Main Motivations of Students of Childhood Education and Primary Education to Become Teachers

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Abstract

Motivations are crucial to becoming a good teacher. This study examines the motivations of students of Childhood Education and Primary Education and their association with participants' gender, program and age. 262 students at the CMI (University of Granada) studying educational degrees completed a paper-based questionnaire about their vocational and teaching motivations. Almost all the students (93.1%) in the Childhood and Primary Education programs are happy with their choice to become teachers, but 32.4% of these students did not choose education as their first option. Vocational motivations and the selection of educational degrees as the first option are different by gender, program and age. Male students studying Primary Education who were over 25 years old showed the highest vocational motivation. More male students under 25 years old studying Childhood Education reported that teaching was their first option in comparison to their counterparts. It is important to deepen students' motivations to choose educational degrees. University programs have to ensure that their students develop management skills to deal with difficulties in the classroom. Moreover, it is also important to incorporate a training period in the successive years of the teacher training program as a key to working with vocational and teacher motivations in university. In any case, it would be crucial to develop a better social image of teacher in the society, because this factor can create a better world.

Keywords: Motivation, vocation, Childhood Education, Primary Education, teacher.

1. Introduction

It is a well-known fact that motivation is always a crucial key to becoming a good teacher. In general terms, there is often a connection between motivation and self-realization, and this can be applied to any field of life. Nevertheless, in the task of teaching, motivation and vocation are especially important. This is why it is a priority to analyze future teachers' reasons for choosing this university program, as well as their aspirations, and to examine the potential differences between those who would like to teach in Early Childhood Education compared to Elementary Education.

It is important to keep in mind that "being motivated means purposeful" (Wlodkowski, 2011, p. 23). Motivation makes it possible to achieve our goals in life. Motivated, go-getter teachers will be better able to transmit values, hopes and interest in learning to children, particularly in the new social and educational context characterized by diversity. This is one of the keys to raising students' interest in teaching. Moreover, interest is an effective motivator for learning. We cannot ignore the fact that "teachers' personal and professional histories and pre-service training, alongside issues of school culture and leadership, emerge as stronger mediating influences" (Flores & Date, 2006, p. 219). This is why their vocation and reasons for studying education exert an important influence on their students to a greater or lesser extent, and by extension, on their families, on the educational system and on society as a whole, as well. Teachers have a long term and lasting impact. We all have experienced the influence of a good teacher, and also the unforgettable influence that a bad educational professional can have, often due to his or her predisposition (or not) to teach. There is a set of abilities required to become a good teacher and to develop properly in the profession (Mentkowski & Loacker, 1998):

-   Strategies
-   Motivation
-   Disposition
-   Positive attitudes
-   Values

- Proper behavior
- Knowledge of concepts and procedures
- Self-perception.

These skills are not only going to be developed during the university teacher training program, but they are supposed to be part of the future teacher's personal characteristics when they choose to become educational professionals and opt for this particular career.

1.1 Reasons to become teachers

Motivation is a key which guarantees the best learning. Sogunro (2014) emphasizes that "the way to ensure success of students in higher education is first to know what motivates and sustains them in the learning process" (p. 1). There are two important aspects we should take into account. On the one hand, motivation is "an internal force that activates, guides, and maintains behavior over time" (Thordkilsen, 2002, p. ix). On the other hand, motivation is linked to personal aspirations and the reason for choosing this particular career.

The main motivations and reasons for becoming a teacher can be summarized as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Motivations to choose Primary or Childhood Education Degree

Like working with children	Importance of teaching as profession	Intellectual interest	Career advancement/ promotion	Help others/social worries	Influence of family
Working conditions (schedules, vacations)	Change of work (previous experience)	Social prestige	Economic security	Own experience at school	Change current system

Source: Authors, based on Sinclair, Dowson, Mcinerney (2006); Watt& Richardson (2012)

The reasons and motivations summarized in the table change according to context. In any case, social motivations are the basis of students' choice. We should take into account that personal values and attitudes are directly linked to reasons for teaching and for persevering in this profession.

1.2 Personal values and teaching

Personal aspirations and motivations are directly linked to values and goals. This is why Veugelers and Vedder (2003) underscore "the possibilities and necessity of teachers paying more attention to values in schools" (p. 377). It is a fact that most Western countries have experienced profound transformations. This over all context implies a change of paradigm and a gradual process of adaptation to the new social demands. The decline in academic standards is currently one of the most important difficulties in teaching, "in large part, due to the view espoused by the educational establishment that schools should solve personal and social problems that afflict society" (Hunt, Carper, Lasley and Raisch, 2010, p. 651). Changes in teaching and curricula affect academic achievement. In any case, there are many variables and causes involvedin this process. A number of significant factors, such as families, the global recession, social stratification, increasing precariousness and instability in the labor market and other significant factors exert their influence to a greater or lesser extent. We must emphasize that families play a crucial role in the transmission, acquisition and development of corevalues, because this process mainly occurs during socialization. "The acquisition of values is one of the main purposes of the socialization process" (Vinik, 2014). We should take into account that families share less time together, mainly due to the factors mentioned above, although this circumstance has many causes, such as gender or social class (Nomaguchi & Johnson, 2013). One cannot deny the strong decline in parental time at home, which has many consequences. One of the most striking features of this problem is the lack of values and behavior references for children. This is why teachers are often role models for students, in their attitudes and values, becoming inspirational ideals to imitate. They set an example and exert their influence on their students at school. Schools are not only cumulative deposits of knowledge, but prime spaces for the acquisition of values.

Table 2. Main values observed in teachers in training.

Peace/peaceful cohabitation	Assertiveness
Responsibility	Authenticity
Human Rights	Dignity
Respect	Empathy
Equality/gender equality	Diversity
Solidarity	Conflict resolution
Self-concept/self-confidence	Cooperation
Social skills	Creativity
Emotional skills	Dialogue/communication

Source: Authors, based on observation and direct interactions with teachers in training.

Schools cannot replace families as far as education and transmission of values are concerned. But they are as important as agents of socialization as are families, peers, and media in current society. Their influence acts on an individual's attitude, beliefs, and behaviors to pressure them to conform to the influencing group's beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes. It is essential to analyze goals and values in teachers, because they will only be able to transmit what they believe, live and the values and goals in life they have. It is a fact that students are usually inspired by consistentteacher, which, in turn, are the basis of their choice to opt for this university career.

The purpose of the study is two-fold: 1) to discover motivations for becoming a teacher in students of teacher training degree programs, 2) to examine the association between vocational and teacher motivations and student teachers' gender, degree and age.

2. Research Methodology

2.1 Study design and participants

Students (n=262) of the University of Granada (CMI) participated in this study. Data were collected during the second semester of the 2016 academic year. Students completed a 10-minute self-reported paper-based written questionnaire. Participants reported their sociodemographic characteristics, vocational motivations and reasons for choosing the teacher training degree program at the university, and their satisfaction after their first semester. Student self-reported their sociodemographic characteristics (gender, age and program).

The questionnaire about vocational motivations and reasons for choosing the program was created and prepared by the authors. It consisted of 7 questions (variables): 1) Vocational motivations; 2) the importance of social status in their choice of the university education program; 3) choice of the education degree due to lack of other opportunities; 3) whether teaching was their first option (initially, real vocation); 4) satisfaction with their choice; 5) happiness with their choice; 6) attitude and satisfaction up to that point; 7)no intention to teach in future. Participants answered questions 1 and 2 on a 10-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 10 (strongly agree). Items 3 to 7 used binary (yes/no) questions.

Since the researchers have no direct control over the independent variables, the methodology employed was an ex post facto one-group design (the observations were not intrinsically manipulated) (Diem, 2002).

2.2 Procedure

Both the faculty directors and the participants were informed by the researchers about the study goals and procedure. After obtaining consent, the researchers contacted professors of the programs to inform them about the research and ask for permission to collect data in their classes. The head of the university center was in charge of obtaining informed consent from the students.Data collection was conducted as an anonymous and voluntary group activity at the university center.

The students filled out the numbered questionnaires in their classrooms during their normal class hours.

2.3 Data Analyses

Demographic characteristics were analyzed using descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations).Differences in

vocational motivations and social status by gender, program and age were analyzed using the Mann-Whitney U test. Differences in teaching motivation by gender, age and program were analyzed using the chi-square test.

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) in the *Statistics* 22 version for Windows was used to perform the analysis, and the level of significance was set to p<0.05.

3. Results

The surveyed students were125 males (54.6%) and 119 females (45.4%) (Table 1). Most of them (86.3%) were under 25 y/o. 163 (62.2%) of the respondents were students of the Childhood Education program. Vocational motivations were different by gender, program and age (all p<0.01). Male students studying Primary Education and over 25 years old reported the greatest vocational motivation.

Table 1. Sociodemographic characteristics and differences in vocational motivations and social status

	N	Vocational motivations n (sd)	P	Social status n (sd)	P
Gender					
Male	143 (54.6)	7,68 (1.66)	**.009**	2.99 (1.35)	.098
Female	119 (45.4)	8,17 (1.60)		3.11 (1.19)	
Program					
Childhood Education	163 (62.2)	7.68 (1.67)	**.003**	3.09 (1.34)	.803
Primary Education	99 (37.8)	8.26 (1.56)		2.97 (1.18)	
Age					
Under 25	226 (86.3)	7.81 (1.63)	**.005**	3.00 (1.21)	.402
Over 25	36 (13.7)	8.47 (1.73)		3.31 (1.65)	

Most of the students (93%) reported being happy with the option of studying Childhood or Primary Education programs, and this was mainly confirmed after their first training period (Table 2). We must underscore that the greatest difference was found in gender related to *teaching as first option* (p=0.000). Over 80 per cent of males reported they had chosen this university career as a first choice. On this basis, they are supposed to be more motivated to become teachers, on the surface. By contrast, only half the females chose their current university program being aware that they wanted to teach in future, regardless of the consequences or the subsequent process. A small percentage of these students (3.8%) have no intention to teach.

Table 2. Teaching motivations by gender

	Teaching motivations n=262 n (%)	Male n=143 n (%)	Female n=119 n (%)	P
I could not chose a different program	84 (32.1)	46 (32.2)	38 (31.9)	.968
Teaching was my first option	177 (67.6)	115 (80.4)	62 (52.1)	**.000**
I am happy with my choice	244 (93.1)	133 (93)	111 (93.3)	.931
After my first training period I am happy with my choice	252 (96.2)	138 (96.5)	114 (95.8)	.767
I would not like to teach in the future	10 (3.8)	9 (6.3)	1 (0.8)	n/a

There are two aspects of Table 3 to note. The results showed notable differences in the variable "teaching as first option" by degree (p=.003) and age (p=0.15). Those who decided to study Childhood Education seemed to be determined to do so *a priori*. Nevertheless, half of the Primary Education students were motivated to start their university studies to become teachers as their first option. As we have previously emphasized, there is a positive change of attitude in these students after they have completed their first training period. Students under 25 had teaching as their first choice (over 70%). In contrast, students over 25 years old were less likely to have selected teaching as their first choice (50%).

Table 3. Teaching motivations by degree and age

	Childhood education n=163 n (%)	Primary education n=99 n (%)	p	Under 25 n=226 n (%)	Over 25 n=36 n (%)	p
I could not chose a different program	49 (30.1)	35 (35.4)	.374	71 (31.4)	13 (36.1)	.575
Teaching was my first option	121 (74.2)	56 (56.6)	**.003**	159 (70.4)	18 (50)	**.015**
I am happy with my choice	151 (92.6)	93 (93.9)	.686	210 (92.9)	34 (94.4)	n/a
After my first training period I am happy with my choice	155 (95.1)	97 (98)	n/a	217 (96)	35 (97.2)	n/a
I would not like to teach in the future	8 (4.9)	2 (2)	n/a	7 (3.1)	3 (8.3)	n/a

4. Discussion

The main findings of this research underscore that vocational motivations are deeply influenced by different students' characteristics. Social or economical status does not seem to become the main motivations to choose teaching as a career. Despite their choice (Childhood Education or Primary Education), students are very happy with it; this satisfaction tends to become even higher after they have finished their training period.

Manuel and Hughes (2006), in their study about motivations for choosing to teach, underline that majority of participants "made the decision to teach based on reasons that reflect personal aspirations to work with young people to make a difference in their lives" (p. 5). There is a link between personal values and vocational reasons to opt for teaching. This is similar to the findings of our study, in which social status or finances are not fundamental reasons for the students' choices. Moreover, in the current global crisis, new challenges and situations make young people reconsider the general situation and search for principles and values to transform the current situation.

Watt and Richardson (2008), on the basis of an analysis of teacher education candidates, reach the conclusion that three types of teaching professionals can be identified in terms of motivations, professional development and leadership aspirations: "highly engaged persisters", highly engaged switchers", and lower engaged desisters"(p. 408). Previous motivations, vocational aspirations and awareness of social situations and sensitivity, as we can see, become decisive elements for success in teaching. Teachers are usually role models for children. Their values and attitudes have a large influence on their students, and by extension, to the whole educational community, including families. In line with this vision, Chong and Low (2009) consider that "teacher identity is based on the core of beliefs one has about teaching and being a teacher, beliefs that are continuously formed and reformed though experience" (p. 61). It is undeniable that experience changes personal and professional perspectives; nevertheless, this is based on beliefs and expectations, and, in turn, on one's own values and interests. These ideas and values usually tend to be reinforced after any teaching experience, including the training period.

Many students did not have the intention to choose these university programs as their first option. We should take into account that in Spain it is relatively easy to enter Primary or Childhood Education programs. This is why, after trying to enter other university programs, many students choose these programs in order to get a university degree and, in turn, to improve their chances of gaining access to the labour market. This is different from other countries, where access to university teacher training programs is more restricted. In spite of this, it is very difficult to get a job as a teacher. Moreover, teacher salaries are not very high, and their social prestige is gradually decreasing, but students are still choosing teaching as a career by a number of intrinsic, extrinsic and altruistic motivations as desire to work with children or job security (Watt and Richardson, 2007). Because of these difficulties, social status is not an important reason to study these university programs. We found significant divergence between males and females in the variable "teaching as first option". Men seem to be more likely to choose this career as a first option. It contrasts with the reality that there is a higher number of women studying to become teacher in Primary Education or Childhood Education, according with other studies placed in Australia (Richardson and Watt, 2006). This also holds for students under 25 years old, and for those who are studying Childhood Education. In all these cases, their training period marks a turning point in their motivations and goals. This is reflected to a greater or lesser extent in the data and results of this study. Therefore, when these students have experienced direct contact with schools, children and teaching, their choice to study education is confirmed. This is why over 90% feel very satisfied with their training period and their vocational motivations, as well. However, a very small percentage of them do not intend to teach at all, even after this decisive experience.

Sinclair, Dowson and Mcinerney (2006), in sharp contrast with the results we obtained, found profound differences in students' attitudes before and after their practicum. Beliefs, hopes, and motivational goals seem to collide with the reality of many schools, where students come up against difficulties for the first time. These authors consider the ease of

entry or work to be one important motivation to teach (in their analysis of their specific reality). In our particular context, this is not a crucial preference, because obtaining access to the teaching profession is a real challenge, and after graduating, students usually run into difficulties to find work as a teacher. Additionally, there is an important difference between the first professional experience and the perception of teaching after some years. Classroom disturbances, discipline problems and other difficulties usually lead to a state of stress. This is why management skills are a priority for future teachers and teachers in training (Dicke, Elling, Schmeck and Leutner, 2015).

5. Conclusion

Teachers exert an important influence on their students, so it is important to know their values, motivations or goals. To a greater or lesser extent, the future of our society depends on schools, and teachers become an authoritative reference for children, and by extension, for the whole society. It is relevant to analyze and research future teachers' attitudes and reasons for studying education as well as the vocational motivations. As a far as Watt and Richardson (2010) are concerned, "Understanding teacher candidates' motivations for choosing teaching has implications for teacher education planning and curriculum design, teacher recruitment authorities, and government and intergovernmental planning and policy decisions" (p. 167).

In any case, it turns into a priority to deepen the awareness, experience and the impact of a good teacher. Even though, it would be important to develop a better social image of teachers in the society as one of the most significant factors to build a fairer world.

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