

## Chapter 7

### THE INFLUENCES AND MOTIVATIONS FOR BECOMING PRESCHOOL TEACHER: TURKISH CASE

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#### ABSTRACT

Teacher candidates' motives for becoming a preschool teacher are very crucial for their success and satisfaction in their career. Acceptance and recruitment policies of the teacher candidates to the preschool teacher education program are current topics in Turkey for the improvement studies of the education system. This study aims to identify the factors influencing teacher candidates' career choices and to reveal if their perceptions change after entering the program. Data was gathered through semi-structured questionnaire and analyzed descriptively by content analyses. Participants were preschool teacher candidates from different education faculties attended the Preschool Teacher Education Student Congress (PTESC, 2014) hosted by Baskent University, Ankara. Finding a permanent job, having additional scores at the entrance, considering it as a female suited profession and interest in children care were some of the main motives declared by the teacher candidates.

*Keywords:* preschool teacher candidates, teacher education, motives for choosing a career, external and internal influences.

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

Choosing a career is one of the important decisions to be made in our circle of life. This kind of a decision needs a specific maturity level since it affects whom and how we will live with, which values and ideals we will share (Özyürek & Kılıç-Atıcı, 2002; Çermik, Doğan & Şahin, 2010; Hamamcı, Bacalı, & Doğa, 2013). While planning the qualified human resources, authorities pay great effort to help the individuals decide accurately about their career and develop positive attitudes towards their professions (Bozdoğan, Aydın, & Yıldırım, 2007; Tekmen, 2012). Like the other professions, initial or entry motivation to become a teacher is, however, just the first step in becoming a teacher. Once a teacher candidate enters an initial teacher education program, what sustains or enhances that motivation plays an important role in their success. Further, what sustains or enhances commitment to teaching in terms of the value placed on teaching as a profession and intended retention in that profession is also significant to investigate to improve the teaching (Darling-Hammond, Chung, & Frelow, 2002; Tekmen, 2012).

In Turkey, career choices are made generally according to the university entrance exam results and mostly unintentionally. Therefore, the young adult feels conflict between his or her choice and parents' expectations from them. They not only have to decide on their future profession at an early age, but also have to get a score that will allow them to begin their training for it, if the profession requires a higher education degree, which mostly does. Because of the high demand to the best paid and prestigious jobs, it requires so much effort to get the expected scores in these nationwide exams. The two important phases of preschool teacher education system in Turkey are the acceptance of the candidates and the

recruitment policy of the graduates, which have a great effect on the motives of the preschool teacher candidates (Tekmen, 2012).

It is the teachers, as the leaders of educational transformation, who will primarily enable preschool education to be perceived as an indispensable requirement and the quality of preschool education depends mostly on the teachers and the training received by them (Kavak, 2010). The expectations from the preschool teachers are high due to the importance of the early years of human life. In the recent decade, preschool education and preschool teacher education has gained both political and public priority that result in the increase demand for the preschool education and preschool teacher profession.

### **1.1. Acceptance to the preschool teacher education program**

After graduating from secondary education, students take a central and nationwide entrance exam to have a score to be used to be placed in a higher education program at a university. They can make up to thirty choices from top to down as a ranking list according to their score and major at their high school graduation. At the placement of the candidates, their entrance exam score and major at the high school graduation are the two important variables. In addition to that, in order to support to continue ones high school major, some additional scores are given if the candidate prefers to follow the same major in the higher education. For example, if the graduate of a vocational teacher high school prefers to enter to faculty of education, some additional scores are added to the entrance exam results. This affects the vocational high school and vocational teacher high school graduates preferences of the preschool education programs specifically. The additional score policy mainly aims the continuity in education and to balance the scores between different types of high schools graduates. Vocational teaching high schools (besides the general culture and fundamental science courses, some educational courses are included in the program), vocational high school for girls (there are general culture courses, child development and education courses in the program, but the fundamental science courses are limited).

### **1.2. Preschool teacher education program**

Preschool teacher education in Turkey can be defined as four-year bachelor's degree program in the elementary education departments of the education faculties that gives preschool teacher diploma upon graduation. Preschool teacher education programs in Turkey are reformed in 1998 by Higher Education Council. The courses include general culture, content knowledge and educational knowledge. Beside the theoretical courses, there are practicum courses in the last year of the program. In order to be able to graduate from the program, required total credit score must be taken and teaching practice course must be successfully completed. The students graduating from preschool teacher training programs are qualified as preschool teachers without any other graduating exam.

### **1.3. Recruitment of the preschool teachers**

After graduating as preschool teachers, there are mainly two ways to continue to the profession, either under private schools or government schools. In this case, there is still a huge demand to the preschool teachers so that it is relatively easier to get a permanent position in a government school than other teacher professions, because the recruitment system works with the obtained base score taken from the Civil Servant Selection Exam. If the demand is high, the needed base score to be recruited to the civil positions is easier than the areas of other education fields.

## 2. BACKGROUND

In the relevant literature, there is a solid background on the qualities of being a good teacher, however “what and how” of becoming a good teacher is a rather vague issue. Defining the professional maturity is the first step (Bacanlı, 2008), such as, to be consistent about the level and qualifications of the field, to be realistic about one’s abilities, interests, personal characteristics and the social class. In addition, skills such as problem solving, making future career plans and search for appropriate professional pathways are also other indicators of reaching professional maturity. However, there is research (Bacanlı, 2008; Çakır, 2003; Germeijs, Verschueren, & Soenens, 2006; Hamamcı et al., 2013) indicating that most of the young adults have irrational decisions on career planning. They do not have enough knowledge about the career opportunities and requirements, so that they have difficulties in making decisions about their future jobs and are more prone to their parents’ or friends’ influences. On the other hand, there is also research (Bastick, 2000; Boz & Boz, 2008; Kniveton, 2004; Kyriacou & Coulthard, 2000; Saban, 2003) advocating that choosing a career can be evaluated under three categories namely, social utility including desire to serve the public and the country, intrinsic values such as humanity, interest in human relationships and development, and extrinsic values such as occupation assurance, social security and working conditions. In addition, it is believed that the socio cultural and economic status is also influential in career choice. Perceiving teaching as a profession “suitable for females” is also a factor supported by research in different cultures (Foster & Newman, 2005; Saban, 2003). Another point stated in the research is in developed countries, mainly altruist and intrinsic values, in non-developed or developing countries extrinsic values are affective in choosing career (Bastick, 2000).

In addition to the above mentioned factors, teacher selection policy decided by the governments is also one of the critical factors on career choice in Turkey. For instance, university placement system requires both academic success and ranking preference. Therefore career choice is also affected by the system itself whereas the education policy of a system influences the individuals’ career choices directly or indirectly (Tekmen, 2012). Giving additional points to encourage the students follow their high school majors in the higher education or the recruitment policy of the graduates, which was mentioned in the introduction part of this chapter, are other influential factors on making career choices.

With regard to teaching and teacher education, motivations may, therefore, determine what attracts individuals to teaching, to the extent they engage with their courses, whether they complete their education programs and continue their occupation.

## 3. METHOD

In order to decide on the sampling strategy, first thing considered by the researcher was to find the “information rich” data sources for the purpose of the study and to reach the ones “who knows more about the subject” (Patton, 2002). In this respect, both purposive and convenience sampling were taken into consideration. Consistent with the purpose of the research, preschool teacher education program students of the education faculty were taken as the data source for the research.

Participants were 107 teacher candidates from 18 different universities attending the preschool teacher education program who attended 9<sup>th</sup> Preschool Education Student Congress hosted by Baskent University. During the data collection, aims of the study were reminded, and participants’ consent was taken. Furthermore, before the data collection process, the participants were ensured that the information they provide would be kept

confidential and their identities would not be revealed by any means of the study as well as in the possible future publications.

When building a framework for the questionnaire, the literature on the preschool teacher education and the research questions of the study guided the questions development process. Open ended questions included in the questionnaire were as follows:

*What was your ranking of the program in the list required for national university entrance exam?*

*What / who affected your ranking mostly?*

*What are the reasons behind your ranking?*

*Are you satisfied with your selection and why or why not?*

*Are the reasons behind your selection have changed after entering the program?*

*Can you consider teaching as a satisfying career? Why or why not?*

*Can you describe the requirements of being a preschool teacher in your own words?*

Before the implementation of the data collection, an intensive pilot study was carried out, which aimed to ensure if the questions are directly addressing the research questions of the study, and to sustain the clarity of each question and probes. A descriptive content analysis was conducted to classify the responses and construct the subthemes of the results. Internal validity is sustained firstly through ‘member checks’, by sharing the coding patterns and going over the data by some peers as well as by some experts in the field to consult whether the data is perceived in similar way in the eyes of the researcher and other parties (Creswell, 2012, p.196).

#### 4. RESULTS

The majority of the participants were females (81) only whom 26 of them were males, and they had graduated from a wide variety of high schools all over the country. Three types of them were Vocational Teaching High-Schools, Vocational High-Schools for Girls and Anatolian Vocational High-Schools. Vocational school graduates were the majority (76).

*Table 1. High school type.*

High school	Male	Female	Total
Vocational Teaching High-Schools	10	17	27
Vocational High-Schools for Girls	-	26	26
Anatolian Vocational High-Schools	5	18	23
Other High schools	11	20	31
Total	26	81	107

In addition, their ranking order of the program preferences also varies. According to the responses, four categories for the ranking order are, first three, last three and others including the ranking other than these two categories. Among the 107 participants, 35 of them responded that they put the preschool teacher education program at the top of their ranking during the program selection at the university entrance (higher education candidates can select 30 programs they want in this required list). 19 of the participants gave the answer that they listed this program as their top three choices while 11 participants indicated that this program was their last three choices in the ranking list (rest of them put this choice in the middle ranking of the list).

Table 2. Ranking order.

Ranking	Male	Female	Total
First three	2	17	19
Last Three	6	5	11
In between	18	59	77
Total	26	81	107

#### 4.1. Reasons behind the ranking

Data showed that there are different reasons affecting the career choices of the teacher candidates. The most popular answer given to this theme was to take care of children and support their development (33), feeling suitable for the profession and perceiving themselves as easy to communicate with little children (21). The convenience of finding a permanent position as a teacher in the government schools and “employment assurance” (30) were the other most frequent answers given for the motives behind their preferences (Table 3).

Table 3. Reasons behind the ranking.

Reasons	N
To take care of children and support their development	33
Convenience of finding a permanent position	30
Feeling suitable for the profession	21

Other reasons were related with the comfort of the working environment, loving to take care of little children, believing the significance of this profession. Some of the interesting answers are given below:

- “I believe I can do this job”*
- “to be comfortable in the future years”*
- “less working hours”*
- “want to catch the education at the very beginning”*
- “having more holiday time”*
- “being the first teacher in children’s life”*

Some types of Vocational High Schools encourage their graduates to continue in related Higher Education Programs by giving additional points in the university entrance exam. Having additional score which serves as an advantage to enter the preschool teacher program because of the high school they graduated from.

- “getting additional score”*
- “being a vocational high school graduate”*
- “my major at the high school was same”*

On the other hand, those who mentioned that they were influenced by someone or something when choosing the program indicated their “parents” as the most influential (24) source for their choices. As it was mentioned in the background part, parents had big influence on the young adults’ career choice in many cultures. As it is indicated in the answers of the participants, parents consider teaching as a decent job and guide their children to be teachers, especially they encourage their daughters to become preschool or primary school teachers.

Other than the mentioned answers categorized, there were other interesting answers such as:

*“a film I watched”*

*“my friends were planning to be a teacher too”*

*“I chose accidentally”*

When it comes to the recruitment of the education faculty graduates, it is considered as the responsibility of the government in Turkey, and because of the demand to the preschool teachers, teacher candidates fell comfortable about finding a permanent position. Participants' answers to that recruitment question supported the common perception. Their answers to the question where they thought they would work after graduation from the faculty were such as;

*“I want to work at government schools; I do not want to worry about unemployment”*

*“I want to be under the government roof, I do not believe they pay enough respect to the teachers at the private schools”*

However there were also idealist answers given to the same question:

*“I want to work for public, I want serve and reach to the rural areas that need more support”*

#### **4.2. Satisfaction of the teacher candidates with their selection**

This theme was the least answered one in the questionnaire. Only 68 of the participants among the 107 answered to this question and results were given in table 4 below.

*Table 4. Satisfaction with their selection and reasons for losing their motives.*

<i>Satisfaction</i>	<i>N</i>
Felt more positive about the profession	23
Changed their mind in a negative way	17
Satisfied with their selection	15
Have not decided yet	13
Total	68

Among those who replied the question, the majority of them described themselves as satisfied with their selection and felt positive about the education they were having (38). Participants who indicated that they had changed their mind and felt more positive about the profession mostly gave reasons about the positive change. Their understanding the significance of the field improved and felt more responsible for the future generations (23).

However, rest of the answers (17) indicated that they changed their idea in a negative way after entering the program. Some interesting quotations for this theme are given below:

*“not so prestigious”*

*“not as easy as it was to find a permanent position”*

*“I thought it was much easier to be a preschool teacher”*

*“there are lots of requirements and expectations from teachers”*

*“it is a hard work to be a good teacher”*

In addition, there were answers showing that they were not sure or haven't decided yet (13). Among the reasons they gave to change their mind, "low economic status of being a teacher" and "lack of respect to the preschool teachers" were the most common ones.

#### **4.3 Teaching as a career**

Participants' opinions about the teaching were mostly positive and indicated the significance of the profession. They explained that they were aware of the requirements and the expectations of the public from a preschool teacher. However, as one of the replies summarized their concern about their future career below; they were reluctant because of the low income status of it, although they agreed on the moral satisfaction part.

*"morally satisfying, but not have the prestigious status it deserves"*

### **5. DISCUSSION**

Today, with the transfer to the technology age, the improvements in science and technology, makes it inevitable for the individual to be qualified with so many kinds of requirements. For this reason, countries conduct studies for developing quality teacher training programs for preparing the well-educated and competent teachers. Developing a system to choose the right candidates for these programs should be one of the important issues. This study mainly aims to reveal variables that may be linked with preschool teacher candidates' career choices. To take care of children, to be responsible of their education and development, feeling suitable for the profession were the mostly desired reasons for a preschool teacher candidate to choose his or her career, but on the other hand the second mostly given motivation for choosing this profession was "convenience of finding a permanent position", which has nothing to do with the qualities of becoming a good preschool teacher.

Results imply that teacher candidates make their career choices according to their university entrance exam scores. In addition to that, intrinsic factors such as caring for children, belief about meeting the requirements of the profession, and extrinsic factors such as parents, friends, job stability, working conditions are found to be affective on their making career choices. In fact, teaching is a profession that has high public responsibility that should be chosen consciously and purposefully. In another research supporting this result, the perception of the academicians at the preschool teacher education programs of education faculties in Turkey were investigated and it was found that academicians in these programs do not believe in the accuracy of the selection policy of the teacher candidates (Tekmen, 2012). They did not believe the selection system was sufficient enough to reach the most appropriate candidates for the profession. They indicated the need for the additional exam to determine their skills and attitudes to the profession before accepting the candidates to the programs to train them.

Teacher education programs should help to prepare teachers to understand what it means to be a teacher, since students generally enter programs with an incomplete and unarticulated initial view of teaching (LePage, Nielsen, & Fearn, 2008). For this reason, educational system needs improvements to provide the candidates the opportunity to decide about their career more wisely and on a rational base. Moreover, teacher education programs should place more emphasis to the activities and practices that would increase the candidates' positive attitude towards the profession.

Another topic to be discussed about the results is the difference between number of the girls (81) and the boys (26) establishing the participants (107) of the study show that the program is preferred by the girls mostly and therefore, it is consistent with the belief that

this career is seen as a “female profession” in Turkey. Similar results were found in the study of Saban (2003), that the two third of the primary school teacher candidates were females who attended the program. In a research undertaken in Canada, the ratio of male primary school teachers to the female teachers was found to be lower than one to ten (Gosse, Parr, & Allison, 2008). This result is described in many of the related studies as, teaching is perceived as a “female profession” and preferred mostly by females and therefore the male candidates attending the teaching programs felt like they had entered a field that belong to females (Foster & Newman, 2005; Mulholland & Hansen, 2003; Tekmen, 2012). In addition to that, the term called for “preschool education center” in Turkish is “anaokulu”, which means “school of the mother” and that might be another cause for the perception that the profession is mostly suitable for females.

When it comes to the attitudes to becoming teacher in general, there is also a similar situation. In the research conducted by Özder, Konedrali, and Zeki, (2010), the attitudes of male and female teacher candidates were compared and found that there was a significant difference between their attitude scores towards the teacher profession. In the relevant literature, there are many examples supporting the same findings. The attitudes towards the teaching profession studies stated that females candidates had more positive attitude towards the profession than the male candidates (Çapri & Çelikkaleli, 2008; Güneyli & Aslan, 2009; Baykara-Pehlivan, 2004; Temizkan, 2008; Üstüner, Demirtaş, & Cömert, 2009).

On the other hand, teacher candidates participated to the current study are generally graduates of the child development programs of the vocational high schools which implies that the education system in Turkey, also has influence on the career choice of the students as mentioned in the introduction part of this chapter. However, in a research undertaken by Özsoy, Özsoy, Özkara, and Memiş (2010), the teacher candidates were graduates of, general high schools 41%, Anatolian high schools 22.6%, foreign language high schools 21.3% and only 11% of them were vocational high schools. This indicates that there might be variations according to the teacher education program, since the participants of the study were chosen from a different teacher training program other than preschool and primary teacher education programs.

In addition, the chance of entering other undergraduate programs without the additional score gained by choosing these teacher training programs is low for a child development high school graduate and therefore it becomes a motive to choose preschool teacher education program in higher education. The number of the participants (54) who ranked the preschool teacher education program at the top three of their university placement list makes us think that they chose the teaching career purposely but on the other hand, results also showed that they were graduates of vocational school which provides them additional scores at the university entrance exam. Similar results were also found in related research (Özsoy et al., 2010), and it implies that because of the requirements and the important status of the teaching profession, the choice of the candidates should be more conscious and intentional. Such professions as teaching require high responsibility and awareness, and most of all needs those who have the required qualifications for becoming a teacher. The educational system should be designed to provide the most suitable and capable candidates to the teacher education programs.

The reasons mentioned by the teacher candidates about their career choice are divergent, but most repeated reasons are willing to take care of children and the job security, which were indicated in the research carried out by Eskicumalı (2002). In his study “willing to take care of children” was also one of the frequent answers given by the teacher candidates (23%), following by “less working hours and long holiday season”

(37.1%). In the related literature there are other similar results supporting the findings of the current study (eg: Brown, 1992; Özder et al., 2010).

However, it should not be missed that there are some other interesting reasons given by the candidates namely; “ the movie I watched”, “we choose it as a group with my friends”, “accidentally” and “my score was fitting”. These quotations indicate that when making their career choices, not all the teenagers are conscious or rational about their choices. Moreover, they are not totally aware of all the career alternatives and leave the responsibility of choosing their future career to others such as friends, relatives or parents. Parents are one of the top influential factors according to the results of the study and followed by teachers and friends. These findings also support the findings of Kniveton (2004) and Hamamcı et al. (2013). In their study students were found to be mostly affected by parents, teachers and friends.

Another theme searched in the current study was, if the candidates were satisfied with their choices or not, and they were mostly consistent with their choices. Among the answers of the 107 teacher candidate participated in the study, 68 of them mentioned either they were satisfied with their choices or not decided yet which could be investigated for further research. This may lead us to think that they made their career choices willingly and informed. In Hamamcı et al.'s (2013) related study, university students were found to trust their decisions about their career choices and had positive attitude towards their education. However, these positive thoughts about their future profession are somehow failed as they began the practicum courses. In our study participants were concerned about the requirements of the teaching and felt less confident about being competent, especially at the third grade, where they began the practicum courses and made visit to schools. They also mentioned about perceived low prestigious of the teaching in their responses and losing motivation about their choices. This might indicate that preschool candidates are not well informed, not aware of all the requirements, status of the teaching profession while they are making their career choices and moreover they do not have a rational and solid self-awareness about themselves.

This study is conducted with limited number of preschool teacher candidates from different universities in Turkey and there is no intention of generalization, but provides useful information about their perceptions about the teaching profession, their reason of choosing this career and their awareness about teaching. In conclusion, this study provides an understanding of what attracts those aspiring to be preschool teachers. Same results were found in the research carried out from the academicians' perspective to understand the reasons behind choosing this program (Tekmen, 2012). The perceptions of the faculty members in preschool teacher education programs were asked and the guarantee of finding a permanent job in the government positions was the top reason stated. In addition, it is also mentioned that the dissemination policy which increases the need for preschool graduates in the system lowers the qualifications expected from the teacher candidates, for example having low scores in the entrance exam when entering the programs and getting low scores in the selection exam after the graduation for the recruitment.

Research has demonstrated that not every individual is similarly motivated to teach but that there are some motivations commonly expressed by those considering a career in teaching. Findings in this study showed that teacher candidates have multiple motivations for becoming a preschool teacher. Influences and motivations are centered on one's love for future students, capabilities, likes and dislikes such as including their future work, working conditions and how both fit with their personal lives. Together these intrinsic and extrinsic motivations also have potential implications for teacher recruitment, retention and professional learning. Therefore, if higher education began to attract candidates to initial

preschool teacher education and then to the teaching profession, it may be of value to appeal to the range of factors that attracted them to teaching as a profession and their initial or entry motivations to teach.

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