

## Professional Experiences of Turkish and Moroccan Teachers in Dutch Secondary Schools

**Ebru Öztürk Akar, PhD.**

Assistant Professor Doctor

Abant İzzet Baysal University

Department of Secondary Science and Mathematics Education

Faculty of Education, Gököy, 14280

Bolu Turkey

### Abstract

*This study was conducted to gain insight into the professional experiences and perceptions of Turkish and Moroccan teachers in Dutch secondary schools from the point of ethnic heterogeneity within the school staff. The data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with four teachers who have diverse backgrounds from the national majority. Content analysis was conducted to identify these teachers' perceptions of the educational context and to describe their experiences of tension and conflict in teaching. The results showed that the teachers' personal professional experiences, their ethnic identities and the assumed corresponding understanding of their roles in the educational context create tension and conflict. Considering the number of Turkish and Moroccan teachers in secondary schools, findings of the study should be taken into consideration by teachers, teacher educators and those charged with inducting new teachers into the profession. This study also provides implications for further research, including replication on greater scale and in various locations as the number of teachers from diverse backgrounds increases in many countries.*

**Key Words:** Turkish and Moroccan teachers, ethnic groups, conflict and tension, educational context

It has been more than a decade since Inglis and Philips (1995; in Michale, 2006) made the claim that an educational system that emphasizes the transmission of the dominant culture does not place immigrants in a position of 'educator'. Today minorities of diverse immigrant ancestries in the teaching profession are represented in a variety of national contexts (Beynon, Ilieva & Dichupa, 2001) such as in the Netherlands.

The Netherlands is an ethnically heterogeneous country both within the student population and the school staff. Although a major effort has been made to improve the educational status of ethnic groups, there has been very little research on teachers with diverse immigrant ancestries. Educational research on ethnic groups in the Netherlands mostly focuses on:

- ethnicity and underachievement (Alkan, 1998),
- parental involvement by immigrant communities (Alkan, 2001),
- acculturation and school success (Andriessen & Phalet, 2002),
- teacher-reported problem behavior (Crijnen, Bengi-Aslan & Verhulst, 2000),
- teacher-student relationships (Den Brok & Levy, 2005),
- limits of educational policy and practice (Rijkscroef et al., 2005),
- home language and language proficiency in primary schools (Driessen, van der Silk & de Bot, 2002),
- linguistic and cultural appropriation (Jongenburger & Aarssen, 2001),
- self-esteem and ethnic identity, ethnic attitudes (Verkuyten, 1990, 2002),
- psychological disidentification with the academic domain among ethnic minority adolescents (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2004), and
- age at immigration and educational attainment (van Ours & Veenman, 2006).

The findings of these studies center on the problems of discrimination, limited participation in society and educational disadvantage of immigrant-ethnic minority children/youth (Leeman & Ledoux, 2003, Andriessen & Phalet, 2002; Verkuyten, 1990, 2002, 2004, Verkuyten & Thijs, 2000). This study was conducted to understand the professional experiences of subject area specialist Turkish and Moroccan teachers with the following research question in mind:

- What are the professional experiences of subject area specialist Turkish and Moroccan teachers in Dutch secondary schools? How students from ethnic minority groups interact with these teachers?

The subject area specialist teachers from the Turkish and Moroccan communities, former labor immigrants and currently the largest ethnic groups in the Netherlands, are extremely underrepresented in Dutch secondary education (Leeman, 2006).

Examination of these teachers' perceptions and professional experiences in the educational context would provide implications to improve the status and working lives of these teachers and facilitate their adaptation to the educational context. Teacher educators can use the findings of this study while inducting new teachers into the profession, and to improve teacher education programs concerning intercultural education. The study can in turn contribute to the educational success and social integration of Turkish and Moroccan pupils. This study also provides implications for further research, including replication on greater scale and in various locations as the number of teachers from diverse backgrounds increases in many countries. The socio-cultural and educational status of Turkish and Moroccan people in the Netherlands is introduced in the following section to draw accurate conclusions about the educational context experienced by the teachers.

### ***1. Socio-cultural and educational status of Turkish and Moroccan people in the Netherlands***

In terms of the socio-cultural and educational status of ethnic groups, The Netherlands shares similar problems with other countries of high immigration such as discrimination, limited participation in society and educational disadvantage (Leeman & Ledoux, 2003). Verkuyten (2002) reports clear status and cultural differences between the native population and ethnic groups. There are also differences between ethnic groups and between generations (Leeman & Ledoux, 2003). Forming the two largest ethnic groups in the Netherlands, Turkish and Moroccan people share similar histories of labor migration and have certain common characteristics. They usually come from a rural background; have a predominant cultural heritage of relatedness and a low level of education (Driessen, 2001, Leeman & Ledoux, 2003). Their linguistic and cultural backgrounds are also different from the native population and other ethnic groups. They live in less prosperous areas and in the old quarters of the big cities (Verkuyten, 1990). A disproportionate number of them are found in the lower echelons of the labor market, and their children are less successful in terms of schooling (De Haan & Elbers, 2004).

They face similar problems of social disadvantage, prejudice, negative stereotyping, and ethnic discrimination in the society (Andriessen & Phalet, 2002; Verkuyten, 1990, 2002, 2004, Verkuyten & Thijs, 2000). Although the overall educational level and socioeconomic positions of the second and third generation of Turks and Moroccans has generally improved, there is still a difference in comparison to the native population (Leeman & Ledoux, 2003). Despite all the measures taken, research results highlight slow social integration of these two ethnic groups due to language problems, lack of adaptability, being behind in education and some specific ethnic causes (van der Veer, 2003). Together with problems such as unemployment, poverty, early school leaving and increased crime rates (Driessen, van der Silk, de Bot, 2002), their ethnicity in Dutch society gains an extra dimension (Verkuyten, 1990). They have been subject to critical attention in the Dutch media and politics, and in recent research their educational status has been shown to be plagued with problems such as low achievement levels, little pursuit of higher types of education, widespread truancy and disciplinary problems, and high drop-out rates (Gillborn, 1997; Leseman, 2000, Rossi & Montgomery, 1994; cited in Driessen, 2001, Verkuyten, 2004).

Research reports highest rates of school failure for Turkish and Moroccan pupils (Dagevos et al., 2003; Hustinx, 2002; Rijksroef, ten Dam, Duyvendak, de Gruijter & Pels, 2005; Tesser & Iedema, 2001). They leave elementary school at a later age than their Dutch peers. They are over-represented in the vocational track- lower level of secondary education (Sociaal Cultureel Planbureau, 2003). Few complete a higher level secondary school (Crijnen, Bengi-Arslan, Verhulst, 2000). They are disproportionately assigned to 'segregated' black schools (Vedder, 2006); schools densely populated, more than 90% (Driessen & Valkenberg, 2000), with ethnic minority students. According to Bastedo (2007), the black schools are assiduously avoided by the native population, meaning that the students from these schools are far less likely to have the training, qualifications, or financial resources to succeed at university. Driessen, van der Silk and de Bot (2002) report that Turkish and Moroccan pupils can be found only to a limited extent in higher and university education. Differences in language and culture, low socio-economic status of the parents, parents' familiarity with Dutch school culture and educational investment strategies, and teachers' stereotyped attitudes such as prejudiced interaction and low expectations of students' abilities and achievement (Alkan, 1998, Andriessen & Phalet, 2002, Van Ours & Veenman, 2006) have been put forward as factors contributing to their educational disadvantages.

### ***2. Theoretical Framework***

Recent research reports that teachers who have work experience in another country and/or are from different ethnic origins face a great challenge adapting to the school system. Teachers have to master the language and new curriculum, and have to adjust to the new school culture and student-teacher relationships (Remennick, 2002).

Those used to teaching in a teacher-centered manner in their home cultures are likely to find it different, even difficult, to teach similar topics in a relatively student-centered learning environment (Seah, 2005). Remennick (2002) also reports a striking difference in the notions of authority and social distance that shape teacher-student interactions. He found that teachers from different ethnic origins were surprised that they had no taken-for-granted authority in the students' eyes and had to work hard to win their attention and respect. These teachers faced constant challenges in the way the students ignored their demands. Discipline problems were worst in schools with a weaker socio-economic student profile, as well as in heterogeneous classes, that is those which were ethnically mixed or included many immigrants. Teachers also had to resist negative stereotyping of them as professionals by native colleagues. Better schools mean a more tolerant and friendly atmosphere for them.

According to Subedi (2008), ethnic minority teachers' cultural identities in the US school setting were constructed particularly in regards to the exotic and simplified representation of their religious, ethnic and gendered identities. Subedi describes how ethnic minority teachers were viewed as legitimate speakers about the diversity; that is, as an ethnic minority, she could relate to the challenges faced by ethnic minority students. Bascia (1996, cited in Seah, 2002) reports the relationship between ethnic minority teachers and minority students to signal ramifications for professional status and organizational access. There were also reports of exclusion from mainstream professional and formal and informal social interactions, conflicts between personal values and beliefs of what is acceptable in the school, which may well lead to teacher engagement with covert subversive actions in the classroom (Bascia, 1996). Seah (2002) reports the way ethnic minority teachers feel professional, social and cultural alienation and isolation as a recurring outcome. The accepted cultural differences on the societal level, the corresponding assumptions about ethnic minorities, and ethnic communities' retaining of their own cultural values to some degree (Seah, 2002) can lead to the encountering of some conflicts and tensions by teachers.

According to Haynes (2003), how a person is treated influences how they see themselves and how they treat others. When teachers from communities of ethnic minorities, who are affected by 'structural inequalities and oppressions' (Gold, 1997, p. 288) are concerned, this is translated into how and what they teach and how they treat other members of the school community. Not only how the teachers perceive themselves (Dickar, 2008) but also tensions between their role as educator and their ethnic identity affect the perceptions and expectations of the viewing audience i.e. students, colleagues, and parents (Scott, 2003), and performance of teachers from ethnic groups.

As pointed out by Haynes (2003), all members of a school community bring with them into the field of education their history, experiences and capital. In addition to their unique histories of their pedagogy, teachers bring a desire to construct a unique identity as teachers. They negotiate and renegotiate that identity in various contexts (Agee, 2004). Ethnicity, one of the markers of identity, is rarely inscribed in research with regards to teaching identities. However, racial/ethnic attitudes in many children are reported to be well advanced by the time they start school. These attitudes come not necessarily from the parents but from peer group and the media (Short & Carrington, 1992; Pushkin & Veness, 1973; in Haynes, 2003) and affect children's conduct with their peers and teachers in schools. If schools are not proactive in promoting equal opportunities, they may have a hidden curriculum which sends negative messages to staff and pupils alike (Haynes, 2003).

Den Brok and Levy (2005) highlight a conclusion drawn from the literature that the ethnicity is consistently associated with students' perceptions of their teachers. Dickar (2008) reports that while students expect all their teachers to teach them academic content, they expect teachers who share their cultural and racial/ethnic heritage to provide racial/ethnic solidarity, support and advocacy. Villegas and Clewell (1998) assert the more students encounter educators from similar ethnic/racial and cultural backgrounds, the more culturally relevant and meaningful their education will be. However, these similarities and student expectations may cause their teachers to experience tensions between their role as educator and their racial/ethnic identity. Yet, such conflicts in the working lives of teachers have been undertreated in the literature and teacher education programs (Dickar, 2008).

### **3. Method**

A phenomenological research design was employed to inductively and holistically understand the teachers' experiences in context-specific settings (Patton, 1990). The aim was to determine what an experience means for the teachers who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it (Moustakas, 1999).

Purposive sampling was used to reach four participant teachers: Preliminary contacts were first made with the teacher education institutes. A short list of Turkish and Moroccan science teachers was prepared since there were very few ethnic minority subject area specialists in Dutch secondary schools. The researcher then contacted the teachers on the list, and informed them about the purpose of the research. Participant teachers agreed to take part in the research. In order to protect the participants' identities, teachers were assigned with pseudonyms. The reason why these teachers were selected was because of their ethnic identities and their subject areas of teaching.

### **3.1. Participants**

The participants, two female and two male science teachers, were from schools in the two big Dutch cities with a large population of ethnic groups. As seen in Table 1, Erhan and Aysha were 30, Sibel was 31, and Saim was 42 years old. All but Saim were born in the Netherlands. Aysha was Moroccan and the other teachers were Turkish. Sibel and Aysha taught Biology, Saim and Erhan taught Chemistry and Physics respectively. Aysha, Erhan and Sibel had been teaching for 4 to 6 years as secondary school science teachers; whereas Saim, who had previously been a post-doc researcher and a university lecturer, had been teaching for a year at the time the data were collected.

All the participants had acquired skills in their country's language and culture before beginning teaching. They were used to the cultural customs of the Dutch society and spoke the language. Since Sibel and Aysha were second generation immigrants, having been born in the Netherlands and having completed their education in the Dutch schools, they were familiar with the Dutch school culture. Saim and Erhan, however, had finished a part of their education in their home countries and felt the need to get used to the Dutch school culture and student-teacher relationships.

Sibel worked in a vocational-lower level black school. 99% of the students in Sibel's school were Turkish, Moroccan and Surinamese. In some of the classes, there were no Dutch students at all. 50% of the foreign students were Moroccan. Aysha worked in a white-higher level secondary school where majority of the students are Dutch. There were no students from ethnic groups at all in her school. She had previously worked in black vocational schools and she had had many Turkish and Moroccan students. Saim worked in a mixed-black and white- higher level secondary school. 15% of the students in Saim's school were Turkish and Moroccan. Erhan worked in a white-higher level secondary school which had about 30 Turkish students.

**Insert Table 1 about here**

### **3.2. Data Collection**

A semi-structured interview protocol consisting of six questions was used to collect information about the participants' perceptions and experiences of relationships, conflicts and tensions experienced in the educational context. The interview protocol was first piloted with a Turkish geography teacher teaching in a Dutch school. Then the researcher visited each participant teacher in his/her school and conducted in-depth interviews separately. The participants were asked about the reasons behind their decisions to become science teachers; what they thought were the most rewarding and most difficult aspects of teaching; and how they described their relations with their students and colleagues. These audiotaped interviews lasted about one to one-and-a-half hour with each teacher, and were conducted in Turkish with Sibel, Erhan and Saim, and in English with Aysha. Within one week of the interviews the audiotapes were transcribed and the participants' responses were prepared for categorization during data analysis.

### **3.3. Data Analysis**

A content-analysis approach was used to analyze the data. The steps below were followed during the process:

- The data were first read to achieve a holistic and intuitive understanding of teachers' perceptions and experiences;
- Raw data from each participant were coded and thematized. The preliminary list of codes consisted of cultural background, schooling experience, teacher role beliefs, challenges specific to Dutch schools, and experiences in classes, conflicts, etc;
- Matrices for interview questions were generated (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The responses of each teacher to specific interview questions were recorded in response columns of matrices.
- Irrelevant, repetitive and overlapping data were eliminated, and similarities and differences in responses were identified and grouped;
- Invariant themes were developed (Patton, 1990), and patterns of responses were drawn;

- Inferences and generalizations about patterns of responses were made, and the research questions guiding the study were answered.

#### **4. Results**

The participants did not form a homogeneous group concerning their backgrounds. Yet, the analysis of the data revealed that the participants experienced tension and conflict centering around three themes: adapting to the educational context and dealing with contextual constraints, challenges of establishing discipline and order, and challenges of ethnic identity.

##### **4.1. Adapting to the Educational Context and Dealing with Contextual Constraints**

Although in different ways, the teachers appeared to be using their unique experiences of coming from a different culture, but at the same time adapting to the education context where they were teaching. All the teachers mentioned that they knew the requirements of the Dutch educational system and followed the educational policies i.e. do more practical lessons; give students more responsibility about their own learning, and have students do more independent work and self study. Although Saim said that he had used his previous observations and experiences as a frame of reference when he started teaching, he discovered that he needed to avoid traditional ways of teaching. He reported in the interview that he needed to improve his teaching skills, create rich learning environments in which the students study together, and learn by doing; and that he needed to use a rich variety of instructional materials, carry out laboratory studies and have the students do experiments by themselves.

Similarly, Sibel and Erhan also reported in the interview that they felt the need to improve themselves continuously as teachers. Erhan mentioned that he faced difficulties in using the laboratory equipment and doing experiments in his first years of teaching, since he had studied Physics more theoretically at university in his home country. He needed to study and learn the use of laboratory equipment, and carry out more experiments. Both Saim and Sibel mentioned that they used different teaching methodologies in their classes. As required, they prepared detailed daily plans in advance and followed them. Like Erhan, Sibel explained that she introduced the subject matter, and the students did the exercises in the book. She used models and posters, and had the students do exercises on the computer. She used CDs if they had time and prepared questions for the videos they watched. Aysha was obliged to teach faster in order to finish the subject matter of two years in a single year. Therefore she tended to teach science theoretically. Aysha described her lessons as mostly lecturing and answering questions. When the students asked for further explanations, she provided detailed information.

Both Saim and Sibel complained that they had to use extra time and effort to organize and finish laboratory studies in time. For Saim, being unable to finish laboratory studies on time was more problematic than organizing and carrying out these studies. Use of time was problematic for Aysha and Erhan, too. They both mentioned that they needed more than the allocated class hours. Erhan had difficulties in teaching students who were not intrinsically motivated to learn. Aysha's responses suggested that she also believed that the students had difficulty in understanding the subject matter, and this negatively reflected onto her teaching. As in Saim's classes, managing and encouraging students to participate in the lessons were also problematic in Sibel's. Some of Sibel's students refused to work in the laboratory and take notes during the lessons.

##### **4.2. Challenges of establishing discipline and order**

Coming from countries where teachers are greatly respected by students, discipline and respect were important issues for the participants. Yet, discipline was a common difficulty all the teachers experienced in their classes. Erhan strongly emphasized respect as an issue because having arguments with the students made him tired. Erhan's responses suggested that he expected his students to treat him as the authority and respect him. However, he mentioned in the interview that he realized that the teacher-student relations were different in Dutch schools, which reflected the liberal Dutch culture i.e. teachers and students were like friends and their communication was more flexible than Erhan was accustomed to. Yet, Erhan said that the teacher as the authority should be respected. He emphasized the importance of observing teacher's authority, drawing borders between students and teachers, and reminding students of these borders when they protested against the teacher's authority. Erhan's responses suggested that he felt the need to create his own authority, and gain the students' respect. He needed to be superior to have students do what he wanted them to do. If he acted in a friendly way, the students would become out of control.

I had small arguments with the students. I slowly became more resistant. If I have to act personally or if there is a personal attack i.e. students protest my authority, I become tired. Students want to try everything. They want to cross the borders between me and themselves.

When I try to protect these borders, I become tired because I have to put an extra effort. It is the characteristics of the age. Some students try harder, they are braver, or their culture dominates.

Although Aysha and Sibel completed their education in the Netherlands, they also raised the issue of “respecting teachers” as one which they missed very much in Dutch schools. Aysha emphasized that she used to have more respect in a Moroccan school and that she used to enjoy it very much. She stated that the students should respect teachers no matter what. Students should be able to feel safe and comfortable in the class but should not talk to their teachers as if they were friends. Students should know their responsibilities and they have to follow the teacher’s plan. They should obey the class rules. Sibel’s school was densely populated with Turkish, Moroccan and Surinamese students. If she had more respectful students, she would become more motivated to teach, and would have stronger relations with the students.

#### **4.3. Challenges of ethnic identity**

Challenges of ethnic identity teachers faced were grouped into two: teaching students with similar ethnic background and challenges of being different.

##### **4.3.1. Teaching students with similar ethnic background**

All the teachers had experience of teaching both Turkish and Moroccan students, and reported during the interview that they faced the challenges of meeting their needs and expectations. For instance, Saim seemed to be concerned about the Turkish students’ expectations that he should be disciplinarian and be respected by them. The Turkish students were also more timid compared to their Dutch peers in talking to Saim and they were surprised to see a Turkish man teaching Chemistry in their school.

I try to keep the distance between me and the students. If I become closer, it can be interpreted differently because of the Turkish culture. Discipline is our culture, it is respecting the family and the teacher. Students learn it at home. You see this difference between Dutch and Turkish students. Yet, I try to be friends, and make jokes with my Turkish students too. They are surprised to see a Turkish man teaching Chemistry. It is so good for them. It means Turks are in education. This is a positive thing, progress.

Saim stated that he sometimes faced Turkish students’ resistance in group works. Although he wanted to form groups consisting of both Dutch and Turkish students, he reported that Turkish students resisted and wanted to work in the same groups with the other Turkish students. They complained about their Dutch peers, saying that they were talking behind their backs. Saim explained that the Turkish students’ tendency to form homogenous ethnic groups during class hours and breaks was a reaction to the societal approach to the Turks.

Although Erhan mentioned that he did not observe any difference in students’ attitudes towards him in general, he reported during interview that his Turkish students seemed to feel more positive about him because he was also Turkish. As Saim’s students were, Sibel’s Turkish students were also surprised to see a Turkish woman teaching in their school. She heard a Moroccan student telling Sibel and her female Moroccan colleague to go to the kitchen and do their jobs there. Students’ disinterested behavior and unexpected events such as bringing personal problems to the class and protesting teachers’ decisions were issues Sibel had to deal frequently in the black school at which she worked. During the interview she reported that the most of her students had familial problems and she was concerned that her students were not talking about their problems with their families, but with her instead. Her classes were so crowded that she could not deal with all of the students’ problems.

Students bring their problems to the class. If students have a problem at home, they can be aggressive. There are sometimes student fights. A student threatened a teacher few days ago. Some students explain about their problems to me instead of their families. I only make some recommendations. There are so many students and I cannot deal with all of their problems.

Sibel stated that the Turkish students also expected her to tolerate their misbehavior and support them when they had a problem. She described her Moroccan students as the most aggressive and most problematic ones because they came from crowded families where they lacked care and attention. They had difficulty in attending classes and studying. During the lessons they were distracted by other things, disturbed other students and created problems. They looked for attention by doing interesting things. Aysha also mentioned that she had struggled with her Moroccan students in the low level black schools she had previously worked at. Although Aysha was not working at a low level black school anymore, she mentioned the difficulties in working at such a school. Classes were crowded and students had many problems.

Therefore they were very restless and defensive, and could not concentrate on the subject matter. Instead, they argued and aggravated each other. She described teaching in such a school as:

‘It is like the juggler’s trick. You have the sticks and on each stick you have a plate. You have to turn one and switch back to turn the other plate. That is the teaching in low level black schools. It is so difficult, and a big problem. I’ll never choose teaching in a low level school again’.

She said that she worked very hard to maintain her teacher status and to prove that she was not a friend, cousin, sister or a parent of her students. Aysha reported that she had many Moroccan students who were very aggressive and defensive without a reason. She remembered one of her Moroccan female students from a broken family.

Moroccan students see you like a mother. They are mad at you and you don’t know why. Their madness comes from their homes. They project it on you because they feel a similarity. Once there was a girl. She was so mad. She was out of control and it was not because I did something wrong. It was the madness in herself. She had a broken family, dad was in jail.

During the interview, Aysha stated that *‘When you teach your own people, you have to fit in to their’*. Aysha described Turkish and Moroccan students as insecure and having societal problems. They were coming from crowded-low SES families, living in small houses, and having a lot of stress and no privacy. They were restless and unstable, and wanted to be accepted in the society by doing weird things. Teachers were the object for these students to get attention and care. She said that she had to be alert in the class and not be too involved with her students’ problems. Otherwise, she could lose her job and respect as a teacher. Students could see her as a mother as they did in the past, and they could project their unhappiness to her because she was also a Moroccan.

#### **4.3.2. Challenges of being different**

Although the number of teachers having diverse backgrounds than the national majority is increasing in the Dutch schools, the number of subject area specialists is limited. Saim, Sibel and Erhan were the only Turkish Science teachers in their schools. When they were asked about their relations with their colleagues, the participants mentioned that their relations with their colleagues were professional. However, Saim stated that he was sometimes made to feel different by his colleagues. Although he was not officially charged to mediate communication between school administration and Turkish families, he was the first one to be asked to solve problems of Turkish students. He did not want to become a problem-solver, and his responses suggested that he felt uneasy with such issues.

They make you feel as if you have a different status in the school.. You are seen and treated as a Turkish person that will help in solving problems with the Turkish families. I don’t want to be seen as the connection between school and the Turkish families. I’m a Chemistry teacher here. Nobody gave me such a responsibility here.

Sibel reported that she had closer relations with her colleagues and valued their friendly communication. She had been working in the same school for a long time, and was not thinking of transferring to another school. She considered them to be a big family, and stated that they supported each other whenever they needed.

Aysha had worked in different schools, and described herself as a social, flexible and easy-going colleague. She concluded that a teacher’s relations with her colleagues depended on her colleagues’ attitudes towards him/her. During the interview, Aysha stated that she felt relieved to be respected as a person and as a teacher in her present school i.e. she was not judged by her color or her background. However, she reported that she had had major difficulties with her colleagues in her previous schools. She thought her colleagues were prejudiced against her because she was Moroccan. She stated that she had begun to think that all the other teachers were talking about her. She reported that she believed her colleagues saw her as inferior and that she could not teach well. She thought she had to double her capacity and had to work twice as hard. Yet, she had weak lesson plans, could not organize her classes and made a lot of mistakes. Although she asked for help to improve herself as a teacher, she was fired at the end of the year without any feedback, as she reported during the interview.

I had many problems with teachers who had prejudices and judgments in my previous school. I felt that I have to double myself, and work twice as hard to show them that I can teach well. It was so stupid but I did it. I wanted to be accepted.

### **5. Discussion and Conclusion**

The number of educated Turkish and Moroccan professionals is increasing and more ‘but still a few’ of them are represented in higher echelons of the labor market, as the teachers in this study.

All the participants had the necessary training and qualifications to teach in Dutch secondary schools and they could speak the language. Since they had finished at least one part of their education in Dutch institutions, they were familiar with the educational context. They were aware of the contemporary practices of their subject area teaching and reformist Dutch educational policies, too. They carried out these practices and followed the implications of the current policies in their classes. Yet their personal professional experiences, their ethnic identities and the assumed corresponding understanding of their roles in the educational context lead to their encountering with conflicts and tensions. Examination of the characteristics of the educational context showed that Saim seemed to be reduced to the status of a minority specialist by their colleagues. Saim and Sibel were seen as unexpected guests in their schools by their Turkish and Moroccan students. This finding reveals the fact that even the ethnic minority students accepted the corresponding assumption about minorities in the Dutch society that their disproportionate number is found in the lower echelons of the labor market (De Haan & Elbers, 2004). Ethnic minority students were also accustomed to the assumed cultural opinion about ethnic minorities that women do not work. Because of this, Saim and Sibel experienced conflicts as professionals.

Similar to the interaction of immigrant teachers and their native colleagues described by Subedi (2008), Saim was seen as a problem-solver and mediator between his native colleagues and Turkish students, though he did not want to become so. Aysha's ethnic identity also seemed to be judged both by her students and her colleagues. Saim and Aysha were made to feel the issues of difference in the schools they work. Sibel and Aysha, who worked in black schools, had crowded classes consisting of minorities who lacked academic motivation. They seemed to miss good physical facilities in their schools and over-performed to teach and deal with the problems of their students. Thus, their images of themselves as teachers and their teaching were negatively influenced. Aysha seemed to become a more defensive and conservative teacher, and started to use more traditional teaching methodologies, stricter classroom rules and had a more distant relationship with their students; yet both Sibel and Aysha admitted the fact that they enjoyed being respected as teachers. This finding points to the fact that even if the teachers complete their education in the Dutch schools, they retain their cultural values to some degree and consequently encounter tension and conflict. Although both Sibel and Aysha were familiar with the Dutch school culture, they seemed to miss being respected as teachers, having cultural descents where teachers have taken-for-granted authority and respect in the students' eyes (Remennick, 2002).

However, respect for the teacher was an important value not only for the teachers from ethnic groups, but for all teachers in the vocational track at schools with predominantly ethnic minority students (Remennick, 2002, Leeman, 2006) where pupils were acting out of their assumed cultural customs and protesting the society in a way as coming from the ethnic groups facing the highest level of discrimination and rejection (Verkuyten, 2002). Since all the participants came from countries where teachers are highly respected, they all seemed to struggle changing their own cultural models of teaching and learning. Although Saim and Erhan, who had finished a part of their education in their home countries, put more effort to adapt to the educational context, where teaching was student-centered and the power distance was low between teachers and students (Hofstede, 1997), they did not seem to have to deal with the discipline problems Sibel and Aysha encountered due to school characteristics and student profile. The black schools, Aysha and Sibel worked, were challenging institutional contexts for teachers as Bastedo (2007) identified. Yet, there is very little research conducted on the characteristics and dynamics of these schools. Driessen and Valkenberg (2000) call attention to the need of large scale quantitative and qualitative information available as to the background of the pupils, parents and the teachers, how these schools evolved, their achievements and the problems they encountered.

Driessen and Valkenberg (2000) also notify that the special socio ethnic population of black schools lead to isolation and segregation in the society whereas they could be used to promote the social cohesion of the country, and to improve the integration of ethnic minorities (Bastedo, 2007). Adapting to the educational context was also identified as a challenge because of the increased importance of ethnicity in the society. Aysha stated that native colleagues had prejudiced interactions with her. Saim also reported that the students protested stereotyped attitudes towards ethnic groups in his school. Aysha's Moroccan students demanded her to fit into their cultural models of living. As Bascia reported (1996), her relationship with Moroccan students negatively influenced her professional practices i.e. she started to teach in a more teacher-centered manner. Aysha's fight against her native colleagues' negative stereotyping as a teacher also gave the impression that it damaged her professional status. Although she was an activist working in a social network of Moroccan intellectuals living in the Netherlands, she stated that she was exhausted because of these experiences.



Therefore, she had chosen to work in a white high level school. This way, her ethnic identity would lose ground, and she would enjoy working in a more professional and tolerant atmosphere for her. As Aysha, Sibel, Saim and Erhan also seemed more oriented towards teaching and improving the way they teach. Their professional identities surpassed their ethnic identities. Saim's responses suggested that he would enjoy the presence of people who are officially charged to deal with the issues of ethnic diversity and moderating related negative interactions in his school. Sibel also stated that she would like to use her time at school for teaching instead of carrying parents' and/or school administrators' responsibilities.

The findings showed similarities with the international research on ethnic minority/immigrant teachers concerning adaptation of these teachers to the educational context, and challenges of establishing discipline and order. However, in this study teachers' ethnic identities were identified as the major source of the challenges, tension and conflict teachers experienced in their schools. It is difficult to draw general conclusions about professional experiences of ethnic minority teachers only on the basis of this research. Yet, considering the number of subject area specialist teachers in the secondary schools, these findings should be well considered by teachers, teacher educators and those charged with inducting new teachers into the profession. Researchers and policy makers could also use findings of this study to address the problems experienced in black schools. As Saim and Sibel's responses suggested, assigning specialists to moderate communication between pupils, teachers, and parents would contribute to the educational attainment of ethnic minorities and promote their integration.

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**Table 1.**

Name	Age	Sex	Place of Birth	Nationality	Subject Area	Education	Experience
Sibel	31	Female	The Netherlands	Turkish	Biology	undergraduate degrees of biology, Turkish, and Turkish language and literature from a Dutch university.	6 years of teaching as a secondary school teacher
Aysha	30	Female	The Netherlands	Moroccan	Biology	undergraduate degree of medical biology from a Dutch university	4 years of teaching as a secondary school teacher
Saim	42	Male	Turkey	Turkish	Chemistry	Primary education in Turkey, undergraduate and PhD degrees of Chemistry and Immunology from a Dutch university	Lecturer and post-doc researcher at university, one year of teaching as a secondary school teacher
Erhan	30	Male	The Netherlands	Turkish	Physics	Secondary education in Turkey, undergraduate degree from a Turkish university, graduate degree in Physics Teaching	Four years of teaching as a secondary school teacher