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"Go or stay?" - Examination of Career Leaving among Vocational Teachers

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Abstract: The bringing back of the quality of education to the work of teachers has prompted a whole range of teacher research at international level. The OECD's international teacher researches sought to explore the possibilities of attracting and retaining teachers as well as the conditions for ensuring their professional development by interpreting the teaching profession as a complex vocation. (OECD, 2009) Some developed countries have to face significant teacher shortages. International reports identify teacher shortages as a serious problem with the expansion of education and the loss of career prestige (Mihály, 2002). Despite the fact that, unlike in many European countries, there is no shortage of teachers in the absolute sense in Hungary, the first signs of this are also visible also in our country (Ság-Ercsei, 2012a and 2012b). However, the problem of teacher shortages and career abandonment is mostly not a quantitative issue, but a structural one. It is therefore important to understand the characteristics of the career leavers and the reasons for leaving the field. In this study, we formulate the theoretical basics of our study done among vocational teachers.

Keywords: career abandonment, vocational teachers, career motivation

Introduction

The bringing back of the quality of education to the work of teachers has prompted a whole range of teacher research at international level. The OECD's international teacher researches sought to explore the possibilities of attracting and retaining teachers as well as the conditions for ensuring their professional development by interpreting the teaching profession as a complex vocation. (OECD, 2009)

Some developed countries have to face significant teacher shortages. International reports identify teacher shortages as a serious problem with the expansion of education and the loss of career prestige (Mihály, 2002). Despite the fact that, unlike in many European countries, there is no shortage of teachers in the absolute sense in Hungary, the first signs of this are also visible also in our country (Ság-Ercsei, 2012a and 2012b). However, the problem of teacher shortages and career abandonment is mostly not a quantitative issue, but a structural one. It is therefore important to understand the characteristics of the career leavers and the reasons for leaving the field. In this study, we formulate the theoretical basics of our study done among vocational teachers.

Career Leaving and its Causes

Looking at the national and international literature of career abandonment, we discovered a great number of aspects.

Identification of the Concept of Career Leaving

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It may also be difficult to define the concept of career leaving, since while this question is easier to define for a public knowledge teacher, it is less clear for a vocational teacher, e.g. an engineer-teacher. Can an engineer-teacher who performs educational tasks in a corporate environment or an engineer who, although being in an engineering position, organizes and conducts the training of newcomers as early entrants?

Career abandonment as a negative term may indicate that the abandonment of the learned profession occurs because the training output structure is inadequate, i.e. the labour market does not need yet or no longer needs the relevant qualifications. (Dávid-Horváth, 2010.). However, it can be seen that there is a large shortage of vocational teachers in the education system, but it would also be worth seeing that they are absorbed immediately by other areas of the economy, i.e. training alone carries in itself a high degree of conversion and opportunity on the labour market.

A job undertaken outside the learned profession offers a flexible possibility of using qualifications, since the vast majority of the professions that can be studied can sometimes be used in a narrower and sometimes in a wider range of jobs. In other words, the phenomenon can be described by identifying the usefulness of the qualification and the extent to which it is being used. However, the purpose of the analysis and examination is not to describe the usefulness or usability of vocational teacher training, but merely to identify the reasons for it, since the resulting shortage of specialists must be compensated in some way and the phenomenon (career leaving of teachers) must be reduced in order to alleviate the structural teacher shortage in the education system.

Veroszta (2012) also pointed out that there is a significant structural distance from teaching employment to the employment of engineer-teachers. After all, they typically have a low share among public servants, a higher than average private sector weight, and a high proportion of foreign-owned employers with more than 1000 employees. In other words, engineering teachers do use the knowledge acquired during their tertiary education, but in a different sphere.

The training of engineer-teachers at college level before the Bologna system was reinforced also by the fact that the graduate engineer-teachers, most of whom had completed their training both in engineering and pedagogical fields in so-called parallel training, received a double degree, i.e. both engineering and teacher qualifications at the same time. These diplomas were and are characterised by a high degree of conversion on the labour market according to our DPR studies (Bacs-Bán, 2013)

Causes of the Career Leaving

When analysing the reasons for career leaving, we can first look at socio-demographic factors, i.e. age, time spent in the career and sex. Research shows that age can have a combined effect with stepping on career and leaving the teaching field. (Sass, 2012) According to some researchers, beginners who start late (over the age of 40 years) will be less likely to leave the career than their younger teaching colleagues (Hancock, 2008), but this is partly linked to lower wages, as young people may reach higher starting wages in other occupations. Those over the age of 40-50 are considered stable in these researches, while those over 50 are again seen as leaving the career. Despite the introduction of the teacher's career scheme, the wages of a secondary school junior teacher and the starting salary of an engineer show considerable distance. According to profession.hu data, the former can expect a net income of HUF 180,000 and the latter 250,000 HUF net.

Although the literature sees a correlation between the sex and the career leaving (Sass, 2012), where men's career leaving behaviour is identified, it is mainly because they show a greater degree of dissatisfaction with the profession and a susceptibility to other areas of education (e.g. administration). However, we must state that this cannot be shown among our vocational teachers. The likely reason is that the specific nature of the degree itself may result in the possibility of getting employment in the field of engineering, either as a woman or a man, or choosing a different career path. No other studies in Hungary have seen a link between career abandonment and sex (Varga, 2007).

The literature also suggests that there is a correlation between the fact that the graduate had completed his pedagogical studies beside work or already had a teacher's degree when he entered the career. Although our study asked about the pedagogical studies, we did not find a correlation between the factors, while our previous studies (Bacs-Bán, 2014; Bacs-Bán, 2015.) have demonstrated that the training of engineer-teachers under the Bologna system strengthens the stay on the career. The trainees choosing this degree course remain more likely in the teaching profession because of their love of the teaching career, their vocation, their profession than

because of the urging need for a qualification, they stay or in some cases they have been placed on the teaching career.

The literature links the career leaving with the topic of the taught subjects and the teacher specification (Varga, 2007), although our study did not cover the subjects taught, but examined a special group, since the group of vocational teachers, be they engineer-teachers or vocational trainers, really teaches a special field of training. In the possession of their skill, they are facing several tasks in their work, as their training and qualifications prepare them for the teaching of several subjects or groups of subjects at the same time, or of an entire profession. It is a well-known fact that these groups abandon both the teaching career and the field of education at a higher rate, and, if not in formal education, but, for instance, also in corporate training, they would have a significant role and task to play, as our accomplishment studies have shown (Bán, 2006; Bacsa-Bán, 2013.) that their professional and pedagogical knowledge, i.e. education and teaching knowledge, make all this possible. International studies have shown that teachers teaching science subjects are more likely to leave the career than secondary school teachers teaching other subjects, and their analyses also indicated that teachers leaving the career were more likely to specialise in a particular field (Paksi et al, 2015a and 2015b). This also leads to an examination of the reasons for the career leaving of vocational teachers, since it is known that leaving the profession is characterised by a higher number of groups whose qualifications allow them to take up more occupations and which may result in higher average salary. Applying it to teachers in Hungary, Varga presented the significant correlations in detail (Varga, 2007). When asked about the main factors of leaving the teaching career, the respondents were most likely to name dissatisfaction with income and dissatisfaction with personal circumstances, followed by professional content and prestige inadequacy, and other reasons such as lack of dedication, feeling incompetence and excessive administration. The same conclusion was reached in the national survey on teacher career leaving (Paksi et al 2015a and 2015b).

The work of teachers is also clearly decisive in the development of the income situation, this known relationship has already been pointed out by Veroszta (Veroszta 2012), according to which leaving the teaching career results in a significant income surplus; and we know from his examinations that the career-leaving advantage of the engineer-teacher is very significant; as well as the professional and content of the work also. All in all, engineer-teachers, using their knowledge acquired in higher education flexibly and moving away from the public education sector, utilize all that which brings them significant financial and satisfaction benefits. Our test results are almost identical to national data, i.e. there is almost the same trend among vocational educators as in the study of social prestige in general among teachers (Paksi et al 2015a and 2015b).

Conditions of the Career Leaving and staying on the Career

Studies revealing the reasons for teachers' career leaving focus on the main factors influencing staying on teacher careers. Prather-Jones (2011a and 2011b), who made a survey among teachers teaching students with special education needs, identified 8 elements among the factors for staying on the field. He divided the factors into two groups, into the group of individual characteristics and that of grants arriving from the direction of the institution. Several authors have linked additional factors to the model of staying on career:

- satisfaction, mental health (Berry, 2012.);
- support received during the start of a career (Parker-Ndoye-Imig, 2009.);
- collegial relations, administrative support;
- role of helping associated professions (school psychologists) (Gallant 2009.).

These aspects are accompanied by the characteristics of the institutions employing teachers, such as:

- work load;
- size of class and group;
- type of the maintainer of the institution;
- geographical location of the institution;
- the school atmosphere;
- role of collegiality;
- measure of the individual support;
- role of the head of the institution and the atmosphere of organisational trust;
- characteristics of the composition of students. (Paksi et al, 2015.)

The research, both on national and international level, has shown that career abandonment is mostly associated with dissatisfaction with the teaching career; i.e. dissatisfaction with the career is the main motivating factor for career leaving. In some studies, it has also been pointed out that the potential for professional development (Cha and Cohen-Vogel, 2011) has a strong positive impact on career satisfaction, as well as the prestige of the career, which has been quite low in the case of teaching professions in recent decades, and that a loss of prestige may explain the extent of the level of career abandonment – the latter of which we will return to later. The career abandonment was also examined by a number of researchers in Hungary, the studies (Chrappán, 2012.; Veroszta, 2012.) focus on groups of teachers whose satisfaction is low and thus have a high rate of career abandonment. These researches drew attention to the fields of engineer-teachers and trainers in general, as well as to the fields of vocational teaching as a result of the aforementioned aspects (Bacsa-Bán, 2014).

If the career leaving is high, what can be done about it? One of the most important factors in staying on the track is track satisfaction (Chrappán, 2010). In the least satisfied group of teachers interviewed in the DPR studies, a significant number of former students in vocational teacher training were present. This is due not only to the primary income dissatisfaction of career leavers, but also to the different conversion of teacher diplomas, which has become significant in the field of vocational training. Although the teacher career model has been introduced, teacher incomes in vocational training are still far below the income that can be obtained in the competitive sphere through an employment of the same duration (Chrappán, 2010).

Consequently, the authors of the above studies (Varga, 2007; Mihály, 2010; Chrappán, 2010.; Chrappán, 2012.) conclude that the diploma of teacher, vocational trainer and engineer-teacher still seems to be the most marketable on the labour market. This includes the finding that vocational teachers/trainers have dual identities, professional and teacher identities, which in their employment positions provide them with transition, access between school and many areas of the labour force market. (Bükki, 2017.)

Career Motivation

It is known from international and domestic researches and theories that the reasons for choosing a teaching career can be external (extrinsic) and internal (intrinsic) reasons (Paksi et al, 2015.) which can be further broken down into individual reasons and motivations related to the work/career of the teacher. These reasons were also partially revealed in our own investigation. Individual internal motivations e.g. self-realisation were not present, but social contribution, the importance of teaching work at social level and the motivation for transfer of knowledge were clearly present in the answers of our interviewees. (Paksi et al 2015a and 2015b) Just like the love of children so much talked about in the literature (Chrappán, 2012; Kocsis, 2002.). Among individual external motivations, freedom and leisure time appeared as motivational factors. The possibility of professional development and job security did not play a role here, unlike in other studies (OECD, 2009, Klinic-Watt-Richardson, 2012) and opportunities to build intellectual careers (Nagy, 1998, Hajdú, 2001, Jancsák, 2010), but the compatibility with family and personal life was present (Butt-MacKenzie-Manning, 2010).

Work-related external motivational elements such as positive experiences with previous teaching/learning were given by our respondents precisely as a reason for non-advice, the presumed employer expectations, the teacher community atmosphere, the working conditions were also raised in this context. They are all mentioned both in the domestic literature (Chrappán, 2012; Kocsis, 2002; Varga 2010) and in the international literature (Manuel-Hughes, 2006).

All in all, the literature emphasises the existence of intrinsic motivations as the determining factors of staying on the career and the choice of career. However, the teacher study carried out between 2013 and 2015 (Paksi et al 2015a and 2015b) also found that their career choices were mostly based on 5 factors: the appropriate skills; shaping the future of children/adolescents; the importance of working with them, but also the internal value of the career and the previous teaching/learning experience have shaped their career choices.

This was confirmed by our investigation based on these literature findings.

Summary

By analysing the factors of the choice of the teaching career, we can find that the choice of the teaching career is a multi-factorial, multi-player situation, the most important stages of which are: the choice of teacher training, the employment on the teacher's field after graduation, and, finally, the decision to stay on the career. Looking at the career leaving of teachers, it should be noted that there is a smaller proportion of graduates in teaching

positions who have obtained their diplomas in technical, IT, legal and economics groups of profession. But, all in all, those with lower earnings attainable as non-teachers and teachers are found in teaching positions. This is becoming a very important aspect for vocational teacher training graduates!

The risk of leaving the career could be reduced. Reversing career abandonment, i.e. returning to teaching, can be attainable, and appropriate changes in education policy can trigger it. The correlations between career leaving and motivation should be incorporated into the training, as well as making it part of the career model for practising teachers on the field.

Scientific Ethics Declaration

The author declares that the scientific ethical and legal responsibility of this article published in EPESS journal belongs to the author.

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