

## **Jobs for the Boys: Teaching as a career choice for secondary school boys in Abu Dhabi, UAE**

**Martina Dickson**

*Assistant Professor, Emirates College for Advanced Education, Abu Dhabi, UAE*  
*Email Address: martina\_dickson@hotmail.com*

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**Abstract:** Teaching is globally becoming an increasingly feminized profession, and the United Arab Emirates is no exception in having extremely low numbers of Emirati male teachers, particularly in primary schools. So much so that most male teachers in government schools have historically had to be recruited from other Arab countries or more recently, from Western countries. There is a body of research to suggest that boys fare better academically and otherwise when they are taught by a male from their own community, indicating that encouraging more males into teaching, and in particular encouraging more Emirati males into teaching is highly desirable. In order to do this, the reasons why they are turning away from the profession need to be examined more closely. In the spring of 2012, 190 male final year secondary school students were surveyed in order to explore their perceptions of teaching as a career. Of those, 17% of Emirati students and 22% of non-Emirati students said they had given serious consideration to the career as an option. However, none of the students surveyed actually chose teaching as their career. This study examines the reasons for this and gives suggestions as to how to increase the recruitment of Emirati males to teacher education courses.

**Keywords:** Teachers; Males; United Arab Emirates; Teacher education institutions

### **INTRODUCTION**

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a federation of smaller emirates lying between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman. It covers an area of around 30,000 square miles and has a population of around 8 million, only around 11% of whom are Emirati citizens (National Bureau of Statistics, 2010, p 10). The remaining 89% are expatriates from mainly South-East Asian countries, other Arab countries and a small percentage of expatriates from Western countries too. The country has been developing at an astonishing rate since the discovery of oil in the late 1950s, and an increasing emphasis over the past decade has been placed upon the development of its education system, which has historically relied on a large number of expatriates to function.

The UAE recorded 14% of its primary teachers as males in 2010, with differences between the emirates – Dubai for example recorded only 5% of males teaching in government primary schools in 2010 (KHDA, 2010). The large youth population in the UAE (51% under the age of 20), (UAE Yearbook, 2007) is educated in both private and government schools. The government schools are gender segregated from grade 1 upwards, with mainly female teachers for male students until grade 5, and only male teachers beyond grade 5. Due to the dearth of national male teachers, however, up until 2009 the majority of teachers in boys' schools had to be recruited from other non-Gulf Arab countries such as Egypt, Jordan or Syria. The pedagogical backgrounds of such teachers was called into question (Ridge, 2010) since some do not hold professional teaching qualifications, or their teacher education often encompassed little or no hands-on teaching experience. Since 2009, with the wide-scale educational reform taking place across the UAE, some of these non-Gulf Arab expatriates have been replaced by native English speaking teachers from Western countries such as the U.S.A., Canada, U.K., Australia and New Zealand. Increased proficiency in English language for UAE students is a prime goal of the government and educational authorities, but while the

English language may be improved by the introduction of these new teachers, their presence also opens up more complex issues such as new cultural exposures.

The increasingly feminized field which the profession of teaching is becoming is not unique to the UAE, the setting for this study. Indeed, it has no global confines as staffing figures world-wide show an increasingly small number of males choosing to enter into, or remain in, the profession. This occurs for a variety of reasons, such as the perception that teaching is a profession to which women, not men, are somehow better biologically and intrinsically suited to. Male teachers are highest in number in secondary schools, and lowest in number in primary schools. Many countries record no males whatsoever teaching at pre-school or kindergarten levels (e.g. Bahrain, Jordan, Saudi Arabia), and a small proportion teaching at primary level (e.g. New Zealand (16% in 2010), United States and Western Europe (17% in 2010)) (UNESCO, 2011).

Some studies have shown that male students can perform better academically when taught by a male teacher (Dee, 2006), and that they can perform better when taught by a member of their own community (Xuehui et al, 2008, and REACH Report, 2007). Mills, Martino and Linguard (2004) take the position that “men should take greater responsibility in caring and teaching children and young people across the schooling cycle” (p 356). With this view in mind, and given the small number of Emirati male teachers, this research sets out to explore the perceptions of secondary school males in order to gain some indicators of the mind-set and answer the question of why teaching is such an unpopular career choice for young men in the UAE, if indeed it is. Additionally, what, if anything, would encourage suitable young men making career choices to choose teaching?

Plenty of research has been carried out in countries such as the U.K. and the U.S.A. into the reasons why men do not tend to enter teaching (in all phases, but particularly primary). Some research has found, for example, that the “connection between the care of young children and mothering provides the biggest obstacle to men who want to train as teachers of young children, as there is an implicit assumption that they are ‘emotionally unsuited’ to this type of work. It also seems likely that this association with mothering causes many men to reject lower primary teaching as a career because of the challenge that this proposes to their gender identity” (Wadsworth, 2002, p 42). One researcher learned upon interviewing upper-primary male teachers that they viewed “working with younger children (as) not ‘proper teaching’ because of its association with childcare, and is, therefore, not appropriate for ‘real men’” (Skelton, 2003, p 204). However, little published work exists on the subject in the unique setting of Abu Dhabi, the capital, largest, and mostly highly nationally populated emirate of the U.A.E. Higher education institutes have much to gain from a better understanding of why males are not choosing teaching, as does the educational council of Abu Dhabi (ADEC) in order to intervene to increase the numbers of new male teachers.

The lack of Emirati male teachers is well known in the UAE and frequently a subject of media reporting. Various national newspaper articles have cried out for more male teachers, often using teachers or pre-service teachers to speak out on the cause: “The major benefit of having Emirati men in the classroom is a ‘better understanding of the pupils and local culture’” said one pre-service teacher (Swan, 2010), while a university student was quoted in another article as saying about his own school years that “as a local I would feel more free to communicate with a local teacher – you are both from the same environment”. He went on to say that he especially ‘remembered his Emirati teachers’ too (Bardsley, 2009). The Federal National Council (FNC) of the UAE met in early 2012 to discuss the issue, to “express their concern at the shortage of male Emirati teachers at public schools” and called for questions being raised regarding the education sector’s “failure to attract male Emirati students” (Salama, 2012).

The poor recruitment of male teachers in the U.A.E. may be compounded by the fact that Emirati males traditionally tend to be thought of as the family provider, and have responsibilities to their immediate and extended families. Therefore they are motivated, even pressured perhaps, to quickly earn salaries. This tendency results in a lower ratio of males to females in university courses in general in the U.A.E, and a high ‘no-show’ and drop-out rate of males accepted into university too (Ridge, 2009). The relatively low status of

teachers in Emirati society, too, is an issue; in a study of Emirati pre-service male teachers' perceptions, all thought that teaching was a poorly regarded job (Dickson & Le Roux, 2012).

The poor representation of Emirati teachers in government schools at present means that there are few role models for young boys to witness working at the job, which may have a negative effect on recruitment. According to Balchin (2002), "Many young people who are thinking seriously about taking the BEd (Bachelor in Education) or PGCE (Post-Graduate Certificate in Education) are attracted to it initially by parents or friends who are teachers" (p 32).

## METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted by means of a survey administered to Grade 12 male secondary school students in Abu Dhabi, U.A.E. Students in government schools are both Emirati and non-Emirati Arab students. Only government schools were included in the study since they provide education for the majority of Emirati students in the country. The sample was composed of 66 Emirati students and 125 non-Emirati students from Grade 12. The ratio of Emirati to non-Emirati students was unusual in government schools where normally the majority are Emirati students, however it allowed us to study both groups' opinions. Approval to administer surveys was sought firstly from ADEC, then from the school principal, and finally from the students themselves. The questions were designed to generate quantitative data about the students' perceptions of teaching as a career. The questions were built upon either a two or four point Likert Scale based on agreement criteria (strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree, or simply agree/disagree). After some deliberation it was decided to utilise the four, rather than five-point scale, which omits a 'neutral' option so as to "force subjects to take up a position" (Newby, 2007). Additionally, each section of the survey gave opportunity for further explanation or elaboration, providing scope for qualitative statements too.

The survey questions themselves were checked by pre-administering to four objective pre-viewers. Feedback was gathered on the relevance of the survey questions and their relations to the research questions from: two BEd students, and two educational professionals with research interests in this field. Adjustments were made on the basis of this feedback to increase the validity of the survey questions.

The specific research questions are as follows:

- How do male students perceive teaching as a career?
- Is teaching a possible career for them?
- What are their personal expectations of their chosen career?
- How do the responses for these questions compare between the two groups of students, Emiratis and non-Emiratis?
- What recommendations could be drawn from the students' responses as to how to encourage more males into teaching?

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### *Male Students' Career Choices*

Table 1: Career Choices of students surveyed

| <i>Career Choice</i> | <i>Number of Emirati students (n=66)</i> | <i>%</i> | <i>Number of Non-Emirati students (n=125)</i> | <i>%</i> |
|----------------------|--|----------|---|----------|
| Military             | 4  | 6        | 30  | 24       |
| Police               | 20                                       | 30       | 2   | 2        |
| Ministries           | 24                                       | 36       | 17  | 14       |

|                        |    |     |     |     |
|------------------------|----|-----|-----|-----|
| Private Companies      | 0  | 0   | 15  | 12  |
| Teaching               | 0  | 0   | 0   | 0   |
| Other – Medical Doctor | 1  | 2   | 14  | 11  |
| Other - Engineer       | 2  | 3   | 22  | 18  |
| Other – Pilot          | 5  | 8   | 3   | 2   |
| Other – Dentist        | 0  | 0   | 1   | 1   |
| Other - Actor          | 0  | 0   | 1   | 1   |
| Other - Business       | 3  | 5   | 2   | 2   |
| Other - Pharmacist     | 0  | 0   | 1   | 1   |
| Other - Unspecified    | 5  | 8   | 12  | 10  |
| Not decided            | 0  | 0   | 1   | 1   |
| No Response            | 2  | 3   | 2   | 2   |
| Total                  | 66 | 100 | 125 | 100 |

Table 2: Percentage of students who gave serious consideration to entering the teaching profession

|   | %Emirati citizens | %Non-Emirati citizens |
|---|-------------------|-----------------------|
| % Students who said they <b>had</b> given serious consideration to teaching as a possible career path     | 17                | 22                    |
| % Students who said they <b>had not</b> given serious consideration to teaching as a possible career path | 78                | 76                    |
| % no response   | 5                 | 2                     |

Table 1 illustrates that a high proportion of the Emirati students selected careers in the police and the ministries. No Emirati student chose ‘private company’ as an option, while 15 non-Emiratis did so. This is a well-known occurrence: in terms of Emiratisation quotas, private companies find it “very hard to attract Emiratis and therefore meet those quotas ..... the success of the Emiratisation policies in government agencies has not been reflected in the private sector” (Godwin, 2006, p 9). UAE nationals prefer to work in the government sector due to higher salaries and better employment conditions, meaning that only a small percentage can be found employed in the private sector. The UAE Government has applied the same Emiratisation policies to its own ministries by gradually replacing expatriate employees with UAE nationals. This is reflected in the 36% of Emiratis who said they would take up employment in the Ministries (Table 1). Surprising, perhaps, is the difference between uptake in the military between Emiratis and non-Emiratis – 6% v 24% respectively. This was unexpected and suggests a high degree of patriotism in the non-Emiratis, indeed three added to this sentiment with an additional statement such as “I want to protect this country”. So, the military was a popular option for non-Emirati males.

Far fewer Emiratis than non-Emiratis chose careers traditionally thought of as having a high status and requiring very high exam results, such as medicine or engineering. Only three Emiratis mentioned these careers, compared with thirty-six non-Emiratis (Table 1). Only one student was undecided about his career, suggesting that even before sitting high school final exams, decisions have already been made. There was also a greater diversity of career choices among the non-Emirati data – with 11 different careers either ticked or specified. The Emirati students only specified 8 different careers.

In answer to the research question ‘Is teaching a possible career for them?’ no student from either group chose teaching as a career option. However, the most striking finding of this section is that a roughly similar percentage of Emirati males (17%) and non Emirati males (22%) (Table 2) stated that they had given serious consideration to teaching as a career. It is particularly striking given that not a single male from either group finally chose teaching as their career. Somewhere, in the gap between a young grade 12 student thinking about university or career choices, and actually applying to or joining these careers, there would appear to be a discrepancy, or perhaps a niche in the market for higher education institutions offering teacher education

courses. If 17% of Emirati males gave joining the teaching profession serious consideration, why would it be that none of them actually enrolled on a teacher education program?

### *Male Students' Perceptions of Teaching as a Profession*

Table 3: Perceptions of teaching as a profession

|  | <i>Emirati citizens<br/>(n=66)</i> |             |                  | <i>Non-Emirati citizens</i> |             |                  | <i>t-test<br/>(Emirati males v<br/>non-Emirati<br/>males)</i> |
|--|------------------------------------|-------------|------------------|-----------------------------|-------------|------------------|---|
|  | <i>% agree</i>                     | <i>mean</i> | <i>Std. dev.</i> | <i>% agree</i>              | <i>mean</i> | <i>Std. dev.</i> |   |
| Teachers are poorly paid                         | 68                                 | 1.82        | 0.67             | 60                          | 1.64        | 0.57             | 0.085 (NS)  |
| Teachers have low status in our society          | 53                                 | 1.58        | 0.59             | 48                          | 1.50        | 0.55             | 0.372 (NS)  |
| Teaching is only a suitable profession for women | 68                                 | 1.7         | 0.49             | 64                          | 1.66        | 0.53             | 0.56 (NS)   |
| Teaching has limited promotional opportunities   | 67                                 | 1.72        | 0.55             | 71                          | 1.73        | 0.5              | 0.741 (NS)  |

The students' perceptions of teaching as a profession are shown in Table 3. In order to compare the groups' responses (Emirati v non-Emirati males) t-tests (two-tailed, unpaired) were performed on the data reduced to binary form. Perhaps contrary to a common perception that Emirati males have little interest in teaching as a profession, we can see that in fact, there was little difference in the two groups' (Emirati and non-Emirati students) perceptions of teaching as a profession. Perceptions such as teachers being poorly paid, which are often assumed to be widespread and a major reason for the low male teaching numbers, were fairly high – 68% for Emiratis, and slightly less at 60% for non-Emiratis. This is not a sentiment which is corroborated by all males – indeed some pre-service teachers thought teachers earned a fair salary (Dickson & Le Roux, 2012).

The perception that 'teachers are poorly paid' generated the lowest value of p for the t-test (which was still not statistically significant) - for this, slightly more Emirati than non-Emirati students agreed with this statement. Around half of both groups thought that teachers held a poor status in society, which could provide some of the explanation as to the low popularity of the profession. However, one could flip this statistic optimistically to see that actually, half of the students disagreed with this statement.

What about the 22% of 125 non-Emirati students (27 students) who gave serious consideration to the profession? At present, federal institutions in the UAE accept only Emirati students, or in some cases, students who do not have Emirati passports but who have Emirati mothers (at the time of writing citizenship cannot be passed by maternal lineage in the UAE, although there have been some indications in the local media that this may change soon). Some higher education institutes also accept the non-Emirati female spouses of Emirati male citizens. However, there are many non-Emirati Arab citizens (neither of whose parents are Emirati citizens) who have been born, brought up and educated in the UAE and so are fully cognizant of cultural specificities including local dialects. Many families of such citizens have lived in the UAE for decades, but due to immigration policies are not entitled to hold citizenship, yet feel enormous loyalty to the UAE (for further discussion on this subject, see for example, (Mohammed, 2008)). Should these students be candidates for teaching in national higher education institutions, this would be a completely different scenario from in previous years where due to the lack of male Emirati teachers, vacancies were filled by non Gulf Arab expatriates recruited as qualified teachers directly from their home countries (mainly

Egypt, Jordan, and Syria) where they were trained under variable, often less than ideal, conditions (Ridge, 2010).

### ***Students who said they had given serious consideration to the teaching profession***

These students said they had given serious consideration to the career, and yet did not choose the career. What is happening, or not happening, between these times? The additional qualitative responses which these students gave give us some clues. These have been separated into those from Emirati and non-Emirati students to allow for a separate examination of these groups. Some positive reasons given for were that:

#### **Emirati students' comments:**

- *I might think about it, but I want to study at a masters or a PhD level at university.*
- *I thought about it, but in the end I decided against it because I worry that teaching is a difficult job that I can't do.*
- *I might become a teacher, but I have to first look at the plans and understand the strategies of the ministry/ADEC.*
- *When I graduate I might think about it.*
- *Yes, I thought about it, because there are so few Emirati men in teaching and they need us*
- *Maybe ... teaching is the most essential job in life!*

#### **Non-Emirati students' comments:**

- *I would be so happy if I became a teacher. I'm not going to say being a teacher is enough ... I'll do many things in education.*
- *Yes, teaching is good for our development and makes us stronger in our thinking!*

Some of these sentiments, of the "I thought about it", "I might think about it" or "I would be so happy" variety are simply ripe for nurturing, particularly as the statements accompany the choice that they gave serious consideration to the profession. Or, as will be discussed in greater detail in the 'Recommendations' section, could possibly be turned around with the correct support, such as the student who said he worried that teaching was a difficult job that he could not do.

### ***Students who said they had not given serious consideration to the teaching profession***

Some students, who said they would not consider the profession nevertheless gave thought to their answers, giving us some insight into the issue. Their answers can be coded according to three main categories, firstly – that teaching is a tiring, exhausting job. Among both Emirati and non-Emirati students, there were plenty of statements which refer to the difficult, tiring nature of teaching:

#### **Emirati students' comments:**

- *Teaching is just too much responsibility*
- *Teaching is very hard*

#### **Non-Emirati students' comments:**

- *It's a tough job*



- *The salary is not enough and it's hard to deal with the students*
- *A teacher needs patience and I don't have patience!*
- *No, because it's too hard and tiring to work with this kind of student at such a weak level.*
- *Teaching is too hard and tiring so I don't like it*
- *No. I want a different job, and I don't have the strength for teaching!*
- *I'd love to teach, but it's very difficult and so not good for me.*
- *I'd like to, but it just seems like too much responsibility.*

This idea of teaching being such a demanding, tiring job which requires patience, is a common theme, one which even experienced, contented teachers would probably at times agree with. Yet, this perception is something which might be over-turned with greater information and more exposure to the reality of daily life as a teacher (the rewards and joys of the job as well as its challenges) which might sway the opinions. Missing here is a sense of balance – there seems to have been little exposure to the concept of how rewarding teaching can be, how much influence a teacher can have on developing young people, etc. If some of these opinions could be turned around and influenced more positively, it might well be that some of those students would change their minds about the profession. Suggestions for how this may be achieved are given in the recommendations section of this paper. Inevitably, among both groups of students there were some strong and highly negative statements such as:

#### **Emirati students' comments:**

- *Keep me far away from teaching!*
- *No, it's the worst job I could think of!*
- *I don't want to be a teacher ever.*
- *Impossible!*

#### **Non-Emirati students' comments:**

- *There are many better things to do than teaching!*
- *My ambitions are beyond being a teacher.*
- *I hate teaching.*
- *I'm not interested.*
- *I don't think of education as a profession.*
- *I want to get out of school! I don't want to go back into a school!*
- *No, it doesn't appeal, it's not very exciting.*
- *Are you insulting me?*

These rather extreme responses came from a minority of students, and obviously, a recruitment focus would not be best placed upon these individuals. As reported earlier, approximately half of both student groups agreed that teachers had a low status in Emirati society. This perception is reflected in some of the statements here, such as “There are many better things to do than teaching!”, “I don't think of education as a profession”

and “My ambitions are beyond being a teacher”. These prejudiced views can make it difficult for males to choose and remain in teaching due to peer pressure, but unfortunately, it seems to be part of life for pre-service teachers and teachers too. An American study of male pre-service teachers reported that “their college friends teased them about teaching, and the teasing they faced shared many commonalities....to combat such teasing, the student teachers often asserted their masculinity and ... developed strategies to downplay or deflect the impact of the gendered regulations being imposed on them by friends” (Weaver-Hightower M.B., 2011, p103).

Recent research of Emirati male pre-service teachers reported teasing from peers and derogatory comments from members of the public (Dickson & Le Roux, 2012), which could make completion of a teaching degree difficult for some. The males in that study also generally made the career choice against the wishes and without the encouragement of family, friends and their society at large.

Some of the students’ comments and reasons for why they would not consider teaching pertained specifically to the developments which have taken place in the UAE as a result of the educational reform, and so form a second coding category of responses.

#### **Emirati students’ comments:**

- *God forbid! It’s a very hard career as they are changing everything, such as the curriculum, all the time.*
- *Difficult to understand and work with this new generation of students, and to work with the new education system, which has destroyed our education completely ...*

#### **Non-Emirati students’ comments:**

- *I’m not working in a place which is destroying boys and taking away behaviour and manners, heritage and Islamic rules. The new system of expat teachers has destroyed what they want to teach us. Billions is spent in bringing companies in – a complete waste of time and money – they’re destroying everything. Arab teachers were a million times better!*
- *No I wouldn’t be a teacher. It’s getting more and more difficult with all the changing rules at ADEC. Also, it’s very difficult to work with the badly behaved students.*
- *No! Because my father was terminated from school for no reason*

The comments illustrate some of the heated feelings which some students have about the educational reform. The reforms taking place in government schools in Abu Dhabi have focused on, in theory, improving the teaching and learning in schools in an attempt to improve attainment and competency levels of students, re-training existing teachers and in some cases replacing teachers. The last comment from a non-Emirati student is particularly poignant. As explained earlier, when the policy decision was made to recruit thousands of Western teachers for the English medium subjects many non-Gulf Arab teachers who had been living and working in the UAE for decades had their contracts terminated suddenly. Clearly, this young man feels resentment enough (understandably) to completely rule out following in his father’s career footsteps. The other comments suggest undercurrents of resentment at the changes which have taken place, pushing the students away from even considering the profession. An in-depth study of the students’ perceptions of the educational reform and its implication to teacher recruitment can be found elsewhere (Dickson, 2013b). However, the comments are included to give a rounded picture of the factors which are affecting these students’ choices. The third category of response relates to teaching as being a low status, low salary profession with few promotional opportunities. These responses are discussed within the context of the students’ expectations of their career, which again gives us an indication of the driving forces behind career choices of male students in the UAE.



Table 4: Students' expectations of their careers

|  | <i>Emirati students<br/>(n=66)</i> |                    | <i>Non- Emirati students<br/>(n=125)</i> |                    | <i>t-test</i> |
|--|------------------------------------|--------------------|--|--------------------|---------------|
|  | mean                               | standard deviation | mean                                     | standard deviation |               |
| My family expect me to have a job which will allow me to provide for them financially        | 2.94                               | 1.14               | 3.06                                     | 0.87               | NS            |
| It is important to me that my place of work is near my home to be close to my family         | 3.18                               | 0.82               | 3.01                                     | 0.76               | NS            |
| I have many family obligations   | 3.06                               | 0.85               | 3.01                                     | 0.80               | NS            |
| It is important for me to be able to provide financially for my family                       | 3.46                               | 0.78               | 3.53                                     | 0.65               | NS            |
| It is important for me to earn a high salary   | 3.56                               | 0.59               | 3.45                                     | 0.70               | NS            |
| It is important to have a job in which I will be promoted quickly                            | 3.48                               | 0.8                | 3.34                                     | 0.73               | NS            |
| It is important that my job has professional development opportunities                       | 3.59                               | 0.67               | 3.52                                     | 0.68               | NS            |
| It is important that my job will provide opportunities for me to gain further qualifications | 1.82                               | 0.605              | 3.47                                     | 0.73               | $p < 0.01$    |

There are many references to the idea of teaching as having a lack of promotion opportunities and not being well-paid, which seems to be extremely important to the students. Examples of this sentiment are given for both Emirati and non-Emirati students:

#### **Emirati students' comments:**

- *No, because teachers are not treated well, not in salary nor in promotion – he gives a lot but never gets anything in return*
- *Studying more (to be a teacher) would make me weak financially, better to work*
- *Many jobs have opportunities and choices as you stay longer. But in teaching you will be the same position all your life*
- *I would prefer to study and work at the same time*

#### **Non-Emirati students' comments:**

- *Teachers have no rights, that's why I don't want to be one*
- *No, because it's a hectic job which doesn't give you high social standing*

The last statement from the Emirati students corroborates research into ways of recruiting more males onto a BEd degree: "two of the students suggested colleges run degree courses in the evening so that they could continue to pursue full-time work in the daytime and work towards their degree at night." (Dickson & Le Roux, 2012, p 9). The subject of promotion came up frequently in that study too; as one male pre-service teacher put it "To get more males into teaching in general there should be clear promotional opportunities,

like people should not spend fifteen years just being a teacher with no opportunities clear for them” (also p 9).

In terms of family responsibilities such as needing to provide for family and needing to have a workplace geographically close to the family home, means of responses for these were high for both Emirati and non-Emirati students (Table 4), suggesting that the desire or need to provide for family may be widespread across Arab cultures, rather than being an Emirati specificity. There were no significant differences in the answers regarding promotions or the need to earn a high salary, both of which scored high means. So, for both groups of males, a requirement of a future career is a high salary and a career with good promotional opportunities. Perhaps the references to promotion and the high mean of this response are also a subconscious offset to the perceived low status of teaching – if they have to be in a low status job, let it be one with a high salary and promotions at least! There is a discrepancy between this perception and the reality of teaching though, as Ridge (2010) argues: “Promotion opportunities are available to all Emirati teachers, and in particular to Emirati males, who due to their small number, can easily expect to become a school principal in a very short period of time. Female Emirati teachers also are able to become school principals, but this involves a longer and more competitive process than for males. In contrast, expatriate teachers cannot typically aspire to be a school principal” (p 5). This phenomenon (of rapid promotion of male teachers) is not limited to the UAE and is observed globally. Williams (1992) discussed how the speed with which men in ‘feminized’ professions tend to be promoted has sometimes been referred to as the ‘glass escalator’. Wingfield (2009) talks of the glass escalator as being a racially biased privilege, which would appear to be the case in the UAE also, given the propensity for Emirati males to be promoted over at times more qualified and experienced non-Emirati colleagues which Ridge observed.

Both groups thought that it was important for their career to provide opportunities for professional development training – possibly because this was connected in their minds to promotional opportunities. Table 4 shows that the means for the groups’ answers to this statement were similar (3.59 for Emiratis, 3.52 for non-Emiratis). However, noticeably and significantly different ( $p < 0.01$ ) were the groups’ responses as to whether or not it was important that their job would provide opportunities to gain further qualifications. Why this would be much more important for non-Emirati than for Emirati students is most likely job-security related – because of the large Emiratisation drives taking place in the UAE maybe these men know that they will be able to find work fairly easily and do not necessarily need the ‘edge’ that further qualifications provide, or perhaps the non-Emiratis are thinking too of their countries of citizenship wherein employment is much more competitive and higher degrees are more necessary for employment.

It is regularly argued that to increase the involvement of men in teaching, and in particular primary education, the status of the profession needs to be improved through higher pay levels (Skelton, 2002). It’s not immediately clear though whether improving the status of the job in the UAE is as simple as increasing salary, since some students disagreed that teachers were poorly paid yet simultaneously thought that the profession held a low status. Instead, perhaps using the few male Emirati teachers as role models to speak publicly to high school students and explain the realities of the job would do more to improve status than a salary increase.

During the afore-mentioned FNC meeting one member was reported to have commented that “Emirati men didn’t have the patience for teaching at local schools” (Driscoll, 2012). The FNC also called for research into “the reasons why children drift away from their early ambitions to certain fields” (Salama, 2012) based on an assumption that wanting to be a teacher is, for men, only an early ambition. However, these findings indicate that for a significant minority of men, the ambition has not drifted away and is very much present in Grade 12. It may be that the ambition is simply not being nurtured to transform itself into attendance at teacher education courses and therefore qualification as a teacher. 17% of the 66 Emirati students surveyed had given serious consideration to entering the teaching profession. Had this desire been nurtured to fruition, this would have translated into eleven male students joining a teacher-training institution. If that could be duplicated across the Emirate, a large number of male teachers would have been harvested which is not only internationally comparable, but would be higher than in many developed countries – in Scotland in the UK for example, one of the major teacher education institutes recorded only 10% of males entering their BEd

primary education course in 2011 (Glasgow University Registrar's Office, personal communication, 6 January, 2012). Additionally, if even half of these males had actually had their interest nurtured to translate into attendance at a teacher education institution they would have tripled the present number of males studying education in higher education institutions in Abu Dhabi (Emirates College for Advanced Education Registrar's Office, personal communication, 24 January, 2012).

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Much work needs to be done in the UAE to capitalize on the interested, but apparently un-nurtured teaching ambitions of these students. Recruitment departments of higher educational institutes can play their part by becoming more actively, visibly involved in schools. Liaisons between career counsellors (mainly termed 'social workers' in Abu Dhabi government schools) and Abu Dhabi Educational Council to introduce 'shadow a male teacher' days where students can spend a few days with a male teacher (preferable Emirati for the Emirati male students). Experienced and positive Emirati male teachers could play a very influencing ambassador's role to help recruit more Emirati males in particular, and to help to balance out the perception of teaching as being such a tiring job with its more rewarding, equally present, attributes. A report produced by the Ontario College of Teachers (2004) made two recommendations to specifically increase recruitment of male secondary school students: establish a secondary school-based program for existing male teachers to mentor male students wishing to become teachers, and develop a targeted scholarship program for tertiary teaching courses aimed at Year 10 and 12 male students. These could very feasibly be taken up by Abu Dhabi Educational Council too, which would also address the issue of the male students' need to contribute financially to the household. Echoing this, one of the male pre-service teachers in the previously mentioned study (Dickson and Le Roux, 2012) commented that "in schools from grade 1 to grade 12, we need to show the students why we need teachers, explain to them the importance of being a teacher. In addition, make the view and image of teachers and teaching nice and respectful for the students. This will help to encourage them to choose education degree when they graduate from the school". From a student who had already spent five years in an education degree and many months working in schools on teaching practice, this could be important advice.

Emirati pre-service teachers specifically cited seeing their male Emirati teachers as a catalyst for their own journey into teaching (Dickson & Le Roux, 2013a). Since Emirati male students seem to have been very positively influenced by their male teachers, perhaps asking experienced Emirati male teachers with a positive attitude to share their experiences with the grade 12 students would be beneficial. Lastly but importantly, some consideration could be given to the recruitment of the non-Emirati males into federal higher education institutes who have shown such interest in the profession. There is no question that the recruitment priority should be towards suitably qualified Emirati males. However, rather than recruiting from outside the UAE as happens now, a better option may be to allow non-Emirati Arab students such as the ones in this study to receive stipends to train at federal universities and teach in schools. In this way, they would be trained in local higher education institutions on internationally accredited BEd programs and in adherence with the needs and wishes of the developing education system in the UAE. In addition to being culturally aligned with the UAE, many of these students appear to feel an allegiance to the country who possibly gave them a better standard of living, or a safer existence, than their home country could. A non-Emirati student said that the reason he had given serious consideration to teaching as a career was: "I want to help in developing the nation!" It is not actually 'their' nation, yet they want to help in its development.

## CONCLUSIONS

Many career stereotypes of Emirati males as teachers prevail, the assumption being that most simply do not want to become teachers. However, the findings of this study show that this may not be the case. A significant minority (17%) of male Emirati students surveyed professed to have seriously considered teaching as a career. Nonetheless, none had finally chosen it as a career. Much work needs to be done to capitalize upon this group of students, by school career counsellors and recruitment teams in higher education institutions offering BEd programs in nurturing this significant interest by providing information

and assurance. The nurture of this interest may well result in a far greater intake of suitable males onto BEd programs. In addition, a significant number of non-Emirati males (22% of those surveyed) professed an interest in teaching, an allegiance to serving the UAE as teachers and helping the nation develop. Whilst the first priority needs to be on recruitment of Emirati citizens, this larger group of young men, many of whom have been brought up and educated in government schools in the UAE, may provide an alternative, plentiful pool of male teachers to work in government schools.

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