

TEACHER'S VOCATION AND STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS A CHOICE OF TEACHER'S VOCATION

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Abstract. Research published by Eurydice in 2015 „Teaching Profession in Europe: Practices, Perceptions, and Policies” indicates to the significance of teaching vocation in a sustainability-oriented learning environment, but at the same time there is an indication of a low prestige of teaching vocation in Latvia. The situation in Latvia reveals a significant problem teacher trainers need to deal with. There are very high standards set for teachers' profession, on the other side, the politics of the country is oriented towards a motivation of young specialists to choose teacher's vocation. In order to train competent teachers this is essential to explore a motivation of learners to acquire teaching profession and to make a decision to work at school and in the kindergarten. The aim of this study is to explore reasons why youth in Latvia choose to study in the educational programs and to explore changes in students' attitudes during their learning process in teacher training institutions.

Keywords: attitudes, professional choice, teacher training institutions, teacher's vocation.

Introduction

Teacher plays a significant role in fostering each individual's development, because teacher helps one to acquire necessary skills and attitudes for leading a responsible life. The research carried out by the Omnicom Media Group „Teaching – future profession” (2014) reveals that out of the pool of 505 parents who participated in the investigation, 99 % of parents want a good teacher for their children. What does this mean to be a good teacher in the 21st century? On the bases of teacher's professional competence lies three components: knowledge about the development of a personality, organization of an educational process, cooperation skills, ability to study, to motivate, to cooperate, to solve problems, to control and to evaluate, to develop one's attitude towards one's profession, children, values and problems (Andersone,

2010). Teacher needs to undertake a responsibility to prepare pupils for life so that they become critical thinkers who respect the otherness, who are flexible and with an active citizen's position (Eurydice, 2015). This means that teachers' profession is complex and very demanding. At the same time a prestige of teachers' profession is quite low in the society and as well as a societal interest about teachers' profession is also quite low.

In Latvia, only one percent of interviewed parents wishes to see their children as teachers (Eurydice, 2015). There is a societal attitude that teachers are overloaded, low- paid, they work in an insecure environment and in the conditions of high stress (EK, 2015).

To train competent teachers, teacher training institutions need to be aware about a motivation of learners to acquire teachers' profession and to work in school and in the kindergarten. Therefore, the **aim of this study** is to explore reasons why youth in Latvia choose to study in the educational programs and to explore changes in students' attitudes towards teacher's vocation during their studies.

Teaching profession in the 21st century: Challenges and possibilities

Data gained in the international research (MacBeath, 2012) point to increasing tendencies of aging and a lack of teachers. In Latvia, approximately one third of teachers are older than 56 (LU, 2015). In The reason why young people in Latvia do not choose to relate their career to teachers' vocation is found because of high requirements placed for teachers by a contemporary society; on the other side, it can be explained by a very demanding working conditions and a low teacher's prestige.

21st century places the task for the teacher and the school to help the learner to acquire such skills that are necessary for life in a competitive job market and in a knowledge-based society (Eurydice, 2012). The century challenges a teacher to undertake a responsibility about designing an open and flexible learning process in a value-based learning environment (Liakopoulou, 2011). The answer to the question what qualities and competencies the teacher needs to acquire in order to solve all the tasks is reflected in the research (Eurydice, 2015; Educational Center of Initiatives, 2013; EU, 2013) and scientific literature (Parkay, 2006; Andersone, 2010; Liakopoulou, 2011; Baumert & Kunter 2013), that puts an emphasis on the content of a professional competency. There are diverse interpretations of a professional competency in the scientific publications.

Teacher needs to know one's subject, methods of teaching and pupils' physical, social, and emotional peculiarities, didactic and classroom

management principles, as well as local and global contexts of teaching (Andersone, 2009; Liakopoulou, 2011).

The research carried out by the DnB NORD in 2013 indicates to the most urgent problems to be solved which teachers have mentioned as a lack of discipline, low technical equipment, violence, huge number of students in the classroom, and a lack of technologies (DNB NORD Latvia's Barometer, 2013).

Security of teachers in Latvia and a satisfaction with work does not foster a lack of Regulations of evaluation of teachers' professional work (LR MK, 2014). The system is not efficient. Discussions started in 2016 about the system of evaluation of teachers' professional qualification, as well as about the inability to come to the agreement about teachers' duties and obligations, as well as skills, knowledge and competencies needed to fulfill those obligations. There is lack of a system of requirements and aims. This is one of the reasons why there are less teachers (61 %) in Latvia than in other OECD countries (77 %) who agree with the statement that there are more advantages than disadvantages in choosing to work in teaching (Eurydice, 2015).

The research carried out in Latvia about the prestige of a teaching vocation as evaluated by the diverse groups of people (VIKNVA, 2007) reveals that teacher's prestige may decrease since majority of graduates of pedagogical programs do not choose to work at school, and that after the first years at school they leave the school. In such a situation high responsibility lies on policy makers and executors of educational programs in teacher training institutions. They need to undertake a responsibility of developing necessary competencies for teachers so that teachers develop a positive attitude towards a chosen profession, as well as a motivation to work in the educational establishment. Besides, in the content of the educational programs in higher education institution, essential attention needs to be paid to the development of a motivation of teachers. In order to work at a meta content level, this is essential to understand why students choose to study in the educational programs and to explore their attitude towards teaching profession during the study process. This is particularly important that there is a demand to re-organize teacher training programs by a careful selection of teachers, by creating a practice-based learning programs in the pedagogical high schools and by ensuring a professional support in schools.

Research methodology and research participants

For the purpose of this study the authors chose **1) a written questionnaire** where the students evaluated eleven factors for a choice of teacher's profession, such as willingness to obtain a degree, willingness to work with children, the influence of a close friend as a motivating factor, family traditions, a prestige of

a profession, personal characteristics, achievements, a possibility to obtain a well-paid job, and the interest in a new knowledge **according the Lickert's scale** (5 – significant influence, 1- no influence). 2) An open-ended questions characterized students' attitude towards teaching profession at the beginning of their studies and reflected changes in the attitude during their studies.

Students evaluated their attitude towards teaching vocation at the beginning of their studies and the change of an attitude during studies, as well as they were asked to evaluate their further perspectives in relation of teacher's vocation. Criteria chosen for a questionnaire are based on the results gained in the research carried out in 2010 ("The motives of a choice of teaching profession" (Černova, 2010).

The questionnaire was piloted in 2016 with the involvement of sixteen participants. It was concluded that significant changes in the design of a questionnaire are not needed therefore, this particular questionnaire was chosen for the purpose of this study.

The article presents the analyses of data gained in 2015 about the reasons of a professional choice and the attitude towards teaching of students employed in teacher training institution in 2015 and their attitude towards teaching as a case study (Geske & Grīnfelds, 2006). The study took place at Daugavpils University, Bachelor program "The Teacher." The total number of research participants were one hundred fifteen research participants from Daugavpils University who have participated in the research from a full time program "The Teacher" preschool (Grades 1-3) and basic school students (Grades 1-6) as well social science students. The total number of research participants who took part in this study were 115, that is 2/3 of all students. The participants represented different age groups, educational level and experience, therefore data gained in the questionnaire fully represented reasons of a professional choice and students' attitude towards teaching profession.

The research respondents represented different age groups, educational level as well as a work experience. Since Daugavpils University is one of the six higher educational institutions in Latgale's region where the teachers are being trained, this allows us to conclude that the data gained in this study reveal the motives of a choice of teaching vocation as well as the main tendencies of students' attitude towards teaching profession.

Research findings

As this is found out in the research, the most significant influence on student's choice of studies is made in favor of teaching vocation, that is, a willingness to get a higher education (85 % of students), a possibility to study in a budget placement (77 %), achievements of a personal character, to enrich

one's professional qualification (63 % of students). The evaluation of research results indicates that according to the indicators suggested by Bastik (Bastick, 1999), allows the authors to conclude that the students begin their studies in teacher training programs on the bases of intrinsic motivation. Among the external and altruistic motives of a teaching profession, among the most significant factors the students have mentioned such factors as one's ability to study in a budget placement (external factor) and one's willingness to work with youth. Internal motivation of students to obtain teaching profession justifies the fact that 78 % of all the respondents have joined teacher training programs knowingly, and only 6 % of all the respondents acknowledged that the choice of teaching profession has been a coincidence. This means that the most of students are the ones who are highly motivated to study in teacher training programs. The data gained in the international research indicate that during studies students' opinion changes.

Table 1 Factors determining the choice of one's profession.

| Factors determining the choice of one's profession | Significant influence (N) | Partial significance (N) | No influences (N) |
|---|---------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|
| Willingness to obtain higher education | 78 | 8 | 5 |
| Willingness to work with children | 78 | 11 | 2 |
| Influence of close friends | 17 | 41 | 33 |
| Family traditions | 12 | 10 | 69 |
| Prestigue of a profession in the society | 22 | 25 | 44 |
| Personal features, achievements | 58 | 18 | 15 |
| Coincidence | 5 | 14 | 72 |
| A possibility to get tuition for studies | 70 | 10 | 11 |
| Willingness to raise one's professional qualification | 57 | 19 | 15 |
| Possibility to obtain well paid job | 46 | 22 | 23 |
| Demand of a profession in a job market | 41 | 25 | 25 |

The international OECD environmental research "TALIS 2013" indicates that 36 % of teachers from Latvia consider a possibility to choose the other profession (Geske & Ozola, 2015). Only 13 % of all the respondents of the educational programs continue a work in the field chosen by their parents and grandparents. Only 13 % of all the students responded that family traditions have influenced considerably a choice of their profession. Only 36 % of all the students claim that their choice is not influenced by friends and teachers (Geske & Ozola, 2015). Most of the teachers have come across with the positive and successful teacher whose example has inspired one to choose teaching profession.

The rating of teacher's salary has been placed among the low paid professions in the survey carried out in 2015. It has been discussed about a reduced number of teaching placements in the educational programs in media. Still, many students choose teaching profession because they evaluate it as well-paid and easily accessible. Majority of the respondents originate from Latgale's region where unemployment is very high – 17,8 % (Employment agency, 2015). In small village teachers' profession is one of the most well-paid professions. The majority of respondents (31 %) are already employed in teaching during their studies but 24 % of respondents already have had their teaching experience.

The second questionnaire offered for the students required them to describe their understanding about teacher on the first year of their studies. The data obtained as a result of a content analyses allows one to conclude that at the beginning of their studies the students associate their profession with: 1) the responsibilities, necessary knowledge and skills, 2) the prestige of teacher's profession, and 3) features necessary for work.

Responsibilities, knowledge and skills necessary for teaching

The analyses of data gained in the questionnaire reflects that at the beginning of a study process students associate teaching profession with “a huge responsibility” towards the future of each and every child. Therefore, they consider teaching as a complicated activity. The teacher needs to learn “psychology and a development of children,” “upbringing of children” and other important issues. “We all were learners, but how to teach nobody has taught us” since the students have gained the first perception of a teaching profession, and they know that teaching is a complicated activity and that they need to motivate pupils for learning. Teacher prepares for classes, prepares teaching material, organizes out-of-school activities, and tries “to cooperate with teachers and parents.” Other students wrote that their understanding about teacher's profession was different. They thought that teaching is a very easy activity since “the teacher only plays with children” and that “teaching does not require patience and lots of efforts” and that “everybody can become a good teacher.” They associate a teacher with a person who does not need to know much, that “teaching is rather easy,” and it is not the same as “learning math.” Students had different views on teaching at the beginning of their studies.

The status of teaching in the society

Some of the students hold an opinion that a chosen profession is very demanding in a job market “there are less and less teachers who choose to work

at school and there always will a need for people who can teach others,” one of the students wrote. They wrote about teaching as highly appreciated profession in the society. Some of the students wrote that this is a well-paid job, teachers have many holidays and that their vocations are longer than for other professions. Some of them hold a different view. They were aware that teaching is not a prestigious job in the society, and that the government is not interested to place teaching among well-paid professions. Even more, some students wrote that their family “will not support this choice” and that “teaching is placed among stressful professions.” The results of a questionnaire point to a low quality of teaching, since “many teachers work the same way every day.”

First year students’ opinion about the prestige of teaching profession in the society has not changed a lot. From one side there is a view that “teachers’ job is more interesting than I think,” but from the other side there is a clear understanding that “teachers’ job is very demanding.” A teacher has “lots of work both at home and at work.” “Teaching work occupies huge amount of time,” and “less time is devoted for their family.” The students have no illusions about the prestige of teacher’s job in the society, about working conditions, payment, and knowledge that they are ready for that, because it is “a job that comes from a heart and a payment does not play a significant role.”

Teachers’ characteristics and attitude towards work

As described by the students, a teacher needs to be “active, diligent, always in a good mood”, and “always together with children.” The question naire highlighted altruism as a significant factor in teaching. Young people who decided to become teachers think that they chose to become teachers since this is “a nice profession.” Teachers “put a foundation for a development of a child”, “they help one to find one’s place in the society,” they are ready “to become a trustful person for a child,” “they find a way to each person’s heart.” This is a profession that brings a satisfaction to a teacher, and “provides a wide spectrum of emotions.” At the same time teachers are aware that they chose a profession where “they need to invest a lot.” They need to study a lot, because teacher “needs to be an ideal.”

On a question about one’s future perspectives, 67 students (74 % out of a pool of all the respondents) indicate that they have an intention to work in the educational institution. The analyses of students’ comments allow to conclude that work as a teacher is determined by teachers’ love towards children and their willingness to work with children – to help children “to learn about the surrounding world.” One’s vocation to work in the educational institution they describe as “a dream,” “a vocation,” and “a conscious decision.” They know how “to find a dialogue with children and teachers” – how to conduct events,

they know how to “find a dialogue with children, how to motivate children.” Teachers’ job is relevant for many students because they like to “enrich one’s knowledge,” “to accept new challenges,” as for example, “to organize competency-oriented learning process.” At the same time the students are not completely sure that they want to relate their career with teaching. Some of them made such remarks: “My opinion changes every day because I am not stable in my profession,” “If I am not successful with teaching I will choose studies in the other field of work.”

Many of them think that “a person “needs to do things which he/she is trained for” therefore he or she wants to try oneself in teaching.” At the same time, they do not want to invest too much resources – “as long as one’s nerves are strong, I will work,” “I want to try myself in teaching but I am not sure if I can invest so much energy in this job.” Some of the students wrote that they would refuse to work in teaching if they are offered better options. “I will not be the one who spends a lifetime in one’s job placement” or “I will not be the one who can work as a teacher a whole lifetime”.

26 % of all the interviewed students are less confident that they will choose teaching as their life profession. The evaluation of one’s opportunities to work in the educational institution after completing their studies they evaluated as a possible option. They wrote that this is a complicated vocation and requires a huge responsibility. They are not confident about their “their ability to gain authority among children,” and they expressed their doubts that they will be able “to carry out their duties in a qualitative way” or if “they will be willing to invest their time in this vocation at all.” Despite of a choice of teaching in a very purposeful way, this is clear that not all the students want to relate their life with teaching.

Conclusion

The focus of the 21st century has been placed on teachers’ values and the attitude towards children and one’s profession. Such factors as work environment, salary, the attitude from the society and others reveal that there is a lack of long-term strategy in education in Latvia. Still, teaching is very attractive for youth. This is essential to emphasize that majority of teachers come to a higher educational institution motivated and they are conscious about difficulties of teaching vocation. They obtain a confidence that the requirement for teacher’s vocation brings along huge teacher’s responsibility to ensure a quality of education.

The state politics oriented towards the critique of teaching vocation in mass media is a bases for developing a negative societal attitude towards teaching

profession and educational system in general. In these conditions the students are aware that their teaching profession has a low status in the society.

Teachers find this difficult to combine work with family duties, they lack a materially technical bases, they undergo a huge psychological burden, they lack a methodological support (LIZDA, 2013). At the same time, they indicate that teaching vocation is stable, required in a job market and creative. Teaching is a mission that gives a satisfaction and emotional fulfillment.

The data gained in this research allows to conclude why the graduates of pedagogical programs do not choose a job in the educational institutions or leave it shortly after they begin to work. They become aware that work in this profession requires significant spiritual, material and physical resources, therefore they are not ready to combine their life with a work at school and preschool educational establishment. To change the current situation, the Ministry of Education and Science as one of the criteria of financing programs has put forwards a more detailed process of a selection of students (University of Latvia, 2015).

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