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Examination of the Professional Self-Esteem of Teacher Candidates Studying at a Faculty of Education

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ABSTRACT This study aims to determine the professional self-esteem levels of teacher candidates studying at the Faculty of Education, Ahi Evran University, Kırşehir, Turkey, to examine whether certain variables create any differences in their professional self-esteem levels and to propose suggestions in accordance with the results. The study was conducted among first- and fourth-year students. Data about the participants was collected through the use of a general information form, and their self-esteem levels were evaluated through the Scale for Professional Self-Esteem developed by Arıcak. The results reveal that gender, grade level, credit given to the importance of teaching as a profession, the ranking of choosing teaching as a profession at university and participating in professional activities in teaching do not cause any differences in teacher candidates' self-esteem levels, yet the activities of lecturers with regard to the reputation of teaching cause differences in their self-esteem levels.

Introduction

One's profession has an important role in defining one's life. Individuals maintain their life and place in society through their professions (Arıcak & Dilmaç, 2003). An individual has the desire to advance his/her innate talents, potential and hidden strengths by using and improving them. The most efficient place that these talents, potential and hidden powers can be used and improved is the work environment. It is in this professional environment that individuals maintain their social identity and social interaction. If they do not have any professional fulfilment, they may experience personal and social problems (Sarucan, 2008). Baloğlu et al (2006) point out in their research that there is a meaningful correlation between teachers' level of professional self-esteem and their internal and external satisfaction.

There are many social and personal factors that affect the success of the teaching profession. These factors may have a positive or negative effect on professional self-esteem by creating differences in the activities of the teacher (Campbell et al, 2003). Teachers spend their entire day with children, sharing all their excitement, motivations and problems. For this reason, all teachers must have the necessary characteristics to relate well with children and respect their profession; that is, they should be individuals with high professional self-esteem. Being an important element

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in the success of a teacher, professional self-esteem can be defined as the credit given to the chosen profession (Arıcak, 1999). Professional self-esteem reveals how valuable and important the person views his/her own profession and is seen as a precondition for professional adaptation and satisfaction (Arıcak & Dilmaç, 2003).

Research emphasises that full acceptance of one's profession (Krejsler, 2005), professional motivation and satisfaction (Scott et al, 1999), social relations and talents (Byrne, 1994), communication with children and having a family member in the same profession (Köksal Akyol & Aslan, 2006), the number of children in the classroom and the age of the teacher (Aral et al, 2007) and professional performance (Brighouse, 1995) may all be important factors in the improvement of teachers' professional self-esteem. Moreover, research shows that professional self-esteem and satisfaction have an important place in teachers' own self-esteem (Arıcak & Dilmaç, 2003; Erdönmez, 2004) as well as children's self-esteem (Le Cornu, 1999). In accordance with these studies, it is apparent that a high level of professional self-esteem on the part of teachers fosters better results both for themselves and the children they teach.

Researching the professional self-esteem of teachers is considered crucial in education as teachers are the ones who give different perspectives to children, shape their views, prepare them for the future, and guide them to make effective decisions. Furthermore, these studies may contribute to the development of educational support programmes by assessing the positive and negative elements influencing teachers' professional self-esteem. All these factors have formed the scope of this study, which aimed to determine whether gender, grade level, credit given to the importance of teaching as a profession, the ranking of choosing teaching as a profession at university, participating in professional activities in teaching and the activities of lecturers regarding the reputation of teaching have an influence on teacher candidates' professional self-esteem.

Method

Research Model

The research was designed as a descriptive study using the sweep model.

Research Population and Sample

A total of 315 teacher candidates – 140 first-year students and 175 fourth-year students – on the Elementary Education Programme at Ahi Evran University, Kırşehir, Turkey, took part in this research.

Data Collection Tools

Data was collected through a general information form to gather information about the teacher candidates and their schools, and their self-esteem levels were evaluated through the Scale for Professional Self-Esteem developed by Arıcak (1999).

General information form. The form consisted of questions on the teacher candidates' gender and grade level, the credit given to the importance of teaching as a profession, the ranking of choosing teaching as a profession at university, participating in professional activities in teaching, and the activities of lecturers regarding the reputation of teaching.

Professional self-esteem scale. The Scale for Professional Self-Esteem is a five-item Likert-type measurement tool. It consists of 30 items in total, 14 of which are positive and 16 of which are negative. Each item is given a score of 1 to 5. For negative items, there is reverse scoring. The maximum point possible on the scale is 150, whereas the minimum is 30. A higher score shows more positive professional self-esteem. The reliability of the scale was measured with Cronbach's alpha (0.93) and a test-retest reliability coefficient (0.90). Validity was ensured with scope validity and only those items accepted by 75% of the field experts were included in the scale. The structural validity of the scale was ensured through factor analysis (Arıcak, 1999).

Data Analysis

In this study, the *t*-test was used in order to determine whether gender, grade level and the credit given to the importance of teaching as a profession caused any difference to teacher candidates' professional self-esteem. In order to determine whether the ranking of choosing teaching as a profession at university, participating in professional activities in teaching and the activities of lecturers regarding the reputation of teaching caused any difference to teacher candidates' professional self-esteem, one-way analysis of variance was used. As a result of the variance analysis, the Scheffé test was applied to determine which group caused a difference in the professional self-esteem of teacher candidates (Büyüköztürk, 2002).

Findings and Discussion

Of the teacher candidates who participated in this research 31.1% were aged 18-19, 16.8% were 20-21, 47.3% were 22-23 and 4.8% were 24 years old. The findings are discussed in the following tables in accordance with the aims.

As seen in Table I, although the mean scores for teacher candidates' professional self-esteem according to gender do not reveal a significant difference ($t_{(313)} = -0.246$, $p > .05$), it is noticeable that the male scores are higher than the females scores when the t-test results are analysed. This finding suggests that some factors other than gender may be influential on professional self-esteem. However, Arıcak & Dilmaç (2003) came to the conclusion that girls' level of professional self-esteem is meaningfully high compared to that of boys as a result of a study they carried out to analyse levels of self-esteem and professional self-esteem. One explanation for this finding may be that girls regard teaching as a more appropriate profession for themselves and adopt it more easily.

Sex	*n*	M	S	df	*t*	*p*
Female	190	119.01	15.21	313	-0.246	.806
Male	125	119.47	16.95			

Table I. Mean scores, standard deviations and *t*-test results regarding professional self-esteem of teacher candidates according to gender.

When Table II is analysed, it is seen that there is no significant difference ($t_{(313)} = 1.338$, $p > .05$) between the mean scores of teacher candidates for professional self-esteem according to grade level. According to Ginzberg's professional development theorem, individuals between the ages of 18 and 22 cannot yet determine their fields of interest as they progress through their first years of university education and have only received some basic education. However, towards the end of this period, there appear to be changes in their interests and they approach their final moments of decision (Kuzgun, 2003, p. 85). Therefore, the fact that the grade level does not have an influence on the level of professional self-esteem can be regarded as an expected result since the ages of the participants in this study range between 18 and 24. Köksal Akyol & Aslan (2006) came to the conclusion in their research that grade level does not have a direct influence on professional self-esteem.

Grade level	*n*	M	S	df	*t*	*p*
First year	140	121.24	14.83	313	1.338	.188
Fourth year	175	118.02	16.43			

Table II. Mean scores, standard deviations and t-test results regarding professional self-esteem of teacher candidates according to grade level.

When Table III is analysed, the t-test results show that there is no significant difference ($t_{(313)} = 1.145$, $p > .05$) between the mean scores of teacher candidates for professional self-esteem in terms of credit given to the importance of teaching as a profession. Although, according to the results, credit given to the importance of the teaching profession does not affect professional self-esteem, the candidates who believe in the importance of the profession appear to have higher

mean scores and are in the majority. Other studies reveal that valuing the profession (Byrne, 1994) and adopting (Krejsler, 2005) have an impact on professional self-esteem. Arıcak & Onur (1999) determined that the mean average of the self-esteem of a group that defined 'teaching as a very reputable profession' was meaningfully higher than that of a group defining it as 'an ordinary profession that anyone can do'.

Credit given to the importance of the profession	*n*	M	S	df	*t*	*p*
Important	270	120.49	14.66	313	1.145	.243
Unimportant	45	116.51	22.64			

Table III. Mean scores, standard deviations and t-test results regarding professional self-esteem of teacher candidates according to credit given to the importance of teaching as a profession.

In Table IV, the results of variance analysis show that the ranking of choosing teaching as a profession does not make any significant difference ($t_{(312)} = 1.160$, $p < .05$) to the professional self-esteem of teacher candidates. One's profession is the main factor that shapes the values, perspective of life, daily life and habits of an individual (Yeşilyaprak, 2003). The choice of profession, which can be a turning point in one's life, necessitates a correct and appropriate decision. Choosing a suitable profession helps the individual develop high professional self-esteem, whereas an unconscious and reluctant choice causes it to be low (Arıcak, 1999). Övet (2006) points out as a result of his research study that teacher candidates make their choices through four main factors when choosing the teaching profession: consciousness, safety, ideals and being influenced. The most apparent factor among the four seems to be consciousness, which indicates that, in recent years, teaching has become a profession that is consciously preferred. In other words, the fact that the ranking of the chosen profession does not make any difference to professional self-esteem can be explained in terms of teacher candidates choosing this profession consciously. Üstün (2005) analysed the attitudes of teacher candidates towards the teaching profession in his study and emphasised the fact that the ones who willingly chose the profession scored the highest.

Preference ranking	*n*	M	S
First place	162	119.58	16.37
Middle place	110	117.60	15.34
Last place	43	121.76	15.39
General	315	119.19	15.39

Variance analysis results	SS	df	MS	F	*p*
Between groups	586.032	2	293.16	1.160	.315
Within groups	78827.155	312	252.65		
Total	79413.187	314			

Table IV. Mean scores, standard deviations and variance analysis results regarding professional self-esteem of teacher candidates according to the ranking of choosing teaching as a profession at university.

In Table V, the results of variance analysis show that participating in professional activities in teaching does not make any significant difference ($F_{(2\text{-}312)} = 1.269$, $p < .05$) to the professional self-esteem of teacher candidates. The professional satisfaction and positive attitude of teachers towards the profession may affect the level of professional self-esteem. Their participation in activities may trigger a positive attitude towards the profession and thus may have a positive impact on professional self-esteem. In a study conducted by Baloğlu et al (2006),it is stated that there was a significant difference between the level of professional self-esteem of teachers and their internal and external satisfaction.

Participating in an activity	*n*	M	S
Participating in seminars	245	119.11	16.13
Experiencing an efficient teaching practice	31	116.09	16.16
Increased sharing with people in the profession	39	122.15	13.96
General	315	119.19	15.39

Variance analysis results	SS	df	MS	F	*p*
Between groups	640.601	2	320.300	1.269	.283
Within groups	78772.587	312	252.476		
Total	79413.187	314			

Table V. Mean scores, standard deviations and variance analysis results regarding professional self-esteem of teacher candidates according to their participation in professional activities in teaching.

As seen in Table VI, the variance analysis results show that the activities of lecturers regarding the reputation of teaching made a difference to professional self-esteem ($F_{(2\text{-}312)} = 1.269$, $p > .001$). The Scheffé test revealed that this difference was brought about by the group of lecturers who 'emphasised the importance of the profession in their classes and provided examples of what may be experienced in the classroom'. This finding highlights the positive impact of the activities lecturers planned on professional self-esteem, regardless of in what sequence they occurred and with what aim teacher candidates had chosen the course. Moreover, the respect the teaching profession receives in state or private institutions may also increase the professional self-esteem of teachers. A study carried out by Aral et al (2007) emphasises that teachers who work in private schools have high professional self-esteem. Furthermore, it is added in this study that this may be achieved through the activities held in private schools to improve professional self-esteem. In brief, all the activities carried out to maintain respect towards the profession should be considered to encourage professional satisfaction and self-esteem.

Activities with respect to the profession	*n*	M	S
Emphasising the importance of the profession and giving examples of what may be experienced in the classroom[1]	164	119.11	17.05
Providing information on professional ethics[2]	88	116.90	14.86
Both[3]	63	126.23	13.22
General	315	119.19	15.39

Variance analysis results	SS	df	MS	F	*p*	Meaningful
Between groups	3418.67	2	1709.330	6.88	.001	3-1
Within groups	77445.50	312	248.223			3-2
Total	80864.10	314				

Table VI. Mean scores, standard deviations and variance analysis results of professional self-esteem of teacher candidates according to the activities of lecturers regarding the reputation of teaching.

Recommendations

The following recommendations can be made in accordance with the results of the research, which aimed to determine whether some variables were influential on the professional self-esteem of teacher candidates:

- The teaching profession requires a healthy personality and is not a profession that can be pursued by just anyone. Assuming that individuals who do not consider this profession suitable for themselves can still make good teachers may lead to undermining the importance of the teaching profession. For this reason, consciousness of the importance and the necessity of the teaching profession should be increased by organising educational seminars for teacher candidates.

- Faculties of education play an important role in the improvement of the quality of the teaching profession. Therefore, educational standards for these faculties should be developed that establish the basis of the education system.
- Family education programmes on the importance of the teaching profession in order to develop consciousness and respect for it should be held together with parents.
- An improvement in the economic and social environment of teacher candidates should be maintained so that they willingly pursue their profession.

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