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Motivational Benchmarks for teaching career choice

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Abstract

Motivation is an important determining factor of the individual aware and responsible option for a specific career. With regard to student's option for become teachers, the reasons may be different: the availability and stability of employment, working hours, perception of personal skills, challenges and satisfaction that it bring the practice of the profession, the social importance of occupation etc. In this study we present the results of an investigation on student's motivation from Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca for choosing teaching careers. We can see, therefore, whether they have properly planned teaching career after a well-founded educational and vocational guidance or a concern for the moment as a temporary solution until they identify other opportunities.

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Keywords: teaching career, student's motivation, career choice

1. Theoretical premises

Prospective students applying to a certain university specialization and subsequently young graduates seeking a successful career path are faced with the complex process of making a choice that is strongly determined by individual identity issues (such as type of personality, talents, abilities and personal interests), as well as by the structure of society and labour market requirements (Pavelea-Răduleţ, 2013).

There is a whole set of prerequisites needed for a freely-assumed choice of career path. Among these, we can mention

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competences acquired as a result of attending school, the ability to apply previously acquired knowledge, special skills, expertise and interests an individual becomes aware of throughout the education process in order to carry out activities that are specific to a certain domain. Also, the motivations and personal values, the career development model offered within families of origin and followed by family members, the attitude displayed by the community toward individuals, what society has to offer in terms of employment opportunities, labour market dynamics, are also important aspects in this respect. As stated before, one of the essential individual and identity-driven factors involved in choosing a certain career path is motivation, the inner force that leads to performance in any activity we decide to undertake. From such a perspective, the following definition seems more appropriate: "Motivation relates to those emotional and cognitive states and processes that can determine, direct and sustain various behaviour and activities" (Lemeni & Miclea, 2004, p. 40).

Motivation is the trigger for the initiation of an activity as well as for the persistence in completing or abandoning a certain task. For that reason, we can safely infer that motivation is one of the key factors with major impact on performance. In most cases, the motivation triggering certain human behaviour is a result of the interaction between different sets of motives. With regard to prospective teachers, among the reasons they state for seeking a career path in education, we have identified the following: availability and stability of employment, challenges and satisfactions specific to the profession, working hours and flexible schedule, social consequence of the profession, etc.

2. Investigation Outcomes

This study aims at presenting the results of a research based on objective findings with regard to the motivation behind the career choice made by students enrolled at „Babeş-Bolyai” University of Cluj-Napoca, who decided to become teachers. The research was conducted according to the questionnaire-based survey methodology, at the beginning of the second semester, among first-year undergraduates (March 2015). The interviewees (119 students) were students enrolled in the undergraduate programmes at the faculties of Letters, History and Philosophy, Economics, Mathematics and Information Technology, Physics, Chemistry and Chemical Engineering, Biology.

The items of the questionnaire have been developed in such a way that data collected to indicate the extent to which a set of reasons we considered to be representative enough have determined the motivational mechanisms behind students' decision on becoming teachers, as well as their future intentions of pursuing a long-term career in education. We can thus have an image on whether they have intentionally and properly planned their career as prospective teachers or they see it just as a temporary solution, until they manage to identify another employment opportunity. The items and the results of the survey are listed below.

1) The number of jobs available in the education system. Labour market is an important factor influencing career choices for every individual. Although between 2009 and 2012, the number of teachers employed in the Romanian university education system decreased, in conjunction with the also decreasing number of students enrolled in the same system, the number of the former slightly increased during the school year 2013-2014, except for the general upper-secondary and the vocational upper-secondary education (Apostu et al., 2015).

Given the relatively high number of students graduating from universities every year and trying to fill the relatively low number of vacant positions in the education system, the competition between prospective teachers is fierce. In these circumstances, 26.89% of students who consciously chose to prepare and train themselves in order to follow a career path in education consider that the number of positions available within the system does not constitute an essential reason for their option, 22.69% of them regard the number of available positions as secondary, while 37.82% of respondents consider it is a fairly important, but not the main reason for their career choice.

Therefore, only 12.61% of students regard the number of positions available within the education system as a main reason for their preference in choosing a career path, which leads us to believe that most respondents have other reasons they consider as fundamental, such as the attractiveness of the profession and the supposed and expected satisfactions.

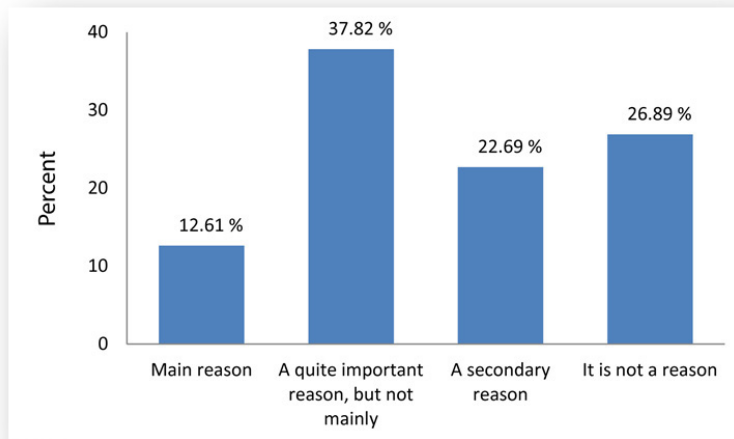


Figure 1. Teaching positions are available as jobs

2) Income. The level of benefits and remuneration for teachers working in the Romanian education system is relatively low, and obviously insufficient. Income, therefore, is one of the main reasons that prevents many students to choose a career in education. They turn to other professions and careers instead, in most cases with no connection whatsoever with the training they received at the university. Nonetheless, 68.07% of respondents state that wage and the level of income they would earn as teachers is not a reason they opt for such a career, 22.69% say income and salary is a secondary reason thereof, whereas 7.56% of students consider income a fairly important reason, but not fundamental, and only 1.68% of respondents state that salary and the level of income is the main reason they choose a career in education.

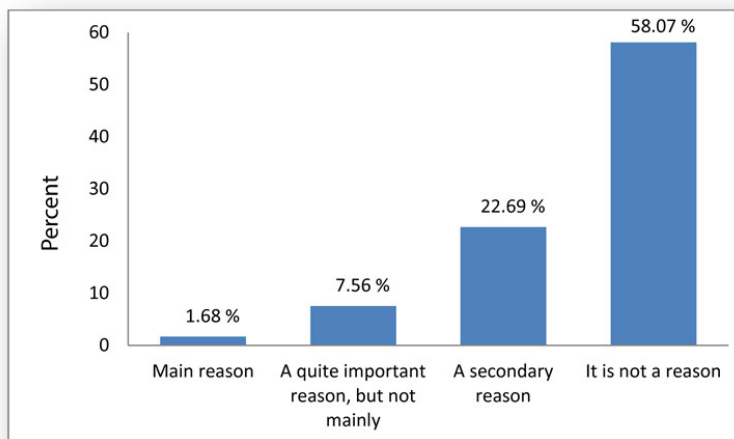


Figure 2. I am attract by the salary that a teacher has

The low level of income also has a considerable impact on the quality of human resources involved in the

educational process, that is to say many undergraduate students with outstanding academic records try to avoid employment in the education system or leave their positions after a few years, when they manage to find a better-paid job in another field of activity.

3) Self-assessed teaching skills and competences. We can define these skills as a sum of abilities such as aptitudes as natural inclinations or preferences for a certain domain and innate or acquired capacity that fosters performance in activity. Of course, students participating in the survey are in the early stage of training for becoming teachers, and despite of not having an appropriate perception of their teaching skills yet, they are to prove themselves to their chosen career as soon as they will be able to acquire a position within the system, as well as the status attached to it.

Such self-assessment of one's own teaching skills can initially be made even after one semester of training in the fields of psychology and pedagogy, as well as through each individual's own experience as pupils and students involved in the complex process of teaching and learning. In this respect, self-assessment refers, on the one hand, to identifying one's own skills, values and belief system, attitudes, specific behaviour, and on the other hand, to the awareness of how these elements can be used in order to build a strong and successful career as a teacher.

Carl Rogers (2008) stated that "a person is a continually changing constellation of potentialities, not a fixed quantity of traits." Consequently, "a good life involves the stretching and growing towards becoming more and more of one's potentialities." From such a perspective, career management is fundamental.

Aptitude is an important factor influencing vocational and professional guidance (Phillips & Imhoff, 1997). It stands for the potential of any individual to learn and deliver performance in a certain domain. In order for the aptitude to foster performance, though, it must be developed through constant learning and practice. In what our survey is concerned, 42.86% of respondents consider talent or the aptitude for teaching as the main reason for their option of pursuing a career in education, while 26.89% of them regard it as fairly important, but not the main reason. Also, aptitude was considered a secondary reason by 25.21% of respondents, whereas 5.04% of them do not consider it a reason at all in choosing their career path.

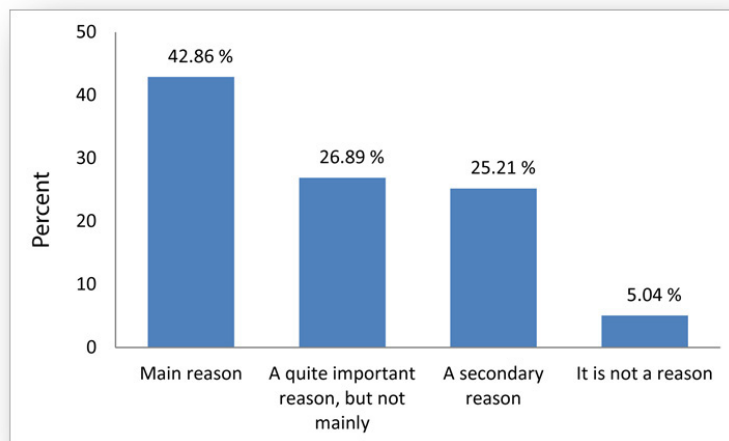


Figure 3. I think i have a talent for teaching

We can therefore safely ascertain that more than a half of the students participating in the survey are not sufficiently aware of the importance of acquiring the pedagogical skills and competences which are, in fact, vital in assuring the quality of teaching. This attitude may negatively impact on the way they relate to and assume their own training. The 26.89% of respondents who stated that aptitude and the teaching skills required when focusing on a prospective career in education represent an important, but not the main reasons for their professional choice, probably imagine it sufficient to master or have perfect command of the knowledge and specific subjects taught at

the university in order to fulfil the proper requirements for quality teaching, with secondary importance attached to consistent pedagogical training.

4) Enjoyment in working with children/teenagers. In time, based on general observations and/or information acquired with regard to a series of professions, any individual can form a picture of what occupations are, of the personality of those carrying out a certain activity, of the type of work and tasks they fulfil, of their lifestyle, benefits and working conditions, of whether a certain profession suits the person practicing it and so on (Pavelea-Răduleț, 2013).

Individuals tend to evaluate the degree of compatibility between occupations and the image they have of how they would like them to be, of how much effort they are willing to put into carrying out a specific activity, in function of their preferences for certain domains and of the values they assume and promote (responsability, honesty, initiative, acknowledgement, beauty, etc.).

Interests are the crystallized preferences of a person for certain domains of activity and essential motivational factors in choosing a career path. They also determine and influence the degree of satisfaction and performance in activity with any professional. Values stand for one's strong beliefs with regard to what is important in life, in interpersonal and work relations, and are also important elements in making proper career choices. Along with interests, values function as grids that can assist individuals in reading and interpreting potential career opportunities (Lemeni & Miclea, 2004).

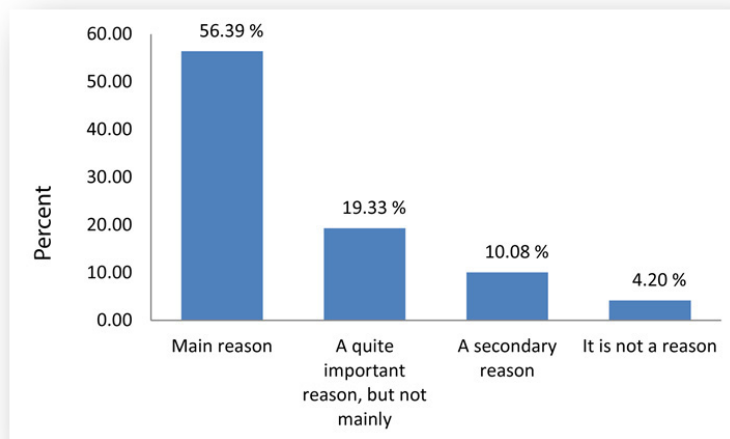


Figure 4. I love working with children/adolescents

In the course of our investigation, 66.39% of respondents consider enjoyment in working with children and/or teenagers as a main reason behind their decision of becoming teachers, while 19.33% think this is a fairly important, but not the main reason for their choice, whereas 10.08% regard it as a secondary reason and 4.20% of the students participating in our survey do not feel enjoyment in working with children and/or teenagers is a reason for their professional choice.

5) Satisfaction and challenges faced by education professionals. The more a teacher is properly trained, open-minded and creative, practicing self-discipline and carrying their daily tasks and activities systematically, not randomly, the more professional satisfaction is likely to increase. We can safely infer that an individual's personality is the main factor influencing the career path. Anyone would choose an occupation that is suitable and in harmony with their personality traits, allowing them to operate from the perspective of their own attitudes and values (Holland, 1959). A good match between personality traits and the specific aspects related to practicing a certain occupation is also likely to boost success and satisfaction at work.

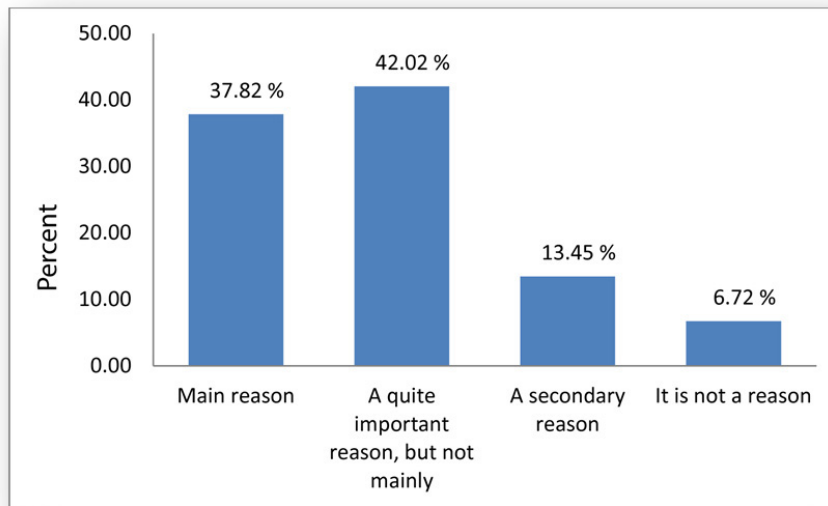


Figure 5. The teaching profession is fraught with challenges and reward

With regard to our survey, 37.82% of respondents considered they can envisage challenge, but also rewarding and satisfaction provided by a career in education and listed it as a main reason for choosing this particular career path, whereas the same considerations are regarded as a fairly, but not a main reason they choose to become teachers by 42.02% of respondents. For 13.45% of the students in question, the challenges and satisfactions offered by a prospective career in education are viewed as a secondary reason, and no reason at all for 6.72%. Consequently, we can infer that for most students participating in the survey, challenges and potential rewarding attached to their prospective profession are important reasons in choosing to be a teacher.

Each student as an individual entity is a challenge. Teachers face multiple challenges due to the uniqueness of their personality and development. Nonetheless, coping successfully with properly responding to these challenges brings along professional satisfaction for teachers as mentors.

6) The attractiveness of the status as a teacher within the community. The status is the position held by an individual in a given social system. It implies earning a certain level of revenues, but there are also other factors we must take into account, such as professional achievements. The position one gains in a social structure is thought to reflect a certain type and amount of appreciation offered by other members of that community. Each person is judged and "assessed" in function of their position within the group and its acknowledgement depends both on the personality of the individual, the values and norms they internalize and promote, and on the social values and norms honoured by the community they live in. In more specific and definite contexts, the status serves as grounds for displaying appropriate social behaviour.

With regard to the status of teachers and its attractiveness within communities, 18.49% of students regard it as a main reason for their career option, 35.29% of respondents think this is a fairly important, but not the main reason, whereas 24.37% see it as a secondary reason and for 21.85% of respondents, a teacher's status in society would constitute not constitute a reason in choosing a career in education. The fact that a large number of respondents (21.85%) do not consider the social status of teachers attractive enough in order to consider it a valid ground for their career option, can be partially explained by the rather low level of payment and its consequences on daily life aspects. Given the answers students provided for this particular item of the questionnaire, we assume they envisage that high social status can only be acquired through financial means.

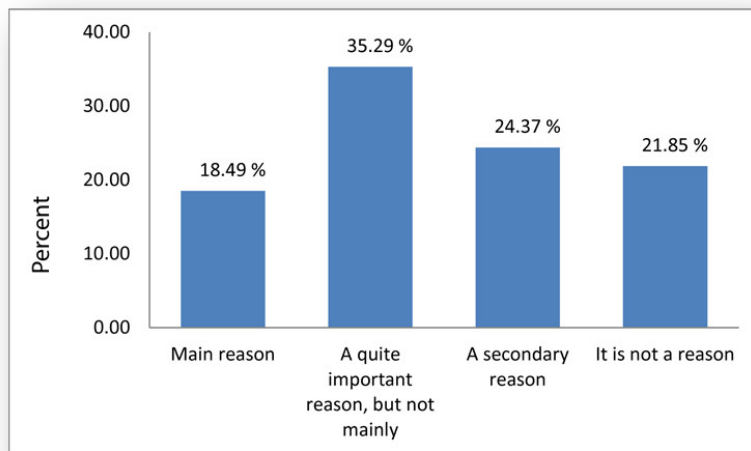


Figure 6. I love teaching status reporting to the community

Individuals develop a series of stereotypical perceptions with regard to occupations and these perceptions often shape their opinions and beliefs about professions and have a major impact on the way they relate to choosing a career path (Holland, 1959). The fact that teachers in general enjoy respect and consideration in society, can be a powerful reason for someone to choose a career in education.

7) Long-term career or a short-term solution? We have developed this item in the questionnaire since stability of personnel is important in any education system. It lies at the core of any consistent and coherent education policy and is an essential prerequisite in the process of providing, through education and ongoing training, the high-quality human resources needed within the education system.

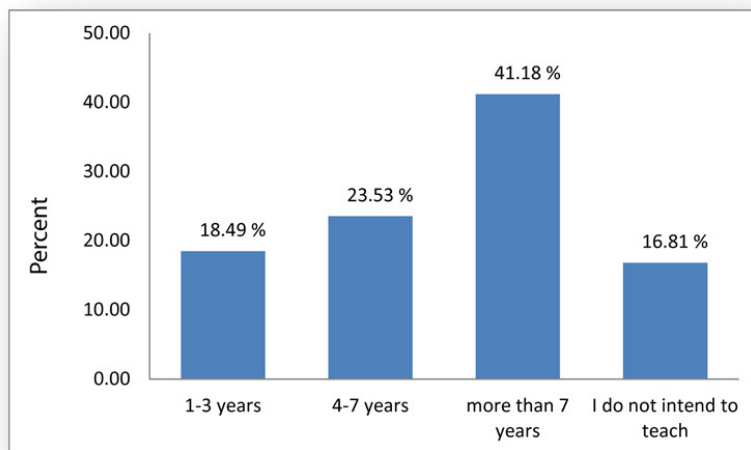


Figure 7. How long you think you will practice as a teacher

With regard to this particular matter, 16.81% of the students participating in the survey declare they have no intention to seek employment as teachers after graduating the university, 18.49% estimate they would work in the

system for about 1-3 years, whereas 23.53% consider choosing a career in education for 4-7 ani, and 41.18% estimate they would be willing to choose teaching for more than 7 ani.

Again, the fact that a significant number of students estimate they would take up a position as a teacher after graduation for a short (1-3 years) or an average timespan (4-7 years) can be explained by their intention of subsequently shifting towards other more financially attractive domains. We believe the most worrying aspect revealed by the ninth item of our questionnaire is the fact that 16.81% of respondents have no intention whatsoever to seek employment as teachers after graduation.

We could, therefore, ask ourselves why are they even attending the pedagogical and psychological training programmes offered by the University through its Department for Teaching Staff Professional Training. The most plausible explanations we can think of are the following: they chose their specialty at random, they either wanted to go with the crowd, that is to say, following the footsteps of colleagues and friends, or lack appropriate career planning. In the Romanian upper-secondary education system, students benefit from what literature calls *Career Education*, *Career Counselling*, *Career and Professional Guidance*. Nonetheless, the fact that many of them subsequently take random decisions with regard to their professional future, instead of grounding them on a personal plan of career development, makes us wonder whether these activities provided in the curriculum have any efficiency at all.

3. Conclusions

The matter of career counselling of the youth has direct impact on their employability. Current reality shows that the main problem of young people is not finding just any job, but above all, finding a good, stable job that suits the qualification the individual in question has acquired.

According to the data gathered throughout our investigation, many students do not pay proper attention to career planning and development. From our perspective, career planning with students is a process that would enable them to choose a suitable career path, to establish potential professional goals and objectives and initiate actions with the purpose of attaining them. It is a known fact that career planning is an ongoing process of adjusting goals both to personal traits and profile, and to the constantly changing educational and employment opportunities available.

The efficiency of this process depends on the abilities acquired in the following areas: self-knowledge, exploring and gathering data on the existing educational and professional opportunities, making a conscious choice with regard to one's prospective career path, from a multitude of options available at a given time, self-promotion through capitalizing of one's abilities, competences and interests, as well as educational and professional experiences in order to attain one's career goals and objectives.

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