

Teaching Careers from the Perspective of Graduates of Training Programmes for Teachers (Pilot Study: ASE)

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Abstract. *The article aims to identify how graduates of the psycho-pedagogical training program of the Department for the Preparation of Teaching Personnel (DPPD) and of the Master's in Teaching (MD) at the Bucharest University of Economic Studies (ASE) relate to the idea of a teaching career, their level of interest and motivation to continue in this professional direction, as well as their satisfaction with these programs and the skills acquired, using as a case study the graduates of the two programs at the ASE. Teachers' motivation is considered an important factor both for job satisfaction and for the level of teaching performance, or the degree of retention in the field, less addressed in the human resources policy at the level of teaching staff in state institutions. Thus, the discussion can also be considered relevant in the context of the precarious salaries in Romanian education, a problem that can generate difficulties in attracting qualified people with a high level of skills in the field in which they teach. The main results of the pilot study showed that a large part of the respondents consider that their teaching career path is one that suits them, with an increasing interest in training and documentation, as well as in interacting with learners. The study concludes with the idea that intrinsic and altruistic factors are most important to graduates, in choosing a career in this field*

Keywords: teaching career; motivation for teaching career; intrinsic and altruistic factors; psycho-pedagogical training programmes.

Introduction

In the field of education, the performance of teachers is associated with a complex set of competences and skills, in addition to the theoretical knowledge specific to the subject taught, with emphasis including the presence of vocation, of professional "calling" (authors such as Lortie - 1975) argued as early as the 1970s that "teachers were perceived as having a special mission in society" (p.27). However, the role and identity of the teacher has undergone transformations in recent decades, including the awareness that there is an emotional and social impact that teachers have on students (Eacute & Esteve, 2000; Heinz, 2015; Pantić & Florian, 2015).

When talking about teaching careers, however, at least at the level of public opinion, an important issue that is not sufficiently highlighted is related to the responsibilities and expectations felt by teachers (Eacute & Esteve, 2000) which are also translated by the high level of stress they face (compared to other similar professions) (De Heus & Diekstra, 1999). Given the nature of the teaching profession, but also the negative external factors that can affect teachers' perceptions of

the teaching profession (such as poor salaries, low social status (Wang, Wang, & Lin, 2023), the question of motivation towards this type of career inevitably arises. It is important to understand how the career path is perceived by both teachers working in the education system and those preparing for a teaching career. The reasons given for choosing a profession in education, as well as the vision of a teaching career, can be important predictors of the intention to go through and complete teacher education programmes, as well as the likelihood of remaining in the profession (Heinz, 2015; Casely-Hayford, Björklund, Bergström, Lindqvist, & Kwak, 2022). The issue is also important for the development and/or adaptation of teacher education programmes that should be concerned on the one hand with attracting motivated future teachers, but also with providing incentives for maintaining a high degree of motivation (especially if we refer to studies indicating that early career teachers show a high degree of motivation (Hartl & Holzberger, 2022).

Thus, in the present article we are interested in observing how teaching careers are perceived by graduates of the psycho-pedagogical training programme and of the master's degree in teaching, their level of motivation towards the teaching profession, as well as how they relate to the programme they have completed or to the skills they have obtained. The research is a pilot study and focused on graduates of the two ASE programmes

Literature review

The interest in understanding teacher motivation in academic literature is not new, as noted by authors such as Feng, Helms-Lorenz, & Maulana (2023). Motivation towards a teaching career can be defined, according to Pekrun (2021), as "the goals, desires, and intentions related to achieving actions and attaining desired states, such as a teacher's goals and intentions to successfully teach a mathematics class and foster student understanding" (p. 313). Reviewing the literature on the conceptualization and operationalization of teacher motivation, Heinz (2015) or Han and Yan (2016) argue that in terms of the level of motivation among pre-service teachers, the main reasons given for the decision to teach fall into the category of both intrinsic, altruistic and extrinsic motivations and can be ranked differently in importance, including according to the institutional context in the states where these studies are conducted (Watt H. M., et al., 2012).

Intrinsic motivation refers to a set of personal aspirations and accomplishments such as: enjoyment of teaching, job satisfaction or interest in the subject being taught (Heinz, 2015). Altruistic factors refer to the fact that a teacher places more emphasis on the social role he or she has, with the goals of supporting students to develop (Heinz, 2015, p. 266). Reviewing research focused on this topic Feng, Helms-Lorenz, & Maulana (2023) find this type of motivation relevant because it can be a predictor for a "type of effective teaching behavior" (p. 545). An example of an empirical study relevant in this context is that conducted by Watts and Richardson (2007) who applied the Factors Influencing Teaching Choice (FIT-Choice) scale (which we will describe in the methodology section) among first-year teacher education candidates in Australian universities. An important finding of the study was that "perceived teaching ability, intrinsic career value, shaping the future of children/adolescents, social contribution, working with children/adolescents and previous teaching and learning experiences" were important to respondents (p.190). Similar results on the hierarchy of motivations for choosing a teaching career were also found in the application of the instrument (adapted to the context) among trainee teachers in the Netherlands (Fokkens-Bruinsma & Canrinus, 2014) in Slovenia, applied among students enrolled in teacher education programs (Steiner, 2022) or Germany (König & Rothland, 2012).

In the category of extrinsic arguments for choosing a teaching career are (or extrinsic motivation) Bruinsma & Jansen (2010) argue that they include: social recognition and status,

financial rewards, other people find the job suitable for them (p. 186). In addition to these, Heinz (2015) also mentions leave, job security, transferability and flexibility (p. 267). Some studies indicate that this type of motivation is not so relevant in the choice of teaching career (Watt & Richardson, 2007), but the context in which these indicators are measured may weigh significantly in the results obtained. For example, research in Turkey (Yuce, Shahin, & Kocer, 2013) indicates a gender difference in motivation towards teaching careers: while women more often invoke intrinsic arguments, men tend to place more emphasis on extrinsic justifications.

In Romania, the topic of teachers' motivation towards teaching careers has been less addressed. In a study that had as subjects the students of the psycho-pedagogical module of the University "1 Decembrie" of Alba Iulia: (Herman, 2018) it appears that students tend to perceive the educational field as a suitable one for them, about a quarter of students want to continue in this direction. An extrinsic factor that weighs heavily in how students enrolled in this program perceive teaching careers is related to the role models they have had in the person of other teachers.

An important role in the study of motivation and perception towards a teaching career is also played by experience and evaluation of the training programme. Bruinsma & Jansen (2010) indicate that there is a link between a positive evaluation of the teacher education programme and the level of intrinsic motivation that its trainees display (p.198 Identifying the level of motivation can be an important addition to teacher preparation programmes (Feng, Helms-Lorenz, Maulana, & Jansen, 2021). A qualitative study conducted in the Netherlands (Meens & Bakx, 2019) shows the importance of intrinsic and altruistic motivation for enrolment in the psychoeducational preparation programme. The positive experiences they had in the programme strengthened the level of motivation and led respondents to continue the programme.

Methodology

The main objective of this pilot study was to identify the way in which the graduates of the psycho-pedagogical training programs run by the Department for the Preparation of Teaching Personnel (DPPD) and of the Master's Degree in Teaching treat the prospects of a teaching career, as well as the level of interest and motivation to continue in this professional direction, having as a case study the graduates of the programs at the Academy of Economic Studies. Being a pilot study, the questionnaire-based survey was applied only among graduates of the two programmes in the last 2 years (2022 and 2023).

In order to examine these premises, a questionnaire was designed consisting of questions grouped into 2 sections: the section on motivation towards a teaching career and the section on general evaluation of the teacher preparation study programme completed. Regarding the timeframe of the study, the questionnaire was administered from 01.06 to 23.08.2023, distributed through online channels (e.g. email or WhatsApp). The questions address the extent to which respondents agree with certain statements, using the same response scale from 1 to 7 (where 1 in very low and 7 in very high) or dichotomous answers (yes/no).

The first section of the questionnaire is largely an adapted version of the instrument developed by Watts and Richardson (2007) "Factors Influencing Teaching Choice (FIT-Choice) scale", which measures the reasons for choosing a teaching career. The instrument includes dimensions such as: perception of teaching skills, intrinsic values (interest in a teaching career), subjective achievement values (related to more family time, leave or job security) and social impact (contribution to society, desire to work with children). Another component of the instrument developed by the two authors concerns the perception of the profession, whether it is one with high expectations, involving high specialization, or how teachers perceive the social status associated

with the profession, salary, and teacher morale (pp. 171-173). Along with questions from the questionnaire mentioned above, we also used a set of questions from the "Teacher Job Satisfaction Questionnaire (TJSQ)" proposed by Lester (1987) focused on identifying the level of satisfaction shown by teachers towards their profession. The second section of the questionnaire is an adapted version of The Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) which measures graduates' perceptions of their degree programs (Wilson, Lizzio, & Ramsden, 1997).

Results

In this section the author presents the main findings of his/her research. It is important to use critical thinking in order to realistically analyze the results obtained, and how the research hypotheses have been validated or not. Also, it is important to compare results of present research with results obtained in similar research, by using the literature in the domain. If the paper presents a theoretical model or theory, the discussion should be about the way the new conceptual contribution can be applied and how it compares with some similar models or theories.

Following the administration of the questionnaire and the consolidation of the responses from 53 respondents (graduates from the classes of 2022 and 2023), the data were processed and interpreted through descriptive analyses, as well as by calculating average scores of the values given to the questionnaire questions. The analysis and interpretation of the data obtained, supported and illustrated by relevant graphs is presented in the next section.

Fifty-three people took part in the survey, 44 of them women and 9 men aged between 22 and 59. Regarding the programme completed, 25 of the respondents have completed the Master's Degree in Teaching, while 28 have completed the DPPD psycho-pedagogical training programme (14 level I, and 14 level I and II. Regarding integration in the labour market, 25 of the respondents are employed in the public system, 17 in the private system, 5 are self-employed, 4 are students and 2 are unemployed. As to employment in the teaching profession, 20 of the respondents are working in the education system (9 respondents in the university environment, 4 in the secondary school environment, 7 in the secondary school environment), 28 respondents are not working but wish to do so for their professional future while 5 respondents are not working and have no future prospects in this respect.

Motivation for a teaching career

The first and second sets of questions measure motivation for a teaching career through opinion questions (with a scale from 1 to 7 where 1 is very low and 7 is very high), as shown in Figure 1 (where you can see the colour legends for the graphs below).



Figure 1. Response scale for survey questions

In the opinion of a considerable number of respondents, a teaching career is seen as an opportunity for professional advancement (31 respondents) and as a career that offers the possibility of promotion (33 responses were positive). At the same time, a teaching career is not equally perceived as a profession that provides them with a secure future (about half of those who answered the question - 21 of the respondents - chose very low, low and medium, while 20 of the respondents answered very high, high and high, with 12 respondents choosing the neutral, middle option).

At the same time, respondents tend to consider their work as a teacher as very enjoyable (where 34 respondents i.e. 64% chose the high and very high variants), as teaching gives them the opportunity to help their students learn (there is a significant difference in responses as 32 respondents i.e. approx. 60% indicated the very high variant, as shown in Figure 2). At the same time, respondents are also interested in improving their teaching skills (44 of the graduates indicated that they intend to a great or very great extent to achieve this in the future).

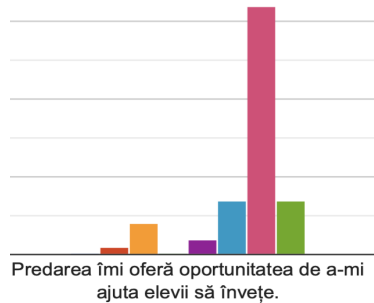


Figure 2. Responses obtained for the question "Teaching gives me the opportunity to help my students learn"

Teachers' income, an important incentive for professional performance as well as retention, is not considered to be adequate for usual expenses (22 of the respondents chose very much or very little, with only 5 choosing very much or very much, as shown in Figure 3).

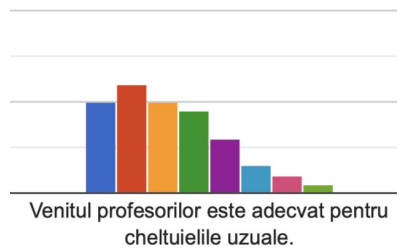


Figure 3. Responses obtained for the question "Teachers' income is adequate for usual expenses"

In regards to why respondents chose to become teachers, the majority of graduates (41 respondents) indicated that they pursued this career path because they are interested in teaching; wanting a job that involves working with children, adolescents or young adults (33 respondents), because they enjoy working with them (41 graduates). In the same vein, equity-related arguments are considered motivating for about half of the respondents (26 graduates), who largely and very largely consider that teaching will enable them to benefit the socially disadvantaged.

However, only 23 respondents (43%) believe (to a great and very great extent) that teaching can provide them with a stable career. Also, only 24 respondents believe that teaching will fit in with family responsibilities and only 20 believe that school holidays will fit in with family commitments. A very important reason why 39 respondents chose to become a teacher is that they had worked with teachers in the past who inspired them in their career choice (32 very much and 7 very little - a very high score highlighted in Figure 4 below), and 36 respondents (in another sub-question) had positive learning experiences (very much or very much).

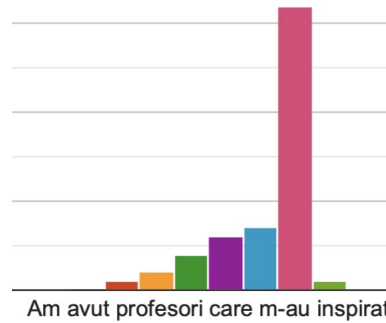


Figure 4. Responses obtained for the question the question "I had teachers who inspired me"

Regarding the advantages of flexible working hours, only 7 respondents think that as teachers they will have short working days and only 9 respondents think that they will have long holidays. This response corroborates similar ideas that this profession is not limited to teaching hours in front of pupils/students, but requires additional hours of preparation as well as hours of administrative work, including during the summer (admissions, final exams involving teachers).

Also, 36 respondents have favorable opinions of their own teaching skills which led them to choose this profession, the same figure being recorded for the fact that teaching will enable respondents to influence the next generation of young people. The influence of the opinions of family members, friends and colleagues was also a reason for 17, 22 and 27 respondents respectively to choose this profession. For 27 respondents this career did not come as a last resort professional alternative, and 38 respondents believe (to a great and very great extent) that they really possess the qualities of a good teacher. As a conclusion of the first section of the questionnaire, 41 respondents are satisfied with their decision to become a teacher.

In order to see the extent to which intrinsic, extrinsic or other factors play a role in the choice of a teaching career, a score (as an average of responses with values between 1 and 7) was calculated for a series of questions in the questionnaire (shown in the table below).

Table 1. Intrinsic, altruistic and extrinsic factors score

Intrinsic	Intrinsic factors	5,62
	Teaching is very enjoyable.	5,78
	I am interested in teaching.	6,00
	I have good teaching skills.	5,87
Altruistic	I have the qualities of a good teacher.	5,82
	Altruistic factors	5,38
	Teaching gives me the opportunity to help my students learn.	6,30
	Teaching will allow me to influence the next generation.	6,02
Extrinsic	Teaching will allow me to benefit the socially disadvantaged.	5,13
	Teaching will allow me to make a contribution to society.	6,02
	Extrinsic factors	4,30
	Teaching provides me with a secure future.	3,90
	Teaching will fit in with the responsibilities of a family.	5,06
	Teaching / Teaching activity will provide a secure income.	3,86
	School holidays will fit in with family commitments.	4,42

In addition to the descriptive analysis provided earlier, the table above also shows that respondents tend to invoke intrinsic and altruistic arguments more often (similar to the empirical results of studies conducted in other countries).

Perceptions of teaching careers

Another dimension of the questionnaire was related to respondents' perception of their teaching career. Several results of this set of questions corresponded to the authors' expectations, i.e. that teaching work is perceived as poorly paid (48 respondents), although teachers need a high level of specialist knowledge, while being emotionally demanding (52 respondents) and involving a high workload (46 respondents).

There were also responses in the questionnaire indicating issues related to how the teaching profession is perceived in the public perception, such as that teaching is not a respected occupation in society (28 respondents) or that the profession does not have a high social status (23 respondents), or even that it was suggested to them by other people/acquaintances that teaching is not a good career choice (31 respondents);

Evaluation of the teacher preparation study programme

The teacher preparation programme plays an important role in how graduates tend to shape their perceptions, expectations and level of motivation towards the profession. In terms of the results of the pilot study, we notice a high degree of appreciation (very high and high) of the skills developed during the studies, skills considered highly relevant for this type of profession as well, whether we are talking about problem-solving (36 respondents), analytical skills (36 respondents), teamwork (35 respondents), written (32 respondents) or oral (35 respondents) communication, or developing the ability to plan one's own work (32 respondents).

Regarding specific competences for the teaching career, more than 40 respondents rated positively (very and to a great extent) the development and improvement of the following skills: use of fundamental teaching concepts and principles in communicating with pupils and their parents, students, adults, in the teaching team and with educational authorities; interpretation, design, implementation and evaluation of the educational curriculum; evaluation of pupils/students/adults and educational activities;

Respondents highlighted that the degree programme also contributed greatly and very greatly to the development of other competences in addition to those listed above, namely: leading and monitoring the training and education process of pupils/students/adults or awareness and clarification of the role of the teacher in the classroom, school and local community in relation to carrying out work tasks and leading the teaching process (39 respondents). At the same time, a significant number of respondents (37) consider that they have improved their skills in school and career counselling and guidance for pupils/students/adults

The second set of questions deals with how the multiple activities in the study programme were carried out. There are certain aspects that respondents reported positively (choosing the response options to a great or very great extent) about the collaboration and interaction with teachers, highlighted by this set of questions, such as: that teachers in the graduate programme motivate students to do their best work (44 respondents) or that they gave a lot of time to give feedback for students' activities/ homework/ projects (33 respondents). At the same time, respondents feel that teachers make a real effort to understand the difficulties students may have with activities in the programme of study (34 respondents), giving useful feedback on how students

are progressing in the programme (39 respondents) or designing their subjects so that they are interesting (40 respondents)

There are also questions in the survey about other aspects of the teaching/learning process. For the question "The amount of work is too much", the answers were divided, with most respondents having a neutral opinion (15 respondents) and on the same topic, 22 respondents having a very low and low opinion that "The amount of work to be done in this programme does not allow you to understand everything in depth".

There were also multiple opinions on the question whether the syllabus tries to cover too many topics, where each answer variant received between 6 and 9 responses, the same case being present for the question - Is there a lot of pressure on you as a student where each variant received between 6 and 11 responses (it should be noted here that 11 responded here to a very small extent).

33 respondents felt that "In general, they were given enough time to understand the things they had to accumulate for the exams" and 26 respondents claimed to a very small and small extent that it would be possible to get through this teacher training programme just by working hard during the exam period, which indicates that more than half of the respondents wanted to really get involved in the learning process.

At the end of the set 43 respondents concluded that "Overall, they were satisfied with the quality of the teacher training programme they completed", as noted in Figure 5 below.

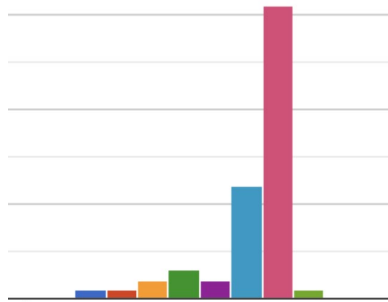


Figure 5. Responses obtained for the question "In general, I am satisfied with the quality of the teacher training programme"

The final set of questions in this section was designed to examine how the graduate respondents of this study rated the subsequent usefulness of their own psychoeducational training. Predictably this preparation was rated by respondents, i.e. 46 respondents (86%), as useful for their subsequent teaching work as shown in Figure 6.

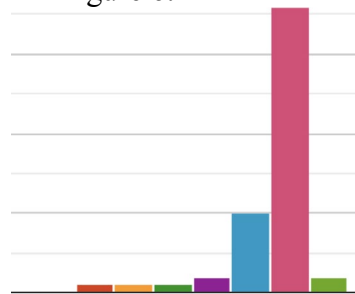


Figure 6. Responses obtained for the question "Do you consider that the psycho-pedagogical training will be useful in your teaching activity"

A large number of respondents (44) indicated (to a very large and large extent) that this training will be useful for them in their family life and the upbringing of their children, as well as

in the communication relationships they develop in society. Relatively unexpectedly, the smallest number of respondents (35) who considered to a very great and great extent that psycho-pedagogical training will help them was in the direction of professional activity in general (other than teaching), although this kind of training can be beneficial for any professional who wishes to have a management or training/training position.

Conclusion

The pilot study carried out among graduates of psycho-pedagogical training programs (DPPD and MD) at ASE had as main objective the identification of the way they relate to a teaching career, the main types of arguments they use to justify this professional direction, as well as how they evaluate the programs they have completed and the skills they have acquired. The main findings of the pilot study reveal that most of them invoke intrinsic or altruistic arguments: such as their personal perception of their teaching skills, their preference for this type of work or their interest in working with children and adolescents. These results, although at an exploratory level (being a pilot study), are in line with the results of similar international studies. Another set of relevant findings relates to the fact that graduates appreciate the good preparation acquired in these programmes, the fact that they have developed both psycho-pedagogical competences and other skill sets useful in other professions and personal life, with minor differences between the two categories of graduates.

As mentioned earlier, monitoring this dimension of the profession (motivation towards a teaching career) may be relevant to the way teacher education programmes are constructed. Taking into account also international studies on this topic, mechanisms can be introduced in the training process focused on increasing the level of motivation of future teachers, a factor that plays a role both in continuing in this professional direction and in involvement in activities with pupils/students.

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