



Reasons for Choosing the Profession of Teacher

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Abstract

The teaching profession is an attractive career prospect for many prospective students, and the number of first-year students is rising continuously. Therefore, the aim of this qualitative work was to highlight the reasons for the choice of studies for first semester teacher students of the Necmettin Erbakan Üniversitesi Ahmet Keleşoğlu Faculty of Education with the help of the problematic interview. Three male and three female teaching students were interviewed. No subjects were given, as the main motive for the work was to determine the reasons for the choice of the teacher training course. The interest in job security or civil servant status is the strongest motive for students to begin teacher training, followed by the desire to educate and work with children and young people. Furthermore, it emerged from the interviews that the desire to impart knowledge is not so much scientific and technical knowledge as the imparting of values and ideals.

Keywords: Career choice, Student teachers, Teaching profession.

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Contribution of this paper to the literature

The aim of this qualitative work was to highlight the reasons for the choice of studies for first semester teacher students of the Necmettin Erbakan Üniversitesi Ahmet Keleşoğlu Faculty of Education with the help of the problematic interview.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background and Questioning

The choice of a profession is a complicated decision-making process in which individual goals and interests, subjective assessment of one's own abilities, previous professional experience, requirements, costs and job opportunities are important (Schutz *et al.*, 2001). The teaching profession is an attractive career prospect for many prospective students, and the number of first-year students is rising continuously. The first-year students are aware that they have chosen the career path of a teacher when they began their studies in teaching (at least with the aim of passing the state examination).

The reasons why a teacher training course is taken up were examined in many ways. Most of the studies show that contact with children and young people, professional interest and social contribution are the main motives for choosing a teaching profession. Pohlmann and Möller (2010); Steltmann (1980) and Ulich (1998) cite extrinsic motives, which are frequently portrayed in public opinion, such as the length of school holidays, civil servant status, salary or the lesser difficulty of studying, as being of secondary importance. Only the desire to reconcile family and career and a definitely greater interest in leisure time (Lipowsky, 2003) are determining extrinsic reasons for the decision to study or to become a teacher among students. Individual criteria (e.g. interests and inclinations) as well as training and institution-specific reasons (e.g. duration of studies) therefore interlock (Denzler and Wolter, 2005). However, it must be stated that the research situation on the career choice motives of prospective teachers is not as clear as it appears at first glance (Rothland and Terhart, 2010). Motives for study or career choice in the international arena are mainly collected through questionnaires with closed response formats, whereby rarely tried and tested and evaluated instruments are used. Rather, specially constructed instruments with different numbers of items are used (Bastick, 2000; Watt and Richardson, 2007; Rinke, 2008). In this procedure it seems to be particularly problematic that different motives are put up for choice and consequently other, potential motives cannot become visible (Terhart *et al.*, 1994). In addition, these guidelines may force obvious distortions due to the phenomenon of social desirability (Rothland and Terhart, 2010).

Studies with open interviews (Baus *et al.*, 1977; Hirsch, 1990; Ulich, 2004) are rarely and/or for the most part no longer up-to-date. There are isolated indications that the motives to be assessed in questionnaires were explored in qualitative preliminary studies (Steltmann, 1980; Oesterreich, 1987; Brühwiler and Spychiger, 1997) or that the closed questions were supplemented by individual open questions (Kiel *et al.*, 2004). The authors are not aware of any comparative studies that explicitly weigh open and closed survey methods against each other. In Turkish-speaking countries, however, there are neither questionnaires, investigations nor open surveys. There is a large research gap.

The following research question, which is relevant for this work, essentially results from the above explanations:

- Which study motives can be identified for teacher training students in Turkey? An essential focus of the work was the question of why students in Turkey have chosen the teaching profession. It should be noted that this work does not close the gap described above. Rather, an explorative approach was deliberately chosen as a first step.

1.2. Theoretical References and Empirical Findings

In order to do justice to the initial questions, it is now necessary on the one hand to differentiate what constitutes the decision for the choice of the teaching position in general (What are the motives behind the decision to study teaching?).

One of the central hypotheses that can be derived from approaches to the choice of studies and careers is the class-specificity of the choice of studies. In terms of human capital theory, a class-specific study choice can be explained by factors such as study duration, direct entry into the labour market, labour market opportunities and costs (direct education and living costs) of studying. The expected returns of a certain education are compared with the costs. The individual demand for education thus depends on the individual assessment of the costs and benefits, which vary according to socioeconomic position, school abilities, disciplinary orientation and personal preferences (Freeman, 1986; Helberger and Palamidis, 1989; Becker, 1993). The effect of these factors is reinforced by differences in time preference among the different strata. Students from lower socioeconomic class generally have a higher present preference, which leads them to attach greater importance to economic factors in their choice of studies. If one compares the different types of higher education institutions and study programs in Turkey, it can be assumed, at least based on average and direct professional qualifications, that people who opt for teacher training tend to come from lower socioeconomic class.

The choice of studies for a particular class is not only explained by economic factors. Educational decisions are made in a complex interplay of individual (school skills), social (family resources, family decision-making behavior) and institutional factors (selection mechanisms of the education system). Sociological approaches justify social selectivity in the choice of studies by the fact that different courses of study and occupations are associated with different social status or power. Higher socioeconomic classes try to avoid losing the social status of their descendants by ensuring that their children's school and study careers are adequate in terms of status (e.g. Boudon (1984)). However, the teaching profession and training at a teacher training college probably do not have the same social prestige as professions based on medical or legal studies. Consequently, it can be assumed that especially prospective students from academic homes will decide less frequently for teacher training simply for reasons of maintaining their status. First-year students from academic families study more frequently at universities, choose medicine or law more frequently and less frequently a teacher training course (Schnabel and Gruehn, 2000; Becker,

2000a;2000b; Watermann and Maaz, 2004; Georg, 2005; Maaz, 2006). Similar findings are available from a Spanish study (De Dios Jiménez and Salas-Velasco, 2000). These results suggest that teachers continue to be recruited from lower social classes.

The cost-benefit considerations described are made against the background of personal interests, inclinations and abilities. Motives and preferences, subjective importance, intrinsic value and expected benefit of education as well as the anticipated probability of success are factors that must be considered when making educational decisions (Lent *et al.*, 1994; Eccles, 2005). Estimates of benefits vary by discipline (Smits *et al.*, 2002; Wolter and Weber, 2003) and by origin (Becker, 2000a). It can therefore be assumed that prospective teachers systematically differ from other students in these aspects as well. If the expected probability of success for a university course of study is low or if its cognitive costs are estimated to be too high, the tendency to undertake teacher training at a teacher training college is likely to increase.

Furthermore, matching theories can be presumed accordingly (Holland, 1995;1997) or based on economic models of social identity (Akerlof and Kranton, 2000) that those interested in the teaching profession are primarily socially oriented, communicatively and charitably inclined persons. Various studies on the careers of teachers, for example, highlight positive experiences with activities in the field of youth work as a decisive factor for career choice (Ulich, 2003).

Finally, the local supply of university courses is likely to influence the choice of course for both economic and social reasons. The distance to the nearest university has direct cost consequences for the individuals concerned (Frenette, 2006). For people living outside the catchment area of a university, the choice of a university means higher costs in the form of higher living costs due to living abroad, but also non-monetary costs such as the loss of social networks. It is known from future teachers that they are often integrated into social networks in their place of residence which they would lose if they moved.

2. Methodical Approach

In the present report, an attempt was made to gain insights into the reasons for choosing a teaching degree. The qualitative interview method of the problem-censored interview was chosen in order to find out the motives for the choice of studies and profession of teacher training students. The problem-oriented interview is based on a structured guideline that enables relative comparability of the interviews. This can be defined as a survey method that allows the interviewee to speak as freely as possible in order to come close to an open conversation. However, it is centred on a specific problem which the interviewer introduces and to which he repeatedly returns (Mayring, 2002).

2.1. Data Collection

The guidelines for the interviews were developed after studying the literature appropriate to the question. The questions were focused on the reasons for choosing the teaching profession. In the guidelines, the question "Why did you decide to study teaching and thus to become a teacher" was first asked in a general sense.

The search for interview partners was carried out via personal enquiries to students of the pedagogical faculty of Necmettin Erbakan University. The purpose and aim of the study was explained in regular lecture hours. Since the participation of the students was voluntary, only six students agreed to participate.

These are three male and three female teacher training students, aged between 18 and 21, with an average age of 19.66 years. All of the interviewed students attend the Faculty of Education at Necmettin Erbakan University and are in their first semester. The subjects are not given because the main motive of the work was to determine the reasons for the choice of the teacher training course. The names of the interviewed students were anonymized for data protection reasons.

Of the interviews conducted between the beginning of January and the end of February 2019, those were conducted in the premises of the Faculty of Education with the consent of the students. Each interview lasted about 40 minutes. At the beginning, the interview partners were assured that their anonymity would be preserved in order to prevent social pressure or individual vulnerability regarding personal information on the basis of confidentiality and anonymity. It was also explained that they had the possibility to stop the interview at any time. Subsequently, interviewers repeatedly reaffirmed that the interviewees as interlocutors were the actors of the event and could therefore speak freely and uninfluenced for as long as they wished. During the interview, care was taken to ensure that the interviewee was not interrupted by questions and could always finish speaking.

Due to the large amount of material, it was decided to write it down in summary minutes. The summary minutes were written immediately after the interviews so that the contents of the discussions were still present and the significance of the statements was not lost. In these summarizing minutes, the meaning of the sentences is partly changed and filler words, which are not relevant for the question, are omitted in favour of comprehensibility.

2.2. Evaluation

After the step of data preparation through complete transcription of the interviews, the transcribed interviews were evaluated after the structured content analysis, i.e. certain categories were filtered out of the material. "The category system compiled from the structuring dimensions is precisely defined so that a clear assignment of text material to the categories is always possible". For better traceability the evaluation was supported by the computer program MAXqda.

3. Presentation of the Results

A compilation of the interview results follows. The subjective views of the interviewees are presented. An open answer format was chosen in order to allow as many free memories and as little social desirability as possible.

3.1. General Motives for Choosing Studies and Careers

In the interviews, the reasons for choosing a teacher training course were asked in an all-encompassing sense. The general question of the interview guide is: "Why did you decide to study teaching and thus to become a teacher? This question generally aims at the motives for the choice of studies and profession.

In particular, the students surveyed stated in the first place the professional and financial security: "*Yes... what can I say, it's a safe job, so in teaching it's simply safer not to sit on the street after graduating*". (Mehmet, 19 years old).

Caner says in this respect: "*Nowadays it is very difficult, even if you have studied, to find a job at all, but in teaching you quickly find something... if it doesn't work out in the state at least in the private sector you always find something as a teacher. I simply know that I will have a job after my studies*" (Caner, 19 years old). The professional and financial security associated with the profession is of great importance.

Filiz mentions the civil servant status in this context: "*Teaching enables me to be a civil servant, which is not possible in other areas... The civil servant status is very important for me, because I find my future secured*" (Filiz, 18 years old).

This could mean that the students would not have started their studies if the chances of being hired at the end of their studies had been low.

There is also strong support for the area of reconciling family and career, especially among the female students surveyed: "*Because the teaching profession also has many advantages, such as family planning. As a woman, it is very important to be able to carry a career and family with you*" (Derya, 20 years old).

"*Besides, if you have a child, you don't have to worry about losing your job. You can go back to work at any time or with a child it is not so difficult now, because the working hours are also very good*" (Filiz, 18 years).

"*Well, I really want to start a family, and with a teaching position, I can do that. I can work and start my family at the same time without necessarily having to choose one of the two. That's why I only consider teaching*" (Mehtap, 21 years).

It can be seen that the motive of family compatibility among female student teachers can be regarded as central to the teaching profession. The female students surveyed attach overall importance to this motive.

With regard to the possibility of part-time work, it can also be regarded as central to the apprenticeship profession: "*The teaching profession is now also ideal for me, because you can also do something on the side, because you don't work every day from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. now*" (Mehmet, 19 years).

"*Well, I'm actually interested in a lot of things. So as a teacher it's no problem to be interested in other things, because you don't spend the whole day in school*" (Caner, 19 years).

"*As a teacher one has a good planning of the working day with more spare time, than with other occupations*" (Filiz, 18 years).

Furthermore, the students interviewed described their work with people and, in particular, their interaction with children and young people as decisive for their choice of studies: "*I also find social contact very decisive. There is always a special attraction... new people new challenge. I find it will never be boring in the teaching profession, because you are constantly faced with new challenges with people, which attracts me personally, because I find contact with people very important. It is interesting to get to know new people or new children... I mean, you always get new impressions of how people live and in what kind of life situation they are*" (Filiz, 18 years old).

"*Just being with kids or teenagers... well, I'm very confident about dealing with kids or teenagers. That's why I want to work with them, because I simply know what I have to convey, not just technical, certain moral demands*" (Cihan, 21 years old).

"*I give private lessons to some children and teenagers, so where I help them with their homework and so on and that is fun for me and I talk to them about problems, so now not always the subject matter... you give such an educational help and I simply notice that I can help them and that I like to be with children*" (Derya, 20 years).

It can be seen that working with children and young people is attractive and motivating for the students surveyed, and their own abilities are highly valued in this sense. Motives such as establishing a relationship with children and adolescents, participating in their upbringing and being contact persons for them are in the foreground and consequently also show less interest in the subject.

It is also noticeable that the students interviewed cite the future relevance of the later teaching activity for children and society and the associated responsibility as well as the possibility of conveying and realizing important values and ideals as decisive for the choice of the course of studies: "*As a teacher, I later have the opportunity to develop children in their lives and prepare them for a better life through education, i.e. to have the opportunity to give them a reasonable start on their way*" (Mehtap, 21 years).

"*I am also concerned with passing on social values and norms to children. As a teacher you have this opportunity to pass on the important social values, which is not the case with other professions*" (Mehmet, 19 years old).

The teaching of knowledge to pupils also plays an important role: "*It is such a happy experience for me when I see that the children to whom I give tutoring have learned something or when I have taught them something that they could not do before, makes me incredibly happy*" (Derya, 20 years).

Regarding the teaching of knowledge, Cihan states: "*As we say that whoever teaches me a letter, I will be his slave for forty years... so, it's to recognize how important it is to teach. It is also a confirmation for yourself if you have taught something*" (Cihan, 21 years).

Also, the interviewed students mention an inner certainty about their professional suitability as reasons for their choice of studies: "*It's also like this... hmm.... I think that I can explain things very well, i.e. such abstract things above all, I can explain very well with examples, because without concrete examples it simply gets stuck... this is confirmed to me again and again and it's also like this, I also like to explain and as a teacher you should also be able to explain well*" (Cihan, 21 years old).

"*And to explain something, so I have no problem with that. And I always do this in such a way that I explain depending on the person, because everyone is different when learning*" (Mehtap, 21 years).

Also, the students interviewed cited exemplary teachers in particular as further reasons for choosing a teacher training course: "*Well, I would say that my primary school teacher, unconscious of her now, actually taught me the desire to become a teacher. Yes, she was just such a role model, the first motivation*" (Derya, 20 years).

"I also had a teacher who, so for me it was really the best, the best teacher I got to know and thought... yes there must be more such teachers and yeah therefore I want to become a teacher" (Caner, 19 years).

"Of course, we had some good teachers, who were now personally also human role models for me and still are today" (Mehtap, 21 years).

It seems to be characteristic that the experiences of one's own school days have "shaped" one's career aspirations. The positive school experiences as well as teachers from one's own school years who act as role models have a clear influence on the career decision.

Influences of third parties on the decision are not relevant here. So good own teachers work as strong role models, whereas the advice of family members is partly present, but partly rejected: "My parents have already granted the studies, but it was then still my own decision" (Filiz, 18 years).

"It is still a decision that came from me... I mean I was not so directly influenced now; I mean I was already supported now by the parents, but it was yet my own decision" (Derya, 20 years).

"I chose it myself" (Mehmet, 19 years old).

"It now came from myself to study teaching" (Cihan, 21 years).

When asked about forms of support that would have made it easier to decide to study as a teacher, the students interviewed described the offers they would like: "I would like it if you could get concepts for teaching, e.g. how to behave in extreme situations. I don't know how to behave in front of forty people. What am I allowed to do?" (Derya, 20 years old).

The wish is also expressed for more information on the bureaucratic process at universities as well as specific information on the course of studies: "You don't get enough answers. You had to go from A to Z when enrolling... you had to do this and had to do that, but you didn't get such real answers" (Mehmet, 19 years old).

"We have a wonderful study plan, but I don't know what it should be for. More advisors would be good" (Caner, 19 years old).

Gathering one's own experience and testing one's own skills in an internship is also desirable: "This practical relevance is simply missing. More practical training would be good... go to the faculty for a month and do practical training at schools for a month, because we learn a lot here, but I think if I don't practice it, you forget half of it" (Mehtap, 21 years).

„Such research projects in the field of educational science would be advantageous, i.e. one would go to school with the theory and be shown how to apply these theories in practice now" (Filiz, 18 years old).

The answers given indicate that there is a need for action: improved university advice and increased cooperation with schools to ensure that students can make decisions at the university appear affordable.

Finally, the students were asked about their expectations of their studies. The students interviewed expect to acquire didactic knowledge and prepare for lessons in general: "I have high hopes for the coming years. I hope that much will be given to me on the way, because it should not come too briefly. I hope that in the course of the years... like me later with the pupils something works on, like I lead them on the correct way, thus the things to learn" (Derya, 20 years).

"Especially the didactics, of course. I would like to know how I can teach children something, that is, that I can learn how best to prepare the school subject matter and how it can be presented vividly" (Mehtap, 21 years old).

"Hopefully we will learn how to prepare a lesson and so on" (Filiz, 18 years old).

In addition, the students expect preparation for dealing with everyday problems and also mention aspects of good teaching: "I want to learn how to deal with problems in everyday school life, that I learn to deal with pupils at puberty age... so that social and psychological skills are improved" (Cihan, 21 years old).

"I would like an active involvement of the students now and also that learning contents are well conveyed" (Mehmet, 19 years old).

"So a pleasant learning atmosphere, so common working and learning, cooperation" (Filiz, 18 years old).

It is striking that the students questioned answered the question about their expectations regarding their studies in a double literal sense. Desires and demands of the students were described and also ideas of the actual contents of the study were mentioned. A professional as well as practice-oriented education is in the foreground of the expectations.

4. Conclusion and Perspectives

Although the results of this work are not representative, fundamental motivational structures of student teachers in the first semester at Necmettin Erbakan University in Konya could be shown.

In order to find out why the students chose the teaching profession; they were generally asked about the reasons for their decision to study. The most common reasons given by the students for choosing the teaching profession and the appeal of the profession are as follows:

- Job security/official status.
- Desire to raise children.
- Desire to work with children/young people.
- Compatibility of family and career.
- The desire to convey knowledge (less scientific or technical knowledge, more values and ideals).
- Exemplary own teachers.

Although all the students surveyed mainly mention job security, which is understood as a pure step towards the desired secure occupational position, working with children and young people is also attractive and motivating for them.

However, for them the intellectual challenge is not at the forefront, i.e. imparting knowledge is by no means of central importance, intellectual curiosity is not the main motive and is not the focus of attention. In terms of the scientific nature of the studies and the intellectual level of the knowledge to be imparted, a certain lack of ambition has indeed been observed, while educational work and contact with children and young people as well as job security are the central attractions of studying and working. This is expressed in formulations such as "preparing children for life", "giving children something for life, conveying values" and the like.

The question here is whether this disconnectedness can be lifted at least a little at the end of the course of study. Since the surveyed students are at the beginning of their studies, a longitudinal study must show how this

development will continue. Standardized surveys could be used, which are increasingly being used to review and improve university teaching.

Furthermore, the answers of the students surveyed show that organizational problems as well as problems with supervision and counseling are most frequently addressed. This points to the general need for improvement in these areas. Increased information can be given before the study in order to achieve a realistic expectation of the study reality. This would avoid or reduce disappointments regarding the expectations of content preparation for concrete curriculum content.

In addition, the students surveyed expect to acquire didactic knowledge, in particular practice-relevant content, which will be useful to them in everyday school life. In this sense, it would be useful to complete several internships, which would enable them to test the contents and skills acquired during their studies. This would give the program a stronger and, if necessary, earlier practical orientation.

In order to further deepen the knowledge about motives and motivational structures of teacher training students, analyses of freshmen are recommended, which study orientation measures, such as orientation internships, are the most promising and how these can be classified and reflected. For this purpose, special attention should be paid in further work to the fundamental personality and motivational characteristics of student teachers.

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