

Career Choice: Motivations and Perceptions of the Students of Education

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ABSTRACT In Turkey as well as in other countries, choosing an occupation is a lifelong process. Motivations and perceptions of students are of great importance when they choose an occupation that they think is best for them. This paper investigated the motivations for choosing teaching as a career and the perceptions of the teaching profession among 315 first year undergraduate students of a state university in Istanbul. It employed a non-experimental survey research design involving quantitative and qualitative approach. Two open-ended questions were used to obtain authentic and spontaneously expressed responses: (a) What is your primary motivation for choosing teaching as a career? (b) What is the first phrase(s) (in terms of a proverb, a quotation, a saying or a cliché) about teachers and/or teaching that come to your mind? Results revealed that their main motivations of the freshmen students were having a worthwhile job/career; a stable salary; helping children and touching their lives; and personal satisfaction and improvement. Moreover, the respondents tended to perceive teaching as a profession that is ideal for women, comfortable, sacred, and relatively low-paid.

INTRODUCTION

Students are often pushed to make career decisions even while still in high school. However, choosing an occupation is a lifelong process; it starts long before high-school graduation and continues long afterwards (Schoon 2001). "Career choice implies that individuals have gone through a decision-making process, that they have surveyed work field, have assessed their competencies, have some understanding of what brings a sense of fulfilment and have examined alternatives, and the likely effect of these alternatives on their self-concept" (Gokuladas 2010: 146). London and Noe (1997: 62) identified several factors that affect career decisions and behaviour: situational conditions such as career resilience (the ability to adapt to changing circumstances), career insight (the ability to be realistic about oneself and one's career), and career identity (the extent to which one defines oneself by work). A study of 7,649 adolescents in the United Kingdom found that job aspirations were related to parental education, teacher

ratings and self-ratings of ability test scores in mathematics, and the school environment (Schoon 2001). There are also gender differences regarding career decisions. A longitudinal study (Duffy and Sedlacek 2007) in the United States found that, when choosing an occupation, men placed a greater emphasis on making money whereas women emphasized working with people and contributing to society.

Although university candidates in today's information age have a wider range of career options than ever (mostly due to the advancement and use of computers), such as application developer, market research data miner, and chief listening officer, teaching continues to attract many students' attention.

In Turkey teaching seems to be one of the most attractive professions according to the ranking students do after the annual nation-wide university entrance examination. This exam takes place every year in spring and is a highly competitive standardized test for the admission to higher education in Turkey. Just to give an example, according to the announced entrance points of programs for the year 2014-2015, English Language Education is higher than Environmental Engineering ("Dört Yıllık Bölümlerin Taban Puanları" 2014). However, the profession has also a negative reputation for its crowded classes, insufficient salaries, inadequate classroom conditions, bureaucratic barriers, and for teachers being assigned to subjects other than

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those for which they possess expertise. According to a study Anatolian Education Union (2010) has done with 240,000 teachers in all the cities in Turkey, 65 percent of teachers think of taking on additional employment to make up for the inadequate pay. In the same study, 34 percent of the teachers reported that they were not happy with being a teacher, and 41 percent of teachers are considering leaving the profession. Therefore, it can be said that “teaching is a profession that requires the characteristics such as self-sacrifice, tolerance, updating yourself constantly and applying the profession willingly. However, teaching is also a risky profession that can affect teachers’ mental health due to some stress factors” (Demir and Nazli 2014: 425).

In this regard, goals, motivations and aspirations to become a teacher have been the focus of research for decades in many countries, such as Australia (Richardson and Watt 2006); Belgium (Schepens et al. 2009); India (Mooij 2008); Jamaica (Bastick 2000); New Zealand (Anthony and Ord 2008); Slovenia (Krecic and Grmek 2005); South Africa (Wolhuter et al. 2012); the Netherlands (Canrinus and Fokkens-Bruinsma 2009); Norway (Tjomsland et al. 2009); South Africa (Cross and Ndofirepi 2015); the United Kingdom (Malderez et al. 2007); the United States (Pop and Turner 2009); and Turkey (Akbayir 2003). Apart from single studies done in different countries, there are evaluative papers on this subject, too. For instance, Heinz (2015) provides a systematic and conceptual review of empirical research studies exploring student teachers’ career motivations and commitment in 23 countries from five continents. This substantial body of research indicates that highly valued future goals play a motivational role in individuals’ present decisions, and that the expectation of future goals plays a significant mediating role in relationships among planned effort, planned persistence, ability, intrinsic career value, desire to make a social contribution, and career choice satisfaction (Eren and Tezel 2010).

Motivations to enter the teaching profession vary. According to Kyriacou and Coulthard (2000), the reasons for pursuing a teaching career fall into three main categories: altruistic reasons (a socially worthwhile and important job), intrinsic reasons (an interest in using one’s knowledge for children), and extrinsic reasons (long holidays, status, and level of pay). There seems to be a general consensus that altruistic

reasons are most prominent. In a study of 79 secondary teacher education students in Australia, Manuel and Hughes (2006) found that among the many commonly cited reasons to become a teacher—such as personal fulfilment, working with young people, working conditions, lifestyles, and professional status—altruistic reasons are the most important. Other studies verify these views. For example, in the United States, Wadsworth (2001) found that new teachers believed in what they did, cared about their students, and were deeply committed to their profession. In Turkey, Sarikaya and Khorshid (2009) reported that students training to become teachers chose the teaching profession most frequently because of positive opinions related to the profession (41.6%); because they believed that they had some advantages related to the profession (39.6%). Terzi and Tezci (2007) found that student attitudes toward the teaching profession were generally positive. Aksu et al. (2010) claim that alongside altruistic reasons, the most commonly cited reasons to choose teaching as a career include a perceived teaching ability and an appreciation of the intrinsic value of teaching. A study in the United States (Padhy et al. 2015) found that factors related to expectancy-environment (for example, a pleasant and enjoyable working environment), expectancy-intrinsic (for example, reasonable workload, opportunity to care for others), social-media-education (for example, salaries, social status), social-prior-experience (for example, sharing knowledge with others, previous experiences), and social-suggestions (for example, friends’ and parents’ suggestions) were found to be significant in choosing the teaching career.

Culture also plays an important role in students’ choice of careers as well as in their perceptions of the professions. Although researchers have focused on the role of culture in career choice, it is argued that “there still is a void in the literature in theoretical explanations of why and to what extent cultural context plays a role in career development” (Aycan and Fikret-Pasa 2003: 130). There are various qualities that reflect cultural beliefs, opinions and views of a society, among which are proverbs, quotations, expressions, sayings, and/or clichés common in daily conversations. They are generally transmitted orally from one generation to the next. They are important because they communicate views that are widely shared in a society and

because they usually convey something of emotional significance. In various societies, the popularity of certain sayings sheds significant light on attitudes toward the teaching profession. Some such examples are "Teachers open the door; you enter by yourself" (Chinese); "Classes are the replica of their teachers" (German); "A child is not a vessel to be filled, but a lamp to be lit" (Hebrew); "Honour the old, teach the young" (Norwegian); "Teaching is sacred" (Turkish); and "Teachers and trees shine with their products" (Ukrainian). Similarly, famous thinkers from various cultures have given us memorable statements about the role and value of teachers:

"The new generation will be the teachers."
— Atatürk, founder of the Turkish Republic;

"A teacher who is attempting to teach without inspiring the pupil with a desire to learn is hammering on cold iron." — Horace Mann, American education reformer;

"An understanding heart is everything in a teacher, and cannot be esteemed highly enough."
— Carl Jung, Swiss psychiatrist and psychotherapist;

"A teacher who can arouse a feeling for one single good action, for one single good poem, accomplishes more than he who fills our memory with rows and rows of natural objects, classified with name and form." — Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, German writer and statesman;

"We should not teach children the sciences but give them a taste for them." — Jean

Jacques Rousseau, Genevan philosopher, writer, and composer;

"The teacher who is indeed wise does not bid you to enter the house of wisdom but rather leads you to the threshold of your mind." — Kahlil Gibran, Lebanese poet and writer;

"I will be the slave of the person who teaches me one single letter." — Ali, cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam;

"Those who educate children well are more to be honoured than they who produce them; for these only gave them life, those the art of living well." — Aristotle, Greek philosopher and scientist.

Following the above overview, the purpose of the present study is two-fold: First, to extend knowledge of attitudes toward the teaching profession by asking first year undergraduate students what primarily motivated them to choose teaching as a career. Second, to explore what they most closely associate with teachers and the

teaching profession in terms of proverbs, quotations, sayings or clichés frequently cited in the Turkish culture. The goal is to see if particular phrases common in Turkey, such as Atatürk's comment or other sayings, are still popular among young people. It is believed that investigating the perceptions of undergraduate students in this way will contribute to the understanding of the values and characteristics that are widely connected with the role of teaching as a career in Turkey. Such a study will contribute to enriching the self-definition of teachers and the teaching career, and their significance in education and in society.

METHODOLOGY

A non-experimental survey research design involving a combination of qualitative and quantitative data was used to ask undergraduate students about their motivations for choosing teaching as a career and their perceptions of the teaching profession. Demographic questions such as age, gender and two open-ended questions were used to obtain authentic and spontaneously expressed responses: (a) What is your primary motivation for choosing teaching as a career? (b) What is the first phrase(s) (in terms of a proverb, a quotation, a saying or a cliché) about teachers and/or teaching that come to your mind?

Sample

The present research was conducted in Istanbul in the fall of 2013 in the faculty of education of a state university, which accepts students each year from the countrywide university entrance exam administered by the state. Therefore, it is believed they provide a good representation of Turkey's student population. Data was collected by convenience sampling from 315 first year undergraduate students (216 females, 99 males) aged between 18 and 19.

Procedure

Official permission to conduct the research was obtained from the university. The researcher administered the questionnaires in the classes personally. All participants were informed about the purpose, confidentiality, and voluntary nature of the study. They were reminded that it was part of a scientific study, and that their honesty in answering the questions would make a substantial contribution to the research.

Data Analysis

Content analysis of participants' written responses to both questions (primary motivation for choosing teaching as a career, and the first proverb, quotation, saying or cliché about teaching that comes to their mind) was conducted using the inductive technique of open coding (Strauss and Corbin 2008). This method, widely used in the social sciences, emphasizes the construction of meaning, and it consists of screening a document and counting the frequency of occurrence of words or concepts, which can then be grouped according to similarity in meaning. The "process involves the simultaneous coding of raw data and the construction of categories that capture relevant characteristics of the document's content" (Merriam 1998: 160). For the first question, statements were assembled under nine main categories; for the second question, coding yielded seven categories. To ensure reliability of the coding, two of the researcher's colleagues reviewed the data independently and constructed their own sets of categorizations. Comparing all the categorizations determined that 92 percent of the categories were identical; revisions were made to address areas of inconsistency, and the category definitions were specified in such a way as to maximize mutual exclusivity. After the categories were determined, the Statistical Package for Social Sciences 12.1 for Windows (SPSS) was used to analyse the data.

RESULTS

Undergraduates' Motivations for Choosing Teaching as a Career

The statements that expressed freshmen's motivations for choosing teaching as a career were categorized under nine general headings (Table 1). In the order of frequency, the most prevalent motivations were (1) having a worth-

while job and/or career; (2) earning a stable salary; (3) helping children and touching their lives; (4) experiencing personal satisfaction and improvement; (5) finding a job immediately; (6) getting a good education; (7) working in a positive climate; (9) no expectations or motivations from the chosen career; and various (distinctive, unusual answers such as learning a foreign language, chance for social activities, and working for the government, which did not fit well into any category).

Table 1: Categories of undergraduates' motivations and their frequency and percentage

<i>Categories</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
A worthwhile job/career	67	21.2
A stable salary	51	16.2
Help children/touch their lives	49	15.5
Personal satisfaction and improvement	39	12.3
Find a job immediately	32	10.1
Get a good education	18	5.7
Positive work climate	17	5.4
No motivations or expectations	10	3.0
Various (learning a foreign language, chance for social activities, working for the government)	32	10.6

Note: *N* = 315.

Undergraduates' Perceptions of the Teaching Profession

Freshmen students were asked the first phrase in terms of a proverb, a quotation, a saying or a cliché about teachers and/or the teaching profession that came to their minds. The phrases that were commonly used in Turkish society to refer to teachers and/or the teaching profession were arranged into seven different categories (Table 2). In the order of frequency, they were: 1) teaching is ideal for women (a cli-

Table 2: Frequency and percentage of the undergraduates' perceptions of the teaching profession

<i>Phrases</i>	<i>IW</i>	<i>CP</i>	<i>SP</i>	<i>LS</i>	<i>NG</i>	<i>SPT</i>	<i>BT</i>
<i>Frequency</i>	28389.9	17455.2	172	170	14847.0	91 28.9	48 15.2
<i>Percentage</i>			54.6	54.0			

Note. *N* = 315. IW = "Teaching is ideal for women"; CP = "Teaching is a comfortable profession"; SP = "Teaching is a sacred profession"; LS = "Teaching has a low salary"; NG = "The new generation will be teachers"; SPT = "I will be the slave of the person who teaches me one single letter"; BT = "If you cannot become anything else, you can always become a teacher."

ché); 2) teaching is a comfortable profession (a cliché); 3) teaching is a sacred profession (saying); 4) teaching has a low salary (a cliché); 5) the new generation will be teachers' generation (a quotation); 6) I will be the slave of the person who teaches me one single letter (a quotation); 7) if you cannot become anything else, you can always become a teacher (a cliché).

DISCUSSION

Motivations for Choosing Teaching as a Career

A detailed examination of the categories in the first question indicates that altruistic motivations (a worthwhile job or career, helping children and touching their lives) are indeed prominent, reported by 36.7 percent of respondents. However, extrinsic motivations reported by 31.7 percent (stable salary, immediate job, positive work climate) were almost as frequently cited as the altruistic ones. Intrinsic motivations reported by 18 percent (personal satisfaction and improvement, getting a good education) appear less often.

The finding that altruistic reasons are the most powerful motivators for teaching is not surprising. As noted earlier, it is similar to the findings of most studies in other countries about future teachers' reasons for choosing the teaching profession, and Turkey seems no different. Having a worthwhile job or career, a desire to work with children and to make a difference in their lives, helping children and touching their lives are some of the examples of altruistic reasons in this study. Along the same line, in another study with Turkish pre-service teachers, Akar (2012: 76) reported, "the highest rated motivation for choosing teaching was the 'social utility value' of the teaching profession (that is, making a social contribution, shaping the future of children/adolescents, enhancing social equity)". White (2015: 32) reported that although teaching is a thankless and exhausting job, stirring up a love of learning in the hearts and minds of students, motivating them to set goals and reaching them, enabling them to feel the "exhilaration of success" are the factors that make teaching an attractive job. Similarly, according to the 2005 report of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the most frequently expressed reasons for choosing teaching as a career in France, Australia, Belgium, Can-

ada, the Netherlands, the Slovak Republic, and the U.K. were a desire to work with children and adolescents, the potential for intellectual fulfillment, and a desire to make a social contribution (OECD 2005).

Extrinsic reasons such as a stable salary, finding a job immediately, a positive work climate, and a good future are the next most frequently cited motivators in this study. A stable salary being the second motivator in choosing the teaching profession is indeed surprising because teaching is known to be a low-paid profession (as found as one of the most cited phrases for the second question of this study) and not providing ample wages. Most teaching candidates apply for jobs in public schools, where they work as civil servants. In Turkey according to law, civil service jobs are permanent; teachers cannot be dismissed from their jobs. Therefore, as soon as a teacher finds a job in a state school, it means having a guaranteed job. Regarding 'finding a job immediately', the participants apparently are aware of the shortage of teachers across the country and that it will not be difficult for them to find a position in a school. According to the declaration of Ministry of Education in 2014, more than 417,000 teachers have been appointed in different parts of Turkey for various branches in the last 10 years (Ogretmen Atamaları 2014). Further, every year 10,000 teachers retire and the ministry opens 30,000 posts for new teachers. These posts are comprised of a wide range of branches such as special education, Turkish, math, counselling, physical education, preschool, social sciences, biology, geography, English, Arabic, visual arts, handcrafts, music, science, etc. This finding is supported by Aksu et al. (2010) who found that one of the reasons for their participants to choose teaching was the opportunity to find a job easily. Similarly, Hammond (2002) indicated that a cohort of 15 trainee teachers, who took a post-graduate certificate course in education at the University of Warwick, though stating that they were not motivated by material rewards, expressed a desire for a comfortable salary and career progression. Aycan and Fikret-Pasa (2003: 19) claimed that in Turkish society "having power and authority, peaceful work environment, opportunity for career advancement, and pay were the most motivating factors in job selection". Boz and Boz (2008) examined why 38 prospective mathematics and chemistry teachers chose that profession and found that both

intrinsic and extrinsic reasons affected prospective teachers' preferences. A positive work climate is well explained by Johnson et al. (2012) who claim that working conditions such as clean and well-maintained facilities or access to modern instructional technology are not as important for teachers as the social conditions such as the school's culture, the principal's leadership, and relationships among colleagues.

One study shows a particular similarity with this study having found altruistic and extrinsic factors as primary reasons for choosing the teaching profession. The first one is by Mooij (2008: 512-513) with 20 teachers in south India, which reported that moulding children into good citizens, or "carving the future of the country" was one of the primary motivations among the participants. In the same study it is also reported that this motivation is prominent among young teachers because "they have to earn their livelihood and it is a government job providing job security. Some of them said that they had no other option and therefore became teachers".

According to the participants of this study, personal satisfaction and improvement, and getting a good education are also powerful motivators to become a teacher. This may be due to the fact that the universities these participants study in are among the finest universities in Turkey. They know that within whatever program they get the chance to study, including teaching, they will have a good education and achieve personal improvement. This view seems popular among teacher candidates in other countries as well. In a study in Malawi with secondary teachers (Mtika and Gates 2011: 430), for instance, the teaching profession was identified as an intrinsic source of knowledge and inquiry. The trainee teachers commented on the intellectual nature of their day-to-day work. The wide reading teachers have to do as their daily work is "regarded as a way of enhancing the development of critical and analytical thinking among teachers". Along the same line, in a study in Australia among the several motivations that pre-service teachers have, Sinclair et al. (2006) mention love of learning or love of a particular area, which they believe makes teaching an intellectually stimulating occupation and a good opportunity for career advancement. With 237 second-year education faculty students in Slovenia-Krecic and Grmek (2005) found that students' leading reasons for becoming a teacher were that teaching

provides a useful public function for the whole society, that teachers can be an example to children and young people as well as teaching provides opportunities for professional development during one's whole career; and it will enable them to use all their abilities and talents.

Another interesting finding in the present study is the 3 percent of respondents who said that they had no motivation for or expectations from their chosen career. Although it is a very small percentage, the result still has a value reflecting the situation students are in while choosing a career. It suggests that some students are seeking simply to get a diploma of some sort, or that perhaps they may have a family business where a diploma of a specialized area is not needed; therefore they have no expectations from the teaching career. It may also be said that they have not been successful enough to enter the program they had in mind and had to choose a program their university entrance scores permitted them to. Sarikaya and Khorshid (2009) found similar results: 34.4 percent of their sample chose their profession at least partly out of hopelessness and helplessness after their scores on the Turkish university entrance exam were too low for them to pursue other options. Candidates taking this national exam can list up to 20 professions of interest, beginning with their top choice. If their score is not high enough, they may not be admitted into their preferred areas of study, which may result in a sense of hopelessness as they wonder how to cope with the situation. Some of these students do not enrol in the areas offered to them, but instead wait another year and take the exam again. According to 2013 statistics, 400,000 out of 856,000 students took the national university entrance exam a second time because they did not like the professions into which they were admitted the first time (Ozay 2013). This result suggests that some people spend their career lives unwillingly and with no motivation for their jobs because of the wrong choices they have made.

Perceptions of the Teaching Profession

The answers to the second question show that "Teaching is ideal for women" is the most widely known or remembered quotation, recognized by 89.9 percent of respondents. "Teaching is a comfortable profession," "Teaching is a sacred profession," and "Teaching has a low sala-

ry” were mentioned by more than half of the participants, and “The new generation will be teachers” by nearly half of the participants. On the whole, it is possible to say that students have internalized the cultural values and beliefs of the society about teachers and teaching because the phrases they cited were old and known; some going way back to the sixth century (Ali’s quotation: “I will be the slave of the person who teaches me one single letter”). This suggests that beliefs or understandings about teachers and/or teaching have not changed over years and new ones have not yet shaped in the society in the modern times.

“Teaching is best suited for women.” Regarding perceptions of the teaching profession as being best suited for women, the study found that 89.9 percent of all the undergraduates think “teaching is ideal for women.” This is neither a proverb nor a quotation belonging to a respected person but just a cliché repeated in the very same words over the years. However, it surely reflects a common belief about clear-cut gender roles embedded in the Turkish culture connected to choosing a career. It is a striking result; since nearly 32 percent of the sample is male meaning that male respondents too believe that teaching is a woman’s job. Teaching is considered suitable for women because it has fewer working hours than most other jobs, and because women can work while their children are in school, therefore not neglecting their homes, children, and husbands. A woman’s place is still widely perceived to be her home, and her main duty is to look after her husband and children; therefore working outside her home is contrary to her primary duties (Kuzgun and Sevim 2004). Moreover, Turkish husbands who hold traditional views also tend to view schools as safe and respectable places of employment for women, especially since most of the other teachers are also women. OECD statistics for 2011 indicated that the top reason why women in OECD countries were not in the labour force was that they were busy with housework (TurkSat 2012). According to the same source, working women usually held jobs with lower wages than men and with limited opportunities for promotion, and that were compatible with housewifery.

Although no significant difference has been found between the attitudes towards the teaching profession of male and female teacher candidates (Shahehen 2015), there seems to be a gen-

eral consensus in many parts of the world that certain occupations are differently suited for either men and women, and that teaching, especially at the primary level, is highly suited for women. This global phenomenon is called the feminization of the teaching profession, and working with young children is often associated with nurturing and care; therefore, especially in the younger grades, it is connected to a mother’s role. When Richardson and Watt (2006: 50) profiled the background characteristics and teaching motivations of individuals entering teacher education at three universities in Australia, they found that far greater numbers of females than males enrol in teacher education, especially at the early childhood level, but up through the secondary level as well. Drudy (2008: 312) suggests similar reasons for the feminization of the teaching profession, especially at the primary school level: (a) men are attracted to other careers; (b) primary teaching is perceived as “unattractive—as boring, hassle causing, stressful or requiring too much patience”, and (c) it is low-paid. Women are more likely to engage in caring and counselling work with their students than men, and they are seen as nurturing figures within educational settings. Some researchers (Yapici and Zengin 2003; Yilmaz 2009) have explained this attraction of females to the teaching profession by claiming that females are more attached to the value of community and to their students’ intellectual and social development. They invest more time and energy in their teaching than their male colleagues and derive more satisfaction from it. Similarly, Johnson et al. (1999) reported that female trainees in their study claimed more frequently to be motivated by the perceived intrinsic aspects of primary teaching. In the researcher’s experience, many female teachers say that they are happy to have chosen this profession because they are not torn between their jobs and finding time for their families.

Again, despite the general consensus, there are some exceptions due to social and cultural factors. It is reported that in the Liberian education system, for instance, there is a lack of female teachers in schools (Stromquist et al. 2013: 523). They argue that this problem stems from the fact that Liberian teaching positions provide substantial benefits, such as job security and pensions, and therefore attract males in large numbers, making it difficult for women to gain admission

to teacher training programs. Moreover, the possibility of being assigned to rural areas poses an obstacle for female teaching candidates due to “the likely reluctance of husbands or male partners to move”. Arguments are also made for greater male teacher involvement in early childhood education classrooms based on the assumption that male teachers may bring something unique to classroom teaching (Bullough 2015).

“*Teaching is a comfortable job.*” The second most frequently cited (55.2%) saying about the perceptions of the teaching profession is that “teaching is a comfortable job.” The word “comfortable” is interpreted in this study as meaning free of stress, or at least less stressful than other professions, most probably due to its long holidays, ample family time, perceived job security mentioned above, and free time during the day. This view finds support from other studies. For instance, a study of 157 teacher candidates in Turkey found that most of them chose teaching because of the long holidays and comfortable working conditions (Cermik et al. 2010). Similarly, in their study of the motivations of students from Mainland China enrolled in teacher education programs in Hong Kong, Gao and Trent (2009) found that students considered teaching to be a pleasant profession, lacking the complexities involved in other lines of work. In Australia, Richardson and Watt (2005) identified the opportunity to enjoy family time as a prominent factor in students’ decisions to pursue teaching. A study in Taiwan found that teaching was perceived as “less stressful than most business and industry jobs,” and respondents indicated that “life in a school environment is simpler and less complicated than most business and industry jobs”; some of them viewed teaching as a good backup career (Wang 2004: 120-122).

An overview of the literature, however, shows that conflicting views exist as to whether teaching is a “comfortable” job. Teachers often expend considerable physical and emotional energy in order to do their jobs well, resulting in higher levels of stress than are observed in many other professions (Troman and Woods 2000). Uninterested or indifferent students, crowded classrooms, discipline problems, frequent evaluations, lack of administrative support, temporary and short-term contracts, and time pressures are among the main sources of teacher stress. In assessing teacher stress, self-efficacy, social support, and psychological distress among Chi-

nese prospective teachers in Hong Kong, Chan (2002) found that teachers reported higher levels of symptoms in somatic problems followed by anxiety and dysphoria. Along the same line, as noted earlier Kiziltepe (2007) found high levels of stress among 152 schoolteachers working in Istanbul due to their workload, inadequate salaries, and students’ work ethic. There are other studies that report that teaching is a stressful career (Foley and Murphy 2015; Hassan et al. 2015).

“*Teaching is a sacred profession.*” The third most frequently cited (54.6%) proverb about the perceptions of the teaching profession was that “teaching is a sacred profession.” In religious circles in Turkey, teaching is considered a spiritual or sacred process, because all prophets are viewed as teachers who have carried out a type of adult education in their communities. This perception of teaching is consistent with that reported by Hansen (1994), who was one of the first to indicate that many teachers consider their work to be more a vocation than simply a job—something to which they are “called,” often in a religious sense. This notion of calling is frequently referenced by those who adopt an intrinsic commitment to serving others or the greater good (Elias 2003). Biggam and Smith (2008) reported frequent comments by participating teachers that teaching requires more of a spiritual foundation than most other jobs; they concluded that the phenomenon of “calling” is strong in the teaching field and leads to altruistic performance of professional duties. Wadsworth (2001: 26) indicated that most young teachers claim to be motivated by their experience of a calling and “are highly motivated professionals who bring a strong sense of commitment and morale to their work”. Duffy (2006) stated that people who believe they are called to their careers are more likely to work in settings that emphasize social interaction; the sense of calling strengthens their internal motivation and gives meaning to their career. Mahmoud (2015) reports that teaching and learning in schools as a sacred life journey.

Some researchers have emphasized that teachers do not simply teach but also influence their students personally, through their mature personalities and by communicating to their students their views on the world and on life (Cenic and Cagran 2002). Teachers must care for a diverse body of students who often need aca-

demic and emotional support, which reinforces the sense of sacredness in the teaching profession. Among other components, care can be perceived as a central purpose in teaching: "If vocation is an answer to the question of why a teacher wants to teach, caring seems to answer the question of how to teach with vocation. It has been said that caring consists of the ethics of relations, which is manifested in various aspects of teaching" (Estola et al. 2003: 249-250). The act of caring needs commitment, a warm and loving attitude, and good intentions, which can be considered by some people to be 'sacred'.

"Teaching is a relatively low-paid profession." The fourth most frequently cited (54%) phrase is considered a cliché, which states that teaching is associated with low salaries. It is interesting to see half of the participants perceiving teaching as a low-paid profession and still choosing it as a career. This may be interpreted in two ways: First, people who are in the field for the money go elsewhere or choose other professions. Second, it reminds us of cognitive dissonance theory initially proposed by Festinger (1957), which was one of the first cognitively oriented explanations of motivation. It posits that a state of tension arises whenever an individual simultaneously holds two psychologically inconsistent ideas attitudes, beliefs, or opinions (in this case a low-paid job and still choosing it as a career). Holding two simultaneously inconsistent ideas is perceived as unpleasant and, therefore, motivates the individual to take action to reduce the negative feelings. In this case, relatively low pay has a counterintuitive impact—it results in the teacher candidates feeling more dedicated towards teaching.

Studies in literature indicate that low pay is one of the major problems facing the teaching profession in Turkey as well as in other countries. For instance, in Turkey Kiziltepe (2007: 135) observed that "to make a sustainable living and to supplement their incomes, teachers are increasingly obliged to take on additional employment. They work, for example, as waiters/waitresses, street-peddlers, sales people in open bazaars, and even as pianist chanters in restaurants". Financial conditions may have changed since this study in 2007 especially for the teachers working in private schools because now private schools offer reasonable salaries to their teachers. However, conditions are still the same for the ones working in state schools. In England,

Kyriacou and Kunc (2007) found similar results: although the salary for beginning teachers is generally quite good, the pay for teachers with several years of experience lags behind that in other professional fields. Richardson and Watt (2005) indicated that low salaries are one of the factors that make teaching a less preferred profession in Australia; and a similar situation was reported to exist in Afghanistan (Khawary and Ali 2015).

"The new generation will be teachers." The fifth most frequently cited (47%) phrase is a quotation from Atatürk (1881–1938), which is apparently still remembered and cited by young people. Atatürk - as noted above - put special emphasis on teaching and on teacher education, taking every opportunity to motivate and inspire the nation's teachers. Under his leadership and with the introduction of new social and political understandings in Turkey, teacher education became as important as creating a new nation (Terzi and Tezci 2007) because he always considered new generations as the masterpieces of teachers. After the War of Independence (1919-1922), Atatürk made a famous speech (called 'The Speech'), in which he said that he and his friends saved the nation from enemies; however, from then on it would be the teachers' duty to save the nation by building the next generations with their devotion, loyalty and hard work. Atatürk's note is written in history and teacher education books, in turn helping the teaching profession to gain an honourable or even a sacred status in Turkish society. It seems that leaders after Atatürk have not contributed much to the understanding of the teaching profession for young people to remember. This finding finds support from a study in Nigeria, which found that the primary reasons for choosing teaching as a career were the possibility of shaping the future of children (Korb 2010). Similarly, Canbulat and Canbulat (2015) claim that teachers are the mirrors of future generations.

"I will be the slave of the person who teaches me one single letter." As indicated earlier, this sixth frequently cited phrase is a quotation (28.9%), which comes from Ali, cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad, the prophet of Islam. Although it originates from Arabia, through the spread of Islam it has gained a prominent place in Turkish thinking. It emphasizes the importance of teaching and teachers. The quotation is frequently repeated by politicians and statesmen,

especially on Teachers' Day, which is celebrated on 24 November every year. It is also repeated in articles, which extol the virtues of the teaching profession (Alemdar 2014). It places value on the dedication of teachers who face hardships and difficulties while dealing with children each school day. It also invites people to show respect and attention to teachers. This quotation certainly elevates the teaching profession, which in turn encourages young people to choose teaching as a career.

"If you cannot become anything else, you can always become a teacher." This seventh and least frequently cited phrase (15.2%) is a saying which reflects the belief that teaching is a fall-back career, or a last resort if one does not have the opportunity to pursue another profession. It is usually heard from parents in Turkey to give their children hope and motivation after they receive their results of the university entrance exam. If the scores their children have received are low, they believe that there is always a chance to be a teacher. However, as noted earlier the entrance scores of the teaching programs are not low, and teaching has become an attractive career among young people. Similar to the results of this study, this motivation was rated very low in Australia by pre-service teacher education candidates in the fall-back career sub-scale Watt and Richardson (2007: 197) developed. They concluded, "Teaching is by and large a career of choice and not something that people fall back on when their other choices are not realized". Topkaya and Uztosun (2012) similarly found that choosing teaching as a fall-back career was the lowest-rated motivation in their sample of 207 pre-service teachers at a state university in Turkey. They commented that this finding contradicts the general public opinion that teaching is a poor career choice. Heinz (2015) also comments on the teaching profession rated by some as a fall-back career.

CONCLUSION

Personal reasons for choosing a career and preconceptions of that profession have a significant role in shaping future identities and roles. The most important implication of this study is that with a large sample coming from different regions of Turkey, it provides insights into the leading motivators of students who have chosen teaching as a career. Second, it draws atten-

tion to variations in the perception of the teaching profession through cultural values, which play an important role for young people in constructing their future. These values include the feminization of the teaching profession, its conditions as a profession, and the sacredness with which this vocation is viewed. Understanding these leading motivators can help us (teacher educators and curriculum planners) to grasp more clearly how public perceptions affect teachers' and prospective teachers' attitudes, and thereby to make teacher training programs more effective.

RECOMMENDATIONS

First, the questionnaire was administered at only one point in time. It is reasonable to suppose that attitudes toward one's career choice might change during a student's program, and this possibility (along with reasons for any changes) would be worth investigating. In addition, in this study the questions were assembled into one group and not segregated by location. To get a better picture it would be interesting to investigate with a much larger sample whether differences exist between the motivations and perceptions of undergraduate students studying in the different regions in Turkey.

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