

THOUGHTS OF PRE-SERVICE CLASSROOM TEACHERS ON TEACHING PROFESSION

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to identify the thoughts of pre-service teachers studying at the Department of Classroom Teaching, of the Faculty of Education at Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University on the teaching profession, as well as their reasons for selecting it. The data from the research patterned in line with the survey model were collected by means of opinion forms developed by the researchers. The data collection tool was administered to a total of 119 students, 73 of whom were in their 1st year and 46 in their 4th year of their study at the Department of Classroom Teaching, of the Faculty of Education at Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University. Based on the findings of the study, it was found out that more than half of the pre-service classroom teachers attending to the above programme did not select it because they loved the teaching profession, and they would be ready to quit the profession if/when appropriate conditions existed. The findings also showed that almost all pre-service teachers were concerned about their appointment as classroom teachers.

Key Words: Teaching profession, classroom teaching, pre-service teachers, teacher training.

INTRODUCTION

The teaching profession is a professional field of occupation based on a special knowledge and experience in the field, which requires a professional training on pedagogy (Erden, 1998: 27). Teaching is a specialty profession, which is acquired through a pre-service training provided in the faculties of education. Nonetheless, this is not solely sufficient for the profession of teaching. Teachers are expected to carry some special qualifications required for this profession (Maguire & Dillon, 1998). Today, people wish to see more credentials in teachers than merely transferring information and getting students adopt certain skills (Çelikten, Şanal & Yeni, 2005). According to Başaran (1999), the success of an education system depends on qualified teachers having the required credentials as well as applying them adequately. Some of these credentials may be a part of an individual's personal characteristics, while some are acquired through pre-service training.

It is possible to say that the professional performance of teachers are affected not only by their personal characteristics, but also by their attitudes towards the teaching profession. Teachers with positive attitude towards their profession practice it with more enthusiasm and love, and of course in a more efficient manner. They can communicate with their students more effectively, motivate them more easily, manage their time more efficiently, and they can significantly support creativity and innovation (Çeliköz & Çetin, 2004). The professional success of a teacher is closely related to one's perception of the teaching profession. Perhaps just for this reason, the teaching profession should primarily be the preference for an individual (Kuzgun, 2000). Selecting one's profession means an individual selecting a profession with the highest yields from among a number of professions. There are many factors influencing this process. Kıyak (2006), in a study conducted with students of a classical high school, listed these factors as job security, social security conditions, finding a job with no trouble and a good salary. The researcher showed the high unemployment rate in Turkey as the reason

for students' not prioritising such features as ability, interest and personality traits. Thus, the focus should be on an individual's preference of the teaching profession for the right reasons, instead of on the necessity of this preference.

Once an individual with an existing positive attitude towards the teaching profession is trained as a teacher and begins teaching, the individual's previous positive attitude is combined with professional knowledge; and here it is possible to say that this consistency affects all elements relevant to education in a positive way. In this regard, several studies have been conducted to identify thoughts of Turkish pre-service teachers about the teaching profession. It has been seen as a result of such studies conducted to reveal the thoughts about the teaching profession as well as reasons for a preference of this profession, by pre-service teachers attending primary education departments (Celep, Özyılmaz & Çörtük, 2013; Çermik, Doğan & Şahin, 2010; Çetin, 2012; Erkan et. al., 2002; Güneşli & Aslan, 2009; Hacıömeroğlu & Şahin Taşkın, 2010; Kartal & Taşdemir, 2012; Özbek, 2007; Özbek, Kahyaoğlu & Özgen, 2007; Özder, Konedralı & Zeki, 2010; Özsoy, Özsoy, Özkara & Memiş, 2010; Şara & Kocabaş, 2012; Ubuz & Sarı, 2008) and secondary education departments (Boz & Boz, 2008; Celep, Özyılmaz & Çörtük, 2013; Doğan & Çoban, 2009; Hacıömeroğlu & Şahin Taşkın, 2010; Karamustafaoğlu & Özmen, 2004; Tataroğlu, Özgen & Alkan, 2011) of the faculties of education, that the priority particularly about the reasons to prefer the teaching profession broadly differs from each other. Besides, it is considered essential to continue conducting such research studies on the qualifications and attitudes of teachers towards their profession, who are the primary actors of the education process, as long as there is a quality problem in education. This study, designed to provide a different perspective from a different sample, aims to assess the thoughts of pre-service teachers attending the Department of Classroom Teaching, of the Faculty of Education at Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University, as well as the reasons for their preference of this profession. The study seeks answers to the following questions:

- What are the reasons for pre-service teachers' preference for the programme of classroom teaching?
- What is the satisfaction status of pre-service teachers regarding the programme of classroom teaching?
- Are pre-service teachers worried about being appointed as teachers after they are graduated?
- Do pre-service teachers' worries about their appointment vary as to their reasons for preferring the profession?

METHODOLOGY

The research study is designed as a survey model, with a both quantitative and qualitative approach. The quantitative part has included an analysis of the responses of participants to close-ended questions on the data collection tool, while the qualitative part has analysed the data obtained from open-ended questions.

Participants

The participants of the study are students attending the Department of Classroom Teaching of Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University in the autumn semester of the 2012-2013 academic year. Since the study has aimed at identifying pre-service teachers' thoughts on the teaching profession as of the start of their professional training and at the last stage of their training, 1st and 4th year students have been selected as participants. A total of 119 pre-service teachers participated in the study, 73 being in their 1st year and 46 in their 4th year.

Data Collection Tool and Data Analysis

A data collection form involving close and open-ended questions was used to describe the phenomenon explored in this study. Close-ended questions were used to collect personal information and tendencies of the pre-service teachers, while open-ended questions were applied to examine their preference for the teaching profession and their perceptions about it.

The opinion forms were designed in the light of the relevant literature as well as information received from academicians and students. In order to ensure internal validity of the data collection tool, all sentences in the form were read by academicians working in three different sub-areas of educational sciences, and the forms were reviewed and finalised in accordance with their feedback. Opinions of the said academicians for each item were evaluated in terms of measuring the required feature, and it was determined that they concurred

with each other. The finalised form was administered to five students in order to test in advance whether the questions were clear and understandable and whether their responses to the form adequately covered the questions. The findings were found to be positive, and the data collection tool was considered valid without need for further changes before administration to the participants. Participation was on a voluntary basis, and the data collection was conducted in classrooms when the participants were available, so as not to have a negative influence on their responses. Evaluation was made on the basis of participants' responses in order to obtain systematic data on the thoughts of pre-service classroom teachers on the teaching profession, as well as the reasons for their preference, and to make an inference based on this data.

Descriptive analysis technique was used to analyse the data obtained from the open-ended question in the opinion form. Opinions of the participants collected in writing were classified under certain headings, and the frequency was taken. The findings were presented under these headings as well as the frequency of repetition.

FINDINGS

Below are the findings obtained from the analysis of the data collected to evaluate the opinions of the pre-service teachers attending the classroom teaching programme of the Faculty of Education at Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University on the profession of teaching. Looking from a gender perspective, 58.8% of the participants are female and 41.2% are male. It is possible to say that classroom teaching may be considered as a profession more suitable for and more preferable by women. Results from other studies in Turkey (Baykara Pehlivan, 2008; Çermik, Doğan & Şahin, 2010; Çetin, 2012; Şara & Kocabaş, 2012) also support this finding. Table 1 gives information on participants' responses to the question about their preference for classroom teaching profession.

Table 1: Reasons for Pre-Service Teachers' Preference of Classroom Teaching Programme

Reasons for preference	f	%
Because I wanted to be teacher	53	44.5
Because I wanted to be enrolled in an undergraduate programme	17	14.3
Because my parents wished me to do so	12	10.1
Because there is more free time	9	7.6
Because I am a graduate of teacher training high school	8	6.7
Because it is a respectable profession	7	5.9
Because it is easier to find employment	7	5.9
Because I like children	2	1.7
Because my parent(s) is/are teachers	1	0.8
Other	3	2.5
Total	119	100.0

According to Table 1, based on an overall evaluation of the opinions of students enrolled in the classroom teaching programme as to the teaching profession, it is seen that almost half of the students preferred this profession because they want to be teachers. Şara and Kocabaş (2012) have reached a similar conclusion where 44.5% of pre-service teachers preferred teaching as a profession suitable for themselves. 14.3% of the participants preferred the teaching profession merely because they have wished to be enrolled in an undergraduate programme, and approximately ten per cent preferred this profession because of their families' wishes. More than seven percent of the participants preferred teaching because it is a profession with more free time. A smaller part of the students (5.9%) pointed out that they preferred this profession since it is easier to find a job. After a general assessment of Table 1, it is possible to say that a little less than half of the pre-service teachers continue their training accompanied with positive attitudes toward their profession, whereas an important segment preferred becoming a teacher merely to have an undergraduate degree, to benefit from amenities of being a teacher, or to satisfy their families' wishes. Özbek, Kahyaoglu and Özgen (2007), in their

study to evaluate pre-service teachers' opinions about their profession, have found out that the majority of pre-service teachers are not enthusiastic enough about their profession. Another study by Çermik, Doğan and Şahin (2010) has shown that pre-service teachers mostly preferred the teaching profession because of self-seeking reasons such as a state-secured, sustainable job, a continuous and regular salary or the availability of free time. Below are examples of participants' opinions to serve as an indicator of the classification done by researchers.

I had many problems at the preference stage because of my family. They wanted me to become a teacher. I wanted to study in other programmes, but in the end I accepted their wish. (Because my parents wished so, 1st year, Female).

I preferred the teaching profession because I think I can find employment easily compared to other professions. I wanted to graduate and start working immediately (Because it is easier to find employment, 4th year, Male).

My score from the university entrance exam was not sufficient to enrol into other programmes I wished to attend. This was the best among the options I had for enrolment. (Because I wanted to be enrolled in an undergraduate programme, 1st year, Female).

Responses of three pre-service teachers, which are grouped under "Other" in Table 1, are shown below:

I preferred teaching because I believed that the vicious circle in my life is going to end if I take this training opportunity (1st year, Male).

I did not want to be a teacher at the beginning. I preferred it because it was the best programme based on my score. Yet, I liked the idea of being a teacher after I enrolled in this department. I changed my mind. (1st year, Female).

I partially wanted to be a teacher but I had other dreams since I thought I could be enrolled to better programmes (than teaching) with my score. I was not really expecting to get this programme (4th year, Female).

Table 2 gives a summary of pre-service teachers' responses by grade as to whether they would have preferred the teaching profession if they had another chance for choosing a profession.

Table 2: Re-preference for Teaching Profession

		YES	NO	Total
1 st Year	f	52	21	73
	%	71.2	28.8	100.0
4 th Year	f	36	10	46
	%	78.3	21.7	100.0
Total	f	88	31	119
	%	73.9	26.1	100.0

From Table 2, it is possible to say that 4th year students would be more willing to choose the teaching profession again compared to 1st year students. Özbek, Kahyaoğlu and Özgen (2007) have also stated that 1st year students less embraced the teaching profession, compared to 4th year students, and they would change their area of study if given the chance. A general assessment of the responses from the participants shows that approximately one-fourth of the pre-service teachers would prefer not to be a teacher if they have an

alternative. They stated that they might prefer to study Law (9.2%), Economics / Business Administration (4.2%), Health Sciences (4.2%) and Guidance and Psychological Counselling (1.7%), instead of Classroom Teaching.

Table 3 shows the participants' responses, as of gender variable, to the question whether they would be willing to quit the teaching profession if they found another job with a higher salary.

Table 3: Quitting Teaching Profession for a Job With Higher Salary

		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Female	f	11	20	21	11	7	70
	%	15.7	28.6	30.0	15.7	10.0	100.0
Male	f	4	7	15	9	13	48
	%	8.3	14.6	31.2	18.8	27.1	100.0
Total	f	15	27	36	20	20	118
	%	12.7	22.9	30.5	16.9	16.9	100.0

Based on Table 3, it is possible to say that female students are more determined not to quit the teaching profession, in the case of finding another job with a higher salary, compared to male students. The researchers think that this may be caused by the social perception that it is generally a man's responsibility to provide the financial contribution to a family. A study by Vefikuluçay Yılmaz et. al. (2009) on the gender roles of university students has found out that there is a statistically significant difference between male and female participants on gender on the basis of work life, and that men have a more traditional perspective on gender compared to women. Özbek (2007) has also found out that personal and social factors are important in female pre-service teachers' preference of the teaching profession, whereas economic factors are more important for male pre-service teachers. In general, our study shows that almost half of the pre-service teachers may consider quitting their profession. Besides, the close ratio between the pre-service teachers who consider quitting their profession and those who preferred teaching for reasons other than loving the profession, may indicate a consistency among the findings.

Table 4 shows the participants' responses, as of year, to the question of whether they are worried about being employed after graduation.

Table 4: Worry About Being Employed After Graduation as of Years

Worry about employment	Year				Total	
	1		4			
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Yes	58	79.5	42	91.3	100	84.0
No	15	20.5	4	8.7	19	16.0

As seen in Table 4, 84% of the students are worried about being employed as teachers after graduation. Fourth year students, who are closer to graduation, feel this worry stronger (91.3%) than the 1st year students (79.5%). A study by Güneşli and Aslan (2009) on pre-service teachers attending Turkish Language Teaching has found out that one of the fundamental problems of pre-service teachers is their worry about being employed as teacher. That the majority of pre-service teachers are worried about being employed after graduation even during their training may be considered as having a negative effect, not only on their attitudes towards the teaching profession, but also on their academic achievement.

Table 5 shows the frequency analysis between pre-service teachers' worries of being employed and their reasons for preferring the teaching profession.

Table 5: Relationship Between Employment Worry and Reasons for Preference

Reasons for preference	Employment Worry		Total
	Yes (f)	No (f)	
Because I wanted to be teacher	49	4	53
Because I wanted to be enrolled in an undergraduate programme	14	3	17
Because my parents wished me to do so	10	2	12
Because there is more free time	6	3	9
Because I am a graduate of teacher training high school	8	0	8
Because it is a respectable profession	3	4	7
Because it is easier to find employment	6	1	7
Because I like children	1	1	2
Because my parent(s) is/are teachers	1	0	1
Other	2	1	3
Total	100	19	119

It is seen that the ratio of pre-service teachers with employment worries, who have voluntarily preferred this profession (85.5%), is higher than the ratio of those who preferred the teaching profession due to other reasons (e.g. parents' wish, their wish to be enrolled in an undergraduate programme) (83.3%). Although the difference is not much, this finding may be a result of that pre-service teachers, who have chosen the teaching profession due to external factors or other interests, are not able to embrace teaching as much as others, and accordingly they are less worried about being employed as teachers.

CONCLUSION

Findings from this study have shown that almost half of the pre-service teachers preferred the classroom teaching programme with positive thoughts, such as wishing to be a teacher, respectability of the profession or loving children. On the other hand, the other half of the pre-service teachers have chosen this profession due to other reasons, such as family pressure, just to be enrolled in an undergraduate programme, or even some false perceptions as teaching being a profession with a lot of free time (although not many). In addition, it has been seen that some teacher candidates graduated from teacher training high school have preferred being a teacher just because they were going to receive extra points for placement in an undergraduate programme, or they were going to find employment easier compared to other professions. Boz and Boz (2008) have stated that pre-service teachers who have chosen their profession for sentimental reasons, such as making a contribution to society, a love of teaching, or to work with young people, are more motivated and enthusiastic in the teaching profession, and continue to work as teachers for a longer period of time. It is considered disconcerting, in terms of the importance of their role as classroom teachers having a key role in the educational life of their students, that almost half of the pre-service teachers preferred this profession due to external reasons.

This study has concluded that one-fourth of the participant pre-service teachers, an important segment, would not choose the teaching profession if they had the chance, which is considered quite troubling. On the other hand, the fact that mostly 1st year students have made this decision may be interpreted as teacher training having a positive impact on the thoughts with regard to the teaching profession. Almost half of the pre-service teachers have stated that they would quit working as teachers if they found another job with a higher salary. This finding is thought to be caused by non-voluntary pre-service teachers who preferred the teaching profession due to self-seeking reasons, interests and external factors. These individuals' perception of this

profession as a guarantee for life is considered to make them ready to quit teaching for another employment opportunity with better facilities. The fact that the majority of pre-service teachers who are ready to quit the teaching profession for another job with higher financial benefits are males may be caused by their focus on economic benefits as their bread-winner role in the society.

In Turkey, in order for graduates of faculties of education to be employed as teachers in public schools, they have to take a national examination (Public Personnel Selection Examination) and to achieve a certain score required by their subject area to be appointed as teachers. Pre-service teachers attending faculties of education experience a high level of anxiety for this examination, especially in their 4th year. It is possible to say that this anxiety experienced pre-service may have a negative impact on their motivation and enthusiasm. As a matter of fact, a study by Karamustafaoğlu and Özmen (2004) has concluded that this employment worry of pre-service teachers diminishes their expectations from their profession, which in turn negatively affects their motivation. It is understood that pre-service teachers mostly focus on passing this national exam and give priority to activities related to this exam while they also have work to become a qualified teacher in professional, scientific and cultural terms. Nonetheless, despite the fact that most of the students (73.9%) are anxious and worried about being employed after graduation, it is meaningful for them to state they would prefer classroom teaching profession if they had another opportunity. It is thought that this may be caused, despite all other things, by the fact that it is easier to get an employment as a teacher compared to other professions and that the student quota of most of these programmes is higher than other undergraduate programmes.

According to another result of this study, those who preferred the profession with enthusiasm and motivation experience a stronger worry for being employed after the graduation compared to the pre-service teachers who preferred teaching profession due to external reasons, though the difference is not very significant. Even though not significant, this difference may be caused by the fact that the former group are more motivated and willing to start their teaching career.

An overall assessment of the findings of this study leads us to think that secondary education students should be in closer and more effective contact and communication with guidance services in their schools, in order to make more accurate decisions about their future professions. Being guided to teacher training high schools from middle schools and to faculties of education from high schools, not only on the basis of their abilities but also of their interests and personality traits, would enable them to make more sensible decisions about their preferences for a future profession. Besides, the training programmes of the faculties of education should be redesigned so as to include scientific, social and cultural activities to assist pre-service teachers in developing more positive attitudes towards the teaching profession. Moreover, further comparative studies on the opinions of pre-service teachers on the teaching profession and their professional performance after employment may be able to enlighten other studies in the area.

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