



What are the Effects of Students' Preferences on Choosing Religious and other Schools in Turkey?

Başaran GENÇDOĞAN¹

¹ Assoc. Prof. Dr., Atatürk University, Turkey, basaran@atauni.edu.tr

Abstract

In this study the differences between students who preferred to study in Islamic high schools (Imam Hatip) and other high schools in terms of the following issues were examined: a) whether or not students were religious b) whether or not students' parents were religious c) whether or not parents lived in rural areas or in the city d) parents' income level e) students' basic education (grades 1-8) academic achievement f) gender. The study group comprised 500 high school students: 322 students studying at Islamic high schools (Imam Hatip), and 178 students studying at other high schools. Quest Religious Orientation Scale and Islamic Religious Affinity Evaluation Scale were used to collect data. The findings showed that Islamic high school (Imam Hatip) students had more affinities towards religion. It was also found that the parents of the majority of Islamic high school (Imam Hatip) students lived in rural areas. These students had the tendencies in having dogmatic beliefs instead of questioning and improving their way of looking at religion. Especially students who preferred Islamic high schools (Imam Hatip) were found to be low academic achievers in basic education. It was also found that male students had more religious affinities compared to female students. The latest regulations by HEC (Higher Education Council) to decrease students' interests for Islamic high schools (Imam Hatip) did not only seriously affect students who preferred these high schools but also students who preferred to go to other high schools. It also decreases the ratio of vocational and technical education institutions which perform educational processes effectively in the 21st century.

Keywords: *Islamic high school, Imam Hatip, Vocational School, Islamic piety, religion tendency*

Introduction

Being active in a field, producing something for the benefit of others and doing it for the purpose of attainment form the basis of professions (Kuzgun, 2000). Professions can be defined as activities which are based on systematic skills and knowledge acquired through education. The rules of professions are determined by the society. Profession is also the most important source of one's identity. Professions help individuals gain respect from others, having contact with people, having a good status in the society and feeling important.

If a person prefers to be in a profession that involves interesting activities, his interest in that profession may positively affect his motivation. Professional values are related with job satisfaction attained through factors such as income, reward etc. Professional values can be classified as intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic values constitute job-related factors such as improving skills, creativity, intriguing job activities. On the other hand extrinsic values are related with values such as income, job safety, recognition, reward etc. which are affected by the physical job factors (Ginzberg, 1972).

People who want to choose their profession usually put job values in order of importance and choose their profession accordingly. People's expectancies from a profession vary depending on the variables such as job, age, socio-economic status and gender (Piskin, 2007) Therefore students before should be tested and given information about professions and guided to choose their high schools according their choice of profession. Yet students choose their high schools under the influence of many psycho-social and economic factors (Splete and Freeman-George, 1985; Naylor, 1986, Robberts, 2002). In Eastern societies students are affected by their parents and social environment and choose to go to high schools for the profession which they are not interested at all (Piskin,

2002). Students also work in professions which do not match with their field of study. In this case education only serves for improving individual's knowledge but nothing more.

In contemporary Turkish education system there are various types of high schools (general high schools, Technical high schools, fine arts high schools, teacher schools, super high schools, Anatolian high schools, Imam-Hatip high schools, Sports high schools, Girl's high schools, Science high schools). It is possible to divide these schools into two groups according their characteristics. General high schools which prepare students for higher education are in the first group while vocational and technical schools form the second group. Imam-Hatip High school which is one of the vocational and technical high schools gives religious education and offer programs for training reverends.

Entrance criteria for Higher Education institutions are determined by CHE (Council of Higher Education) (OSYM, 2007). Students who graduate from general high schools are offered high composite score which makes it easier for their enrolment in universities. On the other hand students, who graduate from vocational and technical high schools, are given low composite score because it is thought that they do receive high quality of education in these schools. Therefore these students have more difficulty entering universities.

In Turkey there are many job opportunities for graduates of vocational and technical high schools both in private and public sector. Yet it is too difficult for graduates of Islamic high school (Imam Hatip)s to find jobs in private sector, because in our country religion related jobs are run by the public sector. Parents prefer to send their children to Islamic high school (Imam Hatip)s because they want their children to get "true knowledge of Islamic religion". Besides there is a social and political pressure on Islamic high school (Imam Hatip) graduates to enrol in universities. This situation has been considered as a serious social and educational problem. There is a common view that the majority of the students come from parents of low socio-economic status who reside in rural areas and that these families and their children have high religious affinities. Yet there is no any research studies confirming these views. Therefore this study aims to find if there is any difference between students who prefer to study in Islamic high schools (Imam Hatip) and students who prefer to study in other high schools in terms of religious affinity, family structure and academic achievement.

Method

Study Group

The study group comprised 500 high school students. 322 students studying at Islamic high schools (Imam Hatip), and 178 students studying at other high schools. 135 of these students are female and 365 of them are male and their age average is 16,5.

Data Collection Instruments

Quest Religious Orientation Scale: In this study Maltby and Day's (1998) Quest Religious Orientation Scale which was adapted from Batson and Schoenrade's (1991a, 1991b) original Quest Religious Orientation Scale was utilized. The scale had 12 items. Scoring for the items is as follows: 1= No, 2= I don't know, 3= Yes (Shaw & Joseph, 2004). Translation of the scale into Turkish and reliability and validity tests of the scale were made by "Yazar" (2005). Islamic religion in Turkey does not encourage questioning. Parents have a dogmatic way of teaching their children about Islam. Therefore, in the original scale the high scores imply high religious orientation, while in the Turkish culture low scores show high religious orientation.

Islamic Religious Affinity Evaluation Scale: This scale was developed by “Yazar” (2005) to assess Islamic religious affinity. The scale had 11 questions with three levels (“Never”=1, “Sometimes”=2, “Always”=3). Test-retest correlation (r) was found to be 0.93 and Cronbach alpha coefficient was found to be 0.93. Similar scale reliability correlation with the scale developed by Karaca (2000) was found to be meaningful: $r=0.12$ ($p<0.001$). High scores show high Islamic religion affinity. Besides, the participants who scored 23 and above were considered religious while the participants who scored 22 and below were considered non-religious. The scale had questions on the following subjects: a) going to the mosque b) Friday prayers c) praying d) starting a work with bismillah e) fasting f) believing in God g) being covered h) reading Koran i) saying the shahadah (The Shahadah is the Muslim declaration of belief in the oneness of God and acceptance of Muhammad as his final prophet) j) considering one self as religious.

Findings

In this study meaningful differences were found between the students who study at Islamic high school (Imam Hatip) and other high school students ($\chi^2=23.01$, $p<.05$). 93 % of the Islamic high school (Imam Hatip) students ($n=299$) had religious affinities while in other high schools 78% of the students had religious affinities. These findings show that students who preferred to study at Islamic high school (Imam Hatip) had high Islamic religious affinities.

Meaningful differences were found between Islamic high school (Imam Hatip) students and other high school students in terms of parents’ places of residence ($\chi^2=110.75$, $p<.05$). 57% of the Islamic high school (Imam Hatip) students ($n=184$) and 9% of other high school students ($n=16$) reside in villages or towns. These findings show that students who preferred to study at Islamic high school (Imam Hatip) come from rural areas. No meaningful differences were found between Imam Hatip High school students and other high school students in terms of students’ gender ($\chi^2=2.13$, $p>.05$). This finding shows that gender does not play an important role in students’ high school preferences. Meaningful differences were found between Islamic high school (Imam Hatip) and other high school students in terms of parents’ income ($\chi^2= 87.61$, $p<.05$). Parents of 71% of students ($n=230$) studying at Islamic high school (Imam Hatip) had low income level while parents of 38% of the students ($n=67$) had low income level. These findings show that students who preferred Islamic high school (Imam Hatip)s came from parents with low income level.

Meaningful differences were found between Islamic high school (Imam Hatip) students and other high school students in terms of their basic education academic achievement ($\chi^2=19.68$, $p<.05$). Basic education academic achievement of 28% of Islamic high school (Imam Hatip) students ($n=89$) is very low while academic achievement of 20% of the students is very good ($n=65$). On the other hand basic education academic achievement of 18 % of other high school students ($n=32$) is very low while 37% of them is very good ($n=66$). These findings imply that students who preferred Islamic high schools (Imam Hatip) have very low basic education academic achievement. No meaningful differences were found between Islamic high school (Imam Hatip) and other high school students’ evaluation of their parents’ religious orientation ($\chi^2= 1.49$, $p>.05$). This finding shows that there is no difference between Islamic high school (Imam Hatip) and other high school students in terms of their way of perceiving their parents’ religious orientation. 62 % of both Islamic high school (Imam Hatip) and other high school students thought that their parents had high religious orientation.

Table 1 Findings related to religious high school and other high school students

	<u>Islamic high school</u>		<u>Other high school</u>		χ^2
	N	%	N	%	
Religious Affinities					
Low	23	7.1	39	21.9	
High	299	92.9	139	78.1	23.01*
Places of residence					
Villages/towns	184	57.14	16	8.99	
City	138	42.86	162	91.01	110.75*
Gender					
Female	80	24.84	55	30.89	
Male	242	75.16	123	69.11	2.13
Income level					
Very low	230	71.4	67	37.6	
Low	79	24.5	54	30.3	87.61*
High	13	4.0	57	32.0	
Academic achievement					
Very low	65	20.2	66	37.1	
Low	168	52.2	80	44.9	
Good	75	23.3	30	16.9	19.68*
Very good	14	4.3	2	1.1	
Religious orientation of parents					
Low	9	2.8	2	1.1	
Medium	113	35.1	64	36.0	1.49
High	200	62.1	112	62.9	

(*) $p < .05$

Comparisons related to Islamic religious affinities and religious orientations are shown in Table 2, and Table 3.

Table 2 Means and standard deviations of Islamic Religious Affinity and Religious Orientation

	N	<u>Islamic Religious Affinity</u>			<u>Religious Orientation</u>		
		M	Sd	t	M	Sd	t
School							
Imam Hatip high school	322	26.49	2.85		20.66	9.01	
Other high schools	178	23.90	2.72	9.881*	21.06	4.65	0.553
Gender							
Female	135	24.80	2.47		20.21	4.89	
Male	365	25.86	3.21	3.463*	21.01	8.56	1.035
Place of Residence							
Village-town	200	26.71	3.10		21.19	10.86	
City	300	24.82	2.80	7.075*	20.55	4.62	0.898

* $p < 0.05$ significant.

Meaningful differences were found between Islamic high school (Imam Hatip) and other high school students in terms of their religious affinities ($t=9.881$, $p < .05$). The average of Islamic high school (Imam Hatip) students' religious affinities is higher than that of other high school students (Table 2). This finding shows that religious affinities of Islamic high

school (Imam Hatip) students are higher than those of other high school students. No meaningful differences were found between Islamic high school (Imam Hatip) and other high school students in terms of their religious orientation ($t=0.553$, $p>.05$). This finding implies that religious orientation of both Islamic high school (Imam Hatip) and other high school students is in the same level.

Table 3. *Analysis of Variance for related to Islamic religious affinity and religious orientations*

	N	Islamic Religious Affinity			Religious Orientation		
		M	Sd	F	M	Sd	F
Parents' Income Level							
Very low	297	26.03	3.05		21.22	9.29	
Low	133	25.23	2.84	11.05*	20.01	4.39	1.16
High	70	24.26	3.12		20.57	4.89	
Total	500	25.57	3.07		20.80	7.74	
Student Perception of their parents' religious orientation							
Low	11	26.27	4.20		23.63	6.78	
Medium	177	25.03	3.03	4.12*		21.83	11.28
High	312	25.84	3.00		20.12	4.62	
Total	500	25.57	3.07		20.80	7.74	
Students' basic education level academic achievement							
Very low	131	25.44	2.59		19.34	4.76	
Low	248	25.47	3.31		21.52	9.82	
Good	105	26.03	3.06	1.01	21.00	4.83	2.33
Very good	16	25.25	2.67		20.31	4.38	
Total	500	25.57	3.07		20.80	7.74	

* $p<.05$ significant

Meaningful differences were found between female and male students in terms of their Islamic religious affinities ($t=3.463$, $p<.05$). The average of male students' Islamic affinities is higher than those of female students (Table 2). This finding shows that Islamic affinities of male students are higher than those of female students. No meaningful differences were found between female and male students in terms of their religious orientation ($t=1.035$, $p>.05$). This finding shows that both female and male students have the same level of religious orientation.

Meaningful differences between students' Islamic religious affinities and their parents' places of residence ($t=7.075$, $p<.05$) were found. The average of Islamic religious affinities of students whose parents reside in villages or towns is higher than those of students whose parents reside in the city (Table 2). This finding implies that religious affinities of students whose parents reside in villages or towns are higher than those of students whose parents reside in the city. No meaningful differences were found between students' religious orientation in terms of their parents' places of residence ($t=0.898$, $p>.05$). This finding shows that students whose parents reside in village-town and students whose parents live in the city have the same level of religious orientation.

In order to determine if there is any difference between students' Islamic religious affinities in terms of their parents' income level, LSD Post Hoc test was conducted. The results showed that students whose parents had very low income level ($M=26.03$, $s.d=3.05$)

had higher Islamic religious affinity compared to those whose parents had low income level ($M=25.23$, $s.d.=2.84$) and those whose parents had very high income level ($M=24.26$, $s.d.=3.12$). No meaningful differences were found between students' religious orientation in terms of their parents' income level ($F_{(2,497)}=1.16$, $p>.05$). LSD Post Hoc test showed meaningful differences between students' perceptions of their parents' religious orientation and their Islamic affinities ($F_{(2,497)}=4.12$, $p<.05$). The test results showed that students who perceived their parents' religious orientation high ($M=25.84$, $s.d.=3.00$) had higher religious affinities than those who perceived their parents' religious orientation as moderate ($M=25.03$, $s.d.=3.03$). The LSD Post Hoc test showed meaningful differences between students' religious orientation and the way they evaluated their parents' religious attitudes ($F_{(2,497)}=3.54$, $p<.05$). The test showed that students who evaluated their parents' religious attitudes high ($M=20.12$, $s.d.=4.62$) had lower religious orientation than those who evaluated their parents' religious attitudes as moderate ($M=21.83$, $s.d.=11.28$). This also shows that these students do not satisfactorily question their religious beliefs. The post hoc analysis showed no meaningful differences between students' basic education level academic achievement and their religious affinities ($F_{(3,497)}=1.01$, $p>.05$). The analysis also showed no meaningful differences between students' basic education level academic achievement and their religious orientations ($F_{(3,497)}=2.33$, $p>.05$).

Discussion

This study showed that the majority of Imam Hatip High school students are the children of rural families. These students had tendencies of dogmatic beliefs instead of questioning their religious beliefs. Therefore it could be argued that Islamic high school (Imam Hatip) students had more religious affinities than other high schools students. Considering the fact that the perception of these students on their parents' religious beliefs is relatively higher compared to other high school students, this finding is not a surprise. It could be said that parents whose religious affinities are high can ask their children to conform to religious values. Low income level can also affect this situation. It could also be argued that in the future these students can have dilemma between their religious beliefs and scientific thinking even if they successfully complete their higher education.

The study showed that students who preferred Islamic high school (Imam Hatip) come from low income families. Low income level may also be an indication of low education level. This could also show that these students have fatalistic attitudes. Besides, students who preferred Islamic high school (Imam Hatip)s had low basic education level achievement. Islamic religious affinities of male students were found to be higher than those of female students.

In Turkey as the income level decreased people had more Islamic affinities because they saw Islam as the only way of salvation. An extreme inclining towards religion brings bigotry. It could be argued that if income level gets higher inclining towards religion will also decrease. It is therefore important that the government should accelerate economic investments in the Eastern part of Turkey. Besides, the latest regulations by HEC (Higher Education Council) to decrease students' interests for Islamic high school (Imam Hatip)s did not only seriously affect students who preferred these high schools but also students who preferred to go to other high schools.

In Turkey the ratio of vocational and technical schools compared to other high schools is 31% (MONE Statistics, 2007). Eventually this situation increases inequalities in education and attenuates vocational technical education. It also decreases the ratio of vocational and

technical education institutions which perform educational processes effectively in the 21st century.

References

- Batson, C. D., & Schoenrade, P. (1991a). Measuring religion as quest: (1) Validity concerns. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 30, 416–429.
- Batson, C. D., & Schoenrade, P. (1991b). Measuring religion as quest: (2) Reliability concerns. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 30, 430–442.
- Gençdoğan, B. (2005) *Dini Yönelim Ölçeği ve Quest Religious Orientation Scale'nin geçerlik ve güvenilirliği*, (Validity and Reliability of Islamic Religious Affinity Evaluation Scale and Quest Religious Orientation Scale, Unpublished research).
- Ginzberg, E. (1972) Restatement of the Theory of Occupational Choice, *Vocational Guidance Quarterly*, 20(3),169-176.
- Karaca, F. (2000) Din psikolojisinde metod sorunu ve bir dindarlık ölçeğinin Türk toplumuna standardarizasyonu. *EKEV Akademi Dergisi*, 2 (4), 4,187-202. (Method Problems to Religious Psychology, EKEV Journal of Academy, 2 (4), 4,187-202)
- Kuzgun, Y. (2000). *Meslek Danışmanlığı, Uygulamalar Kuramlar*. Nobel Yayın Dağıtım, Ankara (Occupation Counseling, Application and Theory, Nobel Publishing, Ankara)
- Maltby, J., & Day, L. (1998). Amending a measure of the quest religious orientation: Applicability of the scales use among religious and non-religious persons. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 25, 517–522.
- MONE Statistics, (2007) *2006-2007 yılı Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı İstatistikleri*, MEB yayınları, Ankara. (2006-2007 years the Ministry of Education Statistics, MEB publishing, Ankara)
- Naylor, M. (1986) *Family Influences on Employment and Education*. Overview. ERIC Digest No:56, ERIC Product (071): ERIC Digests (selected) (073) ERIC Identifier:ED272702.
- Nevil, D.D. and Super, D.E. (1986) *The Saliency Inventory: Theory, application, and research*. Palo Alto, C.A.: Consulting Psychologist Press.
- OSYM (2007) *ÖSS 2007 Yükseköğretim Programları ve Kontejanları Kılavuzu*. Ankara:ÖSYM Yayınları. (ÖSS High school programs and quota guide, Ankara:ÖSYM publishing)
- Pişkin, M. (2002) Çocukların kariyer planlamasında ailenin rolü. 2001 yılı Aile Raporu. (Ed. İrfan Çayboylu) 245-271, Ankara: T.C. Başbakanlık Aile Araştırma Kurumu Yayınları. (*Role of Family to children' carrier plans, Family report of 2001 year*, (Ed. İrfan Çayboylu) 245-271, Ankara: T.R. Institution Family Research of Prime Ministry)
- Pişkin, M. (2007) *İlk ve ortaöğretim öğrencilerimizin kariyer gelişimleri ve yönlendirme süreçlerinde gözlenen sorunlar ve çözüm önerileri*. 2006 yılı Türk Eğitim Sisteminde Yeni Paradigma Arayışları Sempozyumu. 55-97, Ankara: Pozitif Matbaacılık. (Problems and solution suggestions in process of carrier developing of elementary and junior high school students. New Paradigm Searches in Turk Education System Symposium, 55-97, Ankara: Pozitif Press)

- Robberts, S. (2002) *Parents*. University of Minnesota, Counseling and Career Services. <http://www.crk.umn.edu/people/services/CAREER/parents.html>
- Shaw, A., & Joseph, S. (2004) Principal components analysis of Maltby and Day's (1998) amended quest religious orientation scale: a replication of the three component structure, *Personality and Individual Differences*, 37, 1425–1430.
- Sharf, R.S. (2001) *Applying Career Development Theory to Counseling*. Brook/Coole Publishing Company, Pacific Grove, California.
- Splete, H. and Freeman-George, A. (1985) Family Influences on the Career Development of Young Adults. *Journal of Career Development*, 12,1,55-64.
- Super, D.E. (1990) *A life-span, life-space approach to career development*. San Fransisco: Josey-Bass.