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Appendix1: Groups of creative people according to Bosch and Fritsch (2007) and their corresponding ICSO, *International Standard Classification of Occupations* (ISCO 88).

Creative core occupations	ISCO
physicists, chemists and related professionals	211
mathematicians, statisticians and related professionals	212
computing professionals	213
architects, engineers and related professionals	214
life science professionals	221
health professionals (except nursing)	222
college, university and higher education teaching professionals	231
secondary education teaching professionals	234
other teaching professionals	235
archivists, librarians and related information professionals	243
social sciences and related professionals	244
public service administrative professionals	247

PRESCHOOL TEACHER CAREER AND WHY INDIVIDUALS CHOOSE IT

Maja Hmelak¹, Jurka Lepicnik Vodopivec²

| 220

Abstract

The first part of the article examines certain fundamental theoretical facts about preschool education courses and the preschool teacher profession, as well as current theoretical and empirical knowledge about the motives for choosing this career path. The central part of the article is devoted to the empirical study. A study was performed on a sample of 616 students and preschool teachers to determine their opinions about how suitable they think their choice of education and future profession was, and about the motivational factors that led the respondents to choose preschool education studies and the preschool teacher profession. The study also factored in respondents' backgrounds (students, teachers) and status (beginners, established, experienced). An analysis of differences between the respondents in regard to their background and status revealed a general agreement with the suitability of choosing their education/future profession, but it also showed that their choice was primarily guided by self-actualization and altruistic reasons. However, statistically significant differences were spotted in other reasons as well. Considering that inner motivational factors were the most common among all respondents, the authors deduce that the respondents represent a suitably chosen and educated population of current and future preschool teachers, which should ensure quality work with preschool children.

Key words: motives, preschool teacher, profession.

Introduction

Preschool education as the primary part of the education system has in the past undergone a number of systemic and substantive changes and in the last decade we are noticing an increasing demand for a high level of professional skill in preschool teachers. They are required to have a high level of professional competence, which they have to acquire

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through quality education based on theory and practice. According to Lučić (2007) the future preschool teacher participates in constructing and shaping the image of man as the ultimate value, so he bears a heavy responsibility. He provides and organizes the educational process, as he has intimate knowledge of the fields of pedagogy, didactics and methodology, which systematically contain all the knowledge about teaching and education. His general and professional education, his skills, spiritual and ethical values, and his attitude toward work and children are all factors that affect how successful preschool education is.

That is why the profile of a preschool teacher matters, just like it matters what reasons and motives made that individual choose to study preschool education and to later become a preschool teacher.

Theoretical background

Preschool education studies and training

Training preschool teachers includes two important, closely intertwined segments:

- scientific and professional education and
- practical training.

As a part of the *scientific and professional education* students learn about the basic didactic-methodological and pedagogic-psychological skills. Bastič Zorec (1997) divided the competences acquired by students into the following groups:

- child and education, which includes specific competences in pedagogy (education, didactics and preschool pedagogy theories), psychology (development and pedagogy psychology), sociology, philosophy, social pedagogy and health education. Competences in these fields primarily include various definitions of childhood, history of education in the past and the present, and various theories about development and teaching of preschool children;
- theoretical and practical knowledge of individual fields of preschool education (movement, language, mathematics, art, nature and society). Students obtain in-depth knowledge of those fields, which they upgrade with a methodology that they use to find ways and forms of transferring these competences to preschool children in different stages of development;
- communication with children and adults includes oral communication, reading and writing skills, non-verbal communication and artistic expression. Students learn how to make conversation

(dialogue, group discussion), narrate freely (elocution), transfer their information to the listener (adapting the narration to children of different ages, parents with different levels of education, laymen, professionals, etc.) and to listen to and heed the opinion of others. In addition, they are trained how to independently study professional literature (understanding, critical analysis, etc.), write technical texts, work in teams, etc.;

- about the child care system (school system, public and private kindergartens, legal, social and medical institutions). Teachers must be informed about services offered by institutions aimed at helping the family and preschool children. Knowledge of children's rights is also important;
- scientific critical thinking, which means that students become proficient in professional argumentation, scientific critical analysis, analytic thinking and synthesis of ideas.

On the other hand, *practical training* has a huge impact on students' professional development; this is how Plestenjak (1997) defined the following *functions of practical training*:

- *testing if they made the correct career choice*: students often wonder if they made the right choice regarding their future career. Their first contacts with educational practice can provide an answer to that question, as they get "first hand" information about their work, work-related problems and work conditions;
- *getting to know preschool children*: practical training provides students with the opportunity to improve and upgrade their theoretical knowledge of children. They learn how children think, react, feel, how they are different from each other based on their age, and how active they are. They discover which children they find it easier to establish contact with – younger or older ones;
- *linking theory and practice*: practical training lets student test the significance of theoretical knowledge on the one hand, and connect practice with theory on the other. This way theory becomes easier to understand and practical skills receive better legitimacy when they are founded on theoretical fundamentals;
- *experiential learning*: skills and competences that are required for working as a teacher cannot be acquired merely through lectures and books. During their practical training, students learn through their own experience and their own activities. Experiential learning is based on the idea that we learn best if we do the relevant tasks ourselves; the focus is therefore on the comprehensive personal experience;
- *testing their work qualification*: independent work in a unit provides students with the chance to get to know themselves, their skills,

interests and their potential. They discover how this kind of work makes them feel, how adept they are at leading and guiding a group and at making contacts, which fields of education they are most proficient in, and how they adapt to working conditions. They learn where their greatest challenges lie and in which areas they will have to improve their knowledge and competences.

Practical pedagogic training give students an insight into their chose profession and into how pedagogic work is actually being carried out in kindergartens, so they can link this practical experience with theory. When talking about practical pedagogic training, Plestenjak (ibid.) also mentions the *professional socialization* of future preschool teachers. This refers to becoming familiar with a specific professional culture, values, norms, habits, skills and competences. At the beginning of their professional careers, students and teachers learn how to adapt their viewpoints and opinions to new situations. They form suitable social strategies and ways of finding compromises between their own beliefs, interests and ideals on the one hand, and external limitations, conditions and requirements set by the new environment on the other. This allows students to be gradually integrated into their new professional structure.

In order to implement the functions and objectives of the practical pedagogic training listed above, certain principles of implementation must be observed. Cencič and Cencič (1994) define them in the following way:

- *the principle of integrating theory and practice* requires mutual integration of theoretical learning and practical pedagogic training. Practical training is a learning process that combines observation, thinking and action;
- *the principle of adequacy* is being upheld with an adequate balance of theoretical and practical education;
- *the principle of feasibility and organisation* requires a conscious organisation of practical training. If its goals are to be met, we must limit ourselves to those contents and work methods that help students develop. Activities that do not stem from these objectives do not belong into the framework of practical training;
- *the principles of gradualness* requires gradual quantitative and qualitative upgrades of practical training proportional to the level of student proficiency. Practical training must start with observation and end with independent management of a unit under a senior mentor;
- *the principle of universal interrelationship and versatile professional activity* allows for a comprehensive practical training. It requires

integration of all essential activities of the educational system, for which the students are being trained for;

- *the principle of economic efficiency and rationality* is being implemented through suitable scheduling of individual activities. This lets us minimize work time and use as little energy as possible while achieving as much as possible;
- *the principle of active and creative student work* requires optimal student activation. The emphasis of practice must be on teaching skills and not on writing reports and routine imitation.

“We can recognise a common theme in various definitions, which on one hand emphasizes direct, active involvement of individuals in standard, everyday life situations, through which they acquire experience, while also emphasizing that individuals must think about (process) the experience they have acquired” (Lepičnik Vodopivec, 2002: 65). One of the more important experts in this field, Kolb, says that “experiential learning is each type of learning in direct contact with the reality it studies ... It is a direct meeting with the phenomenon, not the thinking about such a meeting or about what could be done in a real situation” (Marentič Požarnik, 2003; quoted from Kolb, 1984: 38).

However, practical training is only one method of experiential training. Educating future preschool teachers includes a number of others. Cencič and Cencič (1994) identified the following ones:

- structural exercises and tasks; these activities make the student work directly with a content or with each other. Exercises are clearly defined and are carried out step by step;
- role playing; participants in role playing focus their attention on a problem and assume a previously selected behavioural pattern. This training is about mutual interaction, which represents realistic behaviour in an imaginary situation. Students usually only receive general instructions and in the “what if” situation they react as they imagine someone else would, or they stay “themselves” and act as they actually would in the imaginary situation;
- simulations; simulations are models or presentations of individual pieces of experience or reality in a simplified form in an imaginary situation. Rules and materials that are prepared beforehand to a certain extent define how the simulation plays out, however, the decisions of participants can affect the flow of events. By working together they try to directly solve a problem and create a direct experience, which is later analysed and evaluated, other possible solutions are discussed, the consequences of their actions are examined, etc.;

- simulations of mini-lessons: mini-lessons are a form of micro teaching.³ Participants form several smaller groups and each of them prepares a mini-lesson. A group member acting as a teacher holds the lesson. The others simulate children or act as observers. The one holding the mini-lesson has to prepare in advance and the lesson is followed by an analysis and a discussion involving all participants.

However, we have to be aware that even all the competences acquired through studies are not always enough. “Despite the fact that every person needs some kind of formal education for getting employed, much more attention should be paid to informal education and working experience” (Šinkovec, 2009: 48). A number of studies-related and concrete work experiences help the individual develop an integrated personality that will help him on the labour market. “Employers expect that young candidates should be flexible, innovative, adaptable, dirigible and to have a positive attitude towards work. But at the same time they accuse the first employment seekers of lacking direct knowledge, working habits, motivation for work or studying and responsibility” (Šinkovec, 2009: 49).

The profession of a preschool teacher

The profile of a preschool teacher has been constantly changing throughout the history, unlike the expectations of the environment, which has always expected the preschool teacher to “be dedicated, a source of quality knowledge, a role model and that to always work to the benefit of the childrens” (Toman, 2001: 23). According to Cenčič and Čagran (2002), preschool teacher career is chosen by those individuals who consciously and deliberately made the decision to work with children that are undergoing their most challenging and most sensitive stage of development. That is why the preschool teacher career is a demanding one and requires responsibility, because during that stage in children’s lives the teacher has a much stronger influence on them and his actions can affect children for life. On the other hand, it is also a career that gives a lot back to the preschool teacher.

“Preschool teacher’s qualities, both as a professional and as a human, have always been and always will be the defining factor in preschool education quality” (Plestenjak, 1990: 27). The preschool teacher not only

³ Microteaching is a shorter form of teaching with limited content. It is based on the premise that “the complex teaching activity needs to be broken down into elementary skills and with the help of feedback one must practice those skills until one has mastered them” (Marentič-Požarnik, 1987: 29).

nurtures, but also raises and educates children, combines his efforts with those of his colleagues and works with parents to create the best possible learning environment for children. He constantly expands his knowledge and learns about new methods of working with small children, about new technologies and about various ways of motivating children to develop as many skills and competences as possible (Cenčič and Čagran, 2002).

Batistič Zorec (2003) finds that recently experts are putting more and more emphasis on knowledge, skills and competences of the teacher, e.g. on professional qualifications and initiative. Preschool teachers must be experienced, attentive and participating observers of children. Only this way will they be able to know children's interests and identify their potential talents. They must use their knowledge of how children develop and learn as a basis for planning curricula for children of various age groups. However, educational work is not merely an efficient execution of any planned activity, but it also requires preschool teachers to be present in the unit and participate in every situation. This educational work also refers to the hidden curriculum.

“Working with preschool children is professional work that cannot be framed or narrowed down to simple recipes or solutions that would be suitable for all children” (Grum, 2003: 108). However, there are certain guidelines and legal acts that define this profession.

The two key central documents on preschool education in kindergartens in Slovenia are:

- *Kindergarten Act* (1996) – it defines the organization and the contents of preschool education in kindergartens, the fundamental objectives of kindergartens, the principles of preschool education, its goals and programmes, and how they are financed. It also sets the education requirements for preschool teachers and their assistants, and sets their workload. Preschool teacher's workload includes preparation, planning and implementation of educational activities, work with parents and participation in organizing the life and work at the kindergarten. It contains the fundamental objectives of the kindergartens, defines the objectives of preschool education and set the allowed number of children per unit, which in the first age group cannot exceed 12 and in the second group 22 children;
- *Curriculum for Kindergartens* (1999) – it represents the professional basis for work in kindergartens. It contains global education goals, the principles of preschool education, the basic knowledge about children's development and learning and about the role of adults. It includes six activity areas: movement, language, arts, society, nature

and mathematics. For each area it defines the general objective and suggests examples of activities and contents that represent a potential method of reaching those objectives. Individual areas are linked with interdisciplinary activities like moral development, traffic education, healthcare and safety.

However, the *Kindergarten act* is not the only document defining the life in kindergarten, as certain guidelines can also be found in the *White Paper on Education in the Republic of Slovenia* (2011). This document also contains principles and goals of preschool education that are defined similarly as in the act. In addition, the Paper also contains certain solutions on how to implement changes to kindergartens.

Reasons for choosing the preschool teacher career

Our choice of career paths is guided by various tendencies with motivation definitely playing a pivotal role. Psychologists try to explain the choice of profession through various motivational theories. Among the best known ones are various variations of psychoanalysis by S. Freud and A. Adler, and A. Maslow's pyramid theory. A little less known is the London's Career Motivation Theory (London and Noe, 1997), according to which the choice of a specific profession depends on the potential for identification with the work in this profession, a realistic estimate of one's own skills and competences, and the individual's perseverance in light of the circumstances, which might even oppose such decisions. However, this theory, which emphasizes income as one of the more important motives for choosing a profession, does not fit the motives of future pedagogic workers, where the predominant motives are happiness, desire to work with children and various altruistic influences (Donohoue Clyne, 1998; Cenčič, 2000).

Very few studies on motives for choosing the preschool teacher profession have been carried out compared to studies done on elementary and secondary school teachers. Studies that examine the reasons why young people chose the teaching profession have been going on for over 80 years. L. G. Daniel and C. M. Ferrell (1991) analysed 19⁴ of them and based on the results they made a hierarchical list of reasons that influence young people to choose teaching as their career path. The ten most common reasons are:

- fondness for children and young people and a desire to work with children/young people,
- job security and/or suitable pay,
- good working conditions (e.g. working hours, long vacations),

⁴ Studies included in their analysis had been carried out between 1925 and 1987.

- interest in a specific subject,
- potential for lifelong learning,
- potential for teaching, but also potential employment in other professions,
- work for humanity,
- family's or teacher's influence,
- interest in the field of preschool and general education and
- the opportunity to have a creative and stimulating career.

A newer study carried out by C. Montecinos and L. Nielsen (1997) on students of elementary and preschool education confirmed that fondness for children (e.g. the desire to make a change in a child's life) was the primary reason for choosing a career in pedagogy. Other important reasons were: previous experience in work with children, a desire to imitate exceptional teachers that had influenced them during school, or the family's influence (parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc.).

Several years ago a similar study was carried out by Cencič and Čargan (2002). The aim of their study was to determine the motivational factors for selecting the preschool education studies and the career of a preschool teacher. An analysis of their study revealed that the desire to work with children was the most important reason for Slovenian students. This was closely followed by: students' awareness that this profession lets them use all their skills and competences, that it is a valuable public service, that they are a role model for children and that at the same time they can accomplish their goal of acquiring university-level education. Based on factorisation of the sample of variables, the authors (ibid.) identified five groups of fundamental motivational factors:

- an inner calling to be a preschool teacher,
- influence and self-actualization,
- social and economic benefits,
- alternative goals and
- aspirations and stereotypes.

Similar lists, but for the teaching profession, were also compiled by Ivanuš Grmek and Javornik Krečič (2005). By abstracting the common characteristics and with the help of the factorisation from the aforementioned study by Cencič and Čargan, they divided the individual reasons for choosing the teaching profession into five groups:

- *Self-actualization reasons* express the desire for personal and professional growth and for beneficial and influential work. This group includes the following reasons:
 - teaching is a beneficial work for the whole society;
 - as a teacher I will be a role model for children and young people;
 - the teaching profession provides opportunities for lifelong professional development;
 - this profession allows me to employ all my skills and competences.
- *Altruistic reasons* are students' internal motivation factors, which are mostly based on their personal interests. These are:
 - a desire to work with children/young people;
 - I always wanted to become a teacher;
 - I did not see myself in any other profession;
 - this profession gives me the satisfaction that results from work.

Material reasons point to external motivation in choosing the studies, which is based on beneficial socio-economic consequences of work, the potential for promotion and further education. This group includes:

- attractive work conditions (e.g. shorter working hours, holidays ...);
- education in this field provides opportunities for further training;
- this education profile is also suitable for other professions;
- this profession guarantees financial security upon retirement;
- this profession offers a rather high personal income.

Reasons based on inspiration and stereotypes reflect both one's own as well as others' aspirations and stereotypes about professions. These reasons are:

- my parents' wanted me to acquire an academic education;
- I consider faculty education important;
- family members working in this profession;
- this profession is suitable for women.

Alternative reasons express an external motivation affecting the choice of studies due to not meeting the conditions to enrol in one's desired course. This includes the following reasons:

- grades and results in the secondary school were not good enough to stud at another faculty;
- I somehow dropped into this programme;
- coincidence;
- I did not manage to enrol in a course I initially wanted.

This latter classification was somewhat expanded and adapted, and used in our empirical study. The statements were adapted to the requirements of preschool education studies.

Objectives

The objectives of the empirical study were to analyse:

- the respondents' opinions on the adequacy of their choice of study/profession and
- motives for choosing the study/profession.

We were particularly interested in differences between backgrounds (students, teachers) and the respondents' status (beginners, established, experienced).

Methodology

The research methods used were the descriptive and the causal non-experimental method of empirical pedagogic research.

Based on the purpose of the task we used quantitative research procedures. When answering the research question we took an extensive approach at the faculty and in the kindergarten, using a questionnaire that allowed us to reach a large and representative sample of students and preschool teachers.

The research sample in the extensive part of the study at the inference statistics level contained a random sample of a hypothetical population. It included 616 respondents – 296 students and 320 preschool teachers. The respondents were citizens of Slovenia and Croatia.

All respondents, both students as well as preschool teachers, were categorized as either beginners, established or experienced at their level of education or employment. Among students, beginners were those enrolled into the firsts year of the course, established were those in the second year, and experienced were those in the third year of their studies. For preschool teachers, beginners were those with less than 5 years of work experience, established had 6-10 years of work experience and the experienced were those with 10 or more years of work experience. Based on the data, the experienced group (47.9%) was the largest and the established group (23.5%) the smallest; the beginners made up 28.6% of the sample.

We gathered data through a questionnaire, which underwent a sample test prior to being used for the study, so we could eliminate potential disadvantages and errors before deciding on a final version. The

questionnaire was then given out to students and preschool teachers in Maribor (Slovenia) and Rijeka (Croatia). The study was anonymous.

Data that was collected with the questionnaire was computer processed with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences.

For closed questions we defined the absolute (f) and percentage (f %) frequencies, so we could present the acquired data in table form. Based on the relation between these variables we conducted the χ^2 -test. In case of low or empirical null distribution of frequencies or when these frequencies were lower than 5, we combined the related categories.

Through abstracting the common characteristics and with the help of the factorization done in previous studies (M. Cenčič and B. Čagran, 2002; M. Ivanuš Grmek and M. Javornik Krečič, 2005), we combined individual reasons for choosing the preschool teacher career into five groups: altruistic, material, alternative, self-actualization, and reasons based on aspiration and stereotypes. To test the differences in reasons for their choice of studies between different respondent groups based on status, we used the general F-test in combination with Levene's test. To test the differences in reasons for their choice of studies between respondent groups based on their background, we used the independent sample T-test in combination with Levene's test. In cases where the premise of homogeneity was not justified, we performed the Welch's test.

Results and interpretation

1. Analysis of the respondents' opinion on the suitability of their choice of studies and the profession of preschool teacher associated with it?

Table 1: The amounts (f) and structural percentages (f %) of respondents based on how they answered the question: "Do you think that you have chosen the right field of studies and the preschool teacher career associated with them for yourself?"

Suitability of the choice of studies and profession	Respondents	
	f	f %
Yes	544	88.3
No	9	1.5
I don't know	63	10.2
Total	616	100

Based on the table, the majority (88.3%) of respondents believes to have chosen the correct course for themselves. That group includes both the students of preschool education studies who are currently within the education process and are still learning about their future

professional role and the forms and methods of work related with it, as well as kindergarten teachers who are already practicing the profession they have trained for. Only 1.5% of the respondents were not satisfied with their choice, while 10.2% were unsure about it.

The results were encouraging and a cause for optimism, as based on the findings we can justifiably assume that in the future kindergarten teachers will be those individuals who consciously chose that profession and are satisfied with their choice and everything related to it. Only happy individuals or employees can perform their jobs successfully and consistently, and in this case the results are satisfactory, as this pertains to education of the most sensitive population – preschool children.

1.1 Are there any differences between respondents in regard to their opinion on the choice of the right studies and career based on their background or status?

Table 2: Background and status of respondents in relation to their opinion on the choice of studies and career.

Choice of suitable studies or career		Background		Status			Total
		students	preschool teachers	beginners	established	experienced	
Yes	f	252	292	156	128	260	544
	f %	85.1	91.3	88.6	88.3	88.1	88.3
No	f	3	6	1	1	7	9
	f %	1.0	1.9	0.6	0.7	2.4	1.5
I don't know	f	41	22	19	16	28	63
	f %	13.9	6.9	10.8	11.0	9.5	10.2
Total	f	296	320	176	145	295	616
	f %	100	100	100	100	100	100
		$\chi^2 = 8,848$ g = 2 p = 0,012		$\chi^2 = 3.707$ g = 4 p = 0.447			

Based on χ^2 -test we find that in one case we keep the null hypothesis, which means that there are statistically significant differences between statuses of respondents in regard to the opinion about the choice of suitable studies/career. However, there are also statistically significant differences based on respondents' backgrounds (P = 0.012) and in that case the null hypothesis is rejected.

In regard to status, there are no statistically significant differences and even a detailed analysis of frequencies does not show any deviations, since the values are more or less the same. The majority of polled

beginners (88.6%), established (88.3%) and experienced (88.1%) believes that they chose the correct studies/career for themselves. This clearly shows the respondents' awareness of how important it is to deliberately think about which faculty course to enrol in and it also shows that the respondents know themselves and their wishes very well and can, based on that knowledge, choose the most suitable studies/profession for themselves.

However, the case is completely different when it comes to respondents' backgrounds, where we identified statistically significant differences. While the group that is not sure about the suitability of their choice of studies/career contains more students (13.9%), preschool teachers (91.3%) are prevalent among those who are fully satisfied with their decision, even though the majority of students (85.1%) also stated that they chose a suitable career path for themselves. The latter is definitely an encouraging and expected information, which confirms that both the students and the future preschool teachers will really desire that job and be satisfied with it, which will in turn lead to satisfied children and parents.

There are several potential reasons why there are more undecided students than preschool teachers: either their choice of studies was forced upon them by someone else, or these studies were not their primary choice, or they realised that they are not cut out for this profession when they came in contact with the theory and practice of the studies, etc. We did not ask them about these reasons, so we cannot provide a reliable estimate.

Analysis of reasons for choosing the studies and career

We based our analysis of reasons why students and preschool teachers chose their studies/career on the existing factorization (Cencič and Čagran, 2002; Ivanuš Grmek and Javornik Krečič, 2005). Individual reasons were divided into five groups.

Self-actualization reasons

- *Preschool teacher's job at a kindergarten is beneficial public work for the whole society.*
- *As a preschool teacher I will be a role model for children and young people.*
- *This profession provides me with the potential for lifelong professional development.*
- *The profession allows me to use all my skills, e.g. musical, dancing, verbal, etc.*
- *I am good in organizing people.*

- *As a preschool teacher I will be able to influence how the society develops.*
- *I have much to pass on to children.*
- *I would like to influence the children.*

Altruistic reasons

- *I always wanted to become a preschool teacher.*
- *I would like to work with children (young people).*
- *I could not imagine any other profession for myself.*
- *This profession will give me the satisfaction that will arise from my work.*
- *Being a preschool teacher is the right profession for me.*
- *I always liked kindergartens.*
- *I was born for this profession.*
- *I would like to influence or change education.*

Material reasons

- *This profession offers attractive work conditions (shorter working hours, holidays, etc.).*
- *This profession offer a good personal income.*
- *This profession ensures economic (financial) safety after retirement.*
- *This level of education will allow me to work in other professions.*
- *Education in this field gives me the opportunity to continue my education.*
- *Work in a kindergarten is a stimulating and creative profession.*
- *This profession offers good employment opportunities.*

Reasons based on aspirations and stereotypes

- *This profession is represented in our family.*
- *This is a suitable profession for women.*
- *Studying at the faculty is important for me.*
- *My parents wanted me to acquire an academic level of education.*
- *The preschool teacher profession has a high status in our society.*

Alternative reasons

- *My marks and results in secondary school were not good enough for me to enrol to another faculty.*
- *I somehow dropped into this programme.*
- *It was merely coincidence.*
- *I did not manage to enrol in the course I originally wanted.*

Let us look at the differences between the various respondent groups (background, status) regarding the reasons for choosing the preschool teacher career.

Table 3: Results of the T-test of differences in self-actualization, material, inspiration and stereotype, and alternative reasons based on the background.

Reasons	Background	Number	Arithmetic mean	Standard deviation	Variance homogeneity test		Test differences of arithmetic means in	
		n	\bar{x}	s	F	P	t	P
Self-actualization reasons	Students	296	33.8378	3.80732	0.864	0.353	1.033	0.302
	Preschool teachers	320	33.5281	3.63273				
Altruistic reasons	Students	296	31.7500	5.19566	2.742	0.098	-0.633	0.527
	Preschool teachers	320	32.0031	4.73465				
Material reasons	Students	296	22.4324	4.00536	9.149	0.003	approx. = 6.294	approx. = 0.000
	Preschool teachers	320	20.1906	4.82203				
Reasons based on aspiration and stereotypes	Students	296	13.3716	3.06601	10.276	0.001	-0.351	0.726
	Preschool teachers	320	13.4688	3.73566				
Alternative reasons	Students	296	5.8007	3.23185	12.510	0.000	approx. = -3.499	approx. = 0.001
	Preschool teachers	320	6.7469	3.47968				

Tests of variance homogeneity show that the premises are not justified in three categories: material reasons (P = 0.003), reasons based on aspirations and stereotypes (P = 0.001) and alternative reasons (P = 0.000). As shown by the general T-test, there are no statistically significant mean differences in reasons based on aspirations and stereotypes. However, in case of material and alternative reasons, the T-test reveals statistically significant mean differences. In this case we used the Welch's test to review statistically significant differences. In

both cases we identified statistically significant differences between students and preschool teachers in regard to reasons for choosing the studies.

Results of the general T-test of differences between arithmetic means in cases of self-actualization reasons ($P = 0.302$), altruistic reasons ($P = 0.527$) and reasons based on aspirations and stereotypes ($P = 0.726$) do not show any statistically significant differences between students and preschool teachers in regard to reasons for choosing the studies.

However, statistically significant differences do occur in material reasons ($P = 0.000$) and alternative reasons ($P = 0.001$). The averages show that most often material reasons were the ones that made students (22.4324) choose the preschool teacher career; however, these reasons were less common in actual preschool teachers (20.1906). Students have a stronger interest in salary conditions than preschool teachers and they believe that employment can easily be obtained everywhere, even outside of kindergartens. Preschool teachers, on the other hand, whose personal experience gives them a better understanding of the situation, know that things are not that simple and that this should not be the deciding reason for the choice of studies or career. Alternative reasons were more common among preschool teachers (6.7469) and less common among students (5.8007).

Table 4: Motivational factor ranking based on their average importance for individuals.

Rank	Students	Preschool teachers
1	Self-actualization reasons	Self-actualization reasons
2	Altruistic reasons	Altruistic reasons
3	Material reasons	Material reasons
4	Reasons based on aspirations and stereotypes	Reasons based on aspirations and stereotypes
5	Alternative reasons	Alternative reasons

As seen from the above table, both students and preschool teachers consider the most important motivational factor for their choice of studies to be self-actualization reasons, followed by altruistic reasons. Both reasons are primarily linked to inner motivation and a strong desire for influence and self-actualization. Therefore, during studies and later during their career, the priority of all respondents is to fulfil their potentials, while the least important are considered to be alternative reasons, which represent external (forced) factors, like insufficient points to enter another programme, unfulfilled wishes, etc.

In general, the findings show that both students and preschool teachers have similar expectations regarding their studies and career.

Table 5: Results of single factor variance analysis of self-actualization reasons, material reasons, reasons based on inspirations and stereotypes, and alternative reasons in regard to respondents' status.

Reasons	Status	Number	Arithmetic mean	Standard deviation	Variance homogeneity test		Test differences of in arithmetic means	
		n	\bar{x}	s	F	P	F	P
Self-actualization reasons	Beginners	176	33.4205	3.65113	0.053	0.949	0.800	0.450
	Established	145	33.9448	3.70394				
	Experienced	295	33.6983	3.76619				
Altruistic reasons	Beginners	176	31.9034	4.52508	1.218	0.297	0.053	0.949
	Established	145	31.7655	5.02357				
	Experienced	295	31.9254	5.18513				
Material reasons	Beginners	176	22.6818	4.29896	0.459	0.632	21.556	0.000
	Established	145	21.9862	4.37319				
	Experienced	295	20.0712	4.54962				
Reasons based on aspiration and stereotypes	Beginners	176	14.0000	3.01425	1.891	0.152	3.734	0.024
	Established	145	13.3379	3.44444				
	Experienced	295	13.1186	3.61443				
Alternative reasons	Beginners	176	5.8920	2.92472	11.895	0.000	approx . = 5.675	approx . = 0.004
	Established	145	5.8000	2.95710				
	Experienced	295	6.7729	3.77685				

The homogeneity variance test reveals that in one case the premise is not justified, namely in case of alternative reasons (P = 0.000). In that case we used Welch's t test (approx. test) to analyse the statistical differences. Welch's t test revealed statistically significant differences (P = 0.004) between beginners, established and experienced respondents in reasons for choosing their studies.

Essential for us were the results of the general F-test of differences between arithmetic means. For self-actualization reasons (P = 0.450) and altruistic reasons (P = 0.949) there were no statistically significant differences between beginners, established and experienced respondents in regard to their reasons for choosing the field of studies.

However, statistically significant differences did occur in material reasons ($P = 0.000$), alternative reasons ($P = 0.003$) and reasons based on aspirations and stereotypes ($P = 0.024$). Based on the average values, material reasons are the most common reasons why preschool education studies and the preschool teacher career was chosen by beginners (22.6818), and they are the least common reasons for experienced respondents (20.0712). The latter group also most rarely (13.1186) chose reasons based on aspirations and stereotypes, which were the most common reason for choice of studies for beginners (14.0000). The beginners, compared to established and experienced respondents, also most clearly showed the presence of external motivation, which is based on favourable socio-economic consequences of work, but at the same time this also points to the fact that their choice was influenced by both their own as well as others' aspirations and stereotypes about professions.

Alternative reasons, which include the choice of studies under the influence of external motivation due to unmet criteria for entering one's primary choice of studies, are the most common choice for experienced (6.7729) and the least common choice for established (5.8000) respondents.

Table 6: Motivational factor ranking based on averages of their importance for individual statuses.

Rank	Beginners	Established	Experienced
1	Self-actualization reasons	Self-actualization reasons	Self-actualization reasons
2	Altruistic reasons	Altruistic reasons	Altruistic reasons
3	Material reasons	Material reasons	Material reasons
4	Reasons based on aspirations and stereotypes	Reasons based on aspirations and stereotypes	Reasons based on aspirations and stereotypes
5	Alternative reasons	Alternative reasons	Alternative reasons

As we can see from the ranking, beginners, established and experienced respondents all considered the most important motivational factors in their choice of studies to be self-actualization reasons, followed by altruistic reasons. Both are primarily linked to inner motivation and a string desire for influence and self-actualization. Therefore all respondents put achieving their potentials in the first place, with alternative reasons, which that assume external (forced) factors like insufficient points to enrol in another programme, unfulfilled wishes, etc., being the least important.

Conclusion

The choice of education and career is one of the most determining in one's life. In order to make it simpler, it is necessary for individuals to first get to know themselves, their desires and interests, but also to realistically evaluate their knowledge, competences and skills. All too often it happens that the choice of studies is primarily affected by external (forced or misleading) mechanisms or unverified information, which leads to unhappy students and later unhappy and disinterested employees, which only work because they have to, not because they like the career they have chosen.

Our findings for the field of preschool education are completely different from that trend, which is a cause for optimism. As this is a field that affects the most sensitive population, preschool children, it is a very encouraging fact that as many as 88.3% of respondents stated that they chose the suitable studies and profession for themselves. That is why we assume that they are content with their choice and that after finishing their studies they will be happy to look for work in the field of preschool education and be proud and glad to perform it.

We divided the motives and reasons that guided the respondents in their choice of studies and profession into 5 groups: self-actualization reasons (the desire for personal and professional growth in combination with beneficial and influential activities), altruistic reasons (internal motivation, which is primarily based on personal interest), material reasons (external motivation, which is primarily based on socio-economic interests), reasons based on aspirations and stereotypes (both personal as foreign influences, under strong influence of stereotypes) and alternative reasons (external motivation or mostly constraints due to unfulfilled conditions and wishes).

We have discovered that the most important reasons that made respondents choose preschool education studies and the preschool teacher career are self-actualization reasons. They are followed by altruistic reasons. Both are based on a certain internal, personal interest and mostly on the desire for beneficial and influential work, while also showing a strong desire for professional development. On the one hand, they have a strong interest in quality and constructive work, on the other they wish to be able to upgrade and improve their knowledge, social skills and competences, and personal development, they strive for lifelong learning and to contribute to quality professional development. At the same time, they have an honest interest in work with preschool children and are ready and willing to perform it with strong motivation