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Choice factors in M.A. ELT programs

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Abstract

The present study has been carried out in order to determine professional targets of M.A. ELT program students, the factors that are influential in deciding to start M.A. ELT studies, and the ones that are influential in department selection. The study group comprises both students and graduates from various ELT departments and they are made up of three groups in terms of occupation: research assistants, instructors, and teachers. The results indicate that many students undertake postgraduate education primarily with a view to improve their intellectual skills and most of them state that they want to continue their PhD studies.

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1. Introduction

Post-graduate education is conceived as one of the most important steps in educating prospective academics and maintaining national scientific policies. Thus, the fundamental aim of post-graduate education can be regarded as raising qualified workforce that can produce, use, and criticize information. Clearly, therefore, post-graduate education itself becomes highly important and must be empowered by scientific studies (Alhas, 2006).

Teachers cannot be thought of as isolated from the situation on the basis of the fact that teachers are the most important agents that are supposed to impart knowledge that is being produced in universities. In addition, teachers are supposed to take on a dual role on account of the fact that they are responsible for both keeping abreast of the recent knowledge and the most recent developments in teaching methods. Accordingly, the importance of post-graduate education for teachers, and especially for language teachers, is two-fold. One is related to developments that take place in linguistics and the other is

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methodological innovations. Shortly, the significance of teacher education is aggravated by these important factors and moreover this situation signals the pressing need for specialization, continuity and innovation in teacher education (Ersoy, 2002).

There are a number of studies that handle post-graduate education from various viewpoints in Turkish context (Karaman & Bakırcı, 2010, Arslan & Kara, 2010, Ahlas, 2006, Ünal & İltar, 2010). However, these studies are not particularly related to ELT departments. In addition, they cover the issue from either a general perspective or boil down to beliefs or opinions of participants. In short, there are no studies that are specifically related to the profile of participants who conduct their M.A. studies. This study, therefore, aims at investigating the factors that motivate students to start their M.A. studies in ELT programs, their professional targets, and the factors that are influential in department selection.

There is one study that specifically focuses on the factors that are influential in doing master degree. It was carried out by Erkiş (2009) and it is one of the studies that gave the inspiration for the present one. Erkiş's study was an extensive study that was carried out with a very large number of participants from science, medical and social sciences faculties. From Erkiş's study, it is clear that the most important factors that were influential in starting M.A. study are related to educational purposes rather than research and developmental, psycho-social, and socio-economic ones. In short, this study aims at answering the following questions:

Research questions:

1. What are the professional targets of M.A. students?
2. What is the influence of the given factors in deciding to do M.A. studies?
3. Which factors are influential in department choice?
4. What program components are favored by current M.A. students and graduates?

2. Participants

The subjects of the study in two groups are 90 participants (male=30, female=60). The first group comprises of the current M.A. students (n=29) attending M.A. ELT programs in Turkey. The second group includes graduates (n=61). In terms of their occupations, the participants come from three main groups: teachers (n=15), instructors (n=56), and research assistants (n=11). The age range of participants spans between 23 and 41.

3. Data Collection

Data were collected by means of a questionnaire which has three parts that inquire (1) the professional targets of the participants, (2) the factors that influence the students' decisions to do M.A. studies, (3) the factors that are influential in department selection, and the courses favoured by those current M.A. in ELT students and graduates.

Table 1. Distribution of participants in terms of graduation and jobs

	Teacher	Research Assistant	Instructor	Total
student	14	4	12	30
graduate	9	7	44	60
total	23	11	56	90

As we can understand from Table 1, the number of teachers who participated in the study is 23. There are nine students and six graduates in this group. The number of research assistant is 11, with four students and seven graduates. The number of instructors is 56, 12 students and 44 graduates.

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