

OPTING FOR THE TEACHING PROFESSION: VOCATION OR OPPORTUNITY

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ABSTRACT. Our research aimed to study the motivational and attitudinal spectrum of people who chose to be teachers after graduation and decided to attend the post-graduate training program for pursuing a teaching career. The main method of investigation was the survey based on the questionnaire. The items of the questionnaire included the current employment status of trainees, the determination of the decision to pursue a teaching career, the motivation behind this option, the time horizon in which they think they will practice as teachers, as well as the estimated level of professional satisfaction. The study highlights the need for early vocational counseling programs that should ease a correct option for the teaching profession.

Keywords: *teaching career, teaching training program, motivation, didactic competence, professional satisfaction, vocational counseling*

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG. Unsere Forschung zielt das Studium vom motivationalen Spektrum und von den Einstellungen den Personen, die als Lehrer nach dem Studium arbeiten wählen und die beschlossen, an einem Weiterbildungsprogramm für die Verfolgung eines Lehrtätigkeit teilzunehmen. Die wichtigste Untersuchungsmethode ist die Untersuchung basiert auf einem Fragebogen. Die Fragen des Fragebogen beziehen sich auf den aktuellen Beschäftigungsstatus der Auszubildenden, Festigkeit der Entscheidung als Lehrer zu arbeiten, die Motivation dieser Entscheidung, Zeithorizont in dem sie denken, sie werden als Lehrer arbeiten und der geschätzten Arbeitszufriedenheit. Die Studie unterstreicht die Notwendigkeit einem frühzeitigen Berufsberatungsprogramm, um eine solide Wahl für den Lehrerberuf zu erleichtern.

Schlüsselwörter: *Lehrtätigkeit, Lehrausbildungsprogramm, Motivation, Lehrkompetenz, Arbeitszufriedenheit, Berufsberatung*

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Introduction

The teaching profession, perhaps more than other jobs, requires a clear vocational orientation on behalf of those who choose this career. In this relationship, we are considering the reality that there is a strong interdetermination relation between the quality of the instructive-educative process and society's level of development.

In any society teachers are most important for many reasons. Teachers impart knowledge to children. These children are the future generation. What these children learn from their teachers from a very young age stay with them in some form throughout their lives. So, teachers definitely have an impact and a significant mark on children (be it very young or old alike), as they teach and help them in developing knowledge so that they can be useful and productive to their society. Hence, teachers play a vital role in developing the future and shaping up the lives of next generation and so people with the above mentioned qualities and those who have a particular idea about the roles and functions of being a teacher can and will definitely be a better teacher (Gopinath, S., 2015). An important role in ensuring an effective and performing educational system is granted to training and development programs for the future teachers. Teacher preparation has been continually searching for the best possible ways of preparing teachers in the future. It is increasingly urged to focus on way of developing education quality through teacher preparation program. The concept of teaching professional experiences recognizes pre-service teachers as key elements in their own professional growth, role of model, knowledge constructors and distributors, and agents of change in students learning behaviors (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1999; Darling-Hammond, 1994; Nuangchalermsri, P. & Prachagool, V., 2010).

The training system of the next generation of teachers is important, obviously, from the point of view of endowing them with strategies and methods meant to orient the knowledge acquisition and the building of competences towards in-depth learning. Generally research shows that for teachers to make sustainable changes to their instructional methods new implementations must adhere to specific principles, and importantly, must provide evidence that they produce results (Klapwijk, N., 2012). In other words, the acquaintance of the forthcoming teachers to distinct methods and teaching strategies is not the only aspect of importance, but there is also the emotional adhesion to these and the belief that they will function. In this respect, we are taking into consideration the fact that pre-service beginning teachers have a well-developed set of personal beliefs about learning and teaching prior to entering their teacher preparation programme. These beliefs constitute meaning that these novices have constructed on the basis of their personal experiences and cultural backgrounds (Hollins, E.R., 2011, Gowrie, G. & Ramdass, M., 2012).

For example, within the pre-service stage, the future teachers build their own professional identity and the value and attitude system that this identity embodies has a decisive impact upon their understanding of the teaching career.

The concepts of self-identity in general and teacher identity in particular are fundamental to our understanding of what the teaching profession means to an individual and of the tensions and conflicts teachers experience at different stages in their professional career. This is most transparent at the initial stages of becoming teachers (Barker, D.G., 2010). Simultaneously with the building of the professional identity is a period when the bases of motivation for the teaching career as well as the resilience bases are established. The career motivation in teachers may be explained on the basis of the motivation-cognition relation, and its maintenance and improvement may be obtained by means of personal development. (Toma, R., 2009)

It is a common belief that a teacher's motivation - strongly related to the desire to be involved in the educational process - is an essential component of classroom effectiveness and improvement (Good, T. & Brophy, J., 1994, Gultekin, H, Acar, E., 2014). Resilient teachers are an important part of every community. If schools are to help create a happy present and sustainable future for children, their teachers should be confident, emotionally intelligent, flexible, healthy, optimistic, positive people - but the evidence on such resilience is worrying (Barnes, M.J., 2013).

By synthesizing, we deem important the study of initial training programs of the future teachers not only from the perspective of the informational contents that are implemented at this stage but also from the perspective of the vocational potential of those who choose a didactic career.

Research Coordinates

The aim of our research was to study the motivational and attitude spectrum of the people who opted to become teachers after graduation and who had decided to enroll in a post-university training program to pursue a teaching career. The main investigation method was the questionnaire-based survey. The questionnaire included half-open format items with multiple choice options and was applied to a number of 112 subjects. The results we obtained are presented in tables below. We must mention that all the ethical principles specific to a psychopedagogical investigation were respected.

Presentation and interpretation of results

The first item of the survey was in regard to the professional status of the participants to the post-university training program in view of pursuing a didactic career. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Professional status of the participants

Current professional status	N	%
<i>Employee</i>	61	54.46%
<i>Unemployed</i>	36	32,14%
<i>Others</i>	15	13.39%
Total	112	100%

The data indicated in the table above reveal that the sample of surveyed subjects is mainly made of 54, 46% individuals who account for active workforce, which allows us to state that the interest in attending didactic training classes is not necessarily related to the lack of a job, but also to the possibility of accessing a more attractive and benefit-generator domain on the workforce market. We also reckon that such professional reconversion may be caused not only by the intention of pursuing a teaching career, but also by the prediction of losing the current employment position, a situation that has oriented subjects towards ensuring a professional alternative. It is also significant to mention that 32, 14% of the learners are currently unemployed, their option for the teaching career being merely contextual from the perspective of the professional reconversion.

The second item of the questionnaire focused on identifying the reasons why the subjects didn't attend didactic training classes during their university studies. The data we obtained are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Reasons why learners didn't enroll in Teacher Training Module classes during their university studies

Which was the reason why you didn't enroll in the Teacher Training Module during university studies?	N	%
<i>I had no knowledge of the existence of such classes</i>	11	9.82 %
<i>Specialty courses were highly demanding</i>	63	56.25 %
<i>I had no intention of pursuing a teaching career back then</i>	38	33.93 %
Total	112	100 %

As indicated in Table 2, the main reason why the subjects hadn't enrolled in Teacher Training Module classes during their university studies was the fact that their specialty courses were highly demanding, these subjects representing 56, 25%, which is more than half of those surveyed. The decision that a third of the surveyed subjects took-33, 93% referring to attending such classes even if they lacked any previous intention of pursuing such teaching career seems also surprising. We consider that this group's reconversion towards a teaching career is determined by the momentous impossibility of finding a job that corresponds to their training level. Moreover, a small number of subjects, 9, 82% claim they failed to enroll in the Teacher Training Module classes because they had no knowledge of the existence of such courses.

The third item of the questionnaire aimed at finding out the extent to which the surveyed subjects manifest a clear option in pursuing the teaching career.

Table 3. The firmness of the option regarding the pursue of a teaching career

Are you completely decided to pursue a teaching career?	N	%
<i>Yes</i>	76	67.86 %
<i>No</i>	36	32.14 %
Total	112	100 %

According to the data displayed in Table 3 we observe that even if the number of those who are enrolled in Teacher Training Module classes with a specific intention of having a didactic career is high (67.86%), however, nearly a third of them are not firmly convinced they will embrace this career. This aspect indicates that the attractiveness degree of the teaching profession is not an increased one, being however a valid professional alternative to a third of the surveyed individuals.

Another item regarded the subjects' opinion on the need for a certain personality profile in view of exercising successfully and in optimum conditions the teaching career. The results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. The need for a personality profile that is adequate to the teaching profession

Do you consider that a certain personality profile is necessary to exercise the teaching career?	N	%
<i>Yes</i>	83	74.11 %
<i>No</i>	29	25.89 %
Total	112	100 %

Specialized studies in the field indicate that the quality of the teaching act is conditioned by the existence and the level of specific didactic abilities, but there is also the popular belief according to which any individual who possesses scientific knowledge in a certain area is capable of teaching learners the respective contents. The analysis of the data in the table above allows us to observe that fact that a significant percentage of respondents, 74,11% consider that a certain personality profile is deemed essential in order to exercise the teaching career successfully, as such a career is associated with a set of competences that a teacher possess(scientific, psycho-relational, pedagogical, digital). At the same time, we also observe that a quarter of the subjects, 25, 89% state that there is no need for such a personality profile in exercising the didactic career.

Another item of the questionnaire focused on identifying the motivation behind the subjects' decision to enroll in post-university courses in view of training for a teacher career. The results are exposed in Table 5.

Table 5. The motivation behind the enrolment in post-university courses

What was the main reason for attending these classes?	N	%
<i>The acquisition of necessary skills for the teaching profession</i>	90	80.36 %
<i>The gaining of the certificate that allows for the exercise of a teaching career</i>	22	19.64 %
Total	112	100 %

The analysis of the data indicated in the table above reveals that the main reason behind the decision to attend post-university classes in order to train for a teaching career was, to a vast majority of 80,36% subjects, the intent of acquiring skills and abilities that are necessary for a successful exercise of the teaching career. Nonetheless, a significant share of respondents, 19,64% admitted there was a mere interest in gaining the certificate that will allow them to teach, which confirms the results obtained with the previous item, namely that nearly 20% of the subjects consider specialty training a sufficient requirement in pursuing the teaching career.

The following item in the questionnaire has the objective of identifying the extent to which subjects estimate that pursuing the teaching career will bring them professional satisfaction. Table 6 captures the results of this item.

Table 6. Estimating the degree of professional satisfaction

To what level do you consider that pursuing a teaching career will bring you professional satisfaction?	N	%
<i>Very High</i>	10	8.93 %
<i>High</i>	69	61.61 %
<i>Small</i>	27	24.11 %
<i>Not at all</i>	6	5.37 %
Total	112	100%

The data in the above table indicates the fact that nearly 70% of respondents manifest optimism in this sense, estimating that a teaching career would grant them a very high level of professional satisfaction (8.93%) or a high level (61.61%). However, we must also observe the fact that nearly 30% of the subjects consider that pursuing a teaching career will bring professional satisfaction to a small level (24.11%) or even none at all (5.37%), a reality that renders pessimism and reduced interest in the teaching career.

The last item of the questionnaire emphasized the aspect of stability in a teaching career. The results are shown in Table 7.

Table 7. Stability in the teaching career

In case you were offered a more advantageous job offer after your employment in education, would you give your career up?	N	%
<i>Yes</i>	58	51.79 %
<i>No</i>	54	48.21 %
Total	112	100 %

The analysis of the data structured in the table above reveals an interesting polarization of the two groups within our sample, by means of the position they take regarding a better job offer as compared to their future position in the educational system. While 51.79% of the respondents are willing to renounce their teaching career in the case of a better prospect, 48.21% claim they will stick to the initial decision and maintain their job. The opinions allow us to state that the teaching profession is rather seen as a sum of responsibilities and less as a series of social and financial advantages, which explains the availability that half of the respondents showed upon abandoning the teaching career in case of a more attractive offer.

Conclusions

The study we conducted, including a sample made of 112 subjects, certifies the fact that the training level of the future teachers depends not only on the quality of the training program they attend but also on their personal perspective upon the teaching career. Regarding the limits of our study we mention that the data analysis was conducted with respect to the educational models of initial and continuing training at the level of the contemporary Romanian education system, which does not allow us to extend the conclusions of our research at a general level in the worldwide or European context.

The recorded data show that nearly one third of the learners opt for a teaching career in the absence of another job, while 51.79 % of them confess they would be willing to quit their teaching position in the prospect of a better professional offer, and 32.14% of the surveyed respondents state that, even if they do attend teacher training classes, they are not fully convinced they will become teachers. Moreover, 29.48% of the enrolled learners estimate that pursuing a teaching career will bring professional satisfaction to a small extent or even none at all, and 33.93% state that they had no intention of becoming teachers during their university studies. All of these led to the conclusion that nearly a third of the participants to the post-university teacher training program somehow see the teaching career with a negative outlook, by envisaging it as a mere momentous professional alternative, one that roused no special interest during their initial training, one that will not ensure sufficient professional benefits and one they would abandon in case of a better employment prospect. We reckon that this set of negative expectations will lead to a decrease in the educational employment and implicitly to a diminishing of the performance level in the teaching activity. We believe that a potential solution to this situation may be represented by the implementation of consistent vocational counseling programs within initial training, meant to facilitate the orientation of undergraduates towards a teaching career, a fact that could ensure not only a more effective training activity but also improved didactic performance, as well as an increase in the level of professional satisfaction.

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