

Reasons for Career Change among Attendees of Retraining Courses

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Abstract

This paper sets out to establish the reasons for career change among Arab academics in Israel who opt to retrain as schoolteachers. Recent years have witnessed a marked rise in the number of students enrolling in teacher training courses at the various colleges of education, designed to train teaching staff for various educational establishments. Many students, both male and female, arrive at the course from various disciplines – often from professions that are considered more “masculine,” or more prestigious. This study examined the motivations behind such career changes among Arab students in Israel, taking into account their electives during high school, their bachelor degree studies, and their chosen speciality during teacher training. The findings reveal that the respondents’ personal inclinations, their desire for job and financial security and satisfaction, their gender and the socio-cultural context all influenced their career choice over time. These findings have ramifications for teacher training colleges – for those retraining to become teachers as well as for those for whom teaching is their first career choice – in that the curriculum should be designed to challenge the students, while recognizing the prior knowledge, skills, experience and professional identity acquired by retrainees in their previous professional capacity and integrating these into the course’s educational theory and practice. In addition, the teaching curriculum for students who chose teaching as their primary career choice should be structured around a varied, broad and dynamic core, to enable the students to avoid overly abrupt changes and integrate other disciplines into their studies, thus providing them with a foundation for other educational paths while preserving their original inclination and choice of teaching as their chosen career.

Keywords: Career, teaching professional retraining program, Arab students, motivations, radical change

1. Introduction

Recent years have seen a growing trend of Arab academics of various fields choosing to leave their original career to retrain as schoolteachers. Some studies have looked at why academics in general choose to make this transition (Avisar & Dvir, 2003; Tokatly, 1999; Atherton, 2002), but few have focused on Arab academics in Israel in particular. A review of the international literature reveals that studies on professional development and career changes generally overlook the complexities of the issue in relation to ethnic minorities (Brown, 2001; Gushue, 2006). However, understanding why members of minorities in general, and the Arab minority in Israel in particular, choose a teaching career is important, given the marked popularity of this career option in recent years, and the growing number of Arab teachers – particularly women teachers – in the Israeli education sector (Touraine, Zidane & Alian, 2007).

This paper examines the personal, social, general and structural-economic reasons for Arab academics to opt for a teaching career, while highlighting the constraints placed upon them as members of the Arab minority in Israel. Significantly, this study is unique in that it examines the reasons for career change within this population over a period of time, from the choice of electives in high school through the decision to undergo professional retraining as a teacher. As such, the findings of this study may help to define the typical profile of Arab academics who decide to go into teaching, and to deepen the understanding of the considerations that guided them when choosing their career. This in turn may help decision-makers within the education system in monitoring its operations and in formulating guidelines at both the policy and the practical levels.

This paper consists of four parts: theoretical background; methodological analysis; findings; and discussion of findings and their implications with regard to teacher training.

2. Career, Changing Career, And Reasons for Choosing a Career

In the literature, a career is described as reflecting the individual's relationship with work (Coupland, 2004). It is described as a series of jobs, roles, positions, activities and experiences held by the individual in the context of employment, rather than defined by any one position or status (Arnold, 1997). A career is the sum and sequence of positions held by a person over their lifetime – as child, pupil, student, citizen, employee, parent and pensioner (Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996). It is defined as a process that describes the individual's study and work throughout his life (Ferry, 2006). A career is a dynamic, developing concept that may be outwardly manifested by a rise in rank and in promotion through a series of positions in a hierarchy of prestige, benefits and salary, and inwardly reflected in the individual's personal perspective of his role and of the significance of events surrounding him (Oplatka, 2008). In recent decades, following increased volatility in the labor market, the meaning of career has changed. The traditional notion of career as a linear and steady upward progression through a series of positions in a hierarchy has given way to a new, multidirectional concept (Baruch, 2004).

Careerchoice is defined as the act of choosing a profession or career in response to specific factors such as events, people, conditions, situations or any influence that affects the individual's choice (Doud, 2003). For most people, choosing a career is an ongoing process that continues throughout their lifetime, and reflected in how they integrate into the world of work by choosing between available employment opportunities (Ferry, 2006). It is a complex process, in which the individual seeks to achieve the optimal match between their personal and professional abilities and the realities of the labor market through their choice of work and preparatory studies (Avissar and Dvir, 2009).

It is also influenced by various internal and external incentives (Bright, Pryor & Harpham, 2005). The theory of cognitive and social attitude toward career development argues that there are three aspects to career development: 1. Occupational orientation – a professional interest that emerges due to various factors; 2. CareerChoice: an iterative process comprising goal formulation, objective-oriented actions and feedback to those actions; 3. Realization, or fulfillment: the more capable a person and the higher their expectations about the outcome, the more likely they are to be motivated to realize that goal and to perform well toward that end. This is a virtuous cycle in which the experience of success encourages the development of abilities that further enhance personal ability and expected outcome (Lent, Brown & Hackett, 1996).

2.1 Reasons for choosing a career

The literature describes various personal reasons for an adult's choice of career, such as entrepreneurship, self-efficacy, and independence (Zellweger, Sieger, & Halter, 2010); skills and commitment to work (Jin, Watkins, & Yuen, 2010); the perception of a career as a personal and professional mission (Friedman, 2006); individual attitudes (Ferry, 2006); personal inclination, religiosity, and spirituality (Duffy & Blustein, 2005). Savicks & Lent (1994) believe that career patterns are governed by the socioeconomic status of one's parents, one's education, personal abilities and attributes, concepts of self and opportunities offered by society. In particular, a person's attributes help determine the range of options they consider, while their characteristics affect the process by which they make their choice.

Brown (2002) argues that a person's professional choices or decisions concerning their career are a product of chance, luck, circumstances and external events. Other studies suggest that a person's choice of career is influenced by their surroundings, achievements, and the education they received while pursuing self-fulfillment (Bandura et al., 2001).

Other factors that may have a decisive role in determining one's career choice might include rejecting certain work opportunities and accepting others in a bid for intellectual development and learning; one's environment such as friends and family; the profession's prestige and its public perception (Olawanle & Abayomi, 2010); the nature of the labor market (Ljungqvist & Sargent, 2008); and working in a field soon after high school before one has had the chance to receive professional training (Issa & Nwalo, 2008). Other studies show that personal variables such as gender, age, education, management experience (Segers, Inceoglu, Vloeberghs, Bartram, & Henderickx, 2010), an attractive salary, good working conditions, and job security (Tella, Ayeni, & Popoola, 2007), were also among the reasons for choosing a career.

In the case of adolescents, Richardson & Watt's study (2005) shows that career choice is determined by social status, suitability, and considerations such as finances, prospective salary, and the likely amount of time it would allow to start and to care for a family. In his study, Esters (2007) found that parents, interest in the subject matter, personal factors, job opportunities, events and circumstances all played an important part in career choice, while Felder & Brent (2005) found that students' choice of study subjects was also influenced by their gender and ethnic status.

Notably, McWhirter (1997) found that adolescents' choice of career was also influenced by their awareness of the potential for adverse discrimination that they may encounter in the workplace due to their gender or ethnicity, and barriers they may face in post-secondary education. Some researchers believe there is a positive correlation between ethnic identity and the adolescent's choice of career and their self-efficacy (Gushue, 2006). Hargrove, Creagh, & Burgess (2002) found that communication patterns and family ambition, intellectual-social orientation and moral-religious orientation, play a part in an adolescent's choice of career. Factors such as the transition from high school, educational influences, academic issues, and gender also come into play (Ciccocioppo, Stewin, Madill, Montgomerie, Tovell, Armour, & Fitzsimmons, 2002).

2.2 Career Change

Career change, or the transition to a new career, is a complex process, since it involves adults whose previous experience affects how they acquire new values, norms and working methods. This is especially true when it involves retraining for another profession (Lazovski and Bakhar, 1997). People who move to a new career bring with them a wealth of previous experience from various professional contexts into the realm of the new profession (Tigchelaar, Brouwer, & Vermunt, 2010). Such a move – whether of one's own volition or due to external constraints – is fraught with difficulties, pressures and conflicts (Riverin, 2000), requiring the individual to make complex decisions involving reasoning and intuition, and a dispassionate appraisal of their personal and professional abilities, their professionalism and the realities of the workplace (Avissar & Dvir, 2009). In such a transition, people may experience various positive and negative emotions all at once – such as fear, anxiety, a sense of loss, denial, self-doubt, calm, compromise, options examination, searches for meaning, and matching their personal inclinations with their gender-based orientation (Avissar & Dvir, 2009).

The impulse for career change may vary. Among the reasons cited are a desire for self-growth (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002); dissatisfaction with one's existing occupation (Brown, 1998; Kaye, 1996); a desire for professional advancement or to enhance one's status (Brown, 1998; Feller & Walz, 1996); limited opportunities for advancement or change (Appelbaum & Santiago 1997); burnout or fatigue with one's current occupation (Kfir & Shani, 1993, 1996); and lack of support or stressful politics at one's current work environment (Adams, 1999).

Career change might take place within the framework of one's existing occupation by expanding one's skillset – or it can be radical, i.e. involving a switch to another line of work entirely (Sterrett, 1999). Changes of the latter kind reflect a trend of growing mobility and a greater range of opportunities in today's workplace. A strictly linear career path – of the sort that once saw people working at the same job throughout their working life, often for the same firm – is no longer valid for today's workers (Brown, 2001).

A successful radical switch is a two-step process: finding a suitable alternative occupation, and the right employer (Sterrett, 1999). It is a formidable challenge, especially when the views, skills and abilities acquired in the one's original line of work are not necessarily relevant to the new one. Accordingly, the modern-day process of professional socialization involves retraining and acquiring new knowledge, skills, and work methods. The retraining imparts new values, and a new professional identity that helps the student disengage from their old identity, while taking into account their particular intellectual and emotional needs and cultivating new personal relationships (Hecht, 2000). Studies by Kfir and Shani (1993, 1996) of students at the Beit Berl Teaching Training College found a strong correlation between burnout in the teaching profession and their desire to undergo retraining.

2.3 Reasons for switching to a teaching career

In their study of the profiles and motivations of people who had enrolled to retrain as teachers, Avissar&Dvir (2003) found that most were married women with children. Academically and professionally, most were also from fields related to education, such as social sciences, behavioral science, and educational studies. Others had come from other humanities disciplines, and only a minority had transferred from the natural or formal sciences. Only a small percentage of respondents had studied or worked in very different fields, such as engineers, lawyers, programmers, lab technicians or opticians. The overwhelming majority (90%) held a bachelor's degree, and the remainder had a master's degree as well. These findings point to external factors behind the decision to retrain as teachers, such as the economic crisis and tight job market, the prospect of combining family life with work, or the influence of a significant teaching-oriented figure. Internal reasons for the decision included having the right personality attributes for teaching, the hope to combine practice with theory, the desire for the relative autonomy afforded by teaching, the ability to implement new ideas and methods, and the need for an outlet for feminine expression.

Literature review suggests that, to date, no study has been made into the issue of career changes within the Arab population in Israel as a culturally distinctive minority – nor has there been any research into the motivations of those choosing to move to the teaching profession from fields very different from education and teaching. Accordingly, the present study set out to determine and examine why people in Israel's Arab sector opt to retrain as teachers, by documenting their career development over time.

3. Methodology

This study used quantitative tools as its methodology, since it allows for easier and more uniform analysis of the subjects' responses. Specifically, a questionnaire was drawn up that probed their reasoning when choosing electives in high school and their course of study in university, and when deciding to retrain as schoolteachers.

3.1 Research Tools

The questionnaire, which was compiled by the authors, was of the informative type, and included questions such as: "Which subjects did you choose as advanced-level electives in high school?" Rank your reasons for choosing these subjects in order of importance, from 1 ("Most important") to 9 ("Least important"). The validity of the questionnaire was ratified by five career counseling experts (see Appendix).

3.2 The study population

The study population consisted of 148 students, selected at random from the professional retraining course at the Sakhnin College for Teacher Education. The sample used represents approximately 40% of this population, drawn equally from first- and second-year students. Women represented 80.4% of the sample; 83.0% were aged 35 or younger. The religious distribution of the sample was 85.8% Muslim, 10.1% Christian, and the remainder were from the Druze community. In terms of background variables, 62.2% of the sample were married, the rest unmarried; 94.0% held a bachelor's degree, the remainder held a master's degree as well; 45% reported earning a minimum wage or less; 70.3% lived in towns or cities, the remainder in villages; 53.8% reported that their partner was also an academic, 31.5% reported that their partner had completed high school, and the remainder reported that their partners held a technical diploma.

3.3 Research procedure

The questionnaires were distributed by the researchers among the students in the study population, after a general explanation of the study's aims and its anonymity. They were asked to return the questionnaires to the researchers upon completion.

4. Findings

The primary objective of the present study was to establish the subjects' reasons for choosing the electives that they did in high school, their academic degree course, and for enrolling in the retraining program with a view to becoming schoolteachers.

The results showed that 73.0% of the students had chosen a scientific subject as one of their major electives in high school; 70% had also chosen foreign languages at an advanced level (4 points or higher in high school matriculation).

Approximately 22.3% had chosen a social sciences subject as their high school elective, 67% of whom had opted for a foreign language at an advanced level, as well. Table 1 presents the distribution of reasons cited for choosing these electives, and the ranking of importance given to each one.

Table 1: Reasons for choosing high school major subjects, ranked by importance (%)

Reason \ Ranking	High	Medium	Low	Total Ranking
Subjects I am good at or am attracted to	50.0	12.2	10.1	72.3
Doesn't require much effort on my part	6.8	17.6	11.5	35.9
My averages only allowed me to do to these subjects	12.2	10.8	14.2	37.2
Allows me to pursue studies that are in demand in the marketplace	10.1	25.0	14.9	50.0
I was attracted by the teachers who taught the subjects	10.1	13.5	18.2	41.8
Totals:	89.2	79.1	68.9	-

As the table shows, 50% of participants reported that their primary reason for choosing the elective subjects that they did was that they were good at them; 72.3% ranked this consideration as one of the top three reasons for doing so. Only 6.8% of respondents cited "Doesn't require much effort on my part" as their prime reason for choosing a subject as their elective; 35.9% ranked it among their top three considerations. Precisely half the respondents (50.0%) cited "Allows me to pursue studies that are in demand in the marketplace" among the top three considerations for their choice of electives. The table further reveals that parents and friends had little to no effect on the respondents' choice of electives in high school.

Table 2 shows the gap between intention and reality when it came to the respondents' choice of course at university or college. Only 37.8% of respondents reported to have planned to enroll in a humanities course, but in reality 73.0% of them ended up doing so. Although 12.3% of respondents had planned to study medicine or nursing, none of them managed to do so.

Table 2: Intent versus reality with regard to post-secondary studies

Subject	Had planned to study (%)	Actually studied (%)
Medicine	8.1	0
Social sciences and social work	40.4	27.0
Humanities	37.8	73.0
Nursing	9.5	0
Civil and electrical engineering	4.2	0
Totals	100.0	100.0

The findings also revealed that after graduation, 61.5% of respondents did not find work in the field they had studied at college or university, but in areas such as customer service, communications, sales, welfare services, accounts, and occasional office work.

Table 3 presents the reasons for the respondents' choices of post-secondary course. For 26.4%, the primary reason was "It was what I had always wanted to study"; for 23.6% it was because "It would enable me to work in my chosen profession." Only 5.4% based their choice primarily on the consideration that "It allowed me to study close to home." Approximately 41.9% of respondents ranked the statement "There is considerable demand for it in the workplace" among the top three reasons for choosing a subject.

Table 3: Reasons for choosing a subject in post-secondary education

Reason \ Importance	High	Medium	Low	Total
It was what I had always wanted to study	26.4	4.7	7.4	38.5
It would enable me to work in my chosen profession	23.6	9.5	6.8	39.9
It allowed me to study close to home	5.4	10.8	6.8	23.0
There is a considerable demand for it in the workplace	18.2	11.5	12.2	41.9
I thought it quite prestigious	12.2	23.0	16.2	51.4
It carries a sense of mission	6.1	10.8	10.1	27.0
Totals:	91.9	70.3	59.5	-

Here, too, we found little evidence that parents and friends had any influence on the respondents' choices.

Table 4 shows how that 33.8% and 27.7% of respondents cited “I did not find a suitable job in my chosen field” and “Further study will allow me to find more work and improve my financial situation” as first and second reasons, respectively, for enrolling in a retraining course. Only 4.1% noted it was mainly because of “burnout at my previous job,” and only 4.7% cited “low pay at my previous job” as the main reason.

Table 4: Primary reasons for enrolling in retraining course

Reason \ Importance	High	Medium	Low	Total
I did not find a suitable job in my chosen field	33.8	12.8	10.8	57.4
Further study will allow me to find more work and improve my financial situation	27.7	30.4	13.5	71.6
Low pay at my previous job	4.7	7.4	11.5	23.6
Burnout at my previous job	4.1	9.5	13.5	27.1
I realized I was not suited to my previous occupation	8.8	7.4	10.8	27.0
A change will be good for me	14.2	18.2	13.5	45.9
Totals:	93.3	85.7	73.6	-

Notably, 71.6% of respondents ranked “Further study will allow me to find more work and improve my financial situation” among their top three reasons for retraining. The respondents’ answers indicate that parents, friends, and the government’s recent Ofek Hadash (“New Horizon”) reforms of working conditions and pay for elementary and junior high school staff in Israel, all had little impact on their decision to retrain.

Table 5 presents the reasons for the respondents’ decision to retrain specifically as a school teachers.

Table 5: Reasons for retraining as a schoolteacher

Reason \ Importance	High	Medium	Low	Total
Suits my present stage of life (satisfaction, self-fulfillment, maturity, sense of mission, fits in with what I believe)	55.4	11.5	8.8	75.7
May lead to other work or integration opportunities in the workplace	29.1	39.9	12.2	81.2
Will allow me to combine work and family life	11.5	21.6	29.7	62.8
Financially rewarding	2.0	13.5	18.2	33.7
Totals	98.0	86.5	68.7	-

It shows that 55.4% of respondents cited “Suits my present stage of life (satisfaction, self-fulfillment, maturity, sense of mission, fits in with what I believe)” as their primary reason for entering the teaching profession; 29.1% attributed it to “May lead to other work or integration opportunities in the workplace,” and only 2.0% said that it was mainly because it was “Financially rewarding.”

The second aim of this study was to examine the reasons for the respondents’ initial career choice and subsequent decision to change careers. To identify the dominant patterns in the respondents’ replies, K-means cluster analysis was used to identify broad groupings based on shared characteristics in relation to the eight variables used to describe their choices over time, from high school to the present. To this end, variances within each cluster were minimized, and variances between clusters maximized. The algorithm used in this method calculated the common squared Euclidean distance between the measures, to establish the order of members in each cluster.

Table 6 shows the most common profiles based on the highest-ranking arguments and considerations cited by the respondents when making their decision at each stage.

The analysis revealed that 70.2% of respondents fell within Cluster #1 – namely, they matched the profile of a woman who had chosen one scientific subject and one humanities subject (including languages) as her advanced-level electives at high school because those were her good subjects; who managed to enroll in her chosen course in college or university but upon graduation failed to find suitable work in her chosen field and therefore opted to retrain as a schoolteacher, since this offered the prospect of more work and opportunities in the future labor market. The typical profile of members of Cluster #2 was a woman who had similarly chosen a scientific subject as her high school elective – because it was her strong suit – but no humanities subject; who failed to get into her chosen course at university or college or to find suitable work after graduation, and was retraining as a schoolteacher in the hope that it might improve her employment prospects.

Table 6: Clustering of respondents based on variables

Variables \ Cluster #	1	2
Gender	Woman	Woman
No. of scientific subject electives in high school	1	1
No. of humanities subject electives in high school	1	0
Foreign languages included in high school electives	Yes	Yes
Ranking of reason "Subjects I am good at" when choosing electives	2	3
Ranking of reason "It was what I always wanted to study"	1	7
Ranking of "I didn't find suitable work in my chosen subject" as reason for changing career in general	2	3
Ranking of "May lead to other work or other employment opportunities" as reason for retraining as schoolteacher	2	2
Cluster distribution	70.2%	29.8%

Table 7 shows the respondents' most common profiles, based on the primary arguments and considerations cited in relation to the labor market and economic situation.

Table 7: Clustering of respondents based on background variables and reasons cited for career-related decisions

Variables \ Cluster #	1	2
Gender	Woman	Woman
No. of scientific subject electives in high school	1	1
No. of humanities subject electives in high school	1	1
Foreign languages included in high school electives	Yes	Yes
Ranking of reason "Will allow me to pursue studies in line with are in demand in the marketplace" when choosing electives	3	4
Ranking of reason "the profession is in high demand and will make it easier for me to find work" when choosing electives	1	6
Ranking of reason "Further study will allow me to find more work and improve my financial situation" when deciding to change career	2	3
Ranking of reason "May lead to other work or integration opportunities in the workplace" as reason for retraining as schoolteacher	2	2
Cluster distribution	65.5%	34.5%

Nearly two-thirds (65.5%) of respondents fell under Cluster #1, which is typically a woman who had chosen one scientific subject and one humanities subject as high school electives (apart from foreign languages), in the expectation that this would enable her to pursue post-secondary studies in fields that are most in demand in the workplace; who succeeded in completing such a course at university or college; who had subsequently chosen to undergo retraining in the hope of improving her financial situation; and who had opted for teaching specifically because she felt it would lead to other work or opportunities in future. The remainder (34.5%) of respondents belonged to Cluster #2, whose typical profile was of a woman who had chosen one scientific and one humanities subject as high school electives (apart from foreign languages) in the hope of pursuing certain post-secondary studies, rather than for financial considerations; who found herself settling for a university or college course in a field that is not in high demand in the workplace; who had finally decided to change her career and pursue further studies because it would allow her to find more work and improve her financial situation; and who had chosen the teaching profession in particular because it offered the promise of improved employment prospects in future.

5. Discussion

The findings show that the respondents' choice of electives in high school was based on personal inclination and on their perception of what would help them to pursue post-secondary studies in fields that are in high demand in the workplace. These findings are consistent with those of previous studies that found that personal preference and workplace demands were the dominant considerations when choosing high school matriculation subjects (Abdah, 2009; Esters, 2007; Richardson & Watt, 2005).

In addition, the findings reveal a notable gap between intention and reality in post-secondary studies, with most respondents reporting having hoped to pursue courses in social sciences, social work, medicine or nursing, but finding themselves having to settle for a humanities course, instead. In particular, a certain “deterministic cycle” was apparent in the respondents’ decisions about their future: they had started out by choosing a prestigious service-related profession such as medicine, nursing or social work in the hope of greater independence and reduced dependency on state institutions, to help them cope with the barriers and exclusion that they encounter as members of an ethnic minority, which prevent them from competing in the labor market on equal terms with the rest of the population (Awad, 2007). Since similar structural barriers impede their entry into their chosen courses in higher education (Hendin, 2009), they settle for academic studies in a humanities field in the hope that they can at least retrain as schoolteachers. The findings also indicate that when choosing a post-secondary course the respondents are guided by much the same considerations and arguments they had used when choosing electives in high school, often settling for fields other than what they had intended or are suited for because of the structural obstacles they encounter in Israeli universities and colleges (Abdah, 2009).

Among the reasons cited for career change, the one that recurred most often was that further studies would allow them to find more work and improve their financial situation and mental well-being – and because they had been unable to find work in their chosen field of study. This indicates that they have a positive image about the world of work and its central role in their lives (Dolliver, 1999); of the mental well-being, sense of maturity, self-fulfillment, and mission that teaching gives them (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002); and the perception that it would improve their employment prospects in the Israeli labor market, notwithstanding its discriminatory practices (Avissar and Dvir, 2009).

In the analysis of responses based on various variables, two broad profiles emerged, the dominant one (representing 70% of the sample) being of women who had chosen a scientific subject, a social sciences subject and foreign languages as their high school electives; who did so largely based on their personal preference and because they had a particular profession in mind. The main reasons these women gave for wanting a career change in general, and to enter the teaching profession in particular, was because they had been unable to find suitable work in their chosen field and because they believed that teaching would lead to other work and opportunities in the workplace in future. The predominance of this profile within the sample may be explained by the women’s need to contend with barriers both within the Arab society and the structural obstacles to non-Jewish ethnic minorities within the Israeli workplace (Awad, 2007).

In recent years there has been increasing awareness of women’s low social status in Arab society and of the ethnic and gender-based discrimination in the Israeli workplace, which in turn may have made Arab women work even harder to deal with the challenges and obstacles facing them now and in the future. Studies show that gender, ethnic status, age, and educational issues all have a marked impact on individuals’ choice of courses in post-secondary education (Ciccocioppo et. al., 2002; Felder & Brent, 2005; Segers, Inceoglu, Vloeberghs, Bartram, & Henderickx, 2010).

The profile of the great majority of the study sample indicates the lengths to which Arab women in Israel must go in anticipation of these challenges. It begins in high school, when they choose electives in natural and social sciences and languages to give themselves with the greatest possible range of options in future. Studies show that adolescents’ choice of career is governed by their awareness of the potential ethnic and gender-related discrimination that they may face in the labor market in future and of the barriers they will encounter when trying to get into post-secondary institutions, as well as by their ethnic identity and their self-efficacy (Gushue, 2006).

The respondents in our study see retraining to become a schoolteacher as a means of securing new opportunities in the marketplace after being denied the opportunity to work in their original chosen field. While their choice of teaching in particular may still related to the socio-cultural context of their lives, it may also be due to the prospect of work and financial security following the OfekHadash and Oz Litmurah (“Courage to Change”) reforms of recent years, which improved schoolteachers’ pay and status. Studies show that choosing a career is affected by considerations such as the desire for achievement within the family, intellectual-cultural orientation and moral-religious orientation (Hargrove, Creagh & Burgess, 2002) – as well as job security, good working conditions and attractive salary (Tella, Ayeni, & Popoola, 2007).

Analysis of the retrainees in terms of their background variables and marketable skills found that they fell into two broad types:

one – representing some 65% of the sample – was of women who had majored in sciences, social science and languages; who had believed that their chosen profession would be in demand, that further training would enable them to secure more work and financial security; that the teaching profession in particular would provide further opportunities for work. Significantly, this group of respondents had not attached great importance to the consideration of subjects that would allow them to pursue post-secondary studies in high-demand fields when choosing their electives in high school. This suggests that they did not have the benefit of professional career counseling at school that would have provided them with a more far-sighted and holistic view of the difficulties faced by the Arab minority in the Israeli workplace. Findings such as these are particularly significant given that the parents of the students reportedly had almost no influence over their choice throughout the period in question – in marked contrast with other populations, where, according to other studies, the parents do have a substantial influence on their children's career choice (Esters, 2007; Savicks & Lent, 1994).

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