FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS' COMPETENCIES

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1. Introduction

Teachers are unequivocally the most important influencers of society since they shape the lives of children, and thus our future. In addition to this, teacher training is also the most important part of any education system. Teachers should be equipped with the knowledge and skills to embrace new systems and methods according to the changing circumstances and needs of society. In our era, with the advances of technology, everything changes rapidly, and new methods or tools for education are invented. Furthermore, every educational context is unique in its own way, and accordingly, educational contexts need to be analyzed and evaluated in their own dynamics. In this chapter, we dwell on some common issues about teacher competencies in general while trying not to ignore the Turkish language teacher education context in specific.

In the Turkish higher education context, the content and training programs that should be implemented in teacher training institutions are among ongoing discussions. The necessary qualifications were put into a framework called 'General Teacher Competencies' by the Ministry of National Education in 2017. In this framework, for some fields, including English language teaching, field-specific teacher competencies were also specified.

In 2021, the Council of Higher Education, with an aim to partially transfer its authority, decided that faculties training teachers would locally determine their own programs; following this, the discussions on teacher competencies came to the fore again. It seems inevitable for the curriculum developed any year to be criticized in the following years, just as the curricula of the past are criticized today. It is obviously unacceptable for institutions directing education to get into such deadlocks and waste of time. It seems reasonable that instead of a fixed curriculum to be changed again and again in the future, a curriculum that is flexible and adaptable to new situations and based on principles rather than fixed competencies should be designed.

2. Teacher competencies

Giving a comprehensible definition of a good teacher is almost impossible; however, we will try to present it by basing on the relevant literature and discussions.

Globally speaking, we have been experiencing unnecessarily rapid changes in every aspect of our lives. These changes are sometimes implemented instantly and can be observed in the immediate material world; our cell phones, cars, televisions, and houses are updated and change before our eyes. The first industrial revolution was possible because of machines; the second revolution was led by electricity; the third one was digitally oriented because of the widespread use of the Internet; and Industry 4.0, as the name suggests, is a software-driven paradigm (Lasi et al., 2014). However, when it comes to matters that are directly related to individuals and society, it takes a while to realize these changes. Naturally, education, which is one of these topics, cannot be isolated from the changes in the immediate material world.

As Hussin (2018, p. 92) suggests, "The IR 4.0 affects not only the business, governance and the people, it also affects education as well; thus the name Education 4.0 came to existence".

Education 4.0 is obviously an analogy and a response to Industry 4.0, where an alignment between humans and technology is sought to enable new possibilities (Hussin, 2018). As the analogy goes, classrooms full of students with teachers as the authoritative figures can be called the first version of education. In these traditional teacher-centered settings, interactions were generally one-way, and individual existence was somehow ignored. Generations were educated this way, and it was the norm until modern technology showed up. The basic use of technology in educational settings can be regarded as the second version of education. Photocopy machines, televisions, and videotapes can be regarded in this version of education. When the Internet appeared in the 1980s, the world started to become a smaller place with people communicating with each other 24/7. An information-technology-driven approach to education emerged, and all around the world, people found personalized ways to socialize and learn; the educational setting that appeared during this period can be regarded as the third version of education. These days, a newer version, Education 4.0, is a topic of discussion. This version of education is deeply interrelated with artificial intelligence and related technologies, and as Peters (2017) suggests, to adjust to the Industrial Revolution 4.0, education must become an open ecosystem by utilizing new technology.

Although some people naively believe that technology will replace teachers soon, a more realistic vision tells us that teachers who use technology will replace teachers who cannot (Clifford, 1987). At this point, it is quite obvious that the biggest load of Education 4.0 will be on teachers' shoulders. Teachers' roles and their professional identity are very likely to go through deep changes, and teacher education programs must be the first place to start adopting these possible changes. Teacher education programs train teachers based on target teacher competencies, and it would be safe to assume that teacher competencies are an important part of all types of planning and adapting that are related to education. However, as Kress (2000) suggests, "the previous era had required an education for stability, the coming era requires an education for instability" (p. 133).

The term 'teacher competencies' seems to be easy to explain and understand, but actually, it is quite a challenging task to talk about it. First of all, teaching competence and teacher competencies should be regarded as two related but different concepts. Teaching competence can be regarded as the general skill that that one individual possesses, and competencies are sub-skills that one needs to teach effectively. These competencies can be taught, and teacher candidates can be trained to practice them.

Teacher competencies as a term originated from behavioral psychology and started to be regarded as a set of theory-free, practical teaching skills after the late 1960s (Pantić & Wubbels, 2010). From this perspective, teacher trainees were supposed to watch the 'master' teacher and, in time, they would become masters themselves. Of course, this type of teacher training is open to criticism, and its validity to form a basis for higher education curriculum has been debated (Barnett, 1994; Korthagen, 2004). Barnett (1994) suggested that higher education should not be regarded as a matter of developing competencies for a specific occupation, and to him, competencies are predictable behaviors that require predictable

situations. However, teaching in this age cannot be reduced to applying certain teaching techniques in certain situations. Although "there are elements of teacher knowledge that are shared by all teachers or large groups of teachers" (Verloop et al., 2001, p. 441), teaching is highly context-bound, and it requires an understanding of the dynamics of the specific educational context. For quite a long time, a mechanistic view of teaching was the dominant paradigm, and its complexity was ignored (Doyle, 1990; Shulman, 1987). However, after criticisms coming from various circles, including teachers themselves, researchers shifted their attention from observable teacher behaviors to the cognition and beliefs of the teachers (Verloop et al., 2001). On the other hand, it is almost common sense to believe that theoretical principles and teacher expertise should play equally important roles in teacher education (see the first discussions in Shulman, 1987; Stones, 1994).

In discussions about teacher competencies, the distinctions between content and pedagogical content knowledge frequently appear. Content knowledge is basically teachers' knowledge of the subject matter that they are teaching. Obviously, content knowledge plays an important role in effective teaching. For example, a language teacher's content knowledge will help them understand learners' problems about the target language better, and in turn, leading to better decisions about constructing learning activities. Pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), on the other hand, is based on the idea that teaching is much more than just delivering the contents of the subject matter, and learning is much more than just absorbing information coming from the teacher. As Loughran et al. (2012) suggest, "PCK is the knowledge that teachers develop over time, and through experience, about how to teach particular content in particular ways in order to lead to enhanced student understanding" (p. 7). In other words, content knowledge is mostly related to the 'whats' of teaching, and pedagogical knowledge is related to the 'hows' of teaching. However, these two categories are only two of the teacher knowledge, and as the related literature suggests, there are other types of knowledge that teachers are supposed to possess. In his seminal work, Shulman (1987, p. 8) summarized the categories of the knowledge base for teachers as follows:

- Content knowledge
- General pedagogical knowledge, with special reference to those broad principles and strategies of classroom management and organization that appear to transcend subject matter;
- Curriculum knowledge, with particular grasp of the materials and programs that serve as 'tools of the trade' for teachers;
- Pedagogical content knowledge, that special amalgam of content and pedagogy that is uniquely the province of teachers, their own special form of professional understanding;
- Knowledge of learners and their characteristics;
- Knowledge of educational contexts, ranging from the workings of the group or classroom, the governance and financing of school districts, to the character of communities and cultures;
- Knowledge of educational ends, purposes, and values, and their philosophical and historical grounds.

As was mentioned previously, the integration of new technologies into the domain of education affects teachers first and mostly; therefore, gaining new knowledge and skills that are highly related to technology seems to be inevitable for teachers. Mishra and Koehler (2006) stated that "thoughtful pedagogical uses of technology require the development of a complex, situated form of knowledge" (p. 1017) and called this type of knowledge as Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPCK or TPACK).

In the Turkish educational context, professional requirements for teachers are outlined and specified by the Ministry of National Education (MEB). The first project in Turkey to clearly define and officialize teacher competencies was launched by the partnership of MEB, the Council of Higher Education (YÖK), and the World Bank in 1998 (MEB, 2017). The study yielded four types of teacher competencies as (1) content-specific competencies, (2) competencies related to teaching and learning, (3) competencies related to testing and assessment, and (4) complementary professional competencies. It is obvious that MEB has been trying to standardize teacher competencies to be used in determining teacher training policies, in-service training of teachers, assessment of teacher performances, and continuing professional development for teachers (MEB, 2006).

In addition to this, the Turkish Education Association (2009) came up with the following skills and competencies that teachers should have:

- Knowledge of the curriculum and subject area

- Planning and implementation of learning activities

- Testing and assessment

- Managing the teaching process and student behavior

- Adapting teaching according to students' needs

- Using information technologies effectively

- Enabling effective communication in the teaching-learning environment

- Planning and realization of individual and professional development

- Collaboratively work with other teachers, parents, and school staff

- Within the framework of ethics, responsible and critical

It goes without saying that teaching is a profession that needs expertise, and this kind of expertise is only possible through formal training. As the related literature suggests, both theoretical background and master-apprentice relationship are necessary for effective teacher training. Another important point is that every teaching subject has its own characteristics and dynamics; therefore, it makes sense to analyze and discuss teacher training in every subject individually.

3. Distinctive characteristics of Foreign Language Teachers

Studies on language teachers' cognition (e.g., Borg, 1999, 2006b; Borg & Sanchez, 2020; Çimen & Daloğlu, 2019; Oranje & Smith, 2018; Woods, 1996); language teacher identity (Arpacı & Bardakçı, 2016; Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Friesen & Besley, 2013; Tütüniş,

2012); perceptions about good/effective language teachers (Brown, 1978; Chang, 2016; Dinçer et al., 2013; Kılıç, 2020; Mishra & Koehler, 2006; Mohammaditabar et al., 2019; Önal & Alagözlü, 2018; Shulman, 1987; Stones, 1994; Tajeddin & Griffiths, 2020) in different contexts have yielded that teaching a foreign language is different from teaching any other subject in terms of content, methodology, and interaction between students and teachers.

Borg (2006a), referring to the related literature, lists five proposed aspects that distinguish language teachers from the teachers of other subjects as (1) the nature of the subject matter itself, (2) the interaction patterns necessary to provide instruction, (3) the challenge for teachers of increasing their knowledge of the subject, (4) isolation, (5) the need for outside support for learning the subject. However, he claims that there has not been any empirical support for those features. Borg (2006a) carried out a qualitative, in-depth study with language teachers, conference delegates, Hungarian pre-service teachers, Slovene undergraduates in English, and subject specialists such as chemistry, mathematics, science, and history. He purposefully included subject specialists to get different perspectives, and he summarized the distinctive characteristics of language teachers as in the following table:

Table 1: Distinctive Characteristics of Language Teachers (Borg, 2006a, p. 24)

Theme	Distinctiveness
The nature of the subject	Language is more dynamic than other subjects and has more practical relevance to real life. Unique in scope and complexity.
The content of teaching	Teaching a language extends beyond teaching grammar, vocabulary and the four skills and includes a wide range of other issues such as culture, communication skills and learning skills.
Methodology	The methodology of language teaching is more diverse and aimed at creating contexts for communication and maximizing student involvement.
Teacher–learner relationships	In language teaching there is more communication between teacher and learners and more scope for learners to work on themes which are of personal relevance.
Non-native issues	In language teaching, teachers and learners operate through a language other than their mother tongue. Teachers are also compared to native speakers of the language.
Teachers' characteristics	For language teachers, characteristics such as creativity, flexibility and enthusiasm are essential.
Training	A wide diversity of recognized language teaching qualifications exist, some as short as four weeks in duration.
Status	Language and language teachers are often awarded lower status than subjects and teachers of other languages.
Errors	Incorrect output by language learners is more acceptable than in other subjects.
Student Body	Many more adults study languages than other subjects.
Commercialization	Language teaching is driven by commercial forces more than other subjects.

As can be seen from the summary, quite a few aspects, such as the nature, content, methodology interactions, and so forth, have already been mentioned in the related literature.

4. Foreign Language Teachers' Competencies

When it comes to specific competencies that a language teacher should possess, we can say that content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and technological pedagogical knowledge would not be enough. Jack Richards, who is an outstanding figure in the field of foreign language teaching, published an article titled 'Competence and Performance in Language Teaching' in 2010. In this article, he first examines foreign language teacher competencies under ten main categories and then analyzes them one by one. Richards (2010), considering the relevant studies, specifies main foreign language teachers' competencies as:

1) The language proficiency factor
2) The role of content knowledge
3) Teaching skills
4) Contextual knowledge
5) The language teacher's identity
6) Learner-focused teaching
7) Pedagogical reasoning skills
8) Theorizing from practice
9) Membership of a community of practice
10) Professionalism

The language proficiency factor: Quoting Canagarajah (1999), Richards (2010) states that most of the language teachers all around the world, especially teachers of English, are not native speakers. Talking about his own observations, he mentions that he has seen non-native teachers doing wonders in the classroom and native speakers sometimes causing disasters in their language classrooms. According to him, this means that in order to teach English well, teachers do not need to have a native-like command of English. Richards (2010, p. 103) lists the language-specific competencies that a teacher should have as follows:

a) To understand the texts written in the target language.
b) To be a good model.
c) To be able to use the target language throughout the lesson.
d) To be able to use the target language fluently.
e) To be able to give instructions and explanations in the target language.
f) To be able to exemplify new vocabulary and grammar points and provide accurate explanations.
g) To be able to use appropriate classroom language.
h) To be able to select appropriate resources and materials for language classrooms (for instance, newspapers, magazines, websites).
i) To be able to monitor their accurate use of language.
j) To be able to give feedback at the right time according to the activity at hand.
k) To be able to provide input at students' level.
l) To be able to give students opportunities to experience and enrich their language.

The role of content knowledge: This aspect includes discussions about what and how much language teachers should know about the target language. Pedagogical content knowledge emerges from the study of language teaching and learning, and it includes teaching language

skills, planning, evaluation, material design, teaching different groups (children, teenagers, or adults), and classroom management. This knowledge also includes language learning theories, language analyses, and language teaching methodologies. Richards (2010, pp. 105-106) points out that pedagogical content knowledge should prepare teachers to be able to:

a) Understand the need of students.
b) Detect students' problems in learning.
c) Plan appropriate goals and objectives for language lessons.
d) Select and design appropriate learning activities/tasks.
e) Evaluate learning process.
f) Design and adapt tests.
g) Evaluate and select materials.
h) Adapt already published materials.
i) Use authentic materials.
j) Use technology to improve learning.
k) Evaluate and reflect on their own practices.

Teaching skills: This dimension of teacher competencies is generally related to teaching competencies and performance. It includes general teaching techniques and routines. Foreign language teacher training involves uncovering a collection of teaching skills acquired through practical teaching in a controlled environment and often using activities such as microteaching or peer teaching or by observing experienced teachers' practices. In this dimension of foreign language teacher training, the following skills should be considered:

a) Opening the lesson.
b) Introducing and explaining the tasks and activities.
c) Organizing learning.
d) Comprehension check.
e) Guiding students.
f) Checking students' language.
g) Transition between tasks.
h) Ending the lesson.

A foreign language teacher acquires a repertoire of basic teaching skills by experiencing different types of learners in different situations and by teaching different content. It could be argued that over time, experience leads to the development of routines that enable such skills to be performed fluently, automatically, and with less conscious thought and attention, and to focus the teacher's attention on other aspects of the lesson (Borg, 2006b; Tsui, 2009). Thus, learning to teach can be thought of as mastering certain teaching competencies; they also reflect complex levels of thinking and decision making, and these are cognitive processes that should be the focus of teacher education.

When considered as a cognitive process of a teacher, teaching is not just the application of knowledge and learned skills. The cognitive process of a teacher is a much more complex process that is influenced by classroom context, teacher's general and specific teaching goals, teacher's beliefs and values, students' motivations and reactions to the lesson, and teacher's management of critical situations during the lesson (Richards, 2010).

Contextual knowledge: This dimension is related to the cultural awareness of both the target language and the local context since foreign language teachers might teach in various contexts such as teaching in a different country, teaching at public or private school, and so on. All these contexts have their own cultures. This aspect of teaching is directly linked to the view that sees the language as a social device, which is the sociocultural perspective. Therefore, foreign language teachers, according to their teaching context, should consider the age, socioeconomic status, cultural aspects, and beliefs of students.

The language teacher's identity: Another important competency that a foreign language teacher needs to acquire is language teacher identity, and this includes the roles that the teacher plays during language teaching-learning processes. These roles are not static but dynamic ones that shape teacher's identity during the process. In a foreign language teacher education program, teacher-learner identity is reshaped by having teacher candidates acquire new discourse styles and roles. For this reason, a foreign language teacher education program should not only include language teaching skills and knowledge about teaching but also what it means to be a foreign language teacher.

Learner-focused teaching: Teaching can be seen as a kind of teacher performance only; however, the real objective and duty of a teacher is not to teach or spoon-feed the learner but to make learning easier. Richards (2010) claims that by observing the following parts of a lesson, we can understand whether that lesson is teacher-focused or learner-focused:

- Teacher talking time.
- How much the learners' inputs affect and direct the lesson.
- Whether the teacher is dealing primarily with classroom management, control or order.
- Whether the teacher can apply the lesson plan well.

Pedagogical reasoning skills: For the last decades, studies on teacher education focus on teacher cognition because teachers need to make decisions during the lesson. Thus, Peterson and Treagust (1995) claim that in teacher education programs, pre-service teachers should be given opportunities to develop their pedagogical reasoning skills in order to teach in schools with sound reasoning. These pedagogical reasoning skills include teachers' minds, how they are formed, what they are consisted of, teachers' beliefs, thoughts, and thinking processes, and how all these affect their classroom practices (Richards, 2010). Wilson et al. (1987, as cited in Peterson & Treagust, 1995, p. 292) proposed a six-stage model of pedagogical reasoning:

1. *Comprehension:* Teacher understanding of the ideas to be taught and the educational purposes of the topic/subject.
2. *Transformation:* Comprehended ideas are transformed by the teacher for use in a particular classroom setting. This includes critical interpretation of text materials, identifying ways of representing ideas, selecting appropriate teaching methods, adapting and tailoring ideas to the particular class group.
3. *Instruction:* The act of teaching. This includes organising and managing the class and students, presenting clear explanations, interacting with students, questioning and evaluating.

4. *Evaluation:* This includes both the evaluation of student learning and the teacher's own teaching performance, materials employed, etc.
5. *Reflection:* The review of the events and accomplishments that occurred during the lesson.
6. *New Comprehension:* New understanding of subjects, learners, purposes and pedagogy through the process of teaching.

According to Borg (2006b), the main factor that increases the research on teacher cognition is that teachers play a crucial role in shaping classroom activities by being active decision-makers. When combined with the thoughts in the field of psychology, which have shown that knowledge and beliefs have a strong effect on teachers' practices, we can conclude that understanding teachers' cognition is at the center of understanding teaching processes.

Theorizing from practice: Richards (2010, p. 115) defines theorizing from practice as "the development of a personal system of knowledge, beliefs, and understandings drawn from our practical experience of teaching". To better understand the concept, he makes a distinction between two types of thinking: *application of theory* and *theorizing of practice.* The first one is directly putting the theory into practice after studying any specific method or technique, such as task-based learning, cooperative learning, and communicative teaching, and so on. The latter one is related to our own practices in our context and thinking and reflecting on them to develop hypotheses and explanations. Thus, language teacher training programs should consider this dimension to train teacher candidates about the procedures of theorizing from practice, such as keeping teaching journals and discussions, etc., which are aspects of reflective practice.

Membership of a community of practice: Communities of practice is relatively a new concept although it is an old phenomenon itself and it has recently become popular in many fields, from education to marketing, to improve the performance of the members of a group (Wenger et al., 2002). Wenger et al. (2002) define communities of practice as "groups of people who share a concern, a set of problem, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis".

According to Richards (2010), language teaching is thought to be a private activity that teachers close the doors of their classrooms and do within the limits of classrooms. Nevertheless, by accentuating the importance of community of practice, he claims that this constricted view misses one important point that learning and improvement could be better achieved within groups of teachers having the same or at least similar values, beliefs, goals, and interests. A community of practice has two features:

1. It involves a group of people who have common interests and who relate and interact to achieve shared goals.
2. It focuses on exploring and resolving issues related to the workplace practices that members of the community take part in (Richards, 2010, p. 117).

This community of practice, among foreign language teachers, generally can be seen as collaboration to share what is going on in other classes, to better understand the knowledge and skills, and to make changes when necessary. Besides, teachers benefit from the potentials

that this collaboration might bring. Therefore, teacher education programs should provide theoretical knowledge about how to improve collaboration among language teachers in the field.

Professionalism: Foreign language teaching is not something that anyone who knows the target language can do; it is a profession. This profession requires particular knowledge gained through both academic study and classroom experiences (Richards, 2010). Although there has not been a consensus on the definition of professionalism, researchers point out some common aspects of professionals and professionalism. Pratte and Rury (1991, as cited in Yoğun, 2020), for example, define a professional as a person who shows ideal behaviors, the skills that make them different from others; this could be showing and applying different pedagogical content knowledge in teaching. Furthermore, professionals play active roles in their field, and they seek opportunities to develop themselves.

Leung mentions two dimensions of professionalism (2009, as cited in Richards, 2010). The first can be named as institutional professionalism, which includes the views of the administrative body of the specific context; thus, it can change from country to country. The second dimension is independent professionalism that is directly linked to an individual's beliefs, values, and practices which shape the teaching process through reflection. Reflection is observing and evaluating one's own teaching and planning future practices, and it includes asking questions as:

1. What was the problem or development, exactly?
2. How did you handle it?
3. Why did you handle it the way you did?
4. Would you handle it in the same way again? If not, why
5. Has the incident changed your general view of how to go about the practice of teaching? (e. g. you may have decided in general to be more strict, to use group work less, to ask more questions, etc.) (Wallace, 1991, p.14)

Richards (2010, pp. 119-120) expands these questions as in the following:

1. What kind of teacher am I?
2. What am I trying to achieve for myself and for my learners?
3. What are my strengths and limitations as a language teacher?
4. How do my students and colleagues view me?
5. How and why do I teach the way I do?
6. How have I developed as a teacher since I started teaching?
7. What are the gaps in my knowledge?
8. What role do I play in my school and is my role fulfilling?
9. What is my philosophy of teaching and how does it influence my teaching?
10. What is my relationship with my colleagues and how productive is it?
11. How can I mentor less experienced teachers?

The above questions can be multiplied or even revised according to the teaching context. Moreover, the competencies mentioned by Richards (2010) are not the only ones; as

mentioned before, the changes in any field are so rapid due to advancements in technology and globalization that teacher competencies should be revised regularly, even each year.

5. Conclusion

Any teacher preparation program should take many aspects of teaching and learning process into consideration such as teachers' knowledge, skills, cognition, beliefs and educational, social, cultural factors and even ideological movements (Kumaravadivelu, 2012). Kumaravadivelu (2012) claims that these factors are not enough in our era; we need to add global economic trends and global cultural flows as well, and he proposes a modular model that tries to answer some questions for teachers to understand

a) how to build a viable professional, personal, and procedural knowledge base;
b) how to explore learners' needs, motivation, and autonomy;
c) how to recognize their own identities, beliefs and values;
d) how to do the right kind of teaching, theorizing, and dialogizing;
e) how to see their own teaching acts by taking into account learner, teacher, and observer perspectives on classroom events and activities.
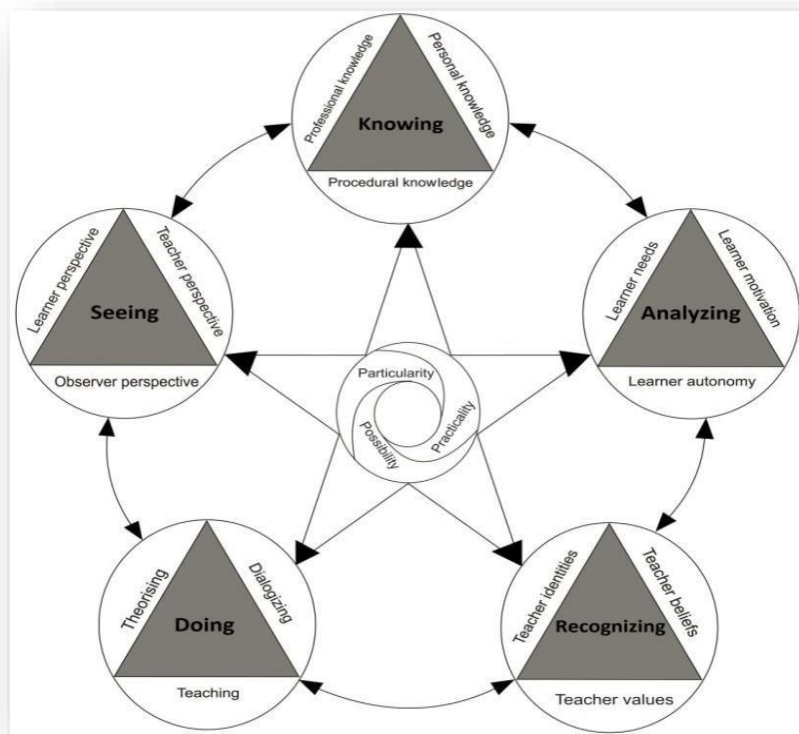
(Kumaravadivelu, 2012, p. 122)

Figure 1: Kumaravadivelu's Proposed Modular Model (2012)

As seen in the Figure 1, the model has five modules: *knowing, analyzing, recognizing, doing* and *seeing* (KARDS) and it is a dynamic model and the modules interact with each other. By applying these five modules teachers, teacher educators or curriculum designers might prepare a flexible curriculum and can make necessary changes according to the needs of learners and the requirements of the century.

At this point, it is necessary to remember that teaching as a profession cannot and should not be reduced to crude models. As the related discussions suggest, teaching is a profession with many dimensions. Nevertheless, these models, along with many others, are supposed to help us understand the complex nature of teaching.

The fact that, in terms of language teaching and learning, we can mostly talk about language learning theories but not language teaching theories makes the language teaching profession even more complex. As every teaching context is unique, so is every teacher; and accordingly, reponses to theoretical issues will also change from teacher to teacher.

All in all, second language teacher education programs should be revised with an 'instability rather than stability' paradigm by taking into account the complexity of the teaching profession without ignoring the practical, compentency-related dimensions of teaching, and it looks like the related literature lacks discussions focusing on the intersection of these issues.

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