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## Views and insights of elementary teacher candidates on sound-based sentence method (case of Pamukkale University)

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### Abstract

This study aims to identify and evaluate elementary teacher candidates' views and insights on sound-based sentence method in teaching basal reading and writing, and their competency related to this method. Participants were 3rd and 4th year 197 students studying elementary education at Pamukkale University. An open-ended survey which was developed by the researchers was used to investigate the teacher candidates' views on sound-based sentence method. While developing the survey, the teacher candidates' opinions were taken into account which was followed by expert opinions. The reliability of the survey was calculated by the help of a percentage of agreement formula. For data analysis, open coding method was employed. The qualitative data gathered through the survey were typed and exposed to content analysis. The data were read by the researchers elaborately and the codes were revealed. Related codes were then grouped under certain themes based on which interpretations were made. To support these interpretations, quotations and the characteristics of quoted participants were provided. The results revealed that the teacher candidates reported to have sufficient theoretical knowledge on sound-based sentence system, but also mentioned that they could encounter various problems in implementation. They also argued that these problems could be overcome by the help of practicum and professional experience while they presumed that other problems would also arise in teaching sounds and finding sample vocabulary during basal reading and writing instruction.

**Key Words:** Sound-based sentence method, elementary teacher candidates, teaching basal reading and writing, qualitative research.

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### 1. Introduction

Due to information age, individuals need to have broader background knowledge. Accessing information does not seem to be enough, individuals should also read, understand and internalize the information they read. For participating in the society and personal development while falling in step with the information age, their reading and writing competencies should be high (Ontario, 2003). In modern societies, individuals moving up in their field of interest and taking important positions is only possible by having advanced reading and writing skills because they cannot reach the desired level of knowledge without reading. Similarly, without writing, they cannot share that knowledge (Çelenk, 1999).

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The profile of individuals that the society needs changes in a way to maximize the expectation from the education system. In this decade, an educated person is expected to keep pace with the change, be an entrepreneur, work in collaboration with other effectively, have the skills for developing himself/herself constantly, and know how to learn. From this perspective, “educational systems should extend across the limits of traditional understanding of education and meet the needs of the society with a ‘life long learning’ approach (MEB, 2006a, p. 34). With the changes in modern society, being literate has a greater importance and is also seen as an indicator of contemporary development. As also stated by Çelenk (2005, p. 109), today, being a functional member of the contemporary society, organizing their work and life conditions, being independent and participant, and having a modern world view are only possible by being literate.

Basal reading and writing instruction include all the practices in the process of being literate and reaching a certain level (Yeleğen, 1977). It is not a simple process. Not only because it is complex, but also vitally important that there have been a lot of discussions on the most efficient method to teach basal reading and writing, and the best strategy to apply it (Martin, Lovat, Purnell, 2007, p.4).

In teaching basal reading and writing, the method that would be used is quite important. As for the 2004-2005 academic year, the Ministry of National Education changed the teaching method used in basal reading and writing with the new Turkish teaching curriculum, and preferred sound-based sentence method instead of analysis method. In sound-based sentence method, as can be inferred from the name, the teaching starts with sounds. At first, by constructing students’ preliminary knowledge, teacher makes them feel the sounds. This is followed by combining sounds to form syllables. And then, syllables form words, words form sentences.

There have been various studies addressing the use of sound-based sentence method. Güneş (2005) argued that this method was suitable for the sound structure of Turkish language. Similarly, Turan (2010) reported that elementary teachers found suitable for ‘recognizing letters and sounds’, ‘starting reading and writing earlier’, ‘students learning reading and writing easier’ and ‘enhanced individual learning’.

On the other hand, in their study which was conducted in the province of Giresun, Durukan and Alver (2008) concluded that the in-service training that the teachers take related to sound-based sentence method is not enough. Bilir (2005) also argued that sound-based sentence method slowed up the students’ reading and was not appropriate to their development.

In their study, Tok, Tok and Mazi (2008) stated that this method reduced the time needed to start reading, however, eased down meaningful and speed-reading. Koç (2012) revealed that students having learned reading and writing through sound-based sentence method could not construct meaningful sentences in writing. Similarly, Baydık and Kudret (2012) enhanced the reading fluency, but decreased the reading speed.

The aim of the present study is to identify and evaluate elementary teacher candidates’ views and insights on sound-based sentence method (SBSM) in teaching basal reading and writing, and their competency related to this method. Based on this aim, the study addresses the following questions: (1) What are the views and insights of elementary teacher candidates related to their theoretical knowledge of SBSM? (2) What are the views and insights of elementary teacher candidates related to their practical competency of SBSM? (3) What are the foresights of elementary teacher candidates related to possible problems that they can encounter in the implementation of SBSM?

## 2.Method

This study employed qualitative research. Qualitative research suggests that researchers examine the subject or subjects under consideration in their natural environment and try to interpret the phenomena from the perspective of the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 1988, cited in Ekiz, 2009). Consequently, ‘holistic single case design’ which is useful in identifying whether an accepted case

in a field works was used. Thus, the study focused on elementary teacher candidates' views and insights on whether they have the necessary competencies related to sound-based sentence method.

### 2. 1. Sampling

Convenience sampling was used in this study. Based on this method of sampling, a close and accessible group was selected, which would be practical for the study. For this reason, the results of the study would be valid for his sample. The study was conducted with 3rd and 4th year students studying elementary education at the Education Faculty of Pamukkale University (n:195).

### 2.2. Data Gathering Tool

In order to identify the views of elementary teacher candidates regarding the sound-based sentence method, an open-ended question survey developed by the researchers were used. While building the survey, teacher candidates' opinions were taken into consideration and a literature review was conducted. The questions were discussed with 4 faculty members who were experts in the field and 5 students to ensure content validity. Based on expert opinions, the final version of the survey was completed. The survey included a form of demographic information and five open-ended questions.

### 2.3. Data Analysis

To analyze the data gathered through the survey, open coding method was used. The qualitative data gathered through the survey were typed and exposed to content analysis. The data were read by the researchers elaborately and the codes were revealed. Related codes were then grouped under certain themes based on which interpretations were made. By identifying the reliability coefficients of the codes determined by the two researchers, it was aimed to enhance the reliability of the study. The following formula was used for each question: "Reliability=Agreement/Disagreement + Agreement x 100". After calculating this formula for each question, the percentage values for the first question was 84; for the second question 91; for the third question 86; for the fourth question 91; and for the fifth question 86.

Codes under the themes were interpreted by explaining them in relation to each other and supporting quotations were provided. In the quotations, abbreviations were used for the participants. These abbreviations include gender (F/M), year of study (3/4), students' grade in basal reading and writing (A1,B1,C1...). For example, (26, M, 3, C2) refers to a third year male student whose grade is C2.

## 3. Bulgular

For the first research question of the study, the theme "the elementary teacher candidates' views on their theoretical knowledge of SBSM" was revealed. The codes contributing to this finding are: 1. I think I am theoretically competent in SBSM. 2. I think I am partially theoretically competent in SBSM. 3. I don't think I am theoretically competent in SBSM.

According to the results of the study, the quotations of the theme "the elementary teacher candidates' views on their theoretical knowledge of SBSM" related to the code "Seeing oneself

efficient in SBSM” are as follows. A total of 127 candidate teachers see themselves theoretically efficient in SBSM.

*“I am familiar with the topic, highly confident (15, M, B1).” “For me, even though we have not been brought up with SBSM, at university we had the opportunity to familiarize with this issue and apply it (33, F, 3, A1).” “I think, because of the fact that our exam was open-ended and our teacher gave importance to this issue, I have had enough knowledge (34, F, 3, A1).” “I know how to apply the principles of SBSM. I think I will not have difficulty. (37, F, 3, A1)” “I can fully transfer the necessary knowledge to students step by step (56, F, 3, A2).” “I don’t think we have too much missing theoretical knowledge, as our teacher paid the necessary attention to this issue. (62, F, 3, C1)” “Actually, I learned this technique both theoretically and practically in basal reading and writing course. I believe, I will be successful. (84, F, 4, A1)” “I think I am efficient. As we also attended the practicum, I can see where I am in terms of teaching. (97, F, 4, C1)” “If I were to score myself from 1 to 10, I would give myself a score of 8. (114, M, 3, A2)” “I see myself theoretically efficient. The basal reading and writing course I have taken is sufficient. (120, M, 3, B2)” “I see myself as efficient as a teacher to instruct a student. (141, M, 3, A2)”*

According to the results of the study, the majority of the teacher candidates think that they have the sufficient knowledge of theoretical structure of SBSM. Teacher candidates, even though they were taught reading and writing analysis, expressed that thanks to the education they took in the undergraduate program they learned the theoretical structure of SBSM at a satisfactory level. Teacher candidates mentioned that conferences and seminars are important in learning the theoretical structure of SBSM and in internalizing what is learned also the learners who were weak in theoretical knowledge mentioned that they would make up for this weakness in time.

According to the results of the study, the quotations of the theme “the elementary teacher candidates’ views on their theoretical knowledge of SBSM” related to the code “Seeing oneself partially efficient in SBSM” are as follows. . A total of 50 candidate teachers see themselves theoretically partially efficient in SBSM.

*“I am at a medium level, it could be better. (8, F, 3, C1)” “I have a medium level of knowledge. (17, F, 3, B1)” “I cannot claim that I am fully qualified in terms of theoretical knowledge but I am trying to improve myself. (19, F, 3, A2)” “I don’t see myself quite efficient theoretically. Improvement is needed. (7,F,3, B2)” “according to what I learned in the basal reading and writing course, I believe I am at medium level in terms of theoretical knowledge. (28, F, 3, BA2)” “In terms of theory, I think I am medium or slightly above medium level. (42, B, 3, A1)” “As I see from the period of basal reading and writing, even not quite efficient, I can be accepted as average. (132, M, 3, B1)” “I am as efficient as I practice. I think that I will make up for this in the practicum. (176, F, 3, A2)” “We have not been taught all the letters yet. We know how to teach some letters but not the letters especially the difficult ones in terms of pronunciation. (180, F, 3, A2)”*

The teacher candidates who think that they are partially efficient in the theoretical dimension of SBSM know their weakness and are trying to overcome it. They attribute this weakness to the fact that they did not take enough instruction on SBSM in the undergraduate program. They predict that they will encounter problems especially in linking the sounds. The candidates, who mentioned that they will make up for their deficiencies in terms of theoretical knowledge with the help of practicum courses, expressed that they had not been taught some letters and would have trouble in teaching the letters that are difficult in terms of pronunciation.

According to the results of the study, the quotations of the theme “the elementary teacher candidates’ views on their theoretical knowledge of SBSM” related to the code “Seeing oneself inefficient in SBSM” are as follows. A total of 18 candidate teachers see themselves theoretically inefficient in SBSM.

*“As we had been taught with sentence technique, it will be difficult to learn with SBSM (44, F, 3, A2)”*. *“I don’t think that I am efficient enough to teach a student. I need to read more and think about the issue and work harder. (162, M, 3, A2)”* *“As far as I know from the lessons that I am not efficient as I have not practiced in a school (166, F, 3, A1)”* *“I don’t see myself efficient in SBSM yet. However, I think that I will overcome this when I become a teacher. (173, M, 4, D1)”*

The students who think that they are inefficient the theoretical dimension of SBSM attribute this to the fact that they were taught with the analysis method in order to learn basal reading and writing. However, the candidates mentioned that they will overcome this either with the help of practicum lessons or when they become a teacher.

In order to answer the second research question, the theme “the elementary teacher candidates’ views on their efficiency in applying SBSM” was found out.”

The codes contributing to the arousal of this theme are as follows: 1. feeling incompetent in the implementation of SBSM. 2. feeling competent in the implementation of SBSM. 3. feeling competent depends on various factors

“ The quotations of the theme “the elementary teacher candidates’ views on their efficiency in applying SBSM” related to the code “feeling inefficient and gaining experience in applying SBSM” are as follows. 43 teacher candidates pointed out that they did not feel themselves confident in implementing SBSM, but they will as they gain experience.

*“A little experience would make a difference in my practical knowledge. (12,F,3, A2)”*  
*“We didn’t expose to an adequate practice. We only made observations. (13,F,3, B2)”* *“I think I will be beter as I gain experience. (23,F,3,B)”* *“I feel confident to the extend we covered in our classes. But, practice could be different (27,F,3,A1)”* *“I don’t think I will have a problem with theory. But, I’m not that sure for practice. I think I will learn it after starting to profession. (94,M,4,B2)”*

Teacher candidates argued that they were competent in practice in general, however, practice sessions were necessary as they will gain experience. They perceive SBSM in two aspects one of which they successfully complete during their undergraduate education, but the second, the practical aspect arises when they start the profession.

As for the code “feeling competent in the implementation of SBSM”, 85 teacher candidates perceived themselves as competent:

*“I think I’m competent enough to show the necessary care. (15,M,3,B1)”* *“I feel very confident. (16,F,3,A2)”* *“I’m active in practice and I think I’ll be successful. (19,F,3,A2)”*  
*“I feel competent since we have enough opportunities for practice. (33,F,3,A1)”* *“I think can implement it since these are all included in real life. (35, F, 3,A2)”* *“We have seen these methods thoroughly, so I don’t think I will have a problem with implementation. (39, F, 3, B)”*  
*“I’m quite competent. I was good at in-class practice. I will be better in real class implementation. (45, F, 3, B1)”* *“I don’t have a problem with implementation. I can make the class creative and useful for the students. (56,F,3, A2)”*

As can be inferred from the above quotations, teacher candidates who took courses embedded with SBSM along with practice perceived themselves as competent. However, the students who took these courses without practice reported to have some problems in implementation. Including practice is not obligatory, but up to the instructor at the faculty. In this sense, it can be argued that including practice would be helpful for students’ implementation of SBSM.

As for the previous code, teacher candidates stated that they were competent, but could also face problems depending on some situations. For this reason, another code was revealed named as “perceiving oneself competent depending on some situations”. 67 teacher candidates said that they were competent although they could encounter problems in some situations. Some quotations for this code are as follows:

*“I have adequate knowledge for teaching. However, there would also be some problematic students. I’m not sure how useful it will be for them. (55,F,3,B1)” “I don’t feel confident in practice. The context and the characteristics of the students would also matter. (132, M, 3, B1)” “I know it theoretically. I may have difficulty only in few sounds, which are hard to find in nature (59, F, 3, A2).” “I don’t have practical experience on sound-based sentence method. I only watched the presentations in our class. That’s why I don’t feel confident for some situations. (62, F, 3, C1)” “In terms of practice, I feel myself competent for making students feel the sounds. However, I can’t be sure for further steps. (64, B, 3, B1)” “No problem with practice, but it would be difficult to do every step. (74, F, 4, A1).” “I can’t be sure before I start practicum. (88,M,4,B1)” “I think there aren’t enough example to create texts. (146,F,3,A)” “Teaching letters one by one is easy. However, I can have difficulty in forming syllables and texts just like students would do. (149,F,3,B1)” “I think I will manage it by combining technology and creativity in practice.(151,F,3,A2)” “Since I don’t have a real classroom experience, I cannot say I am competent or not. (168, F, 4,A2)”*

Most of the teacher candidates answered the survey stated that they were sufficient at the practice aspect of SBSM, however; also emphasized that this would depend on various situations. They argued that students’ cognitive characteristics and ages, physical conditions, present equipment and technological devices would affect their practical competencies. Besides, while applying SBSM, they said that they would not have any problems in making students feel the sounds, but in later stages, some problems could arise in teaching more difficult letters.

The quotations related to the code “Feeling competent in applying SBSM” under the theme of “Views and Insights of Elementary Teacher Candidates on their Competencies related to the Implementation of SBSM” are given below. 67 teacher candidates did not perceive themselves as competent in implementing SBSM:

*“I don’t feel competent because we cannot be proficient enough to conduct such lessons with students. (17,B,3,B1)” “Problems might arise based on the level of the class. (41, B,3, B)” “I haven’t conducted any lessons using sound-based sentence method. (63, B, 3, B1)” “I think I’m not competent in terms of practice because we don’t have experience. (125,B,3,B1)”*

The participants argued that the reason that they are not competent is because of the lack of practice during their undergraduate courses.

As for the third research question of the study, the theme “comparing SBSM with other methods” and related to this, the codes “being able to make comparison”, “making partial comparison” and “not being able to make comparison” were revealed.

Within the code “being able to make comparison”, the quotation from the students who was able to compare SBSM with other methods are provided. Some of the quotations from the 72 participants who felt themselves competent in making comparisons between SBSM and other basal reading and writing methods are as follows:

*“Since I was taught with sentence method, I’m able to make a comparison. I know what the differences are. (183, B, 3, A2)” “I know the sound-based sentence method in depth, as well as other methods. So, I can make a comparison. (175, B, 4, A1)” “I have seen various methods in class, made evaluations on them, that’s why I feel competent.” (156, B, 3, A1)” “I feel confident in terms of comparing this method with other methods with their pros and cons. (150, B, 3, A1)” “For me, sound-based sentence method is better*

*than traditional method. Since I know the characteristics of both, I can make a comparison. (147, B, 3, A1)." "I feel myself confident in terms of practical issues, pros, and cons (139, E, 3, A2)" "We are equipped with the necessary information related to each method. So, I wouldn't have a problem in making a comparison in-between. (116, E, 4, B1)" "I can make a detailed discussion and comparison. I have sufficient knowledge. (113, B, 4, B1)"*

Based on these quotations, it can be inferred that the participants, due to the courses they took, were able to make comparisons between basal reading and writing methods. 33 participants were able to do this because they were taught with sentence method. One of the participants stated that she could make a detailed comparison. On the other hand, 5 participants reported that they could identify the pros and cons of different methods.

73 participants said that they could make a partial comparison of basal reading and writing instruction methods. Some of the quotations related to this code are presented below:

*"I'm aware of the obvious differences and what I should or shouldn't do. (151, B, 3, A2)" "I only know pros and cons to the extent that which is better for which age group. (148, B, 3, B1)" "I cannot make a detailed comparison. (126, E, 3, B1)" "I can make a comparison with the time during which I was taught. I don't know much about other methods. (125, B, 3, B1)" "I can barely distinguish pros and cons. (9, B, 3, B)"*

As can be seen, only obvious differences can be compared and teacher candidates have superficial knowledge of these methods to identify their pros and cons. Besides, 7 participants reported that they could only make a comparison between SBSM and sentence method.

Further findings revealed that 17 participants were unable to make a comparison based on their answers. This constituted the code "not being able to make comparison". Some of the quotations related to this code are as follows:

*"I can make a partial comparison with sentence method, but not other methods. (152, B, 3, A2)" "Not adequately. (130, B, 3, A2)" "Since it is not the sound-based sentence method that I was taught with, I cannot make a comparison. (122, B, 3, D)" "Even if I do, I think there will be a lot of mistakes. (162, E, 3, A2)"*

There seems to be different reasons for not being able to make a comparison between SBSM and other methods. Some also mentioned that even if they made a comparison, it would not be a correct one. However, it should be noted that the number of the students for this code is 17.

#### **4. Discussion and Suggestions**

Results of the data gathered from the participants showed that teacher candidates were familiar with the SBSM in theory. Anılan (2013) found that most of the elementary teacher candidates could easily implement SBSM. In another study, Dedeli (2008) reported that fourth year elementary education students were competent in terms of sound-based sentence method. These findings overlap the results of this study. However, according to teacher candidates, their competency in terms of practice was limited. They also argued that they would overcome this by the help of school practicum and after starting the profession. This finding is also supported by Anılan (2011) and Vural (2006). Anılan(2011) argued that although teacher candidates had positive views on sound-based sentence method, they also had some concerns, but were able to implement this method in spite of their lack of experience. Vural (2006) also emphasized the importance of practice in

undergraduate courses as well as practicum and supervision and feedback during practicum. In this sense, school practicum should be extended and reorganized.

Although teacher candidates were taught with sentence method, they were able to adapt to SBSM and compensated their inexperience through conferences and seminars. Teacher candidates reported to have most problems in combining some sound and pronouncing some letters. Besides, some teacher candidates thought that the reason they have difficulty in implementing SBSM was due to their own learning experience with the analysis method. On the other hand, some candidates stated that they were competent in terms of implementation, but classrooms being too crowded and consequently not having enough time for exercises and activities would cause problems in practice. This was also supported by Şahin, İnci, Turan and Apak (2006) which pointed out that classrooms being very crowded limited the opportunities for exercises and activities. Another problem that the teacher candidates presumed was the necessary equipment for sound-based sentence method. In a study with elementary teachers, Karaman (2008) found that “teachers didn’t have any problems in terms of the necessary equipment, and they created most of the tools needed for the method”. The main reason for the differences in the teacher candidates competences of practice seem to be their undergraduate courses. The students who took the basal reading and writing course with embedded practice were more confident, which was also supported by Yıldırım and Demirtaş (2010) in which it was argued that this course should combine theory and practice.

72 participants stated that they could compare SBSM with other teaching basal reading and writing methods while 73 reported that they could do a partial comparison. 17 participants were not able to make a comparison. It can be inferred that teacher candidates are at a moderate or good level in terms of comparing SBSM with other methods.

Based on the findings, the following suggestions were developed: Since the teacher candidates argued that a practical teaching and writing course would be more useful, this course at undergraduate level should be conducted embedding practice.

Basal reading and writing course has 4 credits with 2 hours of theory and 2 hours of practice. School practicum hours should be extended and spread across four years. It was also concluded that in teaching basal reading and writing course, activities and examples for “combining sounds” and “forming syllables and words”.

In materials design classes, teacher candidates should be trained to prepare the necessary tools suitable for SBSM. Universities and academics should organize symposiums, seminars and conferences towards SBSM for teacher candidates. Instructors should not limit themselves to teaching SBSM only. They should also teach other methods used to date and make a comparison in-between.



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