

## PRE-SERVICE GEOGRAPHY TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF UNIVERSITY EDUCATION AND THEIR EXPECTATIONS OF THEIR FIELD OF STUDY<sup>1</sup>

### Coğrafya Öğretmenliği Öğrencilerinin Üniversitede Aldıkları Eğitime Bakışları ve Alanlarından Beklentileri

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#### Özet

Öğretmen adayları, hizmet öncesi dönemde tercih ettikleri üniversitelerde, kendi alanlarıyla ilgili önceden belirlenmiş müfredat doğrultusunda eğitim ve öğretim faaliyetlerine katılırlar. Bu eğitim ve öğretimin kalitesi öğretmen adaylarının niteliklerini doğrudan etkiler. Üniversite mezuniyeti sonrasında da öğretmen adaylarının önlerinde oldukça uzun bir meslek yaşamı bulunmaktadır. Gerçekleştirilen bu çalışmayla, coğrafya öğretmen adaylarına üniversitede aldıkları eğitime yönelik bakışları sorulmuş ve coğrafya alanına yönelik mesleki beklentileri tespit edilmeye çalışılmıştır.

Uygulama çalışması, 2014-2015 eğitim öğretim yılında toplamda 136 coğrafya öğretmen adayının katılımı ile gerçekleştirilmiştir. Katılımcıların 49'u Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart Üniversitesi öğrencisiyken, 87'si Marmara Üniversitesi öğrencisidir. Katılımcılara, araştırmacı tarafından geliştirilen anket formu uygulanmış ve veriler frekans ve yüzde dağılımları şeklinde değerlendirilmiştir.

Araştırmaya katılan coğrafya öğretmen adaylarının geneli, öncelikle devlette öğretmenliği ve akademisyenliği düşünürken, geri kalan katılımcılar ise memurluk, polislik, coğrafi bilgi sistemleri (CBS) uzmanlığı, özel sektörde farklı pozisyonlarda çalışma niyetindedirler. Bulgular genel olarak değerlendirildiğinde, coğrafya öğretmen adayları üniversitede aldıkları eğitimi pek yeterli görmemekle birlikte, eğitim ve öğretim şartlarının daha iyi olması gerektiğine dair görüş bildirmişlerdir. Ayrıca coğrafya alanına yönelik meslekten beklentilerinin yüksek, yeniliğe ve gelişime açık oldukları söylenebilir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Coğrafya Öğretmen Adayları, Üniversite Eğitimi, Alandan Beklenti

#### Abstract

Pre-service teachers participate in education and training at universities of their choice in the context of a predetermined curriculum related to their field. The quality of this education and training directly affects the qualifications of pre-service teachers, who have a long professional career ahead of them after graduation. The aim of this study is to determine pre-service geography teachers' perceptions of university education and their professional expectations of their field of study.

The study was conducted with the participation of 136 pre-service geography teachers in the 2014-2015 academic year. 49 participants were recruited from Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University and 87 from Marmara University. Data were collected using a questionnaire developed by the researcher and were evaluated using frequency and percentage distributions.

Most participants think primarily about holding a teaching position in state schools or having an academic career, while the rest intend to work as a public servant, a police officer, a geographic information systems (GIS) expertise and in different positions in the private sector. Participants in general are of the opinion that the university education that they receive is inadequate and that education and training conditions should be improved. Results also show that participants have high expectations of their field of study in terms of employment opportunities and that they are open to innovation and development.

**Keywords:** Pre-Service Geography Teachers, University Education, Expectations from the Field of Study

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<sup>1</sup> A summary of this study was presented at the 7th International Congress of Research in Education. (April 27-29, 2017, Çanakkale, TURKEY)

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## INTRODUCTION

Education can be defined as a set of actions aimed at providing people with skills and knowledge, which can, first and foremost, be achieved by preparing highly qualified teachers (Gökçe, 2009: 723) who play a key role in the education of future generations. It is, therefore of paramount importance to equip preservice teachers with the skills and knowledge that they will need in order to function as effective teachers and take up the mission of educating future generations.

Pre-service teachers gain professional knowledge and skills through university education. They receive education and participate in theoretical and applied training programs in accordance with curricula designed by universities. After graduation, they start their careers as professional teachers. During their long career, they can develop themselves professionally by themselves or participate in regular and periodic training programs in order to do that. The quality of those regular training programs, referred to as in-service training, are crucial for the improvement of teachers' skills and competence. Today, Turkey needs a larger number of highly qualified teachers. Therefore, any initiative contributing to the development of teachers also contributes to the education of future generations. The first step in this process is to provide pre-service teachers with skills and knowledge needed to be highly-qualified teachers who meet the standards of today and the future.

### Why Need for Highly Qualified Pre-Service Teachers?

Highly qualified teachers are needed to improve the quality of education. In order to prepare highly qualified teachers, factors affecting the development of pre-service teachers should be investigated and solutions should be sought to tackle potential problems (Gökçer, 2012: 136). Kavas and Bugay (2009), Doğanay (2011), Kartal (2011), Özcan (2011), Sümen and Çağlayan (2013), Şendağ and Gedik (2015), Ünver (2016) and Yıldırım (2016) conducted studies on the preparation of highly qualified teachers and proposed some solutions. Research, in general, focuses on improving the perception of quality in education, such as criticism of the current system, search for new solutions and following new trends in the world. All stakeholders and decision-makers involved in teacher training should take these scientific studies into consideration and focus on improving the quality of education as an imperative of the modern age. Primary responsibility for realizing this goal falls to the institutions of teacher training.

The primary purpose of these institutions is to train "qualified teachers" and "good teachers." According to various definitions, "good teachers" are those who have a good grasp of their discipline, appropriate personality traits, classroom management skills, planning and assessment skills, and technology, communication and guidance skills, and who have the ability to teach students to learn how to learn (Şeker, Deniz and Görgeç, 2005: 240). It is no easy task to train highly qualified and good teachers in Turkey as well as all over the world. Both faculties of education and faculties of arts and sciences in Turkey offer teacher training in accordance with a specific curriculum. Unlike the faculties of education, the faculties of arts and sciences (also called "Faculty of Language and History-Geography" and "Faculty of Literature") end this educational process with formation education. Graduate students should take the KPSS (Public Personnel Selection Examination) and attend an interview if they wish to work as teachers in the public sector. Teachers working in the public sector should develop themselves as they continue their profession and have the commitment to educate their students in the best way possible. Doing this, they contribute much more to the education of future generations.

The first step to train qualified teachers in Turkey is to determine "more precisely" by which areas teachers should be trained and to enforce a university regulation accordingly. This regulation should be followed by many other regulations such as the development of the academic infrastructure, the improvement of physical conditions and even the selection of students. The development of the academic infrastructure should also be followed by the improvement of the "quality of undergraduate education," which should also include the curriculum which students receive, internship opportunities, application and field studies, and academic staff teaching courses only in their area of specialization. This regulation should cover even many different arrangements ranging from limiting the number of students to increasing the number of academic staff. Here, details should be taken into account in a holistic perspective. The process of preparing pre-service teachers should be more qualified and transformed into a new system in which inter-university co-operation is much clearer and often adapted to the needs of the times.

Introducing regulations on the content of the curriculum in Turkey is another issue to be addressed. What is meant here is the harmony between the university curriculum and the curriculum in schools for employment. The purpose here is to provide students with what is needed first. In other words, this means neither an incomplete curriculum nor an extremely intensive one. The curriculum should include on-the-job theoretical and practical training.

The preparation of highly qualified teachers is already an endeavor encompassing all branches. As a holistic approach, improving the qualifications of pre-service geography teachers is not at all different from improving the qualifications of

pre-service teachers of other branches. Making arrangements for the preparation of pre-service teachers in general will contribute to the preparation of pre-service geography teachers in particular as well. Global trends in education should also be taken into consideration to improve the quality of pre-service geography teachers. The countries that have achieved this should be assessed on-site and from an academic point of view.

Determining what geography and pre-service geography teachers want and what they think are shortcomings will also make contributions to the development of their skills because needs are changing very quickly. Their detection and solution proposals will also be an effective initiative to resolve the issue. As stated before, pre-service geography teachers should be provided with the information that they will use primarily in schools. If succeeded, it will support the goal-directed education and training, and help to address the needs of pre-service geography teachers.

This study was planned to contribute to the preparation of highly qualified teachers. Pre-service geography teachers were asked about their views of university education. The questions addressed their future plans, general in-service training, their views of teacher training programs, laboratory, field trip, teaching methods and techniques, classroom management, assessment and evaluation, classroom guidance, special education and so on. Some questions posed to pre-service geography teachers aimed to elicit information regarding their views and expectations of the field of geography. These questions mostly addressed learning new things about geography, keeping up with developments, following legislations and regulations, visiting new places, nature education, participation in symposia and congresses, in-service training in geography, postgraduate education, in-service training abroad and their views of field trips and foreign language education.

## METHOD

The research design was based on a survey model.

Survey models are research approaches which aim to describe a present or past situation as it is or was (Karasar, 2005: 77). The population and sample of the study are as follows.

### Population and Sample

The study population consisted of the students of the departments of geography education in the faculties of education in Turkey (Table 1).

<b>Table 1: Departments of Geography Education in the Faculties of Education in Turkey</b>	
<b>Departments of Geography Education</b>	
1-	Atatürk University
2-	Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University
3-	Dicle University
4-	Dokuz Eylül University
5-	Gazi University
6-	Marmara University
7-	Necmettin Erbakan University

According to the data of The Council of Higher Education (2017), students are placed into the departments in Table 1 based on their university entrance exam scores. Participants from the two of those departments were recruited using convenience sampling, which is a non-probability sampling technique. Only fourth-and fifth-grade students were included in the study based on the presumption that they are likely to have developed an awareness of teaching.

A bachelor of geography education degree used to be a 5-year undergraduate program, however, it has been reduced to 4 years. During the 2014-2015 academic year in which the study was conducted, there were also some fifth-grade students who continued their education with the old system as they were enrolled in the previous 5-year undergraduate program before the transition to 4-year system took place.

The study sample consisted of 136 fourth-and fifth-grade pre-service geography teachers (87 from Marmara University and 49 from Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University). Table 2 shows the distribution of participants according to gender, university and class level.

Sex	f	%
Female	41	30.1
Male	95	69.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>100.0</b>
University	f	%
Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University	49	36.0
Marmara University	87	64.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Grade	f	%
4 <sup>th</sup> Grade	66	48.5
5 <sup>th</sup> Grade	70	51.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>100.0</b>

According to Table 2, 30.1% of the participants were female and 69.9% male; 36% of the participants were students at Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University and 64% at Marmara University; and 48.5% of the participants were fourth graders and 51.5% fifth graders.

### Data Collection Tool

Data were collected using a questionnaire, which consisted of 30 items eliciting information on participants' views of university education and their expectations of their field of study.

The questionnaire was first developed as a draft containing a 40-item pool of questions generated in parallel with the research objectives. At the first stage, the 40-item questionnaire was submitted to two experts (one in educational sciences and the other field expert) and two pre-service geography teachers. Based on their comments, the number of items in the draft was reduced to 33. Afterwards, the questionnaire was administered to 40 pre-service geography teachers and 3 items affecting the Cronbach alpha coefficient were removed from the draft. The Cronbach alpha coefficient was recalculated for the revised questionnaire as  $\alpha=.0.78$ , which was in the acceptable range, and therefore, the questionnaire was finalized. Lastly, the questionnaire was presented to two specialists and two pre-service geography teachers for control purposes. Based on their positive feedback, the reliability and validity of the survey was assessed. In general, the survey consisted of three sections:

Section A: 8 items including personal information and some evaluations

Section B: 11 items regarding university education

Section C: 11 items regarding the field of geography

### Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage) were calculated for qualitative variables.

## FINDINGS

### General Evaluations of Participants

Area of Future Employment	f	%
Public School Teacher	97	71.3
Academic	22	16.2
Others (Public servant, Police officer, GIS expert, Opening a cafe, Any kind of work)	9	6.6
Private School Teacher	8	5.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 3 shows that 71.3% of the participants consider teaching in public schools, 16.2% want to be an academic, 6.6% express a wish to become a public servant, a police officer or a GIS expert, to open a cafe or state that they would do any kind of work while 5.9% state that they would like to work in private schools. What is noteworthy is that participants consider working in different areas although they study geography education.

<b>Having Knowledge of In-Service Training</b>		
	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes	25	18.4
Partially	83	61.0
No	28	20.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Necessity of In-Service Training Activities</b>		
	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes	80	58.8
Partially	43	31.6
No	13	9.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>100.0</b>

According to Table 4, 18.4% of the participants stated that they had sufficient knowledge, 61% stated that they had partial knowledge and 20.6% stated that they had insufficient knowledge of in-service training. Table 4 also shows that 58.8% of the participants were of the opinion that in-service training was necessary while 31.6% partially agreed with it. On the other hand, 9.6% of the participants responded "no" indicating that they found in-service training unnecessary. Overall, these findings indicate that pre-service geography teachers have insufficient knowledge of in-service training and its necessity.

<b>Free Choice of Teaching as a Profession</b>		
	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes	99	72.8
Partially	27	19.9
No	10	7.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Loving Teaching Profession</b>		
	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes	100	73.5
Partially	30	22.1
No	6	4.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>100.0</b>

According to Table 5, 72.8% of the participants stated that they willingly chose to be a teacher. However, 19.9% stated that it was partially their choice to be a teacher while 7.4% stated that they chose to be a teacher half-heartedly. 73.5% of the participants stated that they loved their job. However, 22.1% stated that they somewhat loved their job while 4.4% stated that they did not love their job. The answers to these two questions are noteworthy in terms of "doing one's job willingly and lovingly."

### Participants' Evaluations of University Education

In this section, participants were asked about their views of teaching profession and of university education. Table 6 shows the number and percentage of their answers.

<b>SURVEY ITEMS</b>	<b>YES</b>		<b>PARTIALLY</b>		<b>NO</b>		<b>TOTAL</b>	
	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
	* It should be only the duty of education faculties to train teachers.	129	94.9	5	3.7	2	1.5	136
* I find the current teacher training programs in universities to be sufficient.	15	11	42	30.9	79	58.1	136	100
* I believe that the university will make sufficient contributions to my professional development in such areas as laboratory studies, field trips, corporate trips etc.	28	20.6	50	36.8	58	42.6	136	100
* I believe that the curriculum of the university will make sufficient contributions to my professional development in terms of teaching methods and techniques.	15	11	72	52.9	49	36	136	100
* I believe that the curriculum of the university will make sufficient contributions to my professional development in terms of class management.	25	18.4	75	55.1	36	26.5	136	100
* I believe that the curriculum of the university will make sufficient contributions to my professional development in terms of assessment and evaluation.	24	17.6	81	59.6	31	22.8	136	100
* I believe that the curriculum of the university will make sufficient contributions to my professional development in terms of class guidance.	21	15.4	90	66.2	25	18.4	136	100
* I believe that the curriculum of the university will make sufficient contributions to my professional development in terms of special teaching methods.	19	14	73	53.7	44	32.4	136	100
* I believe that the university will provide me with theoretical knowledge and skills regarding various administrative tasks that I will undertake in my professional life.	23	16.9	69	50.7	44	32.4	136	100
* The university provides me with sufficient knowledge and skills to use technological devices and software programs.	13	9.6	51	37.5	72	52.9	136	100
* The academic staff of the university makes sufficient contributions to my professional development.	18	13.2	80	58.8	38	27.9	136	100

According to Table 6, 94.9% of the participants responded “yes” to the item inquiring whether It should be only the duty of education faculties to train teachers. This percentage indicates that almost all participants are of the opinion that only education faculties should be in charge of training future teachers. 11% of the participants responded “yes,” 58.1% of the participants responded “no” and 30.9% responded “partially” to the item inquiring whether they find the current teacher training programs in universities to be sufficient. This finding is important as it shows that participants consider the teacher training institutions with the current system to be inadequate.

Participants are of the opinion that the content of the university curriculum fails to contribute to laboratory studies, field trips, corporate trips etc. (42.6%), teaching methods and techniques (36%), class management (26.5%), assessment and evaluation (22.8%), class guidance (18.4%), special teaching methods (32.4%), administrative tasks that will be undertaken in the future (32.4%) and use of technological devices and software programs (52.9%). 27.9% of the participants responded “no” to the item inquiring whether they believe that the academic staff of the university makes sufficient contributions to their professional development.

Overall, the results show that participants’ satisfaction with university education is limited. Possible improvements that will be made to the university curriculum regarding the issues outlined in Table 6 will increase students' satisfaction and help prepare highly qualified geography teachers.

**Participants’ Evaluations of the Field of Geography**

In this section, participants were asked questions about the field of geography. Table 7 shows the number and percentage of their answers.

**Table 7: Frequency and Percentage of Participants' Evaluations of Field of Geography**

SURVEY ITEMS	YES		PARTIALLY		NO		TOTAL	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
* I like learning new things about geography. I keep up with new developments and changes.	108	79.4	27	19.9	1	.7	136	100
* I would like to follow new legislations and regulations on geography education.	79	58.1	53	39	4	2.9	136	100
* I believe that knowing a foreign language well enough to follow the global developments in the field of geography will contribute to my teaching.	106	77.9	21	15.4	9	6.6	136	100
* I think that the field of geography is also changing rapidly, and I, therefore, find in-service training in the field of geography to be necessary.	105	77.2	28	20.6	3	2.2	136	100
* I think that today, with the development of technology, in-service training can also be achieved through "e-learning."	33	24.3	55	40.4	48	35.3	136	100
* I may need in-service training on GIS (Geographic Information Systems) in the future.	96	70.6	35	25.7	5	3.7	136	100
* I would like to participate in nature education and in theoretical and applied in-service training activities during semester breaks and year-end holidays in the future.	92	67.6	39	28.7	5	3.7	136	100
* I believe that attending to congresses, symposia and scientific events as a geography teacher can contribute to my teaching in the future.	104	76.5	30	22.1	2	1.5	136	100
* I believe that pursuing a postgraduate degree in the field of geography will contribute to my teaching in the future.	98	72.1	32	23.5	6	4.4	136	100
* I believe that in-service training abroad will contribute to my teaching as a geographical teacher in the future.	99	72.8	32	23.5	5	3.7	136	100
* On the basis of near-to-far principle, I think that participating in field trips in every city where I might be working in the future will contribute to my teaching.	112	82.4	23	16.9	1	.7	136	100

According to Table 7, 79.4% of the participants responded “yes” to the item inquiring whether they like learning new things about geography and whether they keep up with new developments and changes. 58.1% of the participants responded “yes” to the item inquiring whether they follow new legislations and regulations on geography education. 77.9% of the participants agreed that knowing a foreign language well enough to follow the global developments in the field of geography would contribute to their teaching. This result indicates that participants have a positive attitude towards the fact that it is necessary to learn foreign languages. Another important result of the survey is that 77.2% of the participants responded “yes” to the item inquiring whether they think that in-service training in the field of geography is necessary. 20.6% of the participants partially agreed with it while 2.2% disagreed with it, which might be due to the fact that they probably do not have enough prior knowledge of in-service training and its necessity (already demonstrated in Table 4).

35.3% of the participants have negative perceptions of in-service training via e-learning. Among the survey items related to the field of geography, this one received the highest number of “no” responses. Moreover, 40.4% of the participants responded “partially” to this item. These results show that participants disagree with the idea of receiving in-service training via e-learning.

However, Table 7 shows that 70.6% of the participants have a positive attitude towards in-service training for CBS, which might be due to the fact that they feel incompetent due to insufficient university education or that they want to keep up with the developments in the field of GIS. 67.6% of the participants have a positive attitude towards participating in nature education during semester breaks and year-end holidays in the future. This finding confirms the fact that geography education should be carried out in the nature from time to time. It is pleasing to see that participants have a sufficient level of awareness of this matter.

76.5% of the participants stated that they would like to attend to congresses, symposia and scientific events in the future. 72.1% of the participants stated that they might pursue a postgraduate degree while 72.8% stated that they might receive in-service training abroad. These results show that participants are willing to improve their knowledge and skills.

The item that received the highest number of "yes" responses (82.4%) is the one concerning participation in field trips in the city of employment, indicating that participants have a positive attitude towards the idea of the organization of field trips in different cities (based on near-to-far principle). This can be explained by the fact that participants are willing to learn about cities where they might be working in the future.

Overall, the results indicate that participants hold a positive view of the field of geography. Making improvements in the areas specified in Table 7 will surely increase pre-service geography teachers' satisfaction in general.

## CONCLUSION, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The majority of participants consider teaching in public schools or pursuing an academic career. The rest of the participants consider being a public servant, a police officer or a GIS expert, opening a cafe or state that they would do any kind of work. What is noteworthy is that 6.6% of the participants who study at the faculty of education are not interested in teaching. This might have something to do with concern for the future, which has been addressed by Gökçe (2009) and Keskin (2017) as well.

Participants lack sufficient prior knowledge of in-service training and its necessity, which might act as an obstacle to improving the quality of teachers. It should therefore be eliminated.

Similar to the results of Alim and Bekdemir (2006) and Keskin (2017), 72.8% of the participants stated that they willingly chose to be a teacher and 73.5% stated that they loved their job. Ünalı and Alaz (2008) reported that geography students who willingly and consciously choose to be a teacher have less anxiety.

Though 94.9% of the participants stated that only education faculties should be in charge of training future teachers, only 11% found the current teacher training programs in universities to be sufficient. Moreover, participants think that the quality of education in their universities does not satisfy their needs in terms of laboratory studies, field trips, corporate trips etc., teaching methods and techniques, class management, assessment and evaluation, class guidance, special teaching methods, administrative tasks that will be undertaken in the future and use of technological devices and software programs. Further research should be conducted to identify and address the problems and needs regarding these issues.

On the other hand, it can be stated that participants are open to new ideas in the field of geography and are willing to improve themselves professionally. Alim and Bekdemir (2006) also reported a similar result, indicating that pre-service teachers are interested in developing themselves during their professional lives in order to become good teachers.

Participants in general have a positive perception of in-service training in geography, GIS education, nature education, participation in scientific activities, postgraduate education and in-service training abroad. It is only in-service training via e-learning of which they have a negative perception. Participants are also willing to learn about cities where they might be working in the future. Providing such opportunities will definitely yield positive results in the way of preparing highly qualified teachers.

The study on teacher training in general conducted by Sümen and Çağlayan (2013) shows that pre-service teachers have low satisfaction with the faculty of education, academic staff, management services, resources and technological means, and moderate satisfaction with counseling services, courses and syllabi. Some of these findings are consistent with those of this study.

All in all, the most important criterion in preparing high quality teachers is providing them with high quality university education. Şeremet (2017) recommends that policies focus on further strengthening and supporting current departments rather than opening up new ones that meet only minimum standards. Şendağ and Gedik (2015) also

underscore the need for a systematic model for teacher training in Turkey. Those who are in charge of constructing such structures and models should also take research findings, ideas and suggestions into account.

In conclusion, improving the quality of university education and conducting further research on the field of geography will be beneficial for pre-service geography teachers. This should also be extended to other branches of teaching. Longitudinal studies covering the whole period of university education will also satisfy pre-service geography teachers.

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