

## Motivation to Become a Preschool Teacher

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### Abstract

The purpose of the presented research was to find out which external and internal considerations and life experience motivate students for acquiring university education for the teaching profession to major in preschool teaching. Data collection was based on the method of unstructured interview on a given theme. Evaluation was based on coding. The presented factors are external factors of the “people” category. Every category is divided into sub-categories and the subcategories are further subdivided to subgroups on the basis of the nature of the incentive. Young people were mainly affected in their decision-making by their mother, her professional and private behaviour, by positive stimuli from their grandmothers, aunts and children. Fathers were not mentioned as actors in making this kind of decision. The most frequently mentioned human factor was represented by female teachers on different levels of education and from different school types. The discouraging factors included schoolmates. Children and schoolmates were newly identified considerations.

**Keywords:** *student, factor, teaching profession, incentive, stimulus*

### Introduction

The student’s motivation to study a selected subject is crucial for continued study, successful progress of education and development of a positive approach to the future profession. Motivation differs from individual to individual and needs to be brought to the surface, analysed, understood and supported from the beginning of study.

Human life does not provide enough time to try individual professions the young person is inclined to choose in life, to find out what they have to offer. Adolescents, however, are governed by the need to fulfil a particular purpose or intention in life (Čáp, 1997, p. 84) and by interest in a certain reality or activity as an acquired motive, focus of attention in a particular direction. They get to know the activity they are interested in and learn how to perform various activities that are related to it (Čáp, 1997, p. 86). This is also accompanied by certain emotional experience.

## **General Background of Research**

The teaching profession is a profession every individual comes into contact with in their childhood. Young people completing their secondary education can assess it from the viewpoints of a child/pupil or on the basis of mediated information. Personal experience only reveals external, noticeable human or material aspects of the teaching profession (Čáp, Mareš, 2001), which they rate in relation to their potential future study and performance of the teaching profession in future on a scale ranging from excellent, through acceptable, to unacceptable. The aspects of the teaching profession assessed as excellent or acceptable can become activating or supporting motivations orienting the individual towards the teaching profession or application for admission to study for this profession. The aspects of the teaching profession seen as unacceptable, on the other hand, attenuate interest in this type of university course. Mediated statements and assessments of the preschool teacher university course and profession presented by people from the social environment of the young person can become external incentives stimulating the individual's interest in study of this subject as an internal motive encouraging and supporting this decision, or on the other hand, suppressing or attenuating this stimulation. In addition to external stimuli, the personality of the future student of the preschool teaching profession might also have been shaped by inner motives stemming from the very personality of the student – feelings related to the individual factors, emotions experienced in relation to teaching and learning and gained experience.

While many professions, at least in Europe, represent a uniform kind of work (doctor of medicine, lawyer) and the same uniformity can then be seen in the content and demand for the study and social recognition of the profession, the preschool teacher profession and its status are strongly affected in individual countries by the economic level of individual social classes, social, national and cultural

tradition, history of preschool education, current objectives of the education system, or social status of the institution of preschool education. For that reason, motivation for study for the preschool teacher profession is country-specific. Research on students' motivation for teacher education in general in our country was done, e.g., by Havlík, R. (1995), Hřebíček, L. (1998), Kloknerová M. (2010), or in Slovakia by Káriková, S. (2004), Kasáčová, B. (1996), in Poland by Skibska, J. (2012), while students' (teachers-to-be) motivation for preschool teaching courses was analysed by Burkovičová, R. (2004), Faltýnková, M. and Smetanová, V. (2015, p. 142).

## **Methodology**

The purpose of the presented research was to find out which external and internal considerations and life experience motivate students for acquiring university education for the teaching profession to major in preschool teaching. The factors presented in this article are external factors of the “people” category.

Data collection was based on the method of unstructured interview on a given theme. The theme was formulated as follows: *Write who or what and how (by what) inspired your interest in study for the preschool teacher profession*, related to the main research question formulated as *What is the structure of considerations and the incentives they represent which stimulate young people to acquire education for teaching at preschool level?* This theme is part of a compulsory subject of the 1<sup>st</sup> semester course, its processing is a requirement for successful completion of the course and the students were informed about this task in the course of the second session.

The respondents included 172 students of the Bachelor's course in preschool teaching in the academic years 2010/2011 to 2014/2015 in day study in the abovementioned year and semester. The research population included one male student; the remaining ones were female. Student responses were numbered from S1 to S172.

The statements extracted from the freely formulated responses of the students were further subject to qualitative analysis in the sense of the paradigmatic model. In the open coding (Švaříček & Šedová; Strauss & Corbinová), some codes were named *in vivo*, using one of the names used by the students, while other codes were created. The coding revealed two categories of external factors: the “people” category and the “material” category, and a separate category of “internal consideration”.

The coding within the “people” category distinguished between *direct and indirect external stimuli*. Direct stimuli resulted from *direct expression in active mutual communication*. With regard to the stimulation of the students for study of the preschool teacher profession, the stimuli were classified as *excellent, acceptable, of activating, encouraging nature, or unacceptable* with the effect of *attenuation*. Indirect external stimuli were dimensioned as *manifested by behaviour or action*, with subcategories of *inadvertent, hidden*, and the nature of *activating, encouraging or discouraging, or attenuating*. A characteristic statement of a student is given as an example in each subgroup.

## **Results**

The article presents the found factors of the **people category**, as external considerations by which the students were motivated in their previous lives to choose the preschool teacher profession and take the relevant university course. The students mentioned *an individual or individuals* from their surroundings who motivated them in this respect and specified them. These motivating people were further subdivided (Pravdová, 2015, p. 167) into: *a) family members, b) female teachers, c) other*. The categorised statements were analysed again and sorted into subgroups on the basis of the defined criteria of categorised stimuli.

### ***Subcategory “family members”***

Family members as a factor stimulating young people into taking a university course for future teachers were also mentioned by M. Kloknerová (2010, p. 177). The most frequently mentioned family members in this context included **mothers** (37 = subgroup frequency) of the students. Considering the answers to the question of *how (by what)* mothers stimulated their children for the teacher profession, the following characteristic subgroups were distinguished:

- Impact on the student by their *overall external activating indirect stimuli, by their expressed behaviour and acting*, with *inadvertent, hidden* relation to the subject of study: “I was stimulated by my mother; she has always taken good care of me, being my mother and friend at the same time.” (S15 = student whose answers are identified as S15) The identified motif can be defined as *care* – scored as *excellent*, together with the motif of *role*. The statements also reveal the motif of the *relationship* of the students to their mother as the *ideal*, a strong *supportive* motif.

- The statement: “My mother, who is a teacher, influenced me as a teacher but never forced me to choose her profession,” (S92) already mentions a stimulus towards the particular study, which the student is aware of, as a motif of *teacher profession effect* and *hidden positive assessment* of the profession, both *supportive* in nature. The *external indirect incentive by manifest behaviour and actions* of the mother/teacher is rendered *acceptable* by the student.
- Mothers, however, also act as a factor providing *external direct stimulus expressed in direct mutual communication*, whose *nature* is (regarding university course for preschool teachers) *attenuating*: “Mum, a preschool teacher, discouraged me: Never be a preschool teacher.” (S111) The statement of the student does not include the mother’s justification of her discouragement. Here the absolutely *unacceptable, negative incentive* towards the teaching profession ended up with the opposite of what was intended, i.e. *positive* result (if meant seriously).
- Just one *unacceptable* stimulus *directly and actively expressed in mutual communication*, including *indirect negative assessment of the profession* by **both parents** with *attenuating, discouraging nature* was analysed: My parents discouraged me, telling me that I would ruin my life and that I should choose a more prestigious profession.” (S26)
- The students most frequently stated indifference of their mother (or both parents) in relation to their study subject selection, usually justified by the parents with the sentence: “It is your life”. (S18, S29, S44 and others) Parents’ expressions represent *external direct stimuli expressed in direct mutual communication* with the *nature discouraging* the student’s interest in the university course for teachers.

Another *activating family member* is represented by **grandmothers** (14), who used to work as preschool teachers. The students were *in contact* with their grandmothers, who became their *ideal*. Grandmothers affected students with *external direct activating stimuli* expressed in *direct mutual communication*. The stimuli include:

- *Orientation towards the future*: “She used to say that children were the purpose of life.” (S17)
- *Positive approach to the profession*: “My grandmother spoke about people who despised her profession adding: But what would they do without nursery? Nursery and preschool is one of the basic public services.” (S37)
- *Positive feelings*: “My grandmother is glad that I am studying to be a preschool teacher, asking about my study success, being proud of me.” (S43) This suggests the motif of *family tradition*. Family tradition as motivation

for the selection of the teaching profession was also confirmed by research done by R. Havlík (1995, p. 156), with *positive assessment of the profession* and as one of the few motifs supporting *success in studies*.

“My grandmother’s gladness drives me forward even at the hard moments of my study, and *focus on the future*”. (S71)

- *Responsibility*: “I might otherwise have already terminated my study.” (S22) (Strange that the student speaks about the possibility of premature study termination as soon as in the second week of the 1<sup>st</sup> semester and 1<sup>st</sup> year of study.)

In addition to the motif of *teaching* the statements also include the motifs of *child* and *student*.

The subcategories of *family members* overlapped in some cases. The statement: “Most of my **aunts** on my grandfather’s side are teachers” (S62) shows an overlap of the subcategories *family member* and *teacher*.

Also the statement: “My aunt, a teacher, was always very welcoming, fair, nice and strict at the same time, and always managed everything, enjoying natural respect and was able to get through to everybody” (S28) includes two subcategories of considerations, at the same time revealing the motif of *positive assessment of personal properties*, very closely connected with the *teaching profession* and thus acting as an *activating incentive*.

- “One of my aunts – a preschool teacher – was nice, friendly, loved children, was an excellent cook, and would do anything in the world for children” (S53). This statement, in addition to including all the three subcategories of factors, also includes a *positive assessment of personal properties* of the model expressed by the motivated student. “I visited my aunt in the summer, we made various decorations together, painted pictures, she taught me to play the piano and bake treats. She has already passed away” (S2). The student was in *contact with her ideal*. And her statement: “I want to follow in her footsteps” reveals the motif of *focus* of the student *on future* (S88).

The expressed behaviour and actions of aunts as another type of *family member* also act as an *external activating indirect excellent stimulus* with the *nature* in relation to the subject of study being *inadvertent, or hidden*. The clear motifs include *the teaching profession, child* and *appreciation of personal properties* belonging to the *personality of a teacher*.

#### **Subcategory of “female teacher”**

Teachers as factors stimulating students to become teachers are mentioned, inter alia, by M. Kloknerová (2010, p. 177) or R. Havlík (1995, p. 156). Within the

general subcategory of *teachers* (98) as considerations stimulating to take up the profession of teacher for preschool the students mentioned a teacher at higher elementary education level; a secondary school teacher; a piano teacher at music school; the “fantastic teacher of the first form”; a teacher that praises and also a preschool teacher. These human factors stimulated the students towards the teaching profession in general, with just one case of direct stimulation to teaching in preschool.

The next step of the analysis following the aspect of *how (by what)* the stimulation worked identified the following characteristic subgroups:

- The statement: “Teacher – very welcoming, fair, nice but strict, enjoying natural respect” (S11) includes *positive assessment of personal properties* as well as *professional assessment*, where the teacher estimated which profession would be most suitable for the student and *directed her towards study* at the teachers’ grammar school. Just in this sole case the motif is also supported by *activating, supporting action*.
- “Class teacher at secondary school – a young miss with the values of a teacher with 30 years of experience – when she felt it appropriate she talked to us as her friends but as soon as a problem emerged her authority reached up to the ceiling and nobody dared to even speak up, let alone oppose her” (S74). This is, again, an example of *positive assessment of personal properties* combined with *professional skill appreciation* in the dimension of *manifested behaviour and action* with the nature in relation to motivation to study in the field of *external indirect stimulus*.
- In some cases teachers formerly viewed negatively by the students eventually receive a *positive final judgement*: “Then I realized that the stupid teacher (*negative personal and professional assessment*), who was against me throughout my attendance (*negative feelings of the student*), was in fact a nice lady (*positive personal assessment*) and it is only thanks to her that I still remember fractions or diagonals (*positive professional assessment*). I realised that the old witch (*negative feelings of the student*), who hammered Czech language grammar and spelling into my brain contributed a lot to how I express myself today (*final positive professional assessment* (S72). On the basis of the *dimension of manifested behaviour and action an external activating indirect stimulus* is diagnosed here in relation to the field of study in question.
- Another identified subgroup is based on the motif of *the teaching profession*, which is mediated. This is the case of *external incentive expressed in mutual communication* not focused on the students. The students assessed the

incentive as *acceptable* and *activating* for study to become a teacher for preschool profession. At the same time, the students accepted the positive *assessment of the profession* mediated to them. There is also the motif of *child*. “A family acquaintance, who is a preschool teacher – always spoke nicely about her profession, mentioning varied activities, and sharing stories with the children; I came to believe that this work was no stereotype and might be fulfilling” (S48).

- Another subgroup is defined as *external incentive* as a *directly stimulating contact* with a teacher, which was *long-term, with a positive effect*. Observation of activities of the teacher in contact with children resulted in a *positive assessment of the profession*, *positive assessment of the personal properties* of the teacher, *indirect evaluation of the results of pedagogical activity* of the teacher with a prevailing motif of *children*. “Fantastic first form teacher – welcoming, beautiful work, although often with risk, you must think of thousands of things at the same time, do everything at full steam, think of how to entertain the children, make them enjoy what you are just doing with them” (S113).
- *Excellent activating external stimulus* expressed in direct communication, represented by direct praise of a teacher for the student’s decision to study the profession of teacher for preschool including the motif of *child* is analysed in the context of another subgroup. “The teacher who praised me for my decision, telling me: I am glad when the teaching profession is selected by somebody who I know likes working with children and does it with enthusiasm” (S145).
- Direct observation of professional activity when the student realises the related secondary aspects of the profession not from the viewpoint of a former pupil but as a potential teacher, expresses them and renders their *positive professional assessment* as *acceptable*, with *supporting* nature with regard to stimulation for the teaching profession. “My relative is an elementary school teacher. I watched her work with the eyes of a person other than a pupil at the school bench – a quiet, good profession with relatively short working hours and a long holiday.”
- Personal experience of student S119, reflected in her expression of *assessment of personal properties* of her teacher, *positive professional assessment* with identified major *positive* motif of *child*. This stimulus became a *positive indirect excellent expressed incentive* with *activating* nature. “My maths teacher – a young and unspectacular person, understanding her subject well, strict when you did not obey, capable of being very angry if she had



a reason. She properly explained every topic, practised everything with us, and if this was insufficient, she took us one by one for another detailed discussion. A best friend, a proud woman, loving her subject and her profession, overcoming obstacles to achieve our knowledge and satisfaction.”

- Another group of statements focuses on an active teacher for preschool, whose activity acted as *external indirect stimulus* of the nature of *model, or ideal*. This is an analysis of the motif of *the teaching profession, child, and excellent professional assessment*. New elements brought by this analysis include *identification* with a professional team and appreciation for *untraditional rendering of the profession* of preschool teacher. “A preschool teacher who has founded a private company and organised various events and performances for her children across the country; I am a member of her team” (S159).
- A teacher as an *activating external* factor in many cases only acted through *positive feelings*, necessarily also involving implicit *positive assessment of human and professional personality* pointing towards *ideal, or model*; and the *child* motif in connection with the assessed teacher. (S143, S148, S153, S166, S168) “I will cherish positive memories of my teacher for the rest of my life” (S3, S50, S76, S117).
- Another identified group includes teachers *indirectly* but strongly motivating for the teaching profession through the motif of *child* as a bridge to the motif of *teacher*. “Teachers greatly contribute to the development of a child’s personality” (S45).
- Just in a single case, the stimulus for selection of preschool teacher as a professional study course in the *teacher* subcategory was represented by a standard preschool facility teacher. *Professional assessment*: “She is a heroine, able to involve dozens of children and not get mad” (S33). The positively realised subcategory of *ideal*, i.e. *positive assessment of profession*, means *admired, respected*.

In all the identified subgroups, teachers stimulated by *external, indirect incentives* with the *dimension of expressed*, and the nature of *activating*, were assessed by the students as *excellent*. This involves the motif of *the teaching profession* in general and the motif of *child*. The analysis reveals the *teacher personality* as positive motivation: “The teacher is a model for her pupils” (cf., e.g., S14, S34, S38, S41, S54), with *positive assessment of personal properties*: of the teacher who is “kind, welcoming” (e.g. S1, S75, S111). What can be diagnosed: a) the *attitude of the student to her ideal*: “That old witch”; b) *the relationship of the ideal to the student*: “The teacher...managed to get through to everybody”; c) *ideal assessment by the*

*student*: “The teacher ... very welcoming, fair, nice but also strict, always managing everything, enjoying natural respect”. With apparent *focus on the future*: “She met teachers who evoked the idea: This is what I would like to be” in the aspired-to self.

### ***Subcategory “Other”***

Other factors motivating young people for the profession of preschool teacher also include **children** (14), representing the following stimuli, divided into the following characteristic subgroups:

- “Children add energy and strength to work on myself as teacher, to learn new things all the time” (S131). The most outstanding motifs include “*child*”, “*focus on the future*” in the context of the motif of the “*teaching profession*” and the motif of “*teacher personality*”. The child is the *direct external activating stimulus*.
- The student observed and took care of twins with Asperger’s syndrome since their birth, could consult their medical records (?)... (S67). This represented a long-term unique and extraordinary *external activating stimulus* deserving appreciation with the prevailing motifs of *child* and *care*. This category merges with the material category, subcategory of *practical teaching experience* with children in the first place.

All the students defined behaviour and actions of children and children as such as positive *excellent acceptable external* stimuli with *activating and encouraging, supportive* nature.

Another identified factor was represented by **schoolmates**.

- The clearly *attenuating, suppressing external manifested* stimulus acting *directly* and assessed by the students as *unacceptable* and discouraging them from the teaching profession was “observed behaviour of her schoolmates at school – killing her dream of becoming a teacher” (S122).

## **Discussion**

External factors of family members, most often mentioned by the respondents as stimulating them to become preschool teachers, were mothers. However, the most significant stimulus still seems to be represented by grandmothers, whose behaviour and actions activated awareness of the family tradition of the teaching profession and stirred responsibility for continued study and study success in heading towards the acquisition of professional education and generally towards the future. Fathers did not play any role whatsoever in stimulating their children to

become teachers. In one case engagement of both parents was analysed as an unacceptable directly actively expressed stimulus with indirect negative professional assessment as a discouraging stimulus. What is surprising is the indifference of parents in relation to study subject selection by their children. Aunts complement the family member subcategory with positive stimuli.

Generally, the most frequently mentioned external human factor focusing interest of young people on studying for the teaching profession was represented by male/female teachers on different levels of education and from different school types with a relatively varied range of direct and indirect stimuli. The effect of their influence is mainly exerted by the long-term nature of the contact with them also related to their authority as a teacher.

What is very positive is the finding that children themselves motivate a certain small group of young people to become teachers. On the other hand, schoolmates often represent the attenuating factor with their behaviour in the course of school attendance often discouraging young candidates for the teaching profession from pursuing this career. The last two subgroups of the “*other*” subcategory are newly identified factors in the motivation of students to select a teacher course of university study in general.

## **Conclusions**

Regarding the uniqueness of the obtained data, the results cannot be generalised. The content of the student statements represents great informative value, though. With regard to future research, a question emerges as to which of the identified external factors are most relevant for continuation in the selected course of study and how and by what means they act.

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