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Prospective teachers' perceptions of teaching profession

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Abstract

Training well-qualified teachers gains importance in this rapidly changing world. Schools have to train individuals who can adopt the changes and act accordingly. Teachers have a major role to prepare the individuals for the future. The better the prospective teachers are trained, the better they will perform when they work as teachers. In this sense, the opinions of prospective teachers toward teaching profession gains importance. This is a qualitative study in nature. The aim of this study is to explore perceptions of prospective teachers of teaching profession. Prospective teachers enrolled at the departments of Classroom Teaching, Fine Arts Teaching, Turkish Language Education, and Computer and Instructional Technologies were included in the study. Ten prospective teachers in each department were selected as the study group and they were interviewed. Those who were volunteer were included in the study. An interview form was used in the study. The interview form included three semi-structured questions. N-VIVO 8 program was used to analyze the data. Descriptive analysis was utilized to analyze the data.

Keywords: Teaching profession, prospective teacher, education faculty

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1. Introduction

Education, one of the fundamental dynamics of communities, is not only important for the content and quality but also for educating teachers who will scale up that quality and perform their job in high spirits. Regardless of individuals' occupations, acknowledging and valuing it will raise the quality of their performance. Education system is based on student, teacher and curriculum. Importance of teachers' role is undeniable in that regard (Temizkan, 2008; Maden, Durukan & Aslan, 2010). It is known that there are many factors effecting individuals' choice of profession. Kuzgun (2003), emphasizing complexity of selecting a profession; socio-economical status and gender role perception are also effective in this process as well as psychological factors such as skills, interests, values and needs. Parallely, the reason behind prospective teachers selecting teaching as profession can be personal, social and economic (Ozbek, Kahyaoglu & Ozgen, 2007). Hacıomeroglu and Sahin-Taskın (2009) emphasizes that teachers' perspective is also as important as their education in raising qualified teachers. Thus, we should accept that teaching performance is influenced by occupational perspective and ideas (Ozbek vd. 2007). In other words, we believe that occupational perspective of prospective teachers will affect their valuing of profession and performance success (Gurbuzturk & Genc, 2004).

Therefore, in order for communities to be able to stand and maintain sustainability, importance of education should be acknowledged and; pre and post service educations of teachers as a fundamental ingredient of this process must be assessed. This study is conducted because prospective teachers' deliberative occupational choices, their perception on how to perform the occupation as well as perception of positives and negatives of the profession are influential factors on qualified teaching performance.

2. Purpose

Purpose of this study is to identify prospective teachers' perception of teaching profession.

3. Method

This study is conducted in accordance with qualitative research method and phenomenology pattern. This pattern focuses on phenomena that are not known in depth and detail, and targets to identify experiences, perceptions and trends on the matter. Data collection techniques that are deemed suitable for the process are observation and interviews (Yıldırım & Simsek, 2005). In this study, data are collected by interviews. Target is to understand non-observable but important factors such as individuals' experiences, attitudes, perceptions and ideas by means of interview (Merriam, 1998; Yıldırım & Simsek, 2005). In other words, it is a research technique (Ekiz, 2003) that tries to identify what individuals think and why; how do they feel and why lies behind their actions. In this study, interviews are conducted in accordance with semi-structured interview technique. In the semi-structured interviews, there is a possibility of asking sub-questions that help elaborating existing questions depending on the progress of interview as well as previously prepared questions (Lichtman, 2006). Students were directed three questions and their answers were recorded. Prospective teachers were first asked for reason to choose the profession, issues of concern, and difficult and easy matters they may encounter in performance of their profession.

In the research, study group is selected in accordance with maximum variety sampling among the purposeful sampling methods. Purpose of maximum variety is to increase variety of individuals that can be a party to the study, and reflect it on the research at maximum extent. The basic principle here is to identify common or shared phenomena among the varying conditions instead of providing variety for generalization (Yildirim & Simsek, 2005). Therefore, 10 students from each four departments of University of Firat, Faculty of Education were included in the research. 20 male and 20 female students were selected from Primary School Teaching, Fine Arts Teaching, Turkish Teaching and Computer Teaching Technologies Departments. N-VIVO 8 program is used for data analysis.

Analysis are made in accordance with descriptive analysis method. Descriptive analysis is based on summarizing and interpreting data according to themes identified by research questions (Yildirim & Simsek, 2005). Data are encoded, classifications were established and regulated in that regard. Frequency distributions are provided in respect to prospective teachers views during interpretation of findings. The research is validated by providing direct quotations from the participants. Quotations from participants are important elements validating researches in qualitative researches (Yildirim & Simsek, 2005). Another element is to increase variety of participants. Thus, maximum variety sampling is used in the study. A second person was included in the research data analysis process, and the analysis was conducted together for reliability purposes. It is believed to increase research consistency (Yildirim & Simsek, 2005).

4. Findings

In this section, research findings are presented. Research question was stated before presentation of the findings. Prospective teacher answers are put in order and outlined. Frequency distribution for each theme is provided in paranthesis adjacent to the theme.

4.1. Prospective teachers' reasons for profession selection

In the research, the principle target was to identify prospective teachers' reasons for selection of the teaching as profession. The most emphasized reasons in the light of prospective teachers' answers were to believe that profession is suitable for them (16) and to be useful for the community (12). In addition, trusting communication skills with children (10), believing that teaching is a noble profession (8) are the most emphasized reasons. Other reasons were the family encouragement (4) and teaching profession being a childhood dream (4). Finally, other reasons influencing selection of this profession are; to perception of the profession as a comfortable job (1) and wishing to correct negative teacher perception observed during their education period (1). A Prospective teacher from Turkish Department states O.2.K“..The main reason behind my choice is to be useful for the community. I think it is very important to be useful by teaching people ...”. A Primary School Teaching student similarly states O.8.E. “...I think this job suits me well, I am a Teaching High School graduate anyway, so I willingly decided to study here... additionally, believing that teaching is a noble profession influenced my choice... ”.

4.2. Important elements of performing teaching profession

Another significant matter is the important elements of performing teaching profession. Prospective teachers mostly emphasized communication with the student (12) and fair treatment (12). Another important matter identified is making the lesson understandable (11). Other most emphasized themes are updating their knowledge (6), setting a positive example (6), valuing individual differences (5) and establishing a discipline (5). Other desired and valued teacher behaviors identified by prospective teachers are empathizing (4) and effective use of language (2). Some other acknowledged teacher behaviors are to be open to criticism (1), to be patient (1), respecting students and ability to surrender prejudices (1). A student of Computer Teaching department stated his opinion O.12.E. “..I should pay the most attention to communication.. because I will be working in a people-related profession, I should not allow communication accidents ...”. Another student from Fine Arts stated O.32.K “I will try to understand my students.. but of course, I should also set discipline ...”.

4.3. Easy and difficult aspects of teaching

Another subject assessed in the research is to identify the aspects deemed difficult and easy by prospective teachers. Prospective teachers are observed to be focusing and emphasizing mostly on difficulties of the profession. Among the difficulties of the profession, dealing with different children (25) has been the most significant element. Another difficulty, parallel to previous one, is to establish authority (8) and great responsibility of the profession (7). Again, insufficient wage (3) and obligation of self improvement (2) are stated as the other difficulties of the job. On the other hand, half day working (9), long leave periods (8) and satisfaction of teaching (7) are stated as the easy aspects of the profession. A prospective primary school teacher O.4.K. stated "understanding different children, dealing with them, speaking the same language are the most difficult aspects of the profession... and I think pleasure of teaching something to someone is easy and enjoyable.." whereas a prospective Turkish Language teacher stated his opinion as O.25.E. "...the easiest and best part of it is having a 3 months of summer vacation, and difficulty of the job is dealing with children...".

5. Conclusion and Discussion

It is aimed to identify prospective teachers' perception of teaching profession by this study. The research was conducted on first grade students of education faculty. It is important to determine first grade students' perception of teaching profession. Because effectiveness in teaching is in close relation to the prospective teachers' individual opinions and behaviors. Knowledge of prospective teachers' opinions on the matter may help in determination and execution of educational activities in training students (Ozbek, 2007).

Findings of the existing study were analyzed in general, and some conclusions were made. Based on that, our conclusion is that prospective teachers choose the profession mostly because they believe the job is suitable for them. A similar conclusion was observed in a research by Temizkan (2008). In addition, influence of social concerns on their choices is also among the conclusions. Furthermore, profession of teaching is acknowledged to be important for social development conclusion made in the studies executed by Gurbuzturk and Genc (2004) as well as Ozbek et al. (2007). Teaching profession is also perceived as fulfilling social responsibilities (Temizkan, 2008).

Furthermore, believing to have strong communication skills and considering the profession as a noble job are amongst the reasons for choosing the profession. Nobility of the teaching profession was emphasized in different studies (Gurbuzturk & Genc, 2004; Ozsoy, Ozsoy, Ozkara & Memis, 2010). There are studies that emphasizing spiritual satisfaction aspect of the profession (Temizkan, 2008; Kartal & Tasdemir, 2012).

The most important elements in performance of the profession are paying attention to communication with students, fair treatment, making the lesson content understandable and improving the knowledge. Temizkan (2008) also determines that teaching is perceived as a profession requiring continuous self development in a study.

One of the research conclusions is about easy and difficult aspects of the profession. It can be stated that prospective teachers perceive the profession as a difficult profession. Because they mostly emphasized the difficulties of the job. Difficulties of the job are stated to be dealing with different children in classrooms as well as establishing an authority, great responsibility and insufficient pay at this point. Another study conducted by Ozbek et al. (2007) similarly states that teaching profession is perceived as a profession requiring responsibility and devotion. Another study shows that profession is providing spiritual satisfaction, however the pay is deemed to be insufficient (Gurbuzturk & Genc, 2004). Easy aspects of teaching profession are half day working and vacation periods.

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