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## **Moroccan foreign language students' views of a career in teaching**

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### **Abstract**

This study explored the views of 203 university students studying English or French at a University in Morocco about a career in teaching. The students completed a questionnaire in which they were asked to rate the importance of 20 factors influencing their choice of career, and then the extent to which they thought teaching offered these factors. The factors rated highest by students as 'very important' in their choice of career were: 'a job that is respected'; 'a job that I will find enjoyable'; and 'a job where I am required to use my intellect'. Interestingly, 'a job that is respected' was also rated very highly as being a factor that 'teaching definitely offers'. Students most highly rated 'my wish to share my knowledge with others' as the factor that might influence an individual's decision to become a teacher. Finally, when asked about changes to the profession that might encourage more people to consider it, the highest rated measure was 'an improvement in the quality of materials, resources and facilities for teaching'. The findings support a model of career choice based on a match between factors the students consider important in a job and whether they perceive these factors are offered by the career in question.

A number of countries throughout the world are facing problems in recruiting an adequate supply of new teachers into the profession (McGraw 2001; Menter et al 2002). Teaching as a career has to compete with a whole range of other job opportunities. As such, a better understanding of which factors influence a young

person's decision to choose teaching could have important implications for strategies to improve teacher recruitment and retention.

We already know from a number of studies (eg Chuene et al 1999; Kyriacou & Kobori 1998; Kyriacou et al 1999; Reid & Caudwell 1997; Spear et al 2000) that the main reasons cited by student teachers for choosing teaching as a career fall into three main categories: (i) *altruistic reasons*, such as a desire to help children succeed and a desire to help society improve; (ii) *intrinsic reasons*, such as the activity of teaching children and an interest in using their knowledge and expertise of a subject; and (iii) *extrinsic reasons*, such as long holidays, level of pay and status.

However, most studies of the reasons for choosing teaching have focused on the views of student teachers, which may give a misleading picture of how the career is viewed by young people, since they deal with the factors cited by those who have already chosen it. Student teachers may have quite a different image of what teaching is like as a job compared with those who do not choose to become teachers. In order to get a better understanding of how different factors may influence a person's decision to choose teaching, we need to consider the views of young people before they have embarked on their chosen career.

Unlike most occupations, teaching is inevitably considered (even fleetingly) as a potential career by most individuals in developed countries at some time in their youth because, having all attended school, they are aware of teaching as a possibility. This gives it a major advantage over many other potential careers.

The decision to choose one career over another can be seen to rest on individuals' views of what they are looking for in a career compared with what a particular career appears to offer. If the teaching profession appears to offer individuals want in a career, they are more likely to seriously consider it.

In many countries, there is a shortage of teachers of foreign languages (FL). University graduates in a FL have a number of job opportunities available to them and, as a result, the competing attractions of teaching as a career compared with other careers is intense. In England, the shortage of FL teachers has been acute for several years (Adams 2000). In France, recent reforms to introduce more FL teaching in primary and secondary schools, at a time when the number of graduates applying to become FL teachers has been failing, is also likely to lead to shortages (Bronner & Phélippeau 2001; Marshall 2001). In many less developed countries, FL teaching as a career faces intense competition with other types of employment, where graduates with FL qualifications are highly valued.

Given the particular difficulties that many countries face in recruiting FL teachers, this study focused on the views held by Moroccan undergraduates studying English or French about FL teaching as a career. More specifically, the

aim of this study was to explore these students' views about factors that might influence their career choice and the extent to which they thought teaching might offer what they were looking for.

English Language Teaching was first introduced into Moroccan secondary schools during the era of the French protectorate in the 1930s, with French as the main medium of instruction. Since independence in 1956, French continues to be widely used as one of the main languages of communication and as the medium of instruction in many schools and universities. Many Moroccans are bilingual in French and Arabic (and/or Berber) (Séfrioui 1996). However, in the last two decades, French has been losing ground to Arabic which, through the process of Arabisation, is gradually assuming many of the functions that used to be fulfilled by French (Redouane 1998). At the same time, English has been making inroads into Morocco, infiltrating the education system and socioeconomic life.

Nowadays, Moroccans regard English as the gateway to the outside world and to scientific and technological development. At university level, a degree in English is seen to secure more job opportunities than a degree in French. As a consequence, students in English Departments far outnumber those in French Departments. Developments in higher education (see Meziani 1999) include the emergence of new institutions using English as the medium of instruction. Indeed, English has gained such popularity that, in many circumstances, it is rivalling French as the preferred foreign language. Taken together, it can be seen that in Morocco there is a high demand for graduates of English and French, in teaching and in other careers.

Unlike many countries, however, Morocco is not experiencing a problem with teacher recruitment. As such, it was felt that exploring the views of Moroccan FL undergraduates regarding teaching as a career may highlight some of the reasons for this. In Morocco, the number of applicants for the teaching profession far exceeds the teaching posts available. Every year, hundreds of university graduates apply for a training course that would allow them to qualify as teachers, but only a minority of the candidates are admitted. Only applicants who have obtained their first degree with a high distinction are normally authorised to take the entrance examinations organised by the teacher training centres. The number of applicants who are finally offered a place in the training course has to conform to the quotas established by the Ministry of Education, on the basis of the budgetary posts available and the needs of the schools. After becoming qualified, all new teachers are automatically assigned to a school by the Ministry of Education. City schools tend to be saturated with teachers, which means that new recruits are often sent to remote areas or to villages.

It is also worth noting that in Morocco, teachers are not overworked in terms of teaching hours (18 hours a week on average). In addition, when they are in school, they just teach; pastoral and administrative matters are dealt with by special staff. During the summer, they have two and a half months of holidays,

which is plenty of time to travel and read, although some teachers - particularly those who are young, dynamic and dedicated to their profession - sometimes complain that this break is too long.

### **Data collection**

A questionnaire was designed with four sections. Section one requested general information about the students and their current course. They were also asked 'What are your current feelings about becoming a school teacher?', to which they could respond:

- (i) I am seriously considering it;
- (ii) I am vaguely thinking about it; or
- (iii) I am not considering it.

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

Section three listed 13 possible factors 'that might influence someone's decision when considering a career as a school teacher'. The students were asked to rate each factor using a three-point response scale that included: 'encourages me to consider teaching'; 'I feel neutral about this factor'; and 'discourages me from considering teaching'.

Section four asked 'Could you be encouraged to consider a career in teaching if changes were made to the profession?', offering three categories for response:

- (i) I have already decided to become a teacher;
- (ii) I definitely do not want to become a teacher, and nothing would make me reconsider; and
- (iii) I could be encouraged to consider a career in teaching.

The students were then asked whether each measure 'would encourage you to consider teaching as a career'. The three-point response scale was labelled: 'would definitely encourage', 'might encourage' and 'would not encourage'.

The content of this questionnaire was adapted for use in the Moroccan context from one used to explore the views of undergraduates in England regarding teaching as a career choice (Kyriacou & Coulthard 2000).

The target sample for this study was undergraduate students at Université Mohammed V. The University is based in Rabat, the capital city of Morocco. The students were drawn from the Department of French and the Department of English in the Faculty of Arts and Human Sciences. They were all enrolled in a four-year BA course in English or French. In the first two years, they study language skills and culture, and in the last two years, they specialise in either literature or linguistics.

The questionnaire was made available in English and French. One hundred and thirty-one students of English completed the English questionnaire, whilst 72 French students completed the French version. Of the respondents, 23% were male and 77% female. First-year students comprised 28% of respondents, 44% were in the second or third year, and 28% in the fourth year (all percentages in this paper have been rounded to the nearest whole number). The replies for the two groups (English and French) were very similar and, as such, only tables for the total sample will be shown.

## **Results and discussion**

37% of the students were 'seriously considering', 36% were 'vaguely considering' and 26% were 'not considering' becoming a schoolteacher. Of the 73% interested in the career, all were considering teaching in secondary schools. In Morocco it is very unusual for students studying English or French at university to consider becoming a primary school teacher.

The percentage of students' ratings of the importance of factors in choosing a career is shown in Table I. It can be seen that the students rated 'a job that is respected' as the most important factor, followed by 'a job that I will find enjoyable' and 'a job where I am required to use my intellect'.

Interestingly, in choosing a career, 'a good starting salary' was rated as very important by only 49% of this sample, and is positioned in the lower half of the table. This suggests that, whilst important, high initial earnings for most Moroccan FL undergraduates is not by any means the overriding factor in their choice of a career. It is also interesting to note that these FL students did not rate 'a job that gives me the opportunity to travel abroad' very highly, although it is still regarded as very important by nearly half (47%) of this sample.

**Table I: Students' ratings of the importance of factors in choosing a career and the extent to which they think a career in teaching will offer these (N = 203)**

<b>Career factor</b>	<b>Importance when choosing a career</b>			<b>Extent to which teaching offers it</b>		
	<i>very</i> (%)	<i>quite</i> (%)	<i>not</i> (%)	<i>definitely</i> (%)	<i>might</i> (%)	<i>not</i> (%)
1. A job that is respected	89	9	2	71	26	4
2. A job that I will find enjoyable	79	17	4	30	51	20
3. A job where I am required to use my intellect	73	25	2	58	35	7
4. A job that gives security	72	21	7	35	48	18
5. A pleasant working environment	70	26	5	22	62	16
6. A job where I can use my university subject	70	22	7	54	36	10
7. A job that gives me responsibility	68	27	5	79	17	4
8. Possibility of promotion and advancement	68	26	7	26	53	21
9. A job where I will contribute to society	66	28	6	63	29	9
10. A job where you gain skills that can be applied in other contexts	62	34	5	24	51	25
11. A high salary over the length of the career	56	32	13	9	58	32
12. Colleagues that I can get along with	55	37	9	26	66	8
13. A job where I can care for others	53	38	9	58	34	8
14. A job that can easily be combined with being a	52	29	19	47	39	14

father or mother						
15. A job with good mobility (easy to get a job anywhere)	51	30	19	12	45	43
16. A good starting salary	49	46	6	10	73	17
17. A job with high quality resources and equipment	47	43	10	10	42	49
18. A job that gives me the opportunity to travel abroad	47	38	16	16	51	33
19. A reasonable amount of work	37	46	17	28	47	25
20. A job where I can work with adolescents/children	35	39	26	66	26	8

Table I also displays the percentage of students' ratings of the extent to which they think a career in teaching will offer these factors. Of critical importance here is the extent to which students think that the factors they regard as very important in choosing a career are matched by what they think a career in teaching definitely offers. This matching can be obtained by looking at each factor with a high rating for importance in Table II and seeing whether the students think teaching offers this factor. Particularly noteworthy here is the very high rating for 'a job that is respected' (rated as definitely offered in teaching by 71% of the students). As this statement was ranked first in terms of importance when choosing a career, this suggests that teaching offers these students what they are looking for in a career. In addition, the item that received the highest rating as being 'definitely offered in teaching' was 'a job which gives me responsibility' (78%), which also compared favourably in terms of being 'very important' when choosing a career (68%).

Looking at the ten items rated as 'very important' in choosing a career by over 60% of the students, three items were also rated by over 60% as definitely offered in teaching. Two of these have already been mentioned: 'a job that is respected' and 'a job which gives me responsibility'. The third item, 'a job where I will contribute to society', was rated by 66% as 'very important' when choosing a career, and rated by 63% as definitely offered by teaching.

An analysis of factors rated as both 'very important' for career choice and 'definitely offered' by teaching indicated that those students who tended to tick both these boxes for certain factors were more likely to be seriously considering teaching. For example, 61% of the total sample rated 'a job that is respected' as both 'very important' for career choice and 'definitely offered' by teaching. Of this subgroup, 42% had said they were seriously considering the teaching profession. In contrast, only 30% of the students who had not ticked both these boxes had said they were seriously considering teaching.

This analysis supports a model of career choice based on a match between students' perceptions of important job factors and whether these factors are offered. This has important implications for campaigns to increase teacher recruitment. If we take an individual's view of the importance of the different factors in his/her choice of a career as a starting point, then that individual will only begin to develop a more favourable attitude towards teaching if we can increase the extent to which those factors regarded as important are viewed as being well met by the teaching profession. In other words, we need to find out what these students believe are the most important factors and then demonstrate that teaching meets these factors.

The students were also asked to rate the extent to which they would be encouraged or discouraged by possible influential factors in considering a career as a school teacher. As shown in Table II, 'my wish to share my knowledge with others' was rated by 83% of the students as encouraging. The next highest rating was 'the possibility of self-development or self-improvement on the job' (71% viewed it as encouraging). Surprisingly, only 55% of the students in this study rated 'teachers get long holidays' as encouraging, although this item has often received one of the highest ratings in similar studies. The reason for this might be that these students consider a strong desire for long holidays to be inconsistent with their concern about 'sharing their knowledge with others', 'improving themselves in the job' and exerting 'their potential talent for teaching'. To many young people, putting a high premium on long holidays may sound like an admission of (or confession to) laziness, and may reflect a lack of commitment to hard work in a world where competition is fierce and unemployment is rife. At the other extreme, the item that received the highest rating (55%) for being discouraging was 'dealing with undisciplined pupils'.

**Table II: Students' ratings of whether possible factors would encourage or discourage them from considering a career in teaching (N = 203)**

<b>Possible factors that might influence someone's decision when considering a career as a schoolteacher</b>	<b>Influence on decision to teach</b>		
	<i>encourages</i> (%)	<i>neutral</i> (%)	<i>discourages</i> (%)
1. My wish to share my knowledge with others	83	14	3
2. The possibility of self-development or self-improvement on the job	71	22	7
3. My personality and potential talent for teaching	66	23	11
4. Having a lot of autonomy in the job	64	33	4



5. Being able to use my teaching qualification/training in other fields	63	32	4
6. Getting long holidays	55	39	6
7. Staying another year at university to undertake teaching training	41	48	11
8. The government's commitment (engagement) towards education	26	49	24
9. Having an inspector visit my class	21	62	18
10. Having to deal with undisciplined pupils	20	25	55
11. The image of teachers in the media (television, newspapers)	19	48	32
12. The administrative tasks to be done by teachers	17	49	33
13. The amount of financial resources that schools receive	12	57	31

In response to the question 'Could you be encouraged to consider a career in teaching if changes were made to the profession?', 26% responded 'I have already decided to become a teacher' and 59% responded 'I could be encouraged to consider a career in teaching'. Only 15% responded 'I definitely do not want to become a teacher, and nothing would make me reconsider'. This suggests that over half these students could be regarded as 'undecided'. As such, changes to the teaching profession could well influence the career choice of a substantial number of these students.

This issue was addressed by asking students whether they would be encouraged to consider a career in teaching if a number of specific changes were made to the profession (see Table III). The two changes that received the highest ratings were 'an improvement in the quality of materials, resources and facilities for teaching' and 'improvements in the working environment and conditions' (rated as definitely encouraging by 73% and 72% of the students respectively). This echoes to some extent the findings of a study conducted in the United States by Shen & Hsieh (1999), who surveyed the views of student teachers, current teachers and teacher educators on measures that could be taken to increase the professional status of the teaching profession. They reported that improving 'salary and working conditions' received the highest rated measure.

**Table III: Students' ratings of whether measures would encourage them to consider a career in teaching (N = 203)**

<b>Possible measures to encourage people into teaching</b>	<b>Would this encourage you to teach?</b>		
	<i>definitely</i> (%)	<i>might</i> (%)	<i>not</i> (%)
1. Improvement in the quality of materials, resources and facilities for teaching	73	22	4
2. Improvements in the working environment and conditions	72	24	4
3. Higher salary when teachers start teaching	67	28	5
4. Higher top salaries for teachers and head teachers	67	27	6
5. Salaries based on the quality and efficacy of teachers' performance and work	67	27	6
6. Allowing teachers more training and responsibilities, and faster promotion for good performance	66	27	8
7. Increase in teachers' autonomy or freedom in their work	59	32	9
8. Payment of a large scholarship (bourse) for the teacher training year	58	33	9
9. Reduction in class size	57	35	7
10. Ongoing or continuous training for teachers	51	36	13
11. Improvement in the public's opinion regarding teachers	47	45	7

Interestingly, the Moroccan students' least highly rated measure was 'an improvement in the public's opinion regarding teachers' - a reflection of the fact that teachers are already regarded very highly in Morocco.

### Conclusion

The present study indicates that for Moroccan FL undergraduates there is quite a close match between factors that are very important to them in their choice of career and factors that they think are definitely offered by teaching as a career.

There are three items in particular that feature highly here: ‘a job that is respected’; ‘a job which gives me responsibility’; and ‘a job where I will contribute to society’. This may, in part, explain why levels of teacher recruitment in Morocco are quite healthy. Teaching is also seen as a career that appears to be dominated by an intrinsic motive, as the item ‘my wish to share my knowledge with others’ was the most highly rated as a factor encouraging students to consider teaching as a career. Nevertheless, there are areas where changes could make teaching an even more attractive career choice. These include increasing the quality of resources and improvements in the working environment.

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