In-depth Analysis of How Prospective Social Studies Teachers Make Sense of Their Career Choice Decisions

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Abstract

People choose teaching as a career for intrinsic, altruistic, extrinsic, materialistic, and stereotypical reasons. It is also argued that extrinsic, material, and stereotypical reasons divert people's career preferences away from their real interest or talent. Hence the effectiveness of educating teachers depends upon exploring pre-service teachers' rationale for choosing teaching as a career, and using this perspective to shape the teacher education process. This qualitative case study was conducted to investigate holistically how pre-service teachers in the field of social studies make sense of their choice of career. The participants were 12 pre-service teachers who were enrolled in a teacher education program for social studies at a major university in western Turkey for the 2010-2011 academic year. Data was collected through in-depth interviews and analyzed using the content analysis technique. The findings revealed that five related themes took place along the pre-service social studies teachers' journey to the teaching profession: disturbances, role models, getaway, status, and transformation. These themes give idiosyncratic explanations as to why pre-service teachers often depend on extrinsic and altruistic reasons. The participants' experiences also disclosed that these steps, or themes, must be understood in relationship to each other. These experiences might also make important instruments for a constructivist teacher education in the field of social studies.

Key Words

Career Choice, Interview, Social Studies, Teacher Education, Teaching Profession.

The teaching profession, in many countries around the world, is often viewed as a secure harbor for those who wish to make a career choice. The choosing of this profession comes about for a number of reasons. For instance, during destabilizing economic crises, the income of the teaching profession remains relatively reasonable almost all of the time. Research studies (*e.g.,* Behymer & Cockriel, 1988; Çermik, Doğan, & Şahin, 2010; Kniveton, 2004; Maree, Hislop-Esterhuizen, Swanepoel, & van der Linde, 2009) point out that people's career choice often depends on financial reasons and therefore economic pressures usually divert career choices away from their genuine interests or talents. This obviously results in a shortage of motivated and high quality applicants coming into the education program as a career, and as Yong (1995) stated, with a meager commitment to the chosen profession for the long term. From the career choice perspective, however, the teaching profession is among the most vulnerable to extrinsic and material factors.

Extrinsic and Material Reasons

Findings of the previous research consistently point out that *extrinsic* factors play an important role in the career preferences of those who choose the teaching profession (Azman, 2013; Bastick, 2000; Boz & Boz, 2008; Çermik et al., 2010; Papanastasiou

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& Papanastasiou, 1997, 1998; Saban, 2003; Yong, 1995). Extrinsic reasons cover "aspects of the job which are not inherent in the work itself" (Kyriacou & Coulthard, 2000, p. 117). Studies disclose that multiple extrinsic factors play a role in choosing teaching as a career. Among these are pleasing salaries (Papanastasiou & Papanastasiou, 1997), a desire to have a steady income (Saban, 2003), swift employment after graduation (Papanastasiou & Papanastasiou, 1998; Saban, 2003), long summer vacations (Kyriacou, Hultgren, & Stephens, 1999), job security (Johnston, McKeown, & McEwen, 1999), the possibility of having extra time for family and kids (Watt & Richardson, 2007), the prestige of the teaching profession in society (Bastick, 2000), and the encouragement from other people such as parents, teachers, relatives, or friends (Rodzevičiūtė, 2008; Sinclair, 2008). There are several other extrinsic reasons, such as being in high school orienting a person towards the teaching profession (Boz & Boz, 2008), having good teachers as positive role models (Çermik, Doğan, & Şahin, 2011), teaching provides good social security, a teaching degree is easier to obtain compared to some other fields, lacking any other choice, and being evaluated unfairly when entering a university (Çermik et al., 2010).

Previous studies (*e.g.,* Bastick, 2000; Papanastasiou & Papanastasiou, 1997, 1998) also reveal that in some ways these extrinsic factors relate to the social, cultural and in particular the economic conditions of a society. That is to say, the extrinsic factors play a bigger role than the intrinsic or altruistic factors in the career choices of people in currently developing societies where the economy is often not stable. In developed societies with a more stable economic system, however, the intrinsic and altruistic factors play a more salient role in career choice decisions while the force of the extrinsic factors fades away to some extent. For instance, Bastick (2000) found that the extrinsic factors are the most influential on the career choice decisions of Jamaican prospective teachers, and Bastick interpreted this finding as being in line with the circumstances in currently developing societies. The study also revealed that extrinsic factors were followed by altruistic and intrinsic factors. In their comparative study, Papanastasiou and Papanastasiou (1997) attempted to investigate the factors influencing students to become a teacher by studying students at Pennsylvania State University and the University of Cyprus who are majoring in elementary education. Findings of the study pointed out that the factor called "internal motives" was the strongest element

influencing students at Penn State University who are majoring in elementary education. The factors that were highly influential for the students of the University of Cyprus who were studying the same subject were the "variety of benefits" and the "status of the profession". Another study by Papanastasiou and Papanastasiou (1998) similarly pointed out that "swift employment after graduation" was the strongest reason for prospective teachers in Cyprus for choosing teaching as a profession. Along the same line, a study of student teachers in Brunei Darussalam (Yong, 1995) revealed that about 13 percent of the participants reported they had selected teaching as a last resort, which is also known as a "fallback career" in literature (Watt & Richardson, 2007). One would further expect that this proportion is prone to increase if the economy gets weaker and other jobs are not easily available.

Some studies addressed the effect of "mercenary" or "material" reasons in place of extrinsic reasons (*e.g.*, Olashinde, 1972). However, mercenary factors often exclude such extrinsic motives as family support, teacher advice, good teachers as role models, or having a teacher in the family. In their study investigating why prospective chemistry and mathematics teachers prefer the teaching profession, Boz and Boz (2008) found that an extrinsic yet non-mercenary motivation, *sympathy toward his/her own chemistry/math teacher*, was the strongest motivation source for prospective teachers' career preferences. In another study attempting to explore the career choice decisions of newly graduated prospective primary school teachers who were beginning their teacher education program, Çermik et al. (2010) found that the strongest factor called "mercenary motives" was followed by extrinsic, intrinsic, and altruistic reasons. It is interesting to note that, in this study, mercenary and extrinsic motives accounted for about 60 percent of all reasons. The authors went further and asked the same group to answer the hypothetical question, "What would be the reasons if you had a new chance to choose the teaching profession right now?" Findings in this second part of the study demonstrated that the strength of mercenary factors remained the same while the weights of all other factors varied markedly as compared to their entry-level preferences. While this reveals that the teacher education programs might have some impact on the decisions of students, it also points out that career choice decisions based on mercenary factors are firmly resistant to change over time. Also Kyriacou et al. (1999) noted that career choice decisions could be

understood through investigating the social and cultural contexts shaping the image one holds of teaching as a career, as well as investigating basic economic parameters. The social and cultural contexts often yield the altruistic reasons for a career choice.

Altruistic Reasons

Studies also point to the effect of altruistic motivation sources on choosing a teaching career. Altruistic reasons "deal with seeing teaching as a socially worthwhile and important job, a desire to help children succeed, and a desire to help society improve" (Kyriacou & Coulthard, 2000, p. 117). The typical altruistic reasons that emerged from various research studies were to serve the nation or society (Çermik et al., 2010; Evans, 1993; Olashinde, 1972; Saban, 2003; Sinclair, 2008), to help children achieve (Bastick, 2000; Kyriacou et al., 1999; Saban, 2003), to take the place of traditional teachers (Çermik et al., 2010; Sinclair, 2008), to influence the school systems which cause negative school experiences (DeLong, 1987), to enhance social equity (Richardson & Watt, 2006), to make a difference in the lives of children, and to serve as a role model for children (Saban, 2003). In a recent study of 855 pre-service teachers from various fields in a Turkish context, it was demonstrated that the view of teaching as a sacred profession played a greater role with choosing teaching as a career than other factors (Özsoy, Özsoy, Özkara, & Memiş, 2010).

Intrinsic Reasons

Besides extrinsic, mercenary and altruistic factors, the findings of various studies point out the important role of intrinsic motives with career preferences. Intrinsic reasons "cover the aspects of the job activity itself, such as the activity of teaching children and (having) an interest in using their subject-matter knowledge and expertise" (Kyriacou & Coulthard, 2000, p. 117). Among the commonly known intrinsic reasons gleaned from the previous studies are enjoying the subject that will be taught (Kyriacou et al., 1999), loving children, a match between the personality and the work (Çermik et al., 2010, Özsoy et al., 2010; Saban, 2003), the ambition to become a teacher (Bastick, 2000; Yong, 1995), opportunities for academic development (Çermik et al., 2010; Yong, 1995), the desire to work with children (DeLong, 1987; Krečič & Grmek, 2005; Kyriacou et al., 1999; Richardson & Watt, 2006; Saban, 2003), and loving to teach (Boz & Boz,

2008; Çermik et al., 2010). As noted above, intrinsic factors become more evident than extrinsic or altruistic causes with the career choices of people in societies with a stable economy (Papanastasiou & Papanastasiou, 1997). Although intrinsic career choice reasons are often welcomed by teacher educators, the findings of previous studies drew attention to a link between the intrinsic causes of a career choice and the feminizing of the teaching profession. In societies where the intrinsic sources of motivation played a dominant role with career choice decisions, the feminizing of the teaching profession became a highly debated issue. This issue is often referred to as a career or gender stereotype.

Stereotype Reasons

People develop stereotypes by observing their surroundings superficially and making shortcut decisions based on their observations. In order to demonstrate how gender stereotypes develop, researchers (Raffaele Mendez & Crawford, 2002; Şahin, 2011) stated that the abundance of men in positions of power and women in supportive roles in the media as viewed by children in real life help perpetuate these gender stereotypes. Hence limited exposure to women in prestigious positions is likely to hinder the occupational aspirations of girls with the potential to pursue an education leading to a prestigious career (Kerr, 1995). Boys attempt to pursue careers that are significantly higher in education and prestige level than girls, while girls demonstrate greater gender-role flexibility and interest in a significantly greater number of careers (Raffaele Mendez & Crawford, 2002).

People develop certain stereotypes about teaching as a career as well, and those stereotypes eventually play a considerable impact on people's preference of teaching as a career. There are several studies (*e.g.,* Foster & Newman, 2005; Johnston et al., 1999; Krečič & Grmek, 2005; Maree et al., 2009; Saban, 2003; Smedley, 2007) demonstrating evidence of the stereotypical belief that the teaching profession belongs to, or is more appropriate for, women. Because of this stereotypical belief, especially in earlier grades, many more women than men choose the teaching profession and this eventually leads to the feminizing of the profession in many societies around the world (Özoğlu, Gür, & Altunoğlu, 2013). For instance, males make up less than one-tenth of all primary school teachers in Ontario, Canada, and the rate of men continues to decline over time (Parr, Gosse, & Allison, 2008). Correspondingly, 82% of primary and 65% of middle school teachers were

female based on the OECD average (Özoğlu et al., 2013). However, the mere rate of males or females does not represent the whole image regarding the feminizing of the teaching profession. Saban (2003) revealed that female prospective teachers depend more on altruistic and intrinsic reasons than men and they demonstrate a stronger belief than men regarding the appropriateness of this work for their personality. In another study conducted in England, Johnston et al. (1999) similarly reported that women more often base career choice decisions on intrinsic factors while men base their decisions on extrinsic reasons. The same study further disclosed that women demonstrate higher motivation to "work with children" than do men, while men demonstrate a stronger motivation than women for the "income factor". Other studies (Foster & Newman, 2005; Richardson & Watt, 2006) similarly point out that male prospective teachers, before or upon their entrance to the female culture of primary school, have to challenge the general public image that looks down on teaching as a poor career choice for a man, a job that is only fit for women.

Previous research conducted in Turkey (Boz & Boz, 2008; Çermik et al., 2010; Saban, 2003) demonstrated that several stereotypical beliefs about teaching as a career (*e.g.,* teaching is an easy job, teachers have lots of free time, teachers have a long summer vacation, teacher education programs are not challenging) still play a role in career choice decisions. The stereotypical belief that *teaching is a woman's job* indeed resides on those career stereotypes that portray teaching as low-prestige and easy-going work. Eventually women attach themselves to the so-called jobs with low challenge and prestige in order to allocate more time to their assumed roles at home (Fidan, İşçi, & Yılmaz, 2006). Hence females often choose to work at the beginning levels of school, pre-school and primary levels in particular. Correspondingly, in Turkey, the rates of female teachers in pre-school, elementary, and secondary schools were 95%, 52%, and 42%, respectively. Based on those statistics, it could also be asserted that the rates of female teachers in elementary and secondary schools were not as high as the rates of female teachers in those schools from many other western countries, such as Slovenia, Italy, Hungary, United States, Germany, and the Czech Republic (Özoğlu et al., 2013).

Taken as a whole, career choice studies in the field of education were often conducted to describe pre-service teachers' reasons for choosing teaching as a career. Those studies often focused on the pre-service teachers of primary, elementary, and secondary schools. Studies that gave in-depth investigation to this issue usually focused on the gender issues and the feminizing of teaching in particular. Few studies investigated the career choice reasons in regard to pre-service teachers' field of study, such as science and math. In brief, people's career choice decisions are inextricably tied to the social, cultural, and economic features of the society in which they live. Since these features never remain steady, the investigation of prospective teachers' career preferences is, and must be, an ongoing effort in order to yield valuable information for improving the retention of teacher trainees as well as the overall quality of the teacher education process. Although the literature of career choice yields a rich amount of information as to why pre-service teachers choose teaching as a career, the link between career-choice reasons and the field studied is still missing. Using a Turkish context, this study is an attempt to provide an in-depth investigation of how pre-service Social Studies teachers make sense of their career choice. The study addressed the following specific questions: (*1*) How do pre-service Social Studies teachers make sense of their career preference? (*2*) What implications do the findings present for the future and the enhancement of pre-service teachers' education?

Method

Research Design and Context

This study is based upon the qualitative case research methodology which views issues intricately tied to social, political, historical, and personal contexts. In such research, according to Stake (1995), issues cannot be studied apart from the contextual factors which bind them. Hence a case study is defined as a holistic inquiry that examines an existing phenomenon within its natural setting (Yin, 1984) or as analyses of persons, events, decisions, periods, projects, policies, institutions, or other systems that are investigated holistically by one or more methods (Thomas, 2011). This methodology of approach, which aims to yield the description of the case or case-based themes, is appropriate particularly when available issues have clear boundaries (Creswell, 2007). In the context of this research, the boundaries are career choice, social studies, elementary education, and teacher education. First year students' career preferences in the *Social Studies Teacher Education Program* from a university located in the western Turkey have been selected as a case in this research. The program, as with all *Social Studies Teacher Education Programs* in other universities,

shows some typical characteristics among the teacher education programs from other fields of study. The most important is that though more than one hundred students come to the program each year the employment rate of the graduates in a government school is about 5%, the lowest of all fields in the elementary teacher education programs. Because of this particular issue, the selection of this "single" case requires extreme, or deviant, case sampling (Patton, 1990).

Participants

The participants were comprised of 12 first-year prospective teachers who registered for the *Social Studies Teaching Program* at a major state university. Although an array of possibilities for purposeful sampling was available, the "maximum variation" technique was used to best reflect the different perspectives (all relevant aspects) of the issues, events, and processes intended to be portrayed (Patton, 1990). Demographic profiles indicated that participants varied in their gender (Female, n=6; male, n=6), marital status (Single, n=11; Married, n=1), ethnicity (Turkish origin, n=9; Kurdish origin, n=2; Mixed, n=1), ages (ranging between 18 and 26), and disability status (major disability, n=1; minor disability, n=1; no disability, n=10). All participants wanted a career in the field of education, but most of them were not able to score high enough to enter a school for their preferred field. As was seen in Table 1, seven of the participants wanted to study in a field other than Social Studies but couldn't score high enough to be accepted in their preferred field. Demographic details for each of the 12 interview participants are presented in Table 1. Consistent with the findings of earlier studies (*e.g.*, Saban, 2003; Şahin & Çokadar,

2009), most of the participants come from families with low educational background and income.

Data Collection Instrument

In qualitative studies, researchers usually attempt to find out information in regard to context, process, and meaning in order to holistically investigate an issue (LeCompte & Goetz, 1984; Seidman, 2006). By taking this framework into consideration, the researcher constructed an interview guide including three main questions, each of which aimed to gather information about three specific aspects of the participant: (*1*) the context in which s/he has lived, (*2*) the processes or experiences leading towards the teaching profession, and (*3*) the meaning for them of being a pre-service teacher. This type of interview is usually called a semi-structured interview in the research literature. A semi-structured interview is a flexible process allowing new questions to be brought up during the interview as a result of what the participant says, although the interviewer has a framework of themes to be explored (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). In the process of collecting data, the interview guide assists researchers in focusing on the identified topics without constraining them to a certain format. This flexibility helps researchers to tailor their questions to the interview context, situation, and participant. The first question asks participants to describe the context in which they have lived (Could you please describe the context that you have lived in?). Through this question, the researcher attempts to understand each participant's background as thoroughly as possible in social, cultural, educational, economic, and historical aspects. Hence probes were often used during the interviews. The second question asks them to talk about the experiences which led them to the teacher

Table 1.
General Characteristics of the Participants

Participants' Pseudonyms	Gender	Marital Status	Ethnic Background	Age	Disability Status	Career Preference	Field Preference
Ertaş	Male	Single	Kurdish	21	No	Education	Social Studies
Halim	Male	Single	Turkish	20	No	Education	Social Studies
Ceylan	Female	Single	Turkish	19	No	Education	Counseling
Tülin	Female	Single	Mixed	18	No	Education	Language Arts
Sinem	Female	Single	Turkish	19	Minor	Education	Language Arts
Melih	Male	Single	Turkish	23	No	Education	Visual Arts
Dilay	Female	Single	Turkish	21	No	Education	Social Studies
Ünzile	Female	Married	Turkish	26	No	Education	Counseling
Yunus	Male	Single	Turkish	25	No	Education	Social Studies
Fatmagül	Female	Single	Turkish	19	No	Education	Language Arts
İsmail	Male	Single	Kurdish	23	Major	Education	Musical Arts
Denizalp	Male	Single	Turkish	19	No	Education	Social Studies

education program where they are registered (What are the experiences that have led you to choose the profession of teaching in the social studies field?). The third question asks them to explain what it means to them to be a pre-service teacher in the Social Studies Teaching Program (What does it mean for you to be a pre-service teacher in the Social Studies Teaching Program?). Then four specialists (one in the field of Curriculum and Instruction, two in the field of Social Studies, one in the field of Language Arts) were asked to evaluate the interview guide and its questions regarding their clarity and congruence to the research purpose. After evaluating it, they found the interview guide and its questions appropriate for the purpose of this research. In addition to the interview guide, an audio recorder was used as a data collection instrument. Although various instruments are used in qualitative studies, the researcher is the key instrument during the process of data collection (Seidman, 2006).

Data Collection Procedures

Before collecting the data, participants were informed of the purpose of the research along with their rights to participate voluntarily in the study, to view and approve the written data before publication, to withdraw from the study at any time, and to remain anonymous at all steps. The researcher, therefore, presented a written consent form including the purpose of the research, the rights of the participants, as well as the responsibilities of the researcher. These procedures served to increase the trustworthiness of the findings. Semi-structured interviews were then conducted with participants at their appropriate time, usually in the afternoon between the hours of 14:00 and 17:00, in a place where they felt safe and comfortable (*e.g.*, in a quiet room at the School of Education or in a participant's home). Each interview, which took about one hour, was audio-taped with the consent of the participants. Throughout the interviews, participants presented their contextual background, key experiences and thoughts shaping their choice of teaching as a career, and what it means to them to be a pre-service teacher in the program. The interview process provided participants with an opportunity to reconstruct the experiences that led them to choose teaching Social Studies as a career and to reveal what it means for them to be studying in the program. All the interviews were conducted by the researcher himself in the 2010-2011 academic year.

Data Analysis

The data source for the analysis procedures was the audio-taped interviews. The recorded data was transcribed in order to initiate the analysis procedures. To enhance the trustworthiness of the qualitative analysis, member-checking procedures were carried out upon the completion of the data transcription. Member-checking procedures contribute to the trustworthiness and credibility of the report (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Therefore, each interview transcription was sent to its respective participant in order for him or her to give feedback on the accuracy of the interview dialogue and to correct any misinterpretation of the data by the researcher. Then the member-checked data was coded, categorized, and analyzed for emergent themes (Creswell, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994). This process was carried out by an inductive approach—a process that involves coding followed by the segregation of the data codes into data clumps for further analysis and description (Glesne, 2006). While reading through the verbal data, codes were noted. The researcher paid attention to certain words, phrases, circumstances, patterns of behavior, ways of thinking, topics and events which stood out or were repeated (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Seidman, 2006). The written data was marked for those regularities and patterns in order to obtain emergent themes. This inductive process is called "content analysis" in research literature. Content analysis refers to the determination, counting, and interpretation of the repeated subjects, problems, and concepts among the gathered qualitative data (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Silverman, 2000). The data was then presented in five main conceptual themes and each theme was illustrated by the quotations from the related data. For further concerns of reliability and validity, another coder built a coding scheme using the data from one participant. The procedures of coding and the resulting scheme were evaluated by the coders, with particular attention being paid to the aspects where they differed, until they reached 100 percent agreement. Additionally, two English language experts who also know the Turkish language revised the quoted data translated by the researcher himself.

Results

By using the gathered qualitative data to hold a special lens up to the experiences shaping their choice, this study aimed to provide an in-depth examination of how Social Studies pre-service

teachers make sense of their career choice decisions on a personal level. Taken as a whole, one could easily say that the findings in this study support the results of previous studies that prospective teachers' career choice decisions depend on some extrinsic, materialistic, intrinsic, and altruistic reasons. A rigorous analysis of the qualitative data, however, draws attention to the integrity among various career choice reasons and to how one relates, or even nourishes, others. The analysis procedures have revealed five connected themes across the gathered qualitative data: (*I*) *disturbances*, (*II*) *role models*, (*III*) *getaway*, (*IV*) *status*, and (*V*) *transformation*. Since most of the stated reasons are inextricably tied to the participants' motivation to "transform" the issues they face, the theme of *transformation* is consequential to the other themes. Overall, these general themes and their connections were consistent across each participant's story. Figure 1 presents a general framework for the themes.

Disturbances

As the first theme, *disturbances* refers to the unjust, oppressive, repressive, or challenging conditions in the participants' lives. Although the challenges were usually different for each participant, a distinguishing feature for all of them was how the participant's capacity for social, intellectual, and emotional development were limited by these disturbances. Participants faced at least one of the *social-cultural*, *economic*, *psychological*, *political*, or *pedagogical* disturbances, which eventually drove them to consider a career in teaching as

a way to respond to these disturbing elements. *Social-cultural* disturbances emerge when the social or cultural aspect of a disturbing experience becomes evident in the form of stereotyping, being restrained, discriminated, or oppressed. Females, compared to their male counterparts, faced these challenges more often. Also, these disturbances were more repressive for those living in rural areas than for those living in urban areas. For example, Tülin stated:

> In the past, girls—my sisters—were destined to a certain kind of life in my family. There has always been an obvious line between girls and boys. We [as girls] wouldn't even sit close to our father and talk to him openly. But, in our culture, girls would not usually be allowed to work [with a positive tone], my brothers would work instead… Eventually girls have no right to talk, no right to decide in the family… One of my older sisters, for example, was forced to marry our uncle's son, someone she did not love. She also had a child from that marriage, but she was in misery all the time. Then our parents got involved again and had her divorce. She was back home again. Then she was not allowed to see her child for about eight years… My other sister also went through similar experiences, and this was the life awaiting me.

Unlike the experiences of females, disturbances for males were usually *economic* rather than merely *social* or *cultural*. The *economic* disturbances come out when the economic aspect of a disturbing experience becomes evident in the form of poverty, heavy work, or exploitation. Hence challenging work conditions drove participants to reconsider
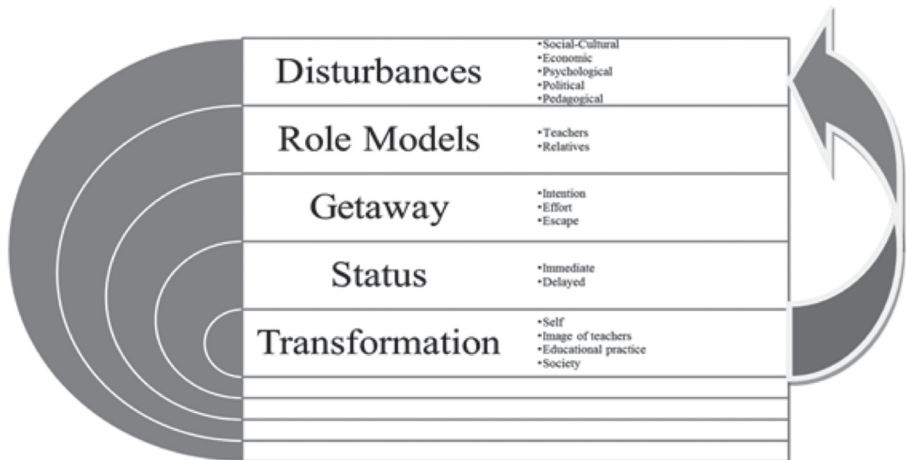

Figure 1.
Themes Emerging from the Data

teaching as their future profession. After finishing his high school education, Melih did several different kinds of work. He stated:

My uncle was actually in the construction business, and right after finishing high school, in the coming summer, I started working for him. But the work was so hard that every day I found myself praying, praying that evening would come soon. When evening came, I would be praying that morning wouldn't ever come. Soon I realized that I couldn't go on like this all through my life, so I tried several other jobs. I worked at a shipyard… I did siding work… I did coal delivery work. We, three people, were hand delivering 15 tons of coal every day for 30 bucks. All of those jobs were extremely heavy labor and there was no social security or insurance for most of them.

Melih eventually started considering teaching as his future career. Although similar experiences were common among males, the psychological impact came to the forefront in the experiences of others. The *psychological* disturbances emerged when the person experienced psychological pressure in the form of hopelessness, pessimism, anxiety, or depression. Although various reasons (*e.g.*, social, cultural, economic) underlie psychological disturbances, psychological impacts or symptoms come to the forefront. For example, Denizalp said, "*The University Entrance Exam was a greater pressure on boys than on girls. What would I do if I fail? Stay home and continue begging money from my dad? Thinking about 'What if I fail?' was turning my nights into sleepless hours*." Hence, a teaching career seemed to be a life jacket for some participants. Pressure for males was primarily financially oriented while females went through experiences shaped on a cultural basis. Ceylan initially felt a discriminatory attitude in her family and found no open channels for better communication in her high school years. This lack of communication eventually led her to a suicide attempt. She continued, "*I made a suicide attempt by swallowing the pills I had been using for a brain disease. Then I had to stay in the intensive care unit for about four days.*" Her experiences, later on, contributed to her career choice decisions in that, she thought, she would be able to change the world through helping students who were never understood by their parents.

A fourth category of disturbance was the *political* one. *Political* disturbances arose when the person faced a political conflict at school or in the community and eventually felt annoyance and anger toward it. For example, Ertaş said, "*I stayed in a dormitory while I was in high school. There was a guy, and one day he wrote 'Kurds and dogs are not allowed in' on the door of his room. It suddenly turned into chaos between Turkish and Kurdish fanatics. I did not do anything but it bothered me a lot when the teachers, to appease the chaos, asked us to be tolerant.*" Likewise, İsmail was disturbed by the biased content (or the presentation) of history class, or perhaps as Dinç (2011) reported, by the extreme emphasis on the "political history". İsmail then said, "*There were certain and never-questioned templates in history class. When we knew those templates or frames, we did not need much of anything in the exams. For example, the developmental period of the Ottoman Empire was always good and nothing was bad in that period. When it comes to the regression period, everything was bad.*" Similarly Yunus stated, "*History curriculum never included even a little information about the military coups of the past 60-70 years.*"

A final category of disturbance was the *pedagogical* one. This disturbance occurred usually at schools when administrators or practitioners fell into practices that were at odds with a robust theoretical foundation of education. It often emerged in the form of ignoring, discriminating, devaluing, or disrespecting some students. Fatmagül stated, "*Our math teacher was separating the good students on one side of the classroom and giving special attention to them. The same way, in our school, math or science students were viewed as superior to those in social or verbal fields.*" In Ceylan's experience, ignorance of students was evident. She stated, "*I was going through a difficult brain disease and therefore using very strong pills. In classes, because of those pills, I was often sleeping and unable to participate. But there was a math teacher, he wouldn't even acknowledge my situation.*" Although it was initially difficult to see those experiences as direct causes of their career choice decisions, they were cornerstones and important sources of motivation for the participants' journey towards joining the teacher education program. Those experiences eventually nourished the altruistic source of *transformation*. While experiencing those disturbances, participants also paid attention to *role models*, the next theme.

Role Models

Although the notion of *role model* had a negative connotation in career choice studies due to gender stereotypes (excessive female role models), some studies (Çermik et al., 2011; Saban, 2003) also reported that good teachers play an important role

in pre-service teachers' career choice decisions. In this context, *role models* are the people who through their distinctive and exemplary qualities (*e.g.*, worldview, attitudes toward students, human relations, approach towards teaching), influence participants to develop an interest in a teaching career. They are often teachers or relatives in the context of this study. Teachers with a unique perspective and attitude influenced some of the participants in such a way that they then aimed to become a teacher. Yunus was one of those who loved the field because of several of his teachers. "*My history teacher was the kind of person who would answer any question asked of him. He would never get mad or anything. The content of the history class, for example, was too narrow, so I was getting curious and asking about the military coups of the past. No matter where or when, he would answer with great patience!*" In a similar way, Ceylan stated, "*I was using very strong pills and often sleeping in the class. Teachers who cared for and listened to me in the classroom, who understood what I was really going through, made me love this job.*" Almost all the participants had some teachers who were outstanding models who let them say, "*I want to be a person, a teacher just like him!*" as Dilay said.

For several participants, the role models were from their family, and they wanted to follow in their footsteps. Sinem stated, "*My older sister was a primary school teacher working in a school in a rural area. I was often going to her home and staying there for a while. Staying with her was almost like a practicum for me. We were talking about education, students, schools… Eventually I started thinking that I could be a teacher, a person who is financially independent, just like her...*" Ertaş similarly stated, "*My brother was a primary school teacher and he was talking about his experiences with his students. I started thinking that I could become a teacher...*" Role models usually invite them to be a teacher.

Getaway

As the third theme, *getaway* refers to the participants' intention, their effort, as well as a way to escape from the aforementioned disturbances hampering their social, intellectual, or emotional development. They felt that the *getaway* was necessary since the development of the self under those circumstances was a challenging task. *Getaway* emerged when the participants demonstrated intention, effort, and eventually an escape not only to be away from the hampering context but also to obtain a new identity or status—the next theme.

The first phase of getaway is *intention* to move away, which results from the awareness of the limiting conditions. Fatmagül, for instance, was aware that living in the restrictive conditions of a small town did not offer adequate opportunities or hope for her future. Therefore, she found herself at a crossroads. She then stated, "*Either I was going to stay home and spend the rest of my life just like everybody else around me or I was going to go away to improve myself. I was really afraid of failing at the entrance exam and being destined to stay at home. I had to achieve…*" Tülin, in a similar way, was afraid of sharing the same destiny as her older sisters. She was, therefore, determined to get away to change her destiny. She stated, "*I was on the edge of a steep cliff and I was about to fall down. There were two different lives. I was going to be sentenced to the life at home if I failed the university entrance exam. The other one was the life available beyond the borders of my town. I had to reach the second one.*" Just like everybody else, for Yunus, awareness came as a result of various disturbances including the pedagogical one. He stated, "*Seeing those teachers [referring to those who demonstrate discriminatory and improper pedagogical acts] put in my mind that I had to do something about it, but I failed the university entrance exam. Then my family did not want to give me a second chance the next year, so I had to go somewhere else in order to try again.*" Participants' intention did not fade and eventually it turned into a deliberate *effort* to make the getaway.

The second phase of the getaway is the *effort* to open the doors of a new beginning. Participants, therefore, found themselves in a continuous effort and struggle to gain entrance to a school of education that would give them a chance to go away. Much of the effort was concentrating on the entrance exam. Fatmagül stated, "*When I was in high school, I tried every possible thing that would boost me up. I often visited my school in summer times in order to be around school staff, to get some assistance when I needed it.*" Dilay found herself making a similar effort. She stated, "*I usually went into a room and locked the door so that nobody could bother me while studying. This way, I was also isolating myself from the social context, context which was likely to harm me in some ways. It then came to such a point that my relatives started calling me 'wild girl' simply because I was avoiding contact with them. I did not care what they said! I studied so hard! There were times I fell asleep on my books during my studying.*" These efforts eventually led to the third phase of the gateway, *escape*.

The *escape* refers to the moment when the participants go away from their home context and its obstructive surrounding. Although the target place was usually the school of education, in some cases, male participants moved away to another place in order to prepare for the university entrance exam. İsmail, for instance, was aiming to become a Musical Arts teacher due to his gift in the field of music. He stated:

> I was spending a good deal of effort and money in order to prepare and apply for the Musical Arts program…My father, one day, asked me to quit those, in his terms, "futile attempts." His stance was the last straw to break the camel's back, and then, I immediately moved to İzmir where my older sister was living. I worked at a café during the days and studied at nights…Despite my effort, I was not able to pass the exam for the musical arts programs. My score in the entrance exam was enough to be accepted for the social studies program.

İsmail moved away from home in order to be able to prepare and then step into a school of education. Likewise Yunus had a conflict with his family after which he moved to another city in order to be able to prepare and then step into a university. He stated, "*After graduating from high school, I could not get a good enough score to enter a university the first year. My father already had an animal farm and a small café in our town. And he needed some help to run the café and to take care of the animals… He wanted me to stay and help him. I then had a fight with him and, getting mad, immediately moved to Ankara. I worked and studied there for the university exam*." For others, particularly for females, escape occurred when they were accepted by a university in another area of the country. Tülin, for instance, said, "*The day I was accepted by the school of education was a new beginning, the beginning of a new life. It was not merely an escape, but indeed a journey to so many opportunities available for me.*"

Getaway, as stated by Tülin, does not solely mean to escape from disturbances. In fact, it is the beginning of a developmental process that will feed participants socially, psychologically, intellectually, and emotionally. Although all aspects of the developmental process are important, participants attributed a great value to the social aspect as a process of gaining a new social status.

Status

The fourth theme, *status* refers to the phase by which the participants exalt their social prestige in order to be able to better express the self and, therefore, to change the surrounding issues, which were referred to previously as "disturbances". The teaching profession becomes an important instrument for this because the public image of the teaching profession in rural areas is already an immediate reward for the participants, despite the degrading view in the urban areas that teaching is easy work and only for women. Although this type of reward was usually true for female pre-service teachers, males often emphasized the status they would gain through a qualifying educational experience in a teacher education program. The theme of status thus emerged in the form of "immediate prestige" upon one's becoming a candidate teacher and "delayed prestige" upon one's relentless effort to improve the self in the teacher education process.

The university and the teacher education program in particular has often become a matter of existence for female participants because of their previous status. Ceylan stated:

> The young generation, especially girls, need to change their public image, an image that is often underestimating or overlooking them. When I entered a university, upon passing the university entrance exam, that negative image automatically changed to a positive one. Then I became an important person in the eyes of people around me… When I go to my hometown these days, people—people who used to control me, who used to criticize and judge every tiny behavior of mine—respect me a lot just because I will be a teacher.

Sinem similarly stated, "*I immediately gained some prestige upon my registration at the university. It really changed how people in my home town viewed me. They tend to respect me rather than look down on me. This makes me so happy now*." Dilay's experiences were the same. She said, "*I hoped my status in the family would change a lot upon my entrance to a university, and it did. Now people come to my family and praise me for my achievement. Then my family started respecting me and my decisions*."

Unlike females, males usually attributed to the "delayed prestige" which would result from a high achievement in a teacher education program. Feeling agony inside from many heartbreaking societal problems, Halim was motivated to deal with and transform those issues. Yet he thought that it was difficult to achieve the transformation without a high recognition, or status, resulting from an intellectual background. In this respect, he stated, "*I felt that I needed to become an important person, a great model, an intellectual who can influence*

and shape the society." It is important to note that participants do not seek status for the sake of mere personal satisfaction. This status is an important instrument for the process of *transformation*, which is the next theme.

Transformation

The theme of *transformation* is consequential to the other themes in pre-service teachers' career choice decisions. Throughout the interviews, participants not only expressed the inhibitory factors limiting the development of the self and society but also stated their goal to change those circumstances. While they were expressing their goal to change the world, they further attached the concept of *transformation* to what it meant to be a teacher. *Transformation* thus emerged in four different forms: transformation of the self, of the negative image of teachers, of the educational practice, and of society.

Since the transformation of the self is a bottom line for educational praxis, most participants referred to it in the same ways. Tülin, for example, stated, "*So far, the men around me made most of the important decisions concerning my life. But now, I want a life without their shadow falling on me. Being here is a great opportunity for me to improve my capability to act on my own decisions, to stand on my own two feet, to shape my future…*" Tülin viewed the teacher education program as an opportunity to delete the dependency syndrome she had developed over her life. Others referred to their intellectual development in order to play a role in effective social transformation. Halim said, "*Right now, I am thinking about developing myself to be a great author writing in the area of literature, history, and geography. I am paying attention to some good models among the instructors and planning to write a historical novel.*" He further stated, "*I don't think defining myself as a Turkish man, or being one, is enough to be an actor of change in this century. I am struggling to develop a global identity as well.*"

Participants were also concerned about the negative image of the teaching profession as well as the degrading public attitude toward it. They perceived themselves as the actors to change that image and attitude. Denizalp stated, "*We must change the image of the teaching profession, change the belief that teaching is an easy job [and] that teachers work so little. Those notions develop from the practices of so many unqualified teachers who are unable to demonstrate exemplary teaching.*" Ceylan similarly stated, "*If someone sees the teaching profession as the last resort, or if someone still says, 'I can, at least, become a teacher if I cannot become anything else', we must be concerned and change that image.*"

Besides the negative image of the profession, participants also agreed to eliminate the educational malpractice, which was also obvious in their past. Denizalp stated, "*My purpose is to change the quality of educational practices at schools. For example, my history teacher was like a programmed machine, conditioned to deliver the textbook content. Instead, I will attempt to take advantage of so many historical places and contextual elements to make a difference in educational practice.*" Ceylan said, "*The system usually focused on good students and ignored weak ones. I feel it's not fair for schools to be on the side of good students. I will pay more attention to low-achieving students and touch their lives by searching for the causes of their failure.*" Ünzile stated, "*My own child has been a learning laboratory for me. I witnessed that I sometimes failed to understand him because of my preconceptions. So, I will not be one of those teachers who knows everything, who never does wrong, who never gives an apology…*" Yunus referred to some of his teachers and said, "*I will not let my students repeat my ideas or what is written in the book without questioning. I will let them construct their own opinion and defend it without feeling any fear.*"

Participants also viewed themselves as the agent of social transformation. Some already initiated a positive change in their context upon their achievements. Ünzile stated, "*My husband's family was very conservative and they were reluctant to send girls to school after compulsory education. I became such a positive role model for them that their attitude towards the girls' demand for schooling changed a great deal.*" Tülin similarly expressed her father's attitude. "*After I started the university, he gradually started thinking that he did wrong by the girls in the family. And his repentance is growing day after day!*" Other participants were concerned about changing the world through education. Ertaş said, "*Being a teacher to me is to take part in solving the major problems in our society, such as, the effect of the media, superficial thinking, social polarization, human rights violations and so on.*"

Discussion

The purpose of this study was not to list the career choice reasons, nor to evaluate participants' choices based on preset criteria. At the root of in-depth

interviewing lies an interest in understanding the lived experiences of other people and the meaning they take from their experience (Seidman, 2006). This study was, therefore, an attempt to understand, in a subjective sense, how pre-service teachers make sense of their career preference in the totality of their context. Findings demonstrate that the context, through its disturbing and motivational elements, plays a crucial role in their journey to the teacher education programs as well as in the meaning they take from their journey. The findings, overall, draw attention to the following specific points:

Although the themes look quite different from the commonly known career choice reasons of past research, these findings could easily be linked, or tied, to the results of previous studies in that the themes of *disturbances* or *getaway*, for instance, included some details along with a subjective understanding of what was referred to in the literature (Bastick, 2000; Boz & Boz, 2008; Çermik et al., 2010; Papanastasiou & Papanastasiou, 1997, 1998; Saban, 2003; Yong, 1995) as "extrinsic" reasons. Similar studies about pre-service teachers' reasons for choosing teaching as a career (Kyriacou & Coulthard, 2000; Kyriacou et al., 1999; Saban, 2003) have found that the most powerful motivators for teaching are altruistic reasons, which supports the finding that the theme of *transformation* resides over, or results from, the issues in other themes. Findings then draw attention to the interconnection among various reasons for a career choice and to the fact that each category of choice could only be understood in relation to other categories. Therefore, the altruistic motivations of helping children achieve (Bastick, 2000), taking the place of traditional teachers (Çermik et al., 2010), influencing the school system which caused bad schooling experiences (DeLong, 1987), enhancing social equity (Richardson & Watt, 2006), making a difference in children's lives and serving as a role model for children (Saban, 2003), as shown in the findings, are deeply rooted in the participants' disturbing experiences in schools and society. Hence, researchers who find intrinsic, extrinsic, altruistic, or any other reason the most powerful motivation source might investigate how it relates to the other reasons that emerge in their studies.

Motivation for the research on this topic has often come from a concern in many countries that a shortage of high-quality applicants in their teacher education programs affects the quality of teacher education as well as the retention of the graduates during their career (Çermik et al., 2010; Kyriacou et al., 1999; Yong, 1995). Because of this concern, pre-service teachers' extrinsic career choice decisions, if compared to their intrinsic or altruistic ones, often receive little positive attention (*e.g.*, Bastic, 2000; Papanastasiou & Papanastasiou, 1997). The findings in this study, however, demonstrate that extrinsic factors, included particularly in the *disturbances* and *getaway* themes, not only comprise the foundation for the altruistic motivation sources but also provide invaluable experiences, or materials, through which the teacher education process in the field of social studies could be carried out on the basis of a constructivist approach, which views the prior knowledge and experiences of the learner as an important instrument in learning (Brooks & Brooks, 1993). As Freire noted (1985), knowledge becomes relevant only when it begins with the experiences that students bring with them from the surrounding culture. Since pre-service teachers' experiences in making their career choice decisions relate the most to topics from the field of social studies (*e.g.,* democracy, human rights, equity, discrimination, gender issues, social status) and to the topics in the field of education (*e.g.*, hidden curriculum, democratic education, tracking, teacher attitude, multiple intelligences), teacher educators must pay particular attention to understand those experiences of pre-service teachers, to integrate them in the process of teacher education, and eventually to let students relate their experiences to larger concepts or theories in the field.

These findings may also provide a useful basis for further exploration and discussion of how peoples' reasons for choosing a career inform whether the candidate is of a high-quality or not, and even who a high-quality applicant might be. It is known from previous studies (*e.g.,* Saban, 2003; Şahin & Çokadar, 2009) that teacher candidates usually come from low-level educational and socioeconomic backgrounds. Since they often depend on extrinsic reasons in their career choice decisions, one might easily ignore the treasure of experience they bring with them and eventually assume that those are not high-quality candidates. The good news, however, is that such groups of pre-service teachers often bring rich experiences that can nourish the effectiveness of teacher education, particularly in the field of social studies. Additionally, upon their becoming a teacher, the majority of the students they will be serving in the future will also be coming from the lower socioeconomic segments of society. Therefore, they can understand the social, cultural, or economic language of society better than any other group can.

To conclude, the findings from this study draw attention to the pre-service teachers' journeys beginning with disturbances and going through the phases of role models, getaway, status, and transformation. The findings overall suggest that the pre-service teachers' journey to teacher education includes various challenges which eventually nurture commitment in them to transform those conditions which have challenged them. While this study strongly points to the need for teacher educators to explore the details of pre-service teachers' journey to teacher education programs in every field, it also points to the need to pay careful attention to how their journey can and must be incorporated into the process of teacher education. Having an in-depth investigation of prospective teachers' career choice decisions helps teacher educators understand who usually comes to teacher education programs, what crucial roles teacher education programs might play to best educate them, and who the teachers of tomorrow will be. This study opens the way to further and deeper discussion of pre-service teachers' career preferences. Would there be a difference if the study was carried out in different contexts? Would similar characteristics emerge in other cultures, other countries, and other teaching areas? And more importantly, what change occurs in the commitment of pre-service teachers to transform the world in which they live upon entering, or staying in, teacher education program? Future research might focus on the questions given above as well as how their commitment to transform the world follows up in teacher education programs. It is also important to note that the findings are limited by an "extreme" case and, therefore, must not be generalized to dissimilar contexts.

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