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Evaluation of Turkish prospective teachers' attitudes towards teaching profession (Near East University case)

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Abstract

One of the important factors that affect a teacher's success and efficiency is his/her attitude towards the profession. For the realization of an efficient / active mother tongue teaching, mother tongue teachers need to have a positive attitude towards the profession. The fundamental objective of this study is to determine the mother tongue (Turkish) prospective teachers' attitudes towards the teaching profession according to their "genders", "classes" and "socio-economic" levels, their reasons for choosing this profession, what the problems they may confront when they start the profession are and whether the education they received is sufficient. The study is built with a structure suitable for combined approach where qualitative and quantitative analysis methods will be used together. The study group of the research consists of students (n= 117) that are students at the first, second, third and fourth classes at Near East University Faculty of Education Department of Turkish Language Teaching in 2008-2009 Academic Year Fall Semester and that are selected by use of random sampling method. In order to evaluate prospective teachers' attitudes towards teaching profession, 5-point Likert-type attitude scale (Cronbach alpha value $\alpha=0.95$) developed by Çetin in 2006 was used. The qualitative data in the study was collected using four open ended questions. For the analysis of the data, t-test and descriptive analysis methods were used. A significant difference occurred in favor of female prospective teachers in relation to the gender factor. No significant difference between attitude scores was observed in relation to the effects of class and socio-economic level. The majority of prospective teachers chose Turkish language teaching because they love the profession. The prospective teachers' most important concern about their future is "not being appointed". The prospective teachers think that there are some deficiencies in the education they receive.

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1. Introduction

The teacher is the most important element of an education system (Kavcar, 2005). The teacher's personal characteristics, his/her proficiency as the manager of learning activities, skills in monitoring the learning process and in teaching, background, and relations with students and other individuals influence his/her study and success within the classroom (Aydın, 1993). Another important factor that affects a teacher's success and efficiency is his/her attitude towards the profession. In literature, attitude is defined as "the core of human individuality", "the permanent organization of an individual's motivational, emotional, perceptual and mental processes towards an event or a psychological object", "positive or negative sensual intensity", and "learned tendency" (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975; Muller, 1986; Tezbaşaran, 1997; Bohner and Wanke, 2002). That an individual's attitude towards his/her occupation may

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affect the end-product and that someone who does not enjoy his/her occupation will not be able to succeed in that occupation is quite a common opinion in the society (Güven, 1988). By taking this point into consideration, prospective teachers' gaining profession related values and attitudes, in other words, their way of perceiving the profession is required at least as much as knowledge. The teacher's attitude towards the profession is "the concepts that are not explicitly expressed and that are formed about teaching, students, classroom atmosphere and the topic to be taught, usually without being aware". These concepts significantly influence teachers' thinking processes, classroom activities, professional changes, improvements and teaching skills (Pajares, 1992; Williams and Burden, 1997; Atay, 2003). The results of the study show that teachers' attitudes and behaviors influence the students the most. The teacher's intellectual attitude, emotional reactions, various habits and personality that includes all these affect the student (in terms of academic success, personality, interests etc.) (Bloom, 1976; Jeans, 1995; Brooks and Sikes, 1997; Çapa and Çil, 2000).

Teachers' attitudes towards their profession are usually related with their enjoying their profession, dedicating themselves to their profession, being aware that their profession is socially necessary and important, and believing that they need to improve their profession, and so, themselves, continuously. Learning experiences of prospective teachers should be organized in a way that they will establish positive attitudes towards the profession of teaching (Temizkan, 2008). The teachers that are educated according to this understanding accomplish their duties precisely, exhibit more positive behaviors towards their students, are inquisitive, think creatively and convey changes to the learning environment easily. Their positive attitudes can be seen in their gestures and mimics and they motivate students more easily, their behaviors towards the students are sincere, they do not have strict rules, they use their time efficiently; in short, they enjoy their profession and thus, they may assume the duties, responsibilities and roles of a teacher in a better manner (Çeliköz and Çetin, 2004).

Mother tongue (Turkish) teachers are the most important elements of mother tongue teaching process. Linguistic skills with cognitive, auditory and kinetic contents are given by the teachers in this field. In the teaching activities they present, mother tongue teachers offer opportunities that improve creativity and thus, they may play an important role in the bringing up of students as thinking and producing individuals (Leach, 2000; Sever, 2002). However, for the realization of such mother tongue teaching, it is necessary that the prospective teachers in this field have a positive attitude towards the profession.

The fundamental objective of this study is to determine the Turkish prospective teachers' attitudes towards the teaching profession according to their "genders", "classes" and "socio-economic" levels, their reasons for choosing this profession, what problems they may confront when they start the profession and whether the education they receive is sufficient. It is considered that the results of the study will contribute in the efforts for the improvement and betterment of teaching profession and the education of more qualified teachers.

2. Method

The study is built with a structure suitable for combined approach where qualitative and quantitative analysis methods are used together. The study group of the research consists of students ($n=117$) that are students at the first, second, third and fourth classes at Near East University, Faculty of Education, Department of Turkish Language Teaching in the 2008-2009 Academic Year Fall Semester and that are selected by use of random sampling method.

2.1. Data collection instruments

In order to evaluate prospective teachers' attitudes towards teaching profession, 5-point Likert-type scale developed by Çetin in 2006 was used. Çetin (2006:28) performed the validity and reliability of the "Scale for Attitudes Towards Teaching Profession" according to the data he obtained from 341 people he selected by using random sampling method. As the result of the factor analysis made in order to determine the structural validity of the scale, the factor loads of scale items were found to vary between 0.48-0.80, Kaiser-Meyer Olkin (KMO) value was found to be 0.95, and the internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach alpha) calculated for the reliability study was found to be $\alpha=0.95$.

The qualitative data in the study was collected using four open ended questions. The questions were shown to Turkish language teaching and measurement and evaluation specialists, and in the light of their recommendations, the necessary corrections were made. The analysis of the answers was made by both researchers and thus, the differences that may have occurred between the researchers' results were minimized.

2.2. Analysis of data

The quantitative data obtained in the study was analyzed using t-test, and comparisons in terms of class, gender and socio-economic status were made. For the examination of qualitative data, "descriptive analysis" method was used. The data obtained

accordingly were summarized and interpreted according to some pre-determined themes (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2006). In addition, the frequency and breakdown tables of qualitative data were prepared and numerical findings were formed.

3. Findings and Discussion

The descriptive statistics of students' attitude scores in relation to gender, class and SES variables and t-test results are given in Table I.

Table I. The Results of the t-test for the Correlation Between Prospective Teachers' Attitude Scores and Gender, Age and SES² Variables

		N	Ave.	Ss	Sd	T	p
Gender	Male	53	140.2	22.1	115	-2.539	.012
	Female	64	149.7	18.5			
Class	1 st -2 nd Class	77	146.3	21	115	.649	.517
	3 rd -4 th Class	40	143.7	20.2			
SES	0-2500	65	147.4	18.7	115	1.143	.255
	2501 and over	52	142.9	22.9			

According to Table I, 53 of the prospective teachers are male (45.3%) and 64 are female (54.7%). 77 (65.8%) of the students who took part in the study group are students in the first and second classes, and 40 (34.2%) of them are students in the third and fourth classes. 65 students' (55.5%) families' monthly income is under 2500 TL, and the remaining 52 students' (44.5%) families' monthly income is over 2500 TL.

The students' attitude test scores were found to be significantly different ($t_{(115)} = -2.539, p < .05$). Female students' attitude mean score ($X = 149.7$) is higher than that of male students ($X = 140.2$). This finding indicates that female prospective teachers have more positive attitudes when compared to male prospective teachers. It was also observed that class level and socio-economical status did not have a significant influence on students' attitudes ($p > .05$). When the prospective teachers' attitudes were studied according to the gender variable, results that were similar to the ones of the studies in literature were obtained (Aşkar and Çelenk, 1988; Çelenk 1988; Coultas and Lewin, 2002; Üstün et al. 2004). It was found that female prospective teachers have more positive attitudes towards teaching profession when compared to male prospective teachers, as also foreseen by the researchers. Çapa and Çil (2000) performed an in-depth study on gender issue and found that female students have more positive attitudes about enjoying and respecting the profession and male students have more positive attitudes about self-confidence.

In his study, Kılınç (1997) stated that teachers have a high level of social status; however, teaching is not an appealing profession in terms of working conditions and economic return. Okçabol and Gök (1998), and Şimşek (2005) pointed out that due to the low level of income; teaching is usually preferred by individuals from middle and low income groups. However, the study was performed at a private university and it was observed that students with high levels of income (45% of students has a monthly income of over 2500 TL) may also prefer teaching profession. Besides, a significant difference between the attitude scores of the prospective teachers with a high socio-economic level and of those with a low socio-economic level was not observed.

No significant difference between the attitude scores of students in terms of class variable was found. The attitude scores of the students in the 1st and 2nd classes are higher than those of the students in the 3rd and 4th classes; yet this difference is not significant according to the t-test results. This may be because the students in the first years are more eager since they are new at the university. The students in the final classes may have increased concerns as a result of the difficulties they have faced in practice studies and their closer observation of problems about appointment for the profession. Another reason is that the students in the final year may be overburdened by the courses they have taken during their university education.

Prospective teachers' reasons for choosing the department of Turkish Language Teaching are given in Table II with the frequencies and percentages:

Table II. Findings about Prospective Teachers' Reasons for Choosing the Department of Turkish Language Teaching

Reason for Choosing the Department	f	%
01- Enjoying the Profession, Aptness / Suitability for the Profession	55	37.4

02- Influence / Guidance by the Family / Teacher	27	18.3
03- Liking Turkish Language	24	16.3
04- Enjoying Literature / Reading	12	8.1
05- Ease of Finding A Job	12	8.1
06- By Coincidence	8	5.4
07- Being A Student of Verbal Department	7	4.7
08- Suitability for the Gender	1	0.7
09- Lack of Education in English	1	0.7
Total	147**	100

According to Table II, it can be seen that there are many reasons for prospective teachers' choosing Turkish language teaching; however, the most important three reasons can be listed respectively as follows: (1) "Enjoying the Profession, Aptness / Suitability for the Profession" (37.4%), (2) "Influence / Guidance by the Family / Teacher" (18.3%) and (3) "Liking Turkish Language" (16.3%). That 37.4% of the prospective teachers chose this department according to their own will, 16.3% did so because they liked Turkish language and 8.1% preferred this department because they enjoyed literature and reading; in other words, that 61.8% of the prospective teachers have positive attitudes towards their profession is an important finding since this will lead to a more efficient language teaching. This finding is also in line with the findings of the study performed by Temizkan (2008). In Temizkan's study titled "A Research on Turkish Language Prospective Teachers' Attitudes Towards Teaching Profession", prospective teachers stated that they would be happy to teach even under difficult conditions (84.85%), that Turkish Language Teaching is the most suitable occupation for them (71.5%), that enjoying teaching has nothing to do with financial

The study group consists of 117 prospective teachers; however, since some prospective teachers stated more than one result, the total number is 147.

conditions (67.9%), and that even possible, they would not choose another profession (73.55%). One of the other important findings of this study is that some prospective teachers (8.1%) have chosen the department of Turkish Language Teaching because "they enjoy literature and reading". According to the results of another study about Turkish language prospective teachers conducted by Özbay et al. (2008), especially female prospective teachers have positive attitudes about *enjoying, habituation and necessity* of reading.

A group of prospective teachers (18.3%) stated that they chose this department because they were influenced by their families and teachers. This finding seems to be consistent with the studies conducted by Erjem (2000) and Erdem and Şimşek (2000). 5.4% of the prospective teachers, as Kaya and Büyükkasap (2005) deduced in their studies, chose this department involuntarily and unwillingly; and 4.7% preferred this department because they were students of verbal department in high school, in other words, because their chances of being a student of this department were higher. In short, 10.1% of the prospective teachers did not prefer this department willingly. The results of the studies in literature (Slacum, 1974; Semerci, 1999; Özbek et al., 2007) and the results of this study are quite close. 8.1% of the prospective teachers chose the department of Turkish Language Teaching because they believed they would not have any problems in finding a job. This may be because teachers have the chance to work not only at state schools but also at private schools and private teaching institutions, and there are more vacancies for teachers when compared to other public services.

The findings about the problems that prospective teachers may face after graduation are given in Table III:

Table III. Findings About The Problems That Prospective Teachers May Face After Graduation

Type of Problem	f	%
01- Not Being Appointed	53	33.3
02- Public Personnel Selection Examination	38	23.9
03- Professional Inexperience / Incapability	21	13.2
04- No Problems	21	13.2
05- Having Financial Problems	11	7.0
06- Not Being Able to Accommodate to the Environment	10	6.3
07- Frequent Changes in the Education System	4	2.5
08- The Profession's Losing Its Reputation	1	0.6

Total	159***	100
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According to Table III, the first two problems that prospective teachers may face after graduation are respectively “not being appointed”, and “Public Personnel Selection Examination”. The findings of this study show great similarities with those of the study performed by Aslan (2008) in Turkey. According to the results of Aslan’s study based on forum messages on Turkish language teachers’ and prospective teachers’ problems, the first of the two biggest problems of especially prospective teachers is “Not being appointed” (40.2%), and the second is “The obligation to get a high score in the Public Personnel Selection Examination” (17.1%). Indeed, the appointment of teachers is done through various exams, which have become a controversial topic, both in Turkey and in Cyprus as the case is for all civil servant appointments. In order to be appointed, the candidates need to get very high scores for a very few number of openings. Therefore, it can be said that the prospective teachers’ concerns on this topic are justified and relevant. While 13.2% of the candidates deem their professional inexperience as a problem, 13.2% believe that they will not face any problems after graduation. Although teaching is generally accepted as a sacred and esteemed profession that is influential in the development of a society, the hard conditions for teaching (financial problems, not being able to accommodate to the workplace, being appointed to different places, and

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frequent changes made in the education system etc.) are accepted as problems by a significant portion of the prospective teachers.

Apart from the ones stated above, some other concerns of prospective teachers about teaching profession which are present in literature (Fuller 1969; Fuller, Parsons and Watkin 1974; Hurt et al., 1978; Demirel, 1995; Geoffrey and Behets, 1999 and Kaya and Büyükkasap, 2005) and supported by the findings of this study can be listed as follows: “continuous changes in educational programs, indifference of students, students’ being undisciplined and crowded classrooms, inspections from outside, fear of failure, and conflicts that may occur with administrators, colleagues and parents”.

The findings about the adequacy of the education that the prospective teachers receive during higher education can be summarized as follows: Since first class students are at the beginning of the academic process, they mostly did not answer this question. For this reason, 50 unanswered questions and 1 irrelevant answer was left out of the evaluation. While 40 (60.6%) out of 66 prospective teachers the answers of whom were included in the evaluation considered education to be inadequate, 24 prospective teachers (36.4%) believed that the education they received was adequate. Two prospective teachers (3%) stated that they were uncertain. Prospective teachers listed the negative aspects of the education they received as follows: “unqualified instructors, few number of practice courses, incompleteness of the courses in terms of theoretical dimension, lack of social activities, lack of use of contemporary learning – teaching approaches, presence of unnecessary courses, insufficient substructure possibilities, and shortness of time spent for education”. That about 61% of the students evaluated the education they received as negative for some reasons is a finding that needs to be thought about and taken into consideration by the department.

The findings about the positive and negative aspects of being a teacher in Turkey / in Cyprus can be summarized as follows: Prospective teachers’ opinions about the positive aspects of being a teacher are “teaching’s being an esteemed and a sacred occupation open to improvement, teachers’ guiding the society, helping / informing people, and shaping their future”. These positive aspects that prospective teachers pronounced are in line with the definitions of a teacher in literature (Aydın, 1993; Leach, 2000; Sönmez, 2001; Sever, 2002; Kavcar, 2005). Prospective teachers’ opinions about the negative aspects of being a teacher are “the lowness of the salaries given to teachers, problems that may be faced in relation to students (crowded classroom environments, indifference, not attaching importance to education etc.), not being able to accommodate to the environment where teaching will take place, insufficient resources at the place of work, appointment to different places of work for short periods of time, excessive workload, too many lesson hours, frequent changes in educational programs, unconsciousness of the administrators at school, negative influences of parents on the education environment, the ministry’s not providing the required support for education”. These findings are also largely in line with various research results and the information contained in literature (XIth National Education Council, 1982; Kavcar, 1986; Duman, 2005; Deryakulu and Olkun, 2006; Aslan, 2008).

4. Conclusion

The education system and especially teachers have very important roles in raising a healthy society and qualified individuals. The teacher has the power to influence all other variables about education. In order to be successful in teaching profession, one needs to love the profession and perform it willingly. In this study, the attitudes of Turkish language prospective teachers were assessed. At the end of the study, it was observed that a majority of prospective teachers like 61.8% have adopted a positive attitude towards their profession, female students have a more positive attitude when compared to male students, there is no significant difference between attitude scores in relation to the effects of class and socio-economic level, and that the two main problems they may face after

graduation are “not being appointed” and “Public Personnel Selection Examination”. While 60.6% of the prospective teachers believe that the education they receive is not adequate, 36.4% believe that it is adequate.

More studies should be made on the attitudes towards teaching profession and according to the results to be obtained, education environments should be reorganized. A healthy and useful communication process should be established between the prospective teachers who are the teachers of the future and the instructors. The profession should be improved in terms of theoretical, social and cultural aspects for an increased interest in the profession and more positive attitudes. Turkish language teachers that are working in the education system should meet prospective teachers and thus, it should be ensured that prospective teachers are informed about the information and problems they need about the classroom environment. The environments in the schools where the prospective teachers go for practice within the scope of “School Experience I”, “School Experience II” and “Teaching Practice and Seminar” courses should be arranged in a way that will be suitable for prospective teachers to love the profession and form positive attitudes towards it. In this study, the attitudes of elementary education Turkish language prospective teachers, who are responsible for mother tongue teaching, towards the profession were examined. For the realization of a more efficient / active mother tongue teaching, the attitudes of Turkish Language and Literature prospective teachers, who are responsible for mother tongue teaching in secondary schools, towards the profession should also be examined and according to the findings, the necessary measures should be taken.

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