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Motivational Factors in Choosing a Teaching Career from Students: A Comparison Between Philology and Physical Education

Adela BRADEA [1]
Valentin Cosmin BLÂNDUL [2]
Anca-Cristina POP [3*]
Dana Ioana CRISTEA [4]

[1] University of Oradea, Teacher Training Department, Romania; https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1696-7772; adelabradea@yahoo.com
[2] University of Oradea, Teacher Training Department, Oradea, Romania; https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4778-0142; bvali73@yahoo.com
[3] University of Oradea, Faculty of Geography, Tourism and Sport, Department of Physical Education, Sport and Physiotherapy, Oradea, Romania; https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9823-1311; popancacristina@yahoo.com
[4] University of Oradea, Faculty of Geography, Tourism and Sport, Department of Physical Education, Sport and Physiotherapy, Oradea, Romania; https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4636-4892; danacristea07@yahoo.com
[*] *corresponding author:* popancacristina@yahoo.com

Abstract: *The teaching profession, in particular, requires a unique blend of passion, expertise, dedication, and ethical responsibility, and the motivations behind this career choice are a topic of considerable interest and importance. This study aims to identify whether there are motivational differences related to the choice of teaching career in terms of students from the Faculty of Letters and those from Physical Education and Sport at the University of Oradea. The study is based on the application of a 20-item questionnaire to a group of 227 students, in relatively equal proportions from Letters and Physical Education and Sport. Analyzing the differences between the faculties regarding each factor, it turned out that there is no significant difference between the processed responses. The most important predictors, as we have mentioned, were long-term attractiveness and perceived training. Even though the teaching profession for the students included in the research sample presents numerous challenges, and even though, from their point of view, it is not the most appreciated profession in Romania, this aspect has shown to have a smaller influence compared to the other two factors. Another conclusion that is required is the need to rethink and reconsider the specific pedagogical practice under the current requirements.*

Keywords: *teaching career; pedagogical practice; students; motivational factors; professional training.*

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Introduction

We live in a world where access to information is unlimited. For this reason, education faces its challenges, and the role of the teacher as a transmitter of information needs to be reconsidered. The categories of students in the 21st century are increasingly diverse, social expectations regarding schools are increasingly high, and the fields of knowledge are increasingly extensive, which has led to the teaching profession becoming increasingly complex and demanding (Mâţă et al., 2024; Nelin, 2024; OECD, 2005, 2017; Wang & Wang, 2022; Watt et al., 2012; Yüce et al., 2013).

The recruitment and especially the retention of teachers in education are proving to be, in many countries, a difficult challenge.

In Romania, the minimum qualification for the teaching profession differs depending on the level of education at which the activity will be carried out: for primary school teachers, a bachelor's degree in educational sciences (3 years) is required; for those in secondary school, a bachelor's degree in a field other than educational sciences and completion of a psychopedagogical training module during the bachelor's degree studies are required; for those in high school, a bachelor's and master's degree in a field other than educational sciences and completion of two psychopedagogical training modules during the bachelor's degree (Level I) and master's degree (Level II) are required. Most universities in Romania offer this form of initial training, and the curricula are unique at the national level. The number of places allocated is not always correlated with the labor market; therefore, in recent years, there has been a surplus of students preparing for the teaching profession as a second career option.

Initial teacher education is an essential aspect of the education system, having a direct impact on the quality of teaching. It is a global recognition that teachers are identified as the most important factors influencing the quality of education in schools (Bay & Harapan, 2021; Da-yong, 2020; Desimone & Garet, 2017; Hafeez, 2021; Hattie, 2003; Mărcuţ & Kifor, 2017; Sánchez et al., 2023; Sultan, 2020; Ventista & Brown, 2023; Toon & Jensen, 2017).

And if education is decisive in the development and well-being of a country (Watt et al., 2012), numerous researchers have explored the reasons that lead young people to choose the teaching profession and what are the positive and negative factors that contribute to their motivation to stay or leave education.

General background of research

The teaching profession, in particular, requires a unique blend of passion, expertise, dedication, and ethical responsibility, making the motivations behind this career choice a topic of considerable interest and importance (Fatima et al., 2020; Vergara, 2023). Synthesizing research in the field, three types of motivations for choosing a teaching career have been identified: intrinsic motivations (interest, love for the profession, personal satisfaction, enthusiasm, professional commitment, etc.), extrinsic motivations (job security, salary, vacations, etc.), altruistic motivations (being in the service of people, society, etc.). There is much research that adds other factors. One of these focuses on the influence of personal experiences and role models. Personal experiences, especially positive interactions with teachers during one's education, can have a profound impact on the decision to pursue a teaching career (Blândul, 2022). The influence of role models, such as inspiring teachers who have demonstrated a passion for teaching and a commitment to their students, may also be a significant factor (Chesnut & Burley, 2015). Aspiring teachers may be drawn to the profession by a desire to emulate these positive role models and have a similar impact on the lives of their students (Rahim et al., 2020).

The professional standards of teachers in pre-university education in Romania (Ministry of Education, 2024) target seven areas of competence: knowing students and how they learn; curriculum and teaching process; learning environment and well-being; student counseling, collaboration with family/tutors and the community; ethics, reflexivity and lifelong learning; institutional development; digital technology in education. The 7 areas cover the general aspects of all specializations. However, physical education has some distinct characteristics compared to other disciplines. To summarize, these would be the following: the venue (physical education room, outdoor field, improvised room), material resources, the way of organizing and conducting the physical education lesson (in a permanent dynamic with the possibility of injury), etc. The physical education teacher has a high responsibility towards the one who teaches a lesson in the classroom (Cristea & Sabău, 2017). Moreover, all of these aforementioned aspects can be addressed differently depending on the environment in which the activity is carried out (i.e., urban and rural), the perception of teachers in the eyes of students, parents in the community, individual teacher performance, relationships between teachers, and in society (Pudełko & Wojtowicz, 2024). In the same way, teachers face challenges in implementing formal physical education programs, with notable differences between primary and

secondary levels in terms of educational priorities, content selection, and teaching methods (Camacho et al., 2009). Although physical education is often perceived as less important from an academic point of view, it remains highly motivating for students, but interest has decreased in the last decade (Gil-Madrona et al., 2017).

A decisive aspect for the future of the physical education teacher concerns specialized knowledge and skills, to which must be added pedagogical competence manifested in specific conditions - formative or competitive activities (Carreiro da Costa & Onofre, 2005; Cojocaru et al., 2015; Tsangaridou, 2006). On the other hand, another very important aspect, which should not be neglected in the physical education discipline, is related to material resources, complemented by the teacher's abilities, skills, and interest, which determine the increase in the attractiveness of the lesson. And last but not least, it is the status of physical education and physical education teachers worldwide, being considered a school discipline without much importance (Hardman & Marshall, 2000), unlike disciplines in the humanities.

Research in the field has demonstrated that choosing a teaching career involves a mix of interconnected factors. This study aims to assess the factors that may influence the teaching career option of students attending the fields of study Letters and Sports. Accordingly, the research questions of the study are: (1) What factors influenced the students' decision to follow the psychopedagogical training module for a teaching career? (2) What are the most important predictors of the intention to remain in education? (3) Is there any difference in approach between the fields of study (humanities-philology and physical education and sports)?

Research methodology

Starting from these questions, the main objectives of the research are the following: (1) Analysis of the motivational factors that determine students to opt for a teaching career. (2) Identification of variables that could influence students' decisions to remain in education for a longer period. (3) Evaluation of possible differences between students attending different fields of study in terms of their perspective on a teaching career.

The specific hypothesis of the research is that not there are statistically significant differences in the motivation for choosing a teaching career between students from the Faculty of Letters and those from the Faculty of Physical Education and Sports.

The Sample of Research

A total of 227 students from the University of Oradea, Romania, enrolled in the psychopedagogical training module, participated in the study. This program is distinct from other bachelor's or master's degree programs, optional, unique at the entire university, and all students interested in a teaching career can participate in it, regardless of the faculty they study in. Students were selected for this research from the 2 faculties with the largest number of students enrolled in this program, 108 students of the Faculty of Letters and 119 students from the Faculty of Geography, Tourism and Sport, specializing in Physical Education and Sport (PES). The distribution by gender is as follows: 69.9% are female, 29.6% are male, and 0.5 preferred not to answer. Regarding the year of study: 42.2% are in the 1st year, bachelor's degree, 24.4% are in the 2nd year, bachelor's degree, 19.1% are in the 3rd year, bachelor's degree, 9.4% are in the 1st year, master's degree, 10.2% are in the 2nd year, master's degree. The research sample included all students of the Faculties of Letters and GTS who attend the psychopedagogical program within the Teacher Training Department. The sample can be considered statistically representative of the population from which it was selected.

Instrument and Procedure

The main research method used in this study was represented by the questionnaire-based survey, and the related instrument was composed of 20 objective items, multiple-choice questions, and 1 subjective item (with an open answer). The questionnaire was developed by specialists in educational sciences within the Interdisciplinary Research Center of the University of Oradea and involved the individual completion of an online form by each respondent. The research implementation period was between December 2024 and February 2025.

In the analysis, we only considered items that target the factors that determine the choice of a teaching career and those that target aspects that may correlate with them.

In the second stage, the results obtained were analyzed and debated within a focus group, consisting of 20 students (10 from the Faculty of Letters and 10 from Physical Education and Sport (PES), final year (III) at bachelor's level), students preparing for the national tenure exam, determined to remain in education.

Data analysis

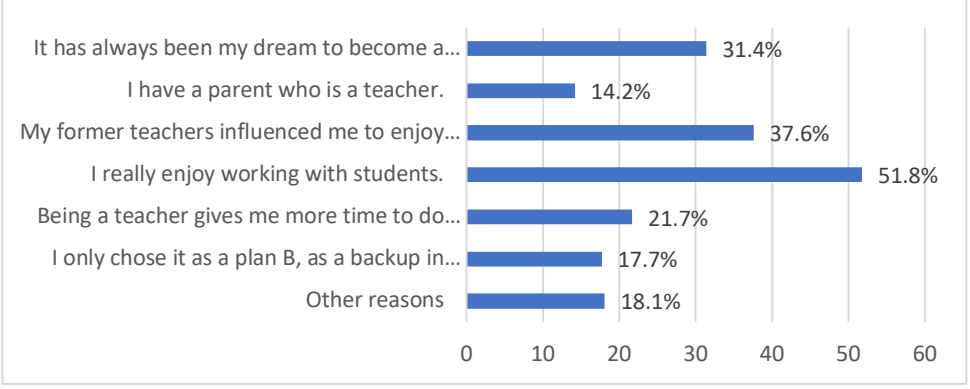
The quantitative interpretation of the results was carried out by calculating the statistical frequency of the answers provided by the respondents through the Jamovi program.

The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the Institutional Committee on Scientific Research Conduct and Ethics of the Faculty of Geography, Tourism and Sport, University of Oradea (Romania), under protocol code 3/2025. All ethical principles related to research with human participation were respected, according to the regulations in force and the GDPR norms. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research, investigating motivational factors in choosing a teaching career, the estimated duration of completing the questionnaire, the voluntary nature of participation, and the right to withdraw at any time. Consent was obtained electronically before completing the questionnaire. The data collected is anonymous and will be used exclusively for academic purposes. The responses do not allow individual identification, and the information is stored in secure environments.

Results

The first aspect we had in mind was identifying the factors that led students to take the psychopedagogical module courses to become teachers (Figure 1).

Figure 1. The factors that determined the choice to follow the psychopedagogical module to become a teacher.



The determining factor with the highest percentage is the one that targets an intrinsic motivation, the joy of working with students (51.8%). What should be noted is that for students of the Faculty of Letters, this factor was associated to the greatest extent with two other factors:

aspirations regarding employment in the profession and the mentoring offered by the teachers who taught the research subjects. While at PES, this factor was associated with the less busy formal school program and with the secondary status of the option to work in education ("I chose only as a plan B, as a reserve in choosing my career"). This fact can be explained by the specificity of the profession of sports teacher, who, having the fewest hours in the curriculum, carries out coaching activities within other institutions, or even at the school level, training sports teams outside of class hours.

Analyzing the differences between faculties regarding each factor, it turned out that there was no significant difference except for the factor regarding the less busy school schedule of the physical education teacher ("Being a teacher I have more time to do other things") ($p=0.0077$; Cramér's $V = 0.179$ – moderate difference – much more frequent at PES). A small to moderate difference turned out to be on the factor regarding voluntary employment in the profession "It was my dream forever" ($p=0.0768$, Cramér's $V = 0.119$ – more frequent at the Faculty of Letters).

The data analyzed demonstrate that most combinations show a strong motivation based on a real passion for working with students and personal influences (teachers, childhood dreams). For students of the Faculty of Letters, vocational motivations and inspirational influences predominate, while for PES, combinations more often include practical reasons (free time, plan B, other reasons). This proves that they are oriented towards a teaching career for pragmatic and strategic reasons, being less guided by idealistic-vocational motivations.

The next item we considered is the one that targets students' perception of the status of the teaching profession. Most answers fall in the median range (1-4.4%; 2 -22.7%; 3- 50.2%; 4 – 20.4%; 5-2.2%) (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Item regarding „how respected is the teaching profession in our country?"

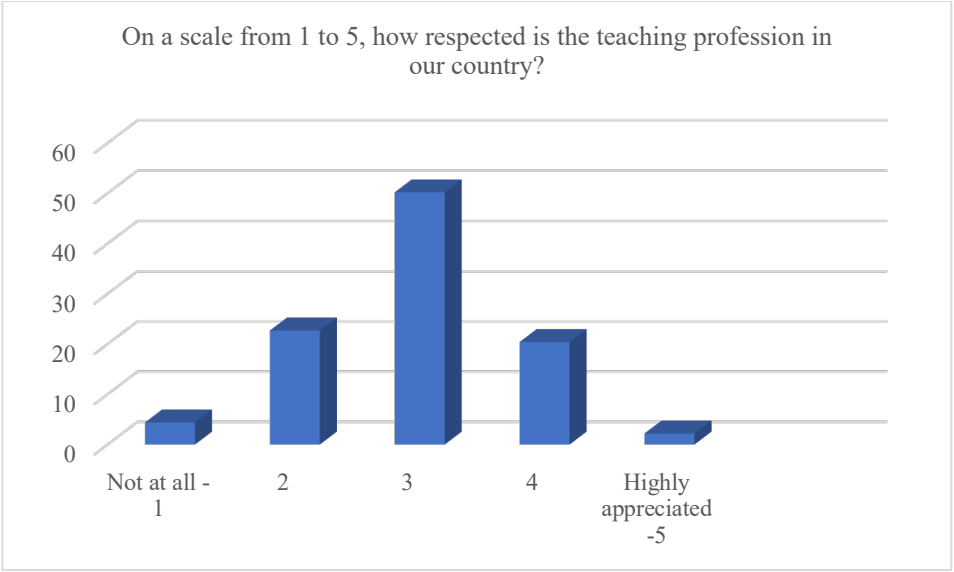


Table 1. Independent Samples T-Test on the differences in perception between Literature and Sports students.

		Statistical	df	p
Respect	**Student's t**	-2.91	219	0.004

Independent Samples T-Test shows that there is no significant difference between students from the two faculties, the dominant perception being moderate, neither negative nor positive (Table 1).

This research investigated how respect for the teaching profession can influence the decision to remain in education, an aspect found in the item "How determined are you to remain in education after graduation? (I will definitely stay; I will probably stay; I am undecided; I will probably quit; I will definitely not stay)".

The medians are very close for both faculties in terms of responses. The mean of 1.80 for the Faculty of Letters and 1.69 for PES shows that both groups are, on average, in the positive zone. The mean is slightly higher for students from the Faculty of Letters than for those from PES, but no statistically significant difference was found between students from the two faculties in terms of their determination to remain in education after graduation (p=0.427). Students from both faculties tend to have a moderately favorable attitude towards the idea of embracing a teaching career.

The research results demonstrate that in the first year of studies, most students seem to be idealistic (expressing their hope that they will enter education), an enthusiasm that progressively decreases towards the third year, demonstrating a sensitive disillusionment or uncertainty, probably due to familiarization with everything that the educational system means, but also with the reality of the labor market.

The responses of master's students demonstrate a slight repositioning of preferences for a teaching career in the sense that the intention remains, but is accompanied by a more realistic or reserved attitude.

Calculating the Spearman correlation between respect for the teaching profession and intention to remain in education after graduation, the results (Spearman coefficient: -0.112 and p-value: 0.098) demonstrate that although it is a weak negative correlation (the more respected a student considers the teaching profession, the more inclined they are to remain in education), the p-value: 0.098 demonstrates that it is not strong or significant enough to draw a firm conclusion.

The decision to remain in education was then correlated with perceived preparation ("How prepared do you feel to face the challenges of education? (Scale from 1 - Not at all prepared, to 5 - Very prepared)") and with the long-term attractiveness of the profession ("On a scale from 1 to 5, how attractive do you find the teaching profession in the long term?").

Table 2. Statistical correlations between variables that could influence students' decisions to remain in education in the long term.

Correlation	Spearman Coefficient	Interpretation
Decision ↔ Long-term attractiveness	-0.57	The more attractive a student finds the profession in the long term, the more determined they are to stay.
Decision ↔ Training level	-0.45	Students who feel more prepared are more willing to stay in education.
Long-term attractiveness ↔ Training level	+0.47	Those who find the career attractive feel even better prepared.
Respect ↔ Long-term attractiveness	+0.33	More perceived respect makes the profession more attractive

The research results demonstrate that the most important predictors of intention to remain in education are perceived training and long-term

attractiveness. Respect for the profession matters, but has a weaker influence compared to the other factors (Table 2).

This confirms the specific hypothesis of the research, according to which there are no statistically significant differences between students of the Faculty of Letters and of the Faculty of Sports, respectively, in terms of the reasons that determine them to enter and remain in the teaching career. The only small differences concern the combinations of factors: if students of the Faculty of Letters consider predominantly intrinsic reasons of an emotional nature, their colleagues studying at the Faculty of Sports seem to be much more pragmatic and more oriented towards elements of an extrinsic nature when choosing to teach in education.

Clarification of some aspects of these results, but especially the wishes and recommendations that the students wanted to make, was achieved in the second part of the research, through the focus group. The focus group reports and then the in-depth debates revealed several aspects that should be taken into account.

We present the most frequent answers: more pedagogical practice, increasing the practical components in training, because there should be more practice in schools to see whether or not the person is prepared to be a teacher, discussing current problems in schools, proposing solutions so that the student-teacher can act accordingly, a greater diversity of experiences in learning, presenting more teaching methods, applying them in various situations and especially, according to differentiated learning, practicing the use of technology, involving students in school projects, involving students in public speaking activities to desensitize them to the drudgery of teaching, familiarizing them with everything that the teaching profession means, greater familiarization with aspects of classroom management etc.

Discussion

Based on these results, a first aspect that can be discussed refers to what motivates students of the Faculty of Letters and those of the Faculty of Physical Education and Sport to follow the psychopedagogical module for a teaching career. In Romania, the teaching profession has lost its prestige after 1990. On the other hand, lower salaries than in other sectors of activity, the burden of teachers with many administrative tasks (in addition to classroom teaching), the increasingly frequent burnout phenomenon among teachers, and the lack of coherent educational policies determine young people to be reluctant to choose this profession (Pop & Bradea, 2024). Many of them choose the psychopedagogical module only as an alternative, as a backup plan. The study included students studying at two faculties with the

highest number of graduates choosing a teaching career. However, there are particularities that need to be discussed and analyzed.

The Faculty of Letters trains teachers of the Romanian language and literature, but also of English, French, and German. According to the statistical data available at the University of Oradea, at the Faculty of Letters, 97.2% of students are women, which explains the very high share of female respondents in the sample structure at the aforementioned faculty. This results in a possible demographic limit influenced by gender. Once they enter education, women's teaching careers are influenced by their family life, in the sense that, in most cases, they give birth and remain on maternity leave for up to 2 years. Consequently, their professional development, represented by obtaining teaching degrees or career promotion, could be delayed.

Another limitation could be the status of the subject taught in the school curriculum. It is known that the status of the Romanian language teacher is somewhat privileged, from the point of view of the importance of the subject in the curriculum: all national exams have a test of the mother tongue and literature, and the number of hours in the curriculum is double compared to the hours for other subjects. On the other hand, students are much more supported by their parents in terms of studying this subject, and the importance they all give is significantly higher than others (with the possible exception of mathematics).

Regarding the physical education teacher, the difficulties are even greater. In the current context, this discipline does not have a national strategy applicable and relevant to the reality in schools. Insufficient hours (and increasingly fewer in the curriculum), outdated, incomplete or non-functional material base, lack of investment in sports infrastructure in most schools, the attitude of students and protective parents, make this profession viewed with reluctance Physical education still has a low importance as an educational discipline, but it is the subject that arouses the greatest interest and motivation. The value given to physical education has decreased in the last decade, and bodily expression remains of little interest to students, while interest in warm-up and relaxation activities has increased (Gil-Madrona et al., 2017).

However, in both groups, the main motivational factor in choosing a career was the pleasure of working with students. There are numerous studies that demonstrate that this intrinsic motivation can determine the long-term embrace of the profession (Fokkens- Bruinsma & Canrinus, 2014; Goller et al., 2019; Kang et al., 2024; Kılınç & Seymen, 2014; Richardson & Watt, 2006, etc.). The only significant difference was in the association of

this factor, at the Faculty of Letters with one that targets personal influences (it was always a dream) or with role models (the influence of former teachers during school), and at the Faculty of Physical Education and Sport with pragmatic and strategic factors (to have more free time or I chose this profession as a plan B). As we mentioned before, these choices are justified, especially in the case of Physical Education students. On the one hand, they also carry out other sports activities outside of classroom activities (they coach school teams, participate in various sports competitions at local, county, national levels, and some even carry out coaching activities outside of school).

A third possible demographic limit is related to the socio-economic status of the teaching profession in relation to other professions. Graduates of the Faculty of Letters, specializing in foreign languages, benefit from fewer hours in the curriculum, and the subjects taught have a less privileged status in relation to the subject of the Romanian language and literature. Studies show that most graduates of the psychopedagogical module choose to work in multinational companies, where the salary is much higher, and if they choose a teaching career, more than 40% leave education for a more financially attractive professional environment.

On the other hand, given that 62% of PES respondents are boys, focus group discussions revealed that they are thinking about the financial needs to support their families. The search for additional sources of income is justified.

If we refer to the situation of other continents, such as Africa or Asia, we must take into account both socio-economic and cultural factors, as well as the motivational differences of individuals (Alemu, 2024) along with the desire to contribute to a quality education for young people to increase their standard of living in the future (Suryani, 2017). It seems that the idea of contributing to the development of society and influencing the future of young people is widespread (Kambeyo & Julius, 2020). On the other hand, in other countries such as Indonesia, Duraku and Hoxha (2021) indicate that other values, such as religion and local culture, leave their mark on teachers' attitudes, while See et al. (2022) highlight financial constraints and limited employment opportunities. Then again, some studies support the fact that working conditions, especially in disadvantaged areas, are not to be neglected, which discourages and can lead to abandonment of the profession (Oblina et al., 2021; Triegaardt & Hugo, 2020).

Another aspect that we set out to analyze was to see to what extent the decision to remain in education is influenced by (1) respect for the profession, as they believe it is perceived by others, (2) how they perceive that

they are or are not prepared to meet the demands of education and (3) the degree of attractiveness of the teaching profession in the long term. The most important predictors, as we have mentioned, were long-term attractiveness and perceived preparation. Even though the teaching profession for the students included in the research sample presents numerous difficulties, and even though it is not the most appreciated profession in Romania, this aspect has shown to have a smaller influence compared to the other two factors. The focus group discussions highlighted the fact that students are convinced that how this profession will be seen in the future depends on them, and, being intrinsically motivated, they are convinced that the passion they have for the profession, the desire to work with students and the belief that they will have a significant role in developing their aspirations can contribute to changing the perception of this profession.

The most discussed predictor in the focus group was the one related to one's training to be a teacher, and especially how this training should be improved within the pedagogical practice. The aspects mentioned by the respondents were not related to the specialized discipline, but to the psycho-pedagogical aspects and those aimed at knowing the school institution and familiarizing oneself with the teaching profession, in all its aspects. Pedagogical practice constitutes a fundamental component in the professionalization process for the teaching career.

Conclusion

Consequently, based on the analysis of the specialized literature, respectively the quantitative and qualitative interpretation of the results obtained from this research, it can be observed that the teaching profession is one of the most important professions in which an increasing number of students are interested. The results obtained from the administration of this research demonstrate that the main reasons underlying the option for a career in education are given by the joy of working with students, the passion to share with those around them from their own accumulated experience, the relatively light work schedule, the concern for self-improvement and to be up to date with the main news in the specialized field, the salary that is becoming increasingly attractive, etc. If students who attend the philology field are interested in accessing the teaching career on the basis of an intrinsic motivation, their colleagues who study at the faculty with a sports profile seem to be rather motivated to teach in education by a series of extrinsic factors. This could also explain why students from the Faculty of Letters seem to be more motivated to remain in education in the medium and long term compared to their colleagues who graduated from

sports-related specializations. This confirms the specific hypothesis of the research, according to which there are no statistically significant differences in the motivation for choosing a teaching career between students from the Faculty of Letters and those from Physical Education and Sports.

Another relevant conclusion for the present study is the need to rethink and reconsider pedagogical practice. Practice is not only a place for applying theory, but also a source of theoretical knowledge and its validation. Instead of the empiricist acceptance of practice only as a way of applying accumulated theoretical knowledge or only as a source of "good practices" (rather recipes for algorithmic action), it is necessary to consider practice as a lived experience, subject to reflective questioning. When practice is subject to a process of reflection, it reaches a certain theoretical level that can enrich everything that theoretical knowledge means (Pop, 2019). And our students, in order to feel prepared to become teachers, need this. If there are teachers prepared to deal with all the situations in which the job will involve them, if they become reflective teachers, eager to develop professionally and personally, the teaching profession will seem attractive and motivating to them in the long term.

The results of our research provide a useful perspective on the investigated topic, but there are several limitations: the fact that only students from two faculties (with the highest rate of insertion into education after graduation) were included in the sample limits the generalizability of the conclusions. In order to validate and consolidate the findings, we propose additional research that will consider expanding the research sample to other faculties of the University of Oradea and from other university centers that run similar programs. Future research directions will consider: (1) the status of different disciplines within the educational framework plans; (2) the way in which the material facilities of schools (libraries, laboratories, sports halls, etc.) can influence students' interest in a teaching career; (3) how the inclusion of students with special educational needs can influence students' interest in a teaching career, knowing that the presence of a student with disabilities in the classroom raises numerous educational, socio-emotional, and behavioral problems.

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