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## **Student Teachers' Motivation to Become a Secondary School Teacher in England and Norway**

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**ABSTRACT** This study sought to explore the reasons given by student teachers in influencing their choice to become a secondary school teacher. Some 105 student teachers in Stavanger and 112 student teachers in York completed a questionnaire at the beginning of their postgraduate teacher training course. Twelve student teachers from each sample were then interviewed. Both groups reported being strongly influenced by enjoying the subject they would teach, liking to work with children, and the fact that teaching would enable them to use their subject. This is broadly in line with other studies. However, there was tendency for more of the student teachers in the York sample, compared with the Stavanger sample, to place value on 'wanting to help children succeed' and 'liking the activity of classroom teaching'; conversely, there was a tendency for more of the student teachers in the Stavanger sample, compared with the York sample, to place value on 'long holidays' and 'social hours'. These tendencies may in large part be accounted for by the fact that more of the Stavanger sample were already teaching, were older and had family commitments.

In recent years a number of studies have been reported which have explored the reasons why people choose to become schoolteachers. Much of the impetus for the research on this topic has come from a concern in many countries that not enough people are making this career choice, resulting in a shortage of high quality applicants to teacher training courses. Although the picture varies somewhat from country to country, international reviews of the state of teacher recruitment indicate that this is a widespread problem (e.g. Neururer, 1995; Fernández, 1996).

Particular attention in this research has been paid to the reasons given by student teachers for choosing a career in teaching. Such research (e.g. Brown, 1992; Kyriacou & Kobori, 1998; Chuene et al, 1999) indicates that the reasons fall into three main categories:

(i) *Altruistic reasons*. These reasons deal with seeing teaching as a socially worthwhile and important job, a desire to help children succeed, and a desire to help society improve.

(ii) *Intrinsic reasons*. These reasons cover aspects of the job activity itself, such as the activity of teaching children, and an interest in using their subject matter knowledge and expertise.

(iii) *Extrinsic reasons*. These reasons cover aspects of the job which are not inherent in the work itself, such as long holidays, level of pay, and status.

Studies of student teachers in various countries as far afield as Brunei Darussalam (Yong, 1995), England (Reid & Caudwell, 1997), South Africa (Leemers, 1998) and the USA (Young, 1995) indicate that the most frequently given reasons for choosing teaching are:

(i) wanting to work with children;

(ii) wanting to contribute to society; and

(iii) enjoyment of teaching.

However, it is noticeable that there are some marked differences in the rankings of various reasons from country to country. This may well be a reflection of the differences between countries in their social, economic and cultural context, and in the general image held of teaching as a career. For example, when national economies are buoyant, and jobs other than teaching are more readily available, the number of high quality applicants to teacher training tends to decrease. Yong's (1995) study of student teachers in Brunei Darussalam found that almost 15% of his sample reported that they had chosen to enter teaching as a last resort. One would expect that this proportion is likely to decrease when the economy is buoyant and other jobs are more easily available, and increase when the economy is flat.

The importance of extrinsic reasons, such as long holidays, has also been reported in several studies, such as that conducted in Cyprus by Papanastasiou & Papanastasiou (1998). Interestingly, they reported that the Government of Cyprus guarantees all newly qualified teachers a job after graduation and their teaching post is then made secure after 2 years of teaching. 'Immediate employment after graduation' was cited as the strongest reason by their sample of student teachers for choosing teaching as a career.

In some countries, an important factor is that many students who are unable to gain a place at university to do a first degree in the subject of interest to them (such as English, mathematics, science) see a degree-based teacher training course as offering an alternative access to higher education. For example, a study of mathematics student teachers in South Africa conducted by Chuene et al (1999) reported that most of the student teachers in their study were motivated mainly by a desire to gain a diploma in mathematics rather than a desire to become a teacher of mathematics.

Another important factor, which again varies from country to country, is the perceived status of teaching as a career, and the extent to which wanting to do a high status job is an important motivating factor in people's choice of

career. Certainly in a number of countries where there is a problem in recruiting teachers, measures to raise the status of the profession have been taken to encourage more well-qualified applicants. For example, a survey by Shen & Hsieh (1999) in the USA highlighted the pressing need to raise the status of teaching there, and indicated that factors such as improving teachers' salary, working conditions, opportunity to exercise leadership (viz. teachers taking important decisions themselves rather than being told by policy-makers what to do), and increasing entry and exit standards were perceived by future teachers to be measures that would achieve this. In addition, changes in the prevailing values within a country can also influence recruitment patterns. For example, Awanbor (1996) noted in his study of student teachers in Nigeria that an increasingly materialistic value system prevalent in Nigeria had, to some extent, devalued teaching as a career choice.

Despite such differences between countries, few comparative studies have been reported which have collected data in two countries using the same research instrument. This study was thus designed with the intention of comparing the responses regarding motivation to become a secondary school teacher for a sample of student teachers in York, England, with that for a sample of student teachers in Stavanger, Norway.

### **Data Collection**

The questionnaire used in this study consisted of a single sheet with the following heading: 'Here is a list of possible reasons why someone might decide to become a secondary school teacher. How much did each of these reasons influence your decision to become a teacher?' A list of 20 reasons was then presented in the order shown in Table I, and the student teachers were asked to tick one of three boxes for each reason, which were labelled 'very important', 'fairly important' and 'not important' respectively. The items in this list were selected to cover the range of reasons highlighted in previous research (e.g. Brown, 1992; Kyriacou & Koberi, 1998; Chuene et al, 1999) and pilot work by the authors.

The York sample comprised 112 student teachers attending a 1-year full-time postgraduate teacher training course at the University of York, England. All the student teachers were training to teach in secondary schools, in one of five curriculum areas (English, History, Mathematics, Modern Foreign Languages and Science). In England, the 1-year full-time postgraduate teacher training course is the main route of training for secondary school teachers. The York sample comprised 21 student teachers of English, 23 in history, 12 in mathematics, 24 in modern languages, 28 in science, and four unspecified.

The Norwegian sample comprised 105 postgraduate student teachers attending either a 1-year full-time teacher training course or a 2-year part-time teacher training course, based in Stavanger (or nearby Haugesund). Most of the student teachers in the Stavanger sample were training to teach in senior high schools, with a smaller number training to teach in junior high schools. In

Norway, senior high school student teachers may train to teach either 'academic subjects' (e.g. Norwegian, social science) or 'vocational subjects' (e.g. health care, engineering). The Stavanger sample comprised 50 student teachers training for academic subjects, 38 in vocational subjects, and 17 unspecified.

In Norway, student teachers in senior high schools typically work as salaried pre-certified teachers, prior to and during their course, and it is also quite common for student teachers to register for the 2-year part-time course rather than for the 1-year full-time course. Approximately 70% of the Stavanger sample were registered for the part-time course. It is also important to note that in Norway, in so far as entry requirements to postgraduate teacher training are concerned, academic and vocational qualifications are considered to be of equal merit. As such, whilst student teachers of academic subjects usually have a degree, student teachers of vocational subjects will usually have an equivalent high status occupational qualification (a *fagbrev*).

For both the York and Stavanger sample, the questionnaires were completed by the students at the start of their teacher training course (in English at York, and in Norwegian at Stavanger). In order to minimise any problems stemming from using a version of the questionnaire in two different languages, the Norwegian version also included the statements in English. However, the point has been made concerning comparative studies, that despite efforts to find an exact translation, the meaning of each statement will still always be context dependent (see Hjerm, 1998).

A follow-up interview was then conducted with a random sample of 12 student teachers in York and 12 student teachers in Stavanger. This follow-up interview focused on four reasons where there appeared to be a difference in the questionnaire responses of the York and Stavanger samples.

### Findings and Discussion

The percentages of the student teachers in each sample who rated each of the 20 reasons as 'very important' in influencing their decision to become a teacher are shown in Table I.

The five reasons which received the highest ratings for the Stavanger sample were as follows.

- I enjoy the subject I will teach (84.5%).
- It enables me to use my subject (74.3%).
- I like working with children (56.3%).
- There are long holidays (51.9%).
- It is a socially worthwhile job (49.0%).

The five reasons which received the highest ratings for the York sample were as follows.

- I want to help children succeed (92.0%).
- I enjoy the subject I will teach (87.5%).

- I like working with children (87.1%).
- It enables me to use my subject (67.9%).
- I like the activity of classroom teaching (66.4%).

From this comparison we can see that both groups reported being strongly influenced by enjoying the subject they would teach, liking to work with children, and the fact that teaching would enable them to use their subject.

Reasons	Stavanger data ( <i>n</i> = 105)	York data ( <i>n</i> = 112)
1. The job offers good job security	21.4	25.2
2. The job has social hours	38.8	9.2
3. The level of pay is quite good	8.9	5.5
4. There are long holidays	51.9	21.4
5. I enjoy the subject I will teach	84.5	87.5
6. I like working with children	56.3	87.1
7. I want to help children succeed	45.6	92.0
8. The job has a varied work pattern	45.6	54.5
9. It enables me to use my subject	74.3	67.9
10. I like the activity of classroom teaching	35.6	66.4
11. It is a socially worthwhile job	49.0	54.5
12. I am good at my subject	32.4	38.2
13. I can get a job as a teacher in any part of the country	23.3	34.2
14. My subject is important to me	35.9	63.4
15. My subject is an important subject for pupils	42.6	58.0
16. Being a teacher can help improve society	26.7	50.5
17. Being a teacher can lead on to other jobs in the future	35.9	17.0
18. Other people encouraged me to become a teacher	13.7	8.0
19. It can help me to get a job teaching in another country	4.9	22.5
20. My experience as a pupil gave me a positive image of the job	16.5	18.8

Table I. Percentage of postgraduate student teachers in each sample who rated each of these reasons as a 'very important' reason influencing their decision to become a secondary school teacher.

It is interesting to note that for both samples the two reasons 'the level of pay is quite good' and 'other people encouraged me to become a teacher' received a relatively low rating as an important influence.

These findings are broadly in line with other studies, including previous research in England (Reid & Caudwell, 1997) and Norway (Bergem et al, 1997). However, Table I also indicates some areas where there appear to be differences between the two groups. The most striking differences were, on the one hand, the much higher ratings of 'wanting to help children succeed' and 'liking the activity of classroom teaching' for the York sample, and, on the other hand, the much higher ratings of 'long holidays' and 'social hours' for the Stavanger sample.

In order to help interpret these differences, follow-up interviews were conducted with a subsample of the student teachers in York and Stavanger, to explore their views about these four reasons. These indicated that the

differences between the two groups might appear in part to be a reflection of the fact that more of the Stavanger sample contained older students (over 30 years of age) who had family responsibilities and already had experience of teaching prior to completing the questionnaire. Indeed, many of the Stavanger student teachers referred to why they 'became' a teacher (using the past tense) in contrast to the York student teachers, who tended to refer to 'becoming' a teacher (in the future). This would appear to make the Stavanger group slightly less idealistic and slightly more concerned with practical matters. This is illustrated by the following quotation from a Stavanger respondent:

*as a woman, I have a family and children; I can be free when they're free during holidays and leisure time, and I can work when they are in bed. A flexible school timetable is very important.*

Indeed, more of the Stavanger sample explicitly referred to their family commitments. Teachers in secondary schools in both countries are contracted to work 195 days. A typical school day in Norway would be from 8 am to 2.30 pm, compared with a typical school day in England lasting from 8.45 am to 3.30 pm. This allows teachers who are also parents to get home at about the same time as their children who are at school and well before the end of the typical working day for most other careers, and also to be on holiday at the same time (more or less) as their children who are at school.

However, it was also noteworthy that in the interviews with the York student teachers, several of them argued strongly that teaching did not have social hours. The following remarks by one of the York student teachers illustrates this well:

*Social hours, what social hours? If you have to spend a lot of time in the evenings and at weekends marking pupils' work and preparing lessons, I can't see how you can say teaching has social hours. There are many jobs where at the end of the working day you can go home and completely forget about the job. You can't do that in teaching.*

However, some student teachers, both in Stavanger and in York, compared teaching very favourably to other jobs, as is illustrated by the following statement by a student teacher in Stavanger:

*I have had different kinds of occupational experiences. I have had to work weekends, on public holidays, at Christmas, New Year, Easter, evenings and night shifts. All of a sudden I now feel that I can live.*

Both the Stavanger and the York students interviewed were generally positive about the importance of 'wanting children to succeed' and 'liking the activity of classroom teaching' as reasons for becoming teachers. One student teacher in the York sample stated:

*I feel I have done well out of the Education system, and I feel I now have a chance to help others be successful, and it appeals to me to do a job that I feel is really worthwhile and important. I knew teaching was not a well paid job, when I*

*applied. I suppose I have always wanted to be a teacher and I think it's because I like the idea of helping others.*

Another York student teacher said:

*This is my main motivation. I tend to feel better when I am working to help others rather than myself.*

Many of the student teachers also stressed the important role of teachers in helping pupils to succeed, by developing their social skills and their self-confidence (as well as by developing their academic abilities). For example, one of the student teachers in Stavanger said:

*teaching children social skills, teaching them what's right and wrong, and to take responsibility for themselves and their own learning – I think these things are important.*

Another student teacher in Stavanger said:

*They come from different home backgrounds, and I think that the teacher is an important resource, not just in subject terms, but also in relation to social skills, ordinary up-bringing. They are going to meet people of different ages when they go out to work and they need to know how to conduct themselves, and I think it's important from a teacher's position that we want to help them get on, that we want to make a contribution, that we are going to help them.*

Overall, however, there was a tendency for the comments made by the York sample to be generally more enthusiastic about the importance of helping children to succeed. A possible reason for this difference may well be the fact that the Stavanger sample included those training to teach vocational courses mainly aimed for the post-16 sector, and as such the reference to 'children' (as against students or young adults) might well have been seen by them to be less relevant to their role.

Finally, in response to a request to comment further about liking the activity of classroom teaching, it was very interesting to note that whilst the York students had been very positive about this when they filled in the questionnaire at the start of the course, the statements made during the interviews conducted with a subsample 5 weeks later were not quite as positive. During these 5 weeks, the student teachers in York were spending 2 days a week in schools, and were beginning to get a more realistic view of classroom teaching and this may have toned down their expectation of enjoying classroom teaching. The following comment by a York student teacher illustrates this:

*Although it seems rather daunting now, the process of classroom teaching remains an interesting and rewarding challenge.*

Another said:



*I do like the activity of classroom teaching but I realise that it can be an extremely stressful experience at times. I have only had positive experiences in the classroom so far, so I have yet to see the other side.*

In contrast, because the Stavanger student teachers already have teaching experience, their views about liking the activity of classroom teaching may be more stable. Their answers to this question tended to recognise that being in the classroom was an essential part of teaching and if you did not like this, you would find teaching difficult or boring. One student teacher said:

*If you don't like the classroom then you'd better not be a teacher, because the classroom is where you do your work.*

### **Conclusion**

The findings of this study indicate that most of the student teachers reported being strongly influenced in their choice of teaching in a secondary school as a career by enjoying the subject they would teach, liking to work with children, and the fact that teaching would enable them to use their subject. This is broadly in line with other studies. However, there was a tendency for more of the student teachers in the Stavanger sample, compared with their York counterparts, to place value on long holidays and social hours, although this tendency may in large part be accounted for by the fact that more of the Stavanger sample were already teaching, were older and had family commitments. As such, we need to be cautious in interpreting the extent to which any differences between the two groups relate to differences in the characteristics of student teachers in the two countries (e.g. sex, age, teaching experience) or differences in the working conditions of teachers in the two countries.

Such findings may provide a useful basis for further exploration of why people choose teaching as a career, which in turn may lead to more effective action to improve teacher recruitment and retention. Whilst many recruitment campaigns tend to highlight altruistic reasons for choosing teaching as a career (e.g. to help children succeed), the data here suggest that more could be made of the fact that teaching enables people to continue working in a subject area they enjoy, and certain aspects of the working conditions of teachers (such as long holidays and social hours) may also be seen by many potential applicants to be attractive features of the job, although some other aspects of the working conditions of teachers (such as the level of pay) may need to be improved before they will act to encourage applicants.

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