

Perceptions of the Teaching Profession and Motivation to Teach among Slovenian University Students

MELITA PUKLEK LEVPUŠČEK*¹ AND KATJA DEPOLLI STEINER²

~ This study examined the perception of the teaching profession among students of social sciences and languages who were finishing their undergraduate studies and intended to continue their studies with a master's degree. A subgroup of students planning to study for a master's degree in teaching reported on their motivation to teach and their satisfaction with their career choice, while a subgroup of students who planned to pursue a master's degree programme without a teaching degree responded to an open-ended question about why they did not want to become teachers. Participants answered the FIT-Choice Scale, which measures twelve motivational factors and six perceptions about the teaching profession. Students recognised teachers' expertise; however, social status and salary were rated lower, indicating an imbalance between demands and rewards in the teaching profession. Altruistic and intrinsic motives were the main reasons for choosing the teaching profession. Students who will study teaching also rated their ability to become a teacher highly. Extrinsic factors (job transferability, teaching as a fallback career and time for family) were less important. Qualitative thematic analysis of the responses of students who will not study to become a teacher revealed that low intrinsic value (e.g., disinterest in teaching) and low personal utility value (e.g., better professional development elsewhere) were the most common themes. The high job demands due to demanding interactions with children and parents were also mentioned, while the teacher education programme was perceived as excessively extensive. The implications of the study highlight important considerations for policymakers and teacher education programmes.

Keywords: motivation to teach, perception of the teaching profession, university students

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Zaznave učiteljskega poklica in motivacija za poučevanje med slovenskimi študenti

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≈ V raziskavi sva preučevali zaznave učiteljskega poklica med študenti družboslovja in jezikoslovja na dveh slovenskih filozofskih fakultetah, ki so zaključevali dodiplomski študij in se odločali za smer študija na magistrski stopnji. Skupina študentov, ki je izrazila namero po nadaljevanju študija na pedagoški smeri, je prav tako poročala o motivaciji za poučevanje oz. učiteljski poklic in svojem zadovoljstvu s karierno izbiro, skupina študentov, ki je izrazila namero po nadaljevanju študija na nepedagoški smeri, pa je odgovarjala na odprto vprašanje o tem, zakaj se niso odločili za pedagoško smer študija. Udeleženci so izpolnjevali vprašalnik FIT-Choice, ki meri dvanajst motivacijskih dimenzij in šest vidikov zaznav učiteljskega poklica. Študentje so visoko ocenili strokovno zahtevnost učiteljevega dela, nižje pa so ocenili učiteljev družbeni status in plačilo, ki ga prejema za svoje delo. V njihovih odgovorih se odraža neravnovesje med zahtevnostjo učiteljevega dela in nagradami (družbeni status, plačilo), ki jih učitelj prejema za svoje delo. Med razlogi, ki jih bodoči študentje pedagoških smeri navajajo kot najpomembnejše za izbiro učiteljskega poklica, so altruistični in intrinzični motivi. Ti študentje so tudi visoko ocenili svoje zmožnosti za opravljanje učiteljskega poklica. Zunanji dejavniki, kot so: možnost zaposlitve drugod po svetu, poučevanje kot rezervna kariera in več časa za družino, so se izkazali kot manj pomembni razlogi za odločitev za učiteljski poklic. Kvalitativna tematska analiza odgovorov študentov, ki so se odločili za nepedagoško smer študija, je pokazala, da sta nizka notranja vrednost (npr. nezanimanje za poučevanje) in nizka vrednost osebne koristi (npr. boljše karijerne priložnosti drugje) najpogostejši temi, ki jih omenjajo študentje. Prav tako so bile pogosto omenjene visoke zahteve poklica zaradi zahtevnih interakcij z otroki in s starši, več študentov pa omenja tudi preobsežen program pedagoških predmetov in možnost njihovega opravljanja po končanem magistrskem študiju. V diskusiji poudarjava pomembne vidike motiviranja študentov za karierno pot učitelja.

Ključne besede: motivacija za poučevanje, zaznave učiteljskega poklica, študentje

Introduction

The Slovenian education system has recently faced a significant shortage of primary and secondary school teachers. According to the Employment Forecast among Employers (Employment Service of Slovenia, 2022), 52.2% of employers in the primary school sector and 57.5% in the secondary school sector anticipated difficulties recruiting staff. The main reason given is the lack of personnel in the labour market, followed by the lack of skills, work experience, and professional qualifications. The age structure of Slovenia's teaching workforce is also a concern. The average age of Slovenian teachers is 46, which is two years higher than the average age in OECD member countries (OECD, 2019). One-third of primary school teachers and 38% of secondary school teachers are over 50 years old, while 9.2% and 4.6% of primary and secondary school teachers, respectively, are under 30 years old (OECD, 2023). The issue of teacher retention in the education system and the problem of an ageing teacher population coupled with a lower influx of young teachers is not limited to Slovenia but is also common in other European and global contexts (Nesje et al., 2018; Shang et al., 2022; Tiplic et al., 2015).

Examining and understanding the reasons that young people choose to become teachers or not is important from several perspectives. It sheds light on how young people justify their decisions about their future careers, what personal and social factors influence their career thinking, what thoughts they have about the teaching profession, how they evaluate the profession, why they might not choose it, and what key factors ultimately determine their decision to become a teacher. A prospective teacher's professional identity takes shape before their academic career begins. The initial professional identity is influenced not only by personal factors but also by the broader social context that the young person observes and reflects on, for example, impressions of how the teaching profession is valued in society or the attitudes of significant others (e.g., parents, peers, teachers) towards the teaching profession (Torres-Cladera et al., 2021). Before deciding to become a teacher, young people have years of experience as students, including their interest in academic subjects, their academic performance, their interactions with teachers, and their experiences with classroom and school dynamics during their education. These social influences and experiences may encourage or discourage individuals from replicating these experiences in their careers (Bergmark et al., 2018).

Theoretical background

Motivation to teach refers to internal and external drives that guide individuals in their choice of teaching profession, their perseverance in training for the future teaching profession and later in their teaching career, and the extent to which they dedicate themselves to fulfilling their professional duties with high quality (Sinclair, 2008).

In a review article, Fray and Gore (2018) present a summary of studies on prospective teachers' professional motivation published in 23 countries between 2007 and 2014 and identify three main motivations for the teaching profession. These include extrinsic, intrinsic, and altruistic motives, with the latter two predominating as the main reasons for choosing the teaching profession. Extrinsic motives refer to aspects not directly related to the teaching profession, such as salary, social status, and working conditions. Intrinsic motives include reasons directly related to the importance of the teaching profession, enthusiasm for it, subject knowledge, and professional competence. Altruistic motives include the perception of the teaching profession as socially significant and the desire to contribute to the development of children and the betterment of society. Tang et al. (2015) also found that the most common reasons for choosing the teaching profession among prospective teachers are intrinsic and altruistic motives, leading to greater satisfaction. However, initial intrinsic motivation is not necessarily a guarantee that individuals will persevere in the teaching profession, and over time, initial enthusiasm for the teaching profession may wane (Sinclair, 2008), as the reality of working directly in the classroom may not match an individual's initial expectations of the job. Teachers face work overload and often do not receive adequate support in their work environment, leading to dissatisfaction and early exit from the profession (Kim & Cho, 2014). In addition, students who choose to study teaching primarily for extrinsic reasons are more likely to drop out or experience a decline in their academic performance over time (MalMBERG, 2006). In general, motives from all three categories intertwine for individuals, but from the perspective of career persistence and quality of performance, it is essential that altruistic and intrinsic motives predominate. In contrast, extrinsic motives are the only supporting reasons for choosing the teaching profession (Struyven et al., 2013).

In Slovenia, there are only a few studies on the motivation of prospective teachers, two of which are from recent years. Among teacher education students at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Ljubljana studying to become teachers at primary or secondary schools, altruistic and intrinsic motivations for the teaching profession were found to be most important (Depolli Steiner,

2022), while among students at the Faculty of Education of the University of Ljubljana studying to become teachers at primary schools, the intrinsic factor of caring was the most important reason (Tašner et al., 2017). In both studies, extrinsic reasons were only rated as moderately important. These findings are in line with the two older studies in which intrinsic and altruistic factors were cited as the most important reasons for choosing the teaching profession among Slovenian students (Krečič & Grmek, 2005; Kyriacou & Kobori, 1998).

The Australian authors Richardson and Watt (Richardson & Watt, 2006; Watt & Richardson, 2007) have developed a model that systematically presents the factors critical to an individual's decision to pursue a teaching career (Factors Influencing Teaching or FIT-Choice model). These factors include an individual's self-beliefs and task perceptions, values, interests, and prior educational experiences. For example, if a person is enthusiastic about the teaching profession, enjoys working with young people, has had positive experiences as a student, and does not perceive the profession as overly demanding, they are more likely to choose teaching. In describing the personal factors that influence the decision to become a teacher, the authors draw on the expectancy-value theory of motivation developed by Allan Wigfield and Jacquelynne Eccles (1992). They explain the reasons behind individuals' decisions and behaviours, especially in academic and professional contexts. The motivation to engage in a particular activity is based on two key factors: a) the individual's belief that he or she is capable of successfully performing a task or activity, and b) the value he or she places on the task or activity. The more the individual believes that he or she can be successful in a particular activity and the higher he or she values that activity, the more motivated he or she is to engage in or perform that activity (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Beliefs in one's abilities can be further divided into a) self-efficacy beliefs (a person's belief in his or her ability to perform a task or activity) and b) task difficulty expectations (a person's perception of how difficult a task or activity is). The assessment of the value individuals place on a task or activity is categorised by Wigfield and Eccles (2000) as a) attainment value (related to the importance individuals place on successfully performing the task), b) intrinsic value (related to personal interest and enjoyment in the task or activity) and c) utility value (related to the perceived usefulness or importance of the task in achieving personal goals). Richardson and Watt (2006) and Watt and Richardson (2007) have adopted the concept of beliefs and values as factors influencing the decision to enter a teaching profession in the FIT-Choice model (Table 1).

Table 1

FIT-Choice theoretical model of motivations for choosing a teaching career as empirically validated by the FIT-Choice Scale questionnaire in Watt and Richardson (2007)

Domains of the FIT-Choice model		Not higher order dimension	Higher order dimension	First order dimension		
Antecedent	Socialisation influences	B Prior teaching and learning experiences B Social influences D Social dissuasion				
Proximal influences	Task perceptions		C Task demand C Task return	Expertise Social status and teacher morale	Difficulty Salary	
		Self-perceptions	B Ability			
	Values		B Personal utility value B Social utility value	Job security Shape the future of children/adolescents	Time for family Work with children/adolescents	Job transferability Make social contribution Enhance social equity
			B Intrinsic career value			
Outcome	Satisfaction with choice	D Satisfaction with choice				

Note. B = Reasons influencing teaching choice, C = Perceptions about teaching, D = Career commitment and satisfaction.

The core components of the model (proximal influences) include three main value dimensions (intrinsic value, personal utility value, and social utility value) and self- and task perceptions about choosing teaching as a career (Nesje et al., 2018). Consistent with the expectancy-value theory, Watt and Richardson (2007) and Watt et al. (2012) defined the value components as intrinsic motivation in teaching and enjoyment of (*intrinsic career value*), extrinsic motivations

associated with a teaching profession, such as job security, time for family, and job transferability (*personal utility value*), and altruistic motivations, such as shaping future of children/adolescents, working with children/adolescents, making a social contribution, and enhancing social equity (*social utility value*). The model also includes maladaptive motivation, such as teaching as a *fallback career*. Self-perceptions in the model are defined as an individual's confidence in his or her *ability* to perform the tasks of a teacher, while task-perceptions are related to *demands* and *returns* in the teaching profession. Demands and returns both refer to 'costs' or the potential sacrifices individuals must make to pursue a teaching career. Such costs could be a perceived mismatch between the demands of the teaching profession (e.g., high levels of expertise and high workload) and the perceived 'rewards' (e.g., high social status of teachers and good salary). These 'rewards' tend to be rated low by prospective and practising teachers, leading to higher 'cost' scores and lower motivation to become a teacher (Nesje et al., 2018). The FIT-Choice model also includes socialisation influences that may influence teaching career choices, such as prior learning and teaching experiences and the social support of significant others. The model also includes the outcome variable, satisfaction with the choice to become a teacher.

Watt and Richardson (2007) developed the FIT-Choice Scale questionnaire based on the presented model, which has been used and validated in different cultural contexts in Asia, Europe, Australia, and North America (e.g., Jugović et al., 2012; Nesje et al., 2018; Simić et al., 2022; Shang et al., 2022; Watt et al., 2013). The dimensions that have consistently emerged as the strongest reasons for students' desire to become teachers in different cultural contexts are the following (Nesje et al., 2018; Simić et al., 2022; Watt & Richardson, 2007): the intrinsic value of the teaching profession, shaping the future of youth, self-perceived teaching ability, contribution to societal progress, and job security. Students who aspire to the teaching profession attribute their career decision to a lesser extent to social influence (e.g., parents, peers) and to choosing teaching as a fallback option. Less important reasons mentioned by students include job transferability, more time for family, and career benefits (e.g., longer vacations and shorter work hours). Most studies on reasons for choosing a teaching profession included samples of students already enrolled in a teacher education programme. One exception is two studies by Giersch (2016, 2021), who suggests more research on students who are faced with deciding which study programme to choose; what are their thoughts and perceptions before they finally decide to study teaching? At the same time, it is important also to hear the voices of students who decided not to study teaching even though they had the

opportunity to do so. This study addresses Giersch's suggestion by including a sample of students nearing the end of their bachelor's degree and deciding on a master's programme that offers them a teaching or non-teaching degree.

Research aims

The first aim of this study was to investigate the perceptions (beliefs) about the teaching profession among Slovenian students of social sciences and languages during the transition to the master's programme. Our aim was to identify possible differences in these beliefs between two groups of students: those who intend to enrol in a master's degree programme in teaching in the coming academic year(s) and those who intend to enrol in a non-teaching degree programme. The second research objective was to explore the motivations for pursuing a teaching career and to assess satisfaction with career choice among students intending to enrol in a master's degree programme in teaching. The final research objective focused on understanding the reasons that prevented students who had opted for a non-teaching master's programme from choosing a teaching profession.

Method

Participants

The study encompassed students from two Slovenian faculties specialising in social sciences and languages (Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, and Faculty of Arts, University of Maribor). These faculties provide education for future teachers of general-education subjects at both lower and upper-secondary school levels, offering teacher training programmes at the master's level.³ Students obtaining a bachelor's degree from these faculties typically study one or two subjects of their choice. They can subsequently pursue a two-year master's programme tailored to prepare them specifically for the teaching profession. Alternatively, they have the option to choose non-education majors in their master's programme.

3 Teacher education in Slovenia lasts five years or 300 ECTS (integrated master's degree programmes, 3+2 or 4+1) and includes the same requirements for the pedagogical qualification of teachers of general-education and theoretical professional subjects at the primary and secondary levels. There are two paths to teaching qualification: within a concurrent model (pedagogical courses parallel to courses in the subject areas) or within a consecutive model (completed master study programme followed by a non-degree teacher training programme of 60 ECTS) (Taštanoska, 2022; Valenčič Zuljan et al., 2011).

Participants in the sample were finishing their third or subsequent year of bachelor's studies at the time of data collection. A total of 238 students participated (82% female, 16% male, 2% non-binary gender), most of them from the University of Ljubljana (77%). The age of the students ranged from 20 to 38 years ($M = 22.6$, $SD = 2.04$). Most students were enrolled in a combined degree programme (two subjects; 71%). The sample consisted of students of language studies (33%), students of non-language studies (34%), and students with a combination of language and non-language studies (33%). Part of the participants, 16%, indicated that they would not pursue a master's degree (at all or in Slovenia), while the majority of the participants intended to enrol in a master's programme, most of them (79%) in one of the two faculties of arts and only a small part (5%) in another faculty. Of the 189 participants who chose the faculty of arts, about half will enrol in a teacher education programme, and the other half in a non-teacher education programme. These two groups are similar in terms of age ($t(187) = 1.225$, $p = .222$), gender ($\chi^2(2) = 3.51$, $p = .173$), and choice of university ($\chi^2(1) = 2.42$, $p = .120$)

Instruments

The online survey began with demographic questions: university, age, gender, current major(s), and year of study. Other questions related to students' intentions regarding their master's degree. First, they were asked about their intentions to continue their master's degree in Slovenia. If the answer was 'yes', we asked them about the university and faculty where they intended to continue their studies. If they chose one of the two targeted faculties of arts, we asked them about the programme of study they intended to choose. Based on their answers, we divided the participants into a 'teaching degree' (will enrol in a teacher education programme) and a 'non-teaching degree' (will not enrol in a teacher education programme) group. The 'teaching degree' group then answered the full FIT-Choice Scale (the instrument described below), while the 'non-teaching degree' group answered the open question: 'Please provide reasons why you did not choose to study teaching in your master's programme' and then answered selected parts of the FIT-Choice Scale (Part C and Part D - social dissuasion; see Table 1).

The FIT-Choice Scale (Watt & Richardson, 2007) is a self-report instrument that measures different types of motivational reasons for individuals' decisions to become teachers. The scale was translated from English to Slovenian using a back-translation procedure. In the first part of the questionnaire, the 12 dimensions measuring different motivations for becoming a teacher (labelled 'B'

in Table 1) include items with the same introductory statement ('I chose to become a teacher because...') and a response scale ranging from 1 (not at all important) to 7 (extremely important). The subscales in this part are *perceived teaching ability*, *intrinsic value*, *fallback career*, *job security*, *time for family*, *job transferability*, *shape future of children/adolescents*, *enhance social equity*, *make social contribution*, *work with children/adolescents*, *prior teaching and learning experiences*, and *social influences* (Watt & Richardson, 2007). The second part (labelled 'C' in Table 1) describes perceptions about the teaching profession. The subscales are *expert career*, *high demand*, *social status*, and *salary*. The third part of the questionnaire (labelled 'D' in Table 1) measures two perceptual dimensions of career commitment and satisfaction: *social dissuasion* and *satisfaction with choice*. In both the second and the third part, the participants rated the extent to which they agreed with the questions on teaching: 1 (not at all) to 7 (extremely).

Research design

Data were collected in June 2023 via an online questionnaire in the 1KA online survey (<https://www.1ka.si/d/en>) application. The survey was available for six weeks. An invitation to the survey with a link to the questionnaire was emailed to all potential participants (i.e., students in their third or subsequent year of undergraduate study) at the two target faculties. Participation was voluntary and completely anonymous. A total of 355 respondents completed all or part of the questionnaire. After data cleaning, responses from 238 respondents were included in the sample. Data cleaning involved eliminating data from 78 respondents who started the survey but did not complete it (they answered only some of the demographic questions) and 49 respondents who did not meet our target criteria (e.g., they already had a master's degree). Statistical analyses that included responses on the FIT-Choice Scale and reasons for not choosing a teacher education programme were conducted on the data of 189 participants who intended to continue their master's studies at one of the faculties of arts.

Results

The FIT-Choice Scale

The Slovenian version of the FIT-Choice Scale has not yet been validated. Most studies validating non-English versions of the FIT-Choice Scale used a CFA (e.g., Nesje et al., 2018; Simić et al., 2022). However, since fewer than 100 participants in our study answered the full scale, we could not conduct a CFA;

instead, we conducted an item analysis (see Tables 2, 3, and 4). Checking the corrected item-total correlations and Cronbach's alphas if the item was deleted showed sufficient discrimination and reliability of the items on the individual subscales, except for three items (B22, B35 and C5), which were thus deleted in the subsequent analyses to increase the reliability of the subscales. The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients showed very good internal consistencies for most subscales. As shown in Table 2, only two subscales (*job transferability* and *social dissuasion*) had alpha values below 0.80 but were still in the acceptable range (.68 and .71, respectively).

Table 2

Item Analysis of the FIT-Choice Scale, Part B (Reasons influencing teaching choice)

Subscales and items	<i>n</i>	α	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	r_c	$\alpha_{\#item\ deleted}$
Ability	94	.80	5.25	1.23		
B5 I have the qualities of a good teacher			5.28	1.39	.62	.74
B19 I have good teaching skills			5.06	1.49	.78	.57
B43 Teaching is a career suited to my abilities			5.40	1.50	.54	.83
Intrinsic career value	94	.84	5.19	1.50		
B1 I am interested in teaching			5.55	1.54	.78	.73
B7 I've always wanted to be a teacher			4.35	2.04	.62	.91
B12 I like teaching			5.66	1.50	.79	.73
Fallback career	94	.80	2.48	1.76		
B11 I was unsure of what career I wanted			2.80	2.02	.55	.24
B35* I was not accepted into my first-choice career			1.43	1.28	.12	.80
B48 I chose teaching as a last-resort career			2.16	1.85	.62	.13
Job security	94	.82	4.89	1.45		
B14 Teaching will offer a steady career path			5.29	1.58	.58	.84
B27 Teaching will provide a reliable income			4.57	1.77	.70	.73
B38 Teaching will be a secure job			4.82	1.70	.75	.67
Time for family	94	.89	3.54	1.59		
B2 Part-time teaching could allow more family time			3.74	1.89	.69	.88
B4 As a teacher, I will have lengthy holidays			3.09	1.89	.76	.86
B16 Teaching hours will fit with the responsibilities of having a family			4.20	1.89	.71	.88
B18 As a teacher, I will have a short working day			3.11	1.83	.79	.86
B29 School holidays will fit in with family commitments			3.57	1.99	.74	.87
Job transferability	94	.68	3.06	1.56		
B8 Teaching will be a useful job for me to have when travelling			2.76	1.76	.46	.43

Subscales and items	<i>n</i>	<i>α</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>r_c</i>	<i>α_{#item deleted}</i>
B22* A teaching qualification is recognised everywhere			4.03	1.78	.28	.68
B45 A teaching job will allow me to choose where I wish to live			3.37	1.81	.51	.35
Shape future of children/adolescents	94	.90	5.55	1.38		
B9 Teaching will allow me to shape child/adolescent values			5.74	1.50	.79	.88
B23 Teaching will allow me to influence the next generation			5.53	1.43	.81	.86
B53 Teaching will allow me to have an impact on children/adolescents			5.38	1.59	.83	.84
Enhance social equity	94	.88	4.93	1.50		
B36 Teaching will allow me to raise the ambitions of underprivileged youth			4.84	1.67	.74	.85
B49 Teaching will allow me to benefit the socially disadvantaged			4.90	1.61	.80	.81
B54 Teaching will allow me to work against social disadvantage			5.04	1.73	.77	.83
Make social contribution	94	.85	5.33	1.43		
B6 Teaching allows me to provide a service to society			5.84	1.38	.76	.77
B20 Teachers make a worthwhile social contribution			5.57	1.46	.76	.76
B31 Teaching enables me to 'give back' to society			4.59	2.00	.70	.85
Work with children/adolescents	94	.94	5.33	1.70		
B13 I want a job that involves working with children/adolescents			5.37	1.84	.88	.91
B26 I want to work in a child/adolescent-centred environment			5.12	1.85	.85	.94
B37 I like working with children/adolescents			5.51	1.69	.91	.90
Prior teaching and learning experiences	94	.93	4.90	1.78		
B17 I have had inspirational teachers			5.00	1.95	.89	.87
B30 I have had good teachers as role models			4.86	1.94	.89	.87
B39 I have had positive learning experiences			4.85	1.81	.79	.95
Social influences	94	.80	3.49	1.64		
B3 My friends think I should become a teacher			3.21	1.93	.60	.77
B24 My family think I should become a teacher			3.38	1.92	.63	.73
B40 People I've worked with think I should become a teacher			3.87	1.96	.70	.67

Note: * = item deleted in subsequent analyses to enhance subscale reliability; α = Cronbach's alpha for the subscale (without the excluded item); r_c = corrected item-total correlation; items were rated on a scale of 1 to 7. The items are presented as published in Richardson and Watt (2006).

Table 3*Item Analysis of the FIT-Choice Scale, Part C (Perceptions about teaching)*

Subscales and items	<i>n</i>	α	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	r_c	$\alpha_{\text{if item deleted}}$
Expert career	170	.87	5.38	1.22		
C10 Do you think teaching requires high levels of expert knowledge?			5.80	1.33	.76	.81
C14 Do you think teachers need high levels of technical knowledge?			5.08	1.37	.74	.82
C15 Do you think teachers need highly specialised knowledge?			5.26	1.42	.75	.81
High demand	170	.81	5.97	0.94		
C2 Do you think teachers have a heavy workload?			5.61	1.28	.68	.75
C7 Do you think teaching is emotionally demanding?			6.17	1.02	.67	.75
C11 Do you think teaching is hard work?			6.15	1.00	.68	.74
Social status	170	.92	3.19	1.27		
C4 Do you believe teachers are perceived as professionals?			3.21	1.50	.70	.88
C5* Do you think teachers have high morale?			4.17	1.14	.31	.92
C8 Do you believe teaching is perceived as a high-status occupation?			3.32	1.54	.82	.86
C9 Do you think teachers feel valued by society?			3.16	1.43	.79	.86
C12 Do you believe teaching is a well-respected career?			3.12	1.40	.86	.85
C13 Do you think teachers feel their occupation has high social status?			3.12	1.38	.80	.86
Salary	170	.91	3.10	1.32		
C1 Do you think teaching is well paid?			3.08	1.33	.83	-
C3 Do you think teachers earn a good salary?			3.12	1.43	.83	-

Note: * = item deleted in subsequent analyses to enhance subscale reliability; α = Cronbach's alpha for the subscale (without the excluded item); r_c = corrected item-total correlation; items were rated on a scale of 1 to 7. The items are presented as published in Richardson and Watt (2006).

Table 4*Item Analysis of the FIT-Choice Scale, Part D (Career commitment and satisfaction)*

Subscales and items	<i>n</i>	<i>α</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>r_c</i>	<i>α_{if item deleted}</i>
Social dissuasion	169	.71	3.21	1.50		
D2 Were you encouraged to pursue careers other than teaching?			3.27	1.93	.52	.63
D4 Did others tell you teaching was not a good career choice?			3.27	1.94	.53	.62
D6 Did others influence you to consider careers other than teaching?			3.10	1.79	.54	.62
Satisfaction with choice	92	.88	5.13	1.33		
D1 How carefully have you thought about becoming a teacher?			5.17	1.47	.64	.94
D3 How satisfied are you with your choice of becoming a teacher?			5.10	1.53	.84	.77
D5 How happy are you with your decision to become a teacher?			5.13	1.42	.84	.77

Note: α = Cronbach's alpha for the subscale (without the excluded item); r_c = corrected item-total correlation; items were rated on a scale of 1 to 7. The items are presented as published in Richardson and Watt (2006).

Tables 2, 3, and 4 also show the mean values and standard deviations of the subscales. Participants in the 'teaching degree' group who completed part B of the FIT-Choice Scale indicated that the most important reason for choosing the teaching profession was *shape future of the children/adolescents*. The item that scored highest on this scale was B9 ('Teaching will allow me to shape child/adolescent values'). The reasons that closely follow are *make social contribution* (the highest rated item was B6, 'Teaching allows me to provide a service to society'), *work with children/adolescents* (the highest rated item was B37, 'I like working with children/adolescents'), *ability* (the highest rated item was B43 'Teaching is a career suited to my abilities'), and *intrinsic career value* (the highest rated item was B12 'I like teaching'). Fairly important reasons were also *enhance social equity*, *prior teaching and learning experience*, and *job security*. Students rated job security as an important reason for choosing teaching as a career; however, they rated the job security reason 'teaching as a steady career path' higher than economic security (i.e., a reliable income). Moderately important reasons were *time for family*, *social influences*, and *job transferability*. Social influences, such as family and friends, were rated below average. The least important reason, which was rated relatively low, was *fallback career*.

Part C, which deals with perceptions of the teaching profession and which was completed by both the group with and the group without a teaching

degree, showed that teaching was rated highly on the *high demand* and *expert career* subscales, while it was in the middle of the scale on the *social status* and *salary* subscales. Hard work (C11), emotionally demanding work (C7) and a heavy workload (C2) were rated highest, showing that students recognise the high complexity of teachers' work. On the other hand, there was a discrepancy in the students' perception of the teaching profession. Students strongly agreed that the teaching profession requires a high level of expertise (C10, C15), but they rated the status of the teacher in society as below average (C9, C12, C13).

Part D, which relates to professional commitment and satisfaction, was completed by the 'teaching degree' group on both subscales, while the 'non-teaching degree' group only completed one scale. The 'teaching degree' group rated *satisfaction with choice of becoming a teacher* quite highly, while *social dissuasion* (i.e., social pressures to pursue other careers than teaching) was rated below the middle of the scale (both groups combined).

The differences between the 'teaching degree' and 'non-teaching degree' groups were very small. As the variances of the data were not homogeneous according to the Levene test, the data were compared using the Mann-Whitney test. Only two differences were statistically significant: *expert career* ($U = 2927.00$, $Z = -2.057$, $p = .040$, $r = .18$) and *social dissuasion* ($U = 2701.00$, $Z = -2.663$, $p = .008$, $r = .24$) were both rated higher by the 'teaching degree' group. Students who chose to enrol in a teaching degree programme rated the expertise of a teaching career higher and reported higher social pressure to choose a career other than teaching than students who chose to enrol in a non-teaching degree programme.

Thematic analysis of open-ended responses

The open answers to the question 'Please provide reasons why you did not choose to study teaching in your master's programme' of the participants from the 'non-teaching degree' group were analysed using a coding thematic analysis that identifies 'themes' in qualitative data sets (Boyatzis, 1998). In defining themes, we used a 'domain summary' approach, meaning we analysed a semantic or surface level of meaning by summarising what participants said in relation to a topic (Braun et al., 2019). Initial themes or categories were developed at the beginning of the analysis process. The authors first read all responses and found that the most common reasons for not choosing to study teaching were consistent with the motives and perceptions conceptualised in the FIT-Choice model, albeit in reverse. Therefore, the preliminary codebook included themes describing proximal influences (values, self-perceptions, and task

perceptions) and socialisation influences. Specifically, the predefined themes were as follows: low intrinsic career value, low social utility value, low personal utility value, low ability, high/low task demand, low task return, negative prior teaching and learning experience, and social influences. After creating the first version of the codebook, we decomposed the participants' responses into individual units of analysis. The unit of analysis was each individual reason found in the participants' responses. Each author independently created a list of units of analysis that were later compared to determine agreement. The total number of units of analysis was 163 for 78 participants who responded to the question. Each author then coded the units of analysis (reasons) into the predetermined themes (categories). A participant could provide one or more reasons why he or she chose not to pursue teacher education, and these reasons were assigned to one or more corresponding categories.

In addition, we found that certain units of analysis did not fit any of the previously established themes. Therefore, we added new categories to the codebook that were not captured in the FIT-Choice model but were discovered in the students' responses: teacher training programme, school system, and constraints. We found 88% agreement among the two authors in coding the units of analysis into the appropriate themes. After coding all reasons into their respective categories, we conducted frequency analyses. We counted all themes mentioned by each participant. The theme was counted only once if multiple units of analysis within a participant were assigned to the same theme.

Table 5 shows the final coding system with all the themes, their descriptions, and frequencies. As can be seen, the students who do not intend to study teaching mostly gave reasons in the categories of low intrinsic career value and low personal utility value. They feel that they have no intrinsic interest in teaching (e.g., 'Teaching does not interest me'; 'I do not see myself in the role of a teacher'; 'I know I would not enjoy it') or are more likely to pursue other professional career plans. Many feel that they will not be able to develop professionally if they choose a teaching career (e.g., 'If I choose a teaching programme, I would limit myself to teaching, but I want to work in different domains; 'I cannot achieve a lot as a teacher in a professional sense'; 'The promotion possibilities are weak'). Sixteen participants also perceived high task demand, mainly because of demanding children and their parents ('I do not like parental attitudes towards teachers'; 'Parents get absolutely too involved in the teacher's work'; 'Nowadays children are very demanding'; 'It is a psychologically very demanding profession'). Fourteen participants feel that the teacher training programme is too extensive (i.e., there is less opportunity to acquire quality subject knowledge), and some students also mentioned the possibility of completing

the teacher training programme after the master's degree. Social influences, personal experiences with teaching and learning, and low confidence in one's teaching skills were mentioned by only a few participants.

Table 5

Coding thematic analysis of participants' responses to the question 'Please provide reasons why you did not choose to study teaching in your master's programme'

Predetermined themes (FIT-Choice model)	Theme description	Frequency
Value		
Low intrinsic career value	No interest in teaching, no enjoyment in teaching	26
Low social utility value	Dislike children, dislike working with children or people in general	12
Low personal utility value	Other career plans, low job transferability, not stimulating working environment	23
Self-perceptions		
Low ability	Dislike performing, high speech anxiety, lack of rhetoric skills, lack of abilities to work with children	6
Task-perceptions		
High/low task demand	Demanding children, demanding parents, emotionally demanding job, high workload, low expert knowledge,	16
Low task return	Low salary, low social status	9
Socialisation influences		
Prior teaching and learning experiences	Negative learning experiences in school, negative teaching experiences in school	3
Social influences	Observation of parents' or friends' work as teachers	2
Other (empirically driven) themes		
Teacher training programme	Too extensive, possibility to accomplish teacher training after master's degree	14
School system	Not good conditions, bad conditions in schools, poor curriculum, poor choice on labour market	8
Constraints	No possibility of choosing teacher training, already have a teaching degree but have not decided yet	11

Note. The frequency of each theme represents the number of participants who mentioned the theme in their answers.

Discussion

We investigated and compared perceptions of the teaching profession among students of social sciences and languages who were in the final stages of their undergraduate studies (i.e., bachelor's degree) and who opted for a

‘teaching degree’ or a ‘non-teaching degree’ in their master’s programme. We were also interested in the predominant motivations for becoming a teacher and satisfaction with the career choice among students who confirmed their intention to pursue a master’s study in a teaching degree programme. Another research aim was to find out why students who intended to continue their master’s studies in a non-teaching degree programme did not choose to become teachers.

Participants answered a FIT-Choice Scale (Watt & Richardson, 2007) that included 12 motivational factors for becoming a teacher and six perceptions about the teaching profession. Both groups of students answered questions on five areas of perceptions of the teaching profession (level of teachers’ expert knowledge and job demands, social status of teachers, perceptions of teacher salary, and social discouragement to become a teacher), while a “teaching degree” group additionally assessed motivational reasons for their decision to become a teacher and their satisfaction with the career choice. The most important reasons for choosing the teaching profession were altruistic and intrinsic, such as making a social contribution, working with children, shaping children’s futures, and the intrinsic value of the teaching profession. These findings complement previous studies with student teachers (e.g., Depolli Steiner, 2022; Nesje et al., 2018; Simić et al., 2022; Tang et al., 2015; Watt & Richardson, 2007). Quality teaching has many facets, including subject knowledge, didactic skills, and classroom management skills. However, it cannot be achieved without enthusiasm and high commitment to the teaching profession and the education of students (Heinz, 2015). Therefore, it is positive that the most common motives motivating young people to study teaching in different countries are inherently intrinsic and socially oriented. They lay the foundation for later high-quality professional competences through the teacher education programme and school practice. Similar to the study with Slovenian student teachers before the Bologna curricular reform (Krečič & Grmek, 2005), the group of students in our study who intend to become prospective teachers also highly rated their abilities to become teachers. Teaching ability-related beliefs proved to be a very important motive in one’s decision to become a teacher (Nesje et al., 2018; Simić et al., 2022; Watt & Richardson, 2007). If young people identify their attributes as similar to those of effective teachers, they develop a strong connection with the teaching profession, leading them to perceive teaching as a natural and likely path (Younger et al., 2004). In contrast, students in our study referred to extrinsic reasons such as job transferability, social influences and time for family, and teaching as a fallback career as less important motives for becoming a teacher. The low importance of reasons unrelated to the profession ...

itself proves once again that the main reasons that drive students to pursue a teaching career are commitment and service role. However, the importance of extrinsic reasons for the decision to become a teacher varies depending on the socio-cultural context. According to Heinz's (2015) review of studies that examined the career motivation of student teachers across different countries, extrinsic reasons such as the social status of teachers, the level of pay, job security and the possibility of better managing time for work and family may be less attractive in European countries, North America, and Australia. However, they can be very influential reasons for choosing a teaching career in Asian, African, or South American countries.

The participants in our study rated teachers' expert knowledge as above average and perceived teaching as a very demanding job. In contrast, the social status of teachers and their salaries were rated much lower, suggesting that the demands and rewards of the teaching profession are not balanced from the students' perspective. However, the students who decided to continue their studies as prospective teachers showed above-average satisfaction with their career choice, indicating their enthusiasm about the profession unweighted the perceived challenges.

In the study, we followed Giersch's (2016, 2021) suggestion to investigate not only the motives of students for choosing the teaching profession but also a counterfactual group of students who did not choose to study teaching. A qualitative thematic analysis was used to examine the responses of students who had decided not to study teaching in their upcoming master's programme to the open-ended question: 'Please provide reasons why you did not choose to study teaching in your master's programme'. Most cited reasons belong to categories of low intrinsic career value and low personal utility value. The 'non-teaching degree' group expressed disinterest in teaching and preferred other career paths because they expected better professional development elsewhere. One fifth of participants perceived high task demand due to challenging interactions with students and parents. They also expressed concerns about the extensive nature of the teacher training programme and the possibility of pursuing it after completing their master's degree. Other themes were mentioned less frequently, such as negative prior experiences with teaching and learning, social influences, and low confidence in teaching skills.

Although the above results suggest a rather low motivation for the teaching profession in non-education major students, the 'teaching degree' and the 'non-teaching degree' groups differed only in two dimensions (i.e., perceptions of the teaching profession) of the FIT-Choice Scale. The reported level of social dissuasion was below average in both groups. However, the first group reported

more social disincentives to continue their studies as prospective teachers than the second group. It could be that students who chose to study teaching experienced more negative comments from others when talking about their decision to become teachers. The 'non-teaching degree' group probably discussed this topic less with others because they had no intention of becoming teachers. In addition, the expertise of teachers was rated higher by the students who intend to become teachers, indicating that they are well aware of the professional knowledge and skills required for the teaching profession. The perception of teaching as a highly skilled profession could be an additional motivating factor for entering the teaching profession.

This study is limited in scope, as it only included Slovenian bachelor's students of social sciences and languages who may choose to study teaching at the master's level. Future studies should also include other faculties that educate prospective teachers for secondary education (e.g., students of natural sciences or mathematics). The study sample was unbalanced regarding university (77% of participants studied at the University of Ljubljana) and gender (82% females). However, the gender distribution of the sample corresponds to the gender ratio of students studying at Slovenian faculties of arts.

Conclusions

The results of our study indicate that bachelor's students who intend to continue their master's studies in a teaching degree programme have predominantly intrinsic and altruistic motives to pursue a teaching career. This finding is consistent with previous research and suggests that the inclination to become a teacher is often based on a genuine commitment to the teaching profession and a desire to contribute to the betterment of society by teaching young generations. As teacher shortages are a global problem affecting many countries worldwide, school policies should make more efforts to 'attract, recruit and retain sufficient numbers of motivated and committed student teachers' (Heinz, 2015, p. 260). The core professional identity derived from one's school experiences and motivation to teach should be further shaped and reflected through high-quality experiences in teacher education and school practice in the subsequent academic career. The quality of interactions with school and university tutors is a crucial factor in prospective students' formative process (Torres-Cladera et al., 2021). In practice, it is important to select school mentors who can serve as supportive partners in developing student teachers' core beliefs about good teaching and who do not confine teacher candidates to their 'tried and tested' teaching methods (Butler, 2021). Emphasising the intrinsic

and altruistic aspects of the teaching profession and promoting a match between personal qualities and effective teaching qualities can attract students who are genuinely motivated to become teachers. Teacher education programmes should focus on supportive communication and teaching methods that foster intrinsic motivation in student teachers. By emphasising the social impact and role of teachers in shaping students' futures, these programmes can strengthen the commitment of future teachers. Emphasising the expertise required for effective teaching can raise students' awareness of the complexity of the profession and attract candidates who value the intellectual and pedagogical aspects of teaching. Policymakers should address the perceived imbalance between the demands of the profession and the perceived benefits and improve the social standing of teachers, which could help attract more candidates to the teaching profession.

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