

FACTORS DETERMINING THE CHOICE OF TEACHING AS A CAREER

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Abstract: Research was undertaken to identify factors that influence the choice of teaching as a profession. A sample of 168 respondents completed a questionnaire covering seven categories. According to the answers provided by the respondents, the commonest motive for selecting teaching and education was interest in working with children and adolescents, while family influence was the least expressed in the questionnaire. Concurrently, a statistically significant relationship was found between age and motivation based on childhood memories and such interest

Keywords: teaching profession, motivation to choose teaching as a career.

Introduction

Teaching is one of the most visible careers today. For many, to be a teacher is the culmination of childhood dreams and desires. But many people who do not teach and even some professionals believe that teachers are born, reflecting knowledge about certain embodied psychic qualities such as mild extroversion, emotional and neuro-psychic stability, self-confidence, ambition and an integrated personality; innate dispositions that are a precondition for anyone pursuing teaching and education as a career.

1 Theoretical and Empirical Starting Points

Becoming an educator takes several years and is a very complex process. The motivation itself is often enough the key phenomenon that drives somebody to select teaching as their career and determines the subject they are going to teach. However, the motivational aspect in a personality has to be reinforced by high-quality undergraduate training that materialises the process of becoming a teacher. Likewise, it should be emphasised that learning how to be a teacher is an ongoing, lifelong process, which neither begins nor ends with undergraduate training. At the same time, it is also understood as professional development, a *'permanent process that encompasses all dimensions of the development of the teacher's personality and his/her competences as it creates personality prerequisites and an internal motivation for lifelong competence in utilising formal, informal and institutionalised opportunities for creative improvement in the quality of vocational performance and education of pupils.'* (Pavlov, I. 2007, p. 219)

The motivation to pursue teaching as a career sometimes has its roots deep in childhood. According to P. Gavora (2002), the decision can have been made in primary school. Yet it affects not just whether an individual really becomes an educator, but also what kind to become. This is because pupils attracted to teaching as a career perceive school life, the role a teacher plays in it and overall happenings in school more sensitively, which in turn has a formative influence on their own educational thinking.

The reasons behind the decision to choose the teaching profession tend to be varied. Among other things, it is often influenced by an excellent teacher encountered in school, a family environment (Porubská, G. 2004) where a member teaches or is involved in education, or an intense personal experience. Many studies have shown altruistic motives, past experiences, former teachers, personality characteristics, family and family members, love for children, peers, interest in the subject, and parenting to have played a major role in the choice of teaching as a career. But J. Čáp and J. Mareš (2001, p. 266) mention other, not quite so positive motivational factors such as uncertainties, strong dominance and an effort to excel. J. Průcha (2009, p. 204) presents a greater incentive imagined from a professional perspective, which is evident in those seeking to teach at lower-level primary schools, as well as in girls and young people from smaller towns. More specifically, B. Kasáčová's (2004, p. 27) investigation into what motivated

students in primary school teacher training found the desire from childhood to become a teacher dominant, followed by the influence of a parent who was a teacher, secondary education, a specific teacher's impact as a role model and other incentives, such as having switched to education from another subject or worked with children.

P. Gavora (2002, p. 240) chose a different approach to clarify the motivation to teach. After qualitatively analysing the life stories from a sample of 11 teachers, he mapped a wide range of factors that influenced their decisions. Certain tendencies toward extroversion in the need for self-presentation before other people, the early casting of a teacher in childhood role-playing games and excellent marks in school are considered significant determinants alongside personal qualities Gavora describes as diligence, responsibility and reliability, in addition to a family background that encourages a positive attitude towards other people, and to how teacher models interact in a school environment. An important role can also be played by a "key person", whom he referenced as *"anybody always interesting or humanly valuable"*. A watershed moment in a person's life that leaves a strong emotional experience can also incentivise someone when they are choosing a career to pursue. The research pointed out the interaction between external and internal factors both influencing the profession chosen and significantly correcting the formation of the professional self as a teacher. Subsequently, he (Ibid., p. 254) describes the various stages identifiable in the decision-making process that results in the selection of teaching and education careers. They are inspiration, a preconceived role of a teacher, identifying with the teacher's role, initial vision, fleshing it out under the influence of other events and finally the decision itself.

Most often, the motivations to seek a teaching career can be distinguished as internal, external or altruistic. R. Tomšík (2016, p. 396-400) classifies as internal motives interest in the profession, personal and professional predispositions and the belief people have in their own abilities. Experience in teaching and education may also be a decisive internal motive (Kasáčová, B., 1996). External factors include social status and the benefits of a career in this area (Tomšík, R., 2016) while, in the final group, Tomšík notes among altruistic motives a desire to improve the lives of others, for examples through pro-social behaviour and assistance to them. T. Svatoš (2012, p. 93) highlighted a shift over a ten-year period in the motives behind the selection of teaching as a career. While in 2000 the social importance of the teaching profession dominated, the applicants' own individual personal values prevailed in 2010.

Incentives motivating what career to choose are also of decisive importance in training for and further managing it. The motivation to become a teacher can be influenced during training even by undergraduate education based on reflexive self-consciousness (Kasáčová, B., 2001) and forming a self-concept in students and future educators. B. Pravdová (2014, p. 169-179) differentiates the latter process into three basic stages:

- *Becoming acquainted with the role of educator.* Young people arriving at university to become teachers when they graduate are already aware of the role they are going to be playing because they have already encountered it several times during their lives. Their awareness of what a career in education entails may be distorted, so their attention is directed toward the data not necessarily constituting a source for drawing conclusions about their own professional conception, but rather it may be subject to higher education coding and analysis. Based on interviews with students and analysis of their responses, Pravdová considers the first two years of undergraduate study to be decisive for becoming acquainted with the role that educators play. During this time, they can either discover their motivation for entering the education profession or lose it.

- *Confronting the real professional self against the ideal and desirable.* Students encounter this stage of professional self-perception during undergraduate teacher training, when they confront their own current professional self-concepts and the demands the role of educator places upon them. Giving them the opportunity to encounter the reality of teaching by practising it lets students acquire the necessary experience conducive to shaping their own professional self-comprehension. On the other hand, confrontation with the reality of practising how to teach can cause a loss of interest in the education profession even among those students whose primary motivation to become educators was positive (Jursová Zacharová, Z., Sokolová, L., 2015).
- *Transformation into the professional self.* Here the focus on the search for opportunities to further professional development and verifying it in teaching training.

The selection of a career in education is sometimes due to coincidence or to replace another career they had chosen, but were unable to pursue (Jursová Zacharová, Z., Sokolová, L., 2015). Průcha (2009, p. 205) noted that almost 60% of jobseekers for teaching positions had made last-minute decisions about embarking on this career. As a consequence, they may have already lacked the necessary enthusiasm and drive in the early stages of their studies and training to help them manage the workload that comes along with it, and this may have an adverse impact when they are later working in education themselves. The motivation to teach also plays an important role in perceived proficiency. P. Gavora (2012, p. 43) presented results from research conducted in Greece by M. Polou (2007) analysing the factors that positively influenced professional development in students training to become primary school teachers. She found the strongest self-development factor for them to be motivation. This implies the drive that leads to the selection of a career significantly influences what they study at faculties of education, the level and results.

2 Method and Methodology

In determining the motivation behind choosing education as a career, we were able to find differences relative, in particular, to the gender of the respondent, the field of study chosen and the environment whence he or she came.

Research objectives: Our research sought to ascertain individual motivations among students learning and training to become teachers and educators, while examining how age influenced the structure of their motives.

Research sample: The research sample was composed of 168 students (N) training for a career in education, of which 124 were full-time students and 44 were studying part time. The respondents' ages ranged from 21 to 36 years, with 24 the mean age (M).

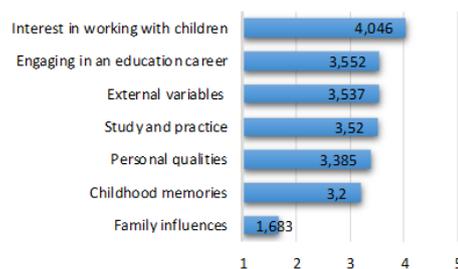
Research methods: A questionnaire was used to collect research data, comprised of 21 questions which were answered with a Likert five-step scale (1-5). There were seven areas of motivation used in the questionnaire: childhood memories, personal qualities, family influence and environment, interest in working with children, study and teaching practice, interest in the profession and external actors in the profession. Data was collected in two stages, one in 2018 and the other in 2019. Research data was processed using Microsoft Excel. Descriptive statistical methods were used for the research data, specifically frequency distribution and mean. Chi-squared distributions were used to determine the relationship between age and individual motivations.

3 Results and discussion

The object of our research was to determine the different motives for choosing education as a career. Answers according to the Likert scale (1- not at all, 5-very much) enabled scores to be calculated in the different motivational areas within the overall questionnaire. Based on the scores, each area was ranked from highest to lowest. Interest in working with children and

youth was the motivation that scored highest. Here altruism dominated among the motivations expressed by the respondents surveyed, characterised by a positive attitude toward children and a willingness to help others (average score of 4.046). Interest in working with children and the opportunity to influence youth development were also identified as the commonest motive for choosing to be educators in research conducted by N. Čopíková (2015), B. Paksi et al. (2015, p. 54), all of whom indicated this motive to be dominant among secondary school students when they were selecting a university and also among university students entering the labour market. Interest in a teaching career was identified as the second most common incentive in our survey (scoring an average of 3.552 points). This motive appeared in the questionnaire where, in terms of the content it provided, the focus was on the placement of graduates in good jobs and interest in studying education. The third most prevalent motivation was external factors in the profession, which included characteristics of the working environment and hours (3.537), followed by the specifics in the study itself (3.520). This particular area was covered in questions that focused on the actual content of undergraduate training. The lowest scoring incentives driving decisions to pursue a career in teaching were personal qualities (3.385), childhood memories (3.2) and family influence in last position (1.683). The results are illustrated below in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Ranking of individual motivations in the overall survey



Another goal was to determine how age influences different motivations. Chi-squared was used in this case to analyse the replies to the questions. Statistically significant differences were expected between the motives because of the age of the respondents. A statistically significant relationship between age and the different motivations behind their decisions was identified in two of the categories - childhood memories and interest in working with children. The choice to become an educator based on childhood memories appears to be determined by age (Table 1), where we found a positive relationship with teachers and school in childhood to be more dominant among older respondents. Our research showed part-time students older than 27 years of age tending to cite these reasons.

Table 1: Relationship between age and motivation based on childhood memories

SUMMARY		Alpha	0,05		
Count	Rows	Cols	df		
168	5	3	8		
CHI-SQUARE					
	chi-sq	p-value	x-crit	sig	Cramer V
Pearson's	15,97359	0,04276	15,50731	yes	0,218038
Max likelihood	16,08114	0,04135	15,50731	yes	0,217026

Age also has a significant influence statistically on decision-making that reflects interest in working with children and adolescents. Results from our research document altruistic motives, which include relationships with children and interest in helping others, likewise dominating among older respondents (Table 2).

Table 2: Relationship between age and altruistic motives

SUMMARY		Alpha	0,05		
Count	Rows	Cols	df		
168	4	3	6		
CHI-SQUARE					
	chi-sq	p-value	x-crit	sig	Cramer V
Pearson's	15,91604	0,014212	12,59159	yes	0,217645
Max likelihood	16,02417	0,012231	12,59159	yes	0,219353

No statistically significant relationship was found in results between age and personal qualities, interest in pursuing an education career, external factors, family influence and the characteristics of undergraduate training, meaning the respondents were equally affected by their motivations, regardless of age.

4 Conclusion

Interest in the teaching profession has long been the centre of attention among researchers. The absence in Slovak universities of any selection procedure for applicants has created diversity among students striving to become educators. Many of them arrive at university faculties of education primarily with the intention of acquiring teacher training and a pedagogical education; although for many of them teaching was their second choice after having failed to enter another field. Their motivation to seek teaching as a career is an important predictor of the professionalism they would exhibit once they become teachers (Kasáčová, 2004), while it remains critical to distinguish between interest in studying education and interest in the profession itself. Undergraduate training can raise interest in pursuing education and teaching as a profession, or it can cause students to lose interest in it. Our research indicates the respondents' choice of a career in education to be driven the most by their interest in working with children and adolescents, while they were least motivated by family influence and environment. Statistically significant differences were expected in how to structure motives reflecting the age of the respondents. A statistically significant influence of age on their motivation was observed when childhood memories and interest in working with children and adolescents formed the basis for decisions. They were more frequently identified among older students, most often those who were studying part time.

R. Tomšík (2016) noted an important predictor motivating the choice of teaching as a profession was the personal qualities of those students interested in becoming teachers. These qualities were likewise crucial in the profession itself and the development of a professional approach toward teaching.

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