



## PROSPECTIVE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TO TEACHING AS A CAREER IN TURKEY: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

### İNGİLİZCE ÖĞRETMEN ADAYLARININ TÜRKİYE'DE ÖĞRETMENLİK MESLEĞİNİ KARIYER OLARAK NASIL ALGILADIKLARI GERÇEĞİ: BULGULARIN ANALİZİ

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#### Özet

Kariyer seçiminde etkili olan faktörler, bireylerin meslek seçiminde dikkat ettikleri niteliklere karşılık gelmektedir. Öğretmenlik mesleğini bireylere nasıl daha cazip hale getirebiliriz sorusuna cevap ararken, diğer yandan öğrencilerin öğretmenlik mesleğine yönelmelerinde hangi faktörlerin etkili olduğuna dair literatürdeki bilgi sınırlıdır. Bireylerin öğretmenlik mesleğini seçip seçmeme kararlarını; öğretmenlik mesleği ile ilgili algılarının ve bir meslekte neye değer verdiklerinin belirlediği düşünülmektedir. Eğer bunları belirleyebilirsek, yüksek donanıma sahip öğrencilerin öğretmenlik mesleğini seçmelerini daha kolay sağlayabiliriz. Bu çalışma, 1. sınıf İngilizce öğretmen adaylarının öğretmenlik mesleğini kariyer olarak nasıl algıladıklarını ve nasıl bir bakış açısına sahip olduklarını araştırmaktadır. Öğrencilere üç bölümden oluşan likert tipi bir anket uygulanmıştır. Birinci bölüm kişisel bilgi formundan oluşmaktadır. 20 maddelik ikinci bölümde öğrencilerden kariyer seçiminde etkili olan faktörleri önem sırasına göre derecelendirmeleri; 10 maddelik üçüncü bölümde ise öğretmenlik mesleğinin, derecelendirdikleri bu faktörlerin ne kadarını karşıladığını düşündüklerini belirtmelerinden istenmiş ve sonuçlar değerlendirilmiştir.

*Anahtar Kelimeler: İngilizce öğretmen adayları, öğretmenlik mesleği, algılar, kariyer seçimi*

#### Abstract

Career choice factors refer to those characteristics people look for in a job. While assumptions exist about how to make the teaching profession more attractive to the individuals, knowledge about the factors that might encourage students interested in these fields to consider teaching as a career is limited. Individuals' decision to go into teaching or not is believed to be influenced by what they value in a job and their perceptions of teaching. If we are able to identify those factors which individuals consider important in their choice of career, and highlight the factors in teaching which

match these, then we might hope to persuade better qualified students to consider teaching. This study explored first –year pre-service English language teachers' views of teaching as a career choice. They were asked to rate the importance of factors in influencing their choice of career, and then the extent to which they thought teaching as a career offers these factors, using a questionnaire survey.

**Key words:** pre-service English language teachers, teaching profession, perceptions, career choice

## Introduction

In various countries a large number of studies have been conducted over the last 20 years searching the motivation of those who decide to become teachers (Brown, 1992; Reid & Caudwell, 1997; Chuene *et al.*, 1999; Kyriacou & Kobori, 1998; Akintomide & Oluwatosin, 2011). There is also growing literature about the factors that influence teachers' career decisions. These studies show that the main reasons cited by student teachers for choosing teaching as a career are categorized under three main areas:

- (1) *altruistic reasons*: these reasons deal with perceiving teaching as a socially worthwhile and important job, a desire to work with children, and a desire to help society improve;
- (2) *intrinsic reasons*: these reasons include aspects of the job activity itself, such as teaching children, and the desire to use their subject matter knowledge and expertise; and
- (3) *extrinsic reasons*: these reasons include aspects of the job which are not inherent in the work itself, such as good starting salary, long holidays, the opportunity to travel abroad and status (Kyriacou, 2000).

It is claimed that the degree of match between what a person expects from a career and the extent to which they think a particular career offers what they expect has a crucial influence on people's career decision-making. The view of what is expected from a career and what teaching is thought to offer will change from person to person. So, there may be many different reasons why a career in teaching might appeal to different people. One person might want a job where they can deal with children, another person might want to make use of their university subject, and another might want to do a job where they feel they are contributing to society.

Unlike most occupations, teaching is inevitably perceived as a potential career by most young people in developed and developing countries because, having all attended school, they are aware of teaching as a possibility. (Kyriacou & Benmansour, 2002). In the field of education, most of the research on the attitudes to teaching has focused on the views expressed by prospective teachers (Johnston *et al.*, 1999; Kyriacou & Benmansour, 1999; Reid & Caudwell, 1997; Richardson and Watt, 2005). These studies have explored the image of teaching as a career held by undergraduates and pupils in schools and colleges, largely based

on opinion poll type surveys using either questionnaires or interviews. Richardson and Watt, similarly, (2006) developed their own scale and they profiled the motivations for first-year pre-service teacher education candidates. Their "FIT-Choice" Scale provides a comprehensive and coherent model to guide systematic investigation into the problem of selection and organization of influential factors.

The aim of the present study was to explore the views held by prospective English language teachers in Turkey concerning what factors about a job influence their career choice and the extent to which they think teaching as a career offers those factors they perceive as important.

## **Method**

### *Research sample*

This study explored the views of 190 first year university students from departments of English Language and Teaching in the Faculty of Education at two universities in Turkey. The universe of the study is English pre-service teachers. Among the students who participate in the study, 72.3 % (n= 141) were female and 27.7 % (n= 54) were male. Prospective English language teachers' characteristics are given in Table 1.

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Table 1. *Prospective English language teachers' characteristics*

	f	%
<i>Type of schooling</i>	74	38.9
Anatolian High School	78	41.1
Anatolian Teacher Training High School		
General High School	33	17.4
Other	5	2,6
<i>Order of preference</i>		
1.	160	84.2
2.	18	9.5
3.	7	3.7
4.	2	1.1
5+	3	1.6
<i>Preferring the profession with their own will or not</i>		
Yes	176	92.6
No	14	7.4
<i>School success</i>		
Bad	12	6.3
Not so good	76	40.0
Good	92	48.4
Very good	10	5.3
<i>Whether there are teachers in the family/friends or not</i>		
In the family	100	52.6
Among friends	49	25.8
Not	41	21.6
<i>Support of parents</i>		
Yes	183	96.3
No	7	3.7

### *Data Gathering Instruments*

The instrument used to accomplish the research purposes was a survey questionnaire. The content of this survey questionnaire was adapted for use in the Turkish context from the study of Chris Kyriacou and Coulthard (2000). Also a sheet requiring personal information was prepared by the researcher.

A questionnaire was designed with three sections: Section 1(Information sheet) requested general information about the student: gender, school type, order of preference, preferring the profession with their own will or not, school success, whether there is a teacher in the environment or not and support of parents.

Section 2 listed 20 'general factors that might be important to you when choosing a career'. The students were asked to rate each factor in response to the question 'How important is this factor to you when choosing your career?' on a three-point response scale labeled 'very', 'quite' and 'not at all'. The students were then asked to rate each factor again in response to the question ' To what extent do you think a career in teaching will offer this?' on a three-point response scale labeled 'definitely offer', 'might offer' and 'would not offer'.

Section 3 listed 10 possible factors 'that might influence someone's decision when considering a career as a school teacher'. The students were asked to rate each factor using a three-point response scale labeled 'encourages me to consider teaching', 'I feel neutral about this factor' and 'discourages me from considering teaching'.

### **Findings and Interpretations**

In analyzing the data, as a first step, frequency distributions were calculated in order to understand the factors that are important for the students while choosing a career and the extent to which they think a career in teaching will offer these factors. Chi-square test was used in order to understand whether the factors that are important for the students while choosing a career and the extent to which they think a career in teaching will offer these factors differ according to gender and school type. Similarly, chi-square test results were analyzed for 'Influence on decision to teach' according to gender. In this study, criterion  $p < .05$  was used to determine the significant results.

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Table 2. *Percentage of students' ratings of the importance of factors in choosing a career and extent to which they think a career in teaching will offer these factors*

Career factors	Importance when choosing a career			Extent to which teaching offers it		
	% Very	% Quite	% Not	% Definitely	% Might	% Not
1. A job that I will find enjoyable	67.4	30.5	2.1	61.1	34.2	4.7
2. Colleagues that I can get along with	53.7	42.1	4.2	47.4	50.5	2.1
3. Pleasant working environment	54.7	43.2	2.1	51.1	44.2	4.7
4. A secure job	58.9	36.3	4.7	64.2	31.1	4.7
5. A career that provides intellectual challenge	46.8	46.8	6.3	40.5	51.1	8.4
6. Good promotion prospects	37.4	52.1	10.5	23.7	53.2	23.2
7. A job which gives me responsibility	57.4	36.3	6.3	75.3	21.1	3.7
8. High earnings over length of career	33.7	48.4	17.9	16.8	51.1	32.1
9. A job where I will contribute to society	58.4	38.4	3.2	71.1	25.3	3.7
10. A job where I can use my university subject	48.9	42.6	8.4	55.8	38.4	5.8
11. A job where you gain transferable skills	50	44.2	5.8	41.1	51.6	7.4
12. A job that is respected	66.8	30.5	2.6	74.7	21.6	3.7
13. Reasonable workload	48.9	45.8	5.3	48.4	46.8	4.7
14. A job with high quality resources and equipment	35.3	53.7	11.1	24.2	61.6	14.2
15. The opportunity to travel abroad	43.7	42.1	14.2	33.2	44.2	22.6
16. Job mobility-easy to get a job anywhere	52.1	40	7.9	31.6	47.9	20.5
17. A job that I can easily be combined with parenthood	35.8	48.4	15.8	48.9	39.5	11.6
18. Good starting salary	36.8	41.6	21.6	22.6	46.3	31.1
19. A job where I can care for others	47.4	46.8	5.8	60.5	34.7	4.7
20. Working with children	41.1	37.9	21.1	70.5	20	9.5

The percentage of students' ratings of the importance of factors in choosing a career is shown in Table 2. It can be seen that the students rated 'a job that I will find enjoyable' as the most important factor, followed by 'a job that is respected', 'a secure job' and 'a job where I will contribute to society'. Interestingly, 'high earnings over length of career', 'a job with high quality resources and equipment', 'a job that I can easily be combined with parenthood', 'good starting salary' and 'good promotion prospects' were rated as very important by only about 30% of the students, which seems to be relatively low in comparison with the other factors, although the other factors 'a career that provides intellectual challenge', 'a job where I can use my university subject', 'reasonable workload, 'the opportunity to travel abroad', 'a job where I can care for others' and 'working with children' did receive a relatively high rating.

Table 2 also displays the percentage of students' ratings of the extent to which the students think a career in teaching will offer these factors. Particularly noteworthy here are the relatively high ratings for intrinsic reasons as 'a job which gives me responsibility', 'a job that is respected' and 'working with children' and the low ratings for extrinsic reasons as 'High earnings over length of career', 'A job with high quality resources and equipment', 'Good starting salary' and 'Good promotion prospects'.

However, what is of critical importance is the extent to which students feel that the factors they regard as important in choosing a career are in fact offered by a career in teaching. This matching can be obtained by looking at each factor with a high rating for importance in Table 2 and seeing whether the students think teaching offers this factor. For example, 33.7% of the students rated 'high earnings over length of career' as very important, but only 16.8% of the students thought a career in teaching would definitely offer this. Similarly, 52.1% of the students rated 'job mobility-easy to get a job anywhere' as very important, but 31.6 % of the students thought a career in teaching would definitely offer this.

When we look at the factors 'a job that I will find enjoyable', 'pleasant working environment', 'a secure job', 'a job which gives me responsibility', 'a job where I will contribute to society', 'a job that is respected', 'a job where I can care for others' and 'working with children', we find a factor where over half of the students think the factor is definitely offered by teaching. So, in terms of altruistic reasons, the profession of teaching seems to be satisfactory for most of the students.

The factors regarding importance when choosing a career such as 'good promotion prospects', 'a job with high quality resources and equipment' and 'good starting salary' were rated low by the students and these factors were also rated low when they considered the extent to which teaching offers them. The profession of teaching does not seem to be fulfilling the extrinsic needs of the students.

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The students were also asked to rate the extent to which possible factors that might influence someone's decision to consider a career as a school teacher would encourage or discourage them. The students' ratings are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. *The percentages of students' ratings of whether possible factors encourage or discourage them in considering a career in teaching*

Possible factors that might influence someone's decision when considering a career as a school teacher	Influence on decision to teach		
	Encourages	Neutral	Discourage
1. Teachers get long holidays	68.4	30.5	1.1
2. My wish to share my knowledge with others	75.8	22.6	1.6
3. My personality and potential talent for teaching	69.5	25.8	4.7
4. The potential for self-development	63.7	33.2	3.2
5. The government's commitment towards education	17.4	47.4	35.3
6. The present level of autonomy of the teaching profession	28.9	63.2	7.9
7. Dealing with disruptive pupils	18.4	45.3	36.3
8. The media images of teachers	22.6	55.8	21.6
9. The amount of bureaucratic tasks to perform	10.5	60	29.5
10. The amount of funding that schools receive	23.7	46.3	30

Looking at the percentages for 'encourages' on each factor, we can see that 'teachers get long holidays', 'my wish to share my knowledge with others', 'my personality and potential talent



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for teaching and 'the potential for self-development' are seen as major factors which encourage a decision to teach. The percentages of these factors indicate that students are intrinsically motivated. Also, 'getting long holidays' is the only extrinsic factor among them. In contrast, looking at the percentages for 'discourages', we can see that 'the government's commitment towards education', 'dealing with disruptive pupils' and 'the amount of funding that schools receive' are seen as major factors which discourage a decision to teach. Such factors show that students are not extrinsically motivated about some aspect of the teaching profession.

Table 4. *Chi-square test results for 'extent to which teaching offers it' according to school type*

Item	Anatolian High School		Anatolian Teacher Training High School		General High School		X <sup>2</sup>
	n	%	n	%	n	%	
	5. A career that provides intellectual change						
Definetely	39	<b>52.7</b>	23	29.5	13	39.4	16.03, p<.01
Might	25	33.8	51	65.4	18	54.5	
Not	10	13.5	4	5.1	2	6.1	
8. High earnings over length of career							
Definetely	16	21.6	5	<b>6.4</b>	8	24.2	9.58 p<.05
Might	38	51.4	44	56.4	14	42.4	
Not	20	27.0	29	37.2	11	33.3	
11. A job where you gain transferable skills							
Definetely	41	<b>55.4</b>	25	32.1	9	27.3	14.23, p<.01
Might	26	35.1	48	<b>61.5</b>	22	<b>66.7</b>	
Not	7	9.5	5	6.4	2	6.1	

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Item	Anatolian High School		Anatolian Teacher Training High School		General High School		X <sup>2</sup>
	n	%	n	%	n	%	
	14. A job with high quality resources and equipment						
Definetely	26	35.1	10	<b>12.8</b>	7	21.2	11.11,
Might	38	51.4	57	73.1	21	63.6	p<.05
Not	10	13.5	11	14.1	5	15.2	
17. A job that I can easily be combined with parenthood							
Definetely	45	<b>60.8</b>	35	44.9	10	30.3	13.64,
Might	26	35.1	29	37.2	18	<b>54.5</b>	p<.01
Not	3	4.1	14	17.9	5	15.2	
18. Good starting salary							
Definetely	23	31.1	9	<b>11.5</b>	8	24.2	10.33,
Might	34	45.9	40	51.3	13	39.4	p<.05
Not	17	23.0	29	37.2	12	36.4	

Prospective teachers' attitudes towards the profession of teaching show significant difference according to the type of schooling. Graduates of Anatolian High Schools perceived teaching as providing intellectual change and as a job where they can gain transferable skills. The same group also rated 'A job that can easily be combined with parenthood' high. 61.5 % of the graduates of Anatolian Teacher Training High Schools believed that teaching is a career where they can gain transferable skills. At the same time, only 6.4 % of them perceived teaching as paying a high salary and 12.8 % of them perceived teaching as a job with high quality resources and equipment. Similarly, 11.5 % of them believed that teaching offers a good starting salary. On the other hand, more than half of the graduates of General High

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School believed that teaching 'might' be perceived as a job where they can gain transferable skills (66.7 %) and as a job that can easily be combined with parenthood (54.5 %).

The attitudes of the prospective teachers' attending Anatolian High School towards the profession of teaching were found to be more positive than the attitudes of those attending Anatolian Teacher Training High School and General High School. This can be interpreted in terms of their scores in University Entrance Exam (UEE). Higher scores from UEE increase the expectations of the students regarding the higher education program they want to attend, as well.

Table 5. *Chi-square test results for 'extent to which teaching offers it' according to gender*

Item	Female		Male		X <sup>2</sup>
	n	%	n	%	
1. A job that I will find enjoyable					
Definetely	92	67.6	24	44.4	8.82, p<.05
Might	39	28.7	26	48.1	
Not	5	3.7	4	7.4	
14. A job with high quality resources and equipment					
Definetely	40	29.4	6	11.1	7.95
Might	76	55.9	41	75.9	p<.05
Not	20	14.7	7	13.0	
15. The opportunity to travel abroad					
Definetely	51	37.5	12	22.2	8.78,
Might	51	37.5	33	61.1	p<.05
Not	34	25.0	9	16.7	

Female prospective teachers were more likely than males to regard the factors 'A job that I will find enjoyable', 'A job with high quality resources and equipment' and 'The opportunity to travel abroad' as very important. Females were more likely to perceive teaching as

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offering these factors. On the contrary, a small number of male students thought that teaching offers these factors. As a result, female students seem to have more altruistic, intrinsic and extrinsic reasons in contrast to male students.

Table 6. *Chi-square test results for 'Influence on decision to teach' according to gender*

Item	Female		Male		X <sup>2</sup>
	n	%	n	%	
5. A career that provides intellectual challenge					
Encourage	28	<b>20.6</b>	5	9.3	8.20
Neutral	68	50.0	22	40.7	, p<.05
Discourage	40	29.4	27	<b>50.0</b>	
6. Good promotion prospects					
Encourage	48	<b>35.3</b>	7	13.0	9.39
Neutral	78	57.4	42	77.8	p<.05
Discourage	10	7.4	5	9.3	
9. A job where I will contribute to society					
Encourage					
Neutral	17	12.5	3	5.6	8.76
Discourage	87	<b>64.0</b>	27	50.0	p<.05
	32	23.5	24	<b>44.4</b>	

In this table, it is seen that only 20.6 % of the female students were encouraged with the idea that teaching is a career that provides intellect challenge. Surprisingly, 50% of the male students were discouraged with the same factor. 35% of the female students were encouraged with the factor teaching offers 'good promotion prospects'. 64% of the female students were neutral about the factor 'A job where I will contribute to society'. Almost 44 % of the male students were discouraged with the same factor. Female students were mostly neutral about the factors mentioned above but male students were discouraged about the same factors. So, female prospective teachers seem to have more encouragement than male prospective teachers in terms of the factors that influence their decision to teach.

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Table 7. *Chi-square test results for 'Importance when choosing a career' according to gender*

Item	Female		Male		X <sup>2</sup>
	n	%	n	%	
1. A job that I will find enjoyable					
Very	100	<b>73.5</b>	28	51.9	8.39, p<.05
Quite	34	25.0	24	<b>44.4</b>	
Not	2	1.5	2	3.7	
19. A job where I can care for others					
Very	73	<b>53.7</b>	17	31.5	8.07, p<.05
Quite	57	41.9	32	<b>59.3</b>	
Not	6	4.4	5	9.3	
20. Working with children					
Very	64	<b>47.1</b>	14	25.9	7.70, p<.05
Quite	48	35.3	24	44.4	
Not	24	17.6	16	29.6	

The overwhelming majority of the female students (73.5%) believed that 'A job that I will find enjoyable' is a very important factor when choosing a career. For 44 % of the male students, this factor is quite important. 53.7 % of the females considered 'A job where I can care for others' as very important. 59 % of the male students indicated that caring for others is quite important when choosing a career. 'Working with children' is a very important factor (47.1 %) for most of the female students; but for the majority of the males, this factor does not seem to be very important.

If we take an individual's view of the importance of the different factors in their choice of a career as a starting point, then that individual will only begin to develop a more favorable attitude towards teaching as a career choice if we can increase the extent to which those factors regarded as important are viewed as being well met by teaching. In other words, we need to find out what these students feel are the most important factors and then demonstrate that teaching meets these factors.

## Discussions

Recently the lenses of research have focused on teachers' beliefs about teaching and the implicit theories behind the beliefs, which are commonly accepted as the driving force for instruction (Feeney & Chun, 1985; Isenberg, 1990; Pajares, 1992). In the future, knowledge about the attitudes of the prospective teachers to work in educational organizations and their attitudes towards the profession of teaching will be an important guide in deciding what kind of education should be offered them in pre-vocational period. As Johnson and Birkeland (2003) noted, it is essential to understand people's concerns and responses, otherwise policymakers and practitioners will continue to introduce what they believe to be promising recruitment and retention strategies with no real effect. Thus, this paper tries to uncover the long and short term determinants of selecting teaching as a career. It intends to determine the attitudes of the students in the Educational Faculties at two universities in Turkey towards the profession of teaching and to analyze whether these attitudes differ according to some variables. Kyriacou (2000) in his study wished that his approach to researching undergraduates' views of teaching as a career option can usefully be extended by focusing more specifically on different subject areas such as foreign language teaching. It is hoped that this study will shed light to the field of foreign language teaching and the opinions of prospective foreign language teachers.

As a result of the study, it was found that prospective teachers' attitudes towards the profession of teaching differ according to gender. Among all prospective teachers females have more positive attitudes towards the profession of teaching. This finding can be interpreted as an indicator of the fact when compared to the past, the profession of teaching, especially at primary school level, is gradually becoming a profession for females every passing day. Moreover, prospective teachers' attitudes towards the profession of teaching differ according to school type. The graduates of Anatolian High Schools have more positive attitudes towards the profession of teaching since they got higher scores than the graduates of Anatolian Teacher High Schools in University Entrance Exam (UEE). Thus, higher scores from UEE increase the expectations of the prospective English language teachers regarding the higher education program they attend.

As might be anticipated, prospective English language teachers report that a desire to work with children is highly influential in attracting people into a teaching career (Alexander, Chant & Cox, 1994; Joseph & Green, 1986; Kyriacou&Coulthard, 2000; Moran, Kilpatrick, Abbott, Dallatt&McClune, 2001, Richardson & Watt, 2006). Shen& Hsieh (1999) conducted a study in the United States. They surveyed the views of the student teachers, current teachers and teacher educators to increase the professional status of the teaching profession. They reported that improving 'salary and working conditions' received the highest rated measure. However, 'good starting salary' did receive a relatively low rating. Studies conducted in different sociocultural contexts such as Brunei (Yong, 1995), Zimbabwe (Chivore, 1988) and Jamaica (Bastick, 1999) found that more extrinsic motivations such as job security and career status are important motivations for choosing a career in teaching. Pre-service teachers from

Israel and from Turkey, in their first year and in their fourth (and last) year of study, were also asked to complete a questionnaire in order to explore the reasons that led them to choose teaching as their career and to reveal their beliefs regarding several aspects of the status of the teaching profession( Markovits&Kartal, 2013). They knew that the salary of teachers is much lower than that of other professions, but they thought that teaching is an important profession which gives a lot of satisfaction.The findings of this study also correspond with the findings of these studies. Prospective English language teachers in Turkey are also motivated by similar factors.

## **Conclusion**

The individual's vocation or career is one of the most important aspects of human endeavor because it determines a lot of things in human existence. This profile of motivations for people entering teacher education programs in two Turkish universities suggests that we should not be focused on a limited number of values, such as working with children, a career that provides intellectual challenge, a job where I can care for others and making a social contribution. Instead, it is clear that a range of values are important. We therefore argue that it is essential to target the multiplicity of factors that together impact the decision to enter teaching as a career. In addition to this, measures taken to improve the standards of teaching as a career need to focus more on those factors that prospective teachers perceive as important in influencing their choice of career in teaching. There are areas where changes could make teaching an even more attractive career choice. These include good promotion prospects, high earnings over length of career, high quality resources and equipment and a job where teachers gain transferable skills. The Turkish government has taken a number of initiatives, and is continuing to do so, notably in revising the curriculum, teaching methods, teacher training and teacher education institutions. Thus principals, experienced teachers, school administrators and academic staff at universities must take action to support new teachers' and prospective teachers' development and policymakers must work hard to make teaching an attractive and rewarding career.

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