

Motives for Choosing the Teaching Profession: Voices of Pre-service Teachers

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ABSTRACT

This paper highlights the motives of pre-service teachers to the various training programmes offered in Malaysian Teachers Training Colleges. A survey was carried out on the 2004 Intake teacher trainees (N= 546) registered for the Teaching Diploma for Primary Schools (N=291), the Post Graduate Teaching Diploma For Primary Schools (N=199) and the Bachelor of Education Programme (N=56). The instrument used for the study was the Motives For Teaching Questionnaire developed by Goh and Atputhasamy (2001). Research findings from this study are presented and compared with those of similar studies done in other countries. Implications of the findings and suggestions for further research are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

The teacher shortage problem caught up with many developed and developing countries rather abruptly in the early 1980s, especially when it came to filling the need for mathematics and science teachers (Farber, 1991). Additionally, this perennial shortfall in teacher supply to meet an increasingly student population was not only confined to the concern for numbers, it also concerned quality as well (Goh & Atputhasamy, 2001). According to Darling-Hammond (1984), the “crisis in teaching can be attributed to the retirement of many highly experienced and well-educated teachers and the concomitant departure of many younger graduates for more lucrative careers elsewhere”. Another reason could also be possibly due to the wide employment opportunities in the private sector in the booming economy of that period which contributed to making teaching as one of the job options for school leavers not necessarily a preferred choice.

However, in the early 1990s, the teacher shortage problem took a turnaround. Not only were there more students planning on embarking on a teaching career and more students entering graduate schools of education, but apparently the quality of these prospective teachers – at both the graduate and undergraduate levels – was increasing (Faber, 1991). The question, of course, is what accounted for this apparent turnaround interest in an educational career? Perhaps, one contributing factor could be the measures taken to redress the situation to include elevating the status of the teaching profession and to make teaching attractive. In Britain, for example, high-performing teachers were given the opportunity to go beyond the first range to higher salaries, besides having a fast track scheme for earlier advancement of exceptional teachers and

promising trainees. Besides, school heads who performed well could look forward to higher salaries under the improved leadership scheme (Moran et al., 2001). The United States, however, adopted a different strategy to reach out to young graduates. Heightened media attention to troubled schools seemed to lend the teaching profession the aura of a calling or crusade. In addition, there was an aggressive “campaign” to edge out the age of self-centered interest, which so marked much of the eighties, giving way to a renewed sense of altruism (Faber, 1991).

Undeniably, the above discussion relates to various strategies used in teacher recruitment. However, it is imperative that measures deemed to attract young job-seekers into the teaching profession must match their motives for choosing teaching. Otherwise, the consequences may be disastrous resulting in many leaving teaching sooner than expected.

A review of the literature revealed various findings with respect to young people’s motives to join the teaching profession. Generally, there are three categories of motives - extrinsic (tangible rewards), intrinsic (intangible rewards) and altruistic (selfless contributions to young lives). According to Moran et al. (2001), each of the three categories contributed independently to affect the motivation of each individual, and besides, there were also gender differences as well.

Findings by Papanastasiou & Papanastasiou (1997) revealed that intrinsic motives were rated strongest by students enrolled in Elementary Education at the Pennsylvania State University compared to extrinsic motives (“the variety of benefits they would enjoy after graduation plus the job security that teaching affords”) rated by students at the University of Cyprus. As a comparison, studies by Summerhill, et al. (1998), Hayes (1990) and Robertson, et al., (1983) in the United States, Doliopoulou (1985) in Greece and Goh & Atputhasamy (2001) in Singapore revealed that it was the altruistic motives (“love for working with children”) that were dominant. A much earlier study by Lau (1968) in Singapore concluded that the most popular motives for entering the teaching profession were mainly altruistic and intrinsic (“service to society”, further education”, develop the young”, “teaching suits temperament and ability”). This same result was also reached in a similar study by Reid & Caudwell (1997) in Britain which showed that the two most popular motives were altruistic (“enjoying working with children”) and intrinsic (“feeling that teaching would bring high job satisfaction”) compared to extrinsic motives such as “job security, salary, holidays etc.”

In contrast, the motives of trainee teachers in Brunei Darussalam for choosing teaching were firstly extrinsic, secondly intrinsic, and lastly, altruistic (Yong, 1995). The teaching profession is said “to provide job security, good remuneration, fringe benefits, and teacher training incentives”. Soh (1988) investigated the relative importance trainee teachers in Singapore placed on various kinds of motives for choosing teaching. He made a comparison with the results of a similar study conducted in 1981. While the study results did not differ significantly, the 1988 students were more interested in the intrinsic nature of teaching while the 1981 students were more motivated by self-actualization. In a later study, Soh (1998) discovered that out of the eight motives for teaching, self-actualization and service conditions were the prominent ones.

In the wake of these findings, it is worth finding out what attracts entrants into the teaching profession in this country. Interestingly, in recent years, the Ministry of Education has also been aggressively taking steps to elevate the status of the teaching profession by revising the salaries of teachers and of late, increasing the monthly allowances of pre-service teachers. The purpose

of this study was to investigate the underlying motives of pre-service teachers to enroll in teachers training college for initial teacher training, and ultimately, choosing teaching as their profession and whether this choice was influenced by the improved conditions and incentives aforementioned.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study will provide insights into the types of factors which motivate pre-service teachers to enter into teaching. Such information will serve as an evaluative feedback to the Teacher Education Division, Ministry of Education in finding ways to enhance the quality of teacher education in this country.

Definition of Terms

Motives

According to Feldman (1993), motives are desired goals that underlie an individual's behaviour. As such, underlying motives are assumed to steer the choice of activities. Cognitive theories of motivation distinguish between the three types of motives, namely, extrinsic, intrinsic, and altruistic. Extrinsic motives are those that cause an individual to involve himself for a tangible reward. For example, to earn a grade or reward, to please someone, or for some other reason that has little to do with the task itself. In contrast, when an individual participates in a particular activity for his own enjoyment, and not for any tangible reward that it will bring him, he is said to possess intrinsic motives: "we do something when we don't have to do anything" Whereas, altruistic motives are those that govern an individual's helping behaviour that is beneficial to others but clearly requires self-sacrifice.

In this study, motives refers to the reasons (extrinsic, intrinsic and altruistic) underlying pre-service teachers' choice of teaching as their profession.

Teaching Profession

Lieberman (1953) defines profession as having the following characteristics: (i) offering a unique, definite and essential social service; (ii) emphasizing upon intellectual techniques in performing its service; (iii) requiring a long period of specialized training; (iv) focusing upon the service to be rendered, rather than economic gain; and (v) having a code of ethics. Similarly, the teaching profession, like any other profession, possesses these five characteristics.

In the context of this study, teaching profession means service delivery to a group of students in a formal classroom by an individual who has undergone a formal and specialized teacher education programme in a teacher training college for a specific duration.

Pre-service Teachers

In the education sector, pre-service teachers is defined as trainee teachers or course participants undergoing their pre-service training in teacher education sponsored by The Teacher Education

Division on a full-time or part-time (holiday course) basis (*Garis Panduan Praktikum Latihan Perguruan Praperkhidmatan*, 2003).

In the context of this study, pre-service teachers refers to three categories of students in teacher training colleges in this country: trainee teachers undergoing the Malaysian Teaching Diploma Course (KDPM), course participants undergoing the one-year Post-Graduate Teaching Diploma (KPLI SR) at the primary level and students enrolled in the Bachelor in Education Programme (*PISMP*).

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 546 pre-service teachers (154 males and 392 females) registered for the three different teacher education programmes (2004 Intake) in a teachers training college in Perak, namely, KDPM, KPLI SR and PISMP. The sample size for the study was determined using the guidelines proposed by Krejcie & Morgan (1971). Of the participants, 53.3% comprised KDPM pre-service teachers currently enrolled for the Malaysian Teaching Diploma (Total = 291; 86 males and 205 females); 36.4% were KPLI SR pre-service teachers from the January 2004 intake (Total = 199; 44 males and 155 females); and 10.3 % *PISMP* pre-service teachers from the July 2004 intake (Total = 61; 24 males and 32 females). In terms of gender, the sample consisted of 28.2% males and 71.8% females. Their ages cover a range of 18 – 33 years with a mean of 24.

Instrument

The Motives For Teaching Questionnaire

The Motives For Teaching Questionnaire was developed by Goh and Atputhasamy (2001) to measure pre-service teachers motives for choosing the teaching profession. It consisted of 22 items represented by four sub-scales, that is, service conditions (items 5, 6, 8, 9, 16, 17, 18, 21 and 22), altruism (items 1, 2, 13, 14 and 20), nature of the teaching profession (items 7, 10, 11 and 15) and social influence (items 3, 4 and 12). Participants were required to give realistic estimates of their choice on a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 – strongly disagree through 5 – strongly agree).

The reliability coefficient for the Motives For Teaching Questionnaire was .81 while those for the various sub-scales was .84 (service conditions), .67 (altruism), .45 (nature of teaching profession) and .36 (social influence).

Procedure

The Motives For Teaching Questionnaire was administered to the participants of the study by the researcher. They were informed verbally that they were participating in a study to investigate the motives of pre-service teachers for choosing the teaching profession. No time limit was set for completion of the instrument. However, most of the participants successfully responded to the 22 items in the questionnaire in 30 minutes.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were employed to determine the most popular motives of pre-service teachers. Inferential statistics was also used to compare the four motivating factors with gender.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Most popular motives

Table 1 presents the percentages of responses for the five-point Likert Scale as well as the means, standard deviations and the rank order based on the mean scores of the items.

Table 1: Motives for teaching

Motives for teaching	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)	Mean	SD	Rank
13. Love working with children	0.0	0.7	11.7	47.6	39.9	4.27	.69	1
1. Love teaching	0.0	0.4	11.4	60.1	28.2	4.16	.62	2
2. Influence young lives	0.4	0.4	11.9	57.9	29.5	4.15	.66	3
14. Intellectually stimulating	0.5	0.7	14.5	59.2	25.1	4.08	.69	4
11. Noble profession	1.5	1.6	16.3	54.8	25.8	4.01	.79	5
7. Secure job	3.5	5.5	29.5	47.6	13.9	3.63	.91	6
4. Inspired by teacher	4.0	8.6	35.3	37.0	15.0	3.50	.98	7
20. Inborn talent	1.3	9.2	50.0	33.9	5.7	3.34	.77	8
17. Immediate employment	6.2	11.0	36.1	37.4	9.3	3.33	1.00	9
15. High status profession	4.2	11.4	44.9	32.8	6.8	3.27	.90	10
19. Many fringe benefits	5.1	17.2	48.0	26.9	2.7	3.05	.87	11
21. Others value teachers	8.1	19.4	43.8	24.5	4.2	2.97	.97	12

Motives for teaching	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)	Mean	SD	Rank
16. Long vacation	9.9	23.6	34.6	27.5	4.4	2.92	1.04	13
12. Friend's encouragement	11.2	22.0	37.5	25.3	4.0	2.89	1.03	14
9. Attractive training pay	8.2	23.8	42.3	23.6	2.0	2.87	.93	15
6. Good prospects	9.2	24.7	50.5	14.7	.9	2.73	.85	16
18. Many job possibilities	9.9	28.9	39.9	17.8	3.5	2.67	.97	17
5. High salaries	16.5	27.7	43.4	10.8	1.6	2.53	.95	18
22. Easy promotion	15.6	34.8	45.4	3.3	0.9	2.39	.82	19
3. Parent/sibling a teacher	35.9	26.6	21.2	9.2	7.1	2.25	1.23	20
10. No other choice	41.2	31.3	20.9	3.5	3.1	1.96	1.02	21
8. Relatively easy job	36.6	40.3	18.9	3.1	1.1	1.91	.88	22

1 – strongly disagree; 2 - disagree; 3 – undecided; 4 - agree; 5 - strongly agree

From the table, it can be seen that the five most popular motives (having a mean of 4.00 and above on a 5-point scale) are: *Love working with children*, *Love teaching*, *Influence young lives*, *teaching is intellectually stimulating*, and *Teaching is a noble profession*. These five items generally reflect a liking for children and the teaching profession. Basically, they are all mainly altruistic motives.

The next category of popular motives (having a mean of 3.00 and below 3.99) are: *Secure job*, *Inspired by a model teacher*, *Inborn talent for teaching*, *Immediate employment upon completion of training*, *High status profession*, and *Many fringe benefits*. This group of six motives is a mix bag comprising service conditions, the nature of the teaching profession, and internal as well as external influences.

Of lesser importance (having a mean of 2.00 and below 2.99) are the following nine motives: *Others value teachers*, *Long vacation*, *Friend's encouragement*, *Attractive training pay*, *Good prospects*, *Many job possibilities*, *High salaries*, *Easy promotion*, and *Parent/sibling a teacher*. These motives are mainly related to service conditions and social influences.

Finally, the least important motives (having a mean of less than 2.00) are two items: *No other choice*, and *Relatively easy job*. Interestingly, these findings reveal that pre-service teachers did not enter the teaching profession out of desperation; they also seemed to understand that teaching is not an easy job compared to others.

At the individual level, pre-service teachers are drawn to teaching mainly due to altruistic reasons. These motives clearly indicate their liking and fondness for children as well as their awareness regarding the stimulating and noble characteristics of the teaching profession. This finding is similar with that of Summerhill, et al. (1998), Hayes (1990) and Robertson, et al., (1983) in the United States, Doliopoulou (1985) in Greece, and Lau (1988), Soh (1981, 1998) and Goh & Atputhasamy (2001) in Singapore. In addition, this conclusion is similar to that obtained from The Metropolitan Life Survey of the American teacher 1984-1995 which was conducted on 1 011 randomly selected public school teachers: "the opportunity to work with children or young people, and to contribute to their growth and development" was the highest rated motive (in Parkay & Stanford, 1998:5) These teachers professed that though they had to work under challenging conditions where the salaries were only modest and segments of their communities unsupportive, they chose to teach simply because they cared about young people. Interestingly, pre-service teachers did not enter into the teaching profession out of sheer desperation nor because of a misconception regarding the value of education.

Motivating factors and gender

Generally, it is a common perception that teaching is more suitable to females than males. This is reflected by the greater number of female candidates compared to male candidates who apply for the various teacher education programmes. Hence, it is interesting to investigate if females and males have different motives for entering the teaching profession.

The t-test was used to examine the difference in the mean scores of the male and female pre-service teachers. The mean scores, standard deviations and the t-values are shown in Table 2.

From the table, it can be seen that there was no significant difference between the two groups with respect to the four motivating factors. This finding which concurs with that of Goh & Atputhasamy (2001) seems to suggest that both male and female pre-service teachers enter the teaching profession for the same motives.

Table 2: Motivating factors and gender

Motivating factors	Male (n=154)		Female (n= 392)		t- value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Service conditions	28.34	9.15	27.97	8.92	.66, p>.05
Altruism	20.01	3.35	19.99	3.23	.96, p>.05
Teaching profession	13.06	3.39	12.79	3.35	.41, p>.05
Social influence	8.67	3.12	8.63	3.10	.90, p>.05

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study show that pre-service teachers chose to enter the teaching profession for altruistic motives. This finding concurs with those of other researchers that attest to the fact that altruistic reasons play a key role in influencing pre-service teachers choice of teaching as a profession as compared to extrinsic and intrinsic motives.

Limitations of the Study

The findings of this study can only be generalized to the teacher training college where the pre-service teachers are registered for their respective teacher education programme. It cannot be generalized to the other pre-service teachers undergoing the same type of programmes in the other teacher training colleges in this country.

Implications of the Study

If pre-service teachers enter the teaching profession mainly for altruistic reasons, then there is an urgent need to sustain their fondness for children and young people. One possible way is to ensure that the service conditions under which they work are favourable and comfortable, whereby teachers should be given incentives including high salaries, and other fringe benefits like promotion prospects, bonuses, scholarship awards, sabbatical leave, and the like. To this effect, this country is emulating the efforts and measures taken by other countries, like Singapore where expert teachers and excellent teachers can now aim for higher level posts to that of super teachers. Under Budget 2005, the Malaysian Government would create 12 Special Grade C posts for super teachers (The Star, September 11, 2004). This means that super teachers will be in a new grade. What is regarded as a welcome move is that these super teachers can now remain in schools and continue to do what they love, that is teach. Prior to this, those promoted to super teachers had to leave their teaching positions for appointments in administrative posts in state education departments or district education offices.

With this recognition and acknowledgement of the teaching profession in general, and teachers specifically, the next move now will be to publicize it far and wide in order to attract young people who are interested in teaching to apply.

Suggestions for Further Research

This study could be replicated to involve pre-service teachers from other teacher education programmes in other teacher training colleges in this country in order to provide further support for the generalizability of the findings. Researchers might also be interested to investigate the influence of other factors like age, programme type and work experience on motivating factors.

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