

MOTIVATION TO BECOME A TEACHER: PERSPECTIVES OF TURKISH PROSPECTIVE TEACHERS OF ENGLISH*

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ABSTRACT

Teachers affect their students' lives, worldviews and the way they learn to a great extent and play a very significant role in their academic lives. They also have a fundamental responsibility in transmitting a society's culture and values to younger generations. Considering the role of the teachers in shaping students' lives and their contribution to societies, it is critical that we develop an understanding of the reasons affecting individuals' decisions to become a teacher. The aim of the present study is to profile and compare the background characteristics and teaching motivations of Turkish prospective teachers (PTs) of English enrolled in a four-year teacher education program of a state university in Turkey and in a one-year certificate program of the same university. Data came from "FIT-Choice" (Factors Influencing Teaching Choice) Scale adopted from Watt & Richardson (2007).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Over the last decade, educators have exerted considerable effort all over the world to find out the reasons that motivate teachers so that more and more teachers can be retained in the teaching profession. Although teaching would appear to be a socially valued occupation, many countries such as Australia, the US, the UK and a number of European countries are currently experiencing difficulties in attracting and maintaining teachers (OECD, 2005).

Research conducted with teacher candidates in a number of European countries, such as France, Belgium, the Netherlands, the Slovak Republic and the U.K. as well in the US and Australia revealed that a desire to work with children and adolescents is the main factor that attracts people into a teaching career (Kyricou & Coulthard, 2000; Richardson & Watt, 2006). A report of studies conducted with practicing teachers confirmed this finding. The most frequently indicated reasons for career choice among teachers were a desire to work with children and adolescents, the potential of the job to provide intellectual fulfillment and make a social contribution (OECD, 2005). A large scale study conducted with 1653 prospective Australian teachers aimed to investigate their motivations for having chosen teaching as a career and their perceptions regarding the teaching profession at their entry to teacher education (Richardson & Watt, 2006). Across the general sample, the highest rated motivations for having chosen teaching included perceived teaching abilities, intrinsic values such as the desire to make a social contribution, shape the future and work with children and adolescents. The lowest rated motivation was choosing teaching as a "fallback" career, followed by social influence of others' encouragement to undertake teaching, job security, and time for social contribution. Background characteristics painted a portrait of these beginning teacher education candidates as typically female, young, and from less than affluent family backgrounds. On the other hand, studies in different sociocultural contexts such as Brunei (Yong, 1995), Zimbabwe (Chivore, 1988) and Jamaica (Bastick, 1999) have shown that more extrinsic motivations such as a salary, job security and career status were found to be important motivations of choosing a career in teaching. Researchers who have examined the motivations of career switchers into teaching in various countries have suggested that rewards of salary and career prestige are not high priority for this group. The decision to switch to teaching was mainly for personal satisfaction, rewards of making a social contribution and a desire to keep learning.

There have been a few studies carried out in Turkey regarding this issue. Cermik, Doğan and Şahin (2010) explored the factors influencing prospective teachers' career choices at the department of elementary education and the extent their choice perception changes at the end of teacher education program. Findings revealed that mercenary, extrinsic, intrinsic and altruistic factors underlie teachers' career choices and that the rate of intrinsic and altruistic motives increases towards graduation.

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To our best knowledge, there has been no study conducted to investigate the motivations of English language teachers in Turkey. Although there is a huge demand to learn English and for English teachers in Turkey, teaching gradually seems to be less attractive as a career at a time when other careers offer higher salaries, clearer pathways for career development, greater social prestige, and more agreeable working conditions. That is, teaching must compete with other careers and professions for new entrants as its appeal as a career is declining. Unless teaching can be made an attractive career choice for new graduates as well as those who switch to teaching after pursuing other careers, there will be a shortage of qualified and experienced teachers. Thus, identifying the motivations related to teachers' career choice is a critical step to attract highly skilled young people to teaching to increase the quality of teaching and education. Moreover, if policy makers wish to redress the current gender imbalance among teachers, it is essential to find out the factors motivating them to pursue teaching.

The aim of the present study is to profile and contrast teaching motivations, perceptions about the profession, and, career commitment and satisfaction of prospective teachers of a four-year teacher education program and one-year teacher certification program in English Language Teaching. Within our perspective, beginning teachers' perceptions impact their subsequent professional engagement, development, and the quality of their work.

METHODOLOGY

Participants and Setting

There were two different groups of participants in this study. Out of a total number of 182 participants, the first group of participants (n=97) was enrolled in a four-year English Language Teacher education program of a state university located in Istanbul, Turkey. The second group of participants (n=85) was enrolled in a one-year English Language Teacher certification program of the same university. While the four-year program is for undergraduate study, the one-year certificate program is for those who have already completed or are continuing their undergraduate studies in a relevant field (i.e. English Language and Literature, American Culture and Literature, Translation and Interpreting Studies). Since the present study also aims to find out the profile of the participating teacher candidates, demographic information related to the participants is presented in the findings section.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected in the spring term of the 2010-2011 academic year by means of a questionnaire developed by Watt & Richardson (2007). The FIT-Choice (Factors Influencing Teaching Choice) questionnaire, based on Expectancy-Value Theory and Social-Cognitive Career Theory, was developed as a comprehensive model for studies that aim to understand why individuals choose a teaching career. The questionnaire consisted of a demographic information section and 3 sections with a total number of 61 items (on a 5-point Likert scale). The data gathered by the questionnaire can be grouped under three subscales: motivations for teaching, perceptions about the profession, and decision to become a teacher.

The first subscale "motivations for teaching" addressed intrinsic values, personal utility values, social utility values, ability-related beliefs, fallback career, and socialization influences related to teaching as a career (Watt & Richardson, 2006, pp.34-35). Within this subscale, items addressing *intrinsic career value* included statements such as "I'm interested in teaching", "I've always wanted to be a teacher". *Personal utility value* combined job security (i.e. "Teaching will provide a reliable income"), time for family (i.e. "Teaching hours will fit with the responsibilities of having a family") and job transferability (i.e. "A teaching qualification is recognized everywhere") factors. *Social utility value* combined factors including shaping future of children/adolescents (i.e. "Teaching will allow me to influence the next generation"), enhancing social equity (i.e. "Teaching will allow me to benefit the socially disadvantaged"), making social contribution (i.e. "Teaching allows me to provide a service to society"), and working with children/adolescents (i.e. "I want a job that involves working with children/adolescents"). Ability-related statements addressed PT's self-perceptions of their own teaching abilities (i.e. "I have good teaching skills"). Items addressing *fallback career* included statements such as 'I was not accepted into my first-choice career' and "I chose teaching as a last-resort career." *Socialization influences* combined factors social influences (i.e. "My family think I should become a teacher"), and prior teaching and learning experiences (i.e. "I have had inspirational teachers").

The second subscale "perceptions about the profession" combined factors expertise (i.e. "Do you think teaching requires high levels of expert knowledge?"), difficulty (i.e. "Do you think teachers have a

heavy workload?”), social status (i.e. “Do you believe teaching is a well-respected career?”) and salary (i.e. “Do you think teaching is well paid?”).

The third subscale “decision to become a teacher” contained items that address social dissuasion (i.e. “Did others tell you teaching was not a good career choice?”) and satisfaction with choice (i.e. “How happy are you with your decision to become a teacher?”).

Piloting was conducted with 36 randomly selected prospective teachers for reliability purposes and the Cronbach coefficient was found to be .82. The questionnaires were administered to each group by their course instructors at the end of a lecture, and participants were informed that their participation is voluntary. Data analyses involved calculating mean scores, their standard deviations and conducting an independent samples t-test to identify the motivational factors that affect individuals’ decisions for choosing a teaching career, and to determine whether there were any statistically significant differences between prospective teachers who were enrolled in the four-year program, with those who were enrolled in the one-year certification program.

RESULTS

Profile of the Participants

In terms of gender, PTs enrolled in both four-year teacher education program and certification program were largely female dominated. Out of 97 PTs of the teacher education program, 66 PTs were female (69%) and 31 PTs were male (31%). Similarly, in the certification program, there were 75 female (88%) and 10 male PTs (12%) among 85 PTs enrolled.

Demographic questionnaire also showed that the 73% of the PTs (69 out of 97) in the teacher education program had a family member or a relative who is doing the teaching profession. Similarly, 69% of the PTs (59 out of 85) in the certification program had a teacher relative.

Finally, when PTs in both of the programs were asked to indicate the education level they would like to work with when they graduate, the majority of them chose primary school education (51% for PTs of teacher education program and 45% PTs of the certification program). Their choices were followed by university level (24% for PTs of teacher education program and 29% PTs of the certification program) and high school level (20% for PTs of teacher education program and 26% PTs of the certification program). While only 4 PTs (5%) of the teacher education program stated that they would work at a kindergarten level, none of the PTs of the certification program made this choice.

Teaching Motivations

When the influential factors motivating prospective teachers to become a teacher were analyzed, it was observed that the highest rated motivations included “shaping future of children/adolescents” (M= 4.24), “making a social contribution” (M= 4.08) and “prior teaching/learning experiences” (M= 4.07) for the PTs of teacher education program and “making a social contribution” (M= 4.36), “teaching abilities” (M= 4.31) and “enhancing social equity” (M= 4.30) for the PTs of the certification program (see Table 1).

The lowest rated motivation was choosing teaching as a “fallback” career for both teacher education and certification groups (M= 2.52, and M= 3.06, respectively). Among the influential factors listed, a significant difference occurred between the two groups for the following factors: “time for family,” “teaching as a fallback career,” “job security,” “working with children/adolescents,” “enhancing social equity,” “social contribution” and “perceived ability” (see Table 1).

Table 1

Different teaching motivations for prospective teachers enrolled in a teacher education program and certification program

	PTs from teacher education program (N= 97)		PTs from certification program (N= 85)		df	t	p
	M	SD	M	SD			
Intrinsic career value	4.06	.78	4.11	.86	173	-.384	.702
Job security	3.48	.73	3.73	.83	177	-2.210	.028*
Time for family	3.51	.71	3.80	.81	172	-2.443	.017*
Prior T&L experiences	4.07	.74	3.86	1.02	173	1.584	.124
Make a social contribution	4.08	.69	4.36	.92	178	-2.263	.025*
Work with children/adolescents	3.96	.66	4.24	.94	178	-2.310	.025*
Social influence	3.58	1.10	3.43	1.30	177	.838	.409
Perceived ability	3.75	.69	4.31	.77	177	-5.103	.000*
Fallback career	2.52	1.23	3.06	.93	176	-2.653	.010*
Job transferability	3.78	.75	3.96	.92	179	-1.443	.151
Shape future	4.24	.57	4.30	.78	176	-2.210	.549
Enhance social equity	4.01	.72	4.30	1.03	179	-2.207	.032*

Note. N: # of students

*p<0.05

Perceptions about the Profession

The analysis of the participants' perceptions about the profession revealed that both group of prospective teachers perceived teaching as a highly expert career, in terms of requiring high levels of specialized, technical and expert knowledge (M=4.25 for PTs of the teacher education program and M= 4.42 for PTs of the certification program). Both groups of PTs also perceived teaching as paying a low salary (M= 2.20 and M= 2.59, respectively). In terms of significance of the results, teacher education PTs gave statistically significant lower ratings for salary, indicating that they do not believe that teaching is a well paid job. Certification program PTs rated teaching as statistically significantly higher for social status reflecting their beliefs that teaching is a high-status profession valued by the society (see Table 2).

Table 2

Different teaching perceptions for prospective teachers enrolled in a teacher education program and certification program

	PTs from teacher education program (N= 97)		PTs from certification program (N= 85)		df	t	p
	M	SD	M	SD			
Expert career	4.25	.67	4.42	.48	173	-1.914	.055
High demand	3.97	.68	3.92	.55	172	.516	.607
Social status	3.25	.73	3.64	.57	169	-3.886	.000*
Salary	2.20	.88	2.59	1.05	173	-2.687	.008*

Note. N: # of students

*p<0.05

Decision to Become a Teacher

The analysis of the third part of the scale where PTs expressed whether they had experiences of social dissuasion from teaching as a career and whether they were satisfied with their career choice showed that both groups of PTs were indecisive about the experiences of social dissuasion (M= 3.00 for PTs of the teacher education program, M= 2.74 for PTs of certification program).

Both group of PTs reported relatively strong satisfaction with their decisions to become a teacher- mean ratings around the scale midpoint, closer to 'agreeing' (M= 3.77 for teacher education program PTs and M= 3.63 for certification program PTs). There was also no significant difference between PTs of the two programs in terms of their satisfaction with teaching as a career choice (see Table 3).

Table 3

Career choice satisfaction of prospective teachers enrolled in a teacher education program and certification program

	PTs from teacher education program (N= 97)		PTs from certification program (N= 85)		df	t	p
	M	SD	M	SD			
Social dissuasion*	3.00	.83	2.74	.76	165	2.103	.037
Career choice satisfaction	3.77	.88	3.63	1.14	167	.824	.415

Note. N: # of students

*p<0.05

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Demographic data indicated a similar background profile among the two groups of prospective teachers. In both groups, the participants were predominantly female, and around 70% had a relative in the teaching profession. The finding related to gender points out to an imbalance, which has been generally attributed to the lower salaries of teachers relative to average salaries, especially for men.

Both groups of PTs indicated they primarily preferred to work in primary schools, followed consecutively by university level and high school level. However, no participants from certification program preferred kindergarten level, and only a minority group (5%) from the teacher education program indicated such a preference. Considering the need for kindergarten level English teachers, the reasons why this level is disfavored must be investigated by further studies and teacher education programs should explore ways to support and encourage PTs in choosing to work in kindergarten level.

In terms of factors that affect participants' motivations for choosing teaching, *social utility value* (shaping future of children/adolescents, making a social contribution, and enhancing social equity) was a strong determinant for both groups, reflecting findings of Kyriacou and Coulthard (2000), and Richardson and Watt (2006). Both groups of participants did not see teaching as a fallback career, and believed teaching requires expertise. Although participants indicated their belief that teaching profession is respected in society, their answers show that they also thought teachers have low salaries. Both groups indicated a strong level of satisfaction with their choice of career.

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