

The Teaching Profession Today: what Motivates Young Students? Case Study

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Abstract

In Romania, teaching is a serious, respected profession, governed by specific regulations set by the Ministry of Education. Choosing a career in education can be a rewarding decision for several reasons: either through vocation or passion, or through a desire for personal development through training. The rewards in both cases consist of the positive emotions that this generates. Furthermore, it is a field that aims to promote fulfilment – a concept where one regularly updates oneself in order to achieve well-being. Nowadays, young people operate in a way that is connected to performance, a process of individualisation where they want to differentiate themselves from others. But the questions that arise are: "How can one become a teacher in this era, where young students are looking for good reasons and motivations to choose their career in the form of constant self-actualisation, in a dynamic that seems limitless?" or "What would be the profile of a teacher as a trainer of behaviour in the current era?" In our study, we aim to find adequate answers to these questions through a questionnaire that we administered to a sample of second-year students (specialising in Romanian, French and English) who are enrolled in the psycho-pedagogical module and are preparing for a career in teaching. Their responses will be analysed in order to obtain the most appropriate interpretations.

Keywords: *Teacher; motivation; student(s); career; training;*

1. Introduction

The Romanian Ministry of National Education (2024) is the main responsible for managing the education system (public and private). The education system comprises different levels, such as primary education (primary schools), secondary education (secondary schools) and higher education (universities). To become a teacher, you generally need to obtain a university degree in education or in the specialisation/subject you want (or would like) to teach, as well as specific teaching certification to carry out teaching activities.

Initial training is usually provided by universities or teacher training colleges, and teachers can also take continuing education courses to improve their skills.

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In terms of working conditions, teachers in Romania have employment contracts in accordance with national legislation, with salaries that vary according to the level of education and professional experience, taking into account the grades obtained over time: in pre-university education – permanent, grade 2 and grade 1, and positions held in university education – assistant, senior assistant, lecturer and university professor).

Currently, the education sector faces various challenges, particularly in terms of funding, resources and the renovation of educational infrastructure. Changes in this area are constantly evolving. The younger generation who would like to embark on a career in education, whether public or private, must be open to challenges of all kinds. There are many situations that young students, future teachers, face; the current realities (underfunding of the public sector, reduced school grants, standards for teachers working 20 hours physically but worth 40 hours per week) only hinder the smooth running and continuation of the education process (Ministry of Education, 2025).

In the current social climate, teachers must overcome several challenges in order to achieve significant results from their students. We have identified a few key challenges to success:

- a) the need to integrate new digital technologies: whether digital textbooks, supplementary textbooks, online teaching materials, or teaching-learning-assessment software, there is an increasingly acute need to adopt and master digital tools to make the educational process more interactive and adapted to younger generations (Kersenti, 2004, p. 187);
- b) adaptation to “online”, “virtual”, “remote”, “teleworking” or “hybrid” modes, adaptation to crisis situations: The Covid-19 pandemic has shown us that the teaching process can be carried out with the help of technology, or “machines”, and has forced us to make rapid transitions, requiring flexibility and innovation on the part of both teachers and learners;
- c) managing diversity in the classroom: this means dealing with increasingly heterogeneous groups of students with varied educational needs, including those with special needs. Teachers are confronted with unusual, even exceptional situations: on the one hand, they must identify and reduce situations of social inequality and work to provide equal access to educational success, despite socio-economic differences; on the other hand, they must use integration/inclusion programmes that provide valid solutions to offer students normal learning conditions. In addition, teachers must identify pupils with psychological or social difficulties, support them and accompany them throughout the teaching-learning-assessment process;
- d) administrative regulations: teachers are faced with tasks outside their usual classes, which they must complete within a specific time frame, with

deadlines; they must therefore “juggle” an often complex framework, with administrative requirements that affect the time that should be allocated to the teaching-learning process itself.

2. Teaching in Romania: vocation or profession?

Without a doubt, the teaching profession offers many satisfactions and successes that are linked to the talent and creativity of the person who is the primary “partner” in the act of education: the teacher. In no particular order, these could include:

- the creation of an open and innovative learning environment, a professional, high-quality atmosphere, with immediate results from pupils;
- motivation and commitment to continuing education, which ensures students' academic performance, and work on applied competitions, which maintains students' motivation and promotes their success;
- the proposal and participation in dynamic extracurricular activities, which contribute to the development of students' active contributions and the achievement of “on-the-spot” results in terms of their collaboration and solidarity. This type of “success” also strengthens the bonds of friendship between colleagues, families and communities in order to support education;
- commitment to and creation of study platforms, contribution to the development of modern digital education, which welcomes a large number of participants, teachers and pupils, into the teaching process, and through the development of educational networks. This also contributes to pedagogical innovation and the development of new teaching methods, integrating technology and differentiated pedagogy. All these successes are visible, quantifiable and measurable very quickly, almost immediately.

When choosing a career in teaching, young students have motivations that are not exhaustive but are quite strong:

- passion or vocation for education – there is often talking of a “vocational crisis” (Mons, & Périer, 2016, p. 15): teachers play a fundamental role in shaping “personalities”, as individualised people, by positively influencing their intellectual, moral and social development. They believe in the importance of education in building a better world. They enjoy teaching others and are passionate about educating and having a lasting impact on others;
- positive influence on others: this means being a role model (physically and morally) for pupils, a benchmark for education and training, a type of person who encourages pupils and gives them self-confidence; teachers are, in fact, guides and supporters for pupils on their educational journey;
- sharing knowledge: the teaching profession allows teachers to continue exploring new subjects while helping others to do the same. This involves

passing on what they love, promoting opportunities and helping students discover new interests and passions (Huberman, 1989, p. 7);

- career and personal development: teaching allows you to develop communication, classroom management and teaching skills, and promotes personal growth and continuous learning. Young students training to become teachers feel a sense of accomplishment and pride when they see their pupil's progress, succeed and flourish, which can be extremely rewarding. Teaching allows you to remain curious, broaden your horizons and constantly improve your skills;

- workplace stability: a career in teaching offers a certain degree of job stability, regular holidays and benefits. This profession is stimulating and rewarding in terms of the daily activities carried out with pupils, as dynamic professional experiences. Sometimes we talk about "...*stabilisation*". This refers to a definitive commitment (on the part of both the individual and the institution)..." (Mons, & Périer, 2016, p. 38);

- contribution to the development of the community/society in general: young students consider it a great opportunity to share their knowledge and contribute to the education and development of pupils, with a positive impact on society in general. Young teachers have the opportunity to become part of a local or national educational network, contributing to the dynamics of the entire community: "In their daily work, teachers do not simply fulfil their main role of imparting knowledge. They are called upon to take on two other roles: that of educator, which is traditionally assigned to them, and that of quasi-social worker, which is increasingly clearly assumed, particularly in priority education areas" (Maresca, 1999, p. 43);

To better understand the motivations and aspirations of young students who are future teachers, we have created a questionnaire on the theme of "A career in teaching". This questionnaire, which we created ourselves, provides an objective view of the motivations, challenges and satisfactions that a career in teaching might offer, as well as a comprehensive and complex picture of the realities faced by students who choose a teaching career or who are considering becoming teachers at some point in their lives. The questionnaire consists of 13 questions that we administered to a sample of 31 students, including 27 female (F) and 4 male (M) students in their second year of study at the Faculty of Arts, French-speaking stream, specialising in Romanian-French, English-French and Applied Modern Languages. The responses were collected as follows:

1. *Do you plan to become a teacher in the near future?*

☒ Yes – 22F, 2M

☒ No – 5F, 2M

☐ Maybe ---

2. *What are your main motivations for considering a career in teaching? (Tick all that apply)*
 - ☒ To pass on my knowledge and skills – 15F, 0M
 - ☒ To contribute to the development of young people – 25F, 2M
 - ☒ Help build a better society – 9F, 2M
 - ☒ Share my passion for a discipline – 13F, 0M
 - ☒ Work in a stimulating and dynamic environment – 17F, 1M
3. *To what extent do you think that becoming a teacher is a vocation or a mission?*
 - ☒ Very strongly – 27F, 1M
 - ☐ Quite strongly ---
 - ☐ Not very strongly ---
 - ☐ Not at all ---
4. *What do you think are the main reasons that motivate you to become a teacher? (Multiple answers possible)*
 - ☐ The desire to pass on knowledge ---
 - ☒ The desire to contribute to the education and development of young people – 27F, 2M
 - ☒ Job stability – 27F, 2M
 - ☒ Passion for a specific subject – 27F, 1M
 - ☒ The desire to have a positive social impact – 27F, 1M
5. *What aspects of the teaching profession appeal to you most?*
 - ☒ The relationship with students – 27F, 4M
 - ☒ The opportunity to innovate in teaching – 27F, 4M
 - ☐ Job stability ---
 - ☐ The remuneration ---
 - ☒ The opportunity to continue learning yourself – 27F, 4M
6. *In your opinion, what are the main challenges facing teachers today? (Multiple answers possible)*
 - ☒ Managing mixed-ability classes – 27F, 4M
 - ☒ Excessive administrative workload – 27F, 4M
 - ☐ Pressure related to student results ---
 - ☐ The need to integrate new technologies ---
 - ☐ Social and professional recognition ---
7. *In your opinion, what qualities are essential to being a good teacher? (Rank in order of importance) – all*
 - ☒ Patience
 - ☒ Creativity
 - ☒ Organisation
 - ☒ Ability to motivate
 - ☒ Empathy

- [x] Flexibility
8. *Do you already have experience in teaching or coaching?*
 [x] Yes (please specify): 10F (7 French, 2 English, 1 nursery school teacher)
 [] No ---
9. *In your opinion, what are the main difficulties faced by teachers?*
 [x] Managing difficult classes – 27F, 4M
 [x] Lack of resources – 27F, 1M
 [x] Heavy workload – 1F, 1M
 [x] Difficulty motivating all pupils – 27F, 4M
10. *In your opinion, what are the advantages of becoming a teacher today? (Multiple answers possible)*
 [x] The opportunity to have a positive influence on students' lives – 27F, 4M
 [] Job stability ---
 [x] The opportunity to contribute to society – 27F, 4M
 [x] Flexible hours (depending on the level of education) – 27F, 4M
11. *How do you see your future as a teacher?*
 [x] As a committed and innovative professional – 27F, 4M
 [x] As a trainer or specialist in a specific discipline – 27F, 4M
 [x] As a mentor or advisor to students – 27F, 4M
12. *What are your expectations of teacher training?*
 [x] To learn modern teaching methods – 27F, 4M
 [x] Develop my classroom management skills – 27F, 4M
 [x] Understand current educational issues – 27F, 4M
 [x] Obtain professional recognition – 27F, 4M
13. *Would you like to specify any other motivations or thoughts regarding your plan to become a teacher?*
 Students' responses:
- "Foreign languages should be promoted in all schools, both public and private. I want to be a French teacher and act as *an ambassador* for the French language in my city" (Alexandra, 2nd year, Romanian-French).
 - "Students who want to become teachers also become *advisors* and educational *counsellors*" (Monica, second year, English-French).
 - "Teachers are like *magicians* who must *enchant their students*" (Florentina, second year, Romanian-French).
 - "Romanian, French and English should remain compulsory subjects in our education system forever" (Gabriela, 2nd year, Modern Languages).
 - "French isn't that difficult; getting students to understand French is down to *the teacher's magic*" (Robert, 2nd year, Modern Languages).

3. Interpretation of data and questionnaire results

The first question concerns young students' desire to become teachers in the near future, i.e. in a year or two. Their responses concern 22 girls and 2 boys, which corresponds to a percentage of 81.48% of girls and 50% of boys who want to find a job in the pre-university education system, which indicates a strong desire to enter the workforce.

The second question concerns the main motivations for choosing a career in teaching. Most of the students who responded (25 girls – 95.59% and 2 boys – 50%) want to contribute to the cultural development of younger generations, while 17 girls (62.96%) and 1 boy (25%) want to work in a stimulating and dynamic environment. 15 female students (55.55%) want to pass on their knowledge and skills to others, 13 female students (48.14%) want to share their passion for a subject, and finally, 9 female students (33.33%) and 2 male students (50%) are motivated by a desire to help build a better society.

The third question asks young students for their opinion on the vocation or mission of teaching: 27 girls (100%) and 1 boy (25%) consider teaching to be both a strong vocation and a mission.

The fourth question focused on the main reasons motivating students to become teachers. Twenty-seven girls (100%) and two boys (50%) considered that there were two good reasons that inspired them to become teachers: firstly, the desire to contribute to the education and development of young people and, secondly, the stability of the workplace. Almost the same percentages, 27 girls (100%) and 1 boy (25%), were recorded for two other good reasons: a passion for a specific subject and the desire to have a positive social impact.

The fifth question focuses on the most attractive aspects of the teaching profession. 100% of respondents consider that the teacher's relationship with their pupils and the opportunity to innovate and continue learning themselves are the aspects that play a key role in the teaching-learning process.

The sixth question concerns the main challenges of the teaching profession; all girls and boys consider that they will face difficulties such as “managing heterogeneous classes” and “excessive administrative work”.

The seventh question asks respondents to identify, in order of importance, the essential qualities of a good teacher: all gave answers that included “patience, creativity, organisation, ability to motivate students, empathy and flexibility”.

The eighth question asked students about their possible experience in teaching or professional coaching. The boys have no professional experience to date, while 7 girls (%) have taught French in various situations (they replaced permanent teachers for a few days or weeks in cases of medical problems or

leave) and 2 girls have taught English in the same situations; only one girl has had a short period of experience as a teacher (approximately two months) at a nursery school.

The ninth question focuses on the main difficulties that students expect to encounter as future teachers: 100% of girls and boys consider it difficult to manage challenging classes and motivate all students in a class, while 27 girls (100%) and 1 boy (50%) believe they will face difficult situations if there is a lack of resources. Only 1 girl and 1 boy (25%) consider the heavy workload to be a major difficulty in the smooth running of the teaching-learning process.

The tenth question refers to the advantages of becoming a teacher at the present time and how young students perceive the privileges granted to teachers. 100% of respondents believe that they will have the opportunity to intervene in a positive way and influence the lives of students, while also contributing to the development of society. A major advantage of being a teacher is the flexibility of working hours. Paradoxically, even though this is a workplace in the public education system, the response "job stability" received no credit.

The eleventh question concerns the students' personal opinion about their future as teachers. The three possible answers were chosen unanimously. The students responded in unison that they see themselves as "committed and innovative professionals", "trainers or specialists in a specific discipline" and "mentors or advisors to their students".

The twelfth question focuses on students' expectations regarding teacher training. They chose (100% convinced) all possible answers: "acquiring modern teaching methods", "developing their classroom management skills", "understanding current educational issues" and "obtaining professional recognition". These responses reflect the students' desire for personal development and professional integration immediately after completing their university studies.

In response to the last question, both girls and boys expressed other opinions about their plans to become teachers and "finalised" a sort of teacher profile. They stated that:

- foreign languages should be promoted in all Romanian schools;
- Romanian, French and English should remain compulsory subjects forever;
- students who want to become teachers should also become educational "advisers" and "counsellors";
- teachers are a kind of "magician" who must "enchant their pupils";
- French is not that difficult; helping students understand French depends on the teacher's "magic".

After answering the questions on the form, the students agreed to write a rough outline of the ideal teacher, according to their imagination and preferences, who would have the following characteristics:

- be attentive to the needs of learners, always listen to them and, therefore, know how to adapt the “scientific content” of their lessons to each learner;
- have good teaching skills;
- have a good memory;
- be empathetic, know how to help at all times;
- be a mediator, a trainer, a language entrepreneur;
- not be rigid, but passionate about teaching and well-informed in the field;
- be communicative, warm, and altruistic;
- be a good time manager, be well organised and have a predictive attitude, anticipate future activities, know how to plan activities and have a sense of anticipation;
- know how to use software and digital tools that support the entire teaching-learning-assessment process;
- be able to work well in a team and communicate effectively with your “team” of students;
- be persistent and consistent in your teaching career, be responsible at work and know how to combat stress;
- know how to prepare students and support them in their learning journey;
- be like a “small entrepreneur” in your vocation as a teacher;
- developing one’s skills and keeping up to date with new developments in the field of teaching;
- be a trainer of behaviour, of future citizens who will be deeply attached to their personal values.

4. Conclusions

Today’s teachers face complex challenges linked to social and technological developments, but they continue to play a fundamental role in the development of individuals and society, making significant progress despite an often difficult context, apart from the current one. Even if we were to ‘wrap up’ our conclusions, there will always be questions from student teachers about trust, tolerance and respect, open-mindedness towards learners, creativity, initiative, flexibility and self-assessment. These are essential skills for the teaching-learning-assessment process and will help the education process as a whole. In our opinion, these questions would be as follows: to what extent could personality development be an explicit educational objective? Could this be transformed into a pedagogical objective? In our opinion, this would be difficult to say. How can we help learners exploit their strengths and overcome their weaknesses? How can

we reconcile the personalities of learners? These are questions that require open-ended answers...

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