

DESCRIPTIVE STUDY ON THE REASONS FOR CHOOSING PEDAGOGY OF PRIMARY AND PRESCHOOL EDUCATION STUDY PROGRAM

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Abstract: *This study aims to identify the reasons why students ($N = 155$) from University of Oradea choose Pedagogy of Primary and Preschool Education study program (PPPE). Data were obtained by a two-dimension questionnaire. The first dimension of the questionnaire focuses on the students' reasons for choosing Pedagogy of Primary and Preschool Education study program (PPPE) (16 items) and the second deals with the facts they consider important during their teacher training performed with pupils in schools (16 items). Data were analyzed by descriptive items (average and standard deviation). We reach the conclusion that students' reasons for choosing this specialization are: "I love working with children and teenagers" ($a_{1st_year}=4,790$, $a_{2nd_year}=4,574$, $a_{3rd_year}=4,743$) and "Teaching is interesting, complex and diversified" ($a_{1st_2nd_3rd_year}=4,380$). The last reason they had chosen is "Because I had no other ideas" ($a_{1st_2nd_3rd_year}=1,33$). The focus on teacher training practice is on the idea that the teacher should be a role model for students, both in family and public life ($a_{1st_2nd_3rd_year}=4,581$).*

Keywords: *career decision, student, professional training*

Introduction

Primary and preschool teacher training in Romania and at the University of Oradea, Bihor County

In Romania, primary and preschool teacher training was achieved till 1989 through pedagogical high schools having pedagogical specialization. Afterwards, there were taken actions to gradually switch this training to universities. There have also been several attempts (1999, 2006 and 2011) to

replace primary and preschool teacher training specialization of pedagogical high school with other specializations. But these schools still have a major importance in training future teachers as professionals, due to their mainly psycho-pedagogical school offer. The path of teacher training as university studies has changed in time. So, in Bihor County, at the University of Oradea, starting with the academic year of 1996-1997, *University College of Schoolmasters* is founded by Ministerial Order no. 5491/1996 and had two specializations: *Schoolmasters – primary school* and *Schoolmasters – preschool*. Beginning with the academic year 2005-2006, due to the reshaping of training fields of BA study programs, within *University College of Schoolmasters, Department of Sciences of Education* is founded, which trained students in two specializations/study programs: *Special psycho-pedagogy* and *Pedagogy of Primary and Preschool Education (PPPE) – full-time learning and blended weekend classes*. For master's degree study program, students can choose Integrative Education in Primary and Preschool Education.

Results of field study and researches on factors influencing teacher career choice

The reason for conducting this study is the need to investigate the motives why students choose PPPE bachelor's degree study program because their number has lowered in time. This tendency is also visible worldwide: Australia, the U.S., Germany and Norway, among other countries including the U.K. and several European countries, report difficulties recruiting and retaining teachers (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003, Liu et al., 2000 cited in Watt et al., 2012).

An important factor that leads to a drop in the number of young female students choosing primary and preschool teaching career can be explained by researches which indicates that a larger percentage of the most intellectually able women now decide to enter careers other than teaching since more career opportunities are now available to them (Education Commission of the States, 2005 cited in Curtis, 2012), due to the fact that this profession is mainly for females. Yüce et al. (2013) believe that teaching profession is being cited among the less desirable professions in Turkey. Another concern for drawing educational policies is linked to the results of some researches which underline that college graduates with the highest intellectual ability are less likely to go into teaching than other college graduates (Shakrani, 2008 cited in Curtis, 2012).

Career choice is considered as one of the major areas of concern for young people nearing the end of their schooling (Alberts, Mbalo & Ackermann, 2003 cited in Yüce et al., 2013) which means that understanding factors that

influence the choice of teaching as a career creates a knowledge base for developing teacher education policies, programs and recruitment (Flores & Niklasson, 2014; Lai et al., 2005 cited in Gore et al., 2015).

Field bibliography points out some studies whose aim was to investigate students' reasons for choosing to become teachers. Although these reasons are varied, there are common factors that influenced career choice.

Manuel & Hughes (2006 cited in Curtis, 2012) conducted a study whose objective was to identify motives why young people choose to become teachers. There was a large number of factors influencing career choice pointed out in the answers, but, in high percentages, the subjects said that they chose to teach for personal fulfillment reasons (71%), they enjoyed the subject (70%), they liked working with young people (66%). One of the lowest responses involved seeing teaching as "good if you have children".

The research of Oliva & Staudt (2003) underline that the main reasons for students wanting to train as teachers are intrinsic: the desire to pursue meaningful work around people (kids and inspiring teachers) they liked and respected, while near the bottom of reasons for selecting a teaching career, along with teacher salaries, was parental encouragement.

Chan (2006) conducted a study on a subject lot of 106 in-service teacher education students of a university in Hong Kong to study their motives and commitment in teaching. Three motive factors were identified accounting for their choice of teaching as a career: "intrinsic/altruistic", "extrinsic/job condition" and "influence from others", amongst which, the strongest one is "intrinsic/altruistic" motive. On the other hand, Yong's study (1995) underlined that extrinsic motives were the main determinants for trainees to choose teaching. The reasons "no other choice" (ranked first) and "influence of others" (ranked second) were the most important. Under altruistic motives "like working with children" (ranked fifth) was found to be the most important reason.

Alongside with identifying motives for choosing primary school teaching career by students enrolled in PPPE in blended weekend classes study program, we intended to understand the aspects linked to students' beliefs on teacher-pupil relationship. Teachers' daily work has become more complex and demanding in addressing increasingly diverse student populations, higher social expectations of schools, expanding fields of knowledge, and new types of responsibilities" (OECD, 2005). Curtis's subjects of his study in 2012, when asked to name the attributes of an effective teacher, the highest responses centered on communication skills, being caring and passionate, having the ability to relate to young people, and being knowledgeable in the subject matter.

Research methodology

Research goals:

1. Investigating the motives why subjects students have chosen PPPE study program for their academic and professional training;
2. Underlining the strong points of teacher-pupil relationship as seen by students after their teacher training practice.

Subjects

The study was conducted on a number of 115 students at the University of Oradea, Faculty of Social and Humanistic Sciences, Pedagogy of Primary and Preschool Education, in blended weekend classes. Out of these, 62 (40%) were in the 1st year, 54 (34,8%), in the 2nd year and 39 (25,2%), in the 3rd year.

Research tool

Two-dimension questionnaire. The first dimension of the questionnaire focuses on students' reasons for choosing this study program (16 items) and the second deals with the facts they consider important during their teacher training performed with pupils in schools (16 items).

Data analysis and interpretation

Research data were analyzed by SPSS ver.18. Data were analyzed by descriptive items (average and standard deviation).

Results for students' choice reasons of PPPE study program are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Students' choice reasons of PPPE study program. Averages and standard deviation

Items	1 st year		2 nd year		3 rd year		TOTAL	
	Average	s.d.	Average	s.d.	Average	s.d.	Average	s.d.
As a teacher you have an important social role	4,048	,798	3,981	1,189	4,236	1,101	4,071	1,023

As a teacher I can combine my family life with my professional one.	3,885	1,126	3,500	1,209	3,820	1,120	3,733	1,160
Because this profession allows you to have a larger degree of freedom.	3,274	1,103	3,000	1,288	2,974	1,038	3,103	1,157
Because being a teacher is interesting, complex and diversified.	4,322	,971	4,388	,787	4,461	,853	4,380	,877
Because I experienced negative experiences during my childhood, and now I want to make things better.	1,919	1,245	2,111	1,040	1,794	1,281	1,954	1,186
Because I always wanted to be a teacher.	3,790	1,229	3,962	1,300	4,025	1,087	3,909	1,217

Because teacher training is complex.	3,822	1,048	4,000	1,143	4,179	,823	3,974	1,035
Because it provides me a secure job.	3,508	1,246	3,641	1,241	3,717	,998	3,607	1,182
Because I like working with children and teenagers.	4,790	,483	4,574	,982	4,743	,677	4,703	,740
Because I would like to pass on my field knowledge.	4,295	,823	4,185	,933	4,461	,642	4,298	,825
Because I had no other ideas.	1,322	,672	1,444	,924	1,205	,614	1,335	,758
Because I did not dare to think about a different study program.	1,541	,992	1,574	1,074	1,564	1,071	1,558	1,035
Because as a teacher I have more free time.	3,096	1,237	2,963	1,331	3,025	1,180	3,032	1,250
Because I know a lot of nice teacher and I want to be like them.	2,934	1,364	3,000	1,300	3,564	1,333	3,117	1,352

Because the study program is rather short.	1,322	,647	1,537	1,004	1,538	1,072	1,451	,898
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Research data underline that students’ motives – no matter their year of study – for choosing this specialization are:

1. because “I like working with children and teenagers” ($a_{total}=4,703$, $s.d.=.740$; $a_{1st_year}=4,790$, $a_{2nd_year}=4,574$, $a_{3rd_year}=4,743$)
2. “Because teaching is interesting, complex and diversified” ($a_{total}=4,380$; $s.d.=.877$; $a_{1st_year}=4,322$, $a_{2nd_year}=4,388$, $a_{3rd_year}=4,461$)
3. “Because I would like to pass on my field knowledge” ($a_{total}=4,298$; $s.d.=.825$; $a_{1st_year}=4,295$, $a_{2nd_year}=4,185$, $a_{3rd_year}=4,461$)
4. “As a teacher you have an important social role” ($a_{total}=4,071$; $s.d.=1,023$; $a_{1st_year}=4,048$, $a_{2nd_year}=3,981$, $a_{3rd_year}=4,236$)

There were also high averages, especially for the 3rd year of study, for: *Because I always wanted to be a teacher* and *Because teacher training is complex*.

The lowest averages were for the following items:

5. “Because I had no other ideas” ($a_{total}=1,335$, $s.d.=.758$; $a_{1st_year}=1,322$, $a_{2nd_year}=1,444$, $a_{3rd_year}=1,205$)
6. “Because the study program is rather short” ($a_{total}=1,451$, $s.d.=.758$; $a_{1st_year}=1,322$, $a_{2nd_year}=1,537$, $a_{3rd_year}=1,538$)
7. “Because I did not dare to think about a different study program” ($a_{total}=1,558$, $s.d.=1,035$; $a_{1st_year}=1,541$, $a_{2nd_year}=1,574$, $a_{3rd_year}=1,564$).

Research results for aspects of teacher-pupil relationship as seen by students after their teacher training practice are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Students’ beliefs on the important aspects of teacher-pupil relationship. Averages and standard deviation

Items	1 st year		2 nd year		3 rd year		TOTAL	
	Average	s.d.	Average	s.d.	Average	s.d.	Average	s.d.
Teachers should first work with the gifted pupils	2,354	1,117	2,629	1,233	2,897	1,046	2,587	1,155

Teachers should be role models for their pupils in both, family and social life.	4,466	,853	4,685	,639	4,615	,711	4,581	,748 8
Teachers should try and approach pupils directly and sincerely, without hidden motives.	4,516	,804	4,555	,743	4,461	,822	4,516	,784
Pupils have the right to be always updated about their academic performance.	4,383	,922	4,592	,687	4,538	,719	4,496	,795
Pupils can stand themselves up by their involvement and cooperation during class activities.	4,387	,610	4,370	,853	4,384	,711	4,380	,723
Pupils should notice teacher's full involvement during teaching/learning activities.	4,419	,820	4,092	,995	4,333	,662	4,283	,858
Pupils' confidential information should be given to other fellow teachers or school management only in exceptional	3,645	1,42 6	3,481	1,46 3	4,025	1,06 3	3,683	1,36 6

cases.								
Pupils' academic performance should be equally graded, no matter if children have different motivations for learning.	3,612	1,486	3,641	1,388	3,641	1,404	3,629	1,423
Teachers should help pupils having difficulties in his/her subject, even in their free time.	3,661	,990	4,075	,937	3,512	1,166	3,766	1,040
Teachers should especially help the poor pupils learn, because the good ones can learn by themselves.	2,419	1,287	2,351	1,101	2,410	1,229	2,393	1,203
Teachers should let pupils know they can address him/her even with their personal problems.	4,403	,819	4,814	,392	4,282	,998	4,516	,784
Fair teachers should keep distance from their pupils.	2,525	1,150	2,055	1,234	2,923	1,222	2,460	1,238
Teachers can deviate from their lesson planning if the teaching/learn	4,096	,986	4,148	,979	4,256	,715	4,154	,919

ng situation requires it.								
Teachers should admit their own mistakes even in relation to their pupils.	4,459	,786	4,407	,901	4,333	,955	4,409	,867
Teachers should respect their pupils' political and philosophical beliefs.	4,096	,953	3,666	1,009	3,717	1,099	3,851	1,024
Teachers should take interest in their pupils life, even outside school hours (eg. hobbies, health problems)	4,193	,865	4,703	,633	4,435	,787	4,432	,797

Research data presented in Table 2 point out that students believe the main focus in teacher-pupil relationship should be on the following aspects:

- “Teachers should be role models for their pupils in both, family and social life” ($a_{total}=4,581$, $s.d.=.748$; $a_{1st_year}=4,466$, $a_{2nd_year}=4,685$, $a_{3rd_year}=4,615$)

- “Teachers should let pupils know they can address him/her even with their personal problems” ($a_{total}=4,516$, $s.d.=.784$; $a_{1st_year}=4,403$, $a_{2nd_year}=4,814$, $a_{3rd_year}=4,282$)

- “Teachers should try and approach pupils directly and sincerely, without hidden motives” ($a_{total}=4,516$, $s.d.=.784$; $a_{1st_year}=4,516$, $a_{2nd_year}=4,555$, $a_{3rd_year}=4,461$)

- “Pupils have the right to be always updated about their academic performance” ($a_{total}=4,496$, $s.d.=.795$; $a_{1st_year}=4,383$, $a_{2nd_year}=4,592$, $a_{3rd_year}=4,538$)

The lowest averages were for the following items:

- “Teachers should especially help the poor pupils learn, because the good ones can learn by themselves” ($a_{total}=2,392$, $s.d.=1,203$; $a_{1st_year}=2,419$, $a_{2nd_year}=2,351$, $a_{3rd_year}=2,410$)

- “Fair teachers should keep distance from their pupils” ($a_{\text{total}}=2,46$, s.d.=1,238; $a_{1\text{st_year}}=2,525$, $a_{2\text{nd_year}}=2,055$, $a_{3\text{rd_year}}=2,923$)
- “Teachers should first work with the gifted pupils” ($a_{\text{total}}=2,587$, s.d.=1,155; $a_{1\text{st_year}}=2,354$, $a_{2\text{nd_year}}=2,629$, $a_{3\text{rd_year}}=2,897$)

Conclusions and discussions

The first goal of this hereby study was the investigation and presentation of the motives of students at the University of Oradea, enrolled in blended weekend classes, for choosing PPPE study program. Data analysis underlined that, no matter their year of study, the subjects have chosen this specialization because they love working with children. This could mean that students made their career choice decision being sure that the most important aspect for a successful professional life is the degree of them becoming close to their pupils. But from a different perspective, another important aspect is that of truly understanding this profession; high averages were obtained for students of all three years of study for the item dealing with the way subjects see teaching as being interesting, complex and diversified. We also underline the following students' motives for choosing this study program: *because I always wanted to be a teacher, because it provides a secure job, because I can combine my family life with my professional life etc.*

The study identified students' beliefs on the strong points of teacher-pupil relationship as seen by subjects after their teacher training practice. Thus, they think a teacher should be a role model for his/her pupils, in both: family and social life; should let pupils know they can address him/her even with their personal problems; that a relationship based on openness and sincerity is the most important; that pupils' academic performance should always be told by teachers and that teachers should admit their own mistakes even in relation to their pupils. Less important seen to be: teachers' interest only in gifted children or in those having learning difficulties.

Further research actions:

- Investigation and assessment of PPPE (and other related specialization) students' career choice with standardized facts;
- Design or adaptation and validation (having authors' consent) of existing scales on career choice influencing factors;
- Investigation of strong points of teacher-pupil relationship as seen by students and recorded in their class activity observation sheet and their teacher training practice diaries;
- Self-assessment of strong points of student-children/pupils relationship;