

Article

An Investigation into the Career Aspirations of First-Year Trainee Teachers at Széchenyi István University

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Abstract

Contemporary issues of particular concern include the current state of the teaching profession, the lack of professional and social respect for teachers, the need for salary increases, the need to reduce the burden on teachers, and performance evaluation. In addition, the low number of young people entering the teaching profession and the low proportion of graduates choosing this career path are of fundamental concern. The present research seeks to explore the perceptions of first-year student teachers towards the profession of teaching through a case study approach. A metaphor method involving sentence completion was used to explore students' conceptions of the 'teacher image'. The students' metaphors were analyzed to determine the prevalence of teacher-centeredness or learner-centeredness, knowledge transfer or knowledge acquisition, and cognition or emotion. The students' essays on the question "Why do I want to be a lower primary teacher?" were analyzed to identify career motivating factors, positive attributes that enhance career motivation, and future aspirations. The main findings of the research are that trainees are mainly inspired by their primary school teachers, they are aware of their strengths to become good teachers, and they envision a career in teaching. The motivation and commitment of our first-year students to their careers is an excellent starting point, which should be built on in both theoretical and practical courses during university education. They should be enriched with real-life experiences, encouraged and supported within their practice, in order to increase the number of young people who choose a teaching career after graduating from university.



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1. Introduction

Throughout our lifetimes, we are frequently confronted with decision-making scenarios that have the capacity to influence or determine our future. The selection of a career is a complex undertaking, particularly in a developed society where the range of options is extensive. A number of factors can influence this decision, including external and internal factors, needs, interests, expectations, the social prestige of the profession, financial recognition, and even fashion trends. It is often the case that decisions regarding career choices are made without a full understanding of the nuances and difficulties of the profession in question, or of the subject structure, content and requirements of the studies that underpin and ensure the acquisition of the profession. Ideally, individuals would be able to choose a profession that perfectly matches their interests, skills, and passions, that is highly useful to society, that is respected, and that offers a competitive salary.

“For those interested in teacher training, it is important to emphasize that students entering teacher training institutions do not come with a “clean slate”. They have twelve to fourteen years of personal experience of school, learning and teaching, which are transformed throughout the process of growing up, shaping into opinions and beliefs, and living on in attitudes and personal theories” (Bárdossy & Dudás, 2011, p. 7).

It has been shown that school experiences during the school years have a significant impact on personal development and career choices, with the potential to influence both positive and negative outcomes. As Hunyady (1993) observes, these experiences not only influence career choices or career-related ideas, “they also shape reactions to specific pedagogical situations, establish patterns of behavior in relationships with children, and determine evaluation and methodological approaches to pedagogical activities. It is precisely through the power of personal experience that they form an extremely durable system of attitudes that is difficult to change” (Hunyady, 1993, p. 165).

In addition, it is essential to consider that “early teaching-related experiences may both reinforce or undermine interest and commitment to a teaching career. Positive teaching-related experiences can trigger and strengthen interests, values, and perceived abilities that reinforce views of teaching as an attractive career, while demanding, stressful, and disempowering experiences may highlight challenges and perceived costs associated with the profession” (Bergey & Ranellucci, 2025).

2. Literature Review

This section introduces the possible motivations for pursuing a career in teaching, emphasize the importance of professional motivations in teaching and introduce some methods for investigating the motivations of trainee teachers.

2.1. The Career Motives of Teaching as a Profession

According to Sinclair (2008) “motivation is what moves us to do something, including beginning a new career or initial teacher education course. Further, motivation involves energy and drive to learn, work effectively and achieve potential” (Sinclair, 2008, p. 80).

In the field of psychology, motivation is defined as “a force that drives individuals to act, whether intrinsic (e.g., need, desire, interest, habit, will) or extrinsic (e.g., expectation, compulsion, attraction). This force can be either internal or external, depending on its origin. Intrinsic motivation is characterized by the attraction of an activity itself, whereas extrinsic motivation is driven by an external force” (Gósi-Greguss & Bányai, 2006, pp. 322–323). A variety of factors can influence an individual’s motivation for career orientation and choice. This is also the case for the choice of teaching as a profession, which occupies a fundamental place in the social system, as teachers have an impact on the rising generation and society in general (Ölmez-Çağlar, 2022).

Becoming a teacher can be influenced by external and internal motivational factors. The professional socialization process can be based on family patterns, positive and negative experiences at school, examples from former teachers, but also on the availability of time and knowledge acquired through training and practice (Heinz, 2015). As (Kyriacou & Coulthard, 2000; Thomson et al., 2012; Yüce et al., 2013; Balyer & Özcan, 2014; Heinz, 2015) presented the career motivations of trainee teachers can be divided into three groups: extrinsic, intrinsic and altruistic reasons, as shown in Table 1.

Topkaya and Uztosun (2012) emphasize the importance of career choice theories that do not focus on traditional extrinsic, intrinsic and altruistic motivations. Among the earliest and most significant of these is Super’s (1953) self-concept theory, which focuses on self-perception and the question “Who am I?” In addition, Holland (1959)’s concept is also cited,

which emphasizes the significance of not only self-knowledge and self-awareness, but also the importance of accurate professional knowledge in career choice.

Table 1. Groups of trainee teachers' career motives.

Motives	Examples for the Motives
Extrinsic motivation: aspects of teaching as a job which are not inherent in the work itself	the status of the profession levels of pay holidays job security transferability flexibility
Intrinsic motivation: factors which address the characteristics of the teaching job itself have been identified	enjoyment of teaching job satisfaction creativity interest in teaching subject(s) high levels of confidence in their teaching abilities: enthusiasm, strong interpersonal skills, energy, ability to generate confidence in pupils positive school experiences influences of family members, friends
Altruistic motivation: considering teaching as a socially worthwhile and important job and as a special mission of moral worth	child-centeredness, loving children willingness and desire to contribute to society, work with/help children, shape the future of children increase social equality

[Bergmark et al. \(2018\)](#) reinforce that lots of studies highlight extrinsic, intrinsic and altruistic motives for choosing to teach as a career however they emphasize to consider Bernstein's concept of pedagogical identity ([Bernstein, 2000](#)) as well. This concept focuses on how students interpret themselves and their future, the reasons for any disagreements and their responses to their professional identity.

2.2. The Significance of Professional Motivation for Prospective Teachers

The importance of effective, efficient, equitable and high-quality education for the future of any society cannot be overstated. In addition to the quality of teachers and their openness to the renewal of pedagogical culture, continuous professional development and innovation, the issue of teacher shortages has been identified by UNESCO as a global problem affecting countries around the world. "According to the [UNESCO Institute for Statistics \(2013\)](#), the creation of 1.6 million teaching posts is projected to achieve universal primary education by 2015, with this number increasing to 3.3 million by 2030" ([Heinz, 2015](#), p. 259).

Research by [Lannert and Sinka \(2009\)](#) has highlighted the growing challenges of attracting motivated and capable young people into the teaching profession, as well as the increasing number of burnt-out teachers who perceive limited career prospects within the teaching profession. "It is particularly important to identify motivated individuals to fill these roles, especially in times of teacher shortage, to ensure the provision of high quality and fulfilling education. Motives, such as career goals and reasons for entering or remaining in the profession, are relevant at different career stages" ([Keller-Schneider, 2019](#), pp. 82–83).

The provision of quality education that benefits both the individual and society requires teachers who are willing, motivated and able to act, and who possess high profes-

sional and human qualities. Teachers fulfill a variety of roles within the education system, which adapt to the needs of different learners. The specific roles teachers take on can be influenced by the education system's focus on a 'teacher-centered' or 'learner/student-centered' approach (Peng, 2023).

According to Harmer, teachers can act as resources, tutors, observers, performers or teaching aids. Beyond these conventional roles, teachers can also act as counselors, mentors, role models and sources of support, providing students with assistance or help when required (Harmer, 2015).

2.3. Some Methods to Examine the Trainee Teachers' Career Aspiration

As part of a complex project (TÁMOP-3.1.5), the Education Office conducted a comprehensive research study among three different target groups: secondary school graduates, student teachers preparing to become secondary school teachers, and in-service teachers. Secondary school and university students were asked about their motivations for choosing a career, while in-practice teachers were asked about the introduction of the teacher career model, staying in the profession and leaving the profession (Oktatási Hivatal, 2015).

According to the students surveyed, the financial and social prestige of a career as a teacher is low, and as a result very few young people from high-income families choose this profession. Conversely, the proportion of secondary school students who have achieved outstanding academic results, passed language exams and accumulated extra credit points is also low among those preparing for a career in education. Family role models, former teachers and positive school experiences were identified as the most important motivators for students with a degree in education. The research also showed that the predominant benefits of a career in education for the secondary school teachers and student teachers surveyed were compatibility with family life, variety of daily activities, enjoyment of working with children, shaping children's futures and job security (Paksi et al., 2015).

Based on Dudás (2006), the research with student teachers initially explored their views on career motivation through questionnaires and interviews, followed by the use of concept mapping and the ordered tree method. A concept map "consists of words and phrases that broaden the scope of the central concept and a network of connecting lines that represent the links between them. Concept maps drawn at different points in time can also be used to trace a developmental process" (Dudás, 2006, p. 155).

One of the latest methods to support the exploration of views is metaphor research. Vámos says: "Metaphor as a research method can be used to understand pedagogical concepts and to explore the meaning behind concepts. A metaphor is a transfer metaphor that is created on the basis of common properties between two entities. The transfer of meaning takes place in the depths of consciousness and therefore, according to the metaphor concept of cognitive linguistics, a metaphor can define a meaning or experience that was not previously known" (Vámos, 2001, p. 86).

According to Pinczés-Palásthy (2019), it is important in teacher education to explore whether trainee teachers understand and can interpret different pedagogical or psychological concepts, since their previous experiences and attitudes might influence their interpretative processes. There are several procedures available for using the metaphor method. One of them is the use of different conjunctions such as like, as if, or even to define the target concept. The other procedure is metaphor provocation whereby one or more source concepts are selected from a list of concepts that match the target term. The third procedure is sentence completion, where respondents can provide their own source concepts for the given target concepts. The created sentences can be analyzed using content analysis method grouping the concepts that are closely related. These metaphors can be discussed

in groups revealing the ideas in depth. The group discussion facilitates the exchange of inspirations, motivations fostering communication and interactions.

Creative writing, nowadays, assumes an increasingly important role in both mother tongue and foreign language teaching (Roundy & Liu, 2014; Fitria, 2024). Jurayeva's (2024) evaluation of creative writing as a tool for academic literacy is a notable contribution to the field. According to Raátz (2008), in the narrower sense, creative writing is defined as the study and mastery of the rules of artistic forms, poetic modes of expression and creating in various genres, and it has explicitly literary-poetic aspects. In broader, general sense, creative writing is concerned with the act of writing itself, as well as with the development of literacy and the improvement of text-making skills. The objective of creative writing is to enable writers to consciously diverge from the established norms and conventions of text structure and composition, which have been refined over time.

3. Materials and Methods

A Case Study

The objective of the research was to investigate, in the years 2024–2025, through a case study of 90 first-year student teachers of the Apáczai Csere János Faculty of Humanities, Education and Social Sciences of Széchenyi István University, their thoughts on teaching, the motivations behind their choice of this field of study, and their future professional aspirations. A total of 90 first-year student teachers participated in the survey, and evaluable responses were received from 87 students.

In this research, content analysis was utilized as a qualitative research method, with the metaphor method (including sentence completion) being employed as a tool. The students were asked to complete the sentence—"A teacher is a (noun) who/which (verb)"—with the provided vocabulary. The resulting metaphors were then subjected to a grouping process, with concepts that were closely related being categorized together. The second research tool used was the analysis of the trainees' essay, titled "Why I want to be a teacher?". A comprehensive dataset was compiled from the creative writing essays, including the students' motivations, the positive qualities they mentioned, and the ideas and thoughts that underpinned their career aspirations.

The students were informed about the purpose of the research and were assured of their anonymity and voluntariness within the framework of a course called Mentoring consultation. Three of the 90 students declined participation in the research, so they did not complete the requested tasks. The others accepted the tasks, thereby also agreeing that the research results could be used (in whole or in part) in conference presentations and/or publications. Participants were not required to disclose any specific personal data during the research process, ensuring their anonymity.

There were no strict formal or content requirements for the essays to be written by the students. It was rather an opportunity for creative writing. It was also clarified that the essays would neither be ranked nor categorized as good or bad. The essays would function as a mirror, reflecting the students' current thoughts, feelings, expectations or any uncertainties they might have. At the same time, students must place themselves at the center of the essay, thinking through who they are. This process can be interpreted as the beginning of a journey of self-discovery, enabling them to set more conscious goals for themselves at the beginning of their studies considering what, how and why they should do in the process of becoming a lower primary teacher.

The use of metaphors also fostered the development of students' creativity, imagination and association skills.

We provided a comprehensive explanation of the research methods to the students, covering both pedagogical and research aspects. During the pedagogical interpretation, we

highlighted the stages of the lessons and the purpose for which these methods could be incorporated into the teaching—learning process. During the research—oriented analysis we discussed the characteristics of qualitative methods and content analysis.

Before starting the research, numerous questions arose in connection with the inspirations and motivations influencing the choice of the teaching profession, the trainees' approach to the teaching process, human and professional qualities, visions for the future as a teacher, teacher roles and so on. Based on these considerations three research questions (RQ) were formulated. These are as follows:

RQ 1: What factors influence the career choices of trainee teachers when entering the teaching profession?

RQ 2: What personal qualities and characteristics do trainee teachers consider essential to becoming a lower primary teacher?

RQ 3: In terms of the teaching—learning process, do trainee teachers prefer a teacher—centered or a student—centered approach?

4. Results and Discussion

The presentation of the research results starts with the metaphor analysis, followed by an overview of the students' motivations, then the examination of the students' characteristics is introduced, and finally we obtain an insight into the students' vision of their future.

4.1. Metaphors Formulated by Students

In the course of the metaphor analysis, students ($N = 87$) identified the teacher (target concept) with 53 different nouns (source concept), as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Metaphors for the word teacher.

Number of Mentions	Metaphors	Number of Words (53)
9	mother hen	1
7	gardener	1
6	architect, map	2
3	compass, expert, magician	4
2	coach, storyteller, role model, advisor, sculptor	5
1	door, creator, owl, friend, magician, astronomer, salesman, rain, supervisor, shaper, caretaker, candle, boat captain, bridge, messenger, hero, trainer, referee, shepherd, adventurer, conductor, mediator, lantern, encyclopedia, math equation, craftsman, engine driver, sun, director, chef, sponge, actor, prop, supporter, tour guide, mirror, fire starter, leader, lighthouse, world changer, composer	41

The metaphors are grouped into three source concept groups according to their content. The largest proportion of metaphors belongs to the group of developing/forming metaphors. The second group includes the caring/protecting/educating source concept group, while the third group contains the leading/guiding metaphors. This is illustrated in the figure below (Figure 1).

The metaphors contained within each group are presented in tables. Teachers, as developers and shapers were expressed in the following ideas, presented in Table 3. This group of ideas contain 26 different nouns as source concept.

Table 3. Elements of the developing, shaping, forming source concept group.

A Primary Teacher Is a/an/the . . .	Who/That . . .
architect (3)	establishes and builds on solid foundations; lays a firm foundation for the acquisition of knowledge and development, lays the foundations for the future; builds on solid foundations; establishes knowledge; lays a firm foundation for development
wizard (3)	transforms/modifies/converts/changes
expert (3)	inspires, develops and prepares you for challenges
coach (2)	motivates, inspires, develops; prepares you for the challenges of knowledge acquisition
role model (2)	someone to emulate; motivates perseverance and commitment
sculptor (2)	molds, perfects, shapes students' character and develops their skills;
story teller (2)	tells the curriculum in a fun way for children; invites children into the magical world of learning
salesman (1)	offers the knowledge
rain (1)	quenches your thirst for knowledge
actor/actress (1)	enchants you with his/her play
owl (1)	sage, one of the possessors and transmitters of knowledge
encyclopedia (1)	provides answers to the questions asked
magician (1)	his/her hat hides many secrets, but he/she always reveals the right one
mirror (1)	highlights strengths and weaknesses
"world changer" (1)	believes in the power of learning
creator (1)	brings an innovative approach to learning
supporter (1)	encourages you to experiment, try and accept failure
mediator (1)	bridges the gap between science and everyday life
shaper (1)	helps to develop a sense of values
messenger (1)	delivers important messages to students so that they can make good choices
bridge (1)	links the world of knowledge with children's desires and dreams; links knowledge and children's curiosity
adventurer (1)	invites students on an adventure of discovery
astronomer (1)	helps you explore the boundless universe of knowledge
fire starter (1)	ignites the passion for knowledge
craftsman (1)	develops and shapes the students with own knowledge and experience
chef (1)	spices up the curriculum with fun and love and children love to learn

The elements of the first group of metaphors ($N = 38$; 43.68%) see the teacher as a source of knowledge, information, or possessor of knowledge (e.g., encyclopedia, salesman, owl). A teacher should be enthusiastic who is ready for adventure, exploration and experiments and believes in the power of learning (e.g., astronomer, creator, world changer). The transfer of knowledge is combined with motivation and inspiration (e.g., coach) and is based on established knowledge (e.g., architect), which shapes and perfects the learner, who participates as a recipient in this process. If a teacher is like a good chef it is possible to organize the activities in an enjoyable way with fun and laugh. There are also metaphors in which knowledge is transferred in a way that is enjoyable for children, experiential, playful and age-appropriate (e.g., wizard, magician, storyteller), which also allows for interactivity.

During the transfer and reception of knowledge, it is essential to identify strengths and areas for development, bearing in mind individual needs, in order to achieve individual development (e.g., mirror).

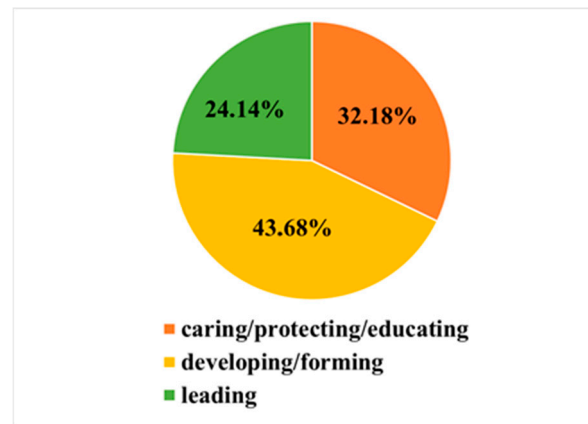


Figure 1. The percentage distribution of source concepts.

The following sentences were placed in the caring/protecting/nurturing group (see Table 4).

Table 4. Elements of the caring, protecting source concept group.

A Primary Teacher Is a/an/the. . .	Who/That. . .
mother hen (9)	loves you unconditionally/believes in you/accepts you for who you are/stands by you/stands up for you/ takes care of you/ praises you
gardener (7)	cares for/feeds/prunes/ nurtures/ develops wild shoots; nurtures small trees with love and patience to bear fruit, carefully nurtures the tender flowers entrusted to him/her
adviser (2)	helps you if you are in trouble/motivates you
caretaker (1)	educates you and nurtures your soul
Sun (1)	gives you warmth
candle (1)	glows in darkness
supervisor (1)	takes care of you
prop (1)	stands by you and supports you
friend (1)	listens to problems, concerns, fears
lantern (1)	shines in the dark forest of knowledge
composer (1)	creates harmony between knowledge and creativity in children's bodies and minds
sponge (1)	absorb students' fears and insecurities
door (1)	opens the world of wonders

The second group of metaphors approaches the concept of teachers and their activities from an emotional point of view. Children spend a considerable amount of time at school, and it is often asserted that school functions as a second home. In addition to the family, which is the primary and most significant socializing environment, the school plays a particularly important role in the process of intellectual, emotional, moral, aesthetic and physical and spiritual development. The teacher therefore has a very complex task. The metaphors formulated by the students ($N = 28$; 32.18%) reveal a shift in focus from the mere

transmission of knowledge to the cultivation of emotional security, trust, and unconditional love in the teacher-pupil relationship. The metaphorical representations of teachers as nurturers, guides, and protectors underline the significance of emotional intelligence in educational settings. It is considered essential for the teacher to help when children encounter difficulties, to offer support and motivate them (e.g., caretaker, support). It is also important to address children's emotional needs by listening to their concerns and fears, giving positive feedback, praising them, and fostering a harmonious learning environment (e.g., adviser, composer).

The following sentences constitute the source concept group of leading and managing (see Table 5).

Table 5. Elements of the leading, managing source concept group.

A Primary Teacher Is a/an/the . . .	Who/That . . .
map (6)	shows you the right/best/successful/walkable/appropriate path to knowledge
compass (3)	shows you the way; helps you find the right and purposeful path in life; guides you through the sea of knowledge
lighthouse (1)	points the way
director (1)	gives instructions
trainer (1)	trains
conductor (1)	conducts
referee (1)	makes you follow the rules
shepherd (1)	guides and directs the children entrusted to him
tour guide (1)	leads you through mountain and valley on the long road to knowledge
leader (1)	leads the team towards a common goal to achieve it
maths equation (1)	every detail has its place, role and importance
boat captain (1)	sails the sea of knowledge with his students
hero (1)	fights hard battles against ignorance
engine driver (1)	proceeds with the passengers on the train on the designated track to their destination

The third group of metaphors ($N = 21$; 24.14%) suggests that the teacher's role as a leader and manager can be compared to that of a direct manager, in that the teacher acts as a conductor, constantly giving instructions to the students, with each detail having its place, role and importance. The transfer of knowledge is unidirectional, with limited opportunities for interaction, and students are primarily passive recipients. However, many of the resource concepts in the group support interaction, with teachers acting as guides, showing the direction and the way, and demarcating the right and wrong direction (e.g., lighthouse, compass, shepherd, map). Furthermore, it is also essential to establish a framework for interaction and cooperation, to cultivate a system of habits (e.g., referee, trainer), to provide the necessary amount and quality of help when needed, and to give instructions. The arduous nature of the teaching-learning process is a shared journey for both teacher and pupil, necessitating the acknowledgement that both triumph and failure are inherent aspects of the learning process. However, it is emphasized that collaboration is a fruitful endeavor. A competent leader is able to guide a group of children towards a common teaching-learning goal and facilitate its realization.

4.2. The Motivations of Students

In this study, a total of 87 student essays were analyzed in order to identify the motivational factors that influenced the students' choice of a career in education.

The following figure (Figure 2) illustrates the 13 factors that were mentioned by the students.

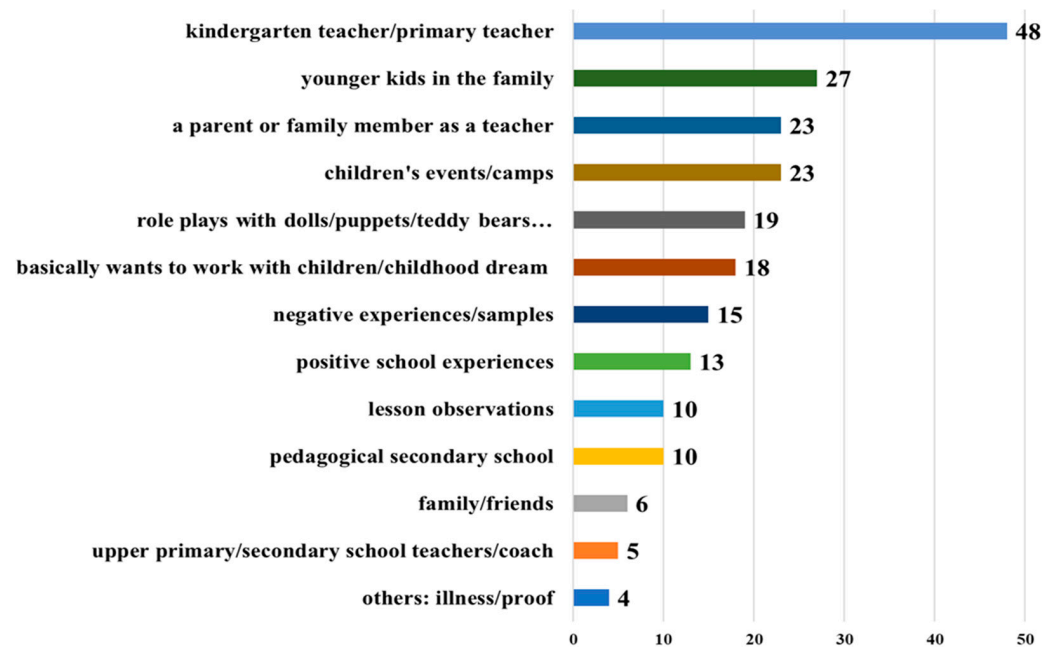


Figure 2. Motivational factors mentioned by students.

For 18 of the students, the aspiration to pursue a career in education was a childhood dream, and they could not and do not imagine themselves engaging in any other profession.

In addition, the study examined whether and to what extent family members, friends or acquaintances, as an important medium for primary socialization, influenced the students' career choice in education. The data revealed that family members, those responsible for childcare and interaction with younger children within the family unit, and individuals from the immediate social environment, such as family, close friends, and acquaintances, were mentioned by students a total of 29 times. In addition, more than half of the students ($N = 48$) expressed positive feelings about their kindergarten teachers, who served as role models during the decision-making process for their future career. Additionally, 5 students identified teachers from upper secondary and secondary school, as well as coaches, as their role models. Furthermore, 13 students reported numerous positive experiences during their school years, highlighting a pleasant, happy and accepting environment, engaging lessons and extra-curricular activities that evoked fond memories. These experiences have also influenced their career choices, particularly towards a career in teaching. Among the students who had positive school experiences or were role models themselves, 19 students reported enjoying playful activities with their peers or younger siblings and cousins, suggesting a positive environment conducive to recreational learning.

Conversely, some students ($N = 15$) reported that negative role models had encouraged them to pursue a career in education, while others ($N = 15$) expressed a desire for their own children to avoid the challenges they had faced during their school years.

Some students ($N = 23$) participated in community service activities related to their secondary school studies, including children's camps and activities. These camps included summer day camps, faith camps, craft camps, and camps for children with diabetes. The majority of these students reported positive experiences, finding it easy to connect with

their peers and express their creativity. They were also pleased to see that the children enjoyed the programs they organized.

It is noteworthy that 4 students faced challenges in their academic lives due to their health problems. These students often experienced bullying, exclusion, criticism, and belittlement from both teachers and peers. However, their unwavering commitment to becoming teachers is a testament to their resilience. They are driven to prove their worth to themselves and to dispel the misconceptions of those who doubted their abilities.

The first-year students participated in lesson observations, with 10 of them citing this as a motivating factor. The two-day trainee teacher experience served as a confirmation for them, reinforcing their sense of having made the right decision and being in the right place.

The motivational factors cited by the students were grouped into three categories. The first category included individuals who played a role in their decision to become a teacher. The second category includes elements that influenced students' decisions from an emotional perspective, while the third category contains activities that could be interpreted as prior professional experience. The following figure (Figure 3) illustrates the grouping of motives.

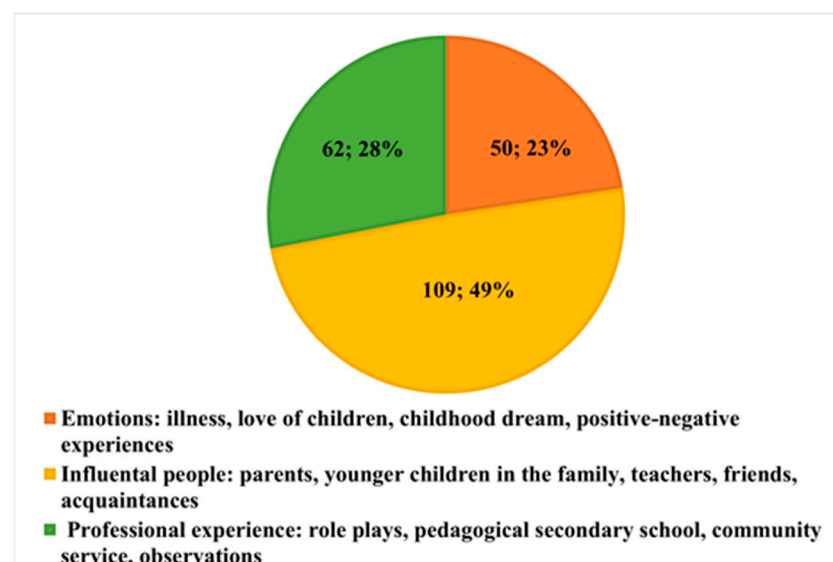


Figure 3. The groups of students' motives.

4.3. Examining Students' Personality Traits and Characteristics

In the essay written by the students, we examined the personality traits they identified and found a total of 53 different traits.

The characteristics are divided into 3 groups. In the first group there are the positive human qualities, in the second group there are the qualities necessary for the development of social relationships and in the third group there are the qualities related to the teaching profession.

The group of positive human qualities, included 16 different words. Among them, patient ($N = 21$) came first, kind ($N = 14$) second and enthusiastic ($N = 11$) third.

In the second group, we collected the qualities that facilitate the development of social relationships. Out of the 11 items in this group, helpfulness ($N = 21$) ranked first, followed by openness ($N = 9$). In third place were curiosity and compassion ($N = 6$).

In the third group, we calculated the mean value of the attributes that were considered professionally important. This group was the largest group and included 26 different words. Creativity was ranked first ($N = 34$), empathy ($N = 15$) was the second and loving children and being persistent ($N = 10$) were ranking third.

The following table (Table 6) shows all elements of the groups, along with the number of mentions.

Table 6. Groups of characteristics mentioned by the students.

Positive Human Characteristics	Characteristics to Develop Interactions	The Most Important Characteristics for Teachers
patient (21)	helpful (21)	creative (34)
kind (14)	open-minded (9)	empathic (15)
enthusiastic (11)	curious (6)	child-lover (10)
honest (8)	compassionate (6)	persistent (10)
calm (6)	communicative (5)	accepting (9)
cheerful (4)	understanding (4)	committed (7)
artistic soul (2)	cooperative (3)	responsible (7)
friendly (2)	caring (2)	supportive (7)
attentive (2)	adaptable (1)	reliable (5)
success-oriented (1)	sociable (1)	dedicated (4)
being a good person (1)	ready to compromise (1)	confident (4)
sensitive (1)		thirsty for knowledge (3)
affectionate (1)		hardworking (3)
positive (1)		devoted (3)
nature lover (1)		knowledge-sharing (2)
respectful (1)		innovative (2)
		fair (2)
		motivated (1)
		non-discriminatory (1)
		caring (1)
		determined (1)
		consistent (1)
		dutiful (1)
		purposeful (1)
		flexible (1)
		conscientious (1)

4.4. The Students' Vision of Future

Our students also shared their initial reflections on teaching as first-year students and their aspirations for the future. During the content analysis, we grouped the students' thoughts. In the first group, we included thoughts that emphasized a commitment to the future generation, to developing their knowledge, expanding their knowledge and developing their skills. The other group of ideas revolved around students expressing a desire to emulate their former teachers, to follow in their footsteps and to provide their own students with the same opportunities they had as students. The third group of students' ideas contains notions that convey the desire to demonstrate their abilities to those who have previously expressed belief in them, or conversely, those who have not previously expressed such belief. The fourth group of thoughts expressed unconditional commitment to the profession.

The following section presents a selection of the ideas shared by the students.

The first group: commitment to the future generation, to developing their knowledge, expanding their knowledge and developing their skills.

"For the future of the country, it is important that teachers remain in the profession, and that they do so with enthusiasm and love. I am eager to see the conclusion of the next few years so that I can be in the classroom with the children."

“For me, teaching is a way of life. I want to create a learning environment where students not only acquire knowledge, but also values and skills that will help them in all aspects of life. Every child is unique and valuable, and it will be my mission as a teacher to help them find their way to success and happiness.”

“As a teacher, I want to help the next generation find the treasures of the world, and once found, help them understand them.”

“As a teacher, I want to educate, teach and prepare future generations for life in the big letters.”

“The many good examples, the motivation and the love that surrounded me when I was a child makes me want to pass on this love, care and attention to the next generation. I am dedicated to ensuring that the children in my care experience a fulfilling and joyful childhood, maximizing their potential and well-being.”

The second group: ideas revolved around students expressing a desire to emulate their former teachers, to follow in their footsteps and to provide their own students with the same opportunities they had as students.

“With sufficient diligence, self-discipline and self-reflection, I can reach a point within four years and be in a position to match my teachers and tutors. I am confident that, with commitment and self-reflection, I can become a teacher, a profession that demands responsibility and dedication. I believe that my students will look back on me with pride.”

“As a teacher, I would like to reflect on my own lower school years and ensure that children receive the same level of support and teaching that I had the opportunity to experience.”

“I consider myself fortunate to have met teachers whose attitude, humility and respect for the teaching profession were impressive. I would like to emulate their example.”

The third group: students' ideas that convey the desire to demonstrate their abilities to those who have previously expressed belief in them, or conversely, those who have not previously expressed such belief.

“Unfortunately, I lost my mother a month and a half ago. Since then, it has become even more important for me to be here to see this through, as that was her wish. If she had doubted my ability to do so, I would not be here now, or I would never have found my way. Because of her, it became even more important that I wanted to be a teacher.”

“Becoming a teacher is my mission. I want to show people who did not believe in me that I can do it and will be a teacher one day. I will do everything in my power to make my childhood dream come true.”

The fourth group: thoughts to express unconditional commitment to the profession.

“Every child is a seed, the school is the garden, and the teacher is the gardener. My dream is to be a teacher.”

“There is nothing more rewarding than seeing a young student's eyes light up with joy. As a teacher, I want to bring that sparkle out in my students.”

“Every time I say ‘I'm going to be a teacher!’, I feel a sense of fulfilment. I am aware that, as with everything in life, this career has its drawbacks, but I consider myself to be one of the most fortunate people in the world.”

Following the detailed analysis of the students' essays, the research questions were examined.

RQ 1: What factors influence the career choices of trainee teachers when entering the teaching profession?

The study found that they were influenced by thirteen different factors. The impact of family members on student motivation has a significant influence especially when there are teachers in the family. Former teachers were serving as positive as well as negative samples for the trainees and they expressed a desire to follow the positive while avoiding the negative ones.

RQ 2: What personal qualities and characteristics do trainee teachers consider essential to becoming a lower primary teacher?

A full list of 53 different characteristics was provided by the trainees with patience, helpfulness and creativity being identified as the most important ones. Among the professional characteristics they have mentioned the words creative, empathic and child-lover ranked highly.

RQ 3: In terms of the teaching—learning process, do trainee teachers prefer a teacher—centered or a student—centered approach?

The concept of a teacher was identified with 53 different source concepts including roles such as developer, educator and leader, based on metaphors. As they are committed and dedicated to becoming lower primary teachers, it is their belief, that the purpose of teaching extends beyond the mere transfer of knowledge. They therefore consider it vital to recognize that effective teaching—learning procedure should be founded on interaction and the active engagement of learners. It is belief of the trainees that the teaching should be student—centered.

4.5. Limitations

In connection with the career socialization research conducted among our first-year trainee teachers, it is important to take the limitations into account. The research is a case study limited to the examination of a given institution, a given year, and a given grade, so we worked with a relatively small sample. The examination focused on a specific period of the students' career socialization process, which does not clearly reflect long-term plans, possible changes or transformations in motivation or the impact of any influencing factors. As participation in the research was voluntary, the results may not necessarily reflect the thoughts of all first-year trainees. Therefore, it is evident that the results cannot be generalized, and their reliability and validity may be subject to scrutiny. The trainees varying levels of writing skills and written communication abilities, their family backgrounds, family expectations, and differences in socioeconomic status may influence the content and structure of the essays. This may affect the quality of the data and even distort the analysis. It is possible that students expressed their own ideas or formulated their thoughts in a way that generated a certain expected response, with the intention of presenting themselves in a favorable light. When interpreting essays, there is also a risk of researcher subjectivity, as the style of an essay may captivate the researcher, which may influence the analysis.

5. Conclusions

Choosing a career is one of the most important decisions an individual will make in his or her life, as it involves not only the present, but also the past and the future. The factors that influence such decisions are many and varied, including an individual's innate talents and abilities, interests, self-awareness, social and economic trends, the expectations

and challenges of a rapidly changing world, and the perceived usefulness and value of a particular career.

It is clear that the path to a prosperous future lies in the hands of committed, enthusiastic and motivated teachers who embody a sense of vocation. The primary aim of the research presented here was to explore the perceptions, motivations, ambitions and visions of first-year trainee teachers. The findings of the case study presented here indicate that all the first-year teacher candidates interviewed expressed a desire to pursue a career in teaching, despite the challenges and perceived social inferiority of the profession.

In relation to the motivational groups identified by [Heinz \(2015\)](#), our first-year trainee teachers were inspired by intrinsic (e.g., influence of family and friends, positive school experiences) and altruistic (e.g., love of children, shaping children's futures) motivations in their career choices.

The metaphors constructed by students are consistent with some roles identified by [Harmer \(2015\)](#), including role model, supporter and resource.

The research shows that students who have teachers in their family tend to emulate and admire their parents. This clearly demonstrates the role of the family as a primary socialization environment in the area of career motivation.

Many students aspire to follow in the footsteps of their former teachers and become positive role models for their pupils. However, there are also students who are inspired by negative examples to do things differently in order to create a climate of trust for the students in their care.

The research also showed that our trainee teachers are aware of their own positive human and professional qualities, which are essential for success in their chosen profession.

According to the research results, students envision their career in education. This approach by trainees could potentially provide a solution to the shortage of teachers. However, it is also important to make education policy decisions that would make the teaching profession more appealing to young people. The trainees articulated that teaching is not merely a transmission of knowledge, but rather an interactive and active learning process founded on a student-centered approach. To this extent, the content of courses in teacher training institutions should be planned on the basis of learning outcomes, considering the individual motivations, needs, and goals of students. In addition to the transfer of knowledge, emphasis should be placed on developing skills, attitudes, autonomy, and a sense of responsibility for individual development. In the case of theoretical courses, it is essential to ensure individual learning styles and personalized learning paths. In this regard, the lecturer can play the role of supporter, helper, guide and developer, as the trainees themselves described in the research. When planning practical courses, it is essential to prioritize interaction and student engagement while fostering creativity, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills. Active involvement in the learning process supports the development and growth of self-awareness, self-reflection and responsibility for learning.

The results of the research are encouraging, but they can also be seen as overly idealistic or even naive, given that they are first-year students. This raises the question of whether the expectations, requirements and experiences of their university studies, theoretical subjects, and teaching practices will confirm or discourage their initial ideas and plans. During their time at university, it is important to consider whether we can maintain their enthusiasm and adequately help them to maintain or strengthen their motivation to pursue their careers. For this reason, the research will continue with the first-year student teachers and will be complemented by a second survey of the same students in their fourth year.

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Institutional Review Board Statement: This research has taken into consideration the ethical and deontological aspects of educational research. The study did not require ethical review and approval as no specific personal data were collected from the subjects and no one can be identified from the shared data. The dignity and integrity of the participants were considered. Students were informed about the purpose of the research, the guarantee of anonymity, and the possibility of voluntary participation. The results of the research were shared with the participating student groups as part of a university course entitled Mentoring consultation. They were also informed that the results could be presented at conferences and/or in publications.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The quantitative results are included in the study. The original written materials, prepared by the students, are kept by the author.

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