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The assessment of the reasons for choosing their professions of State Opera and Ballet Orchestra artists

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Abstract

In this study, it is aimed to lay out the factors which lead to the choice of profession of State Opera and Ballet (SOB) artists. In the survey developed to serve this end, 120 out of a total of 493 orchestra artists working at SOB orchestras in Ankara, Istanbul, Izmir, Mersin, Antalya and Samsun have participated. The data obtained were formatted as tables according to frequency and percentage and analysed with descriptive analysis method. It is understood that, when choosing their profession, orchestra artists do not take into consideration of social and economic factors but rather their ability and interests.

Keywords: Choice of profession, musician, musical instrument training, orchestra artist, music education.

^a This study is conducted within the context of the PhD thesis 'The assessment of perception of professional identity within the framework of State Opera and Ballet Orchestra Artists' point of view' prepared by Zeynep Unver and in consultation with Prof. Dr. Ayşe Cakır İlhan in Graduate School of Educational Sciences, Department of Fine Arts Education in Ankara, Turkey.

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1. Introduction

Profession in Turkish is defined as ‘an endeavour that an individual provides his/her livelihood and specialises in a particular education’ according to Turkish Language Institution (TDK, 2005) Turkish Dictionary. The word in English, however, has a broader content and includes such meanings like ‘field of expertise, vocation requiring formal education’ (Redhouse, 1993). The meaning of the term ‘profession’ in our language is quite broad and involves the endeavours of all levels and areas. Within the framework of the terminologies reflecting the level differences and professional fields needed in the literature regarding the vocational classification systems, vocational education and guidance, the professions that require university education are called ‘Top-Level Professions or Expert Professions’, the professions that require secondary school education are called ‘Intermediate Professions or Skill Professions’(Kuzgun, 2014).

Profession plays a key role in determining a person’s way of life, system of values, social position, function, importance and responsibility; in short, who he/she is. On the other hand, with the acquired profession, there is a certain standard of living and social environment. Therefore, one of the most important decisions in human life is thought to be the choice of profession.

‘An individual’s decision to enter into one of the professions that he/she wants/prefers and his/her effort to prepare for that is defined as the choice of profession. Aspirations play a role in identifying choices. In selection of those choices, however, several factors like physical and mental abilities, economic conditions, the possibility of succeeding in the vocational education are in question’ (Kuzgun, 2014).

‘Vocational education is defined as the process of gaining knowledge, skills and competences that an individual will need when performing his/her profession. The most important function of vocational schools is to equip individuals with both theoretical and practical knowledge’ (Odemis, 2014). These schools also provide a preparatory environment for the acquisition of professional culture.

In our country, although preparatory training for professions requiring specialisation starts at the high school level in some areas (such as social sciences high schools, science high schools and fine arts high schools), there is no training for a certain profession in schools other than vocational-technical high schools. Specialisation training is given at universities. The vocational education given at high school level is aimed at intermediate occupations.

Unlike other professions that require specialisation, musical instrument and ballet artist trainings must be started at an early age because they are progressive with the physical development of the individual.

The orchestra artists, who are the subject of this research, receive a 12-year specialist training in musical instrument education starting at the 5th grade of primary education^b (graduate studies are added to this period). The education of a conservatory student encompasses a large period of his/her time, including childhood, adolescence and youth. The gains at the conservatory, however, have an impact on every aspect of his/her life.

All orchestra artists working in orchestras of State Opera and Ballet (SOB) have graduated from conservatory and their equivalent schools. In this study, the reasons of the artists who had a certain specialisation education in the conservatory and who had made the choice of profession as children were evaluated.

^b There are also conservatories that apply part-time education programmes starting from the first year of primary school. In addition, the students are allowed to be admitted to intermediate classes by entering a two-stage examination (short-list and final acceptance exams) if their theoretical knowledge and level of playing their instruments are in conformity with the class they are going to be admitted to.

2. Objective and importance

Profession has a multifaceted impact on all aspects of human life. It is rather ‘an occupation that provides independence, assurance, belonging to a group and recognition to an individual, a way to self-realisation’ (Kuzgun, 2014) than ‘a job that is based on expertise and monetary gain’ (TDK, 2005).

Since it is one of the most important decisions in human life, the choice of profession should be done consciously. The purpose of this study is to determine the criteria that the orchestra artists consider when choosing their profession and the validity of these criteria in terms of professional conditions.

It is thought that the study will shed light on the restructuring and improvement works in the education system of the conservatories.

3. Methodology

In this section, the methods and techniques applied from the determination of the problem of the research until its resolution, and the stages of application of those methods and techniques are given. In the research carried out in the descriptive survey model, it was tried to reveal the reasons of SOB orchestra artists’ orientation to vocational music education. ‘Descriptive methods are research approaches that aim to describe a situation that exists in the past or in the present as it is. Events, individuals or objects that are subject to the research are tried to be defined in their own conditions and as they are’ (Karasar, 1982).

As of 1 July 2017, there are 493 artists working in the orchestras of Ankara, Istanbul, Izmir, Antalya, Mersin and Samsun SOB Directorates according to the official website of the General Directorate of SOB. One hundred and twenty artists from the mentioned directorates participated in the survey. Those 120 orchestra artists from whom data were collected constituted the study group of this research.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the study group

	Percentage	Frequency (%)
Gender		
Female	60	50
Male	60	50
Age		
20–29	24	20
30–39	46	38
40–49	28	23
50 +	22	18
Education		
High school	1	1
Undergraduate	77	64
Postgraduate	33	28
PhD/Qualification in	9	8
Arts		
Instrument		
Flute	11	9
Oboe	6	5
Clarinet	8	7
Bassoon	3	3
Trumpet	6	5
Horn	6	5
Trombone	12	10

Tuba	2	2
Violin	26	22
Viola	13	11
Cello	16	13
Contrabass	2	2
Harp	1	1
Piano	1	1
Percussion	7	6
Contractual status		
Permanent Staff	86	72
Guest	30	25
Foreign guest	4	3
Speaking of a foreign language		
Yes	83	69
No	37	31
Ownership of instrument		
Yes	94	78
No	26	22

According to Table 1, 20% of 60 female and 60 male artists surveyed are between 20% and 29%, 38% are between 30% and 39%, 23% are between 40% and 49% and 18% are over 50 years of age. 0.8% of them were high school graduates, 64% have an education at bachelor degree, 28% were masters and 8% were PhD/Qualification in Arts levels. 22% of them play violin, 13% cello, 11% viola, 10% trombone, 9.2% flute, 7% clarinet, 6% percussion, 5% horn, 5% oboe, 5% trumpet, 3% bassoon, 2% tuba, 2% contrabass, 1% harp and 1% piano. 72% of them work as permanent, 25% as guest and 3% as foreign guest artist. 69% of them speak foreign languages, 31% of them do not speak any. 78% of them have their own instruments and 28% of them do not.

The questionnaire was used as the tool to collect data in the research. Thomas (1998) describes the questionnaire as ‘a research tool to determine people’s living conditions, beliefs or attitudes and behaviours based on their answers to a number of questions’. The survey development process was carried out in four stages: ‘defining the problem’, ‘writing the items (questions)’, ‘taking expert opinion’ and ‘pre-application’ (Buyukozturk, Kilic Cakmak, Akgun, Karadeniz & Demirel, 2008).

Stage 1

Within the framework of 70 questions prepared in the light of the comprehensive literature review, an in-depth recorded interview was held with six artists, including the ones who have been/is general director, general music director, orchestra conductor of SOB and the director of conservatories.

As a result of the information and impressions obtained from the interviews, it was understood that the professional identity of the performing artists was laid in the conservatory and the accumulation they gained there continued to be effective throughout their professional lives.

Stage 2

In the light of the information obtained, questions about the stages, dimensions and content of music education were determined. Previous surveys of similar nature were examined and comparisons were made and they are evaluated for efficiency. Question types were selected and a questionnaire was prepared accordingly.

Stage 3

Necessary adjustments were made to the draft survey according to the views of experts from the fields of psychology, education, measurement and evaluation, sociology, statistics and arts (music, theatre, ballet).

Stage 4

The survey was completed by 14 artists from different provinces and their opinions were also taken. Then the findings were examined by expert educationalists in the fields of measurement-evaluation and research techniques. As a result of the evaluations made, the questions that did not work out were removed and the necessary arrangements were made to develop the data collection tool.

‘The descriptive analysis, a type of qualitative data analysis which includes summarising and interpreting the data according to the determined themes, consists of four stages:

1. Create a framework for descriptive analysis
2. Processing of data according to the thematic framework
3. Identification of findings
4. Interpretation of the findings’ (Yildirim & Simsek, 2011).

The artists were asked the reasons for choosing their profession in multiple-choice form. The number of markings of each option was collected and defined in terms of frequency and percentage, starting from the most preferred, and evaluated in the light of the opinions of experts in the fields of music, sociology, psychology, fine arts education, measurement and evaluation and art management.

4. Findings and discussion

In this section, the findings of SOB orchestra artists' reasons for choosing their professions are interpreted and presented.

4.1. Orchestra artists’ reason to choose their professions

The orchestra artists were asked for their reasons to choose music as a profession in 21 choices. The choices have been prepared in consideration of the specific conditions of the profession and it has been stated that the desired number of choices can be marked. They were also asked to write their own specific reasons, if any.

Table 2. The reasons of orientation of orchestra artists to vocational music education

Reasons	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Being talented	97	81
Having an interest	90	75
Direction of family and close friends and relatives	71	59

According to Table 2, ‘Being talented in music’, which is the first in line among the reasons for choosing profession of the orchestra artists, is marked by 81% of the artists. The second place is the ‘interest in music’ with 72%. The third place is ‘the orientation of the family and those who are important for themselves’.

Table 3. The least preferred reasons for orchestra artists to choose their professions

Reasons	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Job security	14	12
Flexible working hours	14	12
Opportunity to work as a freelancer	12	10

No written exams	11	9
High-income possibility	8	7
Desire to be famous	7	6
Possibility to work in big cities	5	4

According to Table 3, the choice ‘Possibility to work in big cities’ is marked by 4% of the participants, ‘Recognition/Desire to be famous’ by 6%, ‘High income possibility’ by 7%, ‘Absence of written examinations in vocational courses’ by 9%, ‘Possibility to work as a freelancer’ by 10%, ‘Flexible working hours’ and ‘Job security’ by 12%.

To make the choice of profession—one of the most important decisions in human life—properly, ‘a career planning should be made, especially by taking into consideration of the factors like the analysis of the job fields, having information about the advantages and disadvantages of the relevant sector, having knowledge about the professional experience of the employees in the sector and determining the suitability of the profession to the person’ (Celik & Uzmez, 2014).

It is difficult to say that the musical instrument artists who make their career choice in the 10–12 age range do career planning in this context. At an age where there are no expectations as monetary gain, social status and job security, the reasons such as ‘musical talent or interest in music’ come forward in the choice of profession. Musical talent, which is 81% of the artists’ reason for choosing the profession, ‘is a quality determined within the education process. The indicator of this is the speed of development. It can be said that a person who develops faster within the same educational methods and programmes is more talented’ (Say, 2007). In this context, it is understood that it is difficult to determine whether a music prone child has enough talent to be a musician without taking music education.

On the other hand, it is thought that this age range is an early period for determining all abilities and interests of an individual and directing them to a certain profession. Most people do not acquire the profession they dreamed of when they were 10 years old. The interests and expectations change at a later age. ‘Choosing a profession at a young age based on interest may lead to erroneous results’^c (Kuzgun, 2014).

Fifty-nine percent of the artists stated that their family and relatives were effective when they turned to music. According to the conservatory education system, the starting age of vocational music education is the 5th grade of primary education. A student who will be included in the system in the higher classes has to meet the knowledge and skill level required by that class. In order to achieve this level outside the conservatory, the child/young person must pursue a very intensive programme together with the formal education. On the other hand, there will be multiple challenges for a family whose child is attending two educational programmes. This can be seen as an important reason for directing a child who has a talent and interest in music to the conservatory education by the family.

In addition, it is understood that the presence of a considerable number of musicians in their families allowed the orchestra artists to encounter music and music environment at an early age.

Table 4. The presence of musicians in the family

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	65	54
No	55	46

^c The author states that gifted individuals are excluded from this scope. According to him, ‘the child whose talent is recognised and who is provided with possibilities and conditions is more focused to his/her field, as his/her success is recognised by his surroundings’. In this context, it can be said that talented and highly talented children have different developmental lines in music education and professional music life. The highly talented children are left out of the scope of this research—which is for orchestral artists—as they receive a soloistic education at the conservatories.

According to Table 4, 54% of the orchestral artists have musicians in their family. 46% of them have not.

It is seen that it is common for the children of musicians whose talents are recognised by their families to be guided to the conservatory. It is understandable that the child who witnesses the lives of musicians and grows up in the music environment is interested in music earlier and more intensely than their peers. It is thought that these families are guiding their children with a certain consciousness while they themselves are familiar with their children's education programme in the conservatory and future professional life.

It is clear that the families who have no musician members and their talented children should definitely be aware of the difficulties that are awaiting them while entering this path. Musicianship is not only a job limited to standard working hours, but it is a profession that shapes and directs all aspects of an individual's life. With the long education life and extraordinary working conditions that require great devotion (considering the facts that orchestration does not have a certain routine, it is a synchronised and organised work, requires constant attention and focus, the stage performance is exciting, it has a unique and symbolic language and so on.), it can be defined as a 'way of life' rather than a profession.

It is a well-intentioned effort for families and their relatives to invest in the talent and interest of their children in music after recognising them. However, the choice of profession based solely on the criteria of skill and interest can be regretted in the following years due to changes in personal interests, expectations and priorities or inability to achieve the desired result.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

It has been determined that the main factors behind the choice of profession of the orchestra artists are their musical talent, their interest in music and being directed to music by their families and relatives. It is understood that artists made their choice of profession at an age when they could not discover other personal interests and abilities and also without having pre-knowledge about the criteria such as social position, job security, income and work environment. Therefore, choosing music as a profession is thought to be an emotional decision rather than a conscious one.

The children who have passed the entrance examination of the conservatory and their families who are informed well about the content, pace and method of the education to be taken, as well as their future professional life will be able to gain a realistic perspective on the subject.

In addition, it is thought that dissemination of music preparatory education in some conservatories^d to other conservatories will facilitate the evaluation of children's talent and interest levels in terms of conformity with the profession.

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^d Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University Children's Conservatory (<http://www.msgsudk.com/index.php/cocuk-konservatuvari/>).
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