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Opinions of early childhood education teacher candidates towards the profession

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Abstract

The qualifications of early childhood teachers have a great importance as they are the people whom little children share most of their time apart from their parents. Therefore early childhood teachers have quite an important mission. Moving from this point this study aimed at obtaining the candidates' opinions about the field of early childhood education as a profession. A qualitative research was designed and a semi-structured interview was performed with early childhood teacher candidates all of whom were studying at a foundation university in Turkey. The candidates were from the second, third and the fourth year. Volunteers were asked questions in order to reveal their opinions about the profession such as, the characteristics of the profession, positive and negative sides of the profession or the conditions of the profession. The interviews were decoded by the researcher and the collected data was analyzed by using descriptive statistics. Although the perception of the job was negative in society and the salaries were not satisfactory the results showed that the candidates were dedicated towards their profession. They preferred moral satisfaction more than money.

Keywords: Early childhood education, teacher candidates, opinions about profession.

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1. Introduction

It is important to have well trained, highly qualified human resource to enable our country to take its' place among developed countries. That target can be reachable in case there is a satisfactory education system in the country. The excellence of the system is related to the qualifications of teacher candidates. Teaching is defined as a profession which has social, cultural, economic, scientific and technological dimensions and requires specific expertness in the field (Dogan & Coban, 2009).

Teaching is a term that comprises a position in educational organizations and set of behaviors required by the position, defines the responsibilities and relations of the position (Ustuner, 2006). Whenever studies are designed on teaching professions or the teachers, the teachers' act in the classroom is taken into account as it would be accepted as an indicator of his/her attitudes towards teaching. Although attitudes and opinions somehow have similarities, opinions are personal responses towards certain formations or conditions. Attitudes involve evaluation statements about objects, people, and events either positive or negative. Attitudes express how an individual feels about something (Robbins, 1994). In fact, people are aware of their opinions but not their attitudes totally (Tezbasaran, 1997).

Although opinions are perceived easily than attitudes, there is several research done revealing teacher candidates' attitudes (Richardson and Watt, 2005; Jain, 2007) or self efficacy (Elaldi & Yerliyurt, 2016; Akbaba, 2013) or their perception towards their profession (Capri & Celikkaleli, 2008; Dogan & Coban, 2009; Bulut, 2009). This research is designed to reveal the opinions of early childhood teacher candidates towards the profession by investigating from both positive and negative perspectives.

2. Methodology

The research includes the purpose, model, participants, instruments, data collection and data analysis.

2.1. Purpose

In this research it was aimed to reveal the opinions of early childhood teacher candidates towards the profession.

2.2. Model

In this research, qualitative research approach was used to collect detailed and in-depth data, to directly learn the participants' individual perceptions, experiences and opinions, and to understand and explain the present situations.

2.3. Participants

The participants of the research were 12 early childhood teacher candidates whose ages are between 18-23. They were students at TED University and all of them were female. 2 of them were 1st year; 4 of them were 2nd year, 6 of them were 3rd year and 1 of them was a 4th year student.

2.4. Instruments

A semi structured interview form was used in order to obtain opinions of early childhood teacher candidates about their profession. The form was prepared by the researcher by making a deep literature review on the subject. As a result of the related literature research, a pool of questions which could be included in this study had been established. A 'semi-structured interview form' was presented to five experts who were experts in the early childhood education field to assess the suitability of the research for qualitative work. The form had been finalized by taking into account the views presented. They made necessary expression corrections in some sentences and enabled them to

be more understandable. One of them combined 2 items and the form is finalized with 12 items. Afterwards, a pilot interview was held by making amendments in the direction of the proposals. This pilot interview was made to be aware of the clearness of the questions and then used by making corrections.

2.5. Data collection

The students were invited to conduct the semi structured interview one by one on a certain date and time to a suitable place in the university. The researcher asked the permission of the students to have a record of the answers. There was no objection for it. Then the researcher asked the questions in the same order for each interviewee. The interview took about 20-25 minutes.

2.6. Data analysis

The data obtained from the interview form were analyzed using descriptive analysis. The data was arranged by the researcher and interpreted in relation to the themes. Participants were coded as Participant 1 (P1), Participant 2 (P2) and so on. Some participants' opinions were presented and quoted directly in the discussion section in terms of keeping the identity of the participants confidential.

3. Findings and Comments

The findings of the study were given within the themes determined in accordance with the questions of the research. The findings were categorized under three headings as qualifications of an early childhood teacher, challenges of the profession and professional satisfaction.

The first heading *qualifications of an early childhood teacher* are discussed below. The answers of the candidates focused on having the right qualifications for being an early childhood teacher. The samples are as follows;

'The ones who are full of love towards children and people should choose this job' (P: 3)

'Not everyone can be an early childhood teacher. The first thing is being fond of children. If it lacks the teacher cannot have a sufficient communication with children and cannot make enough contribution to children's development' (P: 4)

'A person should have love, patience and respect towards children. She should accept a child as an individual' (P: 5)

'Besides loving children a teacher should have good communication skills. She should know how to spend quality time with children, should love teaching, should be careful about looking at the issues from the child's point of view, and should care about their future' (p:6)

'Before choosing this job, a person must analyze her character objectively. Everyone cannot be an early childhood teacher. The ones who are impatient or with mental disorders or with psychological problems must not do this job' (P: 10)

'The person must love children and be patient and energetic. The ones should be physically and also mentally healthful enough' (P: 12)

The candidates emphasize the importance of having a suitable character for the job. The main thing is to love children and also your job. The highest frequency is on the teachers' patience. There is another point which is mentioned is that to have good communication with children is crucial. An early childhood teacher must show respect to children, their thoughts, their feelings and accept them as individuals.

The second heading is *challenges of the profession*. The opinions of the candidates about the challenges of the profession focused on the perception of the job around and the imbalance between workload and the salaries.

The samples regarding the *perception of the job around (family, peers, society)* are below;

Family/relatives

'First my family belittled but then they got used to it' (P: 1)

'My mother believes that this job is quite important whereas my father says it is just cutting papers all day long and providing security for children in a certain place'(P:10)

'Some are aware of the importance of the job but others ask if I going to be a babysitter with a degree'

'They usually ask me what I am going to be exactly and add why do I have to go to a university for 4 years for this?'(P: 4)

'They think it is an ideal job for a woman as it looks to be care taking. The other important thing for them is that I'll have a long summer holiday or staying at home when it snows' (P: 7)

'Some wish I studied in another teaching faculty. It is nonsense to study early childhood education for them' (P: 2)

Peers in other faculties

'For them this job is so easy and pleasing' (P: 12)

'They claim that we are playing with dough or cutting cartoons in all courses' (P: 4)

'One of them said how hard can it be as it is just childcare. She thinks my classes are easy; just cutting and painting' (P: 3)

Society

'It is perceived as the easiest job in the world. Early childhood teachers are the ones who just play with children and sing songs to them all day long' (P: 5)

'Childcare' (P: 8)

'Early childhood education is not very well perceived yet. It is still accepted as babysitting' (P: 9)

The answers are around the same point that family members, peers and society have grown a common point of view towards the profession. They all perceive the profession as a kind of care taking. For them it is quite easy which can be done simply by anyone. There is also a smell of humiliation of the profession.

The samples regarding the *imbalance between workload and salary of the job* are below;

'I don't think that the job is satisfactory materially' (P: 1)

'When it is compared to the labor, I don't think the salary is satisfactory' (P: 3)

'As far as I know in some private institutions the salary is quite low. The ones who serve in academic sector earn more..... maybe' (P: 5)

'Although our job is quite important we won't get the money that we deserve. We are the ones who support the children's development. If the salaries were better more qualified people would be volunteering for the job. It is always forgotten that children are our future' (P: 11).

'The early childhood teachers do not have certain times for the break. When they are alone in the class she cannot go even to the toilet or drink a glass of water. They cannot have their lunch in a relaxed condition.'(P: 8)

'They are working long hours; from 8.30 a.m. till 5.30 p.m. The salary and the working conditions are not in balance. The job is very important. There mustn't be 25-30 children in classes. This will lead to under qualified education. Both children and teachers must be happy, peaceful and in safety' (P: 7)

The candidates are all aware of the fact that this is a low paying job. They mention the imbalance between the work load and the salary rate. Working long hours, dealing with a lot of children, not having break times are the negative parts that candidates mentioned. Moreover the job seems like caretaking by the parents and by some institutions.

The third heading is *job satisfaction*. The opinions of the candidates about this are focused on reaching their future goals and satisfaction of the job.

The samples regarding *job satisfaction* are as follows;

'Before anything else, this is the job that I can do with love. I know it will not be satisfactory materially but it is in sense. Moreover, I think international opportunities are wide so I will do my job abroad' (P: 10)

'I always want to have meaningful passions in my life and I believe that job is the one which will satisfy me intrinsically. Touching a child's life, witnessing his growth is priceless' (P: 6)

'I want to operate my own early childhood so I am in the right place' (P: 1)

'One of my future goals is to love my job because I believe that if I do it happily I will spread happiness towards others. I want to make many things for the benefit of children' (P: 9)

'Since I chose this department, I focused on how I can improve myself for the benefit of children. I am in love with my job. It has emotional satisfaction. It makes a person happy. I am sure this job will compensate my goals.' (P: 2)

'When my children feel happy, safe, peaceful, healthy, I will feel the most satisfaction' (P: 5)

'This job will always keep me young, up to date. I know it is physically tiring but as I do the job willingly it will always keep me satisfied till I retire' (P: 12)

'I always want to be an actress. I consider the classroom as a stage and I can act on the stage every day. This is satisfaction for me' (P: 3)

The candidates declare their job satisfaction. They have made their choice consciously and they think it is the most suited job for them so they believe that there will be a full satisfaction. The candidates are also optimistic about their future goals. They are the ones who chose this profession by their own will and like it very much. That's why they are hopeful while they are making their future plans. Their job expectations are high. Besides teaching early childhood, some want to go abroad, some want to have their own institution. They are all positive about their future.

4. Discussion

The candidates most frequently stated that an early childhood teacher should be patient. Besides being patient they have to be full of love towards children and full of energy. Having good communication skills is quite important while having an interaction with children. They also stressed that an early childhood teacher must be mentally healthy in order not to give harm to children. Celikten, Sanal and Yeni (2015) put forward the qualifications of an effective teacher as follows; patient; emotionally controlled; respectful towards different beliefs, vision and groups; careful with his dressing; open for improvement; motivating; a good model; loving; objective; disciplined; leader; supportive and a problem solver. Among the aforementioned qualifications there are ones that the candidates have already stated. Similarly, Celikten and Can (2003) made the description of an ideal teacher as merry, tolerant, loving, reliable, honest, objective, a good model with his thoughts and behaviors. Sumbul (1996) investigated the relation between the professional knowledge and the personality characteristics of teachers and how this relation affects students' success. In the research

Sumbul (1996) describes the personality characteristics of a teacher with several adjectives. Among these there are enthusiastic, excited and job oriented which are close to the definitions of the candidates who participated in the research.

The candidates put forward their opinions on the challenges of the job. They mentioned their dissatisfaction on the perception of the job around and the imbalance between working conditions and the salary. Although the profession is perceived as just care taking among the family members, peers and in society there happens to be a positive attitude towards the profession. For Ayik and Atas (2014) teaching profession needs being patient, self sacrificing and insistent towards the obstacle. In order to be successful in the career it is important to do it in love and passionately. Success is closely related to the attitudes of the teachers. The teacher candidates who have a positive attitude towards their profession will perform their job willingly as a result of this they will contribute to the field of education. The research done according to the attitudes of the candidates have positive results (Caglar, 2013; Dogan & Coban, 2009; Demirtas, Comert & Ozer, 2011; Bulut, 2009) whereas there are results which show that the candidates' negative attitude towards teaching profession. The candidates mentioned that they chose the profession without having enough information that's why they are not passionate enough towards the job (Kahyaoglu, Tan & Kaya, 2013; Hussein, Ali, Khan, Ramzan & Qadeer, 2011; Osunde & Izevbogie, 2006). The candidates in this research mention that they made their job choice by their own will, so they do not ever regret. The main reason can be that they are informed about the profession well, they think about it and come to a decision. In spite of the hard working conditions and dissatisfactory salary rates the candidates in the research quite love their job. The reason for that may be their high motivation and teaching passion. In Dereli and Acat (2010)'s research, it is seen that early childhood departments' candidates motivation towards the job is generally high. According to Kaya, Yildiz and Yildiz (2013) the teachers with high intrinsic motivation do not have financial worries as they believe in the moral satisfaction of the profession.

5. Conclusion

The candidates think that an early childhood teacher should be patient, energetic, loving, and mentally healthy and should have good communication skills. In fact the participants believe that they have these qualifications which will help them adapt to their profession easily. The candidates are dedicated enough towards their profession although there is a negative impression on the job in society and the salary is not satisfactory. Their dedication arises from their informed choice. They are after moral satisfaction rather than materialistic one. The most important point is that they are hopeful about their future career.

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