

## **INVESTIGATION OF PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS VIEWS OF TEACHING AS PROFESSION**

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**Abstract.** The teaching profession has been transformed in the last century in terms of its approaches and structures, such as its instructional methods and learning settings. Such transformations affect the motivations that promote choosing it as a career. Recent studies conducted on the reasons for choosing the teaching profession have been carried out with pre- and in-service teachers' perspectives. The current study explores similar issues within broader views in terms of prospective teachers' personal views about two essential facets: "Prevailing views that teacher candidates hold about the profession"; "If any correlation exists between reasons for choosing teaching as a career and their disciplines". Participants were asked to identify their teaching philosophies and reasons for determining this career path in college. The data collection process took place between 2012 and 2014. A total of 253 pre-service teachers enrolled in teacher preparation programs agreed to participate in the study. The results of data analysis indicated that teacher candidates in different disciplines hold similar viewpoints on both research questions. In addition, they stated that they chose the teaching profession because 'It is a

sacred job; the country needs better education; it is an ideal job for females'. Some correlation according to gender emerged for both of the research questions.

*Keywords:* teacher education, pre-service teacher philosophies, teaching

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## **Introduction**

### *History of teaching and teacher education programs*

The main purpose of teacher education programs for decades has been to develop, for prospective teachers in any discipline, an understanding of pedagogical content knowledge, a higher level of human psychology and classrooms skills to engage students in the learning process and to guide them to their own knowledge on any subject (Ayers, 1995; 2001; Eddie, 1969; McLean, 1999; Parkay & Stanford, 2010). Certain abilities of teachers in various subjects overlap, such as their philosophy of teaching/education and reasons for becoming teachers (Artzt, 2008; Bullough, 1997; Christenbury, 2000; Elfers et al., 2008; Freeman & Richards, 1996; Tinning et al., 2001). World-wide reform movement documents<sup>1,2)</sup> were published to express the importance of the issue. As a result, teaching viewpoint and individual motivation behind their choice of teaching considerably affect their performances in the classroom and, as a result, learner performances.

Individuals need to identify, understand and discover everything in the surrounding environment from the time they first open their eyes. Every person goes through a similar process, but nobody remembers such times. The process of learning about our environment continues until the end of our lives; thus it is a life-long process. Subsequently, we learn something about our families first of all. This is usually sufficient for the next steps. People live and work in a rapidly changing world. New scientific and technological advances

in every part of our lives are continuously presenting opportunities for new experiences. New ideas and approaches emerge. New problems arise and new solutions are sought while learning them. The world is therefore a constantly moving and evolving place. What this means, then, is that, if we are not continuously learning as we go about our day-to-day life, then each day we will get further and further out of touch with the demands of the modern world. It can be dangerous to get into a pothole whereby we continue to face new experiences in much the same way as we have done in the past. Expectations change over time and, if we do not adapt to new circumstances, we are more and more likely to become increasingly out of tune with what is required from us. We need to learn which plan or system we desire for the requirements of life. Finally, people now realize that education or learning plays a significant role in this dynamic process.

Correspondingly, learning is defined as the consistent and deep engagement of the mind and body in the active pursuit of knowledge and experience from birth to death.<sup>3)</sup> Science and education systems stress the benefit importance of learning in keeping minds active and healthy for a lifetime. Therefore, the education system plays an important pivotal role. These two concepts are inseparable parts of each other. What defines a good education system? What are its characteristics? The aim of an education system rises in accordance with people and populations. A good education system should be able to help people to keep up with the modern realm and to succeed in society. Indeed, this presents an economic view of any education system. For this reason, we should design a high performing education structure for a better education system.

An education structure is an indicator that highly educated people live in a population. Openness, intelligibility, unity, persistence, scientific endeavors and dynamism are the main properties of such an education system. Also, its key players are very crucial. It includes teachers, students and parents.

Teachers describe the necessities for good education, as learning and an education system. In brief, anything that gives direction to education concerns them (Adem, 1995). Students are well known that education is applied to the subject. Parents assist them like education advisors. Of course, they are considered to have special importance. In an education system our main focus should be to choose the main groups which are important for the education system. Of these, the main group comprises teachers. It can therefore be concluded that learning, the education system and politics constitute a structure, and the main component is the teacher.

Societies seek individuals who can help us to train for our future according to our needs and we realize that teachers play a very important role in that process. They might be considered to be the most critical part in the eyes of parents. They can help us in working for the future of our society. We need teachers for our next steps. Therefore teachers and their jobs are key issues for pupils' learning, the educational system and decision makers. Unless we provide the necessary training for teachers, we will obviously not succeed in achieving a suitable future for coming generations.

The main purpose of teacher education for decades has been to develop, for prospective teachers in all disciplines, an understanding of pedagogical content knowledge, a higher level of human psychology and classrooms skills to engage students in the learning process and to guide them to their own knowledge on any subjects (Ayers, 1995; Ayers, 2001; Eddie, 1969; McLean, 1999; Parkay & Stanford, 2010). Particular abilities of teachers in various subjects overlap such as their philosophy of teaching/education and reasons for becoming teachers (Artzt, 2008; Bullough, 1997; Christenbury, 2000; Elfers et al., 2008; Freeman & Richards, 1996; Tinning et al., 2001). As a result, teaching viewpoint and individual motivations behind their choice of teaching considerably affect their performances in the classroom and, as a result, learner performances.

The teaching profession is considered as a blessed profession in many cultures. Passing knowledge to future generations is a very difficult and exhausting process. It requires volunteering, dedication and willingness. Teacher candidates are pivotal to this issue. Some countries are, correspondingly, more successful than others in terms of teacher training, such as Finland. According to Claparede: “The most important merit of a teacher cannot be sage but can be teaching knowledge”. The main characteristic (requirement) of teachers is that that he/she should understand child psychology and be friendly with them (Akyüz, 1983). They should have a good character and set a good sample for the students. They should also understand children’s personality; in addition being able to put themselves into childrens’ shoes; and should be very good at observing their actions (Akyüz, 1983). In addition, one may define a teacher as someone who can analyze and understand human characters.

The teacher preparation process is currently evolving, investigating and searching for better approaches, as in the training of other professions such as scientists, engineers and lawyers across the world. The major role of teachers is shifting as the function of education institutions advances. Although slight knowledge was acceptable for pre-industrial society, it is not adequate for today’s modern society and future world. The knowledge now is required very complicated and needs to be specialized. Modern life is changing very quickly due to technological advances. This shapes our lives so students need to acquire the necessary level of such knowledge in order to survive. Teachers play a very important role in transferring current knowledge to new generations. They are not only facilitators in the classroom but also leaders. These factors lead to such population features as social, cultural and economic since they are the driving force of societies.

Teachers are key actors in improving the quality of education. All countries have a similar design for the teacher preparation system. In particular, developed European and American countries are presently giving signifi-

cant importance for teacher training facilities. European countries have recently identified priorities for improving the quality of teacher education systems. Generally, these statements describe a vision of Teacher Education in Europe based upon high quality standards, professionalism and effective support. They are aware that teacher quality is the most important within-school factor affecting student performance. The key role possessed by teachers and trainers in creating quality education and training systems was recognized at the very beginning of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) in Education and Training. The authors describe a vision of Teacher Education<sup>4)</sup> as follows: (i) key professional values and attitudes such as reflective practice, autonomous learning and collaboration should be promoted; (ii) practical teaching competencies should be improved; (iii) recruitment and selection should be more effective so that Member States attract and retain the best candidates for the teaching profession and promote teaching as an attractive career; (iv) the quality of Initial Teacher Education should be improved, with all teachers having a HE qualification that is evidence-based, and balances theory and practice; (v) all new teachers, during their first years in the profession should receive professional and personal support; (vi) all teachers should be engaged in relevant and effective Continuing Professional Development, based upon regular reviews of their training needs; (vii) the recruitment and development of school principals as leaders for learning should be improved; (viii) the quality of Teacher Educators (Teacher Trainers) should be promoted; (ix) each teacher education system should be organized as a seamless continuum: it should be adequately resourced and quality assured.

It is a fact that European teachers are more fortunate than their colleagues in other countries because the latter do not have proper education policies. Therefore as UNESCO reported, these countries have more educational problems especially in teacher training (UNESCO, 2014).

The aforementioned studies revealed that choosing teacher candidates is a very important process for every nation. Preparing future teachers is an extremely critical issue. For this reason, programs should be designed based on prospective teachers' philosophy of education and the main motives that encourage them to choose the teaching profession. Recent studies (Richardson & Watt, 2005; Priyadharshini & Robinson-Pant, 2003) found some specific explanations listed in terms of career changes to pursue teaching profession. For example, Richardson & Watt (2005) indicated that career changes are strongly related to five main factors including social status, career fit, prior considerations, financial reward and time.

### *Teaching as profession*

Teaching is known as an area, which facilitates learning. It requires the specified application of knowledge, skills and attributes designed to provide the educational needs of society. Although it takes place in the classroom, interaction between teacher and students lies is within the most important element in teaching. The best teachers are considered to be those who bring out the best in students.

Various studies have been conducted on selecting the teaching career in specific disciplines such as elementary (Çermik et al. 2010; Ozsoy et al., 2010), physical education (Tinning et al. 2001), mathematics (Artz, 2008; Brown & Borko; Tataroglu et al., 2011), social studies (Goodman & Adler, 1985, Ozsoy et al., 2010) and English (Christenbury, 2000; Freeman & Richards, 1996; Ozsoy et al., 2010). Ozsoy et al. (2010) found that among English, elementary and social studies teachers, female teachers possess higher assurance, more consciousness and ideal factors than their male counterparts. Tataroglu (2011) showed that mathematics teacher candidates are highly interested in teaching mathematics and have higher expectations for their students, instructional progression and their faculty members.

According to other studies (Goddman & Adler, 1985), elementary social studies teachers hold six perspectives: non-subject, human relations, citizenship indoctrination, school knowledge, the integrative core of the elementary curriculum, and education for social action. They concluded that teacher education programs should be more effective in such issues.

Other studies (Kyriacou & Coulthard, 2000; Kyriacou et al., 2002; Kyriacou et al., 2003) investigated the reasons why Norwegian and British university students choose the teaching profession. They found that college students wanted to become teachers because teaching is enjoyable and a socially critical job, requires responsibility, contributes to society, has long holidays, and involves working with children and care for others. Similar studies (Manuel & Hughes, 2006; Richardson & Watt, 2008; Hoy, 2008) were conducted for Australian teacher candidates. They discovered that pre-service teachers choose teaching because they like working with young people to make a difference in their lives it involves; engagement with their disciplines and their own; personal fulfillment. Richardson and Watt (2006) developed an FIT-Choice scale to determine what influenced individuals most to the teaching profession. Watt & Richardson (2008) explored the motivations and perceptions of graduate pre-service teachers and determined three distinct types “persisters, switchers, and desisters”. Further investigations involved freshman teacher candidates’ characteristics (Brookhart & Freeman, 1992; Bruinsma & Jansen, 2010; Flores & Day, 2006; Watt et al., 2012) and studied four major characteristics of variables.

The above studies and their results show that decision makers should focus on teacher selection systems designed for teacher education, because they will shape our future. The main point is that they should be selected according to their abilities for the teaching profession. What is most important for such a process? What do they think about their training system? This study was guided by these research questions.



## **Methods**

Participants (N=253) were enrolled in teacher education programs (Elementary science education (ESE), elementary mathematics education (EME) and English education (EE)) at a mid-size university that offers undergraduate and graduate programs in the mid-eastern part of Turkey. We purposefully selected these groups because we wanted to explore any correlation that exists among them. This particular university was selected because it offers large teacher education programs. It was founded in SW in 1967. It is one of the Turkey's major research-intensive universities, and hosts around 2,700 teacher candidates at its Faculty of Education. It offers 13 undergraduate teacher education degrees. The students typically take introductory pedagogical and content courses in the first two years. For the last two years, they participate in field experiences and content instructional courses as they graduate with a diploma and a teaching license. At graduate level, it has six different departments for teachers and administration. There are also teacher preparation programs for those students who studied subjects other than education at bachelor degree level and who want to become teachers. They gain a teaching certificate based on one-year-long pedagogical courses.

Demographic information about the participants is illustrated below. Their ages ranged between 17 and 25. The data collection process took about 2 years. Participants checked boxes to indicate their gender, undergraduate enrollment, year of study, and degree the majority of participants were enrolled (88%) either as freshmen or junior students in subgroups. The data collection process took place during three different core courses: "Introduction to Educational Sciences" (freshman year), "Methods of Teaching" (junior year), Practicum courses (senior year). Financial situations, previous academic performances, race or ethnicity were not taken into account for the purpose of the study.

**Table 1.** Pre-service teachers' demographic information based on three disciplines

	<b>ESE (N=95)</b>		<b>EME (N=104)</b>		<b>EE (N=54)</b>	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
<b>Freshman</b>	0		4	35	13	41
<b>Sophomore</b>	0		0		0	
<b>Junior</b>	24	63	0		0	
<b>Senior</b>	3	3	19	46	0	

ESE: Elementary Science Ed. EME: Elementary Mathematics Ed. EE: English Ed.

Data were collected through a combination of phenomenology and survey research approaches with two open-ended questions in the academic years of 2012 and 2013. We asked the participants what they believe about teaching philosophy and why they decided to pursue the teaching profession. It was completed with paper-based and observational approaches. Participants were allowed to write down their beliefs about the meaning of education and their motives in becoming teachers. About 45 minutes for each session was dedicated to collect data. There were no follow-up interviews with them about their responses. Data were analyzed by using the descriptive data analysis method.

Both quantitative and qualitative analyses were conducted for emerging themes. Using MS Word and Excel programs completed the data analysis process. Several steps were implemented to analyze qualitative data and to identify patterns. Data were first entered into a computer. Then, we subdivided students according to their subjects, years and genders. This approach allows for continuous grouping of open codes on participant responses to generate groupings (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Merriam, 2009). In addition, we recoded to target more specific categories by utilizing pre-determined ideas and

trends with the use of the descriptive research analysis method. Finally, themes were generated into eight categories for the meaning of education (Table 2) and eleven codes for motivations for the teaching profession (Table 3).

**Table 2.** Categories for education philosophies for the question, “What is education?”

Department/Grade	Total	EME/1		EME/4		EE/1		ESE/4		ESE/3	
		M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
1. Directing and developing society according to conditions of this century	20			3	5	2	2			2	6
2. Gaining desired movements and behaviors	81	2	1	2	11	2	12	1	2	15	33
3. Learning responsibilities	1				1						
4. A person's self-cultivation and development	39	1	10	7	7	1	4		1	2	6
5. Education is science	1				1						
6. Preparing children for future challenges in life, teaching life, raising them morally	56	2	10	5	8	6	10	2		5	8
7. Life-long learning	45		9	4	8	2	7			1	14
8. Cultivating individuals according to the customs and traditions of the society they live in	9		3	1	2		3				
<b>Total</b>	<b>253</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>92</b>					

## Results

This study was aimed determining at teacher candidates’ perspectives regarding education and motivations to the profession. Two hundred and fifty three pre-service teachers who were enrolled in teacher education programs participated in the study. Survey responses were collected from them during survey and focal interview sessions. This study was conducted to investigate the primary reasons for students enrolling in teacher preparation programs, choosing teaching as a profession and their main perspectives to describe education philosophies towards education. Three independent variables were taken into account when analyzing the collected data: department, year and gen-

der. Results were evaluated based on these three perspectives as to whether any relationship and significant matters exist. Finally, the results were compared with previous research findings in the literature.

**Table 3.** Categories for choosing teaching career

Dept./Grade	Total	EME/1		EME/4		EE/1		ESE/4		ESE/3	
		M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
1. Affection	12		2	2	1		4	1			2
2. Family's wishes	18		5	1	5		2		1	3	1
3. Like teaching	45		5	3	11	4	7		1	2	12
4. Teacher in the family	9		1		2	1	2	1			2
5. Sacred profession	27		3	2	6	2	8			3	3
6. Be beneficial for society	27	1	1	3	1	2		1		3	15
7. Like children	13		2	2			3				6
8. Like sharing my knowledge	14			5	1	1	4				3
9. Secondary preference	42	3	11	2	10	1	3		1	6	5
10. Holidays/comfortable	41	1	6	1	1	2	12	1	2	5	10
11. Due to deficiency of current education system	5			1	2		1			1	
<b>Total</b>	<b>253</b>		<b>41</b>		<b>62</b>		<b>59</b>		<b>9</b>		<b>82</b>
											<b>82</b>

### *The meaning of education*

For the first research question, findings from the survey and focal interviews were correlated. Eight categories emerged in terms of what education mean for teacher candidates. It has a different meaning for each subgroup. In the mathematics education subgroup, freshmen and seniors indicated similar explanations (Themes 2, 4, 6, and 7). These themes are related to an individual's cultivation, preparing children for the future and life-long learning. 56% of the freshman group believed that education is self-cultivation and the preparation of future individuals. For example, one freshman participant wrote that "education is to raise useful, tolerant and conscious people for society" and

another expressed the view that education is to “prepare future generations for life”. Similarly, of the senior students, 65% also believed that education is to achieve desired behaviors or self-cultivation and to prepare children for the future. For example, one senior student stated, “Education consists of desired behaviors. It is everywhere and it is unplanned”.

For the English subgroup, although they showed similar patterns, almost 1/3 of the freshman students believed that education is the preparation of children for the future. Science teacher candidates mostly indicated that education is about providing desired behaviors for the children. When building themes, responses without legitimate or no answers were ignored.

According to the results illustrated in Table 2, science teacher candidates predominantly believe that education is aimed at gaining desired behaviors. It is significantly similar for grades and gender. However, when Mathematics and English education are compared, they share similar ideas about education. These ideas did not produce one dominant group but generated two prevailing definitions: self-cultivation and preparing children for the future. When grade or gender issues are checked, it is found that no correlations exist among them.

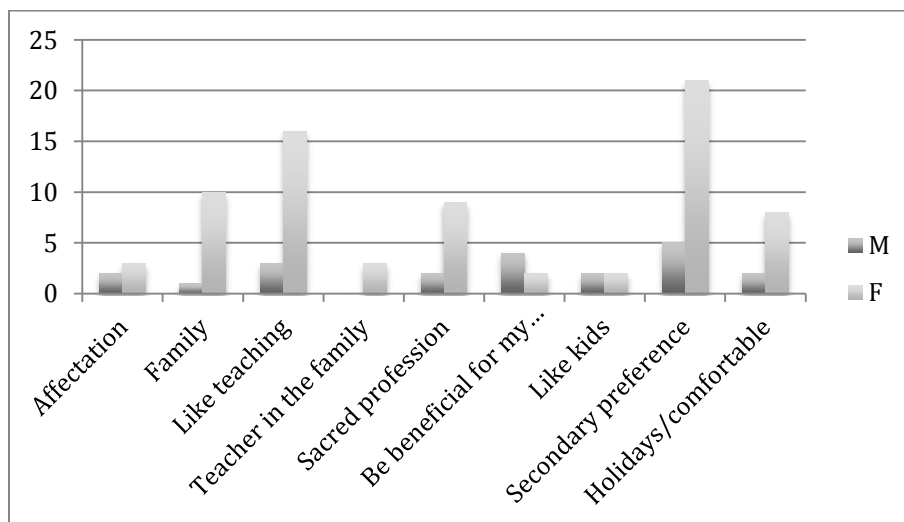
### *Motives for teaching*

When constructing Table 2 and Figs. 1-3, which were related to typical objectives prior to deciding to study to become a teacher, disciplines, gender and grades were taken into account. Firstly, disciplinary themes were constructed and regrouped to obtain the final groups.

The highest rated motivations for choosing teaching as a career included affection for teaching, making a contribution to society, and working with young children. Similar patterns are achieved when comparing to our findings previous research findings. Participants indicated that they wanted to be teachers because they like teaching; they want to be asset to the community,

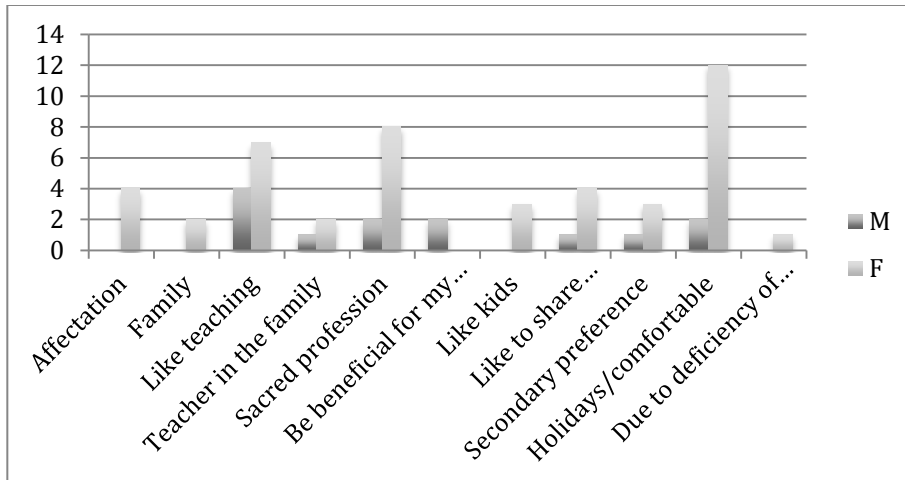
they like affection, like children, and believe teaching is a sacred profession. Such results show similar patterns with what Kyriacou et al. (2002) achieved in their investigations with Norwegian university students concerning teaching as a career, except perhaps for the “sacred profession” theme.

Male mathematics education students (Fig. 1) mostly indicated that they “liked teaching” or “secondary preference (it was not their top choice)” or “teaching is a sacred job”. Freshman students show similar patterns to seniors, but they believe that the “teaching profession has more holidays and is less strict compared to other professions” as their top idea.



**Fig. 1.** Reasons for choosing teaching profession among mathematics teacher candidates

Students in the English education program, both female and male have different ideas. Female students are mainly interested in the holidays, its being a comfortable profession and because it is a sacred profession. However, male students’ top choice was that they like the profession. This was females’ second choice. The top choices of English education teacher candidates are summarized below (Fig. 2).



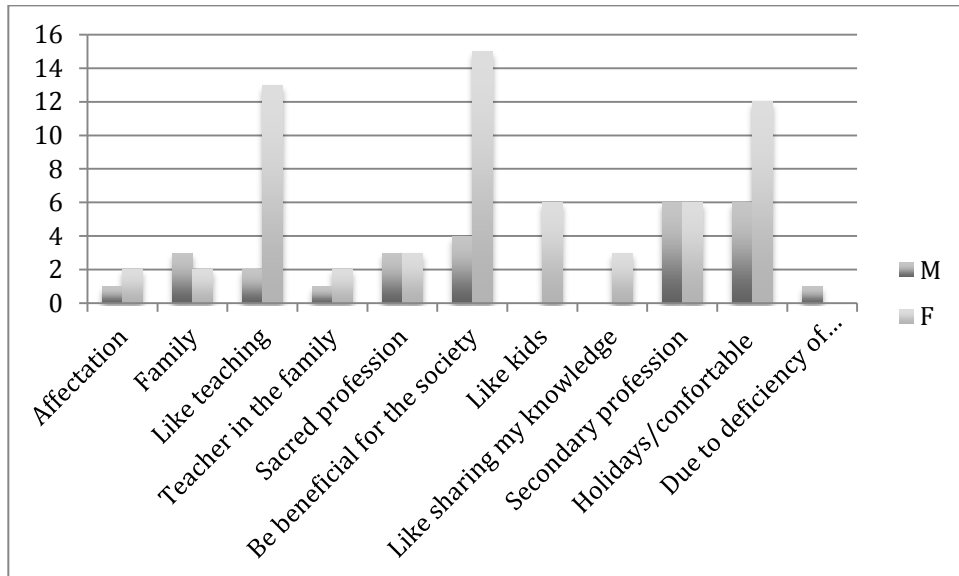
**Fig. 2.** Reasons for choosing teaching profession among English teacher candidates

The elementary science education subgroup choices are illustrated in Fig. 3. When the responses of elementary science education students are investigated, it was found that female students have different ideas compared to their counterparts in mathematics and English education programs. They chose the teaching profession in order to be helpful to their country and community. Their second choice was related to liking the profession. Male students decided to become teachers because it is not their first choice but second for certain reasons.

### **Discussion and conclusion**

Our study profiled teacher candidates' characteristics, motivations for choosing teaching, and perceptions about the profession at a large university in Turkey. The findings were analyzed according to three variables: discipline, gender and grade. Some similarities and differences emerged in terms of them. The findings were elaborated and compared with previous research results. All of the participants major teacher education profession. For this type of sample of teacher candidates, their decisions to study teacher education

programs were based on various motives. Our findings will help teacher preparation programs in recruiting their students as well as selecting appropriate courses and their incentives for them.



**Fig. 3.** Reasons for choosing teaching profession among science teacher candidates

Our findings resembled the previous findings of Kyriacou & Coulthard (2000), Kyriacou et al. (2002), Kyriacou et al. (2003) and Manuel & Hughes (2006). In terms of defining education, the top philosophy that participants indicated was “education is gaining desired movements and behaviors”. Among all groups, except for the elementary science education group, female students predominantly shared this belief to a much higher extend than their male counterparts. This difference might suggest that females are more inclined to be sensitive to students’ behaviors in society. They also expressed the belief that teaching is an act for preparing children for future challenges including the moral issues they will face in life. In addition, in contrast to earlier findings (Manuel & Hughes, 2006), education is believed to support life-long learning experiences and one’s self-cultivation and development for life.



The male participants, probably due to their roles in society, mostly supported the former two beliefs.

Nevertheless, only two students among 253 participants indicated that “education is learning responsibility” or “education is science” in their responses. These two themes were surprisingly not issues for them. Probably, they see education as a social profession and not as a scientific way of life. This shows that they believe that social sciences like education are still not as mature as natural sciences and this is reflected in teacher candidates’ philosophy of education.

Unlike the earlier findings of Kyriacou et al. (2002) and Kyriacou et al. (2003), we found that pre-service teachers decided to pursue teaching because of their families and view that it is believed to be a sacred profession. All of the groups shared these two motivations when they considered studying teaching. Such results prove that the participants were very sensible to the teaching profession and its respected role in society. This view correlates their philosophy of education to raise morally good students. Education is such a sacred job that it implicitly affects everyone’s lives. This was an interesting result that was not achieved in earlier investigations. In addition, most of the participants decided on teaching as their future profession due to the pressures and wishes of their families. This was not a surprising finding because teacher parents affect their children with their passion and happiness (Book & Freeman, 1986; Fox, 1961; Lortie, 1975; Robertson et al., 1983). Family influences were top themes in the choice of teaching as a career. Female teacher candidates also indicated that they wanted to become teachers because their parents thought that becoming a teacher was suitable for females.

Participants perceived teaching as a career that is suited to them because they like their disciplines (Mathematics, Science and English) and they wanted to teach them to their students. They stated that they liked teaching because they wanted to share their ideas and knowledge with them. This was

the number one choice for English education majors and the second top response for other participants (Kyriacou & Coulthard, 2000). They also indicated that they thought this way because it was their ideal job and they liked the teachers they had in their pre-secondary education.

Participants reported strong feeling to be beneficial to their country and community. This result illustrated a patriotic approach. Teaching is strongly related to society and it has deep roots in the development of modern communities. Becoming a teacher because of its contribution to the needs of society is among the top reasons for choosing the teaching profession.

The elementary science education group differed from other participants as they decided to major in education due to their liking children. This motive could be expressed maybe because most of the elementary science education students (about 70%) who participated in the study were females and this reflects feminine feelings towards small children. It is surprising that this point was not found in previous studies.

Mathematics teacher education students said they chose teaching because they wanted to share their knowledge and studying education was their second choice. They stated that they wanted to pursue other professions but they didn't obtain enough qualifications (GPA, University entrance exam scores) to pursue their first choice. Another similar finding with the literature was that education has flexible hours and long holidays. This was a typical reason for teacher candidates from any discipline. However, only English teacher candidates specified this stimulus.

In conclusion, this study obtained some similar findings in terms of the literature but revealed some new results on the philosophy of education and teaching motivations for pre-service teachers. For future studies, research on the ideas that lie behind such beliefs and motives should be conducted in more details. Also, other disciplines should be examined to cross check reasons.

Lastly, correlations among different groups (freshmen through to seniors) of students enrolled in the same department should be studied.

#### NOTES

1. <http://en.unesco.org/themes/teachers>
2. <https://www.ed.gov/sites/default/files/our-future-our-teachers.pdf>
3. <http://blog.artsusa.org/2013/09/18/the-importance-of-learning-throughout-our-lives/>
4. <http://www.emya-mentoring.eu/articles/item/145-the-importance-of-teachers-training.html>

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