



## THE VIEWS OF 100 PRESERVICE ART EDUCATION STUDENTS ON TEACHER RECRUITMENT IN TURKEY

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### Abstract

The ex-deputy chairperson of the Council of Higher Education in Turkey, İsa Eşme, in an unpublished 2009 report, argues that %95 of faculty of education graduates could not be recruited as teachers which influence their occupational motivation negatively. When similar statistical data is analyzed, we understand that around 10.000 art education B.A. graduates are waiting for becoming assigned in public schools. This study demonstrates the views of 100 current art education B.A. students regarding becoming appointed as art teachers in public schools along with their ideas on the teaching profession and preservice art education through a comprehensive survey. In addition, written and oral accounts of participants were gathered to form relevant data sets and a general assessment of the current situation for teacher education professionals and further research.

**Key Words:** Teacher Education, Preservice Art Education, Teacher Recruitment.

### INTRODUCTION

Teacher appointment procedures in Turkey are conducted through a highly centralized model in which, ideally, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Finance work together to determine how many teachers are needed nationwide in public schools and how many of them can be recruited in relation to the parameters of the national budget. While private schools recruit teaching professionals based on their own criteria, the model in public schools operates by this centralized system. In 2002, a standardized test, KPSS (Public Personnel Selection Test) started to be implemented for all public servant recruitment procedures including teachers. With the addition of KPSS, now, appointment of a teacher in a Turkish public school is only possible if the candidates have two documents: A faculty of education diploma (or any diploma along with a certification of a pedagogical formation program) issued by a Turkish university and KPSS score sheet. In other words, in order to become a teacher in a public school in Turkey, regardless of the branch of teaching, faculty of education graduates need to apply the ministry of education with their test results and graduation documents, and wait. According to the news media, the current approximate number of faculty of education BA graduates who are waiting for becoming appointed in a public school in Turkey is more than 300,000. This number repeatedly mentioned in various newspapers and web pages without referencing a clearly stated source reflects one major aspect of “the terrible condition of national education” in Turkey: The teacher recruitment problem (Kahraman, 2004, p. 217). Some newspapers make creative headlines to communicate the gigantic problem of unassigned teachers: “Atanamayan öğretmen sayısı İzlanda’yı geçti” [The number of unappointed teachers surpassed the population of Iceland] (Milliyet, 2014); “Atanamayan öğretmenlerden sazlı sözlü eylem” [The unassigned teachers’ protest with music and lyrics] (Sözcü, 2015); “Atanamayan öğretmenler, sokakta ders yaptı” [The unassigned teachers conducted lessons on the street] (Hürriyet, 2015); “Ataması Yapılmayan Öğretmen Çaycı Oldu” [The unassigned teacher became a waiter] (Kamu Ajans, 2015); “Atama bekleyen öğretmenlerin çilesi bitmiyor” [The ordial of teachers awaiting appointment is never-ending] (My Memur, 2015).

In 2009, the ex-deputy chairperson of the Council of Higher Education in Turkey, İsa Eşme, in an unpublished report, pointed out that %95 of faculty of education graduates could not be recruited as teachers. In this report, numbers related to each branch of teaching in Turkey were also made public. When similar statistical data is analyzed, we understand that currently around 10.000 art education B.A. graduates are waiting for

becoming assigned in public schools. It is difficult to determine a certain number of unassigned art education graduates because these numbers are not shared with public in a systematic fashion and the variables are manifold in terms of calculation and definition of unassigned teachers. In 2012, a congressional representative from İzmir, Rahmi Aşkın Türeli, filed an official question to the Ministry of National Education in the National Assembly of Turkish Republic and was responded by Nabi Avcı, the Minister of National Education, that, among candidates applied for KPSS in September 2012, 295,426 could not be appointed as teachers in public schools (Milliyet, 2015).

The headlines, web posts, report texts, and broadcasts in the news media give a general account of what is happening in Turkey in relation to the unassigned teachers problem while they fall short of conveying various dimensions of it, especially its impact on students of teacher education in specific branches. With this study I intent to collect first hand ideas of a group of 2nd and 3rd year art education BA students on the unassigned teachers problem through a semi-structured survey consisting of open-ended questions and conversational interviews with a smaller group among them. As part of a project that investigates the process of becoming an art teacher in public schools in Turkey, the initial analysis of responses to surveys and interview transcripts in this study will be classified under themes. These themes will be shared with the broader audience consisting of education professionals in general and art educators on a more specific level. These initial results are presented here in order to deepen our understanding of prospective art teachers' views and help build more relevant instructional strategies in art schooling with respect to the unassigned teachers problem.

#### RESEARCH CONTEXT AND DESIGN

The study was conducted in Eskişehir, which hosts one of the largest public universities in Turkey. Located on the main campus of Anadolu University, the department of fine arts education with 30 years of teaching experience yields approximately 55 graduates each year with diplomas certifying them to teach on all levels of public education before the bachelorette level. The research for this study took place in the art education building in the last two weeks of February 2015. Two major processes in the same context dominated the data collection in this study:

A semi-structured survey questionnaire consisting of 13 questions (2 questions seeking personal information and 11 open-ended questions) was the main research tool. The questionnaire was crafted in order to collect students' opinions and understandings regarding the problem of unassigned teachers and it was shared with two professors of art education for review. In the crafting process, questions in the questionnaire were intended to be easy-to-read, unbiased, focused, and not directing students to any certain response (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2000). The final text of the questionnaire was formed with suggestions from peer reviewers and this procedure made the questions clearer, more user-friendly and more comprehensive. The number of students responded to the questionnaire was 100 BA students (58 second-year and 42 third-year) in the department of art education at Anadolu university, Turkey. 87 of the participants were women. All of them were enrolled in the four-year art education undergraduate program and the survey was conducted in three separate classes through questionnaires that are handed out to students in the second week of March 2015. The participants of the survey were not selected according to any criteria other than being registered in the described art education program. The reason for selection of second and third year students was to be able to focus on a population of students who were mostly enrolled in pedagogy courses that aimed preparation for art teaching profession. The first year of the art education program focused more on applications that were specific to visual arts while in the same program most fourth-year students were already preoccupied with teaching internship and supplementary courses in private institutions for KPSS preparation.

The following questions, among supporting questions, constitute the core items in the questionnaire:

- What do you think the number of unassigned art teachers in Turkey is? Please, indicate number.
- What will you be doing in five years' time? Please, explain.
- What kind of impact does KPSS have on your concentration toward your current course work? Please, explain.
- Are you planning to become a public school art teacher in the near future? Please, explain.

After questionnaires were collected, ten students were selected as a concentration group for the conversational interviews. The selection intended to include a balanced number of second and third year (5+5), male and female (5+5) students who were willing to participate. All ten came from middle class families, one from upper middle class and three from lower middle class. With each of these students, one-hour interviews were conducted and a group discussion in which all participated took place followed. The interviews were considered as a basic mode of constituting knowledge through face-to-face communication in the sense that "human reality can be understood as persons in conversation" (Kvale, 1996, p. 37). The interview questions were based on students' responses on the questionnaire that had been administered one week before the interviews. In the interviews, "a holistic perspective through design flexibility, personal contact and context sensitivity" was essential in order to contribute to the prospect of true understanding (Patton, 1980, p. 40-41). All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed based on Erickson's principles of analysis in qualitative descriptive research. According to Erickson (1986), the basic task in such data analysis is "to generate assertions through induction" (p.41).

This is done by searching the data corpus, reviewing the full set of field notes, interview notes and audiotapes, site documents, and audiovisual recordings. Another basic task is to establish an evidential warrant for the assertions one wishes to make. This is done by reviewing the data corpus repeatedly to test the validity of the assertions that were generated, [...] (Erickson, 1986, p. 41).

In the research design, the limited quantitative data provided by the questionnaires was collected in order to support or deny assertions made through multiple readings of the interview transcripts. Likewise, in some cases, assertions derived from questionnaire results were strengthened or weakened by interview data. The grouping of assertions and combining them in inclusive thematic sets and creation of themes followed. These themes constitute the main findings of the study and they are presented as a thematic synopsis along with direct quotes from interviews and responses to questionnaires.

#### A THEMATIC SYNOPSIS

Most students do not have particular knowledge on statistics regarding the number of unassigned art teachers in Turkey. 93 out of 100 students who responded to the questionnaire either could not give a specific number or made open-ended estimations such as "many, thousands of, a huge number of". A recurrent response to the question "what will you be doing five years later?" was variations of "I do not know for sure". 84 of the students stated that they did not know what occupation or profession they would have in five years' time. Half of the remaining mentioned ÖYP, "Öğretim Üyesi Yetiştirme Programı" that translates to English as "Faculty Development Program", which was first established in order to train teaching staff for small-scale universities, and later on, widened its scope to all public universities in Turkey. The remaining half forecasted that they would be working in fields outside schooling.

75 students reported that they would like to be appointed in public schools after graduation while 56 of them added that it did not "look possible" in the near future. In the interviews, one from this group of students explained his way of seeing the issue:

Whether you want something or not does not guarantee that you will have it. Yes, I would very much like to start working as an art teacher, but it seems impossible. You may know the numbers better than me, but as far as I know graduates from our department have been waiting for years now.

77 out of 100 questionnaire respondents convey that they do not believe that KPSS is the appropriate measure for selecting art teachers for public schools. An interviewee explains this situation more openly:

I want to become an art teacher, but becoming an art teacher, in this KPSS system, has nothing to do with your qualifications in studio art, art history, or teaching art. We know that it is a corrupted exam (referring to the investigation on KPSS results in 2010) and it is not just, but even if it had been perfectly fair, it does not measure art teaching qualifications.

For another student, wanting to become an art teacher is not an issue in question. He says:

My family will not support me forever. I need to work. KPSS is the only way for me. The issue here is not whether I will choose art education as my future profession. I already made this choice. That is why I am here in this department.

Another interviewee who noted ÖYP as her future career objective in the questionnaire approaches the issue from a different direction:

When someone asks me, I say I am not going to become an art teacher, but I am not sure whether this is meaningful or not. I do not know whether I say I want ÖYP because KPSS is very difficult or I really want ÖYP.

Like in the questionnaires, some students in the interviews have almost no hope of becoming art teachers. One student I interviewed thinks that she will become “nothing but unemployed like millions” in Turkey. Another student mentions the articles in news media and, with a tone of satire, adds:

I would rather start looking for a job. I do not think I am any good for KPSS or ÖYP. I do not have a rich father who will put money in my account all the time. The possibilities are endless! I can become a waiter, or a receptionist. A friend of mine became an illusionist.

These utterances are not without complaints. Six of the students, during the interviews, mentioned recurrently that politicians do not care whether they are appointed or not. The three main critiques they focus on are the number of new universities with teacher education programs opened in the last decade; the decrease of art education classes in public schools from twice a week to once a week; and the almost non-existent status of fine arts in the general context of the country. Four of the interviewees directly accuse the authorities in the current administration as destroyers of their faith in a fair KPSS. One explains:

It was on the news yesterday. Forty couples, husbands and wives from the same families got the highest score possible in 2010 KPSS. How shall I trust that kind of exam?

Another student concentrates on the number of universities and related programs and underlines the quick increase:

They say thousands are waiting to get appointed, but at the same time, YÖK (Higher Education Council) opens new teacher education programs. If they had one gram of logic regarding this issue, they would not do such a thing!

### Displeasure

An understandable displeasure unfolds as a theme as I look deeply into the questionnaire responses and as I remember the various utterances, and as I analyze the transcribed versions. In many cases, students explain this displeasure with a kind of suspense and apathy that is made of a tension in between faith in the future and loss of trust, willingness and desperateness, hope and pessimism. The majority want to become art teachers while they know that it is a remote possibility. On the other hand, employment in other professions is also remote for them since they are in a program, which mainly raises art educators. It is at times as simple as in the question one interviewee posed: “If I cannot be an art teacher, why am I being raised as one?” A different version of the same question clearly put by another student is, “If not needed, why raise?” At this point, I see symptoms of displeasure turning to questioning full of anger on one side, and feeling unnecessary, useless, and rejected on the other.

### Apathy

A second theme is apathy. During the analysis, I tried hard to decide whether this could be a separate theme or a kind of sub-theme under displeasure, but, with its frequent and consistent appearance in the interview

transcriptions, it almost mandated me to allocate a separate theme section for it. The question “this is an issue of what” was very informative for me on making a final decision. Unlike displeasure, apathy concentrates on the current moment and it is different compared with a general pessimistic vision toward the future. Not only the students in the study were displeased with the situation they were in regarding their possibility of becoming appointed as art teachers and not only they tended to convey pessimistic projections with respect to their future life, they used expressions of apathy for the current conditions they were in as well. 91 out of 100 students expressed that the low possibility of becoming appointed in the future for them had negative impact on their concentration toward current course work. As in the words of one interview participant,

When you do not have hope for becoming a teacher, you simply do not care for getting prepared for teaching. This is the main cause for reluctance on the part of students in terms of getting fully engaged in course work and being attentive to classes in this school.

This lack of interest, says one of the interviewed students unfolds in many students as “indifference to a bunch of courses including art history, art criticism, aesthetics, museum education, and studio art”. Apathy causes students to, no longer, have a desire to succeed and motivation for learning while at the same time it reduces their productivity (Benders, 2011). This is especially visible, the same student argues, in the last year of the art education program: “sophomore students, they rarely come to school, because they are loaded with coursework for KPSS. They prefer “dershane” (private institutions of preparation for standardized tests) to school”.

### Disconnection

Another theme that was formed through frequently observed patterns in the interview data indicates a connection problem between school curriculum and the content of KPSS. In the questionnaires, 68 of 100 students underlined the same issue as their response to the question, “do you think the art education program you are pursuing is sufficient in preparing you for KPSS?” These students think that the program and the test content are vastly disconnected. One student wrote that it was impossible for them to be successful in KPSS without taking classes from a “dershane”. When the issue came up in the interviews, all students agreed that there was a disconnection between the curriculum professors followed and the curriculum of these private institutions. During an interview, one student explained the logic of such temperament:

In KPSS, the questions we need to answer are all about general pedagogy but almost 70% of the program we pursue in the art education department is about specific applications in art and art teaching. Now, why would I spend time and effort on this 70% when it has no effect on my possibility of becoming an art teacher?

This disconnection, I believe, is essential in understanding the psychological state of these students who are often accused of being disinterested in school subjects. In a world in which practicality is continuously imposing itself more and more, there is nothing more normal than these students’ expectations of a connection between the contents of a curriculum they have to follow and an exam they need to take.

### DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTIONS

In this small-scale inquiry consisting of a survey and an interview study with limited reach, a slice of the unassigned teachers problem was highlighted with a concentration on student views in an art education program. Based on the written accounts and the utterances of students, it is fair enough to express that the main concepts that arouse regarding this gigantic problem are displeasure, apathy, and disconnection.

According to ÖSYM (Center for Student Selection and Placement) statistics, in the 2013-2014 academic year, there were 89 faculties of education in Turkey. The number of registered students in teacher education programs was 218,043 (ÖSYM, 2015), and more than 50,000 students are adding up to this number each year. Reading the announcements of authorities responsible for teacher recruitment, one can understand that, for parties involved in teacher recruitment procedures, a possible solution remains remote. Yet, at the same time,



no one can argue that the problem does not require urgent and reasonable solutions. It is as if everyone understands and shares the concerns of teacher education graduates, but none dares to act.

Therefore, beyond political aspirations and conjectural moves, the relevant authorities in Turkey need to create a solid ground for the discussion of the problem at hand and act immediately to investigate all aspects of this problem in order to implement reasonable ways to solve it. From an art education perspective, the negative reflections of this problem on current art education students can be solved if the following suggestions, derived from the questionnaire and interview phases of this study, are taken into account:

- Relevant authorities should share responsibilities in this issue. For this, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Finance, ÖSYM and YÖK must remain in continuous dialogue for the coordination of teacher education, certification, recruitment and statistics. An authorized and autonomous body should be formed for such coordination and it must collect data regarding all aspects of teacher recruitment in Turkey in order to forecast and re-design the whole systems of teacher education and recruitment.
- The number of teacher education institutions, their necessity, their reasons for existence, their curricula, scope and aims need to be re-evaluated and re-arranged in light of the teacher recruitment forecasts in the short and long runs. This re-arrangement might entail radical applications such as diminishing the number of faculties of education in Turkey, decreasing the number of teacher education students. A branch-based evaluation and a clear statement of priorities of the nation must be made in order to make radical decisions at times.
- The teacher recruitment policies, procedures, plans, and statistics should be made public in a transparent, orderly and thrust worthy fashion. All parties involved in and affected by this problem should be informed regularly by objective announcements. The effectiveness of career-planning information at high schools must make use of this information. By this way, we will have better-informed students and parents, which will help decrease displeasure and apathy toward our programs.
- The weight and effectiveness of some branches in the public schools must be re-calibrated in tune with the contemporary needs of the Turkish society. For instance, in art, design and related-technologies education, Turkish system has been left behind for almost two decades since the centralized curricula allocate an average of one hour per week classes in K12. Authorities should re-arrange this allocation as a necessity of our age and as a comforting prospect for art education graduates.
- The curricula of art teacher education programs should be re-organized with respect to teacher recruitment policies and they should acknowledge the KPSS phenomenon. This will decrease reliance on “dershane” and similar institutions. However, the more urgent and essential precaution that needs to be taken is to develop and implement an exam that really measure art teaching competence. The disconnection between the curricula and the centralized one-size-fits-all KPSS must definitely change.

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