

Who are the future teachers in Turkey? Characteristics of entering student teachers

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ABSTRACT

This exploratory study examines the background characteristics, socio-cultural values and pedagogical beliefs that entering student teachers bring with them into the faculties of education and explores their possible implications for teacher education in the Turkish context. The study comprised 18,226 first-year student teachers from 51 faculties of education who participated in the study by responding to a three-section questionnaire developed by the research team. Their responses indicate that students entering education faculties typically come from families of lower-middle socio-economic status living in urban areas, tend to possess more traditional than secular-rational values and have not yet formed clear pedagogical beliefs.

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1. Introduction

It is widely accepted and common sense that teachers make a difference by influencing the lives of their learners and their orientations to life. A considerable amount of research has explored how learners learn and the relationship between their individual characteristics, their approaches to learning and their learning outcomes (see for example, Jardine et al., 2008; Richards and Rodgers, 2001). Existing data supports the view that the characteristics, experiences, knowledge, dispositions, beliefs, attitudes and perceptions that pre-service teachers bring with them upon entering into a teacher education programme substantially influence their subsequent development as students and, eventually, as teachers (Carter, 1990; Minor et al., 2002; Witherell and Noddings, 1991). As stated by Akyeampong and Stephens (2002; p. 262), "the input characteristics and qualities of the typical beginning student teachers are important indicators of the quality of trained teachers at the point of exit and of their continuing long-term commitment to the profession."

Although teachers' conceptions of the teaching and learning processes and their beliefs about students, classrooms and subject-

matter can have an important influence on what they do in the classroom (Mahlios and Maxon, 1998), a limited amount of research exists on the pedagogical beliefs, socio-cultural values and background characteristics of the students who choose teaching as their future careers. Since the ability to reflect on the entering beliefs and to change ill-founded beliefs is consistent with the aims of the teacher education programs in Turkey and worldwide (NCATE, 2002), identifying the pedagogical beliefs, socio-cultural values and other entry characteristics carries great importance.

In the Turkish context, the high proportion of young people in the overall population (according to the Turkish Statistical Institute, in 2007, 26% of Turkey's total population of 70.5 million were below the age of 14) and the resulting high demand for teachers makes the characteristics of entering student teachers an issue of major concern. Today's entering student teachers will have a substantial impact on the education of future generations. In order for a system of teacher education to be effective, it needs to recognise and build on the characteristics and motivations that student teachers bring with them when they enter teacher education programmes. Once these characteristics are understood, curricula can be developed that better address the needs and capabilities of student teachers (Coultas and Lewin, 2002).

1.1. Individual characteristics/family backgrounds of entering student teachers

In their study on the characteristics of entering teacher candidates Brookhart and Freeman (1992) found that entering student teachers were likely to come from homes with annual

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incomes lower than those of their peers who did not study education. The same conclusion was reached by Richardson and Watt (2006) in their survey of freshmen student teachers in Australian universities. Studies conducted by Su et al. (2001, 2002) that looked into place of residence of entering student teachers in China and Tibet reported that the majority of them are from rural areas. When the educational background of the families of student teachers is considered, McIntire and Pratt (1985) and Pigge and Marso (1986) reported that about two-thirds of both mothers and fathers had no college degree, while an earlier study found that about half of mothers and over one-third of fathers had less than a high school diploma (Marks and Gregory, 1975). Another study found that fathers of entering education faculty students had lower occupational levels than fathers of students entering in other faculties (Folsom and Lucy, 1970). Although all of these four studies were conducted in the United States, they differed by region, date and institution. As a result, it is not possible to state the reasons for these differences but the general theme is that "entering teacher candidates typically come from homes where socio-economic status is not as high as that of college students in general" (Brookhart and Freeman, 1992, p. 46).

Studies conducted in Turkey report similar results with regard to the educational backgrounds of parents of entering student teachers. In general, fathers of student teachers appear to have higher educational qualifications than mothers, with most fathers either high school or university graduates and most mothers either primary or high school graduates (Başaran, 2004; Çakar, 2000; Çelenk, 1988; Demirel, 1995; Erjem, 2000; Ok and Önkol, 2007). According to Başaran (2004), fathers of student teachers are most often employed in the public sector, whereas the majority of mothers of student teachers do not work outside the home. Of those who do work outside the home, most mothers are employed as teachers or civil servants. Fathers also tend to be employed as teachers and civil servants, as well as workers and shop-owners. Despite the similarities in professions between mothers and fathers, fathers tend to belong to professions that require higher qualifications than mothers, which may be related to their higher levels of education. Fathers also tend to earn more money than mothers of student teachers (Başaran, 2004).

1.2. Motivation/reasons for choosing teaching as a career

Various researchers have investigated the reasons why entering student teachers enroll in teacher education programmes and, ultimately, become teachers. The most commonly cited reasons include a perceived teaching ability; an appreciation of the intrinsic value of teaching; the desire to make a social contribution, shape the future and work with children; a personal interest in the subject area; and job security and/or better job opportunities (Arends et al., 1998; Brookhart and Freeman, 1992; Ok and Önkol, 2007; Richardson and Watt, 2006). An examination of the career plans of entering student teachers shows that many do not plan to teach for the entire lengths of their careers. West and Brousseau (1987) found that the majority of student teachers (94%) in their sample planned to work as teachers for a minimum of 5 years, but only slightly more than half (57%) planned to teach for 10 years or more. Freeman et al. (1989) reported that the overall commitment to teaching among student teachers is high and is not related to academic ability.

1.3. Socio-cultural values

Socio-cultural values that reflect the social, political or economic dimensions of society are viewed as indicators that help researchers understand individuals' attitudes and behaviors (Esmer, 2002; Inglehart and Welzel, 2005). The literature is replete

with findings showing the importance of values in determining individual behavior in various environments, including the work environment (e.g., Harrison and Huntington, 2000; Inglehart, 1997). Understanding the social and cultural values of entering student teachers may provide some insight into their future behaviours as students and as teachers in school environments. Socio-cultural values also indicate the principles that form the basis of how individuals relate meaningfully to each other in social situations and sustain their connections with their cultural roots. Indicators of socio-cultural values include confidence in institutions, political engagement, and fatalistic attitudes (Esmer, 2002; Inglehart and Welzel, 2005).

1.4. Pedagogical beliefs

According to Pajares (1992), pedagogical beliefs, including perceptions regarding the qualities of an effective teacher, are formed before a student enters university. These beliefs are either strengthened or challenged during the teacher-education process. In studying the influence of formal education programmes on the beliefs of student teachers, Doyle (1997) found that the length of time students spent in the programme and the amount of field experience they engaged in were two important factors in changing students' pedagogical beliefs as they progressed through the educational programme. The literature indicates that teacher education programmes have varying degrees of success with regard to changing the pre-existing pedagogical belief systems of student teachers, with some programmes more successful than others (See: Gill et al., 2004; Wideen et al., 1998). As Opdenakker and Van Damme (2006) state, further research needs to be done to explore the links between teacher characteristics such as beliefs, thoughts and theories if we are to deepen our understanding of classroom practices.

Educational philosophy is comprised of a teacher's beliefs about all aspects of education, including assumptions, theories and beliefs about key aspects of teaching (Parkay and Stanford, 1992). Two commonly accepted educational belief systems are progressivism and traditionalism. Progressives view the school as a social institution and seek to align school programmes with contemporary needs in order to make education meaningful and relevant to the knowledge, abilities and interests of their students. The focus for progressive educators is to teach *how* to think rather than *what* to think (Guttek, 2004). In line with this belief, curricula are expected to be based on students' personal, familial and social experiences with a goal of providing a continuous link between students' school-based learning and their lives outside the school context (Witcher and Travers, 1999). Progressive teachers mostly use student-centered teaching strategies and act as facilitators, guides and motivators.

Traditionalists, on the other hand, view the needs of both students and society as essentially stable. As a result, they see no need to revise, modify or redesign the schooling process in a dramatic way. According to the traditional view, the purpose of the school is to develop the intellect, and the role of the teacher is to transmit important knowledge to students through lecturing, demonstration and recitation (Guttek, 2004; Ornstein and Levine, 1993). Traditional educators advocate curricula that are subject-centered, organised, sequenced and focused on mastery of specific skills and content and view students as passive learners who work independently (Witcher and Travers, 1999).

When the Turkish Republic was founded in 1923, the Turkish educational system functioned as an agent for social change to transform a traditional society into a modern one (Kazamias, 1968). Since then, however, the system has been dominated by a traditional educational philosophy whose main aim has been to provide essential skills and knowledge through a standard

curriculum (Engin-Demir, 2006). Curricula in Turkey's centralised system of education have gone through several revisions over the past 80 years, the latest in 2005, when primary school curricula were revised in an attempt to adopt constructivism as the basic educational philosophy.

As seen above, background characteristics, attitudes, values and pedagogical beliefs have been the major variables considered to influence prospective teachers. Hence, the purpose of this exploratory study has been to examine the background characteristics, socio-cultural values and pedagogical beliefs that entering student teachers bring with them into faculties of education and to explore their possible meanings and implications on teacher education in the Turkish context.

1.5. Teacher education in the Turkish context

Turkey's educational system consists of three main stages: primary, secondary and tertiary. As of 1998, compulsory education increased from 5 to 8 years, with the 8-year primary school now consisting of two levels—Grades 1–5, or “lower primary” years, and Grades 6–8, or “upper primary” years. Prior to 1998, primary school education had consisted of 5 years, followed by a middle school programme comprised of 3 years. In the current system, students who continue to secondary education after completing primary school can choose to go to a regular high school or to one of several types of vocational high schools. These include Anatolian teacher-training high schools, established in 1989, which aim to stimulate young people to look upon teaching as a promising future career (OECD, 2007) and to equip young teacher candidates with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours required in the teaching profession. In order to begin university (tertiary) education, secondary school graduates must enter a standardised university entrance examination (*Öğrenci Seçme Sınavı*) known by its Turkish acronym, ÖSS. Students are required to indicate their preferences in terms of field of study, and placement is determined based on a combination of ÖSS score and secondary school grades. Type of secondary school attended can affect students' overall ÖSS scores, with graduates of Anatolian teacher-training high schools awarded extra points if they chose education as their field of university study.

Teacher education programmes are offered by 65 faculties of education at a total of 51 universities in Turkey. In order to provide standardised teacher education across the country, the teacher education curricula for all of these programmes is established by the Higher Education Council (HEC). All primary and some secondary school teachers (e.g., computer education and instructional technology teachers, English language teachers, music teachers) must complete a 4-year programme at a faculty of education. Secondary school teachers are trained in one of two main programs—either a 5-year undergraduate programme at an education faculty, or, for students who have graduated from a 4-year non-education faculty, in a Masters' of Science degree program without thesis offered by an education faculty (Engin-Demir, 2009).

2. Method

2.1. Participants and procedures

The target group consisted of all students enrolled in the 65 education faculties in Turkey. Enrollment data was obtained from HEC, and a total of 30,000 questionnaires were mailed to these faculties, together with a cover letter addressed to the deans. A total of 18,226 (60%) entering student teachers from 51 education faculties (78%) participated in the study.

2.2. Instrument

A three-section questionnaire was developed by the research team with the main aim of obtaining information about the background characteristics, socio-cultural values and pedagogical beliefs that student teachers bring with them upon entrance into faculties of education. The first section of the questionnaire consisted of 11 questions that provided demographic information such as age, sex, primary place of residence (urban/rural), parental education/occupation, type of high school attended (general, teacher-training, vocational, private, etc.), type of university programme currently enrolled in (evening or regular) and reasons for choosing teaching as a profession. The second section contained 11 items that examined the socio-cultural values of entering student teachers, including their levels of confidence in institutions, opinions regarding Turkey's European Union membership, fatalistic attitudes, self-perceptions as democratic individuals, opinions about the role of religion in social life, reading habits and musical preferences. The third section consisted of 33 items concerning entering student teachers' perceptions and beliefs about various aspects of education and schooling, including the goals of education and schooling and the teaching and learning processes. Using a five-point Likert Scale, respondents were asked to show the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with various statements about education developed based on a literature survey of philosophical theories of education (O'Neill, 1990; Kiraz and Özdemir, 2006). Of the 33 items included, 19 reflected a progressive view and 14 reflected a traditional view of education. These two labels – progressive and traditional – were used to organise statements that reflect the dichotomy faced in educational praxis over the last century. Statements 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 14, 18, 19, 20, 22, 24, 28, 29, 31 and 32 represented the progressive view, and statements 3, 8, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 21, 23, 25, 26, 27, 30 and 33 represented the traditional view of education and schooling. Statistical analysis conducted using the SPSS software programme yielded a Cronbach Alpha reliability value of .82 for the scale as a whole. (Means and standard deviations of individual items are given in Appendix A.)

3. Results

3.1. Individual characteristics/family backgrounds of entering student teachers

Of the 18,226 student teachers who responded to the survey, the majority (68.4%) were enrolled in one of seven programmes (areas of specialisation): classroom teaching (22.7%), science (9.3%), Turkish (9.2%), English (7.8%), social studies (7.8%), preschool (6.3%) and primary mathematics (5.3%). The remaining 31% were distributed across 23 other areas of teacher education. The majority of all respondents, i.e., the majority of students who had chosen teaching as a profession, were female (60.5%).

The age of participants ranged from 16 to 27, with the majority (75%) between 19 and 21 years. Considering that students in Turkey are, in theory, eligible to enter a teacher education department at the age of 17 or 18 if their schooling has proceeded without interruption, these results suggest that for three-fourths of entering student teachers, between 1 and 3 years elapses between their completion of secondary education and their admission to a university programme. This gap may be an indication of initially low scores and subsequent repetition of university entrance exams. Overall, 74% of respondents were enrolled in regular day programs and the remaining 26% in evening programs. Students in evening programmes tend to have scored relatively low on their ÖSS exams and pay additional fees to attend classes opened by some education faculties to meet the high demand for university education and teacher education in Turkey.

Table 1
Educational background of parents of entering student teachers.

	Mother % (N = 17,533)	Father % (N = 17,559)
Illiterate	13.6	2.1
Literate, but no formal schooling	7.1	3.3
Primary school (5 years)	48.2	33.8
Middle school (3 years)	9.8	14.2
Secondary (high) school	14.6	24.7
2-Year college	2.0	5.8
4-Year college	4.6	14.8
Graduate degree	.2	1.1

Almost all of the study participants were graduates of public high schools (97%), which is consistent with the overall proportion of public schools in the Turkish educational system. A more detailed examination of the secondary schooling of respondents shows that 60% graduated from regular public high schools, 27% graduated from Anatolian teacher-training high schools, and the remaining 13% from other types of high schools, including vocational and technical high schools, art high schools and comprehensive high schools.

Given that socio-economic status plays a role in personal and professional aspirations, values and beliefs, the survey also looked at the socio-economic backgrounds of entering student teachers, including the educational background and occupations of parents and the main environment (urban/rural) in which entering student teachers spent their childhoods. In terms of parental education, nearly three-quarters of mothers of respondents had no more than a 5-year primary-school education. As Table 1 shows, 15% of mothers had completed secondary school, 48% were primary-school graduates, 21% were literate but had no formal schooling and 14% were illiterate. In comparison, 21% of fathers had completed secondary school, 34% were primary-school graduates and only 2% were illiterate. Moreover, only 7% of mothers and 21% of fathers had received either a 2-year or 4-year university education.

In terms of parental occupation, the vast majority of mothers (82%) were housewives, 7% were retired and close to 4% were employed as civil servants. In comparison, fathers of entering student teachers had a wider range of occupations. The majority were retired (31%), civil servants (21%), or self-employed (18%). Others were reported to be public-sector salaried employees (7%), daily wage workers (6%) or seasonal workers (5%), and an additional 6% were reported to be unemployed (Table 2).

In terms of family residence, the majority of student teachers spent most of their childhood in urban areas in either a large metropolis (35%) or a small city (25%), whereas the remaining entering student teachers grew up in rural areas in either a small town (28%) or village (8%).

Table 2
Occupational status of parents of entering student teachers.

	Mother % (N = 17,430)	Father % (N = 17,063)
Bureaucrat (civil servant)	3.7	20.6
Salaried employee (public sector)	.4	6.8
Salaried employee (private sector)	1.8	7.6
Self-employed	1.2	17.8
Daily wage worker	.4	5.5
Seasonal worker	.3	4.6
Housewife	82.4	.3
Retired	7.0	30.6
Unemployed	2.9	6.3

Table 3
Entering student teachers' reasons for choosing teaching as a profession.

Reasons	% ^a
Desire to become a teacher	51.2
University entrance exam (ÖSS) score dictated choice	28.5
Opportunity to find a job	25.4
Working conditions (long summer vacation, good working hours, etc.)	20.9
Interest in working with children/youth	15.7
Influence of family	14.9
Status of teaching as a profession	9
Other	4

^a Respondents could choose more than one option.

3.2. Motivation/reasons for choosing teaching as a career

The majority of entering student teachers (51%) said they chose teaching as a profession because they wanted to become a teacher (Table 3). Other frequently given reasons were university entrance exam (ÖSS) scores (29%), opportunity to find a job easily (25%) and working conditions (21%). Only 9% stated that they chose teaching as a profession because of its high status in society.

The majority of respondents (87%) stated that they planned to work as a teacher after graduation, compared to only 10% who stated that they would seek other job opportunities.

Statistical analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between reasons for choosing teaching as a profession, future plans for employment following graduation and type of high school attended. As Table 4 indicates, highly significant ($p < .001$) associations were found between type of high school attended and reasons for choosing teaching as a profession. However, low Cramer's values (.03–.10) indicate a very low level of effect size (Field, 2005), suggesting that the significance levels might be inflated as a result of the large sample size.

Significant associations were also found between type of high school attended and future plans regarding teaching following graduation; however, in this case as well, the low Cramer's value (.08) indicates a very low level of effect size and suggests that the significance levels might be inflated as a result of the large sample size (Table 5).

3.3. Socio-cultural values

Among the questions addressing socio-cultural values of entering student teachers, participants were asked to indicate their degrees of confidence in various political and social institutions. As Table 6 indicates, among the institutions listed, the military was found to inspire the most confidence, with 64% of participants expressing a great deal of confidence and 21% expressing some confidence in the military. Following the military, other institutions considered to inspire relatively high levels of confidence were the police (a great deal: 37%; some: 43%), the Supreme Court (a great deal: 38%; some: 37%), the Office of Religious Affairs (a great deal: 33%; some: 37%) and the Presidency (a great deal: 31%; some: 40%). In contrast, the institution said to inspire the least confidence was the media (a great deal: 2%; some: 19%). Other institutions in which respondents expressed low levels of confidence included political parties (a great deal: 1%; some: 23%), the European Union (a great deal: 3%; some: 28%) and labour unions (a great deal: 6%; some: 42%). Institutions falling in the mid-range of responses in terms of confidence levels were the Parliament (a great deal: 29%; some: 46%), universities (a great deal: 15%; some: 60%) and the government (a great deal: 21%; some: 36%).

Student teachers were also asked to respond to the question "Do you describe yourself as a democratic person?" Slightly more

Table 4
Reasons for choosing teaching as a profession, by type of high school attended.

Reasons for choosing teaching as a profession	Type of high school			
	General H. S. (%)	Teacher-Training H.S. (%)	Other high schools (%)	Total (%)
Desire to become a teacher Pearson χ^2 [6, N = 17,497] = 80.275, $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = .05$	53.6	48.6	55.4	52.5
University entrance exam score Pearson χ^2 [6, N = 17,497] = 317.452, $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = .10$	31.1	32.2	14.3	29.4
Opportunity to find a job Pearson χ^2 [6, N = 17,497] = 188.069, $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = .07$	24.6	32.6	19.6	26.1
Work conditions Pearson χ^2 [6, N = 17,497] = 142.800, $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = .06$	21.0	25.9	14.7	21.6
Working with children/youth Pearson χ^2 [6, N = 17,497] = 34.823, $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = .03$	16.0	16.7	15.6	16.2
Influence of family Pearson χ^2 [6, N = 17,497] = 57.973, $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = .04$	15.9	15.5	11.7	15.3
Status of teaching as a profession Pearson χ^2 [6, N = 17,497] = 26.296, $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = .03$	9.3	9.2	9.3	9.3
Others Pearson χ^2 [6, N = 17,497] = 371.111, $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = .10$	2.8	3.5	11.3	4.0

Table 5
Plans regarding employment in teaching, by type of high school attended.

Plans regarding employment	Type of high school			
	General H.S. (%)	Teacher-training H.S. (%)	Other high schools (%)	Total (%)
Definitely planning on teaching	58.6	46.8	50.9	54.4
Planning on teaching	30.6	37.0	33.7	32.7
Would prefer to seek job opportunities other than teaching	8.1	12.4	11.6	9.7
Not planning on teaching	1.7	2.5	2.7	2.0
Definitely not planning on teaching	1.1	1.3	1.1	1.2
Pearson χ^2 [6, N = 17,144] = 216.825, $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = .08$.				

than half (56%) of respondents stated that they would describe themselves as democratic persons most of the time, 22% said they were always democratic and about 2% said they were not at all democratic.

In order to assess student teachers' levels of fatalism, a phenomenon commonly examined in studying socio-cultural values, respondents were asked to identify causes of poverty.

Table 6
Confidence in institutions.

Organization	A great deal of confidence (%)	Some confidence (%)	No confidence at all (%)	No idea (%)
European Union	3.0	28	63.1	5.9
Supreme Court	37.5	37.2	18	7.3
Presidency	30.9	40.4	19.4	9.3
Office of Religious Affairs	32.8	37.4	13.9	16.0
Educational system	6.7	44.6	45.8	3.0
Security Forces	37.3	43.0	15.8	3.8
Government	21.1	36.3	35.2	7.4
Media	1.6	19.2	75.1	4.2
Health system	11.2	58.7	27.6	2.5
Military	64.4	21.1	9.0	5.6
Political parties	1.3	23.4	65.4	9.9
Non-governmental organisations	13.6	55.4	15.2	15.7
Labour unions	5.9	41.8	21.2	31.1
Parliament	29.4	45.8	18.6	6.2
Universities	15.2	60.3	19.5	5.0

Highly fatalistic individuals believe that their actions have little impact on the outcomes they experience and have been found to attribute negative experiences and outcomes such as poverty to fate or luck (Ergüder et al., 1991; Esmer, 2002). In contrast to the expectations of the authors, who consider a fatalistic attitude, sustained by Islam, to be an important characteristic of Turkish society, only about 1% of respondents in the present study attributed poverty to misfortune. Most frequently poverty was attributed to apathy (38%), social injustice (35%), or a consequence of economic development (26%).

Entering student teachers were also asked the areas in which they believed religion could provide adequate answers in order to assess their attitudes towards the role of religion in social life. The majority of respondents (73%) stated that religion could provide adequate answers to the spiritual needs of individuals and to the moral problems of individuals (54%). In addition 29% stated that religion could adequately address problems of family life and 22% said it could adequately address social and economic problems.

Responses to the question, "Which of the following individual characteristics should be developed by the educational system?" were compatible with the answers given to the above question on the role of religion. The most frequent response regarding the individual characteristic that should be developed in schools was "moral and religious values" (39%), followed by "scientific thinking" (38%) and "democratic values" (23%).

When asked if they felt Turkey would benefit from becoming a full member of the European Union, only 15% of respondents said that EU membership would be beneficial. Moreover, 79% said that

they did not expect Turkey to be accepted as a full member in the near future.

When asked how often they read a newspaper, 34% of student teachers reported reading a newspaper every day and 35% reported reading newspapers 3–4 times a week. About 6% reported not reading newspapers at all. With regard to books read, the most frequently stated genre was the novel (77%), followed by history books (36%), religious books (29%), poetry (26%) and health-related books (10%). The preferred musical genre was reported to be Turkish popular music (53%), followed by Turkish folk music (45%), Turkish contemporary classical music (43%), rock music (35%), international popular music (23%) and western classical music (18%).

3.4. Pedagogical beliefs

Responses to the questionnaire items about education, goals and functions of schooling and the nature of teaching and learning provided insight into the attitudes and beliefs held by students upon entering into a teacher education program. Means and standard deviations for each item are presented in Appendix A. Overall mean scores of items representing progressive and traditional views were calculated separately, and a paired sample *t*-test was conducted to assess whether a significant difference existed between the mean values of the progressive and traditional views. Analysis showed the mean score for the progressive view ($M = 3.862, SD = .474$) to be significantly higher [$t(14345) = 106.3, p = .000, r = .44$] than the mean score for the traditional view ($M = 3.37, SD = .506$). The mean difference between the progressive and traditional view was .484; however, in view of the effect and sample sizes, this significant mean difference should be interpreted cautiously.

Overall, entering student teachers' views on education and schooling tend to be more progressive than traditional; however, the influence of traditional educational philosophy should not be underestimated. Fig. 1 shows the mean score for each item representing the progressive view and Fig. 2 shows the mean score for each item representing the traditional view.

Among the statements representing a progressive educational philosophy, entering student teachers most frequently agreed with the following:

- Item 2: Teachers who respect different viewpoints provide an opportunity to train democratic individuals.
- Item 10: The basic function of school is to prepare individuals for life.
- Item 14: Democratic socialism, which seeks the maximum degree of social justice for all, is the best type of society.
- Item 29: The curriculum should be continuously adapted to the students and the community.
- Item 1: Teachers should be more concerned with stimulating interest in learning than with conveying knowledge.

Among the statements representing a traditional educational philosophy, entering student teachers most frequently agreed with the following:

- Item 33: Teachers should be models for experiencing and transmitting the basic principles of the Turkish Republic.
- Item 3: Schools should shape the moral character of individuals.
- Item 25: Without firm guidance and sound instruction, children are predisposed to error and antisocial behavior.

Among the statements eliciting disagreement by a large number of student teachers was Item 21 representing the traditional view, "There is no need to develop a variety of educational programmes, since all people have similar values and perceptions." From this it can be derived that entering student teachers believe that the basic functions of schools should be to provide a flexible curriculum responsive to the needs of society as well as of individual students.

Student teachers also tended to disagree with the statement "Formal education is basically unnecessary and contributes little or nothing to the vast sum of human experience" (18). Those who disagree with this might be considered more likely to believe that education should be provided by formal institutions. It is possible to conclude that in this regard, entering student teachers tend to have traditional rather than progressive views of teaching and believe schools and teachers play an important role in maintaining the existing social order by educating individuals who respect and conform to the values of society.

One point worth noting is that a high number of student teachers disagreed with the statements "Schools should emphasize the present rather than the historical past or the anticipated future" (19) and "Schools should emphasize the virtues of the historical past as way of correcting the existing over-emphasis on the present and the future" (30). From this it can be inferred that entering student teachers do not have distinct beliefs about the role of school in emphasizing the present rather than the past or the future.

Consistent with the results obtained in the previous sections of the study, entering student teachers appear to be undecided about the role of scientific knowledge in solving the problems of humanity, as indicated by the mean score for the statement "Scientific knowledge can be used to solve all kinds of problems faced by human beings" (32).

4. Discussion

4.1. Individual characteristics/family backgrounds of entering student teachers

An analysis of the background characteristics of survey respondents provided insights into those individuals currently entering the field of teacher education in Turkey. The majority of entering student teachers were found to come from middle-lower SES families. About half of the mothers and one-third of the fathers of entering student teachers have no more than a 5-year primary

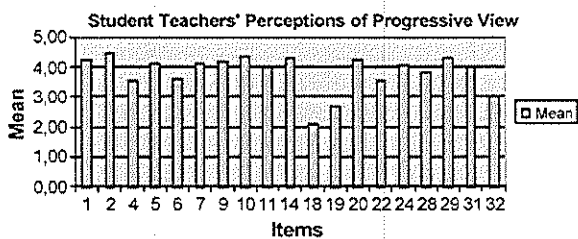


Fig. 1. Student teachers' perceptions of progressive view.

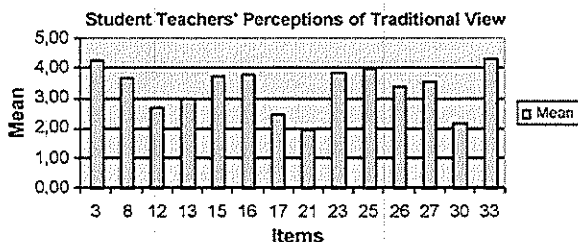


Fig. 2. Student teachers' perceptions of traditional view.

education. In addition, the rate of tertiary education is about three times higher for fathers than mothers. In most cases, entering student teachers come from families in which only the father works or is retired, most frequently from employment in the public sector. The majority of student teachers have lived most of their lives in urban areas. Given these characteristics, it can be argued that the majority of entering student teachers bring with them limited "cultural capital", the term used to describe the cultural habits, dispositions and skills that give individuals a higher status in society and which are mainly acquired at home through exposure to a given set of cultural practices and which are especially influenced by parental socio-economic status (Bourdieu, 1986).

The findings related to background characteristics of entering student teachers are consistent with the findings of previous studies conducted with relatively smaller samples of entering student teachers in Turkey (Demirbolat, 2006; Ok and Önkol, 2007; Saban, 2003). Ok and Önkol (2007) found that students entering education faculties come from families with low levels of education and income and relatively low-status professions. Similarly, Saban (2003) concluded that prospective elementary school teachers in Turkey come from relatively low socio-economic backgrounds. Demirbolat (2006) found that the majority of student teachers lived in urban areas and had parents who were primary-school graduates. These findings are similar to those obtained from studies conducted in other countries. For example, Richardson and Watt (2006) found that a greater percentage of entering student teachers at three major Australian universities come from low SES families, as measured by parental income. In their meta-analytic study on characteristics of entering teachers, Brookhart and Freeman (1992) concluded that entering teacher candidates in the United States were more likely to come from homes with combined annual incomes lower than those of students in other disciplines, and McIntire and Pratt (1985) found that about two-thirds of parents of pre-service teachers in the United States did not have college degrees. In a study of background characteristics of entering student teachers in four developing countries, Coultas and Lewin (2002) concluded that in all countries, the majority of mothers of student teachers were housewives with limited education.

4.2. Motivation/reasons for choosing teaching as a career

Given that the choice of field of study is dictated by university entrance exam (ÖSS) scores, for a considerable percentage of high-school graduates in Turkey, the voluntary choice of department carries importance in the context of Turkish education. This study found that more than half of the entering student teachers had voluntarily chosen teaching as their future profession. From this, it is possible to conclude that this group of entering student teachers have a desire to be teachers and will be motivated to study in faculties of education. In contrast, for one-third of entering student teachers, ÖSS scores played a major role in their decision to enroll in an education faculty. These students are likely to be less motivated, since teaching is not their primary career choice and they would have chosen a different faculty had their exam scores been higher.

Job security, flexible hours and holidays as well as the possibility of engaging in secondary employment were other reasons given for choosing teaching as a future career. Job security is significant in the Turkish context, where teachers hired by the Ministry of Education have a great deal of legal protection in comparison to those employed by private schools, where hiring and firing of teachers due to fluctuations in enrollment may be an issue.

Results showed that the majority (87%) of entering student teachers were planning to work as teachers after graduation. Overall, it emerged from the study that entering student teachers have a positive attitude towards teaching and high motivation for future employment as teachers, which may indicate that entering student teachers are willing to invest time and energy in their education.

Interestingly, the study results indicated that the type of high school attended by entering student teachers did not influence their reasons for choosing teaching as a profession or their future plans regarding employment as a teacher upon graduation, including the length of time they planned to remain in the profession. Specifically, graduates of Anatolian teacher-training high schools did not indicate a commitment to remain in the profession longer than graduates of regular high schools. These results conflict with those of a previous study (Başaran, 2004) that concluded that graduates of Anatolian teacher-training high school had a higher commitment to teaching as a lifelong career than graduates of other high schools.

4.3. Socio-cultural values

The social and cultural values of entering student teachers are expected to reflect social, political, or economic dimensions of a society and may offer some clues as to their attitudes and behaviours regarding teaching. The present study provides important data on the socio-cultural values that student teachers bring with them as they begin a teacher education programme.

Confidence in institutions is generally accepted as one indicator of democratic values and attitudes (Özbudun, 2007). In general, social scientists consider confidence in institutions to be an important indicator of social trust and thus quality of democratic government (Putnam, 2000; Rubal et al., 2007). Analysis of data from this study indicates that student teachers have the most confidence in social order institutions (Rothstein and Stolle, 2002) such as the military, the police, the Supreme Court and the Office of Religious Affairs. This finding is consistent with those of a number of studies conducted in Turkey (Ergüder et al., 1991; Esmer, 1999, 2002, 2008; Tessler and Altınoğlu, 2004). On the other hand, the present study found student teachers have little confidence in political parties, labour unions, the European Union and the media—institutions that can be associated with democratic governance. The low level of confidence in these institutions may create a negative attitude towards political participation and civic engagement and thus prevent entering student teachers from participating in democratic activities initiated by these institutions. This is in line with data from the European Values Survey conducted by Rimac and Stulhofer (2005), which found that only 22% of Turkish participants in their survey spent any of their free time working for non-governmental organisations (NGOs). In his study of 37,680 students from 58 Turkish universities, Yazıcı (2003) also found a low level of active participation in NGOs. Working with NGOs is considered an important indicator for the inculcation of democratic values and attitudes. Almond and Verba (1965) found that NGO members have more democratic values, feel more confident that they can influence government and are more politically active and open-minded.

A 2004 study by Erdoğan found a negative relationship between democratic attitudes and values and a high level of confidence in social order institutions among Turkish youth. In addition, several studies have found a high positive relationship between confidence in social order institutions and piety among Turkish citizens (Erdoğan, 2004; Ergüder et al., 1991; Esmer, 1999, 2008).

Results of the present study also showed that only one-fifth of entering student teachers perceived themselves to always be democratic individuals, although more than half perceived themselves to be democratic most of the time, meaning that they have democratic dispositions for some events. These findings, taken together with the reported high levels of confidence in social order institutions, suggest that a relatively limited number of entering student teachers possess attitudes conducive to democracy and democratisation, which may be related to Turkey's ongoing but unconsolidated democratic transition (Tessler and Altinoğlu, 2004).

In view of the responses to survey items regarding confidence in the Office of Religious Affairs, reading religious books, moral and religious values and the functions of religion, it may be argued that student teachers tend to accept religion as an important aspect of their social and personal lives. This finding is consistent with previous studies related to values in Turkish society (Esmer, 1999, 2008). Based on data from the 2007 World Values Survey conducted among individuals age 18 and over in different regions of Turkey, Esmer (2008) concluded that the higher importance attributed to religion in Turkish society is a distinguishing factor between Turkey and Western Europe. At the same time, student teachers do not seem to have fatalistic attitudes towards poverty; that is, they tend to explain poverty in a rational and deterministic way. This result is also consistent with the findings of earlier studies conducted by Ergüder et al. (1991) and Esmer (1999).

Based on responses to questions related to socio-cultural values, it can be argued that entering student teachers hold more traditional values than secular-rational values. In a cultural map derived from a World Values Survey, Inglehart and Welzel (2005) place Turkey in the traditional cultural zone. According to the study authors, an individual who possesses traditional values has a strong sense of national pride, favours greater respect for authority, derives comfort and strength from religion, is relatively favourable to having the army rule the country and seldom discusses politics.

Consistent with the recent trend in Turkish society as a whole, entering student teachers do not have a positive attitude towards the European Union. More than half of student teachers stated that they had no confidence in the EU, and the majority also stated they did not expect Turkey to become a full EU member in the near future. Similar findings were obtained in studies conducted by Eurobarometer 66 in 2006 and Eurobarometer 68 in 2008, which indicated a dramatic decrease in Turkey's support for the European Union following the identification of a negotiation date in 2005. The last wave of the World Values Survey also showed that Turkish participants had withdrawn their support to the EU (Esmer, 2008). This decline in confidence in the EU might be due to the changing nature of Turkish-European relations. Erdoğan (2007) has argued that Turkish citizens' confidence in the EU is highly determined by fluctuations in Turkey's relationship with this institution, and Rimac and Stulhofer (2005) have argued that "countries searching a way out of transition-caused recession and anomie are more distrustful of the European Union" (p. 320).

Information on the reading habits and musical preference of entering student teachers may also provide some insight into the level of cultural capital they bring with them upon entering training. This study found entering student teachers preferred to read novels, followed by history books, religious books and poetry. Previous studies (Cangil, 2008; Yazıcı, 2003) also found novels to be the most frequently read books among Turkish student teachers. It is worth noting that a significant percent of student teachers reported reading history and religious books, and future studies might examine the factors influencing book preferences in

order to gain more insight into the cultural backgrounds of entering student teachers.

Consistent with findings of other studies conducted with university students (Cangil, 2008; Ersoy, 2007; Yazıcı, 2003), only one-third of student teachers in the present study reported reading a newspaper on a daily basis. The rather infrequent reading of newspapers among student teachers is consistent with the general trend in Turkish society and may be due to the reported low level of confidence in the media. Considering that reading newspapers helps individuals to follow daily occurrences and keep informed of world events, education faculties may consider providing opportunities (e.g., easy access to newspapers at faculty libraries) that support an increased frequency in newspaper reading among students.

With regard to musical preferences, entering student teachers were found to prefer Turkish popular music, Turkish folk music and Turkish contemporary classical music. About one-fourth of student teachers reported listening to *arabesk* or a version of *arabesk*, a type of popular Turkish music that absorbs many strands of Arabic and Turkish musical traditions and is characterised by a fatalistic world view (Stokes, 1989; Özbek, 1997). This study also found Western classical music to be the least preferred genre of music. Yazıcı (2003) has argued that Turkish university students with parents of a relatively high SES have a greater preference for international and Western classical music, whereas students from low SES families tend to prefer Turkish folk music and *arabesk*.

4.4. Pedagogical beliefs

Teachers' conceptions of education and schooling processes and their beliefs about students, classrooms and subject matter have an important influence on what they do in the classroom (Clark and Peterson, 1986; Nesper, 1987). The findings of this study suggest that student teachers tend to exhibit progressive educational philosophies, although the influence of traditional philosophies cannot be denied. The more progressive views of education and schooling held by entering student teachers may be due to the fact that they perceive themselves as predominantly students rather than as teachers. It can also be concluded from these results that, unsurprisingly, entering student teachers have yet to form pedagogical beliefs.

5. Conclusions and implications

Analysis revealed that entering student teachers come from middle-lower SES families and have parents, especially mothers, who have low levels of educations and relatively low-status professions. In this respect, teacher education institutions need to develop strategies to attract students from higher SES families, since, as suggested by Bloom (1976), students' affective and cognitive entry characteristics are important predictors of their learning. The cultural capital of entering teachers gains importance especially in developing countries, where teachers continue to represent the most important source of knowledge and values and are viewed as influential in terms of developing the attitudes and values of the children they teach. In order to attract students from high SES families to education faculties, policymakers and teacher-educators need to develop strategies to raise the economic status of the teaching profession and to increase the quality of the education provided by teacher-training institutions.

Student teachers were found to have high levels of motivation and commitment to teaching. Teacher training institutions should keep this in mind in the process of improving the quality of education they provide. By improving quality of instruction,

faculty attitudes towards students, social/physical environments and extracurricular activities, faculties should be able to maintain and enhance the motivation of their students.

The socio-cultural values of entering students appeared to lean more towards traditional values than secular-rational values, which also indicates the existence of relatively limited democratic values and attitudes. In order to address this issue, curricula at education faculties may be designed to help equip student teachers with the knowledge, attitudes, values and skills needed to allow them to participate in the establishment of a proper democratic culture in their classrooms and in their schools. One way to help entering student teachers develop democratic attitudes and values might be to provide them with more opportunities to participate in decision-making processes in both the classroom and in university governance. This strategy would also contribute to the development of Turkish democracy by increasing the likelihood that these future educators will institute more democratic practices in their own classrooms.

Although entering student teachers were found to hold progressive pedagogical views, the influence of traditional views cannot be denied. It may be suggested that one primary aim of teacher education in the Turkish context should be to nurture

sound pedagogical beliefs conducive to the development of progressive teacher education, as initiated by the constructivist primary school curricula introduced by the Ministry of National Education in 2005. The effectiveness of teacher education programmes may be assessed by how well they promote the formation and development of pedagogical beliefs that are consistent with the philosophy of learning and teaching espoused by the new school curricula.

The findings from the present study also have implications for future research. One subject to be examined is whether or not the socio-cultural values and pedagogical beliefs of entering student teachers change as they gain more knowledge, experience and skills through pre-service teacher training. Indeed, the authors also plan to measure the values and beliefs of the present sample as they reach the end of their pre-service training in their final year at an education faculty. Such information should help to identify the impact that faculties of education have on socio-cultural values and pedagogic beliefs. Developing a better understanding of the changes in values and beliefs of student teachers should also be considered an essential precursor to improving the quality and effectiveness of the current teacher-education programmes in Turkey.

Appendix A. Means and standard deviations of items representing progressive and traditional teaching philosophies

Item No.	Progressive viewpoints	Mean	SD
1	Teachers should be more concerned with stimulating an interest in learning than with conveying knowledge.	4.27	.945
2	Teachers who respect different viewpoints provide an opportunity to train democratic individuals.	4.52	.869
4	The differences between individuals run counter to the principal of implementing the same or similar education for everyone.	3.55	1.262
5	Students should be encouraged to apply relevant classroom learning to solve problems outside the classroom by becoming involved in community projects, social action movements, etc.	4.16	.986
6	Schools should stress critical analysis and the evaluation of prevailing social beliefs and behavior.	3.61	1.167
7	Students should be the judges of the type of education that is best suited to their own personal needs.	4.15	1.001
9	Schools should focus on individual and group problem-solving procedures.	4.19	.873
10	The basic function of school is to prepare individuals for life.	4.35	.893
11	Teachers should be free to criticise whatever social conditions block the fullest realization of individual potentialities.	4.02	1.056
14	Democratic socialism, which seeks the maximum degree of social justice for all, is the best type of society.	4.30	.928
18	Formal education is basically unnecessary and contributes little or nothing to the vast sum of human experience.	2.12	1.091
19	Schools should emphasise the present rather than the historical past or the anticipated future.	2.68	1.254
20	Schools should emphasise the unique personality of each child and adapt themselves to the specific nature of each individual.	4.29	.899
22	Education should stress creative individuality rather than group conformity.	3.57	1.104
24	Schools should be primarily concerned with the child's ability to solve his/her personal problems.	4.10	.902
28	Individual differences (physical, psychological and social) are more important than individual similarities and should therefore be given priority in determining appropriate educational programmes.	3.87	1.048
29	The curriculum should be continuously adapted to the students and the community.	4.30	.914
31	Co-education is necessary for the social and psychological development of children.	4.06	1.132
32	Scientific knowledge can be used to solve all kinds of problems faced by human beings.	3.03	1.173
Item No.	Traditional viewpoints	Mean	SD
3	Schools should shape the moral character of individuals.	4.29	.923
8	Schools should encourage an appreciation for time-tested cultural institutions, traditions and processes.	3.73	1.070
12	Education requires the restoration of more traditional principles and practices.	2.73	1.237
13	Science must be supplemented by religion or traditional philosophy if it is to serve as a satisfactory basis for human values.	3.03	1.281
15	The basic purpose of the school is to transmit necessary knowledge and skills within the existing social order.	3.79	1.039
16	Schools should ensure the appropriation of those ideas, values and beliefs that make Turks Turks.	3.84	1.201
17	Schools should restrict themselves to cultivating the intellect, leaving other important aspects of individual development to other social institutions such as the mosque and the family.	2.46	1.250
21	There is no need to develop a variety of educational programmes, since all people have similar values and perceptions.	1.99	1.005
23	Patriotism should be fostered by introducing children to a set of more or less sacred individuals, beliefs, rituals and symbols.	3.86	1.098
25	Without firm guidance and sound instruction, children are predisposed to error and antisocial behavior.	4.01	1.009
26	Education should stress prudent and responsible action directed toward the preservation of existing social institutions.	3.41	1.015
27	The curriculum should focus on the long-range requirements of society rather than the immediate interests of the students.	3.58	1.024
30	Schools should emphasise the virtues of the historical past as a way of correcting the existing over-emphasis on the present and the future.	2.21	1.121
33	Teachers should be models for experiencing and transmitting the basic principles of the Turkish Republic.	4.35	.972

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