EFL teachers' views about choosing a career in teaching: Perspectives from Oman

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Abstract
This article reports the findings of a study that explored reasons behind some EFL teachers' decisions to pursue teaching as a career. Data were collected using questionnaires, semi-structured and focus group interviews with EFL teachers in Oman. The findings show that participants hold different beliefs about teaching as a profession and have different reasons for becoming teachers. The findings also reveal that females, older and more experienced teachers were more motivated to enter this profession in comparison to males and younger people. The article explores the implications of the findings for teacher recruitment, retention and their initial preparation in Oman.

1. Introduction

Oman, like many other countries internationally is facing a crisis of teacher recruitment, retention and morale. Many experienced teachers are leaving the job each year through early retirement while new university graduates are not necessarily seeing teaching as an attractive job (Al Balushi, 2017). This could be related to teachers' career satisfaction and their motivation towards the job as found by Albelushi (2003) in a previous study conducted in Oman. Drawing on data from 190 questionnaires and 25 semi-structured interviews, Albelushi (2003) revealed that social relationships in schools and teachers' effort recognition are two key elements participants state are vital for their sense of job satisfaction. The researcher further argued that there is a strong relationship between the preparation of future Omani generations and the efficiency and quality of teachers. She stated that the success or failure of the educational system is determined by the quality of teachers' contributions. In the international context, a number of studies have been done to investigate teachers' views about teaching as a profession and work in this area has produced mixed findings.

On the one hand, some of these studies found that teachers seem to have positive attitudes towards their job and are motivated to do it (Har Lam, 2012; Manuel & Hughes; 2006). For example, Har Lam (2012) explored 38 novice teachers' motivation for choosing a career in teaching and their views towards the job. The findings have shown that participants were conceptualized as falling into two groups: one group was exclusively motivated by 'internal satisfaction', the other group viewed 'teaching as a safe haven' but at the same time also appreciated teaching as holding its own internal satisfaction (p. 307).

On the other hand, other studies found that many teachers are dissatisfied with their jobs (Gao & Xu, 2014; Karavas, 2010; Weiqi, 2007). For example, through using a questionnaire, Weiqi (2007) examined 230 secondary school teachers' perceptions about job satisfaction in Japan. study indicated that secondary school teachers are dissatisfied with their job generally and with dimensions such as the education system, student quality, leadership and administration, salaries and welfare, work conditions and achievements as well as work stress. Similar results have been reported in the EFL context in Greece (Karavas, 2010) and in China (Gao & Xu, 2014); both studies

revealed that EFL teachers are dissatisfied with their status and their English teaching professional experience because they could not do what they ideally wanted to do as teachers, they were also dissatisfied with their salaries and with the scarce opportunities for promotion and for professional development. Overall, the previous studies represent inconsistency and present conflicting research findings, and this may itself indicate the need for additional research in this area. This is significant because teaching is a changing profession so over the years it has profoundly affected the work of teachers. Palmer (1998) claimed that the subjects we teach are integral to who we are as teachers; teacher identity and the sense of self (the 'who' of teaching) is organically related to the 'what and how' of teaching. Being disconnected from this essential component of teacher identity may possibly lead to some dissatisfaction and disillusionment that may prompt some teachers to question their decision to teach (in Manuel & Hughes, 2006:21). The current study, thus; has arisen in response to the need to explore views of EFL teachers in Oman who have decided to undertake teaching as a career, and to indicate their reasons and motives for deciding on such a career.

2. Methods
2.1 Design
This study follows a mixed-method design as both quantitative and qualitative research methods were used to collect data from participants using questionnaires, semi-structured and focus group interviews. Mixed-method research has been defined as a type of inquiry where the researcher combines or mixes qualitative and quantitative research approaches, methods, techniques, language or concepts into a single study (Shannon-Baker, 2015; Brown, 2014; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). My aim behind mixing both quantitative and qualitative methods in answering the research questions is to enrich my understanding of the phenomenon under investigation rather than constraining or restricting my choices as a researcher. The questionnaire was used at the beginning in order to identify patterns across the full sample, using a combination of closed-ended rating-scale items and open-ended questions designed to elicit richer qualitative data. After analyzing the questionnaire data, respondents with specific characteristics were targeted for a follow-up interview phase. Senior English teachers (hereafter SETs) were targeted through a focus group interview and English teachers were targeted through individual semi-structured interviews. Both focus-group and semi-structured interviews provided more detail and depth of information in relation to respondents' reasons for choosing teaching as a career.

2.2. Participants and procedures
The questionnaire was piloted and administered online through distributing the questionnaire link to English teachers and SETs in Oman. A stratified sample of 379 participants was selected for the questionnaire phase. Letters had been sent to colleague teacher educators in the middle of April asking for assistance to distribute the questionnaire link to English teachers and SETs. They have been advised to send the questionnaire to double this number of teachers and SETs to increase response rate. A total of 138 questionnaire responses were received by the middle of May. Follow up reminders were sent to those participants who did not respond to remind them to complete the online questionnaire. A total of 331 questionnaire responses were received from participants by the end of May representing an 84% response rate (27.3% of males and 70.5% of females). Questionnaires were received and coded using numbers in order to protect respondents' anonymity as an ethical safeguard. As part of the questionnaire, participants were asked to provide their name and telephone number if they were willing to take part in the follow-up semi-structured and focus group interviews.

2.3. The questionnaire

The design of the questionnaire followed mostly a mixed format of five-item-Likert-rating scale, multiple choices and open-ended questions. The questionnaire starts with an introductory section including information for participants about the study and instructions for completing the questionnaire. The questionnaire sought to collect:

- Attitudinal data towards agreement or disagreement with a number of propositions (covering issues such as job expectations, the demands of teaching, social standing, job promotions, job challenges and job satisfaction),
- Multiple choices asking about participants main reasons for entering the teaching professions and their reasons for becoming EFL teachers with open-ended question asking for other reasons unlisted in the questionnaire (see part A of the questionnaire below). And

- Biographical and demographic data about the participants (gender, job title (Teacher/SET), age category, teaching experience, educational phase teaching in, and qualifications).

Part A: Views about Teaching as a Profession

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements by ticking the appropriate box (Tick one box only)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. The task of teaching has been exactly what I expected before I became a teacher. *	○	○	○	○	○
2. I feel that working closely with students is the most fascinating aspect of my work. *	○	○	○	○	○
3. My status as an EFL teacher in my school is satisfying to me. *	○	○	○	○	○
4. My opportunities for promotion are satisfying to me. *	○	○	○	○	○
5. I feel my workload (teaching and administrative work) is heavy. *	○	○	○	○	○
6. My students' motivation levels for learning create great stress to me. *	○	○	○	○	○
7. Teaching is a challenging job. *	○	○	○	○	○

8. What are your main reasons for entering the teaching profession? Tick the appropriate box (Tick all that apply) *

- ☐ Status of the profession
- ☐ Salary
- ☐ To serve my country
- ☐ Good working conditions
- ☐ Long holidays
- ☐ The desire to work with students
- ☐ It is a stimulating job
- ☐ Job security
- ☐ To learn new skills and knowledge
- ☐ Teaching fits in with my lifestyle/family situation
- ☐ The only option I have according to my marks in high school

- ☐ Others (Please specify) [_____]

9. Why did you choose to become an English teacher? (Tick one answer only) *

- ☐ I have always had good grades in English subject at school
- ☐ I can have better chances if I want to change to another job
- ☐ To contribute to the improvement of English language teaching in Oman
- ☐ Others (Please specify) [_____]

10. Having worked as a teacher for some time, how satisfied are you about this job? *

- ○ Very satisfied
- ○ Satisfied
- ○ Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- ○ Dissatisfied
- ○ Very Dissatisfied

2.4. Interviews

Two types of interviews were conducted with teachers: semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews. In this study, the purpose of using interviews was to follow up individual participants' ideas, and dig deeply into them by investigating feelings and motives (Punch, 2014; Bell, 2010; Kvale, 2009). 18 participants agreed to take part in the interviews (15 English teachers and 3 SETs). Therefore, 15 individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers to follow up the online questionnaire data and dig deeply in responses to the questionnaire. This was followed by 1 focus group interview with 3 SETs that sought to obtain follow up information on individual teachers' comments in the semi-structured interviews. An interview schedule was designed with introductory comments followed by a number of questions, follow-up prompts and probes. All questions, prompts and probes sought English teachers' and SETs beliefs regarding teaching as a job.

2.5. Analyses

The quantitative data gathered from the questionnaires (e.g. the 5-item-likert-scale and multiple choice questions) were analysed numerically using SPSS (the statistical package for the social sciences).Each statement was given a number that matches the statement number in the online questionnaire. For instance, the first statement in the questionnaire was coded as Q1, the second as Q2 and so on. Within each 5-item-likert-scale statement, each of the five choices/answers to the statements was given a score of 1-5 where 1 corresponds to "strongly agree" and 5 to "strongly disagree". In the multiple choice questions, each of the answers to the statement was given a number according to the number of answer statements provided. For instance, if there are 8 answers to a specific question, the first answer was coded as 1 and the last as 8. Analysis of the data was conducted using descriptive statistics (mode, frequency and percentage) which were calculated and presented in tables and bar charts to help develop an understanding of the patterns of the data. Qualitative data analysis involves preparing and organizing the data for analysis, exploring the data then reducing it into themes through a coding process, and finally representing the data in figures, tables or a discussion (Jamieson, 2016; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Creswell, 2007). These were the steps which I followed in analysing the qualitative data from both semi-structured and focus group interviews in this research.

3. Results

The data generally shows that participants hold different beliefs about teaching as a profession and have different reasons for becoming teachers. The majority of these beliefs seem to be affected by participants' real experience of working as EFL teachers in Omani schools. In fact, numerous studies in mainstream educational research have found that teachers' beliefs and classroom practice exist in 'symbiotic relationships' (Foss & Kleinsasser 1996 in Borg, 2003:91).

3.1 It was my dream job but the reality shocked me

The qualitative data from interviews shows that the majority of the participants decided to become teachers because this was their dream job and some of them looked at their teachers as models. However, when those participants joined the job and started teaching at schools they found that teachers are overloaded with lots of work to do. The data shows that such a reality appeared to change teachers' views towards teaching and their eagerness to do the job. Zilal for example emphasized that:

"I like this profession and it was my dream to be a teacher especially an English language teacher, I loved my English teachers since I was a student, I loved this job but when I faced the reality and started the job my views changed…"

Other participants also seemed to be shocked by the reality of this job included Lulwa who argued that the demand from extra curricula as well as teaching duties was shocking "I was shocked with my job… I mean entering the field, teachers are overloaded with lots of things that they have to do, they are also overloaded with lots of lessons". Correspondingly, the quantitative data analysis showed that on the one hand, the vast majority of participants agreed that working closely with students is the most fascinating aspect of their job. On the other hand, a high number of them either strongly agreed (52.7%) or agreed (30%) that their workload is heavy, both their teaching duties as well as their administrative work which were unrelated to teaching. Such findings are in line with the findings of a study conducted in Hong Kong by Choi and Tang (2009); they found that teachers often needed to work long hours because of the increased administrative workload. They showed that such unfavourable work conditions affected all generations of teachers in the sample, and led to their disillusionment with the system. Choi and Tang (2009) further described this situation as a "crisis of teacher commitment…" (p. 775). A similar situation was noted by King (2011) in the wider Gulf context where the current study is located. Based on data obtained from members of the most prominent professional association for TESOL teachers in the region, TESOL Arabia, the researcher concluded that the duties of teachers were one of the things having an impact on TESOL teaching and learning and thus influence the profession in the region.

3.2 Career choice

While the previous findings from the qualitative data showed that teaching was a dream job for many interview respondents, the quantitative data seems to contradict this by showing other things affecting teachers' career choice. Item no. 8 in the questionnaire sought to uncover this by asking participants about the reasons behind their consideration of a career in teaching. The statistical data analysis Table 1 indicates that a number of reasons were put forward with the highest percentage of participants (65.9%) indicating that they made teaching their career choice because it fits in with their lifestyle and family situation. This finding was also supported by interviewees' accounts. This result suggests that flexible working hours was an attraction for teachers to join this profession, as was the possibility of finding a job close to their accommodation. This is exactly what one of the participants, Farida, confirmed in her interview: As she said: *"because my dad was an educationalist, so he told me that teaching is the best job for you as a female and you will find a job easily here inside your region compared to the other jobs…"* Yet, in recent years many graduate teachers in Oman are appointed in other regions (sometimes very far away from their home towns) because the number of graduates each year exceed that of vacancies available in each region.

Table 1: Teachers reasons for entering the teaching profession (by frequency and percentage)

	Responses		% of Cases
	N	%	
- Salary	110	9.9%	35.4%
- To serve my country	155	14.0%	49.8%
- Good working conditions	123	11.1%	39.5%
- Long holidays	56	5.0%	18.0%
- The desire to work with students	108	9.7%	34.7%
- It is a stimulating job	58	5.2%	18.6%
- Job security	101	9.1%	32.5%
- To learn new skills and knowledge	128	11.5%	41.2%
- Teaching fits in with my lifestyle and family situation	205	18.5%	65.9%
- The only option I have according to my marks in high school	37	3.3%	11.9%
- Others Please specify	30	2.7%	9.6%
Total		100.0%	

The questionnaire data also showed some differences among participants' reasons for entering the teaching profession according to some background factors such as gender. For example, only 13.3% of the male participants choose good working conditions as one of the reasons for choosing teaching as a career in comparison to 47.3% of the female teachers. This result has concurrent validity with the results reported by Albelushi (2003) in a previous study conducted in Oman. This study revealed that gender has emerged as an underlying determining factor in teachers' choice of a career; with teaching being particularly attractive to Omani women. These gender differences are found elsewhere, such as in the UK where there remains a high gender imbalance within the profession with a high percentage of females joining primary teaching in comparison to males as reported in a recent study conducted there by Pollitt and Oldfield (2017).

Unsurprisingly, the data shows that age and teaching experience also reflect some differences in participants' reasons for becoming teachers. For instance, only 19% of the younger teachers aged 22-26 have the desire to work with students in comparison to 66.7% of the older teachers aged 42+. By contrast, only 14.3% of the older teachers choose teaching because it has long holidays while double the number of the younger people 28.6% choose the job for the same reason. Similar differences were noted between the most experienced teachers in comparison to the novice or least experienced ones (see Table 2).

(Table 2: Reasons for entering the teaching profession-Teaching experience)

		Experience in teaching English					Total
		1-5 years	6-10 years	11-15 years	16-20 years	21 years or over	
- Salary	Count	23	50	19	11	5	108
	% within Q52	31.9%	39.1%	38.0%	30.6%	25.0%	
- To serve my country	Count	28	64	33	16	12	153
	% within Q52	38.9%	50.0%	66.0%	44.4%	60.0%	
- Good working conditions	Count	23	53	20	17	7	120
	% within Q52	31.9%	41.4%	40.0%	47.2%	35.0%	
- Long holidays	Count	15	21	10	7	3	56
	% within Q52	20.8%	16.4%	20.0%	19.4%	15.0%	
- The desire to work with students	Count	22	38	20	14	12	106
	% within Q52	30.6%	29.7%	40.0%	38.9%	60.0%	
- It is a stimulating job	Count	9	26	9	6	7	57
	% within Q52	12.5%	20.3%	18.0%	16.7%	35.0%	
- Job security	Count	22	46	17	12	4	101
	% within Q52	30.6%	35.9%	34.0%	33.3%	20.0%	
- To learn new skills and knowledge	Count	29	56	19	10	11	125
	% within Q52	40.3%	43.8%	38.0%	27.8%	55.0%	
- Teaching fits in with my lifestyle and family situation	Count	42	88	35	24	12	201
	% within Q52	58.3%	68.8%	70.0%	66.7%	60.0%	

- The only option I have according to my marks in high school	Count	7	16	5	4	5	37
	% within Q52	9.7%	12.5%	10.0%	11.1%	25.0%	
- Others Please specify	Count	10	8	3	3	5	29
	% within Q52	13.9%	6.2%	6.0%	8.3%	25.0%	
Total	Count	72	128	50	36	20	306

Percentages and totals are based on respondents.

3.3 Job ethics "it's the job of prophets"

Teaching as a job involves ethical and moral actions because teachers are moral agents so classroom interaction in specific is fundamentally moral in nature (Ngang & Chan, 2015; Buzzelli & Johnston, 2001). The importance of ethics in teaching was something that was mentioned by the vast majority of the interview participants. On the one hand, many teachers in the semi-structured interviews talked about job ethics and how teachers work with students to help them learn new things. They also stressed that teaching is an important job because it is the base for all other professions in society. Some participants even emphasized that teaching is the job of prophets; thus, it is associated with lots of challenges because not any normal person can do this job. For instance, Alya remarks that:

*"it needs lots of effort and patience, the teacher is dealing with minds so not anyone can be a teacher . While other jobs are dealing with, like, computers, papers and so on, the teacher is dealing with different minds...**prophets** were teachers so this job has lots of ethics and values."*

On the other hand, it was seen in the focus group interview data collected from SETs that some teachers seem to be missing the teaching values and ethics because they have no commitment to the job. The three SETs agreed that old teachers are more enthusiastic, work harder and are attached to the teaching job because they are more aware of the teaching ethics in comparison to novice teachers. One of the SETs, Laila observed: *"sometimes I walk around to see how my teachers are working ... I see some teachers till the end of lesson and when the lesson is over are still teaching while others are not, they are sitting on their chairs and playing with their smart phones...."*

The issue of some novice teachers seemingly lacking some basic teaching ethics and values has been raised as a general phenomenon in the literature. Thus, for example, Mohany (2009:985) argues that "teachers' ethical understanding is (in) adequate in our times". In my view, this is a serious issue that needs to be taken into consideration when planning teacher education programmes in Oman. Mohany (2009:984) supposes that "increasing levels of ethical understanding might yield a number of benefits (in education)". Teachers need some ethical knowledge where they should be introduced to values and morality. Taylor (1994 in Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2011) asserts that ethical knowledge can encourage the exploration of choices and commitment to responsibilities and help develop value preferences and an orientation to guide attitudes and behaviours.

3.4 Job happiness and satisfaction

Many participants talked about job happiness in the interviews and the data showed some conflict between participants' responses in this regard. For example, while a number of participants expressed their happiness with the job, others frankly stated that they are not happy with it. The

happy participants justified that feeling by seeing the outcomes of their work when graduating generations of pupils. Noora explained this in the following way:

"…because I achieved many things and now I can see many students I mean my students most of them go to study in Canada and in America so I am very happy because they were my students one day, so this is very good for me and this makes me very happy because I graduate many students, that's it."

However, some other participants seem to be unhappy either because teaching was not their dream job or because of the job duties and the challenges associated with it. The data indicates that this also resulted in a level of dissatisfaction with the job. As an example, Ameera makes it clear that *"there are many challenges within this job that might affect people's happiness and satisfaction towards this profession."* This result matches Weiqi's (2007) findings of a study conducted in China; he found that teachers are dissatisfied with their jobs as a whole and indicated that work conditions is one of the dimensions creating such level of dissatisfaction. In the focus group interview, SETs elucidated that such differences between participants' feelings are related to teachers' beliefs towards the job. As Laila emphasizes: *"in every school there are the two types, the type who are very positive and love their job and the type who are very negative and hate the job…"* This might be true because some participants talked positively about the job and how they try to overcome the challenges they face. Huda is a good example of that when she highlights:

"As I told you I love teaching, I love the teachers' job I feel it is a valuable job…I try to control myself and manage all the factors that try to make me dissatisfied, I try to keep telling myself that this is my job and I have to accept it and to work hard to overcome any challenges associated with it."

This result validates Har Lam's (2012) and Manuel and Hughes's (2006) findings. These studies showed that teachers who have positive beliefs towards teaching are more motivated to do the job. In my study, job satisfaction was also investigated in the questionnaires and the data showed differences in participants' responses when they were asked how satisfied they were with their teaching experience after working as a teacher for some time. The results as shown in the figure below indicate that 45.6% of the participants are satisfied with their job whilst only 3% are very dissatisfied.
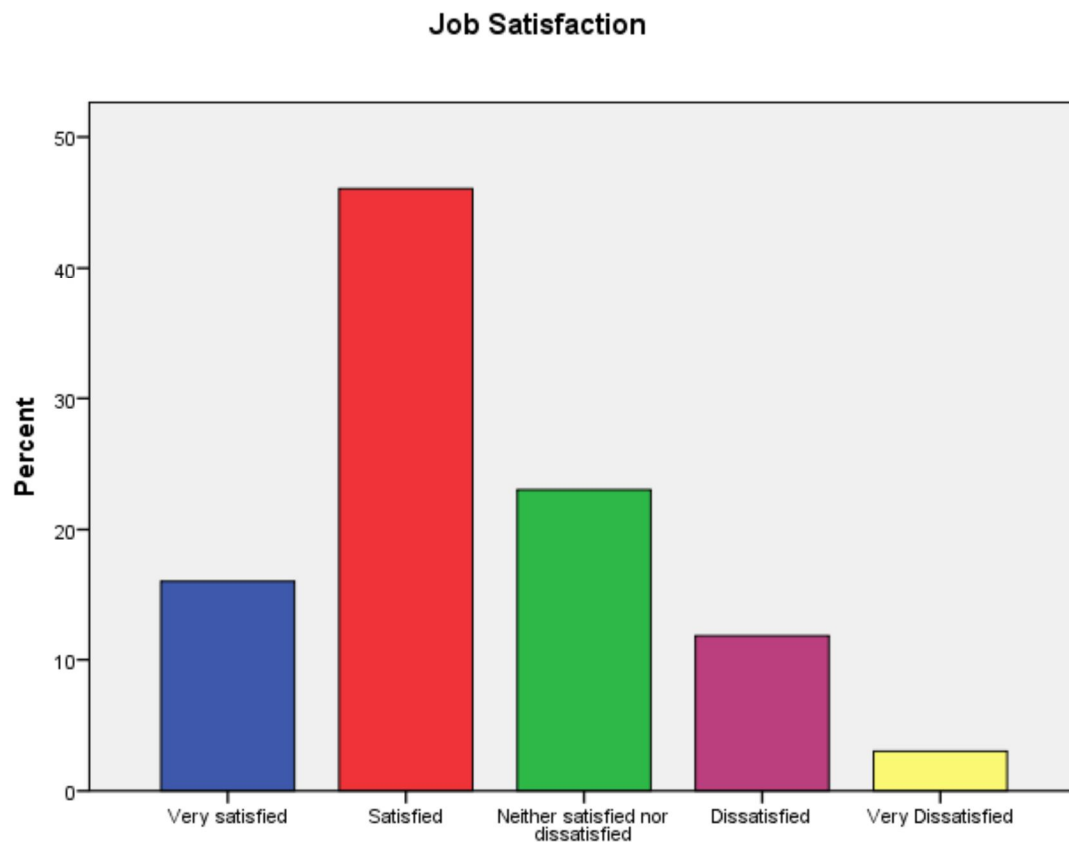
Job Satisfaction

The data
showed some significant differences among participants' job satisfaction according to their
background information especially regarding their age and teaching experiences. For instance, 50%
of the participants who are 42 years or over endorsed the statement that they are very satisfied with
their job compared to only 11.1% of those aged from 22-26. However, the data shows that 33.3% of
the younger teachers are dissatisfied with the job in comparison to only 9.1% of the older teachers.
Similar results were noted regarding differences between participants according to their teaching
experiences (see Table 3).

(Table 3: Having worked as a teacher for some time how satisfied are you about the job-Age)

		Age					Total
		22-26 years	27-31 years	32-36 years	37-41 years	42 years or over	
Very satisfied	Count	3	15	11	12	11	52
	% within Age	11.1%	9.5%	14.1%	30.0%	50.0%	16.0%
	% of Total	0.9%	4.6%	3.4%	3.7%	3.4%	16.0%
Satisfied	Count	8	88	35	13	5	149
	% within Age	29.6%	55.7%	44.9%	32.5%	22.7%	45.8%
	% of Total	2.5%	27.1%	10.8%	4.0%	1.5%	45.8%
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Count	6	32	23	11	4	76
	% within Age	22.2%	20.3%	29.5%	27.5%	18.2%	23.4%
	% of Total	1.8%	9.8%	7.1%	3.4%	1.2%	23.4%
Dissatisfied	Count	9	18	6	3	2	38
	% within Age	33.3%	11.4%	7.7%	7.5%	9.1%	11.7%
	% of Total	2.8%	5.5%	1.8%	0.9%	0.6%	11.7%
Very Dissatisfied	Count	1	5	3	1	0	10
	% within Age	3.7%	3.2%	3.8%	2.5%	0.0%	3.1%
	% of Total	0.3%	1.5%	0.9%	0.3%	0.0%	3.1%
Total	Count	27	158	78	40	22	325
	% within Age	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	% of Total	8.3%	48.6%	24.0%	12.3%	6.8%	100.0%

3.5 Job status

In line with job happiness and satisfaction discussed above, and highly connected to it, the status of the teaching job in Oman was highlighted in the findings. Job status is related to Hargreaves' (2000) idea of professionalization which normally has to do with how teachers feel they are seen through other people's eyes in terms of their status. In fact, the quantitative data from questionnaires revealed that only just under half (48.2%) of respondents feel that their status as EFL teachers in their schools is satisfactory to them. A significant number of teachers (10 in total) complained in the interviews about the low status of their job in society and that teachers are not respected well and helped shed light on why many participants felt negatively about job status. They pointed to a number of things that showed the low status of the job. One reason given was that some parents do not seem to respect teachers. The data further showed that teachers' status in society was better in the past compared to now. Shamsa clarified this by saying:

"Because generations (have) changed, old generations were respecting their teachers more but not the new, also because the people in society like parents are not respecting teachers therefore the status of teachers became less than before, in the past teachers were really respected."

The data also revealed that job satisfaction is closely related to job status demonstrating that if teachers' status is changed in society, it can increase their job satisfaction. Halima made reference to this point asserting: *"We want our rights, our status in society and I think this will increase teachers' level of satisfaction with the job."* This finding lends support to the conclusion of Weiqi's (2007) study which reported that job status is one of the factors which cause a level of dissatisfaction with the job.

4. Discussion and implications

The findings show that English language teachers in Oman hold different beliefs about teaching as a profession and have different reasons for becoming teachers. For example, while teaching was the dream job for some respondents, others entered this profession because it fitted in with their life style and family situation. Despite the different reasons participants had for choosing a career in teaching, the findings reveal that females, older and more experienced people were more motivated to enter this profession in comparison to males and younger people. Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi (2012) stressed that Oman still has a shortage of national teachers of English especially males who prefer other jobs to teaching in general and ELT in particular for various reasons. In my view, the key reason behind this could be socio-economic; the payment in jobs in other sectors is usually higher than teaching and often has less stringent requirements.

However, in the female sector, there is now an excess of teacher supply in most subjects in Oman and a significant number of newly qualified teachers are unable to find teaching positions (Chapman et al., 2012). I think one of the reasons behind this surplus is that teaching is one of the most socio-culturally accepted jobs for women in Oman. Another key reason is that there are no criteria for teachers' selection before joining teacher education programmes. Thus, many Omani females joined a number of private teacher education institutions inside and outside the country to secure an income. The majority of these private institutions seem to be purely commercial and their concern is making money rather than providing the best teacher education to participants. Recently the Ministry of Higher Education has realised that a number of these institutions are not qualified enough to prepare teachers and as a result, has stopped authenticating certificates issued by some of

these institutions and issued a decision to stop the Omani students from registering in these institutions (Al-Rahbi, 2015).

Outside the Omani context, the teaching force in Australia, the USA, Europe and the UK is ageing at a time when new university graduates do not necessarily see teaching as a career priority (Watt et al., 2012; Cooman et al., 2007; Richardson & Watt, 2005). Similarly, in Belgium teacher attrition is high for newly qualified teachers who never start a teaching career and others who drop out after a short period (Struyven & Vanthournout, 2014). Therefore, a report from UNESCO published in (2013) emphasized that many countries are likely to face teacher shortages in the years to come. On the contrary, other countries face the problem of teacher surplus; they have more teachers than they need (Wong et al, 2014; Watt et al., 2012). In Hong Kong, the demand for teachers has reduced; the Professional Teachers' Union warned that more than 800 contract teachers and teaching assistants will lose their jobs when the government cuts special grants to schools for those who are entering the teaching profession (Wong et al, 2014).

Consequently, it is clear that many countries around the world are facing a crisis of teacher recruitment, retention and morale and I would argue that Oman is of no exception. In fact, previously Omanis best and brightest secondary school graduates who scored the highest marks in grade 12 (the last basic school year) were joining the School of Education at Sultan Qaboos University/SQU (the only public university in Oman) as teaching was rated as the second most admired profession after medical doctors in Omani society. However, nowadays, the situation is different, the majority of the new generations are joining other sectors such as the medical, engineering, business or the oil sector while the number of those joining the teaching profession is reducing year on year. Moreover, many experienced teachers are deciding to take early retirement with 1,200 teachers applied for this in 2016. Therefore, there is a real need now for new policies and practices to improve the quality and professionalism of the teaching force in Oman.

The public image of teaching: one of the issues of concern regarding the above is to improve the public image of teaching, to attract more teachers into the profession and retain the most competent ones. The findings from the current study show that workload and the decreasing status of the teaching job seems to negatively affect some teachers' attitudes towards it. Thus, a number of participants told me frankly that they are thinking seriously of resigning from their posts. This finding lends support to the results of a number of previous studies conducted in Oman (such as those by Al-Habsi, 2009; Alharrasi, 2005; Alhinai, 2002) in account of extra curricula administrative duties. Heavy workload also makes it harder for teachers to achieve feelings of competence and reduces a sense of autonomy (Wyatt, 2013). Regarding job status, in a survey of 150 teachers in an Omani region, Al-Habsi (2009) found that only one third of the surveyed teachers reported feeling valued by parents. Having professional relationships within the community and involving parents at schools is important to teachers in Oman to build a sense of belonging. Moreover, a study carried out in Oman by Klassen et al. (2011) which investigated teachers' motivation to enter teaching and their initial commitment to the job and which entailed a comparison of pre-service teacher trainees in Oman and Canada found that Omani participants were more likely to view teaching as a fall back career than were their Canadian counterparts.

In the Omani context there could be a number of explanations for the above; yet, I believe that the education system in the country play a main role in this. Education in Oman, as it is the case in many of the Middle Eastern countries, is centralised where the government is the agency solely

responsible for financing, policy making and delivering all educational services such as syllabi and curricula design, textbooks and materials production and both pre-service and in-service training and employment of teachers. These centralised educational systems are adopting a 'command-and-control' educational management structure for establishing, expanding and maintaining schools and teachers as many international reports have commented (e.g. The World Bank Development Report, 2008). Teachers in these systems thus do not receive high salaries and are promoted according to seniority instead of performance, their workload is usually high and teaching generally is not considered a socially prestigious career.

Such conditions can negatively affect teachers' professionalism and their occupational identity. Day and Sachs (2004) stressed that this can result in teachers' being deskilled along with a crisis of professional identity for many teachers who perceive a loss of public confidence in their ability to provide good services. Teachers' professional identity is informed by both sociological and cognitive psychological perspectives: people develop their identity through interacting with others (sociological perspective), but they express their professional identity through their perceptions of 'who they are' and 'who they want to become' as a result of the interaction (a cognitive psychological perspective) (Beijaard, 2006). Day et al., (2007) suggest that teachers' professional identity is the aspect of teacher's identity which is most influenced by changes in local and national policies as well as their roles and responsibilities.

In the international context, the image of teaching is no better as many studies reported teachers' dissatisfaction with the job due to the unfavourable working conditions such as work load (Cheong, 2009; Choi & Tang, 2009; Weiqi, 2007) or the status of teachers in society, their salaries and the opportunities they have for promotion and for professional development (Pollitt & Oldfield, 2017; Gao & Xu, 2014; Karavas, 2010). It seems that the negative image of the teaching profession has dissuaded many from joining it in many countries around the world (Yuan & Zhang, 2017; Har Lam, 2012). Therefore, attracting and retaining competent teachers is a key concern when it comes to managing the supply and demand for teachers. In order to do that, governments worldwide, including in Oman need to stimulate work enthusiasm by helping teachers meet their expectations, encouraging respect for teachers, improving their work environment and conditions and making them attractive, lightening teachers' workload, and reforming the administration of education (Yuan & Zhang, 2017; Weiqi, 2007).

Teachers' selection and recruitment: another issue of concern in Oman is teacher selection and recruitment and the need for new pathways and requirements. This is important because with an oil-based economy, Oman now faces the prospect of the oil being largely depleted within the next 10 to 15 years (Ministry of Higher Education 2004; Ministry of Finance 2007; Chapman et al. 2009 in Chapman et al., 2012). The Omani government anticipates that developing an alternative economy will depend heavily on a well-educated citizenry. To that end, the government has been engaged in an active campaign of expanding school enrolments at all levels, raising education quality and extending post-secondary options in the country.

Raising education quality, however, needs qualified teachers, which means that recruitment into the teaching profession should no longer be automatic even if the country is facing the problem of teacher shortage and/or surplus. Chapman et al., (2012) investigated the career paths of 625 university graduates who prepared to be secondary school teachers in Oman. The researchers found that nearly half of the participants were at least somewhat ambivalent about teaching as a career.

Those ambivalent about entering teaching tend to also be the ones that continue to be ambivalent about staying in teaching once they start work. The study findings suggest that, at least in Oman, if the government's goal is to ensure a supply of well-trained teachers, it would be worthwhile to ensure that those entering teacher education programmes have a reasonably high level of commitment to becoming teachers. This means that the government needs to give considerable attention to teachers' selection and recruitment.

In fact, some countries around the world have developed systematic and successful policies and practices regarding teacher recruitment which have resulted in them being top the list when it comes to providing high-quality teacher education. Among these countries are Finland, Singapore, the Netherlands, the UK, Hong Kong, Canada, Australia and the USA (Darling-Hammond & Lieberman, 2012). For example, Finland is regarded as one of the world's most literate societies. Teachers are the main reason why Finland now leads the international community in literacy, as well as in science and mathematics achievement (Sahlberg, 2012). In relation to teacher recruitment, the teacher selection process is stringent and follows criteria and different stages in Finland, so access to teacher education is highly selective and only the most capable candidates are admitted (Sahlberg, 2012). Likewise, in Singapore participants are interviewed before choosing them to assess their interest in teaching where the selected teachers must have a passion to teach and the belief that they can make a difference (Goodwin, 2012). I think we need similar criteria in Oman for teachers' recruitment and selection.

Teachers' initial preparation: the initial preparation of teachers is an issue of concern in Oman as is evident from the findings of this study. This is because the results indicate that some of the pre-service teacher preparation programmes do not qualify teachers to do their job properly. Thus, many teachers lack some basic teaching skills and strategies despite spending 4-5 years in teacher education programmes at higher education institutions. Previous studies in Oman reported the ineffectiveness of teacher preparation programmes. For example, Al-Shihy (2003) investigated 120 Omani EFL teachers' perceptions of the EFL teacher education programme at SQU. The researcher found that teachers perceived the general education and university elective courses as not being useful and they rated the teaching practicum as being 'inadequate' to 'moderately adequate'. According to Al-Issa (2005), the vast majority of English teachers who graduated from SQU were found to be lacking both in terms of language knowledge and teaching methodology.

In Oman, teachers' initial preparation programmes are designed to prepare Omani teachers' well for the job and thus, to enhance teaching and learning in Omani schools. Currently two governmental institutions do these pre-service preparation programmes for teachers; SQU and Rustaq College. Although to enter the teaching profession, student teachers need to acquire different types of knowledge about instruction and student learning (Shulman, 1986), it seems that teacher education programmes in Oman focus a lot on the technical knowledge that student teachers need to know which is firmly based on theory. They ignore the promotion of other elements which can bridge the gap between theory and practice (Peercy &Troyan, 2017; Korhonen et al., 2017; Gleeson et al., 2017). I would argue that the ethical and moral dimensions of the teachers' work also seem to be ignored in these programmes. Thus, the findings from this study indicate that some teachers' ethical understanding is inadequate; they are missing some teaching values and ethics which is affecting their commitment to the job. Another element the data showed is that Omani teachers are not prepared well for the reality of the job at schools, so this reality "shocks" many participants when they start teaching.

In the international context, initial teacher education is an area that has generated considerable debate in both policy and academic contexts. Research studies have tended to focus on the issues of relevance, quality, what student teachers need to know and be able to do, and the role that initial teacher education plays over the continuum of professional learning (Clark et al., 2012). Several authors suggest that student teachers' learning does not happen as a result of teaching them educational theories, and does not result from the 'serial learning of concepts on a scale of growing complexity' (Korthagen, 2010:99). Korthagen, and his colleagues (e.g. Korthagen, Loughran & Russell, 2006; Kessels & Korthagen, 2001; Korthagen & Kessels, 1999) stressed that novice teachers need to be embedded in the experience of learning to teach (in Peercy &Troyan, 2017). Through their use of the Platonic and Aristotelian concepts of episteme and phronesis, Korthagen and colleagues have created a foundation for how teacher educators can understand novice teachers' meaningful engagement with practice. They explained that Episteme is scientific, fixed, expert, and abstract knowledge, whereas phronesis is knowing through experience about "concrete particulars". Korthagen and colleagues have asserted that much of traditional teacher education focuses on conceptual knowledge (episteme), which creates a gap between novice teachers' understanding of concepts and their experiences. They argue that episteme is too abstract for novice teachers to apply to their classroom settings. Instead, they argue, working from novice teachers' perceptual knowledge (phronesis) that novice teachers have generated through their experiences (cited in Peercy & Troyan, 2017:29). From such a perspective, student teachers' learning is viewed as being part of the process of participating in social practices, especially at schools. This is because some researchers have noted that the effects of university teacher education is 'washed out' by school experiences (Zeichner & Tabachnik, 1981 in Korthagen, 2010:98). Likewise, the 'practice shock' phenomenon has started to draw international attention, and many researchers from various countries confirm that graduates from initial teacher education programmes face severe problems trying to survive in the classroom, and implement little of what they learnt during their professional teacher preparation programmes (Korhonen et al., 2017; Korthagen, 2010).

As a result of the above, a number of studies have called for developing strong educational policies regarding initial teacher formation (e.g. Nicu, 2015). For instance, in a recent study done in Malaysia, Ngang and Chan (2015) recommended that keeping abreast of developments in teacher education would ensure that novice teachers remain up-to-date in their profession, and that they should be equipped with necessary ethics, moral and professional skills to survive in an increasingly complex teaching environment. In the Netherlands, student teachers are prepared for the "reality shock" where aspects of the "reality shock" are incorporated into teacher preparation programmes both theoretically and practically (Hammerness et al., 2012). I agree that these skills are of utmost importance to be added to teacher preparation programmes in Oman to effectively prepare new generations for the job.

In sum, I believe that in Oman we need to improve the public image of teaching by making strides to develop and enhance the professional image of teachers both inside and outside the school system so as to attract more people into the profession and retain the competent ones (Müller et al., 2009; Weiqi, 2007; Hargreaves, 2000). In addition, we need new policies and practices to recruit teachers. In this respect, teaching as a job should be competitive, so not any one can become a teacher. Instead there should be criteria for selecting the applicants. Besides, in order to prepare effective teachers, teacher education programmes in Oman should be re-planned and important components should be added to them.

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