PROSPECTIVE TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF DISCRIMINATION IN TURKEY

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Abstract

Discrimination means any distinction or exclusion made based on race, color, sex, religion, political opinion, national extraction or social origin [1]. As a profession, teaching requires having the ability to deal with differences. This study explores prospective teachers' perceptions of discrimination in social life. Therefore, the prospective teachers' reactions related to the differences of people in their environment were examined at first. Secondly, the kinds of discrimination prospective teachers were exposed, and their responses to these situations were explored in the study. The data were gathered through a questionnaire developed by the author after reviewing the literature. Research group involved 250 'Teaching Formation Program' students enrolled in the Faculty of Education of Kocaeli University during the 2014–2015 academic year. The results revealed that prospective teachers have discriminated someone because of his/her political affiliations; his/her sexual orientation, his/her speaking or pronunciation style, and his/her clothing style, make-up style, hairstyle, or beard style in their lifetime. In addition, they have been discriminated against due to their political affiliations; their clothing style, make-up style, hair style, or beard style; their religious attitudes; their gender; their economic condition, their hometown; their ethnicity; their weight; their age, and other physical differences; and their speaking or pronunciation style. This study is supposed to contribute to the literature demonstrating types of discrimination in education context in Turkey.

Keywords: Education, exclusion, discrimination, prospective teachers, teacher, Turkey.

1 INTRODUCTION

Discrimination was identified by the Discrimination Convention as any distinction, exclusion or preference made on the basis of race, color, sex, religion, political opinion, national extraction or social origin, which has the effect of nullifying or impairing equality of opportunity and treatment in employment or occupation in 1958 [1]. Discrimination has occurred when individuals are singled out and treated unfairly because of race, age, gender, sexual orientation, disability status or any other factor, as a result, individuals can lose opportunities and options [2]. It can take many forms, such as threats, intimidation, and verbal abuse [1].

Many laws and regulations enforced by the countries (e.g. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in US, and the Prohibition of Discrimination under European Human Rights Law) to prohibit discrimination based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, pregnancy, age, disability, equal-pay/compensation, genetic information, retaliation, and sexual harassment at the workplace. Turkey is party to the convention III, Employment and Occupation Discrimination convention, 1958 of the ILO, and the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) which was set up in 1994 [3].

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission [4] enforces federal laws that make it illegal to discriminate against job applicants or employees because of their race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age (40 or older), disability or genetic information. According to the Commission, age discrimination involves treating someone less favorably because of her/his age, and discrimination can occur when the victim and the person who inflicted the discrimination are both over 40. Disability discrimination occurs when an employer treats a qualified individual with a disability who is an employee or applicant unfavorable because she has a disability. Besides, equal-pay/compensation occurs when there is an inequality in wages between men and women. Further, the Commission forbids discrimination because of genetic information declaring, "An *employer may never use genetic information to make an employment decision because genetic information is not relevant to an individual's current ability to work."* Genetic information includes information about an individual's genetic test and the genetic tests of an individual's family members, as well as information about the manifestation of a disease or disorder in an individual's family members.

National origin discrimination involves treating individuals unfavorably because they are from a particular country/part of the world, because of ethnicity or accent, or because they appear to be of a certain ethnic background. It also can involve treating people unfavorably because they are married to (or associated with) a person of a certain national origin or because of their connection with an ethnic organization or group. Pregnancy discrimination involves treating a woman unfavorably because of pregnancy, childbirth, or a medical condition related to pregnancy or childbirth. Race discrimination involves treating someone (an applicant or employee) unfavorably because he/she is of a certain race or because of personal characteristics associated with race (such as hair texture, skin color, or certain facial features). Color discrimination involves treating someone unfavorably because of his/her skin color. Religious discrimination involves treating a person (an applicant or employee) unfavorably because of his or her religious beliefs. The law protects not only people who belong to traditional, organized religions, such as Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism, but also others who have sincerely held religious, ethical or moral beliefs. Sex discrimination involves treating someone (an applicant or employee) unfavorably because of that person's sex [4].

Discrimination can be direct or indirect. Direct discrimination involves treating an individual or a group less fairly than another does on the grounds of age, sexual orientation, disability, racial or ethnic origin, or belief or religion. It occurs when an individual is treated less favorably than another is, has been or would be treated in a comparable situation on grounds of racial or ethnic origin. On the other hand, indirect discrimination includes unequal treatment that results from the operation of rules that are not themselves apparently discriminatory in intention. It is not the treatment that differs, but rather the effects of that treatment, which will be felt differently by people with different characteristics ([1], [5], [6]).

People are exposed direct or indirect discrimination in education not only as employees, but also as students at schools [1]. Equality is an expectation of unbiased treatment and it concentrates on the individual and the circumstances surrounding him or her. It presumes that since the individual has been assimilated into the society he or she should not be precluded by traditional expectations or stereotypes [7]. Therefore, equality at work means that employers must treat employees neutrally and not focus on group differences based on factors such as disability, race, social class, and gender.

Teachers work in multicultural environments at schools. Because they have to teach different people, they face widely different ethical cases due to the differentiation at schools. Teachers are supposed to teach being fair, just, and patient to differences. Therefore, they need to be fair, just, and patient to differences at first. Because, they are supposed to be just and fair to the students at schools. Even they are modeled by their students. The students learn values such as being just, fair, democratic, or being not discriminating each other as well as academic skills, observing their teachers at schools ([8], [9]). Young [10] argues that students learn more, make better grades, and have enhanced emotional well-being when educators in their schools to protect them from harassment.

According to the Minnesota Human Rights act [11], treating people differently in education because of their race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, age, marital status, disability, public assistance, and sexual orientation are illegal. Teachers are supposed to serve as model in society in Turkey. Besides, students' perceptions of being equal with each other may support the effectiveness of education ([8], [9]). Thus, teachers' behaviors have crucial effects on students' achievements, and even on the future society. According to Banks [12] teachers must develop reflective cultural, national, and global identifications themselves if they are to help students become thoughtful, caring, and reflective citizens in a multicultural world society.

Teacher education is involved in higher education, and students take different courses at faculties of education in Turkey. Studies (e.g. Marcus et al. [13], Rankin [14], Negy and Lunt [15], Boysen et al. [16]) revealed that students are exposed direct or indirect discrimination in higher education. Marcus et al. [13] found that %32 of the students had encountered bias, while Rankin [14] found that %30 of the gay, lesbian, and bisexual students were harassed in class in higher education. In addition, Negy and Lunt [15] found that Hispanic and African American students did not believe that ethnic student organizations contributed to racial or ethnic separatism on campus. Boysen et al. [16] found that students face stereotyping and verbal derogation of specific groups in class. Hanna and Linden [17] found that teachers discriminate against low caste children in grading exams. As mentioned in the literature, student teachers are also exposed exclusive behaviors during their education. Being mistreated during their education period might affect teachers in two ways: they might be sensitive, especially for diversity, or they might regard as usual exclusive behaviors in their life. Therefore, examining teachers' perception of diversity is becoming more than an issue of the multicultural world society for the sake of qualified education.

Since the publication of the ECRI report in 2005, Turkey has been made much progress in education and a number of fields covered by the report. For example, the government announced a new 'democratic initiative' aiming to solve 'Kurds issue' in 2009. Therefore, the university-level Civil Languages Institute, in which Kurdish and other languages of minority groups can be taught, was opened. In addition, Alevi and Roman right ascensions have also been started [18]. However, exclusion examples have still been seeing in the country. For example, African immigrants feel excluded and discriminated by both public authorities and the public, despite the contributions they are making to society, according to a Turkish academic conducting research on the subject [19]. In addition, according to the several voices in Turkey, discrimination is increasing against those who do not practice Sunni Islam or identify as ethnic Turks [20]. Furthermore, according to the Bulut [21] to be a Jew in Turkey seems to mean having been exposed to more than 90 years of systematic discrimination against the use of their native language.

The teacher education programs include 50% field knowledge, 30% professional teaching knowledge, and 20% general culture information in Turkey [22]. In addition to the faculties of education, graduates from different programs in higher education can be a teacher through 'Teaching Formation Programs' served by the faculties of education in the country. While teacher education programs involve various courses related to teaching and especially the lasting minimum in four years, the 'Teaching Formation Programs' last minimum seven weeks. Because of the limited time, the students should not be supposed to be prepared well for teaching. Hence, preparing these students for diversity is crucial for the future of the multicultural society in which physical or social diversity in the country.

This study explores prospective teachers' perceptions of discrimination in social life. In this respect, the aim of the present study is to identify prospective teachers' reactions related to the differences of people in their environment, and the kinds of discrimination perceived by prospective teachers. Thus, the following research questions were examined:

1. What are the prospective teachers' reactions related to the differences of people in their environment?
2. What were the kinds of discrimination prospective teachers have been exposed to in their lifetime?
3. What are the responses of the prospective teachers to discrimination?

2 METHODS

2.1 Sample

The research was carried out in the teaching certification program (pedagogical formation program) in the 2014-2015 academic year in Turkey. The sample included 250 'Teaching Formation Program' students enrolled in the Faculty of Education of Kocaeli University. Since the 12 questionnaire were not filled out properly, they were not included in the analysis process. Consequently, the sample included 238 prospective teachers from nine departments. A structured questionnaire was administered during a class time to collect data on the participants' perceptions and the behaviors they have experienced during their life. Personal information (gender, age, and departments) was asked at the beginning of the questionnaire. Of the total 238 responses, 83% were from female participants (n=198) and 17% from male participants (n=40). The age range of the participants was 20-40 years. While 59% (n=141) were fourth-year (last year) students, 41 % (n=97) were graduated. While 21% (n=51) were from the music department, 18% (n=44) were from the mathematics department, 13% (n=31) were from the press and public relations department, %11.7 (n=28) were from the Turkish language department, and philosophy department, 9% (n=21) were from the health department, 7,5% (n=18) were from the science department, and 2% (n=5) were from the public administration, and history department.

2.2 Instrument

The data were gathered through a questionnaire developed by the author after reviewing the literature. The questionnaire consists of fixed-response, Likert-style and open-ended questions. Personal information (gender, age and departments) was asked at the beginning of the questionnaire. The questionnaire includes three parts: The first one involved six open ended questions asking the kinds of groups that are perceived powerful or effective by the prospective teachers. This section involves six open ended questions to list (1) the groups that they perceive as powerful or effective in their

university, (2) the groups that they perceive as powerful or effective in their local society, (3) the groups that they perceive as powerful or effective in Turkey. The last three questions in this section asked the groups that they want to be their members, and their feelings about their group mates and non-group mates. The second part was asking the participants to indicate their response to the differences in their environment (including one open-ended, two fixed-responses -yes / no questions-, and one checklist of each feature that might be a reason of exclusion). This part asked the types of exclusion that the participants have ever showed to other people. The last part asked the participants the types of discrimination they perceived by the other people and their responses to discrimination perceived (included in the Likert-style and checklist of each item). The data were analyzed through descriptive statistics.

3 RESULTS

3.1 The prospective teachers' reactions related to the differences of people in their environment

To get answers to the first question of the study, the participants were asked ten questions to discover their reactions related to the differences in their environment. The participants were first asked to indicate the groups that they perceive as powerful or effective in their university, local society, and in Turkey. Each participant wrote and listed the groups they perceived as powerful from the most to less. Table 1 shows descriptive statistics of the groups that the participants perceived the most powerful.

Table 1. The range of groups according to the participants' view as powerful (N=238)

Groups	The most		The second		The least		Total	
At university	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Political	104	44	19	8	1	0.4	124	52
Social	106	45	6	2	1	0.4	113	47
Religious	11	5	31	13	45	19	87	37
Local society								
Political	126	53	4	2	2	0.8	132	56
Social	44	18	12	5	1	0.4	57	24
Religious	61	26	69	29	1	0.4	131	55
In Turkey								
Political	157	66	7	3	-	-	164	69
Social	34	14	4	2	11	5	49	21
Religious	34	14	104	44	1	0.4	139	58

Table 1 showed that the participants perceive the most effective / powerful groups in their university in sequence political (52%, n=124), social (47%, n=113), and religious groups (37%, n=87). Besides, they perceived the most powerful groups in their local society in sequence political (56%, n=132), religious (55%, n=131), and social groups (24%, n=57). Lastly, they perceived the most effective / powerful groups in Turkey in sequence political (69%, n=164), religious (58%, n=139), and social groups (21%, n=49).

The participants were second asked to indicate the groups that they wanted to be a member of them. The results revealed that most of the participants (n=186, 78%) wanted to be a member of social groups, while the 28 (12%) stated they wanted to be a member of political groups, and 20 (8%) stated they wanted to be a member of religious groups.

The participants were third asked to indicate their feelings when they were with group members and non-group members. According to the results most of the participants revealed that they felt positive such as comfortable (n=153), confident (n=48), happy (n=30), powerful (n=14), free (n=14), peaceful (n=8), and self-reliant (n=4) themselves when they were with group members. However, most of the

participants revealed that they felt negative such as indisposed (n=52), uneasy (n=22), shy (n=21), the outcast (n=17), nervous (n=12), restless (n=7), and alone, different, and noncommittal (n=4) while 45 (19%) felt confident, neutral, happy, and more self-reliant themselves when they were with individuals who are not their group members.

The participants were fourth asked to indicate the kinds of differences that annoyed them. Table 2 shows descriptive statistics of differences that the participants are annoyed by them.

Table 2. The kinds of differences that annoyed the participants

Differences	N	%
Social, Cultural (style of dressing, physical, ethnic, language, illiterate, criminals)	17	19
Religious fanatics	13	15
Extremists	12	14
Economic differences	12	14
Different behaviors	10	11
Political differences	9	10
Religious differences	8	9
Idea differences	7	8
Total	88	100

As Table 2 shows, 37% (n=88) of the participants revealed the differences that they were annoyed by. According to the results, 19% (n=17) of the participants felt indisposed to social, cultural differences such as different style of dressing, physical difference, ethnic difference, language difference, illiterate people, and criminal people. Besides the results showed that they were annoyed by religious fanatics (n=13, 15%), extremists (n=12, 14%), economic differences (n=12, 14%), different behaviors (n=10, 11%), political differences (n=9, 10%), religious differences (n=8, 9%), and idea differences (n=7, 8%).

The participants were then asked to indicate that they have ever excluded someone because of his/her physical/lifestyle. According to the results, 34% (N=82) have excluded someone because of his/her physical appearance in their lifetime while 65% (N=154) have not. Besides, 63% (N=151) have excluded someone because of his/her lifestyle in their lifetime while 35% (N=84) have not.

The participants were lastly asked to indicate the reasons for exclusion that they have ever shown to other people. Table 3 shows descriptive statistics of the kinds of discrimination by prospective teachers to the other people.

Table 3: Percentages of prospective teachers' reasons for exclusion (n=324*)

	N	%
1. Political notion	61	26
2. Sexual orientation	53	22
3. Way of speaking / pronunciation	42	18
4. Clothing / makeup / hair / beard styles	25	11
5. Level of IQ	22	9
6. Ethnicity	21	9
7. Other	21	9
8. Religion / belief	15	6
9. Education level	13	5
10. Gender	13	5
11. Hometown / nationality	12	5

12. Age	12	5
13. Other physical differences	6	2.5
14. Economic condition	3	1
15. Weight / height	3	1
16. Having any kind of handicap	2	1

*A participant can write more than one reason

As Table 3 shows the participants have discriminated someone because of their political affiliations; their sexual orientation, their speaking or pronunciation style, and their clothing style, make-up style, hair style, or beard style mostly in their lifetime.

3.2 The kinds of discrimination that the prospective teachers have been exposed to in their lifetime

The second question of the study sought the kinds of discrimination that the prospective teachers have ever been exposed to in their lifetime. Table 4 shows frequencies and percentages of the participants' reasons.

Table 4. Percentages of the perceived reasons of discrimination (N=238*)

	Once in a few years		Once/twice in a year		Once/twice in a month		Once/more in a week		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
1. Political notion	54	48	40	35	15	13	4	4	113	47
2. Clothing styles	39	53	21	28	6	8	8	11	74	31
3. Religion / belief	19	31	22	36	15	24	6	10	62	26
4. Gender	21	49	14	33	6	14	2	5	43	18
5. Economic condition	25	68	8	22	2	5	2	5	37	16
6. Hometown	12	38	16	50	3	9	1	3	32	13
7. Ethnicity	8	26	15	50	6	20	1	3	30	13
8. Weight	18	60	8	26	3	10	1	3	30	13
9. Age	19	76	3	12	1	4	2	8	25	11
10. Other physical differences	11	44	8	32	3	12	3	12	25	11
11. Way of speaking	13	54	6	25	3	13	2	8	24	10
12. Education	11	58	8	42					19	8
13. Height	8	47	7	41	2	12			17	7
14. Level of IQ	5	83	1	17					6	3
15. Others: Ideas			2	50	2	50			4	2
16. Sexual orientation	2	67			1	33			3	1

*A participant can write more than one reason

As Table 4 demonstrates, the participants (n=113, 47%) perceive having been discriminated against by people because of their political affiliations. 48% (n=54) of the 113 revealed that they have been discriminated against once a year, while 4% stated that they were excluded by people because of their political affiliations once or more than a week. In addition, they revealed that they have been excluded from because of their clothing style. Besides, they have been excluded because of their make-up style, hair style, or beard style; their religious attitudes; their gender; their economic condition, their

hometown; their ethnicity; their weight; their age, and other physical differences; their speaking or pronunciation style.

The participants were asked to indicate the place where they were discriminated. Table 5 shows descriptive statistics of the places in which the participants were discriminated.

Table 5. Percentages of the places the participants were discriminated (N=238*)

	The place	N	%
1.	At school	101	22
2.	In a public setting (i.e. Street, market, park)	93	21
3.	Getting a job	68	15
4.	At work	63	14
5.	Getting medical care / at the hospital	46	10
6.	In the family / at home	41	9
7.	From the police anywhere	40	9

*The participants were allowed to check more than one item

As Table 5 shows, the participants were excluded at school, in the public setting, where they were seeking a job, at work, while they were getting medical care, in their family setting, and (by the police) at anywhere.

3.3 The prospective teachers' responses to exclusion

The last research question sought the participants' reactions when they have been treated unfairly. The descriptive statistics are shown in Table 6.

Table 6. The participants' reactions to the unfairly treatments

Place	N	%
When they feel they have been treated unfairly		
Accept it as a fact of life	46	20
Try to do something about it	186	80
Total	232	100
When have been treated unfairly		
Talked to other people about it	158	82
Kept it to themselves	34	18
Total	192	100

As Table 6 shows, 46 (20%) of the 232 participants indicated that they accept it as a fact of life, while 186 (80%) revealed that they try to do something about it. In addition, 158 (82%) were indicated that they talked to other people about it, while 34 (18%) kept it to themselves.

4 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The present study examined the prospective teachers' reactions related to the differences in their environment, the kinds of discrimination that they have been exposed to, and their responses to discrimination in their lifetime. The data indicated that prospective teachers believe that the most effective or powerful groups are political, and social groups in the university. On the other hand, they seem to believe that the most powerful groups are political and religious groups in the society, and in Turkey. However, analyses revealed that prospective teachers wanted to be a member of social groups while less wanted to be members of political or religious groups.

The results revealed that prospective teachers seem to feel positive when they were with group members while they feel negative themselves when they were with individuals who are not their group members. In addition, they seem to feel being annoyed when they are with religious fanatics, someone who behave/ live extremely, who are different in terms of economy, religiosity, and politics. In addition, they seem to exclude individuals because of their physical appearance, and their lifestyle. Besides, the results revealed that the participants have discriminated someone because of his/her political affiliations; his/her sexual orientation, his/her speaking or pronunciation style, and his/her clothing style, make-up style, hairstyle, or beard style in their lifetime.

Analyses revealed that the prospective teachers seem to be discriminated against due to their political affiliations; their clothing style, make-up style, hair style, or beard style; their religious attitudes; their gender; their economic condition, their hometown; their ethnicity; their weight; their age, and other physical differences; and their speaking or pronunciation style. In addition, they seem to have been discriminated at school, in the public setting, where they were seeking a job, at work, while they were getting medical care, and in their family setting. Lastly, the data revealed that most of the participants tried to do something, and talked to other people about it while less accepted it as a fact, and kept it to them.

Although this research shows that prospective teachers are both discriminating, and discriminated against by individuals in society, in terms of their political and religious attitudes, social and cultural backgrounds, a more detailed analysis reveals that all prospective teachers who are discriminating or discriminated against based on such factors in Turkey remain under-represented. Nevertheless, this study contributes to the literature demonstrating types of discrimination in the society in Turkey. The findings of this study highlight the importance of drawing the attention of authorities to be aware of discrimination and biases in the society, and policy makers to support adjusting teacher training programs by establishing diversity courses to teach nondiscrimination in these programs' curriculum.

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