

Factors motivating the choice of teaching as a career among student teachers and first-year teachers

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SUMMARY

Introduction

In recent years, researchers have begun to show considerable interest in studying factors that motivate the choice of teaching as a career because, according to OECD data (2005, 2011), countries represented in the Thematic Review on Teacher Policy have developed problems a) related to the ageing of teachers, b) bringing new qualified teachers into schools, and c) getting teachers to remain in the teaching profession. Studies show that Estonian teachers are older than the international average (Eesti õpetajahariduse strateegia, 2008; Loogma, Ruus, Talts, & Poom-Valickis, 2009). Furthermore, in the Estonian context, it is worth highlighting the low public acknowledgement of the teaching profession in the media, and remuneration for teachers that does not correspond to the importance of this profession for the development of society – this results in the profession having a low reputation (Eesti õpetajahariduse strateegia, 2008). The statistics from the past decade indicate that less and less young people choose teaching as a career (Ots, Vaher, Sellio, & Laanoja, 2008), and studies show that the choice of teaching as a profession is at the bottom of the list for young people (Krips, Taimalu, Luik, & Kukemelk, 2009). Although in general, the number of graduates from teacher training programs could be sufficient to cover the needs of kindergartens and schools, only one third of those graduating from teacher training proceed to work in their chosen field (Ots et al., 2008). Factors that motivate student teachers and novice teachers to choose teaching as a career provides input for better organizational and curricular planning in teacher training programmes, arranging better recruitment of teachers, and making better decisions concerning teacher training at the government level (Lin, Shi, Wang, Zhang, & Hui, 2012; Watt & Richardson, 2007).

On the basis of different studies it can be concluded that there are various motivating factors for choosing teaching as a career, encompassing

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intrinsic, extrinsic and altruistic factors (Marston, 2010; Sinclair, 2008b; Watt & Richardson, 2007, 2008). Research also indicates that several simultaneous factors, rather than one single factor, appear to influence a young person's choice of teaching as a career (Richardson & Watt, 2006; Sinclair, 2008a).

A summary of research outcomes (Fokkens-Bruinsma & Canrinus, 2012; Richardson & Watt, 2006; Sinclair, 2008a; Watt & Richardson, 2007; Watt et al., 2012) indicates that the factors motivating student teachers to choose teaching as a career are mostly intrinsic, rather than extrinsic. It has also been determined that factors that motivate teachers to choose the profession of teaching are associated with their satisfaction with teaching as a career and the extent to which they plan to stay true to their chosen profession (Watt & Richardson, 2008). The purpose of the present study was to compare the factors that motivated student teachers and first-year teachers to choose teaching as a career.

The research questions were:

- 1) What differences are there in the structure of the motivating factors for student teachers and first-year teachers?
- 2) What differences are there in the factors motivating student teachers and first-year teachers in their choice of career?
- 3) Which motivating factors are more important for student teachers and which for first-year teachers in their choice of career?

Method

The present study applied a causal-comparative research design because the authors of the article compared two groups of subjects and assumed that the cause of differences already existed between the groups of individuals. The sample consisted of 396 respondents, 207 of whom were teachers in their induction year and 189 were student teachers. The study enlisted student teachers and teachers in their induction year from the University of Tallinn (143; 36%) and the University of Tartu (252; 64%).

The data was collected using a questionnaire based on the Watt and Richardson (2007) scale of Factors Influencing Teaching Choice (abbreviated as FIT-Choice Scale). The FIT-Choice Scale (Watt & Richardson, 2007) was developed on the basis of expectancy-value theory (Eccles et al., 1983, cited in Wigfield, Eccles, 2000; Tollefson, 2000), and after being adjusted for the Estonian context, comprised 38 items: motivation for choosing teaching as a career (26 items), and perceptions about teaching and satisfaction with career choice (12 items).

The study was conducted in 2010 and 2012. Student teachers were sent the questionnaire at the beginning of their pedagogical school practice,

and first-year teachers were sent the questionnaire at the beginning of their induction year. In Estonia, the first year of teaching is an „induction year”, during which they need to develop a teaching portfolio, and participate in university meetings and seminars while they are beginning teachers in schools or kindergartens.

Data was analysed using an exploratory factor analysis and *t*-test.

Results and discussion

Applying the FIT-Choice Scale (adjusted for the Estonian context) to the motives for choosing teaching as a career identified a similar five-factor structure for both student teachers and first-year teachers (there was a difference in only one item). On the other hand, the comparison of the perceptions of student teachers and first-year teachers about teaching, as well as their satisfaction with their choice of career, identified differences in several items concerning factors associated with perceptions about teaching.

A comparison of the motives for choosing career among student teachers and first-year teachers showed statistically significant differences in two factors out of five: *intrinsic motivation and perceived teaching skills* and *extrinsic motivation and compatibility of work with private life*. It appeared that first-year teachers rated their intrinsic motivation and perceived teaching skills significantly higher than student teachers. The items of the factor *extrinsic motivation and compatibility of work with private life* were also rated higher by first-year teachers than student teachers. However, an analysis of the differences within the two groups showed an overlap between the rankings of both first-year teachers and student teachers. That is, both groups had given the highest rank to the factor *intrinsic motivation and perceived teaching skills* and the lowest rank to the factor *influence of important people*. Similar results have been obtained by other researchers studying the ranking of motives for choosing teaching as a career (Fokkens-Bruinsma & Canrinus, 2012; Richardson & Watt, 2006; Watt & Richardson, 2007; Watt et al., 2012).

A comparison of student teachers and first-year teachers regarding satisfaction with teaching as a career, and perceptions about teaching, showed a statistically significant difference for one of the three factors: *satisfaction with choice of career*. First-year teachers rated their satisfaction with their choice of career higher than student teachers. Analysis of the differences within the groups showed that there was a difference in the highest-ranked factor. Student teachers gave the highest ranking to the factor *high vocational skills*, whereas first-year teachers considered the most important factor to be

satisfaction with choice of career. The student teachers participating in the Watt and Richardson (2007) and Fokkens-Bruinsma and Canrinus (2012) studies also valued highly their satisfaction with their choice of career and the requirements of the teaching profession.

There were no differences between the two groups for the lowest-ranked factor – both student teachers and first-year teachers gave the lowest ranking to the factor *social status and salary*. The low status and low salaries for the teaching profession are problematic in other countries as well, where similar results (Fokkens-Bruinsma & Canrinus, 2012; Watt & Richardson, 2007) have been identified.

The authors of the article are of the opinion that an overview of the factors that influence the motivation of the choice of teaching as a career for both student teachers and first-year teachers, and the comparison of these two groups, could be helpful in better organizing the acceptance of new students into teacher education curricula, motivating students to seek employment as teachers, and motivating first-year teachers to remain true to their chosen profession.

Keywords: teaching as a career choice, motivational factors, *FIT-Choice*, induction year and teacher training, causal-comparative research