

World Conference on Educational Sciences 2009

Investigating the experiences of male student English teachers in a traditional non-gender profession

Sibel Ariogul^{a*}

^a*Hacettepe University, Beytepe Campus, Ankara, Turkey*

Received October 24, 2008; revised December 16, 2008; accepted January 4, 2009

Abstract

The research for this paper aims to investigate the viewpoints and career plans of male student teachers of English entering a gender non-traditional field in a university in Turkey. The study has found that the driving motivator for the participants was the strong determination and commitment to the profession and the anticipation of moral satisfaction as well as the desire to be effective role models for their students. Despite the fact that they soon realized the high level societal stigma attributed to the teaching profession, they decided not to get out of the chosen career path.

© 2009 Elsevier Ltd. Open access under [CC BY-NC-ND license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

Keywords: Male pre-service teachers; english as a foreign language; female dominated professions; teacher education; higher education; career planning

1. Introduction

There has been an international recruitment drive to attract more male teachers to join the teaching profession in order to increase their low numbers in schools. In the United States, for example, 24.9% of public school teachers are male (National Education Association, 2003). In Australia, 24% of elementary school teachers are male. (Australian Ministry of Education, 2001). In New Zealand, the number of male elementary school teachers is below 18% (Cushman, 2008). In Britain, male teachers make up less than 10% of teacher population (Evening Standard, 2008). Although 57% of elementary school teachers are male in Turkey (International Labour Organization, 2000), the number of male English teachers is staggeringly low.

Although there have been quite a number of studies in mainstream literature concentrating on career choices of male student teachers, and teachers working in pre-school and elementary school (Bagilhole & Cross, 2006; Cushman, 2005; Mills, Martino & Lingard, 2004; Sumsion, 2005; Wiest, 2003; Williams, 1992; Yilmaz, 2006), further research is urgently needed in the field of second and foreign language teaching to systematically examine male student teachers', and teachers views on working in a female dominated field.

* Sibel Ariogul Tel.: +90-312-297-8575
E-mail address: ari_sibel@yahoo.com

Literature on the reasons for male student teachers choosing English language as a profession is almost non-existent. Therefore, a brief literature review in this study focuses on a few mainstream studies. For example, in a study conducted with ten British males working in female-dominated occupations such as nursing and elementary school teaching, Bagihole and Cross (2006) found that there were four important reasons of male introduction to these professions: limited employment opportunities in male-dominated occupations, women becoming a source of influence, male rejection of gender values, and lack of career ambition. The first reason was only half-accurate as some participants explained that the move to more female-dominated professions was a result of a loss of employment in, for example, a coal mine. For the other half, working in a caring environment was important for them. For the former strand, lack of career ambition was found to be inaccurate in eight of ten participants. Although the participants emphasized that working in a ‘caring and helpful’ environment was important, eight of the ten participants were working in professions where career progression was focused towards managerial positions.

The research for this paper aims to investigate the viewpoints of male student teachers of English entering a gender non-traditional field, their perceptions on their male and female colleagues, and their own career plans. This study also aims to give implications for recruiting more male student’s thereby increasing diversity in this profession.

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants and research context

Participants in this study were senior male student teachers majoring in English language teaching in a large research university in Turkey. All participants were graduates of Anatolian Teacher Training High School (ATTHS). These are four-year High Schools designed to prepare teacher candidates for careers in Schools of Education in Turkey.

2.2. Data collection and analysis

Participants were selected through convenience sampling consisting of eight senior male student teachers and contacted by the researcher personally. Each participant was informed about the research orally and in writing and was requested to sign a consent form before the interview was conducted. Interviews were conducted and audiotaped in a semi-structured style, considered most appropriate (Carspecken, 1996) lasting approximately thirty minutes. They were conducted in Turkish to put the participants at their ease. The interviews were transcribed and coded for emerging themes and categories. Similar themes and categories were combined according to the research questions.

2.3. Research Questions

1. What are the attitudes of male student teachers towards their female colleagues?
2. How do male students view their low number in their career?
3. What are the attitudes of male teachers towards an increase of males in their profession?
4. What are their career plans after graduation?

3. Findings

3.1. Attitudes of male student teachers towards their female colleagues

When all the participants stated that English language teaching is a female-dominant profession, they were asked to comment on the impact of that situation on their own career choice. Every participant responded neutrally. Some tried to explain the entry of more women into teaching with “women starting to get an education”

and “breaking down male hegemony in the field of teaching”. Some were still confused about the population of females in the profession within the last ten years:

... The thing is, the number of female teachers is increasing daily. When I was in secondary school, male and female teachers were equal. When I entered High School, women teachers were in the majority. In the meantime, we (male student teachers) have witnessed a decrease in our gender in this profession. The gender balance has definitely changed. (Atakan)

While discussing female dominancy in the field, six participants complimented their female colleagues’ teaching skills and positive relationship with their students:

I have not encountered any male English teacher in my practicum school. I think female teachers do a better job especially up to High School. My cooperating teacher, Aleyna Hodja, is like a mother to the students. I caught her once playing the violin to the students in the class. They all seemed to be in awe of her and it was a magical moment. I think female teachers are more successful than males especially in elementary and secondary schools. They can be like mothers to the students. I do not think I can talk and act the way my cooperating teacher does to her children. Sorry. I was going to say to her students. (Kenan)

Women seem to have this natural mechanism to becoming a teacher and are born with it. I can see it when I look at my university instructors and school teachers. (Atakan)

Some participants did not want to respond when they were asked to comment on their female colleagues and instead resented the societal stigma that teaching was a female profession. They saw this as a burden they had to bear:

Females are dominant in the field but that does not mean anything to me. There is a belief in Turkey that nursing and teaching are female professions. They say that teachers have long holidays. I do not understand this. Society, in making these comments, is trying to denigrate and simplify the profession. They are like, ‘It is so easy that only women can do it’. (Emre)

As Emre was highly content to choose English language teaching as his field of work, he appeared to feel the need to make clear that teaching English is not under any gender control. He considered it as a challenging profession if you want to do your best for your students.

3.2. Male students’ views on their low number in their career

Interestingly, some participants stated that being a gender minority in their profession is a blessing not a disadvantage for them:

Females are dominant in my field. I feel fortunate by being in the minority because I believe I have the upper hand to be in this field dominated by women. I feel comfortable with the situation. (Kenan)

If something is rare then it is precious. This is the situation in my department. I have a good relationship with my female colleagues and want to be with people who are emphatic and friendly in communication. Because I am like that. I do not see those qualities in men. For example, in my department, I have had no interaction with seven out of ten guys in the last four years. Being a male colleague is advantageous for me. Women are more socially active and use their initiative. (Arkin)

Almost all participants were content about their social relationship with female colleagues. Because they are aware they will be working together in the future, some also stressed the importance of “negotiation and cooperation” to have a good, healthy, and balanced work environment.

3.3. Increase of males in teaching profession

While all participants accepted that teaching is a female-dominated profession, some participants puzzled the researcher when they commented on a hypothetical situation like the increase in male teachers:

I would not prefer that. I do not think that men are as forthright as women. They cannot show themselves as teachers. Women are comfortable in this role and have higher qualifications. (Atakan)

However, some participants stressed the importance of good credentials without indicating gender:

I do not think there would be more male teachers in schools or vice versa. It depends on the qualifications and ability of that person. It is not a gender thing. This profession requires lots of patience. Everyone can go to medical

school but it does not necessarily follow that everyone will be good in that profession. The important thing is to do the best you can while eliminating social pressures. (Sedat)

Overall, all the participants seemed to agree that teaching should be done by people who possess qualities such as content knowledge, patience, determination, good communication skills and confidence while others felt the need to stress that their female colleagues already possessed these qualities.

3.4. Career plans after graduation

Mainstream literature emphasized the likelihood of male teachers taking administrative positions, such as School Principal or a Superintendent. As the researcher assumed that male student teachers in this study would have similar tendencies, she asked them to comment on whether they were interested in taking on any administrative positions in the future:

I think I might be bored by any administrative positions. It is compelling and being a teacher is something I can do. I will probably just continue my teaching career rather than entering into an unknown profession. (Atakan)

I do not want to be a Principal. It requires a lot of responsibility in the school in every area. If I become a teacher, I am just responsible for my students. (Demir)

I never thought about taking an administrative position. It would be the end of being an English teacher. It is a big world out there and an English teacher needs to keep up-to-date with everything because you cannot teach effectively if you are out-of-touch with the real world.” (Emre)

Unlike the male teachers in other female-dominated fields, such as pre-school and elementary education, none of the participants was interested in taking a Principal position in their future schools. They either believed that being a Principal was an overwhelming position that would make them responsible for a large school community or they just wanted to concentrate on doing their best in their field. All participants in this study planned to teach English after they graduate from university. Some wanted to teach for some time in schools in Western Europe or North America, or work for public schools until they retire. Some wanted to pursue an academic career. One common theme in their career aspirations is that all the participants were willing to work hard to educate young people.

4. Conclusion

This study investigated pre-service teachers with high prospects of entering the English language teaching profession, which is in the Turkish context a female-dominated area. Early in their lives, they chose English teaching as their career path and thus accepted to enter a female-dominated area of work, when they had to decide before entry to the ATTHS. The driving motivator was the strong determination and commitment to the profession and the anticipation of moral satisfaction as well as the desire to be effective role models for their students. Despite the fact that they soon realized the high level societal stigma attributed to the teaching profession, they decided not to get out of the chosen career path. This finding is in contradiction to those of Jacob (1993). Jacob (1993, as cited in Bagilhole & Cross, 2006) observes that men's entering in female-dominated professions is short-lived. He argues that this is the case for American men in his study that they get into these professions with a certain expectation and commitment. But the dissatisfaction they experience in such job markets steers them back into male-dominated areas of work. Jacob (1993) calls this phenomenon “enter via a revolving door”. He explains the so-called “revolving door effect” in reference to “social and peer pressure” (p. 36). The findings of the present study do not support the validity of the Jacob's “revolving door” effect. Besides, all eight participants clearly indicated their unwillingness to take on administrative positions, such as principalship, as they regarded that position a risk to their development and a move away from teaching. This is also contradictory to several mainstream researches (Bagilhole & Cross, 2006; Cushman, 2005; Williams, 1992) that argued that males in female-dominated professions are eager to progress in administrative fields or take managerial positions. The findings of this study, however, are in partial harmony with those found by Bagilhole and Cross (2006). They reported that the participants in their study, namely teachers, stressed moral satisfaction in preference to the financial rewards of their chosen profession. Clearly then, the findings and conclusions of this study are in accordance with those of Bagilhole and Cross.

This study was limited to only eight participants and therefore not possible to generalize the findings or indicate solutions. Implications that can be drawn partly correlate with the Education Queensland's publication (as cited in Mills, Martino & Lingard, 2004) named “Male Teachers' Strategy” to recruit more male teachers within the

system. For example, one of the strategies is to increase the number of males applying for teaching positions and to encourage male teachers to promote the teaching profession at school and university career fairs (p 357). As in Queensland, there needs to be a nationwide call in Turkey for recruiting more male teachers, especially in certain subject areas, such as English. However, referring back to comments made by some participants about their male colleagues and considering the statement made by one participant that "... it depends on the qualifications and ability of that person ... it is not a gender thing", a first step could be taken by establishing a university/school partnership. Teacher educators in English language teaching departments can visit, periodically, Anatolian Teacher Training High Schools to introduce this profession to both males and females. Invitations could also be extended to male and female teacher trainees in their universities to talk to students in these schools.

References

- Australian Ministry of Education. (2001). *Inquiry into male teacher numbers*. Retrieved September 27, 2007, from <https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/maleteachers/welcome.htm>
- Bagilhole, B. & Cross, S. (2006). 'It never struck me as female': Investigating men's entry into female-dominated occupations. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 15(1), 35-48.
- Carspecken, P. F. (1996). *Critical ethnography in educational research: A theoretical and practical guide*. London: Routledge.
- Cushman, P. (2005). It's just not a real bloke's job: male teachers in the primary school. *Asia Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 33(3), 321-338.
- Cushman, P. (2008). So what exactly do you want? What principals mean when they say 'male role model' *Gender and Education*, 20(2), 123-136.
- Evening Standard. (2008, November 3). *Discipline fears as female teachers outnumber male peers by 12 to 1*. Retrieved November 4, 2008, from <http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/nws/article-23373976-details/Discipline+fears+as+female+teachers+outnumber+male+peers+by+12+to+1/article.do>
- International Labour Association (2000). *Trends in feminization of the teaching profession in OECD countries 1980-95*. Retrieved September 27, 2008, from http://www_ilo.org/public/english/dialogue/sector/papers/feminize/wp-151.htm
- Mills, M., Martino, W. & Lingard, B. (2004). Attracting, recruiting and retaining male teachers: policy issues in the male teacher debate. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 25(3), 355-369.
- National Education Association. (2004). *Are male teachers on the road to extinction?* Retrieved December 11, 2007, from <http://www.nea.org/newsreleases/2004/nr040428>
- Sahin, V. & Yilmaz, A. (2005). *Communicating with men: professional motivation of male teachers in early childhood education*. Paper presented at the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Annual Conference, Washington, DC.
- Sumsion, J. (2005). Male teachers in early childhood education: issues and case study. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 20, 109-123.
- Wiest, L. R. (2003). The current status of male teachers of young children. *The Educational Forum*, 68, 62-70.
- Williams, C. (1992). The glass escalator: hidden advantages for men in the female professions, *Social Problems*, 39, 253-267.
- Yilmaz, A. (2006). *Communicating with men: Professional motivation in male early childhood teachers*. Unpublished manuscript, Indiana University at Bloomington.