

Title:

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To cite this article:

Serim, M. & Güzel Yüce, S. (2024). Role modeling in primary school from teachers' perspective: The key to affective learning. *Educational Research & Implementation*, 1(2), 115-138. <https://doi.org/10.14527/edure.2024.09>

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Role modeling in primary school from teachers' perspective: The key to affective learning

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Article Information	Abstract
<p>DOI: 10.14527/edure.2024.09</p> <p>Article History: Received 01 July 2024 Revised 29 July 2024 Accepted 27 August 2024 Online 10 September 2024</p> <p>Keywords: Teacher identity, Teacher motivation, Role model.</p> <p>Article Type: Research paper</p>	<p>This research was conducted to examine the perceptions and experiences of primary school teachers regarding the phenomenon of being a role model. In this context, the research was conducted using the phenomenological design, one of the qualitative research designs. The research data were obtained from in-depth semi-structured interviews with 10 primary school teachers. The findings obtained from the definitions show that the majority of teachers associate being a role model with being a behavioral model. But the participants aren't aware of the motivation and setting new goals in being a role model. When their experiences were analysed primary school teachers associate being a role model with affective characteristics. However, it is thought that they make this association informally rather than based on formal education. It is necessary to revise both the primary school curriculum and pre-service and in-service teacher training programs in order to increase this awareness.</p>



Introduction

The question "Who is an effective teacher?" is one of the fundamental questions frequently researched and sought after in educational sciences. Teacher effectiveness stands out as a critical factor influencing the differences in student success, surpassing many other components (Seidel & Shavelson, 2007; Rockoff et al., 2011; Klassen & Tze, 2014; Darling-Hammond, Hyler & Gardner, 2017). However, recent studies have made the characteristics of effective teachers more complex rather than clarifying them, leading to the emergence of new research topics in teacher education programs (e.g., variables such as teacher identity, teacher charisma, teacher motivation, teacher responsibility, teacher closeness, and teacher emotions) (Basalama & Machmud, 2018; Han & Yin, 2016; Huang & Lin, 2014; Turhan & Kirkgöz, 2023). These emerging variables primarily highlight the motivational, emotional, and social characteristics of teachers (Butler, 2012; Seidel & Shavelson, 2007). More specifically, they lead to the depiction of teaching as an interpersonal endeavor that includes relational goals (Butler, 2012).

Among the motivational, emotional, and social characteristics of teachers, one of the most frequently referenced features is the development of professional identity. Identity development involves the formation and restructuring of relations within and among role identities through intra- and inter-personal processes, which are mediated by sociocognitive and cultural means and framed by the context as well as by individual dispositions (Kaplan & Garner, 2017, p. 2036). Identity formation emphasizes the importance of developing values, emotions, goals, social roles, and worldviews in teacher learning (Kaplan & Flum, 2012). Kaplan and Flum (2012) argue that identity formation should be the focus of education in the 21st century. In recent years, the dynamic systems model of teacher identity formation has gained prominence, highlighting teacher motivation as a key variable in this model (Kaplan, 2014; Kaplan & Flum, 2012; Kaplan & Garner, 2017).

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Teacher motivation has emerged through the reconceptualization of motivational theories in educational settings (e.g., expectancy-value theory, social cognitive theory, self-determination theory, interest theory, achievement goal theory, and attribution theory) with the aim of motivating teachers and raising their performance standards (Lazarides & Schiefele, 2021; Urhahne & Wijnia, 2023). Teacher motivation is well known to be crucial for teaching quality, teacher well-being, and student motivation and success (Hoy et al., 2009; Watt & Richardson, 2015). However, much less is known about the underlying mechanisms of such relationships and the potential variables that facilitate or constrain the relationship between teacher motivation and its potential outcomes. In this context, one of the variables that may influence (and perhaps embody) teacher identity and motivation is the concept of teachers as role models. Therefore, it can be considered that teachers being role models and their own role models could be utilized as variables in understanding and explaining teacher identity and motivation.

In the literature, the concept of being a role model is acknowledged as an ambiguous and unclear term (Morgenroth et al., 2015). Morgenroth and colleagues (2015) mentioned the lack of an integrated theoretical framework related to role models in their work, emphasizing the need to draw on the motivation literature. By utilizing expectancy-value theory, they developed a new conceptual framework for understanding role models. According to this, role models serve three different functions: behavior models (showing how a skill is performed and how a goal is achieved), representations of what is possible (demonstrating that a goal is attainable), and sources of inspiration (showing that a goal is desirable) (Morgenroth et al., 2015; De Gioannis et al., 2023; Diepolder et al., 2024). The first function of a role model, as a behavior model, is learned through observation and imitation via vicarious learning, based on the concept of self-efficacy (belief in one's ability to succeed) defined by Bandura (1997) (Morgenroth et al., 2015). As Morgenroth and colleagues noted, this aspect of role modeling provides candidates with a concrete example of the steps or behaviors necessary for success, showing them how to reach a goal. The second function of role models, representing what is possible, relates to demonstrating that a specific goal is achievable, especially in contexts where success seems difficult or unattainable, such as for members of underrepresented groups (Morgenroth et al., 2015). In this function, seeing someone with a similar background succeed can reduce perceived barriers and lead candidates to believe that their goals are realistic and attainable. The final function, as a source of inspiration, shows that role models inspire candidates by making certain goals more desirable. This function influences the candidate's values and aspirations, creating a sense of motivation to pursue new or more ambitious goals. Role models can shape what candidates find meaningful and worth striving for, often reshaping their priorities.

The motivational role model theory posits that candidates actively select role models based on perceived similarity, desirability, or attainability, thus shaping their expectations of success (expectancy) and their evaluations of goals (value), strengthening their motivation and overcoming motivational barriers (De Gioannis et al., 2023). In summary, the framework proposed by Morgenroth, Ryan, and Peters (2015) offers a comprehensive model for understanding the multifaceted impact of role models, emphasizing that role models shape not only behaviors but also perceptions of what is possible and desirable. Based on this information, this study aims to explore primary school teachers' concepts of role models, their role models, and their experiences of being role models in their professional lives within the context of this theory, which could lead to motivational and emotional insights.

The importance of being perceived as a role model by primary school teachers in the educational process is emphasized (Demir & Köse, 2016). After their families, children generally make their first contact with the outside world through primary school, and teachers thus play a crucial role in the social development of children. Teachers influence students' interactions with their peers, fostering positive behaviors. These traits are passed from one person to another, contributing to behavioral changes (Basalama & Machmud, 2018; Flores-Delgado, Olave-Moreno, & Villarreal-Ballesteros, 2020). While there are studies in the literature on teachers being role models, there is limited data on individuals who serve as role models for primary school teachers (Birhan et al., 2021). The impact of these role models plays a critical role in the formation of a teacher's professional identity, influencing both their motivation and their capacity to effectively guide students (Bashir, Bajwa, & Rana, 2014; Birhan et al., 2021). This study aims to contribute to the literature on role modeling in education. In this context, the following questions are addressed:

1. How do primary school teachers define the concept of a role model?
2. What are the views of primary school teachers on the importance of being a role model in primary education?
3. What are the experiences of primary school teachers in being role models?
4. Whose behaviors and qualities do primary school teachers see as role models?
5. What are the teaching approaches of primary school teachers regarding being role models?

6. How effective is the primary school curriculum in guiding teachers to be role models for their students?
7. What are the recommendations of primary school teachers regarding being role models?

Method

Research model

This study was conducted using a phenomenological design. It is a qualitative design which provides deeply understanding of the phenomena through the experiences (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021). While collecting data, any definitions related to role model weren't given to the participants. The definition of role modeling was based on the study conducted by Morgenroth, Ryan, and Peters (2015).

Participants

The participants of the study are consisted of primary school teachers working in two different schools located in Defne district of Hatay province. School A is consisted of 241 students and 8 teachers. And School B is consisted of 221 students and 9 teachers. Both schools have similar physical conditions, environmental factors, sources of school, the importance of education and family patterns. Both schools are close to the centre of the city. Volunteerism, accessibility and applicability has been taken into consideration in the selection of participants. As presented in Table 1, eight participants have 20 years of experience or more except two participants.

Table 1.

Personal characteristics of primary school teachers participating in the study.

Participants	School	Gender	Age	Educational Status	Professional Experience	Receiving Seminar on Role Models
Teacher 1	A	Male	55	Bachelor's degree	28	No
Teacher 2	A	Famale	50	Bachelor's degree	23	No
Teacher 3	A	Male	50	Bachelor's degree	27	Yes
Teacher 4	A	Male	42	Bachelor's degree	20	No
Teacher 5	B	Male	48	Bachelor's degree	25	No
Teacher 6	B	Famale	47	Bachelor's degree	25	No
Teacher 7	B	Famale	53	Bachelor's degree	27	No
Teacher 8	B	Famale	37	Bachelor's degree	15	No
Teacher 9	B	Male	27	Bachelor's degree	5	Yes
Teacher 10	B	Famale	37	Bachelor's degree	16	No

Data Collection Process

In the study, a semi-structured interview form consisting of open-ended questions was used. The form was developed by the researchers and comprised personal information as well as open-ended questions designed to address the research questions. For example, the question "What do you think it means to be a role model?" was asked in relation to the first research question. To address the third research question, the question "Do you think you are a role model for your students?" was followed by probing questions such as, "If yes, how did you observe this? In what ways do you think they consider you as a role model? In what aspects do you see yourself as a role model? If no, why not?" After the interview form was prepared, it was reviewed by three academicians in the field of educational sciences, along with the research problem and sub-questions. The review determined that the interview form was capable of answering the research questions. A pilot study was conducted with three primary school teachers to assess whether the interview questions were comprehensible to the participants. The pilot study revealed that the questions were answered fluently and were well-understood. The interviews with the teachers were conducted face-to-face at the school where the primary school teachers worked, at a predetermined day and time. Audio recordings were made with the participants' consent, and each interview lasted an average of 30 minutes.

Data Analysis

In the initial stage of data analysis, the recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim into a Word document. The collected data were analyzed inductively by reading through each interview question line by line, guided by the research questions (Kyngäs, 2020). The research questions were treated as categories/themes, and teachers'

responses were coded accordingly. A code representing words and phrases with the same meaning was used to refine the data. To ensure coding consistency, two researchers independently coded the first three interviews and developed a coding scheme. This coding scheme was based on a phenomenological approach (Åkerlind, 2005). The researchers encountered disagreements regarding whether certain words and phrases conveyed the same meaning during the development of the coding scheme. This disagreement was resolved through an etymological analysis of the terms. To represent the coding process, participants' statements were directly quoted and included in the research report.

Validity, Reliability, and Ethics

In order to ensure validity and reliability in the research, there are precautions taken during the data collection process, data analysis and reporting of the research. To minimize social desirability bias during data collection, priority was given to creating a comfortable interview environment, and participants were thoroughly briefed on the purpose and scope of the research (Bergen & Labonte, 2020). During the data collection phase, both verbal and written consent were obtained from participants, confirming their voluntary participation in the study. Furthermore, participants were assured that their contributions would not be used in any context outside the research. The researcher made efforts to avoid reflecting their own educational philosophy while asking questions. Probing questions were employed to further elaborate on participants' responses. During the analysis stage, a coding key was developed to ensure consistency between the two researchers. Prior to the commencement of the study, ethical approval was obtained from the Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Social and Human Sciences at the second author's university [Meeting held on September 5, 2022, Decision No: 8].

Results

Teachers' Definition of Role Model

Teachers were asked to provide a definition of what it means to be a role model. Teachers' definitions were evaluated according to role model definitions provided by Morgenroth, Ryan, and Peters (2015) in terms of function, behavioral model, representing what is possible, and being a source of inspiration. When the definitions made by primary school teachers were examined in this context, it was determined that nine teachers defined the role model in accordance with the behavior model function. Behavioral models were defined as people who are successful in a profession and are imitated by role candidates. It is a definition category in which imitation and indirect learning is at the forefront. This category refers to social learning theory. More precisely, there are motivational outcomes resulting from skill acquisition and observation of another individual.

When a person sees the people around him/her as an idol, who can be the people around him/her? For example, for a child it can be a teacher, a parent or an elder. By imitating them, people adopt their good qualities and try to apply them in their own lives. (Teacher 1)

Being a role model includes all kinds of behaviors that show the way, direction and what should be, activates the potential that exists in oneself, and in my opinion, it includes all kinds of behaviors that are done to reach the best one can be. (Teacher 3)

Being a role model for students, imitating a favorite teacher (Teacher 10)

When the definitions made by the teachers were analyzed, it was determined that only Teacher 4' definitions included statements about the function of representing the possible. The role models as representations of the possible shows that a potential goal is achievable. So it can be referred to goal embodiment and attainability. According to this function, the individuals believe that the goal can be achieved, reinforce the goal and adopt the goal. As can be seen in the statements below, both definitions include statements about both the behavioral model and the representation of individuals who can be taken as examples. However, the statements towards the behavioral model are more weighted.

It is to be taken as an example. So a role model is this: It can be a certain person who is a public figure, an artist, a musician or a football player. We can interpret it as influencing a certain group of people with their lifestyles and behaviors and setting an example for them. (Teacher 4)

In three definitions made by the teachers, it was determined that they used an expression towards the role model in accordance with the function of inspiration. The role model as a source of inspiration is about striving to achieve a new or different situation from the previous one in the context of admirable characteristics. In this category, it is not only the influence of the role model on the goals, but also a deeper motivation towards the values, desires and even identities of the role candidate. Although the definitions of the teachers did not include expressions that fully indicate this situation, it was determined that they only used the expression "being a source of inspiration" in their definitions.

"For me, being an example and being a source of inspiration for others" (Teacher 2)

It is a role model for a student to see himself as the person they want to be in the future. (Teacher 5)

"Being a role model actually means that we are role models for children with our every behavior all day long. Even when we enter a classroom, from the way we dress, the way we think, the way we act, all of it is for children. I see role modeling as a bit of inspiration." (Teacher 6)

The Importance of Role Modeling in Primary School

In the interview with primary school teachers, their views on the importance of being a role model in primary school were asked. In this context, when examining the teachers' views, the following points were highlighted: the teacher's effectiveness (f:8), the teacher being a role model (f:6), the teacher being imitated (f:3), primary school as a developmental foundation (f:3), students being highly observant (f:2), primary school as the period when character and personality are shaped (f:2), the teacher shaping society (f:1), students forming a bond of trust with the teacher (f:1), and primary school as the first gateway to the outside world (f:1). For example, two of the teachers expressed the following views:

"It is extremely important because in primary school, after children leave home and establish a bond of trust with their teachers at that age, especially with this bond, they accept whatever they see in their teachers' words or behaviors as true for themselves. They even tell their parents that their teacher told them to do this, and they begin to imitate or learn the truth of their teachers and transfer it to their lives." (Teacher 3)

"We also see this by experiencing it ourselves. As I mentioned before, when a teacher does something wrong even, it is thought to be the right thing to do. I was like that in primary school. The psychology of the students is like that. They accept everything the teacher does as right. They always see it that way. Because the teacher is always a peak point for the student....Primary school is actually a period of maturation of personality and character of the students. It is the period when it starts to form. This is why it is especially important in primary school." (Teacher 7)

"Yes, primary school definitely includes the ages 6-11. In this age period, I believe that students gain behaviors and attitudes that last for years and are permanent in terms of personality development and primary school teachers have an incredible impact on this. Of course, you cannot realize this impact at first, only a few years later you can understand it. Or maybe there are deficiencies in the trainings you've received. You don't start with this consciousness, but a few years later, yes, you can see that you can touch to your student's lives. Even after years and years, the child can carry that effect thanks to primary school teacher who has positive perspectives on human beings, who is a humanist and who loves the nature. I think this is very valuable." (Teacher 8)

Teachers' Experiences Related to Being a Role Model

In order to understand the process, primary school teachers' experiences of role modeling were examined in terms of whether they were role models for their students, how they were role models, and how they understood that they were role models. All interview participants stated that they thought they were role models for their students. These views have been thematized in terms of personal characteristics, affective characteristics and pedagogical approaches. Primary school teachers stated that they are role models by paying attention to personal characteristics such as giving importance to appearance, caring about people and children, not having bad habits (not smoking, not using slang, etc.), being an effective speaker, an effective listener, a problem solver, having cooperation skills, being understanding, determined, honest, empathetic, animal lover, patient, calm, sincere, affectionate, social and consistent. Besides this, affective characteristics are; creating a sincere environment (understanding the child's spirit, using the language of love, making them feel comfortable), seeing students as individuals, making them feel valued, loving children, motivating them in the spirit of struggle, trying to inspire them, giving importance to the personality development of the student, not labeling students as successful or unsuccessful. They also stated that they paid attention to affective characteristics such as avoiding behaviors that would affect them badly (smoking, slang, using a

loud voice, not being able to control anger, not using words against human dignity, not humiliating, judging and hurting students) and paying attention to their attitudes and behaviors as a teacher.

Regarding the pedagogical approach they follow while being a role model, the codes stated by the participants were; giving students the opportunity to teach in the classroom, giving advice and gifts to motivate them, trying to get to know students, observing the social aspects of students, trying to create a sincere environment, paying attention to teacher-student communication, involving parents in the process, trying to inspire students, trying to develop reading habits, instilling animalism, trying to be a role model by writing stories, using children's yoga and doing it with students. When their views on how they understood that they were role models were examined, it was determined that they realized that students imitated them behaviorally and discursively, students reflected the teacher's behavior to each other, received feedback from graduated students, realized that both their positive and negative characteristics were modeled, being consulted by their colleagues, received positive feedback from their colleagues, realized that they were influenced by their own teachers and convinced the parents.

For example, the views of Teacher 1, Teacher 8, Teacher 9 and Teacher 10 in the context of this theme are as follows:

I think my students take me as a role model, most of them do, because as I said, students imitate their teachers, students observe their teachers and act like them. But of course, it doesn't only end with the students and teachers, but also the parents need to be involved in this. I mean, teacher-student cooperation is very important, and parents should be interested enough in their students. For example, sometimes I tell them, "Come and be a teacher instead of me. They use some of my words, some of my methods they like. I approach them lovingly. I make sure that the lesson is taught by giving them more say, considering that they are also individuals. And they like this. I like it and it creates a friendly environment for them. It also makes the child feel more comfortable. (Teacher 1)

In fact, if I were to criticize myself in the first years of my profession, I was less aware of this issue. As the years passed, I became more aware. I held the mirror to myself on this issue. It is as if we realize some things as we gain professional experience over the years. When we first graduate, there is a deficiency there and I think that it needs to be completed. As the years passed, I became more and more aware that I was there for them as a role model. I listened to them very well. Every student is special to me without judgement. I did not separate them as successful or unsuccessful, I made them feel and realize that they can always exist in life, that they are always valuable people, that they can be valuable individuals. When I say read books to children, I say that this will not be enough, that I should also read books. When I say let's love nature and animals, I realized that we need to do it together. I always made my students partners in this process... (Teacher 8).

...I think they learned this from me, because they also observe our social relations and we are their role models. We chat with our friends during breaks. Or when our principal comes to our class and we stand up with respect. You know, we say this in words a lot, but when it comes true when we're role models, they always see how we behave, how we talk or what kind of attitude, we have when we talk to parents, the way we dress, our speech, our teaching. For example, I see that I got a lot of things from my own teacher. For example, I definitely learned problem solving at primary school. I benefited from it in the university exam and also when taking the KPSS. I solved them in the same way I learned from my teacher. My own students, for example, help each other by using the words and the methods the way I teach them. (Teacher 10)

Findings Regarding the Role Models of The Primary School Teachers

The opinions of the participants on the individuals that they take as role models in their lives and why they take them as role models are discussed under this heading. It has been seen that the participants took educators as role models except for Teacher 2 and Teacher 6. The role models chosen by primary school teachers are primary school teacher (f:6), colleague (f:4), high school teacher (f:4), parent (f:3), relative (f:2), academician (f:2), secondary school teacher (f:2), artist (f:1), and book (f:1). The primary school teachers were also asked about the reasons why they take these individuals as role models. The views of the participants have been thematized as personal characteristics of role models, pedagogical approach and affective characteristics. In the first category, which is personal characteristics, the participants stated that they imitated role models with impressive appearance, innovative, humanistic approach, effective communication, active listening, leadership, sportive skills, patience, respect, social, organized, determined, affectionate, animal lover, nature lover, child lover, value, cooperation and empathy skills. In the pedagogical approach, they stated that role models are individuals who are experts in their fields (professionally competent), convey up-to-date information, guide, ask interesting questions, develop students holistically, encourage reading,

cooperate with parents, receive positive feedback from colleagues, meet students' individual and social needs, do different activities, include social activities, find common solutions to problems, are learning and student-centered. Primary school teachers stated that the individuals they took as role models were individuals who also take into consideration affective characteristics such as motivating, not getting angry, not using loud voice, making children happy, being supportive, valuing, not using negative expressions, and not allowing students to judge each other.

In order to understand the characteristics of role models better, the primary school teachers were also asked about the characteristics of teachers they would not consider as role models. In the context of this question, they stated that they would not take as role models their colleagues who only develop students academically, use a high tone of voice, are prone to violence, are not open to criticism, are sulky, are not aware of the child's soul, carry the troubles at home to school, are excessively pessimistic, create unrest, are judgemental, have no empathy, do not value people, treat students badly, claim to know everything, are selfish, have a harsh temperament, and speak slang. When they encounter colleagues who have exhibited these characteristics, they stated that they constantly try to learn, observe, empathize, speak/express ideas, warn, self-criticize and value students. So I avoid the negative attitudes towards teaching and try to be a positive role model. Most of the characteristics of role models stated by the primary school teachers were related to affective and psychological environment.

My inspiration in life comes primarily from my nuclear family, namely my mother and father. And my teachers, especially my Turkish teacher in secondary school, influenced me a lot. Yes, I was also influenced by my sociology teacher so much. I was also influenced by books. For example, my father was a very social person. I was more influenced by my family's encouragement to read, namely their open-mindedness... My high school teachers' questions were very interesting. They tried to create a perspective for us. For example, they would form two groups, two different views. In that way we learned how to discuss a subject, how to understand and listen to each other. I don't take a selfish teacher as a role model. My brain doesn't accept it either. I disable it. I try to be positive role model towards my colleagues. (Teacher 9)

Teaching approaches of primary school teachers about being a role model

The views of the participants regarding the activities they do in and out of class to be a role model in their classes are discussed under this heading. The views regarding this question are examined under the headings of pedagogical approach, methods, techniques and materials used. Primary school teachers follow a pedagogical approach regarding being a role model such as social activity, presentations of the professions, inviting colleagues and experts to the class, paying attention to the language of communication, using technology, complying with the rules of courtesy, managing emotions, increasing dialogue with parents, and learning by doing. The teaching methods and techniques they use are discussion, project, home visit, interview, travelling, problem solving, shopping, yoga for children, and peer teaching. They stated that they used presentations, movies, documentaries, cartoons, and reading books as materials.

So you can bring people who you really believe that they can be role models and introduce them. You can do social activities about them. This is a very effective way. (Teacher 2)

I prepared an e-twinning project called the bookworm project. It provided a touch on so many topics of books there and the families were also included in the study. A library was created. They read with their families. The family is the biggest role model anyway. Then we got involved all together. I used the technique of yoga to encourage the emotional management in children. Because I think being happy is very effective on learning. The children get empathy through this way. (Teacher 6)

The Guidance of Primary School Program in Being a Role Model

The participants' views on whether the primary school curriculum guides teachers in becoming role models are discussed under this heading. Almost all of the primary school teachers (only Teacher 1 did not give a clear answer to the question) stated that the primary school curriculum should be improved in this regard and that it limits teachers. The participants suggested that the curriculum should be adapted by the teacher, that studies on the development of the school-based program should be carried out, that information should be associated with daily life, that the program should include application examples, social and theatrical activities, that school principals should be supportive (the process regarding role models is teamwork) and that in-service training should be provided. In this context; the responses of Teacher 4, Teacher 7 and Teacher 8 are remarkable:

The education program does not provide many opportunities anymore. Because today, since a constructivist education program is implemented, No longer we should have a teacher-centered curriculum , but rather a student-centered one. In this context, collaborative learning is more prominent. The teacher's place has been slightly more in the background. In fact, it is not as active as before, it is a bit passive. Of course, we have chronic problems. Although the curriculum is like that, we can still exhibit old behaviors. I think we haven't achieved the goals of the curriculum yet, because it does not give us that opportunity very much. Unfortunately today, social media and YouTubers etc. are more likely to be role models. Instead of being an individual role, I have a suggestion like this. I think there should be a general curriculum and each school should revise it according to its environment. (Teacher 4)

In fact, I'm in dilemma about this. I would say no to this in some ways and yes in some ways. The points I would say no are that our curriculum is a bit inadequate in my opinion. I think it is a program that needs to be developed. I see the resources published by the Ministry of National Education as inadequate in terms of support resources in some subjects. I think there are not enough activities to gain the goals. At the same time, there are very few activities to be done as social activities in the program. On the positive side, I especially like the adjustment of gains in the mathematics program to make mental operations more practical and the emphasis given to it. I think we should do more theatrical activities in our schools. (Teacher 7)

I think it is inefficient. Yes, we have a program, it is comprehensive enough, but I think it is lacking in terms of guidance. But of course, this is completely related to personal and professional development. For this, we need to be supported with in-service activities and seminars. Or, the school principal should provide the necessary support and assistance. Of course, for this, they need to train themselves first. In other words, success in this regard is not a single issue, it is a team effort. We need to be role models together with the teacher, the administration, the staff. This is not something that can be done with just one teacher. Of course, seminars can be organized. As I said, it can contribute to the teacher's professional or personal development. (Teacher 8)

Primary School Teachers' Suggestions on Being a Role Model

Participants were asked at the end of the interview if they had any suggestions. In this context, participants stated that experienced teachers should participate in the studies of program development, teachers working abroad should be included in the process, out-of-school activities should be planned for motivation, teachers' skills should be increased, pre-service training programs should be developed in terms of being a role model and the internship period should be increased . Teachers 8 and 9's answers to this question are remarkable:

This issue should definitely be addressed at the university and when one starts his profession, he needs to start with this awareness. Yes, we are subjected to exams and interviews, but this is not enough. I definitely think there should be other criterias in choosing teacher. (Teacher 8)

I can say that new graduates are good in terms of technology. But I think they're not good at being good role models. For example, you are trying to communicate with your young colleague but you can't do it actually. (Teacher 9)

Discussion, Conclusion & Suggestions

It has been determined that primary school teachers define being a role model primarily in terms of behavioral models. In this context, an important point that emerged from the findings is that the majority of teachers defined being a role model within the framework of social learning theory. The teachers emphasized that successful individuals should be imitated by students and equated being a role model with setting a good example for students. It is suggested that teachers believe their daily behaviors play a decisive role in the character development of students, yet they do not focus on deeper intrinsic motivational processes. Only three participants associated being a role model with the functions of representing what is possible and serving as a source of inspiration. Given that they used words such as "inspiration," "goal," and "future" when defining a role model, this association is not considered to be deep or consciously made. The fact that teachers emphasized the functions of representing what is possible and being an inspiration less frequently may indicate that they have a limited awareness of their long-term role in guiding students in setting and achieving goals. In this context, their failure to provide a clear definition of a teacher as an inspirational role model may be related to a lack of knowledge in this area. This situation could also signal that they are not informed about neuroscience findings regarding concepts like the cognition, social cognition, and mirror neurons (Adolphs, 2001; Eren, 2009; Prochazkova & Kret, 2017).

Regarding the second sub-question of the research, primary school teachers provided strong justifications for the importance of role modeling during the primary school years. Teachers believe that being a role model is critical in primary school due to factors such as the high observational abilities of students, the establishment of trust, and the role of shaping society. The fact that teachers are aware of their influence on primary school children is a significant finding. This awareness aligns with their belief that primary school is a period in which the foundation of a child's character is laid. However, the findings related to the fifth sub-objective of the research suggest that the teaching approaches, methods, and materials used by teachers are limited in terms of their role model function for students. In this context, it is significant that primary school teachers express a need for in-service training and that teacher training programs should be updated.

Teachers stated that the role model function is not limited to classroom activities and that they also place great importance on the social and emotional development of students. Their acknowledgment of this highlights the impact of the hidden curriculum on role modeling. However, they also expressed the need for the development of an primary curriculum that would guide them in this regard. Participants stated that the current curriculum does not sufficiently support teachers' role model functions and suggested that more social activities and affective learning should be included in the curriculum. In fact, the concept of being a role model in the Turkish education system is more closely associated with character education and is not explicitly used in teacher training. In a study addressing the role model function of teachers within the context of character education, Aktepe (2019) emphasized the need to support teachers in instilling fundamental human values in the new generation through either explicit or implicit curriculum or fostering sensitivity to these values and translating them into behavior. In this context, it is understood that teachers need more support in their role model functions and professional development in this area.

It has been found that most primary school teachers prefer their educators (primary, middle, and high school teachers, academics, and colleagues) as role models. It can be inferred that teachers affect also their colleagues through their experiences and the teachers they've encountered in their education period (i.e., their teacher identities). It can easily be said that primary school teachers are the main influential figures in personal and professional development. The fact that participants' role models possess personal characteristics such as a humane approach, effective communication, leadership, patience, and empathy shows that teachers prefer role models who not only impart knowledge to students but also contribute to their personal and emotional development. Teachers' adoption of these characteristics as role models indicates that the educator is seen as a guide and a model for lifelong learning. From the findings, it can be understood that not only the personal, social, and emotional qualities of role models are important but also their pedagogical approaches are. The participants preferred role models who were student-centered in their professions, took into account the holistic development of students, and were sensitive to individual needs. Additionally, the emphasis on the emotional qualities (e.g., motivational, patient, non-judgmental, supportive) revealed the relationship between affective learning and the phenomena of teachers being role model.

The findings suggest that most teachers define being a role model in terms of behaviors and short-term impacts, but their awareness and explicit discourse on long-term and deeper impacts are limited. In this context, being a role model has the potential to create a deeper effect on primary school teachers' professional values and identities. Moreover, the primary curriculum, teacher education programs, and in-service training should be reorganized to enhance this awareness. While contributing to students' academic development through knowledge, skills, and competencies, teachers also have a critical mission as role models who are closely observed by students (Bashir, Bajwa & Rana, 2014), and they are also role models for their colleagues. Thus, it can be said that teachers are indispensable guides not only in shaping students' futures by taking on various roles and responsibilities in education (Basalama & Machmud, 2018) but also in shaping the professional development of their colleagues.

Limitation

This study is limited to the perceptions, definitions, and experiences of ten primary school teachers. To gain a deeper understanding of this phenomenon, it is recommended to include more diverse data sources (e.g., opinions of administrators, parents, and students). The absence of observation, which is a powerful technique for understanding this phenomenon, can also be considered another limitation. Future research on role modeling should consider these two limitations. In subsequent studies, a larger and more diverse sample of participants from different regions and educational settings should be included. This would increase the generalizability of the study and provide a richer understanding of the role modeling process. Moreover, the findings are limited to the personal, social, and emotional aspects of role modeling. This suggests the need for future qualitative or quantitative research to examine role modeling in different contexts (e.g., cognitive, intellectual, moral).

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding Statement

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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