Conditions of beginning teaching and anxiety perceived in teacher candidates

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Abstract

Anxiety that negatively affects an individual’s mental health and well-being is associated with a number of factors. One of these is concern about one’s ability to find a job. In recent years, it has become increasingly difficult for teachers to obtain employment in Turkey, a fact which may account in part for the increased anxiety observed among teacher candidates. In this study, an attempt has been made to explore the connections between teacher candidates’ prospects of finding a job after graduation and their anxiety levels. The study was conducted with 286 teacher candidates (180 females and 106 males) who were in their senior year in college and were enrolled in various programs in the school of education. Data were collected with the help of a data collection sheet and a Beck Anxiety Inventory. Results indicated that concerns regarding finding a job did not have a significant effect on the anxiety scores. The results also illustrated that there were no significant differences between the anxiety scores of female and male teacher candidates, except for the somatic symptoms sub-inventory. The majority of the participants (79%) stated that they would be able to work in any position to which they might be appointed. It was determined that these findings were in line with the findings of some previous studies, but at variance with other related research. Recommendations have been made for researchers to conduct further studies on larger samples and taking into consideration a greater number of variables.

1. Introduction

Frequent and sudden changes in teacher training system impose limitations on the formation of assessment criteria for the teaching profession. The last fifteen years have seen two changes in teacher training programs. Just before the evaluation of the results of the changes made in 1997, and of what they brought to the teacher training system, the system saw some new changes in 2007 (Küçükahmet, 2007). Various factors play some crucial roles in why teaching profession is preferred by university students. One of these factors is economic income. If one comes from a low economic class and thus wants to have a job within a very sort period of time, this is a very strong sign of priority in his choice of profession (Arslan, 2007; Çeliköz, 2004). Those who have graduated from the faculties of Education sit for an exam called The State Personnel Examination to be appointed as teachers in government schools. Due to limited employment and other assessment criteria, this exam has become of grave importance.

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Particularly in some branches, such limitations have led to some psychological injuries in the lives of teacher candidates (Basında Çukurova, n.d.).

Anxiety, also frequently observed among teacher candidates (Gündoğdu, 2008), can be defined as a state of negative emotions triggered by future expectations, memories of unfavorable past events, or by repetitive states of self-thinking (Strickland, 2001, p. 41). It is possible to study anxiety with reference to university students’ developmental period. This period covers the age limits including that of puberty. To a certain level, anxiety experienced by university students might be an important source of motivation for their attempts to communicate with others and to achieve autonomy. What is important in this period is the difference between normal anxiety and pathological one. The latter can be destructive and can lead to suicidal tendencies, drug addiction and depression (Hayward & Collier, 2008).

Researchers have so far conducted some studies on states of university students’ mental health (Koç & Polat, 2006). This study aims to deal with the relationship between the levels of anxiety of the senior students in various departments of the faculty of education and some of their demographic characteristics and their perceptions of profession.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Target population in this study included 286 senior students (186 women, 106 men) in various departments of Fatih Faculty of Education, Karadeniz Technical University.

2.2. Instruments

2.2.1. Data Gathering Form: This form was designed to gather demographic data from the samples.

2.2.2. Beck Anxiety Scale:

The reliability and validity of the Turkish version of this scale were studied by Ulusoy, Şahin and Erkmen (1996). The scale, containing 21 items with ratings between 0-3, and whose point range is 0-63, observes the anxiety frequency of individuals. Total point taken from the scale shows the intensity of an individual’s anxiety. Consistency co-efficient for Cronbach’s alfa has been reported as .93. Item-total correlation coefficients of the scale vary between .45 and .72, and test-retest reliability coefficient is .57.

2.3. Data analysis techniques

An SPSS 16.0 package program was used to analyze the data. Apart from descriptive statistical techniques, the study also employed independent t test and Kruskall-Wallis as a non-parametric technique.

3. Results

Anxiety scores of the participant teacher candidates were summarized in Table 1. No significant difference was found between men’s scores of subjective anxiety and those of women.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Max.</th>
<th>Min.</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subjective Anxiety</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8.37</td>
<td>7.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somatic Symptoms</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5.70</td>
<td>5.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Anxiety</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14.19</td>
<td>11.76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the final comparison considering gender variable, a significant difference was observed between men’s scores of somatic symptoms and those of women ($t=2.07, p<0.05$).
Table 2. Differentiation of the subjective anxiety scores of the participants according to gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>8.65</td>
<td>7.52</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>7.89</td>
<td>6.60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Anxiety scores of the teacher candidates were also studied considering the points they are supposed to get on the State Personnel Examination. To achieve this, the study formed two groups: the teacher candidates who were supposed to hold a grade under 70 on the last exam given in 2011 in order to be appointed as a teacher (departments like Guidance and Psychological Counseling, Early Childhood Education, and Teaching the Mentally and Hearing Disabled), and those who needed a grade over 70 (Primary Teacher Training, Mathematics and Turkish Teacher Training). Later on, anxiety scores of the two groups were compared using t-test. The results revealed no significant difference between these groups.

Table 3. Differentiation of the participants’ anxiety scores of somatic symptoms according to gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>6.17</td>
<td>5.26</td>
<td>2.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>4.91</td>
<td>4.48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teacher candidates choose the cities they wanted to work in according to the points they got on the State Personnel Examination. They were also asked whether they would make choices in case they were appointed to city in which they did not want to work. The study asked a similar question to the participants and observed their anxiety scores based on the responses. While 222 of the candidates responded they could work in a city out of their choices, 39 said they were ambivalent, and 21 said no. Since the data were not parametric, Kruskall-Wallis test was employed to get the results, and it was concluded that there was no significant difference between the participants anxiety score ($\chi^2=0.46$, $p>0.05$).

Table 4. Differentiation of the teacher candidates’ anxiety scores according to the probability of their appointment as teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Base Point Below 70</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>14.38</td>
<td>11.80</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Base Point Above 70</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>14.09</td>
<td>11.78</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Discussion

This study dwelt on the anxiety scores of teacher candidates and on whether these scores varied according to some factors. Due to the technique of scoring, it is difficult to classify the findings gathered through anxiety scale. Nevertheless, the findings of the study revealed some certain degree of prevalence of anxiety among teacher candidates. In a similar study, Yeniçeri et al. (2007) reported that 70% of the students experienced constant anxiety of medium scale. They also found that their anxiety was related to the exams they were supposed to take and their majors (p.19). While the study found a significant difference between men’s anxiety related to somatic symptoms and that of women, there seemed to be no significant difference between the subjective anxiety scores of these two groups. Similarly, Çakmak and Hevedanlı (2004) found no significant relationship between the anxiety levels of biology teacher candidates and their gender. There are also some studies dealing with both general anxiety and test anxiety. Baştürk (2007) reported that students getting prepared for the State Personnel Exam had higher levels of
delusion, and sensory and total anxiety. His study also revealed that the anxiety levels of men teacher candidates were higher than those of women. Teacher candidates who have lower base scores are more likely to be appointed as teachers after the SPE when compared to the others (State Personnel Exam). However, this did not influence the level of their anxiety scores. The reason for this might be that some other variables played some crucial roles. Certain changes in base scores within some certain periods can be discussed from this perspective, for the need for teacher in the existing educational system may vary from time to time, which also leads to discrepancies in base points. A base point which is high in a given period can be low in another. This study did not discuss the reasons why the participants preferred their present majors. Nonetheless, this might also play role in the levels of anxiety they suffer from. A study conducted on the students studying in the field of social sciences teaching, which requires a score over 70 for appointment as a teacher, revealed that the anxiety levels of those who made their choices willingly held lower anxiety levels of those who made their choices willingly held lower anxiety scores and higher levels of professional motivation. The study also found that the students’ academic success influenced their professional anxiety and motivation (Saracaloğlu, Kumral & Kannaz, 2009).

This study has some limitations because it was conducted only at one faculty of education, some departments were excluded from the study, and it did not deal with the relationship between anxiety and some other demographic variables. Therefore, it is suggested that researchers conduct their studies on larger groups using larger numbers of variables.

References


