

IMPROVING THE TEACHING PROFESSION THROUGH UNDERSTANDING EDUCATORS' SELF MOTIVATION[#]

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The present study was conducted on 221 distance education students to investigate their self motivation towards teaching as a profession. Data were collected via an open ended questionnaire to elicit their perceptions on reasons in favor or otherwise of the teaching profession. Data were analyzed qualitatively using the phenomenological approach. Findings indicated that teachers have several reasons in favoring the teaching profession, such as, teaching being a noble profession, as an opportunity to contribute towards students' advancement, and development, and to fulfill self interest, and satisfaction. Another category that emerged from the findings, is the perception of teaching as a challenging career. On the other hand, reasons for not favoring the teaching profession include low salary, lack of promotion opportunities, unsatisfactory leader behavior, variety of workload, student discipline problems, uncooperative colleagues, and uncondusive working environment. Some suggestions given by the respondents to improve self-motivation included understanding of personal traits, selection of good school leaders, review of educational system, salary scale, and workload. Implications of the study are discussed to understand current status of teachers' self-motivation in relation to individual well-being, and self-actualization.

An area of interest in education is motivation for teaching. This is evidenced by the amount of research that had been conducted in this area. The need to know as to what factors attract people to join the teaching profession had been discussed frequently. It is universally agreed that teaching is an important and noble profession (see, for example, Anucia, 1981; Langodon, 1999; Noran, 1990). The society in general is concerned about the quality and type of individuals being selected into the teaching profession.

According to Ginzberg's theory of occupational choice (Ginzberg, Ginzberg, Axelrad, & Herma, 1951), an important

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consideration in the process of occupational choice is the 'self' factor. The individual analyses his capabilities, interests, and personal values related to the occupation. One 'self' factor is the perception about one's own personality being suitable for teaching (Noran, 1990). A second 'self' factor is liking for children. Another motive for teaching is altruistic in nature. For instance, the desire to educate the younger generation (Anucia, 1981), an opportunity to be of service to others (Noran, 1990) are examples of altruistic motives.

It is more difficult now for schools to attract good teachers and also to retain them in schools. The most frequently mentioned reason that teachers give, for the difficulty schools have in getting and keeping good teachers, is 'low pay'. School administrators and even new teachers agreed that teachers are underpaid. However, they do not believe that money can bring about the improvement in quality of teaching. There are other measures as well which could be more effective such as reducing class size. Many teachers would even sacrifice higher pay if they could work in schools with well behaved students, motivated colleagues, and supportive administrators (Langdon, 1999).

Other reasons given to schools having problems in getting good teachers are 'geographic locations' of the district, 'working conditions', and 'teacher shortage'. The main reason teachers give for leaving, is the same one they give for schools not attracting good teachers that is 'low pay' (35%), working conditions (17%), lack of support from administrators, community and parents (15%), weak or poor administration (9%), work load (6%), better job opportunities (5%), lack of respect (3%), and burnout (2%). The specific problem with working conditions that teachers mentioned most often, is 'poor student discipline' (Langdon, 1999).

Why do teachers go into teaching? What makes teaching an enjoyable life long career for some, while others leave the profession? This paper will discuss those aspects of teaching that contribute to, and detract from the appeal of a teaching career for both prospective and practicing teachers.

The objective of the present study was to investigate qualitatively the self motivation of distance education students towards teaching as a profession. This paper will present findings based on the following research questions:

- 1) What are the factors that make teachers 'like' teaching as a career or profession?

- 2) Why teachers 'do not like' teaching as a career or profession?
- 3) What are the suggestions given by teachers to improve their self motivation?

METHOD

Sample

The participants were 221 distance education students, majoring in the Teaching of English as a Second Language (TESL). Participants were full time teachers of primary schools situated in various states in Malaysia, and they were following the distance education courses on part time basis at Universiti Putra Malaysia. At the end of the 4 years program, they will be awarded bachelor degree in education. Currently their highest academic qualification is a teaching certificate from teachers training colleges.

Procedure

This study employed a qualitative research approach. It consisted of two stages. The questionnaire were administered at the beginning of a face to face session for the distance education students in an 'Educational Management' class, offered as an elective course to the respondents. On a piece of paper they were requested to write reasons why they like teaching, and why they do not like teaching, as a profession. They were also requested to give suggestions regarding how to improve their self motivation. After 20 minutes the paper were collected by the researchers. The objectives of the study were explained to the respondents before they answered the questions.

The student's answers were regarded as the research data. Data were analyzed by an inductive approach known as phenomenography. Phenomenography is a research method for mapping qualitatively different ways in which people experience, conceptualize, perceive, and understand various aspects of phenomena in the world around them (Marton, Dall'Alba, & Beaty, 1993).

Data analysis produced descriptive category on teacher's perceptions about why they like teaching as a profession and otherwise, and what are their suggestions to improve self motivation. This mean that the analysis was not tied to any predetermined classification scheme.

RESULTS

Factors Favoring the Teaching Profession

Data analysis indicated the emergence of six themes as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Frequencies and Ranks of the Reasons for Liking the Teaching Profession (N = 221)

Themes	<i>f</i>	Ranks
1. Fulfill self interest and satisfaction	144	1
2. Contribute to students' advancement	104	2
3. Noble profession	101	3
4. For self improvement/challenging career	52	4
5. Security	52	5
6. Ambition	38	6

As indicated in Table 1, the highest frequency among the themes emerged for teachers to be in favor of the teaching profession, is that it can 'fulfill self-interest, and satisfaction' ($n=144$). One of the reasons given by teachers was having more holidays. People in other professions, may not enjoy the same benefits as what the teachers are enjoying. The extra time that they have during school holidays means a lot to teachers as they can be more prepared for the coming session. Working in an environment suitable to their self need, was another common reason given by teachers for being satisfied with their profession. The teachers also pointed out shorter working hours as another reason for them to be happy in their profession. Apart from that, they enjoyed more autonomy as teachers especially, when they are with students in the classrooms. Another reason for them to be satisfied, is when their students excel in examinations. This is a rewarding experience for teachers, which seldom happens to others in different professions. Another reason given by teachers who experience satisfaction, is the respect that they receive from society. According to a common sense approach, teaching has gained considerable respect from many quarters as being a noble profession. Finally, teachers feel that they are happy as they can contribute some

good deeds to the society in terms of knowledge that they disseminate to students.

The second theme as shown in Table 1 is teachers' contribution to students' advancement ($n=104$). This is achieved by ensuring that students get new knowledge, skills, and learn new attitudes during the course of teaching. Another way of helping students' advancement is by changing their behavior. For instance, through teachers' efforts, students with problematic behavior will change for the better. With less behavioral problems among students, efforts can be focused on students' advancement in knowledge acquisition. Teachers also feel that they should educate students in order to make them equipped to face the world, or the era of globalization. Teachers can also contribute to students' advancement by producing a knowledgeable generation.

According to the results, teachers regard their profession as a noble one, and agree that it is a respectable career ($n=101$). As a noble profession, teachers are happy, and proud to be called teachers. Among the reasons given by teachers, who regard teaching as a noble profession, are their ability to control negative behavior of students, teachers are responsible persons and they help students in becoming good citizens.

Another theme which is of considerable importance highlighted by participants, is self improvement and a challenging career ($n=52$). Teachers regard teaching as a career which allows them to improve themselves in terms of building self-confidence, and communication skills. Besides, they also have the opportunity to acquire new knowledge through reading as well as the opportunity to further extend their studies. In the course of acquiring new knowledge, they improve their self discipline and their self-potential.

A considerable number of participants ($n=52$) have chosen security as a reason for favoring the teaching profession. Compared to the other professions, teaching is a stable job which can provide the security for teachers who are dedicated to their job, and loyal to the profession.

Finally, respondents ($n=38$) have also revealed that they are in favor of the teaching profession because it is their ambition to become a teacher. Even though the frequency is the lowest, this represents the number of teachers who joined the teaching profession because of their interest and choice to become teachers. Dedication to the job and high intrinsic motivation can be expected from such teachers.

Table 2

Frequencies and Ranks of Reasons for not in Favor of the Teaching Profession (N=221)

Themes	<i>f</i>	Ranks
1. Teaching load	89	1
2. Low salary, and lack of promotion opportunities	69	2
3. Students' discipline problems	63	3
4. Unsatisfactory leader behavior	53	4
5. Pressure from various quarters	41	5

Table 2 illustrates the reasons why teachers do not like teaching as a profession. A considerable number of teachers ($n=89$) have highlighted variety of workload as a common reason for not liking the teaching profession. Their workload not only include packed teaching hours but also co-curricular activities. Very often they have to bring home whatever work they can not complete in school. They also have to do plenty of paper work and other clerical duties other than teaching. With all these workloads, teachers find that they are left with very little time to help, or guide the weak students in their lessons. Teachers also feel that the workload given to them, is not well distributed. Some teachers are burdened with a lot more work than others. With a variety of workload that they have on their shoulders, many feel that they experience stress either emotionally or mentally. A number of teachers even have reached a stage where they are not able to cope with the workload.

With regard to salary, teachers ($n=69$) feel that they are paid low salaries compared to their workload and their responsibilities. Apart from that, they are not given extra allowance if they work overtime. Except for those who hold important posts in school, ordinary teachers are not given any traveling allowance if they have to perform their duties away from school. As far as promotion opportunities are concerned, the teachers feel that the process is very slow, and there is a lack of opportunities for promotion. They also believe that the opportunities to upgrade themselves professionally are very limited. Compared to other professions, they believe that the teaching profession is not so bright in terms of promotion, and professional development.

One of the responsibilities that teachers have, is to mould and guide students in their learning, and development. This is a

challenging task for teachers as the students bring a lot of problems to school as complained by the teachers ($n=63$). Some of the problems mentioned by the teachers are undisciplined students, bold, and stubborn students, disrespect for teachers, disobeying rules, absenteeism, and vandalism. The discipline problems among students have become one of the major reasons for teachers not liking the profession.

Teachers also have to face problem with the school management, especially with unsatisfactory leader behavior ($n=53$) Unsatisfactory leader behavior includes irrational leader, and unwise decision making, especially when emotion plays an important part. They also have to face a leader who does not manage well and does not allow two-way communication to take place. Sometimes the system is beurocratic which makes, life more difficult for teachers to get things done. Sometimes teachers have to work under a school principal who is not caring or have no concern for teachers' well being. It is also common for teachers to work under pressure from top management.

Teachers ($n=41$) indicated that they have to work with pressure from various quarters. For instance, parents have high expectations for their children to do well in school. The society as a whole including politicians expect schools to produce students with high achievement. Sometimes teachers face problems with uncooperative parents or intervention by parents who do not understand the teachers' problems. With these problems, teachers feel that they are under pressure, have to satisfy various groups, and at the same time have to carry out many responsibilities as a teacher in the classroom.

DISCUSSION

According to Bishay (1996), it is crucial that we determine what increases teacher motivation. Many factors have been examined in an attempt to identify those factors, which promote teacher motivation, but pay incentives have been found to be unsuccessful in increasing teachers' motivation. Findings of this study also concur with Sylvia and Hutchinson (1985) who concluded that teacher motivation is based on the freedom to try new ideas, achievement of appropriate responsibility levels, and intrinsic work elements. This is similar to the views given by the teachers in the current study who agreed that the teaching profession can fulfill their self interest and contribute to students advancement. Improvement in teacher motivation will directly influence students achievement, as mentioned by Bishay

(1996) "It is likely that high levels of teacher social interaction on the job are linked to higher motivation levels; thus, the possibility that enhanced levels of teacher motivation will lead to superior student achievement cannot be dismissed" (p.147).

Sergiovanni (2001) mentioned that much is known about how to arrange job dimensions, and work conditions within schools so that teachers are more personally satisfied, and are inspired to work harder, and smarter on behalf of teaching and learning. He argued that when teaching is intellectually satisfying, professionally rewarding, and just plain fun for teachers, they are likely to keep improving their effectiveness as the years go by. Students are more successful learners as a result.

The response pattern of teachers in this study indicated that Malaysian teachers like teaching as a profession mainly because they are more personally satisfied, and this concurs with Peters and Waterman (1982) who suggested that high motivating conditions are present in schools where teachers find their work lives to be meaningful, purposeful, sensible, significant, and they view the work itself as being worthwhile, and important. The teachers in this study also mentioned that they enjoy more autonomy especially in the classrooms and this finding supports that of Hackman and Oldham's (1980) work on motivation that motivating conditions are present when teachers have reasonable control over their work activities, and are able to exert reasonable influence over work events and circumstances. The reasons given by teachers in favor of teaching such as to fulfill self interest and satisfaction, responsibility in contributing to students advancement, noble profession, and for self improvement, are similar to attributes of teachers functioning as 'origins' which means that teachers perceive their behavior as determined by their own choice. Origins have feelings of personal causation, that is the locus for causation of effects in their environment lies within themselves. Personal causation is an important dimension of motivation (Sergiovanni, 2001). He mentioned that people strive to influence the events, and situations of their environment, to be origins of their own behavior.

One factor that had a significant impact on job satisfaction was job responsibility (Bishay, 1996). Results of this study indicated that teachers enjoyed teaching because of the levels of challenge, and authority they have, fulfill self interest, and satisfaction and contribution to students' advancement and these seem to be more associated with personal factors or internal work motivation. Internal work motivation means how much an individual experiences positive feelings from effective performance (Sergiovanni, 2001).

Sergiovanni (2001) also stated that teachers with strong positive attitudes towards teaching had students whose self-esteem was high. Students seem to recognize the effectiveness of teachers who are satisfied with their teaching performance. Zigarelli (1996) concluded that among the factors found to be significant predictors of student performance are achievement-oriented school culture, principal's autonomy in hiring teachers, and high teachers' morale.

The reasons given by teachers for not favoring the teaching profession can be categorized as external factors such as work load, low salary, students' discipline problems, unsatisfactory leadership and pressure from various quarters. The response patterns in this study differs from the findings by Langdon (1999) who found that low salary was the main reason for teachers leaving the profession. In the present study, the teachers placed low salary as the second reason for not favoring the teaching profession. This shows that the teachers in this study did not regard salary as the main factor which made them dislike the teaching profession.

Another difference in ranking of the factors for not favoring the teaching profession was found for work load. In Langdon's study (1999) work load was the fifth factor given by teachers as to why they leave the teaching profession. However in the present study, work load was the first reason given by teachers for not favoring the profession. Work load seems to be a great problem among Malaysian teachers. One reason for the problem could be due to the large class enrolment in Malaysian schools and teachers have to handle a considerable amount of paper work in addition to their teaching load as well as co-curriculum activities. A smaller class size would be ideal for teachers to cope with the daily routine.

Suggestions to improve teachers' self-motivation

1. Teachers should be given more opportunity to carry out their work, and be able to use a variety of teacher talents, and skills. Apart from that, teachers should be given substantial freedom, independence, and direction in scheduling work, and deciding classroom organizational and instructional procedures.
2. In order to evoke the psychological state of meaningfulness and responsibility, teachers should be provided with direct and clear information on the effects of their performance. School leaders should be able to ensure the right balance between level of skills and level of challenge, because when challenge is high, principals need to provide the necessary support on the skill dimension to

- avoid frustration. In areas where teacher skill levels are high, challenging opportunities still need to be provided to ensure total absorption of one's work.
3. School principals should be able to utilize some job characteristics model because it provides principals with a conceptual framework allowing them to make informal decisions on the nature and structure of the work related to teaching, and help teachers feel that their job is meaningful. In addition, teachers are able to learn the actual outcomes of their efforts, with feelings of control and responsibility for students' achievement.
 4. School principals should be able to provide supportive school climate, provide teaching and learning environment that are characterized by collegial values, and implement shared decision making. All these factors will contribute to cooperative relationships, higher levels of interaction, higher levels of personal responsibility for outcomes, and higher standards of expectations to make teaching a more meaningful, and significant profession. School principals should consider giving rewards associated with the performance instruments such as recognition, achievement, feelings of competence, exciting, challenging, interesting, and meaningful work.

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