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**THE SUBJECTIVE APPEAL OF TEACHING PROFESSIONS FOR  
FUTURE PEDAGOGUES**

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*Abstract*

Currently in Russia there is a breach between the schools' demand in young teachers and the unwillingness of the recent graduates of pedagogical universities to pursue career in teaching. More data on students' motivation and the subjective appeal of the teaching profession is required to be able to adjust the educational programs and ensure that the schools' demand is fulfilled. This article focuses on factors defining students' motivation for choosing pedagogical professions and pedagogical universities, as well as on the dynamics of the subjective appeal of the profession. The latter has been proven to change significantly from the time when students start their first year at the university to graduation. Building on that, the authors identify the factors influencing students' attitude towards their future profession and propose the list of possible causes to answer the question why this attitude changes. In the course of study, the authors have surveyed 1169 undergraduate (1-4 years) and graduate students (1-2 years, Master's programs). The results of the survey were statistically analysed to ensure the veracity of differences found between the answers of students in different years of study (Students' t-test). Pearson Correlation Coefficient  $r$  was used for the correlation analysis of factors influencing the subjective appeal of the teaching profession. The article presents the systematized summary of this analysis and suggestions on how to encourage students of pedagogical majors to pursue careers in teaching upon graduation.

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**Keywords:** Choosing profession, deliberateness, motivation, quality of education, satisfaction level, responsibility.



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## 1. Introduction

Our society develops rapidly and in the directions that are often hard to predict. There are various visible trends (Bylieva et al., 2019; Evseeva et al., 2020; Razinkina et al., 2020), but also extraordinary events (such as the current COVID-19 pandemic), which influence both the form and the content of the education process. Uncertainty and unpredictability are the challenges we face in the modern system of high education. However, the traditional model of high education in Russia, currently adopted by many universities, implies that professors are solely responsible for defining the content of the courses, which is then postulated in various documents and often stays unchanged for decades. Such contradiction between supply (outdated content) and demand (quickly changing reality) inevitably leads to lowering the satisfaction with the quality of education, likely followed by the profession collapse.

Theorists and those on the ground have already expressed their concerns about the staffing problem, as they have analyzed the alarming statistics on the staff body in various educational institutions around Russia. International study done by the Organization for Economic Cooperation Development (OECD) in 2013, showed that approximately 40% of all teachers in Russia are 50 years old or older, and this percentage is much higher than that in other countries (Lenskaya & Pinskaya, 2015). The aging of the teaching staff can be explained by the fact that young and perspective specialists choose not to pursue careers in teaching. This choice is based on many factors, with subjective appeal of the profession being among the most important ones.

Subjective appeal of the profession is a complex construct that includes internal and external variables. The internal ones include personal motives, potential for personal growth, satisfaction of leading personal needs, the sense of joy and content from working with students. Among the external factors are the general prestige of the profession in the society, working conditions, stress factors, wage rate and the amount of work required.

All these factors influence the decision of staying in the profession or leaving it. The appeal of the profession heavily impacts the choice of a particular educational track for the high school students, but during their time at the university it can either strengthen or weaken. Thus, to be able to implement a smart staff policy and attract more young professionals into the profession, it is important to understand what factors cause these changes. Finding and analyzing these factors are the goals of our study.

## 2. Problem Statement

The subjective appeal of the teaching profession in Russia is steadily declining. In 2008 only 60% of schools got to hire 1 or 2 recent graduates annually, while the teaching staff of other 40% stayed the same over years. Moreover, the best graduates chose not to pursue teaching careers (Bydanova, 2008). This tendency has been confirmed by a more recent study - TALIS-2018 - conducted by OECD in 2018. The study collected data from 4000 teachers from 230 educational institutions in 14 administrative subjects of Russia and showed that the average age of a Russian teacher is around 45-46 years. The percentage of the young teachers under 25 years among the teaching staff has reduces from 4,7% to 3,9%, while the percent of older teachers (50 years and older) increased from 40 to 42%.

For 91% of respondents choosing a teaching profession stemmed from the desire to contribute to the societal development, and 88% saw it as a way to influence the development of children and the youth. Those coming to the teaching profession with experience in difference fields, among their reasons for this move pointed out the external factors: working conditions, stability, reliability and security of the job. Only 6% of respondents strongly agreed with the statement that the teaching profession has high prestige in the society, with 43% mostly agreeing, 13% strongly disagreeing, and the rest mostly disagreeing. These data coincide with the social polls held in Russia, according to which only 48% of the respondents see the teaching profession as prestigious. In the countries with a high prestige of the profession, it becomes an important motivational factor for the young people choosing to pursue the career in teaching.

Another recent study on motives impacting the choice of the teaching profession, was done in the Central Mindanao University (Philippines) in 2017. The study showed that most respondents came from families with low income and saw the teaching profession as prestigious and promising a good career path. According to the authors, this reasoning stands behind students' desire to get good grades (including the entry test) and to become teachers, since it will significantly improve their financial situation. Hence, the appeal of the teaching profession depends not only from the public opinion on the profession, but also from the economic factors, such as students' family income (Bukidnon & Tan, 2017).

The correlation between the prestige of the teaching labor and internal/external motivation for choosing the teaching profession has been confirmed by another group of researches in Hong Kong. According to them, the higher is the prestige of the profession, the more important become the motives of wage rates, job stability, guarantees of career development and of constant employment (Köning & Rothland, 2012). Similar tendency has been observed in China, Turkey, the Philippines and Malaysia (Heinz, 2015), where the teachers' wage rates are higher than the average for these countries. These data correlate with the OECD initial findings from almost a decade ago, which determined how financial incentives in different countries help attract qualified graduates into the teaching force and analyzed the recruitment process (Schleicher, 2012).

In most European countries, the prestige of the teaching profession is not high. As Estonian scholars Saks et al., (2016) put it, in their country it is very low due to the low wage rate and the perception of teachers as workers of the service industry. The authors proceed to conclude that in countries with lower prestige of the profession, students' motivation is more impacted by the internal factors: altruistic motives, the desire to enjoy one's job, calling.

Recent major study by the Russian scholar Vataschak (2015a; 2015b) showed that for the young teachers in Russia the most important factors are: an interesting job with broad-ranging tasks, stability, and, finally, the respect from their students. Significantly less often the teachers mentioned such factors as being respected by the colleagues or school administration, or a decent wage.

The problem of avoiding the teaching profession is especially acute for the students graduating with degrees in foreign languages. According to Harchenko (2013), even when the recent graduates with such degrees end up in school, they see it as a forced measure. The motives of the students getting foreign language degrees were studied by Permyakova and Sheveleva (2015). According to their data, 66% of these students do not want to work as teachers. For another 34% the teaching profession is appealing only

because of the internal factors (such as enjoying working with children). External factors of appeal (working conditions, potential for career and self-development) are chosen significantly rarer. At the same time, the students choosing not to pursue teaching career tend to justify that choice by external reasons, such as low wage or challenging and intensive nature of work. Among the internal reasons are named the lack of interest for working with children and the interest to different professions (Permyakova & Sheveleva, 2015).

The combination of various factors impacting the appeal of the teaching profession can either enhance the negative motivation, leading to the students leaving the profession, or work compensatory and convince them to stay. The interaction between these factors was analyzed by Maslinsky and Ivanyushina (2016). Based on their findings, the decision to leave the profession is negatively influenced by conflicts or issues with students at school, low wage rate and heavy workload (stress factors). It should be noted, though, that the lack of confidence in the respondent's effectiveness in the profession lowers its appeal, while the strong confidence reduces the effect of the mentioned stress factors. Loyalty to the profession turns out to be the strongest predictor of teachers not leaving the teaching career. Hence, the authors conclude that if teachers are supported, and, more importantly, reassured in their own effectiveness, their loyalty to the profession increases and they are more likely to stay in education.

Another important aspect of the subjective appeal of the teaching profession is the motivational dynamics during the course of students' study at the university and the first years at work. This aspect was researched by Rogov and Sheveleva (2015), in their study covering 41 primary school teacher and 59 students getting a degree in elementary education. According to their data, the appeal of the profession among the students was mostly connected to the favorable working conditions, potential for self-development and the satisfied need in professional recognition and personal authority. As the students make progress in their studies, their attitude towards the future profession becomes increasingly critical: the acceptance of the profession lowers, although the students become more interested in self-development and start realizing the potential of the profession for their personal growth. Both, senior students and working teachers mark the need and the potential of personal development as an important factor of choosing the profession and staying in it.

Starting from the second year of studies, students mark their desire for an interesting and creative job as an important motivational factor. At the same time, the importance of the favorable working condition loses its significance by the time of graduation. For the young teachers, however, this factor understandably keeps its importance. Working teachers, overall, tend to name the material and social support, and the active life position of other staff members among the most important motivating factors.

Similar data were shared by the scholars in Nizhegorodsky State Pedagogical University named after Minin. Their findings show that during the course of studies the students' intent to become teachers fades. By graduation, 50% of the students report that they motivation to pursue a teaching career has declined significantly compared to the first year in college, while 10% by this time make a decision to never work in school. The authors suggest that for approximately 1/3 of the students the decline in motivation is explained by the academic challenges and changes in the structure of motives (Arkhipova et al., 2019). While gnostic motives dominate this structure for the first year students, with professional motives lagging far behind, by the third- and fourth-year at the university the motivational structure gets

reversed, and professional motives get to the first place (Arkhipova et al., 2019). Similar results were recently shared by the scholar from Samara university (Nikulina, 2019), who studied the motivation of graduate (master's) students. She has discovered that for these students' professional motives also go first, with the motive of creative self-realization following closely, and gnostic motives being only on the third place. The author points out that the learning process itself, the scientific discoveries, the quality of knowledge and the opportunity for academic development are not as important for her respondents as the professional development and creative self-realization (Nikulina, 2019).

Overall, the amount of scholarship on the subjective appeal of the teaching profession, and the possible causes of particular trends in its dynamics, demonstrates that the topic has been drawing interest of scholars, but its full theoretical and practical potential is yet to be realized.

### **3. Research Questions**

This study has focused on the following questions:

1. What is the students' dominant motivation for choosing a pedagogical university?
2. What are the core motives of the subjective appeal of the teaching profession for the students of a pedagogical university?
3. What changes happen in students' perception of teaching profession during their course of study?
4. What changes happen in the structure of motives and needs which define the students' attitude towards their future profession?
5. What are the possible causes of changes in subjective appeal of the teaching profession during the course of students' study at a pedagogical university?

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The ultimate goal of this study is to find out how the subjective appeal of the teaching profession changes during studying in a pedagogical university. Based on that, we make suggestions on how to improve the students' satisfaction of the education process and how to ensure their interest in pursuing teaching careers upon graduation.

This study operates within the following hypotheses:

- The choice of a pedagogical university has a non-specific motivation and is not necessarily related to a conscious choice of a teaching profession in the future.
- The dominant motivation of those getting a degree in Education changes from external to internal during the course of their study.
- The subjective appeal of the profession decreases as the students learn more about its specifics.
- The lower is the subjective appeal of the profession, especially for students who originally did not intend to pursue a career in teaching, the less likely they are to choose a teaching profession after graduation.

## 5. Research Methods

All the participants of the study were offered the following questionnaire:

1. Why did you choose a pedagogical university?
2. Why did you choose this particular specialization (major)?
3. Do you agree that you understand well what your future profession is like?
4. If you could reapply and start your degree all over, would you choose a pedagogical university?
5. What are your plans for after graduation?
6. Using the scale from 1 to 5 (1 being the lowest) rate the organization of various forms of education in our university.
7. Using the scale from 1 to 5 (1 being the lowest) rate the education process in general.
8. Does your experience in our university coincide meet your expectations?
9. Are you satisfied with the practical trainings and field experience?
10. Using the scale from 1 to 5 (1 being the lowest) rate the level of the support you get from the university.
11. How would you evaluate your level of theoretical preparation as a professional in your field?
12. How would you evaluate your level of practical preparation as a professional in your field?

The collected data were subjected to a quantitative and qualitative analysis. Students' t-test for dependent samples and Pearson Correlation Coefficient were used to ensure the veracity of the results.

## 6. Findings

Our study included 1169 students of the Yaroslavl State Pedagogical University named after K. D. Ushinsky (37.1% of all undergraduate and graduate students currently enrolled).

Participants indicated that their level of satisfaction by the learning process is, on average, 3 out 5. Only 41.1% of them intend to pursue a teaching career, about 22.9% plan on working in a related field. Hence, currently the effectiveness of the university in preparing educational specialists is a little over 60%.

Among the most common reasons for choosing a pedagogical university were named: quality education, childhood dreams, high acceptance rate, easy classes, affordable tuition rates, safety choice.

Based on the leading motives, all the respondents joined one of the two groups: those oriented towards a teaching profession, and those interested in getting a non-specific degree and not planning to work at school.

Among the students of the first group, more than a quarter (26%) were pursuing a childhood dream of becoming a teacher. This conclusion is confirmed by the relevant correlation between the two coefficients ( $r=0,071$ ,  $p<0,05$ ). Their decision to become teachers was impacted by their teachers at school ( $r=0,078$ ,  $p<0,01$ ), friends ( $r=0,094$ ,  $p<0,01$ ), or the university recruitment policy ( $r=0,090$ ,  $p<0,01$ ). Moreover, students oriented towards a quality education, marked the combination of entrance exams and the tuition rates as insignificant for their decision ( $r=-0,121$  and  $r=-0,163$ ,  $p<0,01$ ). They are certain about their choice, easily envision their future profession ( $r=0,247$ ,  $p<0,01$ ), intend to pursue a

career in education ( $r=0,113$ ,  $p<0,01$ ) and are willing to continue studying to become better specialist ( $r=0,065$ ,  $p<0,05$ ). Such positive characteristics of a typical representative of the first group proves that the subjective appeal of the profession and the conscious professional choice (made by choosing a pedagogical university over others) lead to the students accepting responsibility for their learning and contribute to the quality of their preparedness and desire for self-improvement.

The second group of respondents presents a drastically different picture. These students chose the pedagogical university for variety of different reasons, among them: “the admission rate was high”, “it is not hard to study here”, “tuition rates were acceptable”, and “just in case” (safe choice for those hoping to get into different universities but failing). Not only becoming a teacher has never been their dream ( $r=-0,121$ ,  $p<0,01$ ), but many of them were pressed to apply by their parents ( $r=0,083$ ,  $p<0,01$ ), hence, their choice can hardly be called conscious or independent. These students do not see the profession of a teacher as a socially important one ( $r=-0,166$ ,  $p<0,01$ ), but the choice of entrance exams was one of the most important factors influencing their choice ( $r=-0,282$ ,  $p<0,01$ ). Taken such a pragmatic motivation for choosing a pedagogical university, they mostly have a very vague idea about their potential future job ( $r=0,105$ ,  $p<0,01$ ). Had they been given a choice (question 4), they would never apply for a pedagogical university again ( $r=-0,307$ ,  $p<0,01$ ), and definitely would not choose the same major ( $r=-0,238$ ,  $p<0,01$ ). They do not plan on pursuing careers in education and hope to get the second degree in a different sphere ( $r=0,201$ ,  $p<0,01$ ). Teaching profession is not appealing to them, at least partially, because they do not quite understand the specifics of the job (question 3).

We would like to conclude this part of our study with a suggestion to hold professional entry tests for majors in Education. This way, already during the admission process prospective students could decide if they, indeed, enjoy working with kids and feel the calling for teaching. If it turns out that to be opposite, the students could avoid graduating from a pedagogical university out of despair and choosing a teaching career because there were no other jobs available. Otherwise, the quality of education in both, schools and universities, will keep declining.

The next stage of our study focuses on the changes happening to these motives as the students get older, progress in their studies and get the taste of their future profession through various practical trainings.

The check of statistically significant difference showed that the “quality education” motive is reliably important only for the first-year students ( $p=0,02$ ). We connect this result with the successful advertisement, the reputation of the university, and, possibly, parents’ opinion. Later this motive loses its importance and for the older undergraduates and graduate students is replaced by the “easy to get accepted” motive ( $p=0,028$  и  $p=0,02$ ). Besides, starting from the second year, the satisfaction level of the learning process is heavily impacted by the economic factors, specifically, the tuition rate ( $p=0,01$ ). That is also the reason for students to improve their academic performance, provided there are state-funded places to which they can be moved if they are in a good academic standing ( $p=0,33$ ).

First- and second-year students choose their majors based on the assumption that teaching profession is high-paid ( $p=0,03$ ) and that it will be easy for them to find a job in education ( $p=0,017$ ). These motives, however, disappear, as the students get to know what the profession actually is in terms of time consumption and wage rates.

An interesting correlation has been discovered in the surveys of the senior students. Those of graduating students who intend to pursue a career in education, demonstrate the dominance of the “carrying the family tradition” motive ( $p=0,083$ ), while those not planning on becoming teachers justify their choice of the pedagogical university by the set of the entrance exams (accidentally matching the ones they chose to take graduating from high school) ( $p=0,05$ ).

The choice of major for the first- and second-year students is often defined by the vision of teaching professions as socially important ( $p=0,04$ ). However, as the students get older and progress with their studies, this romantic image fades and can even be reversed. Moreover, only the first-year students show confidence in their choice of the profession ( $p=0,02$ ). Already by the third-year the following position starts dominating: «I have a very blurred vision about my chosen profession, but I hope that it will become clear when I start working” ( $p=0,31$ ). Students from the second, more pragmatic group, who were initially not interested in a pedagogical degree, by the fourth year demonstrate the dominance of the different position: “It is important for me to get a (any) degree; the most important thing is to graduate”. For the students in the first group, for whom teaching was the childhood dream, the profession does not lose its appeal, although it acquires a more realistic character.

Only the first-year students responded positively to the provocative question “If you could reapply and start your education all over, would you choose this university?” ( $p=0,013$ ). At the same time, the question of the same nature asking about the choice of a major, got positive answers from first- and second-year undergraduate and graduate students (correspondingly  $p=0,07$ ;  $p=0,05$  and  $p=0,08$ ). We connect such loyalty to both, the university and their majors, among the first- and second-year students with the lack of information about the nature of the future profession. Higher level courses dealing with the special professional competences start only in the third year of studying, and during the first two years students are required to take courses forming universal and general professional competences. Getting accepted to the university is an event important and significant enough for the first- and second-year students, and their satisfaction of the learning process is impacted mostly by their academic standing, not the preparedness to work in their professional field, which seems so far away.

Seniors and graduate students, by contrast, talk more about the conscious choice of their specialization track and the desire to stay in the profession. In response to the inquiry for the plans after graduation, they declare that they plan on working in education in their own or closely related field. The higher the year, the more students tend to give such response, with 82% of graduate students answering along these lines ( $p=0,038$ ).

## 7. Conclusion

The data confirmed that the choice of a pedagogical university and a teaching-related major does not have a particular motivation, and, as such, is of a feebly conscious nature. Subjective appeal of the future teaching profession plays an important role in forming this motivation.

As early as in the first year we can see the heterogeneity of the students’ body based on the attitude to the potential profession. All the students can be divided into two big groups, which we called “Romantics” and “Pragmatics”. In the course of students’ study, the appeal of the profession and the



leading motives for choosing it change differently within these groups, although they share the general tendency for the motivation to change from external to internal.

First-year students' motivation forms under the influence of advertisement, the reputation of the university, family traditions, favorite schoolteachers. It is often romantically tinted and is rarely connected to the pragmatic or economic interests. Within this group the commitment to the profession persists and gets more conscious and realistic by graduation. For the second group the teaching professions do not have a subjective appeal. Their primary goal is to get any kind of a degree with minimal losses. In the course of studying, the dominating motivation can change, which leads to students moving from one group to the other. As they start realizing the challenges of the profession and the necessity of the constant learning and self-development, they start evaluating their learning process differently and formulate different requirements to its content. The more students get to know about their potential profession, the lower the subjective appeal of this profession gets, but the more conscious becomes the decision to either pursue teaching career or not. In turn, the higher is the deliberateness of their professional choice, the more likely the graduates are to connect their life with education.

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