

Why do Emirati males become teachers and how do cultural factors influence this decision?

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Introduction

In the research reported here, we seek to gain an understanding of the context within which male Emirati students make a choice to become teachers, and the challenges they face as pre-service teachers within the Emirati cultural context. There is a significant body of research which demonstrates that male school pupils benefit from having a male role model as their teacher (e.g. Dee, 2006), particularly if the teacher is a member of their own culture and community (REACH Report, 2007; Xuehui et al., 2008). The substantial financial investment of national governmental programmes into reforming education in the UAE is well documented. If the ambitious targets described by the Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC), the Economic Vision 2030 and various Emiratisation programs are to be realised, then producing high quality Emirati teachers, including males, is of the utmost concern (Abu Dhabi Education Council, 2012; *Abu Dhabi Economic Vision Paper 2030*, 2008; Ghubash, 2007).

There has been much research in certain Western countries such as the UK, the USA and Australia into the reasons why men do not tend to enter the teaching profession (e.g. Bernard et al., 2004; Mills et al., 2004). This research has focused on the influencing factors with reference to the particular nation in which the research was carried out, and is therefore culturally specific. While there has been work published into the reasons why an increasingly small number of young Emirati males enter higher education in the UAE (Abdulla & Ridge, 2009), little or no published research exists on the reasons why so few Emirati men are attracted to teaching; specifically, no sociocultural examination of this reality has taken place within the unique setting of the rapidly developing emirate of Abu Dhabi in the UAE. The perceptions of young Emirati male students enrolled on BEd programs in higher education institutions have to be seriously considered in order to inform efforts to encourage more men into the teaching profession in the UAE. With this in mind, we asked the students about how they personally reached the decision to study education, opinions on what may be deterring males from entering the profession, and how they thought more males could be encouraged to enter it. Teacher training institutions, schools and the Abu Dhabi Educational Council in the UAE have much to gain from this information in order to increase and retain male student numbers.

The global decline of the male teacher

The males in our study are training to be primary school teachers in UAE government schools. The concept of schools, particularly primary schools, being heavily dominated by females is not unique to the UAE, or even to the Arab world. Worldwide, teacher training institutions reflect a much higher percentage of female entrants to males, for a number of reasons such as traditional perceptions of teaching as being a caring, gentle profession to which women are intrinsically and biologically better

suited. Other reasons given as to why males are deterred from entering the teaching profession include fear of peer harassment and factors such as the ability to earn more money in other professions (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2010). The General Teaching Council for Scotland in the UK found that only 8% of entrants into primary teaching in 2003 were males. In Northern Ireland, less than 10% of BEd students in Colleges of Education in 2004 were recorded as males. In England in 2008 the percentage of male entrants into teacher training institutions to study primary teaching was just 16% (Carr, 2004), and one in four primary schools has no male teachers (Lipsett, 2009) .

As a consequence of the low numbers of male entrants into teacher training institutions, the numbers of male primary teachers are universally low. UNESCO data from the Middle East shows that in 2010, only 14% of teachers in primary education in the UAE were males, while neighbouring Gulf country Kuwait recorded 10% of the total number of its primary teachers being male, and Qatar 11% (UNESCO, 2011). In the UAE, the emirate of Abu Dhabi (the geographical context of this study) currently has around 50 male Emirati teachers working in primary schools. The pre-service teachers interviewed in this study will, upon graduation, make up around 10% of this group – should they decide to teach. In the emirate of Dubai, only 5% of the teachers in primary schools are males, and only 14% of those males are UAE nationals – in other words, a total of 0.7% of the primary teachers are male nationals (KHDA, 2010).

In the United Arab Emirates the value of education in youth development has always been regarded as an area of priority for future prosperity. Visionary leaders have embraced the opportunities of globalization, transforming this country almost overnight into a regional leader in areas of finance, commerce, tourism and technology. Modeling best practices from countries such as Finland, Singapore and the UK, investing in teacher training and development in UAE government schools has become a focus area. Gender segregation, which occurs in all government schools in the UAE from Grade 1 onwards, has led to a situation of a shortage of teachers for boys with the subsequent employment of often lower caliber teachers from neighboring Arab countries to fill vacancies (Barber et al., 2007). A renewed focus should be on attracting quality National students to the teaching profession in the UAE.

The need for male teachers

Recent writing on the significance of teacher gender support the assumption that it is beneficial to have more male teachers, and in particular beneficial for young boys to have male role models in the classroom. Hansen and Mulholland (2005) state that the "reasons for there being urgency in recruiting more men into elementary teaching are varied (including) to provide elementary school children with male teachers who model learning as acceptable masculine activity" (p. 119-120). Martino & Kehler (2006) discuss the idea that an absence of male role models can be detrimental to students in school. Citing data gathered by the US Department of Education in 2006, Reynolds (2010) states that "the overall effect of having a female teacher instead of a male raises the achievement of girls by 4% of a standard deviation and lowers the achievement of boys by the same amount producing an overall gender gap of 8% of a standard deviation" and that "regardless of the academic subject, when a class is taught by a woman, boys are twice as likely as girls to be seen as disruptive, inattentive and unlikely to complete their homework" (p. 2). Thomas Dee in his 2006 paper *The Why Chromosome* examines the effect of the gender of the teacher on his or her students and concluded that "girls have better educational outcomes when taught by women and boys are better off when taught by men" (p. 68). According to Dee, this effect is partly due to initial engagement between students and teachers (i.e. that boys are more likely to engage more quickly and effectively with a male teacher than with a female teacher) which then indirectly lead to an increase in student attainment. Skelton & Hall (2000) also

argue that “the absence of men in early years work helps to transmit the message that it is only women who are involved in the emotional, social, and intellectual development of young children” (p. 5).

The findings that a male teacher may have a positive effect on student attainment are important because if this were to be applicable in the UAE too, then male teachers are sorely needed. The gender gap in education and educational attainment begins very young in the UAE. Girls in the UAE are outperforming boys in every subject in the UAE – even in those subjects, such as mathematics, which have traditionally been thought of as ‘male’ subjects. The CEPA (Common Educational Proficiency Assessment) is a test which assesses English and Maths levels in Grade 12 students. CEPA Results from 2009 show a marked difference in boys’ and girls’ scores, with the mean girls’ scores exceeding the boys’ significantly (NAPO, 2009).

There really is no ready-made theoretical framework underpinning the assumptions of the need for male teachers which could be specifically applied to the highly unique setting of gender-segregated schools (and indeed society) coupled with the situation which one finds in the UAE of a national population vastly outnumbered by expatriates. In this paper, we explore the understudied significance of male teachers within the UAE context.

The role of the male in families in the UAE

In the United Arab Emirates, the family is the foundation of society. Individuals do not make choices as individuals per se, but rather as part of a wider network of family wherein consequences and effects in the wider family circle are considered and weighed up before a decision is made. Joseph (2002) states that “the constitutions of most Western states define the basic unit of society as the individualized citizen” (p. 23). By contrast, “most constitutions of Arab states identify the basic unit of society as the family instead of the individual” and “the male Arab citizen subject is therefore regarded as a patriarch, the head of that patriarchal family, legally constituted as the basic unit of the political community who accrues rights and responsibilities concomitant with that legal status” (ibid). If we consider the decision for young Emirati men to enter into any tertiary institution, but particularly one which will lead to a teaching degree within this cultural context, a meaningful picture of consequences and contextual realities emerge within which he makes career choice decisions. This link will be explored and discussed in this study.

Of course, the Arab world is not homogeneous and there are huge diversities between countries of ‘Arabia’ in terms of culture, demographics, economics etc. The United Arab Emirates is a small, extremely wealthy state which is a “paradigm of a welfare state, providing an array of generous social welfare benefits covering health, housing and education, even marriage support” (Khondker, 2011, p. 305). Nonetheless, there is still often huge pressure on a male (particularly an eldest son) within UAE society to provide for their family – sometimes also for their extended family such as sisters who are unmarried, or elderly parents and relatives (Ridge, 2009). As a consequence, four year full-time Bachelor degree courses are not enticing to many Emirati men. According to a survey carried out by NAPO in 2006, of those male school leavers who do not take up a place in tertiary education, 60% take up paid employment, compared to only 1% of females (Abdulla and Ridge, 2009). This indicates very clearly the desire of these young men to earn a salary and prioritize this over entering further education. The global gender divide in teaching is amplified in the UAE since young men in general have much lower attendance at both schools and universities than their international counterparts, and certainly lower than their female Emirati counterparts. According to NAPO’s 2005 statistics on no-show rates among males admitted to public universities “the largest percentage of Emirati men who did not pursue higher

education joined either the police or military (33%), both of which require minimal education, while the second highest percentage (30%) were staying at home or recorded as 'looking for work'" (Ridge, 2009).

Al-Mutawah (2005, p. 2) describes the male and female gender roles as prescribed by Arab society long before the introduction of Islam: "Usually the classical Arab mother taught her daughter that the traditional role of the woman involved housekeeping, mothering skills, or serving and pleasing her husband. Correspondingly, the father taught his son how to be the provider and the protector of his children and wife, including all other females in his household. The male, as the protector of the family, was the dominant figure in the male-female relationship". The male as the protector of the family was generally regarded and accepted as the dominant figure in the male-female relationship, constituting a patriarchal family structure in Arab society.

Two things can be inferred, therefore, about the expectations placed upon today's Emirati male. Firstly, as mentioned earlier, since the male needs to be the provider and protector of the family, the faster he can earn a salary to carry out such a task, the better. A male graduating from high school in the UAE and enrolling into a four year Bachelor of Education program will have to wait at least four years until he is able to earn a salary, assuming he does not enter into part-time work during his studies. Emirati students registering on BEd programs in the UAE are normally paid a small stipend, but it is certainly not an amount sufficient to support a family. This is likely to be supplemented by the extended family budget, even in the case of married male students. In a culture with such strong expectations, and one where the identity of the male is so closely intertwined with his ability to provide for his family, it is easy to understand how tempting a career immediately accessible upon leaving high school where no further educational qualifications are required, such as the police and military, becomes to the young male school leaver (Nelson, 2004). In addition, these careers still carry a high cultural status in society, which may be higher than teaching.

Secondly, even if a male were to forego the instant gratification of a salary which does not depend on having gained a university qualification, is teaching the type of career which the family has in mind in order to earn this salary as the 'provider and protector'? In our interviews we set out to explore this issue further and to look in particular at ways in which students at a teacher training institution in the UAE have overcome possible bias and prejudice on their journey toward becoming a teacher.

Aims and rationale

The study sought to ascertain male students' perceptions of teaching as a profession. In particular, we sought to discover how they were able to overcome any cultural challenges which faced them before enrolling on a Bachelor of Education degree course. We explored how their family and community respond to them being teachers in a female-dominated profession.

The main research questions were as follows:

1. Which factors influenced the young men's decision to enrol on the Bachelor of Education program?
2. How did their Emirati social context (namely family, friends and others) react to their course choice?
3. In the students' opinions, how do they think more Emirati males could be attracted into BEd programs and the teaching profession?

Methodology: data collection and analysis

This paper draws upon interviews with six males, all of whom are Emirati nationals studying in the final year of a four year Bachelor of Education degree program at a higher education institute in the UAE. Completion of their degree will enable them to teach the now English-medium subjects of Maths, Science and English in UAE government Cycle 1 primary schools, Grades 1-5. The interviews took about twenty to thirty minutes to complete, and were recorded manually as notes and later transcribed. At the same time, care was taken to maintain eye contact and skills such as verbal encouragement cues to enable maximum interviewer-interviewee connection. In order to test our interview for validity and credibility, we carried out member-checking (Newby, 2007), i.e. the transcript was sent post-interview for verification by the interviewee that these were indeed his intended words.

A semi-structured interviewing method (See Appendix: Interview questions) was used to gather data in a way which allowed the interviewees to elaborate in a narrative style if they wished, and where the interviewer had opportunities to ask further probing questions which came up as a natural flow of the question-response dialogue. The established protocols for undertaking qualitative research of this nature were followed (e.g. Newby, 2007). The interviewees were briefed in advance of the study both verbally and in writing about the nature, purpose and procedure of the interviews; informed consent was obtained and assurances of confidentiality were provided to interviewees.

The number of survey participants is the maximum achievable sample within this institution (i.e. all of the final year male students on the primary BEd course), which is also, by virtue of the low numbers of males in teacher-training institutions in the UAE, a highly significant proportion of all males in teacher training institutions in Abu Dhabi. The interviews were carried out one to one in English, with re-wording and repetition as necessary to aid understanding.

Findings

The responses have been coded into categories connected with the research questions. The findings are discussed within each section.

Which factors influenced the young men's decision to enrol on the Bachelor of Education program?

When asked how they came to enter the college initially, four out of six interviewees said that they had not set out to join a teacher training course, but had embarked upon it partly by chance and availability, for example:

"I joined the college because it was my only choice I would have had to wait to get onto another course and ... it was the only course available immediately at that time."

"Teaching college was the last option for me because it was the only place who would take me immediately and not wait until the following year. I wanted to go to another college and if they had accepted me I would have gone."

"I didn't have any money to study in the private colleges, and I felt ashamed to wait in the home for six months without doing anything until the government colleges accept me. It was the last option for me because other government colleges didn't accept me, and put me on the waiting list."

This trend is slightly concerning, in that there are no signs of commitment or loyalty to the profession itself, rather simply the availability of a place on the course. Four out of the six also mentioned an original desire to study on an engineering course, obviously a much more traditionally male choice; this

did not transpire for different reasons. Despite this contingent element to the degree course choice, some then decided to stay because they started to enjoy the course:

“I thought I would kill time (on the course), then rejoin later (my first choice of university). But after one semester I enjoyed it and decided to stay on the BEd course. I want to continue to get my degree.”

Only one of the six students stated that he had joined the college because of an interest in the work of teaching itself. In this case, the student recalled how:

“In high school, my friends came to my home many times to ask me questions about school work, and ask me to clarify lessons. All of them said to me, “we understand better from you than from the teacher, you have a very good way to explain things.” They advised me to be a teacher. Then my mother said ‘I think you should be a teacher’ because she had overheard me teaching my friends.”

Another student did not have a particular interest in teaching, but described how his mother had dreams of one of her children becoming a teacher, so he decided to do it to fulfill this dream for her. Most of the students made a reference to choosing teaching because of the proximity of the teaching college to their homes and of the perceived relatively short school day compared to some other sectors. The sense of pressure of family responsibility which it was earlier hypothesized that the Emirati males may experience is corroborated in their answers:

“The length of the teaching day is shorter than other jobs, so I would be able to support my family more.”

“I chose it because it’s close to my home, it’s a good salary, and doesn’t need much time, you don’t have to travel for this job, it’s only 6 hours, you can have a lot of family time.”

One student discussed how he was drawn to the profession because of the idea of teaching being a religiously sanctioned idea:

“My brother encouraged me [to be a teacher] - he explained to me the religious concept of being a teacher, in our religion Prophet Mohammed refers to it as one of the good, holy jobs.”

Just as embarking on a teacher training course is no guarantee that a student will graduate from the college, graduating from a teacher training college is not in itself a guarantee that a graduate will teach. Half of the interviewees made some statement to the effect that although they would be proud to complete their degree, they were not committed to working as a teacher after graduation, for example:

“A degree is important for my life, but when I graduate from college, I am not thinking about teaching at all, the most important thing for me is just to get a job, any well-paid job.”

“I heard from many teachers that there is no clear vision for the job, no promotion opportunities. So, if I get another job I will drop teaching.”

“I knew there was a big shortage of Emiratis in all sectors, so I could take my BEd degree and work in any area.”

How did their Emirati social context (namely family, friends and others) react to their course choice?

In terms of any prejudice, stereotyping, or negative reactions they faced, all students said that they had faced some form of these from friends, family, colleagues and people they did not know well. As discussed earlier, family expectations of males in the family can be very traditional and Emirati males entering into teacher-training institutions are very much ‘bucking the trend’. Two of the men said that their families were not against their choice, but did not actively support it either:

“My family didn’t really have any reaction. They don’t exactly support my choice but they are not against me either. But my family was concerned and would have preferred me to complete an engineering degree.”

“My family and friends generally disapprove of my choice to become a teacher. My family said, okay, just get the degree. They support me to study for a degree but they say no need to work as a teacher.”

The latter comment again suggests that completion of a teaching degree is not necessarily an indication of a ‘career choice’, more a ‘degree choice.’ However, it also seems that even when the family does disagree with the degree choice, they are still very proud, as the student went on to explain:

“Of course when I graduate they will be very proud and we will have a big celebration and invite everyone to our home. I am the first son in my family to graduate.”

It is not inevitable that this pride will continue when the son follows a career into teaching. Some families were vocal in their disapproval:

“My family and friends generally disapprove of my choice to become a teacher. They said ‘I hope if he gets another job offer he will take it.’”

This pattern is true even of the student who was mentioned earlier as having chosen teaching because others, including his mother, had advised him that he was a natural teacher, and who had his parents’ and other family members’ approval and encouragement to join the college. He described how his father appeared to change as he drew closer to the end of his degree and began to question whether it was a good idea to be a teacher after all:

“I noticed last year that my father started to worry about me. He heard my uncle (a teacher) saying always, ‘I’m tired’, and bringing home many papers to correct in the home. He lives next door so my father always saw this. So he told me he was worried that I didn’t have the skill to handle this work and maybe I should not teach.”

One student described how dejected he felt when his friends from high school repeatedly belittled his choice of career:

“For one month I only went from college to home, college to home, not wanting to listen to my friends’ talk; they made me feel that I made a very bad decision to come to the college, always saying, ‘why do you want to be a teacher?’”

In this particular student’s choice, he was able to overcome the teasing and remain on the course, mainly, he explained, due to his male colleagues’ emotional support.

One would expect that the views of friends and families closest to the student would have most influence, or would be most difficult to contradict. The views of people further away from the family circle also have an effect. The following responses show that many of the comments which people made related directly to negative perceptions of teaching as a profession, such as that it was a tiring job full of obstacles and challenges:

“Many people at that time told me I made a bad decision to be a teacher, saying ‘I don’t know how you will manage, how will the students treat you?’”

“When we were on practicum, one father asked us, ‘why are you choosing to be a teacher? Why not do another job, they will pay you more and you will not be tired!’”

“There is a negative idea about the teachers’ workplace, that people complain all the time ... this is not encouraging people to be teachers.”

Interestingly, none of the men mentioned that they had counteracted these perceptions to defend the teaching profession; on the contrary, one of the students even corroborated the negative perceptions:

“Maybe one in ten supports me of people I meet. Other people look down on me. When this happens, I want to say, I agree with them! If we think of education, of course it’s an important job. But there are many problems facing teachers, like the pressure from the parents of students, and students not respecting teachers.”

All six of the men disagreed that teachers were poorly paid and said that this was not a factor which they imagined was discouraging other men from entering the profession. They were answering within the context of the Emirate of Abu Dhabi which pays teachers a significantly higher salary than in the other Emirates. Instead, all six repeatedly mentioned what they perceived as a lack of promotional opportunities to be discouraging men, for example:

“I heard from many teachers that there is no clear vision for the job, no promotion opportunities.”
“Also all men are concerned about promotion so this discourages (them to be teachers).”

The frequent reference to promotional opportunities clearly suggests that they serve as a status point for the men, possibly in an attempt to compensate for the missed opportunity to join the male-dominated, masculinized professions such as the military or police. This will be discussed further in a subsequent section.

All students made some reference to feeling uncomfortable about choosing teaching as a career when the majority of their peers were entering the military and police corps. One cited the exciting media and recruitment campaigns for these careers and thought that teaching should try to emulate these. None agreed that being in a female-dominated environment at teacher training college was a discouraging factor to entry. This may be partly because all government institutions in the UAE are gender-segregated, so it was not an issue they were going to have to come to terms with in terms of having female students in the same class, work on co-educational group projects etc.

The sense of brotherhood which arose when the six students found themselves very much in the minority was evident in the interviews, as they described taking turns to support one another and encourage each other to continue with their studies:

“My college group (the other male students) supports each other very much – in the five years that we studied, once in the semester someone wanted to quit, even me. But we all encouraged each other and say, you can’t quit, you must stay.”

This is a very positive aspect of minority culture which is discussed further subsequently.

Four of the six men also said that they saw Emirati men leaving the profession frequently, which negatively affected them in that they felt de-motivated. One student recalled entering a Ministry office one time and finding two of his old school teachers, both Emirati, working there. When he expressed his shock, one of the teachers told him that he had left teaching because nowadays the profession was a “headache”.

In the students’ opinions, how could more Emirati males be attracted into BEd programs and the teaching profession?

All six interviewees, predictably, suggested that more male students would enter teacher training colleges if the stipend for enrolling on the BEd course specifically was increased. This is a universal plea from students, but it may have even more significance here in the UAE placed within the context of the Emirati male needing to feel himself, and to be seen to be, a provider for his family in some form. At the

very least, they do not wish to be dependent upon family to supplement the stipend, and know that other sectors pay more generously than education. The authors do not have definitive data to back up the female perspective on this, but anecdotally based on numerous casual conversations with female students, this had never been mentioned as a barrier to study, presumably because female students have other sources of income such as support from the parental home or husband's earnings, and are not under the same pressure to provide.

Some mentioned the need for men to work in Emirati culture and how important it is for Emirati men to contribute to their home financially even while studying, presumably to feel like a contributing member of society. In order to combat the effect of high school students ruling out teaching as a career path not particularly because of the profession itself, but because obtaining the degree needed to become a teacher would mean delaying earning a salary for four or five years, 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. How feasible this would be given the demands of a full-time BEd course and the family demands made on Emirati males is perhaps debatable, even though the suggestion is a logical one. Two students articulated that the stipend need only be increased for men, not women, and therefore may be financially feasible for some institutions:

"We can get more males into college by increasing the stipend. Men should get a higher stipend than women because they have many women applying, the problem is to get more men and the only way to do this is more money."

The concept of sponsorship was suggested as a means to encourage more young men into the profession, whereby a student would be paid a salary by the Emirate Educational Council to complete their course, and be guaranteed a job at the end provided he obtained a good degree and could carry out work experience during summer school programs etc. in the same way as students sponsored by corporate firms do. All students said that men needed to be guaranteed a job upon graduation.

Five out of six students thought that teachers had a low status in Emirati society. The importance of promotion and professional recognition was mentioned by all of the students, one of whom was particularly annoyed at the perceived inequity among teaching graduates with the same degree, but very different GPA's, who will be employed at the same level of probationary teacher, and be apportioned the same salary ("we need to have balanced and fair rights to attract more men.") They needed this "because of the importance of teachers' role to build and teach the future generation of the country". Four of the students reiterated the need for transparent promotional opportunities, for example:

"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."

"A good idea is to limit the time someone can be a principal for, this gives a chance for younger people to move up. Some people stay being a principal for 30 years which is unfair."

Some suggestions about the work of teaching itself were made, such as:

"Decrease the numbers of teaching periods in the school for teachers. Because it is too much work for them to work from 7 am to 2 pm standing in front of student, then in their free time prepare for the next class, correcting worksheets and exams and other things inside the school."

Another suggested an even shorter school day (3-4 hours) and freedom for men to be able to leave as soon as they had finished teaching those lessons to go home. There was at times an odd contradiction between the students' earlier admissions that one of the reasons that teaching was attractive to them

was because of the 'fewer hours' of the work compared to other sectors, yet later on the same students often referred to the long days which a teacher has to work.

The students felt that school students' perception of teachers was generally negative: that teaching was a difficult job with much preparation and responsibility, which was discouraging many men from entering the profession, but that these perceptions could be turned around:

"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."

"They need to show high school boys that teaching has changed: there are better facilities, better equipped, give them access to teachers to hear this."

Discussion

From the interview data presented above, the majority of the men who were included in this study did not choose to enter teacher training college because of a love of teaching. On the contrary, three out of six even disagreed that they enjoyed working with children. Instead, they chose the degree course mainly because the course was available to them, because the college itself was close to their homes, or because they could likely find a future school close to their homes, meaning that they could continue their responsibilities to their homes and families. They also perceived teaching to be a career which required short hours away from the home, echoing the idea of the necessity of being easily available at home.

The theme of having to spend time with family, or having family responsibilities, came up very often in the students' responses. One might anticipate this in a study of married men, but only one of the six students was married at the time of interview. In other words, the concept of family responsibility seemed not to be restricted to married men, and encompassed all of the men in this study. They explained that being close to home and having a short day would enable them to continue to support their homes and families (supporting and being close to their mothers were specifically mentioned by three of the men). This finding is in keeping with the earlier discussion of the traditional role of the Emirati male who should look after the family members, particularly the women, not only by financially providing for them, but also in a social and moral caretaking role.

There is another possibility to consider here, which is that for these young men, as much a product of society as anyone else, it would not be easy to say that, for example, they had always wanted to be a teacher, a sentiment regularly voiced by females. So again, we have to bear in mind that it may have been difficult to admit a strong desire to teach, as well as to admit now a strong desire to want to work as a teacher post-graduation.

The men found themselves part of a minority culture as male pre-service teachers, which they would not have experienced as part of a more traditionally 'male' profession. One might speculate that this being a minority may in fact be enticing to some – it is certainly unique to be a male student teacher in Abu Dhabi, and the attention and focus that the student group receives (there have been at least six newspaper articles about the men over the course of their degree and their faces are seen frequently on promotional literature) may be appealing and in some ways may be substituting for the perceived status that military or police careers attract. Indeed, one student cites this specific reason as to why he entered the teaching college:

"I felt that there were few men teachers so I would be in a strong position as a teacher."

In the same way that female engineering students were treated as a special case, a novelty and something of a national treasure in some European universities 30 years ago, it may be that the male pre-service teachers find themselves in a very privileged position within their institution, and later, within their schools, as the minority group of national male teachers.

The male students reached the final year of their degree course amidst a plethora of prejudice from many sources. Most do not have their families' explicit support in general, although one had a brother's support, and another their parents' support to complete the degree, though not to work as a teacher as such. This must have been difficult for the students: a recent study of factors influencing Emirati students' choice of degree majors found that most of the study participants said that a family member had greatest influence on their choice of major, and that parents had the strongest influence of all (Gallacher et al., 2010). All of the students have been subject to friends' negative comments and prejudice, and most have been subjected to outsiders' negative comments too. Becoming a teacher in UAE society does not appear to be, for these six men in any case, in keeping with the traditional image of the Emirati male for many people. One could argue that having to deal with these prejudiced views and to struggle with a lack of family and friends' support to emerge as a successful BEd graduate means, by definition, that the graduate is of particularly strong character. Certainly, they must have developed some strength of character on their journey, but whether this translates into being a more committed professional educator remains to be seen.

Not all students would be strong enough to withstand either peer pressure or the lack of support for their chosen path which these men describe. The six men began their degree at the college within a cohort of sixteen male students, meaning that from that initial intake, only 38% have made it into the final year. Certainly, there are numerous reasons for this, such as lack of academic success, insufficient English language exam scores needed to continue at the college etc., but it is perfectly possible too that peer pressure and the lack of recognition of teaching as a suitable career choice for Emirati men might have played a part in this high college attrition rate.

Although all of the students thought that more men would be encouraged into teacher-training college by dramatically increasing the stipends for men only, none of them felt that the salary for working as a teacher was a cause for concern – most even thought that it was a 'fine and fair' salary. The main issue for all of the students regarding work as a teacher after graduation was what they perceived as a lack of promotion opportunities, or a transparency of the framework within which one could be promoted. The underlying assumption seemed to be of promotion as an expectation, and not one necessarily related to performance or competence, as these factors were not mentioned.

There was no mention of the link between competence or excellence in performance and promotion. Instead, it seemed to be assumed that they would be promoted by virtue of being Emirati males. On the other hand, the sentiment that teaching offers a lack of promotional opportunities to Emirati males is refuted by some. Ridge (2010) argues that "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). So, assuming this to be true, there appears to be a mismatch between the students' perceptions of the lack of promotional opportunities and the realities in the schools. Perhaps the mismatch too is in what constitutes a long or short period of time – one student expressed indignation that "for a person to become a vice-principal

he should have seven years' experience. This is too much!" Seven years for a serious promotion does not seem a particularly long wait by international standards, yet for the aspiring Emirati male teacher, it appears to be.

Conclusion and implications for recruitment of male teachers

This study suggests that there is no clear co-relation between studying a teaching degree and becoming a teacher, as no-one in the study articulated a powerful desire to teach upon graduation. However, given that there was no powerful desire to teach expressed at the beginning of the degree course either for most of the students, this may not be a realistic indicator of outcome.

It may be that colleges and universities could capitalize on this lack of intentionality, since there will always be students who appear on courses where entrance requirements are not as high as for other courses. In the case of these six men, something about the course or the college encouraged them to stay, which is no insignificant effort for a five year program (including a Foundation Studies year, which all of the men took). Higher education institutions then have to be vigilant enough not only to recruit students, but to create a vibrant enough social and learning environment that even students who were not initially motivated to become teachers, will remain on the course.

There are many studies to show that it would be a positive thing for young male students in schools to have positive role models (e.g. Carr, 2004). Therefore, it is the authors' belief that educational policy makers in the UAE need to look carefully at the suggestions made by these six students in terms of how to recruit more males into teaching, since many of the suggestions they make are quite feasible and may have a significant impact. Teacher training colleges also need to look carefully at their recruitment strategies to understand why they are perceived as inadequate compared to other employers such as the police, military, and even other universities. So too could Abu Dhabi Educational Council begin to directly and actively create dialogue with the final year students in colleges to bridge the gap between college and the school, offering concrete opportunities; in this way they could perhaps divert those students who may be easily swayed upon graduation by employers who promote their sector more effectively. Since all of these students cite reasons of family responsibilities and factors such as being able to find employment (schools) near their homes to facilitate keeping up their very real and pressing family responsibilities, recruiters should find a way of tying this into their recruitment strategies.

These students are all successful at college in terms of academic and school practicum (internship) performance, indicating that having no explicit desire to teach before enrolling on the course is not an indicator, in these cases, of performance as pre-service teachers. Perhaps we have to consider, then, that the desire to work with children or teach as a prerequisite or assumed motivating factor to teacher-training college entry is an idealistic one. If recruiters are only tailoring their marketing strategy in terms of the teaching role itself, they may be missing a sector of male students who could be targeted. The non-intentional nature of the enrolment of five out of six of our subjects should be borne in mind, in that perhaps many undecided, suitably qualified young males could be attracted into teaching having never even expressed a desire to teach. Perhaps marketing strategies should focus on a different element, that of the Emirati male as the household provider and protector, and it could be shown that teaching is not at odds with this role. By using positive advertising and connecting being a teacher with being a strong, providing male with high societal status in the same way that military and police careers are perceived, more males may well think of teaching as a prospective profession. It is a particularly poignant topic too, at a time where Emiratisation is being promoted frequently and "the UAE's citizens [are] needed to be rapidly trained up to fill a wide range of public and private sector positions being

taken by a fresh wave of skilled expatriates attracted by the concurrent oil boom” (Davidson, 2008. p 641). Education has always been a sector which has attracted expatriates from neighboring Arab countries, but increasingly, under the wide-scale Educational Reform taking place in the UAE at present, teaching posts are being filled by teachers from Western countries such as the U.S.A, Canada and the U.K. too, purportedly until such times as Emirati bilingual teachers can take up these posts.

At the same time, our study has shown that for these men, having guaranteed proximity to their college of place of work is highly attractive in being able to keep up their domestic responsibilities, so this may be another factor to consider. Answering the demands for promotional opportunities is more difficult to address, especially since, as discussed, this perception seems to be at odds with reality.

The participants of this study have already decided to study education and their responses have enabled us to explore the reasons for their choice. However to examine the subject more fully and to be able to examine more in-depth the reasons why some males choose *not* to enter education courses, as well as the perceptions of teaching held by those males who have no intention of becoming a teacher, we have also recently undertaken research with grade 12 male secondary school students with the permission and approval of Abu Dhabi Educational Council. The results of this research, when published, should provide an interesting and complementary development of the work described in this paper.

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Appendix: Interview questions

1. Why did you decide to enroll on the BEd degree course?
2. What were your perceptions of becoming a teacher (if any) at the time of applying to college?
3. Did you family and/or friends support your decision to enter the teacher profession and will they support your choice to work as a teacher?
4. Can you talk about reactions from people outside your close circle of family and friends; when they learned about your choice of degree? (If applicable)
5. Have you ever encountered prejudice or negative comments about your decision to become a teacher? Please explain.
6. What do you think are the main reasons why Emirati men are discouraged from becoming teachers?
7. What do you think can be done to attract more men firstly onto teaching degree courses, and secondly to become teachers upon graduation?