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The Views of Pre-Service Turkish Language Teachers on their Careers and Career Plans

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Abstract

Education is of great importance for all individuals in a society from the very beginning. Individuals have regarded education as the most important way to achieve their goals. In this context, university education, which prepares individuals to work life, has an important place in all societies. However, although individuals start university with great hopes, after a while, concerns and question marks about the future begin. At this point, activities that will contribute to the effective career planning of university students and guiding them on become important. The aim of the present study was to analyze the views of pre-service Turkish language teachers on their careers and career plans. Phenomenology, one of qualitative research methods, was adopted in the study. The study group included 64 pre-service teachers studying at Turkish Language Education department in a large-scale university in the east of Turkey. An interview form which included 4 open-ended questions and was developed by the researcher was used to collect data. The data were analyzed using descriptive analysis. The findings demonstrated that the majority of the participants did not have an effective career plan; they lacked knowledge on their respective fields of study, and their career plans generally focused on teaching and academic professions.

Keywords: Pre-Service Turkish Language Teachers, Career, Career Plan, Analysis.

Introduction

The competition for inclusion in the production system and a better professional life increases among individuals since there is high labor supply and low demand. Today, the increase in this competition makes it increasingly difficult to find and keep a job. The difficulty individuals depends on their education level, experience and skills. Training in a profession, finding a job, and advancing one's professional position is considered a career.

In the literature, there are several definitions of the concept of career. In general, career refers to the increase in individual's income, responsibilities, prestige, and status by advancing in a job (Aydın, Azizoğlu, & Can, 2011, p. 447). Here, increase, development, prestige and status are the goals that individuals are concerned about and desire to achieve. Thus, individuals frequently seek an answer to the question "How can I have a good career?" In this sense, effective career planning plays a significant role.

A good career plan is required for a good career. Being aware of the opportunities, choices and outcomes, professional career planners set the targets, direction and the time to achieve these targets. The process of planning the job, education and other developmental activities that would allow individuals to have a successful career are defined as career planning (Anafarta, 2001, cited by Unver, 2005, p. 30).

The studies in the literature on career and career planning reveal that most of the studies were carried out in trade and business industries, indicating a lack of studies with teachers. The reason for this is the fact that career is perceived as only vertical mobility instead of a horizontal one. The increase in the

number of studies on teacher careers after the Regulation on Promotion in Teaching Career Levels issued by the Ministry of National Education in 2005 (in this regulation, the teaching profession was divided into pre-service teacher-teacher-specialist teacher-head teacher categories) proofs the above-mentioned argument (Gündoğdu and Kızıltaş, 2008; Gündüz, 2013; Şirin, Erdoğan and Olcay, 2010). However, career entails both vertical mobility in a vocation and acquisition of various skills or improvement of existing skills in the same job. Career includes the activities that an individual conducts in life (Akat, Budak and Budak, 1999: p. 448) The contemporary career planning focuses on a better income and a higher position rather than a better job, and on ensuring qualified, experienced, efficient, and successful employees in any position.

Several on the achievements of teachers in the education system covers such issues as their qualifications, their attitudes towards the profession, and the effectiveness of education faculties in teacher training. The low performance of pre-service teachers in content knowledge exams has been frequently questioned. It should be acknowledged that a good career planning and promotion would improve the competency and productivity of teachers. Thus, career planning is inevitable for pre-service teachers. Although almost 644,000 pre-service teachers applied for the 2020 KPSS Teaching Content Knowledge Test (a national test to appoint teachers in Turkey), only 35,000 of them were appointed as teachers in 2021. Every year, about 40,000 pre-service teachers graduate from education faculties and take the exam. The current backlog in the Turkish education system is 18,000 teachers. Furthermore, after the high number of appointments in recent years, the teacher occupancy reached 93% in schools (MEB, 2021) and the total teacher need in Turkey was announced as 140,000 by the Ministry of National Education. Employment in private institutions, which is another alternative for pre-service teachers, has several prerequisites such as experience and career pursuit. Thus, pre-service teachers should have a good career plan and knowledge on other job opportunities which should be taken into account in their career plans. In this context, the present study aimed to analyze the views

of pre-service Turkish language teachers on career and their career plans. Thus, the following research problems were addressed:

- Do the pre-service Turkish language teachers have an existing career plan?
- Do the pre-service Turkish language teachers have a future career plan?
- Do the pre-service Turkish language teachers have a post-graduation alternative career plan?
- What are the potential vocational orientations of the pre-service Turkish language teachers?

Method

Research Design

Since the present study aimed to determine the views of pre-service Turkish language teachers on their careers and career plans, the phenomenology method, a qualitative research design, was used. Phenomenology is employed to reveal the reality behind the visible by focusing on a known phenomenon that we do not have in-depth knowledge about (Yıldırım&Şimşek, 2013). One of the most distinctive features of phenomenological research is to focus on their thoughts and perceptions to reveal the reality behind individuals' behavior (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012).

The Study Group

The study group included 64 3rd and 4th grade pre-service students at the Department of Turkish Language Education in university located in the east of Turkey in the 2019-2020 academic year fall semester. Only 3rd and 4th grade students were included in the study since these students were closer to graduation, and therefore to professional life.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data were collected through an interview form developed by the researcher. Initially, a preliminary interview form including 10 items was developed after a literature review. Then, these items were reviewed by field experts. Based on expert opinion, the final version of the interview form which included 4 items was developed. The participants were asked to answer 4 open-ended questions.

Descriptive analysis was used to analyze the data. The views of the participants were transferred to an

electronic format to perform descriptive analysis. The descriptive analysis included the following three stages (Jankowicz, 2004; Sezer, 2016). In the first stage, the views of the participants were coded. In the second stage, these codes were analyzed, and related codes were grouped to determine the categories. In the third stage, the main themes were determined by grouping the categories.

Consistency, Confirmability, Credibility and Transferability of the Study

To ensure consistency, the correlations between the themes and the predetermined theoretical structure were analyzed, and it was determined that these structures revealed a meaningful and consistent whole. After the interviews were completed, the views reflected in the forms were confirmed by re-interviewing the participants about the views included in the forms, and inconsistent statements were clarified. The study findings were presented to three randomly selected pre-service teacher participants to confirm the themes determined in the study (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013).

To ensure the confirmability of the study, the scientific method, sampling technique, data collection tools and data analysis processes are presented in detail. The conceptual framework of the study was comprehensive to explain the findings better (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982).

To ensure the credibility of the study, the participant views were included as is and without any comments. After the themes were determined and classified, the classification was confirmed by other faculty members, an educational scientist and Turkish language education specialist (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

To ensure the transferability of the study, the roles of the authors during data collection and analysis are reflected clearly. The participant demographics and the reasons for their inclusion in the study are presented clearly. Furthermore, the interviews, the employment of the data collection tool, and data analysis are presented in detail (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982).

Findings

In this section, the views of the participants on their careers and career plans are presented.

The Current Career Plans

Concrete decisions about future are important in career studies. After the goals are set, the required steps to achieve these goals are planned. Thus, the participants were asked whether their ideas about their career was clear, and if so, when it became clear. The responses are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: The Participants’ Views on the Period When their Ideas about their Careers became Clear

My career plan		f	%
is not clear		6	9.4
was clear when I was	At middle school	3	4.6
	At high school	6	9.4
	1st Grade	22	34.3
	2nd Grade	13	20.4
	3rd Grade	13	20.4
	4th Grade at university	1	1.5
Total		64	100

As seen in Table 1, most students (50) made a concrete decision about their careers before the university or in their first two years in the university. It was found that 6 participants did not have a career plan yet. The interviews revealed that the participants without a clear career plan did not want to practice the teaching profession. For example, a participant stated the following:

“I did not chose the faculty. When I started, I thought I could love it, but in the second year I realized that I could not live a life devotedly and willingly in this profession. That is why I want to graduate and move on to another field that I want.” [Participant 32]

Future Career Plans

The participants’ responses to the question that investigated whether they had any ideas about promotions or improvements in their future jobs are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: The Participants' Views on Future Career Plans

	f	%
Faculty member	16	25
Graduate education	16	25
I have no plans for the future	32	50
Total	64	100

As seen in Table 2, 50% of the participants stated that they did not want to continue their education. The interviews showed that they considered undergraduate education as sufficient and they wanted to achieve financial freedom in professional life as soon as possible. It was observed that students who were willing to obtain a graduate degree associated this degree with a career as an academician. Some excerpts of the participants' responses are as follows:

"I do not plan a master's degree. Because teaching in a public school is more attractive. I do not intend to do anything other than teaching." (Participant 9)

"I do not plan a master's degree. Because I never wanted spend my life in a university. I mostly want to teach young children and do something for them." (Participant 10)

"I do not plan a master's degree. Because I want to work at a normal school. I love taking care of children. I do not like the hierarchy at the university." (Participant 23)

"I do not plan postgraduate education. Because I do not need a master's degree because I will be teaching." (Participant 45)

25% of the participants stated that they were willing to obtain a graduate education. However, it was found that they planned to have a graduate degree to improve their qualifications and become a better teacher instead of becoming a faculty member. Some excerpts of the participants' responses are as follows:

"I think about a master's degree. Because I love to learn. I believe that I will learn something in master's, and I can improve myself a little further than my undergraduate level." (Participant 11)

"It is not my first goal, but I will think about a master's degree after my appointment. Because I could have the opportunity to improve myself more in my field." (Participant 39)

Finally, it was found that 25% of the participants planned a graduate education in order to be a faculty member. Some excerpts of the participants' responses are as follows:

"I think that working at the university would contribute to my development and I could become an expert in my field." (Participant 20)

"Yes, I want to continue university education and become more competent in my field and contribute to my department." (Participant 56)

Post-Graduation and Alternative Career Plans

The students were asked to state job they plan to do after graduation and their alternative plans if they could not get the job they want. The responses are presented in Table 3 and Table 4.

Table 3: Post-Graduation Career Plans

	f	%
Staff teacher	50	78
Research assistant	9	15
I do not plan to teach. (Police, Self -Employment)	4	7.5
Language Center	1	1.5
Total	64	100

As seen in Table 3, most of the participants wanted to work at the Ministry of National Education as a permanent teacher. The findings revealed difference between the ideas of the participants in alternative career plans.

Table 4: Alternative Post-Graduation Career Plans

	f	%
No alternative career plan (Students who stated that they will take the exam until appointment)	14	22
Private instruction	13	20
Other professions (Police, construction, restaurant and cafe management)	13	20
Permanent teacher	10	15.5
Master's degree	4	6
Employment in private schools	3	5
Employment in language centers	3	5

Attending another major in a second university	3	5
Employment in prep schools	1	1.5
Total	64	100

As seen in Table 3 and Table 4, the responses were similar. The fact that 78% of the participants planned to work as a permanent teacher and 22% of the participants did not have an alternative career plan demonstrated that most of them only planned to work as staff teachers. Furthermore, it was notable that most of the participants (75%) planned to teach even as an alternative career plan.

“I would prepare for the exam again and again.” (Participant 1)

“I would try to study for the KPSS and try to be appointed somehow.” (Participant 10)

“I would try to become a full-time teacher at the Ministry of National Education and prepare again.” (Participant 27)

The inability of the individuals to have a undergraduate degree and to have a training in a profession to go into the labor force is a financial loss for the individuals and the country. It could be anticipated that the individuals, who are uncertain about their future careers, may not start their lives until they achieve their goals, would be financially dependent on their parents and tire out psychologically since they would constantly experience exam stress.

Table 4 showed that 14 (24%) participants stated that they would prefer other jobs instead of teaching. These participants stated in the interviews that they wanted to be police, construction worker, restaurant or cafe manager. The analysis of the responses revealed that these professions were practiced by family members of the participants. Since they had adequate knowledge about these professions through their relatives, they preferred these occupations. Some excerpts of the participants’ responses are as follows:

“I would work with my family in the family business, in the construction industry.” (Participant 33)

“Since my uncle is a red beret, I learned I know from him. I plan to be a red beret.” (Participant 59)

This finding showed that knowledge on certain professions affected the preferences of the participants.

Potential Occupations

The responses to the question “List the jobs that you can do” are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Potential Professions of the Participants

f	%	
Turkish as a foreign language teacher at language centers	29	45
Anchorperson, editor, journalist	10	15.5
None other than teaching	9	14
Librarian	7	11
Consulate worker (translator)	5	8
Public servant at MNE	3	5
Inspector	1	1.5
Total	64	100

It was found that most of the participants listed working at a language center where Turkish is taught as a foreign language such as Yunus Emre Institute, DILMER, and TOMER. However, as seen in Table 3 and Table 4, only 5 students stated that they could work in such a center. 15% of the participants stated that they could work as an anchorperson, reporter or editor in various broadcasting organizations, especially TRT (public broadcaster). However, none of the students included these professions in their main and alternative job preferences. The analysis of the responses demonstrated that the students learned about these professions in courses in the faculty. The students stated that this information was provided by the lecturers in courses on teaching Turkish as a foreign language and speech education.

“Our teachers kept us informed. We talked about careers in speech education, for example, in each topic.” (Participant 36)

The interview findings demonstrated that the participants did not have adequate knowledge on their profession, how to apply for jobs, the work environment, and the skills of successful employees; thus, they could not recognize job opportunities. It was observed that potential occupations listed by the participants such as consulate translator, librarian, inspector, and civil servant at the MEB were due to lack of adequate knowledge.

The fact that students could not give clear and consistent answers to questions about their career plans, and fields of study suggested that knowledge sources were inadequate. Hence, when students were asked to provide details regarding to their 5-year career plans, 19 participants stated that they did not have a career plan.

“How can a pre-service teacher have a career plan? If appointed she or he will be a teacher, otherwise she or he will wait.” (Participant 47)

“Winning the exam and a good assignment. I have not thought about my 5-year career plan yet.” (Participant 1)

The responses of the participants who stated that they had a career plan revealed that their plans did not include a process. The main issue in career planning is to determine the time to reach career goals after these goals are set and to plan the steps to achieve these goals. Students mentioned their goals; however, did not provide a deadline to reach these goals. For example:

“I primarily try to graduate. After graduation, I want to get a good KPSS score and start my career.” (Participant 15)

Another significant problem in participants' career plans was that they planned to several things at the same time. For example, some participants stated that they will prepare for KPSS and ALES exams, and if they would not be appointed, they could work as a contracted teacher, could register at the graduate school, and prepare for KPSS again until they will be appointed. In sum, the participants planned several options at the same time instead of focusing on the steps to achieve their career goals. For example:

“Working as a staff teacher in the Ministry of National Education, a master's degree and a passing grade in YDS and ALES.” (Participant 37)

The responses of the participants also demonstrated that the career paths they adopted were inconsistent. They stated that that they planned to become a faculty member after working in middle schools for a certain period of time. Such a path would lead to loss of time in achieving their goal and is considered inconsistent since it does not have a positive effect on individuals.

“After I will be appointed, I would acquire the required experience and then I will work as an academician.” (Participant 31)

“If I will be appointed after KPSS, I will teach for 2 years and take ALES again to achieve academic success.” (Participant 52)

It was also determined in the present study that the participants were not aware of the available financial opportunities. None of the participants mentioned scholarships available for them. For example,

“When I graduate, I will be a teacher if I take KPSS and pass the exam. On the other hand, I will apply for a master's degree. If I do not pass the exam, I will work as a contracted teacher and towards my master's degree.” (Participant 55)

Government institutions, foundations and corporations have scholarships for graduate students. The amount of scholarship is higher than a contracted teacher salary. The fact that students do not apply for scholarships and prefer career paths where they are tired physically and mentally revealed the negative consequences of their lack of knowledge about career planning.

Conclusion, Discussion, and Recommendations

The present study aimed to analyze the views of pre-service Turkish language teachers on their careers and career planning. The study findings can be summarized as follows:

- It was determined that 90.6% of the participants had clear ideas about their careers. Furthermore, it was observed that the decisions of the participants who were not satisfied with their department and planned to transfer to another department were not clear.
- It was found in the study that postgraduate education was perceived in a different manner by participants. Although some participants planned to work in middle schools, they also considered the master's degree as an opportunity to improve their qualifications, while others associated graduate education with academic career.
- 59.3% of the participants, regardless of whether they considered graduate education, strived to have a high grade point averages.
- It was observed that most of the participants planned a permanent teaching position since

they knew the conditions better and preferred the benefits of becoming a permanent teaching.

- It was determined that 22% of the participants did not have an alternative career plan, and 20% considered contracted teaching as an alternative.
- It was determined that their knowledge level on the professions was effective in the determination of career goals, and they mostly influenced by the professors and the courses.
- It was determined that participants had learned various jobs such as language center teacher, librarian, and anchorperson in undergraduate courses; however, they did not include these jobs in their plans due to lack of detailed knowledge.
- It was found that 29.6% of the participants did not have a career plan.
- The analysis of the 5-year career plans of the participants having a career plan revealed certain problems.
- These problems included the lack of a timeframe for career goals and lack of knowledge on their options.
- It was concluded that the participants needed the assistance of a career planning specialist to plan their future.

In the study, it was determined that the participants did not have effective and applicable career plans that will take their careers further. They stated that if they would not be appointed, they could work as a contacted teacher, and at the same time, also prepare for the exams and study hard until they would be appointed. However, there are some problems in the contracted teaching at the Ministry of National Education. For example, as Doğan, Demir and Turan (2013) reported, most of the contracted teachers work for a salary lower than the minimum wage and they did not have a job security. They are unemployed after their contract expires or when they experience problems with the school administration. Working for low wages, limited number of appointments and exposure to the exam stress wear out these individuals psychologically. The participants who prefer contracted teaching are either unaware of these conditions or accept all these difficulties.

A brief literature review revealed that the number of studies on the career planning of teachers or pre-

service teachers was limited. For example, Altunışık (2010) analyzed teacher perceptions on the reflection of career goals on career management practices in educational institutions found that the determination of career goals differed significantly by the personal education and development, institutional guidance and support factors based on choosing the teaching profession voluntarily. In addition, Ertem, Engin Demir and Gökalp (2017) determined that although the pre-service teachers were aware of career planning activities, they never or seldom participated in these activities. Furthermore, Mutlu, Korkut Owen, Özdemir & UlaşKılıç (2019) investigated the “career plans of pre-service teachers, their indecisions and coping strategies” found that most of the participants preferred public appointment, followed by graduate education, employment in the private sector, and self-employment. These findings on the views of the pre-service Turkish language teachers on their careers and career planning are in line with those of the current study.

As pre-service teachers require career planning, education system also requires career management. Career management integrates individual and corporate career approaches. Such an integration includes the improvement of the education faculties, reduction of acceptance students, and higher quality education. Furthermore, introduction of a career planning course in education faculties would raise student awareness.

Recommendations

Based on the study findings and those reported in the literature, the following could be recommended to improve the career planning of the pre-service teachers:

- A career course could be introduced to education faculty curricula.
- Career maps that reflect the jobs available for teachers, the qualifications required for these jobs, and how the teachers could transfer between these positions could be developed and distributed to the students.
- Students could intern in language centers, libraries, archives, and National Education departments, trips could be organized and working conditions could be examined on site.

Employees in these institutions could be invited to universities to meet pre-service teachers.

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