriented to moral principles and lack personal qualities and vision, these teachers come back, day after day, in difficult situations, because they believe that they can make a difference in the lives of the children and in society by teaching young people. They understand that realizing their vision is an ongoing process that is created and recreated with students, colleagues, parents, and community. They espouse and enact their vision and that vision sustains them as lifelong educators [30].

If public education is to ensure that all students have able and committed teachers, policymakers must comprehend the enormous challenge of attracting and retaining a new generation of excellent teachers. The model presented as a detailed analysis of personal attributes is the major theoretical contribution of this study. Its practical contribution is the positive impact that these students had on the climate of teaching and learning in the college and the absorption of excellent teachers to enhance the teaching force.

This multidimensional assessment process was applied from our previous study that elicited applicants for medical school [31]. When many case studies show similar results, qualitative generalizability is enhanced [23].

We recommend constructing further studies on different populations and contexts. The long-term predictive power of

these profiles remains a major research challenge. A solid database of non-cognitive attributes opens the door to further research including comparative as well as short- and long-term predictive studies.

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