

Factors influencing the choice of a pedagogy study programme among Czech students in blended learning

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The choice of a field of study is influenced by many factors. This text focuses on the personal preferences and social determinants of choosing a study programme in the field of teaching. Based on selected factors (prestige of the profession, social importance of the profession, interest in working with children, etc.), the motives of the students are surveyed. The work follows the research of Prof. Marta Klímová, D.Sc. from 1973, who conducted studies among students of teacher training programmes. In the current research, parts of Prof. Klímová's questionnaire are used, but they have been updated to reflect the changed conditions in education and the political-economic system. The studied group consisted of students of the first year of the Bachelor's degree in Teacher Training for Kindergarten and Teacher Training for the First Level of Primary School who attend the Warsaw Management University in Karviná in a blended learning programme¹. The presented study shows that students of the blended learning programmes in Primary School Teacher Training and Kindergarten Teacher Training are motivated to study to increase their professional qualifications and to pursue their interest in teaching and working with children. An important factor that positively influenced the results of the research in terms of the interest in teaching and working with children was certainly the fact that 55% of respondents had previously worked in the field of education, often for several years. The research survey showed that these respondents liked their job, and therefore decided to expand their qualifications.

KEYWORDS: teacher, teacher training student, teaching profession, motivation, attitude towards a profession, choice of teacher training, professional prestige.

Studies on the topic of the motivation of students of teacher training programmes are conducted by researchers around the world (Chong, Low, 2008, Bastick, 2000, Yong, 1995, Heinz, 2013, Watt et al., 2012). The Australian researchers P.W. Richardson and M.G. Watt (2005, Watt et al., 2012) recorded four main groups of motives for

entering this profession: the nature of the teacher's profession (the status of a teacher, the prestige of the profession, the importance of the profession for society), the subjective perception of one's suitability for the profession, inner motives (mostly of a personal and altruistic character), motives of a substitute choice. Heinz (2013) learned

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¹ The blended learning form of study is a combination of the distance form of study and classroom teaching. The teaching is organised in blocks and takes place two weekends per month.

that altruistic motives and high expectations of the studies in the context of being prepared for the profession are prevalent among students.

Similar trends can be found in the Czech Republic, where a number of empirical studies have been conducted, focusing on students' motivations to study the field and work as a teacher (e.g. Urbánek, 2001, 2003, Chráska, 2003, Zimová, 1997, Škoda, Doulík, 2001, Křesáková, 2001, Zormanová, 2011, Malá, 2011, Rybičková, 2009, Klímová, 1975, Havlík, 1995, 1997).

This study presents the results of research that mapped the factors influencing the choice of a teacher training programme among students in the 1st year of bachelor studies in a combined form of study. The research was motivated by the desire to better understand the situation of teachers and other candidates lacking the necessary qualifications for the work of teaching who are required to complete a teaching qualification in accordance with the Act on Educational Staff of 12 January 2016 of the Ministry of Education.

A quantitative research method in the form of a questionnaire survey was chosen to conduct this research.

1. Interest in teacher training study programmes

In all developed countries, interest in the study of teaching disciplines has been relatively high for some time. A high degree of interest in the study of pedagogical disciplines was already confirmed in the research of H. Křešáková (2001), conducted among students of the Faculty of Education of Charles University, which showed that there was great interest in studying at the Faculty of Education there. In 1999, there were 5,167 applicants to that faculty, and 819 (15.9%) were admitted. The greatest chance for admission was in the Primary School

Teacher Training programme, where 30.8% of the applicants were accepted. On the other hand, applicants for the Special Education programme were the least likely to be admitted (12.6%). 15.2% of applicants were accepted to the Secondary School Teacher Training study programme.

A high degree of interest in the study of pedagogical fields still remains today. In 2015, 22,231 persons applied to faculties of education. The number of accepted students was 8,313, or 37.4%. In 2017, 19,665 applicants were interested in pedagogy, but 8,885 were admitted, that is, 45.2% (Mach, 2017).

1.1. High interest in pedagogy study fields contrasting with the lack of teachers

However, the high level of interest in the study of teaching is not balanced with the needs in this field. There is great interest in study programmes for teaching in kindergarten, in the first level of primary school and the humanities, but science teaching has long been struggling with a lack of candidates (CTK, 2017).

Currently, schools are facing a shortage of teachers. In 2015, the Ministry of Education reported 4,334 unoccupied teacher positions in schools. Considering the high average age of Czech school teachers, we can expect a 10% shortage of teachers in the next few years, connected with the current retirement of teachers. In some disciplines, such as physics and mathematics, we are already in a critical condition today, and due to the lack of qualified teachers, the directors of many schools have to employ teachers who do not meet the qualification requirements (Schejbalová, 2017).

Another specific phenomenon exists in connection with the interest in studying teaching: even though interest in teacher training programmes is high, some of the graduates never work as teachers, and part of the group of newly trained teachers soon leave

the profession. According to a SCIO survey conducted among more than 4,000 students during the February term of the National Comparative Exam, one-third of those enrolled in a pedagogy faculty do not want to become teachers at all (Novinky, 2016).

Pedagogy faculties face the fact that for some applicants, applying to the faculty is only a fail-safe measure in case they are not admitted to their first-choice preferred faculties.

In 2015, 22,231 persons applied to faculties of education. 8,313, or 37.40% of these applicants were accepted. However, only 7,562 applicants actually enrolled in the studies.

In 2017, there were 19,665 applicants for pedagogy studies, of which 8,885 were accepted. Only 7,252 students enrolled (Mach, 2017).

This misleading interest of applicants in studying at a faculty of education had already been discovered in a longitudinal study by R. Havlík, entitled *The Future Teacher* (1995) conducted at the pedagogical faculties in Prague and Ústí nad Labem. In this study, Havlík proved that only about 58% of the applicants took the entrance examination of the Faculty of Education in Prague. In addition, not all graduates worked in education. Of the total number of Faculty of Education graduates at Charles University in Prague, only 76% of them started working in education (Havlík, 1997). At the UJEP Pedagogical Faculty in Ústí nad Labem, about 80% of graduates started working in schools. However, about 35% of those who actually started working as teachers left the profession after a while (Zimová, 1997). Foreign studies also confirm that teachers leave the profession and experience a gradual loss of interest in the profession (Johnston, 1997, Chong, Low, 2008).

1.2. Demotivating factors

Many graduates of teacher training programmes are discouraged from working as teachers by the worsening discipline of pupils

(Urbánek, 2001), their aggressiveness and misbehaviour (Škoda, Doulík, 2001), the low authority of teachers (Škoda, Doulík, 2001), the low prestige of the profession (Urbánek, 2001), poor teaching conditions (Urbánek, 2001), and especially the low wages (Urbánek, 2001, Mach, 2016).

Teachers' salaries in the Czech Republic are the lowest of all EU countries, according to a study by the Institute for Democracy and Economic Analysis of the National Economy Institute of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, amounting up to 56% of the average salary of a university educated worker in the Czech Republic. According to OECD data, the Czech Republic is one of the lowest wage countries for teaching, teachers' salaries are higher in, for example, Poland, Hungary, Turkey, Greece, Chile, Israel, Scotland, Slovenia, Sweden, Luxembourg, Switzerland, Germany, Belgium, Korea, Austria, the USA, the Netherlands, Canada or Ireland (Schejbalová, 2017).

Research has confirmed low teacher salaries as a demotivating factor for applicants and students of the teacher training programmes and students in the process of choosing a profession. According to a survey by Urbánek (2001), teaching students perceive low wages as the biggest disadvantage of their profession (61.8% of respondents). Moreover, 79.2% of the respondents found teachers' salaries unsatisfactory. According to the research conducted by Škoda and Doulík in 2001, 80% of the respondents from teacher training programmes indicated insufficient financial conditions among the most important negative aspects of the teaching profession.

The reason why many graduates of pedagogical faculties do not start working as teachers is the lack of hours of pedagogical practice during their studies and being poorly prepared, or rather unprepared,

for the reality of primary and secondary schools. “Students often complain that they have not obtained much of a pedagogical education at the university. The emphasis is placed more on knowledge of the subjects that they are supposed to be teaching in the future, but they lack skills on how to best introduce this knowledge to students” (Mach, 2017).

1.3. Differentiation of motivations to work as a teacher by field of study and gender

The study by R. Havlík brought out the fact that the motivation for becoming a teacher is highly differentiated by study disciplines and gender. The interest in education work is mainly manifested by students who are interested in the study of teaching in the first level of primary school. In line with the fact that teaching is a feminized profession, women are more interested in working in schools than men, and job seekers are more often candidates from smaller towns and rural locations. In examining the motivations for teaching among 1st year students at faculties of education (Prague and Ústí nad Labem), 59% of the students were found to have decided “at the last minute” to study at the faculty of education, which means that their motivation to study at a pedagogical faculty, or to work in education has not been a thoughtful and long-term decision. The following correlation was confirmed by the study: “the earlier the respondent decides [to study at] the faculty of education, the more they are oriented towards teaching” (Havlík, 1995). The weak interest of teacher training students in actually becoming teachers has also been confirmed by the research findings that only 36% of them would still choose to study at the faculty of education if they could choose a field of study again. There are also foreign studies (Johnston, 1997, Yong, 1995) confirming the weak interest

of teacher training students in becoming teachers, as the students designated their choice of study as a coincidental substitute choice.

More positive results are provided by the research of Křesáková, which was conducted at the Faculty of Education at Charles University in 1999. The interest in education work was confirmed by 56.3% of all respondents, only 5.4% responded negatively and 38.3% had not yet decided (Křesáková, 2001). According to Urbánek (2003), more than 12% of students were not considering teaching in schools already when choosing the study programme. This was especially true of students of Secondary Level Primary School Teachers and of Teacher Training for Secondary Schools. Similar results were obtained in a study survey among students of teacher training programmes conducted by Škoda and Doulík (2001). This data also corresponds with the results of the study survey by Chráska (2003) conducted on a studied group of teacher training students. In the course of this study, the author found that a large number of students came to faculties of education not to prepare for the teaching profession but only because of the field of study, which was especially noticeable among students of foreign languages (Chráska, 2003).

2. Characterising the methodology used in this study

The aim of the study was to analyse the attitudes towards the teaching profession of students in blended learning study programmes for teaching in the first level of primary school and kindergarten. Another aim was to determine the factors influencing the choice of study programme among these students.

In line with the identified research objectives, we focused on the motives of choosing

the study field of teacher education, on the evaluation of the benefits, the disadvantages, the prestige of the teacher's profession, and interest in working as a teacher.

In line with these aims, the following research questions were established:

RQ1: Do the students of the blended learning study programmes for teaching in kindergarten and the first level of primary school show an interest in the teacher's profession already in the first year of bachelor's studies?

RQ2: Which motivating factors do the students of the blended learning study programmes for teaching in kindergarten and the first level of primary school declare as the most important ones?

2.1. Research method

To achieve the research goal, a quantitative method was used, namely a questionnaire survey. The research tool is an adapted questionnaire (Klímová, 1973). Only parts of the questionnaire were used, as the use of some questions or parts of the questionnaire were not appropriate due to the study choices or political changes that have occurred since the questionnaire was first used by M. Klímová. Some questions inspired by Klímová's survey were also changed to better match the selected form of study.

2.2. Research sample

The questionnaire survey was conducted among students of the blended learning first year of bachelor studies in the following study programmes: Kindergarten Teacher Training and First Level of Primary School Teacher Training. The basic set was made up of first year students at the Warsaw Management University in Karvina studying in the academic years of 2016/2017, 2017/2018 and 2018/2019. The questionnaire survey was completed by 228 students. All respondents were women aged 24 to 52.

3. Research results

3.1. Interest in the study of the chosen teaching field and in working as a teacher

All respondents showed an interest in studying the chosen teaching field of study as well as interest in working as a teacher.

All surveyed respondents stated that it was important for them to increase their professional qualifications and therefore decided to continue studying. Students in the blended learning study programmes also showed a high level of interest in working in the field, as all respondents expressed their wish to work as teachers after finishing their studies.

Another result of this research study is certainly related to interest in the work of a teacher, namely that all the respondents stated that they read pedagogical and psychological literature.

3.2. Motivating factors for choosing teacher training programmes and the teaching profession

The study also focused on the most important motives of the respondents for choosing the given field of study of teacher training and the teaching profession.

An important motivating factor for these students is the creative nature of the teaching profession. For all respondents, it was important that they could use their own skills in their vocation, and from this perspective, teaching seemed to be the most appropriate work because they perceive that teachers have many opportunities for self-realization and creativity. A significant motivation for selecting the teaching field of study was the subjective feeling of the importance of this profession among the respondents. Based on the research results, 95.18% of the respondents perceive the profession of the teacher as very important for society. In addition, 62.3% of the respondents consider this

profession to be a prestigious one, held in high regard in our society. It was found that 58.34% of students believed that people respect teachers.

The respondents also appreciated being able to work in their place of residence (64.48%) and that teaching brings a stable salary (62.3%). It was found that 85.96% of the students had chosen the given field of study or the given profession because it enables them to use their skills.

These research results certainly correspond with the other results of this questionnaire survey. It was also found that 58.34% of the respondents had previously worked in the field of education, often for several years. All the respondents who had previously worked in the school system positively answered the question on whether they liked the work. A significant motivating factor influencing the choice of study was the response by the students (100%) stating their interest in working with children.

3.3. Family situation as a factor affecting the choice of profession

Although all respondents want to work in education after finishing their studies in a position corresponding to their chosen field, it turns out that their family situation is an important factor affecting the choice of employment. This was shown in answers to the question worded as follows: "If you are unable to find a job in your place of residence, would you change your profession or your place of residence?" Here it turned out that many do not understand their vocation in terms of a mission, and therefore 32.46% noted that they would change their occupation; 37.72% of respondents could not say because it would depend on the family situation, health status of parents, etc., and only 30.28% of respondents would like to remain in the teaching profession and would prefer to change their place of residence.

4. Discussion of the research results

The aim of the research was to analyse the attitudes toward the teaching profession of students in blended learning study programmes for teaching in kindergarten and the first level of primary school. An additional aim was to determine the factors influencing the choice of study programme among these students.

The presented results show that students in a blended learning form of study in the field of teaching had a high interest in working in education and their choice of study field was a deliberate one. Students in the blended learning study programmes also showed a high level of interest in working in the field, as all respondents expressed their wish to work as teachers after finishing their studies. A high interest in working as a teacher is also reflected by the fact that they are studying teaching in primary schools and kindergartens, fields whose students have shown a greater interest in the teaching profession as proven by several studies (Havlík, 1995, 1997, Rybičková, 2009, Kotásek, Růžička, 1996).

Based on the comparison of the results of our research and the results of studies already conducted (Havlik, 1997, p. 82, Urbánek, 2001, p. 131, Křesáková, 2001, Zormanová, 2011), we can state that students of blended learning forms of study are more interested in working in education compared to full-time students.

These positive results in terms of motivation to work in education fully correspond with the fact that, based on the research results, it was found that 58.34% of the respondents had previously worked in the field of education, often for several years, and because they had liked their work and working with children, they wanted to return to their jobs after attaining the qualification. Students of full-time

studies face a completely different situation; these students mostly do not have previous experience in working in education. A study by Malá (2011) found that only 11.3% of the students surveyed had previous experience in teaching or mentoring activities.

The research was also focused on mapping the most important motivating factors that influence the choice of the profession among students in blended learning study programmes for teaching in the first level of primary school and kindergarten.

All surveyed respondents stated that it was important for them to increase their professional qualifications and therefore they decided to study further. In 1973, only 78.07% of full-time student respondents stated that they were motivated by this (Klímová, 1975). It was also important for all respondents to be able to use their own skills in their occupation, and from this point of view, teaching seemed to be the most appropriate activity because they perceive that teachers are given great latitude for self-realization and creativity. A similar finding was also found in the research of Zormanová (2011), conducted among full-time students of teacher training for kindergarten. This study found that 85.96% of the students had chosen the given field of study or the given profession because they could use their skills in this profession. The creative character of the work and the space for self-realization as positive aspects of the profession were also recorded in a study conducted by Urbánek on a sample group of Czech teachers from 2000 to 2002 (Urbánek, 2003).

In Klímová's 1973 study, 83.77% of full-time student respondents stated the use of their abilities as their motivation (1975). The opportunity to use their own abilities in teaching as a reason for choosing the profession and the study programme was also found for 72.6% of full-time students

who responded similarly in the research by Malá (2011).

The following research results are apparently closely related to interest in the job of a teacher. A major motivating factor for choosing the teaching profession was its importance for society, and based on the research results, 95.18% of respondents perceive teaching as very important for society. In addition, 62.3% of respondents regard this profession as a prestigious one, garnering people's respect. Klímová (1975) arrived at similar results in 1973 when examining full-time students. She found that 96.05% of them were convinced of the importance of the teaching profession and 63.6% believed in its prestige. This belief played an important role in choosing the field of study. In 2008, we witnessed a change in the social situation, and the prestige of the teacher dropped significantly compared to the 1970s, which corresponds to the results of the research by Malá (2011), conducted among full-time students studying education disciplines. Malá found that only 27.4% of the respondents were convinced of the prestige of the teaching profession in society (Malá, 2011). The decline in the prestige of the teaching profession in society compared to 1973 is also evidenced in the research of Zormanová (2011), conducted among full-time students of the Kindergarten Teacher study programme. This study found that 58.34% of students were convinced that people respect teachers. Urbánek's study, conducted between 2000 and 2002 on a group of Czech teachers, found that 2/3 of Czech teachers perceived the social prestige of the teacher in society as unsatisfactory (Urbánek, 2003).

Based on Malá's research (2011), students did not associate the importance of the teaching profession with the prestige of this profession, as 83.9% of students were convinced of the importance of teaching for society in 2008 (Malá, 2011). This belief was also held by 100% of full-time students

in Teacher Training for Kindergartens (Zormanová, 2011).

Respondents of the research presented in this paper, students in the blended learning form of study, also appreciated the fact that they can work in their place of residence (64.48%), which was true for only 20.9% of the full-time students studied by Malá (2011). The surveyed students in the blended learning study programmes also appreciated the fact that work in teaching brings a stable salary (62.3%), which was valued by only 20.9% of full-time students (Malá, 2011).

Even though all the respondents of this study want to work in education after completing their studies, it turns out that a significant factor influencing their choice of employment is their family situation. Similar results were obtained by Malá (2011), where almost 30% of the students would have decided to change their profession if they had to choose between working outside their desired place of residence or changing work. According to Klímová's research (1975), it appears that 45 years ago, full-time students were more willing to move because of work. At that time, 88.16% of students were willing to move to a place where a vacant position was available.

Conclusion

The presented study, and above all the comparison of the results of our research with other studies on the given topic, shows that for students in the blended learning study programmes for teaching in the first level of primary school and kindergarten the greatest motivating factor to study is to increase their professional qualifications, which for many of them is a necessity – to meet the requirements of the Act on Educational Staff, especially in line with the amendments to this Act, in force as of January 2016. This motivating factor of

increasing professional qualifications was mainly reflected among those respondents who had already worked in education (58.34% of respondents) and who wished to continue to work in this field because they enjoyed working with children. For the surveyed respondents, we noted their great interest in teaching and in working with children, as all respondents said that they would like to work as teachers after graduation. A high interest in the work of teaching is also shown by the fact that they are students in study programmes to become teachers of the first level of primary school and kindergarten, who, as has been demonstrated several times (Havlík, 1995, 1997, Rybičková, 2009, Škoda and Doulík, 2001), exhibit a greater interest in the teaching profession than students of other fields of study in education.

Given the revealed interest in the teaching profession, other results of the study are not as surprising, e.g. it was found that all respondents read professional pedagogical and psychological literature. Apparently, interest in a teacher's work also seems to closely relate to the respondents' belief in the importance of this profession for society (95.18%), and the conviction about the prestige of this profession (62.3%).

However, it should be noted that the positive results in terms of interest in teaching and working with children are due to the fact that the research group was made up of only students in study programmes for teaching in the first level of primary school and kindergarten. An important factor that also positively influenced the results of the study in terms of interest in teaching and working with children was certainly the fact that 58.34% of the respondents had previously worked in the field of education, often for several years. The study survey showed that these respondents liked their job, and therefore decided to increase their qualifications.

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