

Transitioning into Teaching as a Second Career: Skill Carry-Over, Professional Experience, and Classroom Performance

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Abstract

The present study aims to identify the motivations of those who move to the teaching profession from pre-existing careers in other areas, and to explore the transferrable skills and experiences they bring with them to the classroom. Participants were selected from among students in a teacher-training program, all of whom had previous careers—in the military, as counselors, as security staff, and in other areas—and all of whom were in the final stages of their in-classroom practical teaching experience. The study used a semi-structured focus group method to elicit self-reports of these student-teachers' experiences of classroom management, student interactions, and actual approach to pedagogy, as well as their motives for seeking a change of career. The study revealed that the most important factors motivating the switch were a combination of economic ones, such as career stability and salary, and personal, social factors such as the desire to transmit one's values to the next generation. The results also pointed strongly toward the utility, relevance, and usefulness of prior experience in other careers, and participants noted their own preparedness to manage chaotic social situations or draw on real-world experiences to explain complex or morally difficult ideas. The study supports recommendations that teacher training programmes focus on practical aspects of second-career teacher preparation, and support them in adjusting to their new roles and new identities.

Keywords: career transition, class management, motivation, new teachers, teaching methods

1. Introduction

1.1 Teaching as a Second Career

Teacher preparation and continuing education programs serve a variety of students. Some are straight out of their undergraduate education, and intend to move into teaching as their first adult job. Others, though, are transplants, having joined a teaching program after developing professional expertise and meaningful careers in other professions. Those students, who naturally tend to be older, bring with them job-specific skills and experiences of workplace dynamics in the wider world that have the potential to change both their approach and their performance as teachers.

This group thus deserves special attention as a sub-population of potential teachers. Their reasons for joining the profession may be different from those of single-career teachers; their skill and experiences may qualify them for success or weigh them down as they attempt to adjust; and their time in graduate-level teacher education may be characterized by unique problems, learning challenges, or needs.

The literature on these topics is somewhat limited, but it has been studied. However, the available findings must be understood in the context of more general research on teachers' motives for choosing the profession as a first career.

1.2 Factors That Contribute to the Choice of Teaching as a Career

There are several factors that contribute to many people's choices to become teachers. These can be grouped into internal factors and external factors. Internal factors include the search for an enjoyable job, the desire to help create change through education, the desire to transfer important personal values to one's students, and the pre-existing desire to teach from a young age. External factors include the promise of clear material benefits, job security despite economic change, or the relative accessibility of the profession relative to some others (e.g., teaching typically does not demand significant physical prowess). These factors are all relevant to both first-career

and second-career teachers, although there are a number of complications when it comes to the latter group, as addressed in section 1.4 just below.

1.2.1 Internal Factors

Many studies have shown the impact of internal factors on individual to choose the teaching profession. These factors are personal, psychological, and emotional—they involve personal life goals as well as values and aspirations. For instance, a general love of children's education is among the most common reasons given for decisions to become teachers (Hart Research Associates, 2010; Edmonds, Sharp, & Benfield, 2002; Woodrow, 2005). This enthusiasm is a question of both personal enjoyment on the part of the prospective teacher, and of belief in the importance of the work.

Other studies have shown that social responsibility is an important contributing motivation. In one large study, teachers in a graduate-level preparatory program in Australia identified the desire to serve one's community through teaching as one of the most common and one of the most heavily weighted factors (Hunter-Johnson, 2015; Watt & Richardson, 2007). A closely linked motive involves the more general wish to make a difference. For instance, one study found that a combination of three related motives—the desires to make change, to educate young people, and to stay relevant to one's community—all contributed significantly to participants' choice of a teaching career (Manuel & Hughes, 2006).

A similar and closely related factor is the feeling that one has valuable knowledge and skills to offer to others. This conviction is often the result of personal experiences, whether during school or before it. Previous experience conducting trainings, giving instructions, or providing guidance—for instance from working as a trainer or providing private lesson in various fields—can often lead individuals to become teachers, as they believe the job is a good match for their abilities (Sylvia, 2017; Anthony, 2007).

Finally, a big-picture perspective is provided by Att and Richardson (2007), whose detailed analysis relies on the Theory of Expected Values and the Social Cognitive Theory to demonstrate that career choices is almost invariably based on the chooser's personal convictions: most job-seekers attempt to balance personal appreciation for the profession with their expectations about how draining, difficult, and time-consuming it is.

1.2.2 External Factors

External factors are material, social, and economic conditions that affect the availability or appeal of a particular job. In this case, the external factor influencing the selection of individuals for the teaching profession is most often related to the gains and benefits material profitability (Halawa, 2008). Salary and job-linked benefits were also found to be among the chief motives for those seeking teaching jobs (Howes & Goodman-Delahunty, 2015; Raggi & Troman, 2008).

For many teachers, those financial draws combine with the stable nature of teaching jobs (Howes & Goodman-Delahunty, 2015) which in many parts of the world are unioned, well-regulated, widely respected, and very safe (Saban, 2003). For instance, for job seekers used to part-time work, short contracts, or other forms of financial instability, teaching represents the promise of stable long-term work, and is an attractive career specifically for that reason (Klassen, Al-Dhafri, Hannok, & Betts, 2011; Priyadharshini & Robinson-Pant, 2003).

Other forms of stability are also relevant, such as consistency and availability of work within a preferred city or region, often with minimal risk of being transferred elsewhere unless by choice (Hildebrandt, 2018). Hildebrandt (2018) specifically compared two distinct national settings—Canada and Oman—to better gauge the impact of these external factors, and found that they seemed to have greater influence in Oman, where the economic conditions of many jobs are less positive than they are in Canada.

1.3 Religious Aspects of Teaching as a Career

This article is concerned, not just with why teachers choose their profession, but more narrowly with the context of Saudi Arabia and the teaching profession there. Unavoidably, there are religious aspects to the choice, as there are to teaching materials, approaches, and methods across the country. Previous work has reported that religious motivation can be an important element of career choice for some individuals (Lantieri, 2001; Palmero, 1998.) For instance, among a group of teachers in a Catholic preparatory program, most participants described what they called "spiritual appeal" as being a strong motivator for the work (Mayes & Sagmiller, 2002).

From a specifically Islamic perspective, education itself has religious value. Islam promotes both giving and receiving education as important virtues; the Qur'an says, "Are those who know equal to those who know not? It is only men of understanding who will remember" (Az-zumer, 9). The implication is that those who can should seek the lessons to be found in the Qur'an's songs and verses.

More directly, the Prophet said, “God and his angels, the people of heaven and earth, even the ant in its burrow, and even the whale, pray to whom teaches well to people.” The implication there does not need to be elaborated upon, of course.

The long-standing understanding of this responsibility relates to the traditional professions. These were often familial jobs, passed down from parents to sons and organized along family lines (Rashid, 2006). For many, though, that kind of multi-generationally stable work is no longer available; artisans and craftspeople have been replaced by factories, for instance, and shepherds by large farms.

That brings us, finally, to second-career teachers. In a modern economic environment, the idea of changing professions—so-called “professional transformation”—is inevitable. It is simply a feature of the times. And it is just as common among teachers as it is elsewhere: Richardson and Watt (2006) investigated the background characteristics and teaching motivations for individuals entering teacher education programs across three universities in Australia. They found that over a third of the nearly 1,700 participants had previously pursued another career (most commonly entertainment, science, or management).

1.4 Challenges and Differences Specific to Second-Career Teachers

Choosing teaching as a second career differs from choosing it as one’s initial career choice. The difference lies primarily in the grounds one has for comparison: second-career teachers are choosing their new profession, not simply based on their general expectations, but based on how they perceive its benefits and advantages relative to those offered by some specific prior career.

The relevant internal and external factors are thus slightly different. Internal factors include uneasiness with one’s current work, for example, alongside the search for a more enjoyable job. External factors often include dismissal, relocation, or the inability to continue working (Raggi & Troman, 2008; Williams, 2013). The more familiar factors—the desire to effect change through education, the desire to transfer one’s values, and the pre-existing desire simply to teach—are also still relevant, but they are not what sets this group apart (Manuel & Hughes, 2006).

Instead, they are set apart by the experiences, skills, and expectations that carry over from their previous professions. Previous research has shown the advantages and characteristics of those who come to teaching from other occupations. For example, those who attend teacher preparation programmes wishing to change their profession to teaching are often mature (Novak & Knowles, 1992). This has a side-effect: individuals who are more mature in their decision-making are also more committed to their chosen careers, which is reflected in stronger senses of professional ethics and better adherence to codes of good behavior (Anderson, Fry, & Hourcade, 2014).

In fact, there are multiple positive side effects of second-career teachers’ greater maturity. For example, they are also more likely to be more understanding and receptive to others (Anderson et al., 2014). They tend to be understanding of and receptive to cultural and cognitive diversity in the school community (Chambers, 2002), and teachers who were formerly in the military tend to be more conservative, but also to follow the guidelines and regulations (Jenne, 1996).

In addition to that greater level of maturity, second-career teachers also often have the ability to link the knowledge and skills that students receive to how those new abilities can be practiced and put to use in the outside world (Mayotte, 2003; Sappa, Boldrini, & Aprea, 2015). They are more effective in contextualizing and explaining the implications of the material, for example.

They also typically bring improved practical skills, such as social and management skills, that can allow them to more easily manage classrooms and help students stay focused and engaged (Anderson et al., 2014; Mayotte, 2003). Multiple studies have found that this improved skill based contributes to higher success rates for second-career teachers (Sappa et al., 2015; Slayer, 2003).

1.5 Becoming a Second-Career Teacher in Saudi Arabia

This study is concerned with a particular context for second-career teacher preparation, namely higher education environments in Saudi Arabia. In addition to the unique nature of Saudi society, any study of this context must also account for the dynamics and requirements of teacher preparation programs specifically, as these must be designed to meet the unique needs of second-career learners.

One major account outlines what is necessary for programs to do so. They must consider this group’s personal characteristics, the prior work experience, the specific skillsets, and the divergent expectations about teaching (Simmons, 2016). They must provide both procedural and practical education. Learning experiences should

leverage pre-existing skills, rather than seeking to build them from scratch, and the focus should be not on training in general but on adapting to the school environment (Crow, Levine, & Nager, 1990; Serow, 1994).

Saudi Arabia's teacher-preparation programs do not, on the whole, display these features. For this reason, previous studies of the motives of second-career teachers may not generalize to the Saudi setting, a problem that is compounded by the above-mentioned effects of Islam on career choice and how teaching is understood on a cultural level.

With that in mind, this study is concerned with the experiences of student-teachers who are both currently employed and currently enrolled in an educational preparation program. This is a group of future teachers who all possess bachelor's degrees in the field of Islamic studies, who have worked in one or more professions before (e.g., some were in the Saudi military), and who wish to change their profession. The practice teaching they engage in is conducted under the supervision and follow-up of academic supervisors.

The study explores three specific questions. These are:

What do these students identify as their principal motives for switching from non-teaching career to teaching career?

What benefits do they gain from the skills they developed in their previous careers?

What contributions do their previous work experiences make to their ability to manage classrooms successfully?

2. Method

2.1 Study Design and Instrumentation

In order to answer those three questions, a qualitative case study was conducted. Given the relatively unexplored nature of the phenomena in question, open-ended qualitative methods were needed to identify potential topics for future in-depth and quantitative work. Focus groups and semi-structured interviews, in particular, allow participants to exchange ideas, ask questions and listen to answers, making them well-suited for such a task (Creswell, 2002; Krueger, 2014). Focus group interview is a research tool through which a group of interviewees engaged in a discussion on a given topic of a research.

Focus groups were used here to elicit participants' views of the similarities and differences between the teaching profession and their previous professions, how their experiences and skills contributed to their teaching performance within the classroom, and how their prior work assisted them in improving their classroom management.

The focus group sessions themselves were moderated and conducted by the author, using a semi-structured, semi-specific format developed specifically for this study. Pre-prepared questions included general queries about background, teaching, and prior experiences followed by more direct and targeted questions about the key issues. Follow-up questions were used to obtain more accurate and in-depth information and data. To ensure the authenticity of the study tool, the interview questions were presented to five of faculty members who specialize in curriculum and teaching methods, with a view to determining its suitability for the task at hand. Adjustments were made to the language and structure of the question list in the light of the feedback provided.

2.2 Participants

The study participants were chosen purposively as they had current jobs. They were selected by a direct inquiry process from among the author's peers at [school of education]. All were male and all were former professionals in a non-teaching career, all wished to change to the teaching profession, and all were currently enrolled at the school. Their names have been changed to false ones for the purposes of protecting their anonymity.

The full sample consisted of 12 student-teachers, all of whom hold bachelor's degrees and all of whom were enrolled in the Educational Diploma program at Thebes University during the 2018-2019 / 1438-1439 H. academic year. All participants were at the "viewing" stage of their practical teacher training, and were actively giving lessons in nearby schools four days every week.

Table 1. The participants' demographic characteristics and previous professions

Name	Carrier
Nader	Police
Mohanad	Military
Sami	Service Office
Basem	Military
Anwar	National Gard
Saed	Security and Safety Gard
Fahd	Employee -the Two Holy Mosques office
Ibrahim	Lost Visitors Guide
Hamza	Student Affairs Office
Musab	Private Sector Employee
Fwaz	Lawyer Assistant
Zead	Police

The table shows that five of the participants were in the military, one worked in security, one was in the private sector, and one in a government job.

2.3 Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection proceeded as follows. Participants were informed about the location, date, and time of the group interview both in-person and then again by text message. The focus group session itself was a single-occurrence event and last for 95 minutes. It was held in a meeting room facility on the campus of Taibah University. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by hand by the author.

Prior to the beginning of the focus group discussion, the researcher ensured participants that their identities would be protected, and explained the ethics protocols being used (these included pseudonyms in all transcripts, separation of files containing real names from those containing interview data, and storage of all documents in a secure location). Once the meeting began, it followed a semi-structured format. The researcher asked questions and encourage every participant to express their ideas and engage in the conversation. After each of the critical pre-prepared questions for the group, the researcher then asked follow-up questions to individuals based on what they had shared, eliciting further information and additional details. Every effort was made to ensure roughly equal input from all participants.

Once the data were collected and transcribed they were analyzed by the researcher. Many scholars (e.g. Cohen, Manion, & Morrison 2003; Creswell, 2002) suggest a variety of methods to analyze qualitative data. The method used here was “constant comparison,” which Leedy and Ormrod (2005) define as a process through which the researcher analyzes data by moving forward and backward within the collected dataset in an attempt to create codes, develop categories, and establish a relationship between categories. The constant comparison process should allow the researcher to sort the data into a list of core themes that address the research questions. The method was chosen for a number of reasons:

It allows the analysis process to be conducted within the data themselves.

It allows the researcher to create categories and develop themes.

It allows the researchers to recognize the relationship between identified categories and themes to make sense of data.

Glaser and Strauss (1999), Leedy and Ormrod (2005), and Merriam (1998) all state that constant comparison involves several distinct procedures. These include early-stage procedures such as reading and re-reading transcripts, notes, and memos, followed by an open-ended coding process to develop categories and subcategories. Finally, it includes comparing data across participants and across categories in an effort to understand the relationship between categories. Those three stages accurately describe the analysis process used in the present study.

3. Results

The study's results are presented here as summaries of the participants collective interview responses. The data are grouped first by core research topic—motive for changing careers, teaching methods, and classroom management—and then by theme and content. Direct quotes are used to illustrate, elaborate, and support the general and summary statements provided.

3.1 *Motives for Entering the Teaching Profession*

The first and largest set of responses concern participants' motives for wishing to switch professions. These include positive motives—reasons for seeking out teaching positions—as well as more negative ones, reasons that have more to do with what was wrong or unpleasant about previous jobs that they do with internal factors pushing participants toward teaching. The reports were highly varied, so answers here have been sub-divided into eight themes, ranging from religious reasons to job security.

3.1.1 The Holy Message

Many participants pointed out that the motive for moving to the teaching profession came from their belief that teaching is following the example set by prophets and holy messengers. Nader said, “The Prophet said, one who guides to something good has a reward similar to that of its doer.”

Another, Mohanad, explained his motivation as follows: “The teaching profession has a virtue over other professions. Allah almighty has sent prophets to people, and they are teachers.” Fwaz added, “The Prophet (pbuh) (Note 1) has preached to the teacher of the people, adding “what they are practicing in fact is the call to God”

Another commented, “The Prophet (pbuh) has enjoyed many professions from trade to grazing, but the profession in which he was known was teaching”

A similar point was made by Zead, who also noted the exceptional nature of teaching, saying, “It combines religion with life” Another explained that, “I believe it can bring me to the world. Teachers are messengers, it is the profession of the prophets”

3.1.2 Stay Connected

The answers given during the focus group pointed toward social motives for seeking teaching positions, as well. Many participants saw the teaching profession as a chance to stay connected with their subjects and to develop themselves mentally and intellectually. As Saed put it, “Teaching helps teacher to constantly develop his information.” He elaborated, “Teaching is an extension of what was studied in the previous stages of education”

Another pointed specifically to contact with students as part of the means through which this continuing educational enrichment takes place, saying, “...receiving questions, teacher return to search constantly”

Although the rest of the participants agree that teaching helps the individual to stay up-to-date, read constantly, and answer students' questions, some pointed to advancement as a way in which teaching can have the opposite effect. Ibrahim said, “In other jobs, there is a promotion ... but in teaching there is no such thing and this thing is not good.” Hamza supported that point by noting, “But the opportunity and the time available to the teacher is very limited.”

3.1.3 Relaxed Social/Administrative Environment

This result was specific to participants who had previously served in the armed forces or security. They stated that their motivation to switch to teaching as a profession was because the civil sector in general is less restrictive than the military system. Work in the armed forces requires a very high degree of discipline, and has sharp penalties for any transgression; teaching offers a less intense social environment.

Nader said: “the school administration is a civilian administration unlike the situation in soldiery administrations.” Muhannad supported that view, saying, “The spirit of military is execution without justification, and this may be found by some annoying and incompatible with the depth and ability of thier personality.” In other words, part of the problem with armed service is the impersonal nature of punishment and advancement.

Zead expressed a similar sentiment, saying, “The principal of school cannot ask me for additional work or stop me from going out at the end of the day unlike the military regime.”

Anwar mentioned that teaching profession is “psychologically comfortable.” From the researcher note Anwar was “psychologically comfortable” referring to the relaxed nature of the educational system in comparison to the military regime as his college already mentioned.

3.1.4 Clear, Limited Hours

A number of participants noted that one of their motives in pursuing teaching was the fixed nature of the schedule, whether on a daily basis or throughout the year. Speaking about working hours, one said, “teacher knows when the working day starts and ends, but in some other professions such as the military, working times may be longer on some days.”

Some went so far as to describe teaching as being almost a cushy or luxurious working environment. Sami, for

instance, believes that the teaching profession is, “a rather comfortable career unlike my current career, which asks me to be in constant contact. I feel like I’m at work for long time.”

As for Ibrahim: “Working time is very important ... my work time changes ...night shift and sometimes afternoon and this is annoying but the teacher is known to work from morning until afternoon.”

Fwaz shared that view, saying, “The work of lawyers is very excellent and honorable, but it is very exhausting work ...work haunts you down day and night in some cases”

A simple summary of this theme might run as follows: participants did not focus on how many hours they spent working at their previous jobs comparing to what they spent as teachers. Instead, they focused on the consistent and stability of the teaching job.

3.1.5 Community Membership

Many participants expressed that one of the most important factors driving their transition to the teaching profession was the well-defined community that teachers become a part of teachers, on their view, interact primarily with colleagues, school administrators, parents, and students, but need not socialize in a professional capacity beyond that limited circle. They compared this to their previous professions, where they had to deal with a wider cross-section of the society at large.

Saed commented “I deal with different people every day around the clock unlike teachers, they deal with students” Added Nader, “I deal with many people, the security personnel, the citizens ... this requires me to deal with new faces every day.”

The issue of “friction”—that is on-the-job social tensions that can cause stress—was central to this line of thinking. The problem was framed clearly by Fahad, who said that, “friction between the teacher and the principal is limited”

3.1.6 Love of Teaching

Many participants echoed the central and most important of the internal factors discussed in section 1.2.1, that is, the simple love of the practice of teaching. These were people for whom teaching was enjoyable, interesting, and inherently rewarding. Said one, “the love of teaching and teaching is inherent.”

Some had been thinking of teaching since far earlier in their lives. Musab said, “...I find myself more of a teacher than i am in the current field.”

Others came to their enjoyment of education later in life, however. As with Zead, who added: “Being a father, I find myself inclined to education and guidance with my children”

This tendency was linked to the desires to make a difference and change students’ lives for the better. Musab mentioned that one of his motivations for going into teaching was the students’ feedback about him, saying, “Their success stories and praise when I give help and advice is so motivating.”

3.1.7 Financial Benefits

A number of participants stressed that salary was one of the incentives that drove them to enter the education field. Currently, monthly teachers’ salary in Saudi Arabia in average is 3246 USD. Fahad said, “Salary would make a big difference to me.” But Anwar had a somewhat different perspective. He said, “Military salary is better, but after retirement teaching is good because it does not depend on allowances”. In addition, salary issues were complexified by concerned about advancement, with some participants believing that there were distinct advantages for non-teaching jobs in both civilian and military contexts. Chief among these was the opportunity for promotion: “in military, there is a promotion from rank to rank, unlike teaching” Fahad said.

3.1.8 Job Security and Stability

Some participants held that transitioning to the teaching profession would provide them with job security, because government-funded educational posts have very low turnover, especially as compared to the private sector and other non-governmental jobs. Ibrahim mentions that, “the problem of jobs in the private sector, due to market complexities...can open the door for you to go out.”

In this way, they said, teaching was actually similar to armed service. Saed said, “The teacher, being a public servant, is not easily dispensed with, unless there is a case or a court ruling”

But at the same time, he sees safety as a matter of more than just job security. “The security man is exposed to many situations that sometimes threaten his life and personal safety.”

Others argued that security was primarily a question of stability. Zead stated, “Teaching is more stable when

comparing to military regime; the teacher could stay in his school unless he asks for a transfer.” Nader agreed, saying, “Teacher mostly chooses in which city or state he wants to work in, and when he settles in his school he may settle in that school, if he wishes, to retire”

Another dimension—in addition to stability, physical safety, and job security—was raised by Hamza, who added that, “when I look at stability, I also look at psychological stability... teachers are stable people”

In summary, the results reported in this section attest various motives for wishing to switch to teaching. Religion was very important. Among other motives, the feeling of social duty to pass on values to the next generation (which was related to religion) was especially clear. Participants also focused on issues of a job-related nature, such as career stability, well-defined working hours, comparatively relaxed administrative environments, and financial benefits (for some). Finally, many participants cited a simple love of teaching itself.

3.2 How Experience in Previous Professions Contributes to Teaching Methods and Teaching Content

The second major aspect of this study was an examination of the ways in which participants’ previous professions had prepared them to teach well and to achieve positive educational outcomes. The questions used in the interview specifically examined the relevance of previous experiences to choices about teaching methods, and to outcomes in the teaching of scientific ideas and techniques. The results of the study show that having a prior career was, overall, helpful on both counts. The reports resisted clear thematic breakdown beyond this point, but have been grouped here loosely by topic. Overall, there was a clear pattern of the participants using specific skills or knowledge gained from previous roles to add content, expertise, context, and perspective to their actions in the classroom.

3.2.1 Teaching the Qur’an

For example, one common topic involved teaching the subject of the Holy Qur’an. Participants felt that students should understand the overall meaning of the text and learn how to use Sharia judgment in complex, real-life situations. To achieve these outcomes, they said, it was necessary to teach the Qur’an not only in the traditional way—through memorization—but with exercises and lectures that engender real awareness of the meaning of the verses. Nader expressed that idea by saying, “... one of the Prophet’s companions said we not to memorize more verses, until we know what it means and [how to] work with it. My life experiences helped me with my stories I share with students.”

Ibrahim stated that his previous experiences had helped him to present the concept of dialogue and the understanding of others from different faiths. He said, “I have been helped by my previous experience, especially with regard to dialogue with others of different faiths, especially with regard to common mistakes of Islam practice.”

Noor had an even more direct form of experience to apply. “As a security man I had an opportunity to watch how kids learn to memorize the Quran.”

Nader added that preparing for the lesson through real stories had contributed to his previous experience. “Of some incidents, particularly with regard to moral transgressions contrary to Islamic teachings and the law, has been a fertile material has benefited me greatly in teaching.”

Ibrahim mentioned that his previous work in the Holy Mosque had helped him learn about the different doctrines of jurisprudence, which became relevant in the classroom: “I had studied many theoretical opinions ... I have seen it in the real life.”

Something very similar was true of Fwaz’s previous career as a lawyer, which taught him both how to be convincing and how to expand students’ intellectual horizons using Islamic rules and stories. Often, he said, he turned to stories of the issues he went through during his work. He stated, “The field of law is based mainly on Islamic religion. When I explain issues of jurisprudence, I have a lot to list to students”

3.2.2 Stories and Experiences

That pattern—of applying specific forms of expertise to reinforce and deepen Qur’anic lessons—was common to other participants, as well. For example, Ibrahim said that while explaining the ruling of zakat (the obligatory tax that every Muslim must pay) to the students, including the rules determining who is entitled to it, he was able to draw on his experiences working in the field to illustrate the point. The standard method of teaching the material relies on a story about Ibn al-Sabil, a traveler who leaves his home country with very little money. Ibrahim was able to complement the parable with, “realistic stories about some of those who travelled to preform Umrah or Hajj, so the divine wisdom came in giving these people Zakat”

In fact, that idea gradually developed into a common theme: was the use of relevant personal stories or anecdotes

to reinforce or expand on lesson material. Zead pointed out that his previous professional experience had allowed him to tell true stories from his career, often things or had happened to his fellow professionals. “killing others or killing oneself and how God has ordered the individual to preserve oneself ... these stories were one of the things that I went through, from accidents I witnessed or passed on by a colleague.”

Muhannad felt the same way. “I have been through many situations and told students stories about the subject of parental disability and family disintegration and the consequence of bad relationships”

Ibrahim had worked as a counselor, and was able to relate stories from his clients. “I have experienced many stories, family disintegration or the incompetence of some parents ... and I used to tell some stories about this, and explain issues related to family solidarity and family bonding.”

3.2.3 Skill Transference

There was also carry-over of teaching skills, rather than simply of expertise or knowledge. One participant noted that his previous work in providing tourist information (frequently, assisting those who were badly lost) helped him to explain and simplify the information he had to present. Ibrahim mentioned that his previous work led him to, “try to simplify the information and often use some explanations, graphs and map”

In other cases, the carry-over was from the military. Participants discussed how leadership had prepared them for good management of working groups. Zead stated that, “participating in the distribution and listening to each group, have helped me when use collaborative learning”

Hamza commented that his experience in student affairs office has contributed to diversifying “activities for students, both classroom and extracurricular activities”

Sami had a similar experience, stating that, “my work required me to have a very high level of follow-up skill, and this fact helped me remember assignments and students work”

The results related to this second major topic, taken together, suggest that participants’ previous-career skills contributed to their in-class performance. There were a number of common themes in what types of contributions these were, including practical skills (such as speaking/interaction skills), useful knowledge that allowed them to relate classroom materials to real-world situations, and experiences that helped them explain and contextualize information related to those who follow other faith traditions.

3.3 *How Experience in Previous Professions Contributes to Classroom Management*

To answer the present study’s third question, which concerns the relevance of previous-career skills to managing classrooms, participants were asked to reflect on their own abilities and success in creating organized, effective classroom environments and interactions. The results varied, but again, there was a common thread of life experience contributing meaningfully to the ability to lead in an educational environment.

For example, as far as classroom management is concerned, Ibrahim brought up his previous job in mentorship. He said, “It contributed to dealing with different nationalities and races of students” and part of the training and preparation in his previous profession was about the best means of communicating with others and trying to understand them, and “this has contributed to the communication skills with others in the school”

Nader, despite having been in a different career, reported a similar experience, saying, “My work as a policemen have helped me a lot in refining my personality I felt like I’m respected. I got the skills of containment and facing the situation”

That idea of knowing how to handle people proved to be a common theme. For example, Fahad stated that his work in, organizing and directing worshippers in the courtyards of the Holy Mosque has taught him how to contain and face situations, especially “when things sometimes come to a verbal confrontation or attempt to attack, whether physically or verbally”

Anwar agreed with his fellow, but added: “preparation program has trimmed that character” On the other hand, some of the strictness was helpful. Nader said that, “to check and maintain order such as the entry and exit of students, walk in straight line (queue) many teachers do not do this, especially when students return to class from PE class or from breakfast time”

Finally, Sami adds that his previous career has helped him, especially by developing his sensitivity to emotional aspects of social interaction. “I have become familiar with some of the keys in the personalities of many people; I tend to be diplomatic and negotiating”

3.4 *Further Notes on Previous Careers as Preparation for Teaching*

A few of the participants’ contributions did not address any of the three main topics directly. Instead, they reflected

a general conviction that having previous-career experience contributed to their teaching abilities and success, sometimes in nonspecific ways or in ways that are not directly relevant to the communication of information. For instance, the abilities to, “accept criticism and not panic. These are the alphabets that in military have been prepared for during the training courses...more patient ...do overtime elsewhere”

Mohannad supported that idea, saying, “As a military man I’m used to follow instructions and obey orders, we prepared to carry out orders.”

Ibrahim also added that, “I got the habit of asking for help, when I do not know how to communicate with others... when I am not sure about the proper procedure.”

Fwaz explained how his work in the field of law and justice had helped him deal with colleagues, and also had contributed to the content and information he was able to provide. “I know that I am accountable for every word I say, or information that I publish or give to students.”

4. Discussion

4.1 Summary of Findings and Key Conclusions

The overall objective of this study was to identify the motivations of second-career teachers in the course of receiving the final stages of their teacher training. Participants were invited to engage in a focus group that used semi-structured interview questions to assess the effects of their previous work experience on their abilities to teach and manage classrooms, as well as their intentions in seeking teaching positions. The overall results were that intentions were widely varied, but that previous careers did appear to improve both classroom management skills and in-classroom performance.

With respect to motivation, one major finding that was the economic factor of salary is an important motive. This result is consistent with some other studies, such as Reid and Caudwell (1997). However, others participants stated that salary alone was not a strong motive compared as compared to others—teaching, while it pays well, is not so lucrative as to attract those who were unlikely to enjoy it. Chamber (2002) and Jones (2017), echoing that sentiment, have both previously reported that the economic motivation for choosing to become a teacher is found only among some groups of professionals. This can be explained by noting the differences in salary between previous careers. When taking the differences between wages into account, those coming to teaching from security might have a strong financial or economic incentive, while—for instance—military personnel and policemen have benefits that teachers do not, including excellent healthcare and government-mandated paid overtime; teachers enjoy neither benefit.

A related set of motives concerned the desire for stability and job security. Teaching is a notoriously stable profession and provides excellent career stability. Participants specifically noted both advantages as important drivers of their choice to switch careers, which is consistent with many studies, such as Chamber (2002) and Hildebrandt (2018). The teaching profession in the Saudi education system does not require a teacher to move from one school to another, so teachers’ careers are never threatened with unwanted transfer from one city to another.

In addition to those economic motives, however, participants highlighted social ones. In particular, they emphasized a sense of social duty as well as the love of sharing the values they believe are most important. That pattern reflects perhaps the most common finding about motives to teach, as reflected by e.g. Moran, Kilpatrick, Abbott, Dallat & McClune (2001). The values-based aspect of this motive must also be understood in the context of the Islamic educational environment in which the participants live and work. From their perspective, teaching is a blessed profession, and it is a religious responsibility to transmit Islamic values to the next generation. This is fully consistent with Muslims’ belief in the concept of knowledge and the status of the teacher. Specifically, Islam elevates knowledge spoken by God—knowledge that is of holy origin. The bearer of this knowledge (i.e., teachers) gains their relatively elevated position from the inherent virtue of what they relay to their students. Thus, Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) says, “scholars are the heirs of the prophets.” This result, too, is consistent with Western studies that have confirmed that some second-career teachers are linked to the desire to values and beliefs to the next generation (Chamber, 2002; Marshall, 2009).

These several motives seem to be related. In fact, it is likely, that they can in no way be separated from each other, and must instead be understood as complementary. Love of education and the desire to be of service to a community are internal motivations, and they combine with economic motives related to salary, job stability, and job security. Together, these turn teaching positions into uniquely appealing packages of benefits. For example, the desire for career stability may be complementary of, and a catalyst for, psychological.

With respect to the issue of transferrable skills and experiences, the results suggest very strongly that those

migrating to teaching as a second career typically possess characteristics that clearly separate them from others. Chief among these are so-called “soft skills,” that is, diplomatic skills in dealing with others as well as group management skills. Moreover, participants felt that their life and workplace experiences had left them with confidence in themselves, which assisted them in controlling and managing their classes. This finding very likely reflects the general consensus in the literature that second-career teachers are typically more mature than their single-career counterparts (Bank, 2007; Owings, 2006, & Slayer, 2003).

The other major set of advantages that participants focused on related to their knowledge, and the stories they were able to share with students in the process of explaining difficult concepts or connecting classroom experiences to the outside world. Educators like John Dewey have long pointed to the need for schools to connect education to life, and to show students the real-world impact of the topics they are grappling with. Teachers who have worked as security guards, or counselors, or in the military, can clearly and credibly explain the applicability of key topics. In this context, when teaching religious concepts to pupils, especially at the primary level, the teacher of Islamic studies should link those concepts to reality and to what is immediately perceptible, so that students can better understand the meaning of the text (Salem, 1982).

The same soft skills and social sensibilities that assisted the participants in their in-classroom teaching were also reported to have helped them handle the administrative and professional aspects of their new roles. They specifically highlighted their ease in adapting to the requirements of the educational preparation program in terms of discipline, attendance and following instructions school policies. These skills helped participants develop strong collegial relationships with their school administration and their fellow teachers. This finding is consistent with several studies, including Khan (2015) and Mayotte (2003).

In conclusion, then, the results of the present study suggest that participants felt their life experience set them apart from their new colleagues. They felt that they were demonstrably better-prepared to face the work pressures of teaching life, and to accept the challenges and responsibilities that come from occupying such a vital social role.

4.2 Recommendations for Teacher Training Programs

Many studies, including Mayotte (2003), show that new second-career need strong, structured support to adapt to their new duties. This study lends credence to a strategy that seeks to provide that support during the pre-service stage, over the course of preparation programs. It also supports the idea that such teachers might best be prepared by designing their training programs to leverage and capitalize on the skills and capacities developed through their previous work. This might best be done by focusing on practical aspects of teacher training. For instance, participation and discussion workshops might be organized for these teachers that would allow them to exchange and share ideas and discuss their practices and performance in the classroom.

Similarly, the results of the present study point toward the likely benefits of according special attention to second-career teachers, and specifically toward the need to provide guidance and field supervision that is appropriate to the needs of this group. These forms of support are necessary to help them acquire and cope with their new identity as teachers.

Moreover, teacher preparation programs should be structured so as to help second-career teachers most effectively utilize their existing skillsets. For instance, they might have courses or workshops targeted at the differences between prior careers and the day-to-day function of the teaching profession. Among the aspects that teacher preparation programs might profitably focus on are dealing with student discipline and with teaching methods and strategies. These aspects must be emphasized both during theoretical learning and during in-class practice. Relatedly, school principals and supervisors should invest their efforts into acclimatization support when dealing with this group of learners, with less investment in disciplinary strategies, classroom management, commitment to work and work ethics, attendance, and departure, as some school principals do.

It may also be worth considering taking advantage of the broader skillsets and the leadership abilities that second-career teachers have to offer. School administrators, for instance, might consider asking them to take on managerial positions within the school, for activities held either at the school level or at the level of education departments and centers.

Finally, of course, there is a need for further research on the specific needs of second-career teachers. This qualitative and small-scale exploratory study only scratched the surface of the experiences and motives that drive and influence this group of new professionals, and did not include any larger measures of career impact or success. It might be particularly useful to compare self-reported impressions to data supplied by third parties, by, for instance, surveying school principals about their new employees' effectiveness. Richer, more accurate assessments of these teachers' pedagogical abilities and classroom management skills would contribute a great deal to the

field's evolving understanding of how best to meet their needs and leverage their unique abilities.

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Note

Note 1. It is default practice in many Muslim communities to abbreviate the customary post-appellative phrase “peace be upon Him” as simply “(pbuh).” This styling is used throughout the results presented here.

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