

Motivation to join primary teaching profession: The case of Fiji

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The study reported here focuses on motivations for joining the teaching profession. In particular, motives of the entrants joining the primary teaching force were investigated. The trainees at Lautoka Teachers' College in Fiji responded to a questionnaire aimed at identifying their motives for choosing primary teaching as a career. Analysis of the results indicated that a large percentage of trainee teachers enrolled at the College were genuinely interested in becoming a teacher, and that a small percentage of them did not consider teaching as their career choice. The paper also discusses implications pertinent to student selection at the College.

Introduction and background

Of the various factors that impact children's education, none is as important as the teachers (Hargreaves & Lo, 2000; Thomas, 1975, Connell, 1974). This is especially the case in the primary schools of many developing countries, including Fiji, where other types of educational resources are often limited. This, therefore, calls for a commitment on the part of teachers to ensure that children achieve optimum benefit. Of this commitment, Delors (1996:141) aptly states: "Teachers have a crucial role to play in preparing young people not only to face the future with confidence but also to build it with purpose and responsibility."

Evidence demonstrates that those who want to join the teaching profession have the desire to provide service to young people and this is regarded as the most valued quality of a teacher (Sears, Marshall & Otis-Wilborn, 1994). People with such a quality will identify working with students as the most enjoyable aspect of their work. Altruistic characteristics of teachers will enhance school work (Sizer, 1984). However, those entrants who do not have a service-oriented mental disposition are unlikely to show strong commitment to their work and ultimately the education of children will be affected. It has also been pointed out that some students reconsider their

initial decision and quit teaching for another career after completing some practical experience (Chapman, 1983). Darling-Hammond (1990) found in 1995, about 60 % of graduates did not immediately enter the teaching work force after graduation. Similar results were also found by Cohen, Klink and Grama (1990) who found that graduates “learned as a result of student teaching that the field was not for them” (p12). Students develop impressions of careers from direct and indirect experience and these guide their choice of career. As stated by Sears, Marshall and Otis-Wilborn (1994), individuals’ impressions of teaching shape projections of themselves in their future role as teachers. Further, Marshall, Sears and Otis-Wilborn (1987) also identify four categories of students in relation to their commitment to teaching. These are: traditionalist, mavericks, converts, and reservationists.

Traditionalists are service-oriented and they seriously consider teaching as their career option. As one respondent stated “the need to teach is inside me” (Marshall, Sears & Otis-Wilborn, 1987:43). On the other hand, mavericks are not really motivated for a career in teaching. It is because of other things such as for scholarship that they consider joining teaching. Converts initially do not consider a career in teaching but once selected show strong commitment to the job. Reservationists, on the other hand, are undecided whether to remain in teaching for long.

The traditionalists and converts are the ones who express strong desires and a commitment to a career in teaching while the mavericks and reservationists exemplify weak levels of commitment; teaching is considered a likely ‘stepping stone’ to another profession (Book, Freeman & Brousseau, 1985). Williams (1988) pointed out that close family members and their former teachers influence the traditionalists in their decision to join teaching.

Purpose of the research

In the Pacific region, entry qualifications to teacher training institutions are gradually rising but, on the whole, primary teacher training is not a high priority for suitably qualified school leavers (Benson & Singh, 1993). It is vital to investigate and determine the cause of this and to what extent there is an appreciation for the teaching profession in Fiji. Specifically, the study

explores pre-service teachers' motivations for pursuing a primary teaching career. The following research question guided the study: *What are the entrants' motivations for choosing teaching as their career?*

Rationale

Since there is a dearth of local literature available, this study contributes knowledge in this area. The data obtained should help various stakeholders re-examine the current selection criteria and thereby improve the intake and hence the professional preparation of teachers in teacher education institutions. The secondary school teachers and the Career's Section of the Ministry of Education would also benefit from this study, as the outcome would better inform their practice of advising students on their careers. The study has both local and international significance and, as such, the findings could spark other research endeavours in the area of teacher education.

Study context

Lautoka Teachers' College (LTC) was established in 1977 as the second government owned primary teacher education institution. Specifically this institution's role was to provide in-service training for untrained teachers and refresher courses for practising teachers. However, the closure of Nasinu Teachers College in 1981 forced LTC to take over responsibility of pre-service training of primary teachers. It now remains the only government primary teacher education institution in Fiji. It offers a two-year Certificate in Primary Teaching which is currently being upgraded to a Diploma. LTC is responsible for supplying the bulk of teachers needed for Fiji's primary schools.

Research methods

The data-gathering method involved a questionnaire survey. The two-part survey determined teachers' reasons for joining the teaching profession. This was used with student teachers that were recently admitted into the pre-service teacher education program. A survey was considered an effective means of gathering data from a large sample (Gay, 1992).

The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part included 16 statements related to motivations for entering the teaching profession. The respondents were asked to rate each statement on a five-point Likert scale. This helped identify the most and least common factors motivating students to enter teaching. The second part gave opportunities to the students to express their views about factors that led them to join the teaching profession as well as serving to probe further the data obtained in the first item.

I introduced the questionnaire by explaining its purpose and how the results could assist policy makers and those who aspire to become primary teachers. Then I personally distributed and collected the completed questionnaires from the teacher trainees. The data obtained were treated in a way that protected the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants in the study.

Sample

All student teachers admitted at the College in 2003 were asked to complete the questionnaire. The rationale was to have a representative ethnicity and gender mix in the sample. Completed questionnaires were returned by 275 students, representing (72.2%) of the total student population of 356.

Data analysis

The first data set in the questionnaire consisted of quantitative responses. The respondents were asked to rate each statement on a five-point scale. Their responses were analysed using a common statistical mean. The responses in the qualitative data set were grouped according to the motivations emerging from the data. These are presented on the basis of frequency counts.

Results

The survey included a number of items to elicit relevant information associated with the trainee's motivations for joining the primary teaching profession. The data gathered were analysed and presented under the headings quantitative and qualitative data.

Quantitative data

The questionnaire consisted of a list of possible reasons for joining the teaching profession. The trainees were asked to rate each reason on a five-point scale, i.e. the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with each statement. Table 1 provides the summary of the results.

Table 1: Motivating factors cited by the trainees

Rank	STATEMENTS I would like to be a teacher because:	Group Mean N=275
1	I think teaching has a valuable role to play in society	3.7
2	I believe teachers have a high status in our society	3.6
3	I like children	3.4
4	As a teacher there are opportunities to work closely with the community	3.5
5	I like sharing information with others	3.3
6	Teachers can take up leadership roles in the community	3.3
7	Teaching is a learned profession	3.2
8	My parents would like me to be a teacher	3.0
9	I can not think of anything else to do	2.9
10	I think it will be a satisfying job	2.9
11	The job of a teacher is very secure	2.7
12	The profession is well paid	2.3
13	I like to have authority	2.3
14	The working day is short	2.3
15	I like the idea of long holidays	2.2
16	My mother/father/brother/sister is a teacher and I want to be the same	1.9

As can be seen from Table 1, most of the trainees were motivated because they considered teaching has a valuable role to play in society. This was followed by the trainees' perceptions that teachers have a high status in our society. The least motivating factor for joining the profession as shown in the table is 'my mother/father/brother/sister is a teacher and I want to be the same'.

Qualitative data

The trainees were asked to list and comment on the two reasons from the list which influenced them the most to join primary teacher training. A number of comments emerged. The ten most frequent responses in descending order were (1) fondness for children, (2) parents, peer or teacher influence, (3) teaching seen as a noble profession, (4) childhood ambition, (5) security of the job, (6) sharing of information, (7) opportunity to help the community, (8) long holidays, (9) had no other opportunity, (10) better status. Some examples of responses by the trainees, which provide evidence related to the above influences, were selected and are presented below.

Comments relating to the liking for children included:

I like children...I simply adore being with kids. They may drive you up the wall but if you take a moment to reflect you will find that the kids place their 6 hours of living in your hands. And if we are able to properly mould them at a tender age, they become something in future. Children themselves have a lot to teach us as we do for them.

I love children. I have two small sisters at home and I do really love them. Seeing children growing up is very interesting. I love socializing with children and becoming a teacher is one way of being with them.

Some of the comments about 'parents, peer or teacher influence' on selecting teaching as a career are given below:

My parents wanted me to become a teacher as they saw the status my grandparents hold as teachers in society.

My parents have influenced my career. Since my dad was a school-teacher it gave me a kind of strength and motivation that I should follow the footsteps of my dad.

My mother who strongly urged me to take up this job since it is secure and carries a lot of weight in terms of status in society.

My secondary school teachers provided me with the inspiration to become a teacher. Their way of dressing, talking, teaching and sharing of knowledge inspired me a lot. Generally, their professionalism was the greatest influence on me.

Teaching is regarded by some trainees as a noble profession. Quotations from their feedback included, for example:

[Teachers] are the only ones that can bring up a child, beginning from the early ages of 6 until they become adults, so it is the teacher who plays an important role in moulding and instilling the values, behaviours etc to the children.

It is a very noble career, highly respected and can get a lot of attention from the people in the community.

Some trainees had always had the ambition to become teachers. The comments provided below reflect this:

*It was my dream to become a teacher.
I wanted to teach people of young age how to live in life.
It was my goal in life to become a primary teacher.*

The following are some of the comments which indicated that some trainees were motivated to join teaching because of the security of the job:

*Secure job as we can easily get absorbed into the civil service.
It is good to first secure a job. Teaching is a secure job.*

Some trainees wanted to share information and this propelled them to join teaching. For example:

...the interest in sharing information with children. It is nice to pass knowledge to small children. The feeling urged me into this field.

Getting an opportunity to help the community was considered by some trainees

as another factor influencing them to select teaching as their career. These are some of the comments which reflect this perception:

I love to become a school teacher because it is a good opportunity for me to work closely with the people of different ethnic backgrounds.

Teachers can take up leadership roles in the community. People in the community will look up to you and they will respect you.

Some were influenced to join the teaching profession because they liked the idea of long holidays. For example:

I like the idea of long holidays that is when school breaks or ends. You also do take a break and enjoy yourself and also prepare yourself for another school year.

Many holidays and you still receive your salary.

For some trainees, LTC was the only option available:

*I had no other choice but to join LTC.
I had no other option after completing Form 7... I never thought to join LTC.*

Better status of the teaching profession in Fiji was another factor influencing trainees to join teaching. Following are some of the comments:

*Teaching profession has a high status in our society.
I realised that teaching is regarded as a very well respected job.*

Apart from the ten major influences, other reasons given for choosing teaching as a career were: a scholarship; good salary; cheap training; trainee possessed suitable characteristics; short working day; safe working environment; convenient for the caring of family; easy job; and easy to study and pass the training programme.

Discussion

The four categories of students mentioned by Marshall, Sears and Otis-Wilborn (1987) in relation to their decision to make teaching their career were also identified in this study. It was noted that a large proportion of trainees could be considered 'traditionalists'. The trainees' ratings for each statement (Table 1) indicated that they were serious about taking up teaching. They indicated a positive impression of teaching such as: teaching is a valuable role to play in our society (3.7); teachers have a high status in our society (3.6); fondness to work with children (3.4); opportunities available to work closely with the community (3.5), like sharing information with others (3.3); can take up leadership roles in the community (3.3); teaching is a learned profession (3.2); influence from parents (3.0); and teaching is a satisfying job (2.9).

Similarly, trainees' responses to the open-ended questions showed a large proportion of them appeared to be 'genuinely' interested in the teaching profession. Liking for children was cited as the most common factor influencing the trainees' decision to join primary teaching. Evidence from the literature also confirms that this is the most valued quality of a teacher (Sears, Marshall & Otis-Wilborn, 1994). Once the trainees become fully-fledged teachers, they are more likely to be dedicated to their work. Also they would work well with children to enhance their learning outcomes. 'Influence from close family members and teachers' followed 'liking for children' in the free response section. Observing their own teachers, entrants may have formed a positive impression that teaching would be their career of choice.

A relatively small proportion of trainees in the sample was not eager to join the profession and had non-altruistic motives for joining the teaching force. For example, some were using the College as a 'stepping stone' to more lucrative jobs or to 'enjoy long holidays'. A small proportion of students stated: 'I cannot think of anything else to do', 'I like to have authority', 'I like the idea of long holidays'. A student with such reasons may not possess the attributes befitting a teacher or the teaching profession as a whole. Such trainees' could be labeled 'mavericks' and 'reservationists'. It is possible that

these students did not initially consider undertaking primary teacher training programme at LTC. Instead their priority may have been to enrol for training or educational programmes offered by other tertiary institutions and when these institutions did not accept them, they had no other option but to join LTC.

As mentioned earlier, some of the data collected in the closed-ended questions were followed up to gain a more in-depth understanding of particular items of interest to the researcher. It was found that parents, family and teachers had somewhat smaller influence than the trainee's own notions of the profession. But when all these people were considered as the 'significant others' who could influence a person to choose teaching as a career, there seems to be some definite influence on the choice of teaching as a career. This is evident in the ranking of parents, peers and their teachers' influence as second in the responses to the open-ended question. In a general sense, teacher trainees view that profession as having 'a valuable role to play in society'. This view ranked the first in the responses to the closed-ended questionnaire. However, at the level of the community this is not translated into a desire to help the community as evident in the seventh ranking in the open-ended question. Overall the responses gathered from the pre-service teachers through open-ended and closed-ended items show their appreciation for the teaching service in Fiji.

Implications of the findings

The results from this study on 'motivation to join the teaching profession' are important and therefore warrant attention from the relevant stakeholders. Given that a large proportion of student teachers demonstrated an appreciation for the teaching profession, the authorities concerned should not be complacent but try to further strengthen those areas identified in the study to make the profession more attractive, such as better pay.

The results confirm that a small proportion of student teachers seemed to lack interest in the teaching career. Such students may not take things seriously during their professional preparation and later may not demonstrate strong commitment to the teacher's world of work. Lecturers at the College could

use appropriate means to mould these students so that they become interested in the profession. The whole training programme, that is, the courses, facilities, equipment, teaching experience, etc. should be such that they further motivate the trainees to adequately prepare themselves for the teaching profession.

To ensure better quality teachers entering the profession, the policies governing recruitment of trainees could be further streamlined to ensure that only those who are really motivated are admitted into the pre-service programme at the College. The Careers Section of the Ministry of Education could devise appropriate instruments to collect relevant data on the student teachers before offering them a place at the College. This would be a pro-active move to eliminate those not interested in the profession. Also the literature demonstrates that selection should be an ongoing educational process rather than a one-shot exercise at the initial point of entry to the programme (Haberman & Stinnett, 1973). Because teachers play a crucial role in the lives and learning of children and communities, it is important to consider the sort of people we would like to have in the teaching profession, especially at the primary school level. Not only well-qualified students but also those with suitable qualities are needed, people who would help contribute positively in the development of basic education.

The findings of the study also have implications for further research. For example, after some years of teaching, the student teachers sampled in this study could be surveyed to determine their perceptions of the profession over time. This would help ascertain factors motivating them to remain in the profession. More research is needed in other aspects of pre-service primary teacher education in order to establish a knowledge base for teacher education in Fiji.

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