

## **“I never thought I would become a teacher”**

### **Estonian and Finnish students' motivation to become mother tongue and literature teachers**

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**Abstract.** The aim of the study is to examine the motivation of Estonian and Finnish students to become mother tongue and literature teachers. The empirical data were collected through an e-questionnaire distributed to all graduating student teachers in this field at the University of Tartu, Estonia, and the University of Helsinki, Finland, in the spring term of 2014 (26 + 35 students). The respondents expressed their opinions on 27 statements on a scale ranging from one to four, with the option of commenting on each one. The analysis of the data showed that the majority of students in both countries were strongly or moderately motivated to teach and thought that their subject was very important on the societal level. The most significant difference between the groups was in how the social status of the teaching profession was perceived: according to the respondents, teachers are poorly or rather poorly valued in Estonia, and highly or rather highly valued in Finland.

**Keywords:** mother tongue and literature; student teachers; teacher education; motivation; career choice; cross-national comparison; Estonia, Finland

## 1. Introduction

Teaching is one of the most important and influential professions in all democratic societies. In multicultural, multilingual and heterogeneous modern societies the teaching profession has become even more demanding and more multi-faceted than before. At the same time, however, Europe and the United States have been facing increasing problems in attracting qualified teachers to the profession and retaining them. Young teachers are also changing career and suffering from burn-out (Han & Yin 2006; Heinz 2015; Lin et al. 2012: 228; Rots et al. 2010; Rots et al. 2014: 279–280; see also Eren & Vefa Tezel 2010; Richardson & Watt 2005, 2006).

The status and popularity of the teaching profession are facing problems all over the world, and this has affected the number of students pursuing teacher education also in the Nordic and Baltic countries (Dinham & Scott 2000; European Commission 2013a). So far Finland has been the only exception, but a slight slow-down in applicants to teacher training has also been evident there in the past few years. It remains to be seen whether it is a temporary or a stable trend. In Estonia, however, the problem is severe: the teaching workforce in Estonia is ageing, and there is already a shortage of teachers in certain subject areas. As in some other European countries, 70% or more of teachers in Estonia are aged 40 or older. (Löfström & Poom-Valickis 2013)

As the teaching profession is confronting problems, it is necessary to develop teacher education and examine student teachers' motivation for choosing a teaching career and their experiences in teacher-education programmes (Heinz 2015). There is research evidence that if student teachers' motivations are not taken into account in teacher education, their interest in pursuing a teaching career will suffer (Watt et al. 2012: 800–80). The aim of the survey discussed in this article is to describe the motivation of Estonian and Finnish students to become mother tongue and literature teachers.

Estonia and Finland are a relevant pair for comparing views of mother tongue and literature student teachers.<sup>1</sup> Both countries have succeeded very well in PISA tests of literacy, but in the latest assessments Estonia has been on a rising and Finland on a declining curve (Leino et al. 2019; OECD 2018a, 2018b). Second, the societal structure in both countries is relatively similar, although there are also significant differences. Third, both countries are facing the challenges of preserving the importance of national languages in a situation where English is gaining ground in numerous fields of society. The role of mother tongue and literature education is crucial in this respect.

The study at hand is a comparative, small-scale case study, the intention of which is to raise discussion about the status and attractiveness of the teaching profession in Estonia and Finland. It also aims at providing visions for developing teacher education in these neighbouring countries. As Heinz (2015: 259) points out, making comparisons between the motivating factors in different countries can enhance an understanding of the impact of cultural, economic and other factors on student teachers' career motivations. Due to the relatively small size of our data, however, the results are not generalizable.

## 2. Teacher motivation

Teacher motivation has been examined rather extensively in research literature, and the initial motivation for teaching has generally been defined as intrinsic, altruistic or extrinsic (Han & Yin 2016; Heinz 2015; Kyriacou & Coulthard 2000; Watt & Richardson 2012). According to a number of studies, intrinsic and altruistic factors are decisive among students who choose teaching as a career (Heinz 2015: 261). The students

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'mother tongue' is used in the present Estonian national curriculum as well as the present Finnish national curriculum. In current research, the term tends to be replaced with 'first language', but in our article we follow the practice adopted in the curricula. Moreover, the focus in our survey was on first- not second-language teachers.

nevertheless typically have a prevailing combination of motives, not just one type (Bergmark et al. 2018; Löfström & Poom-Valickis 2013: 105). Student teachers from different countries give very similar answers about their motives for their career choice: personal fulfilment, working with young people, good working conditions and a social school environment, lifestyle, prior teaching experiences and professional status have proved effective factors, as have salary and a wish to contribute to the betterment of society (Eren & Vefa Tezel 2010: 1417; Lin et al. 2012: 229; Löfström & Poom-Valickis 2013: 105; Reeve & Su 2014; Watt et al. 2012: 804). However, as Richardson and Watt (2006) point out, earlier motivators such as the desire to work with children and adolescents in a people-oriented profession, and job-related benefits such as security, a good pension and long holidays may not be as dominant nowadays as they used to be. According to their findings, new skills needed for diverse and multicultural environments encompass social, behavioural, civic, economic and technological dimensions (Richardson & Watt 2006: 30).

One of the dimensions in teacher motivation is efficacy, which has received much attention in educational literature (e.g. Rots et al. 2007). As Duffin et al. point out, teacher efficacy has been measured and defined in numerous ways. There is, however, research evidence that it comprises three factors: efficacy for managing the classroom, for engaging students, and for using different instructional strategies. (Duffin et al. 2012) Not only do teachers need to acquire content and pedagogical knowledge and skills, they also need the confidence to transfer such knowledge and skills to their pupils. Because efficacy plays a decisive role in how future teachers deal with their pupils, and because it affects learning and motivation, developing efficacy is a key element in teacher-education programmes (Bakar et al. 2012: 497–498; Duffin et al. 2012; Lamote & Engels 2010.) Creating autonomy in pupils is essential because in the sociocognitive view of learning, knowledge is not only transferred to pupils but created in the interaction between the teacher and the learner (Reeve & Su 2014).

Efficacy enhances motivation, and motivation helps to develop efficient pedagogical skills: these two concepts are tightly tied together. Efficacy predicts teacher enthusiasm, commitment to teaching, job satisfaction, constructiveness towards pupils, and general optimism about student learning, among other things (see, Reeve & Su 2014). Efficacious teachers are likely to be satisfied with their job and committed to teaching, and they experience low levels of burnout (Duffin et al. 2012). Research has also shown that good-quality efficacious teachers produce better school results (Harjunen & Rautopuro 2015: 83, 118; Heinz 2015: 259; Rowe 2003).

There are also two other concepts closely connected to teacher motivation. Rots et al. (2007) speak about teacher commitment, which they define as graduate teachers' psychological attachment to the teaching profession and their willingness to enter it. In our study, we were also interested in the concept of calling, which is used in Estonia as well as in Finland especially in connection with teaching and health care professions. Hansen defines the calling to teach as the internal motivation of teachers, and describes a vocation or calling (Hansen 1995: 5, 10–15) as a hopeful sentiment and a willingness to engage in the world in some substantive way. As Moreau (2015: 401) points out, teaching has historically been described as a vocation, which implies a passionate devotion to the profession, and according to Hansen, vocation is strongly connected to social meaning and value (Hansen 1995: 9–15). He identifies social, moral and ethical aspects in the call to teach, as well as a continuing desire for professional development, and a sense of meaningfulness and job satisfaction. Hansen's concepts can be traced back to John Dewey (1859–1952), one of the major theorists of educational thinking. Dewey uses the terms vocation, occupation and calling interchangeably, and describes vocations and occupations as complex purposive frames.

In today's world, the idea of teaching as a vocation attracts controversy. Bullough and Hall-Kenyon (2012) point out that a calling or vocation are rather rare concepts in contemporary research, whereas Moreau (2015) notes that the term vocation is still used within media and policy

circles.<sup>2</sup> However, there is research evidence that having a sense of calling is common among teachers (Bullough & Hall-Kenyon 2012; Richardson & Watt 2006), and that they find the most satisfaction in working with and caring for the young (Bergmark et al. 2018; Bullough & Hall-Kenyon 2012; Kyriacou & Coulthard 2000; Moreau 2015).

Hoyle (1980) refers to an orientation to teaching, which he describes as narrow or wide professionalism (alternatively, restricted or extended professionalism). Teachers with a narrow orientation focus on the classroom itself (teaching methods, didactics, subject matter), whereas those with a wide orientation see their profession in a larger educational context, which includes sociological and cultural dimensions (Hoyle 1980; Jongmans et al. 1998; Rots et al. 2007). Van Veen et al. (2001) claim that this wider type of orientation strengthens the teacher's motivation and work satisfaction. According to Rots et al. (2010) students with a wider orientation are better motivated and are likely to continue as teachers after their graduation. It is therefore obvious that teacher education should evoke and promote this wide type of orientation.

In our study, we define motivation to become a teacher along the intrinsic and extrinsic lines described above. We see motivation as a commitment, in some cases even a vocation, to share and widen one's content knowledge with pupils, to work in interaction with young people, and to pursue goals that one finds important and valuable in education and in society. These intrinsic elements of motivation are intertwined with certain extrinsic ones, as will be shown later in the article.

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<sup>2</sup> He refers to a statement by Michael Gove, the British Secretary of State for Education, in 2010: "There is no calling more noble, no profession more vital and no service more important than teaching."

### 3. Teaching as a profession and subject teacher education programmes in Estonia and Finland

Unlike many other countries,<sup>3</sup> a Master's degree is a compulsory requirement for subject as well as elementary-school teachers in Estonia and Finland.<sup>4</sup> However, the subject-teacher education programmes are rather different in structure. The majority of subject-teacher education courses at the University of Tartu are organised in the subject departments (in our case in the Faculty of Humanities). The teacher-education courses are worth 120 European credit points, including 60 credit points for pedagogical studies.<sup>5</sup>

All pedagogical courses (60 credit points) at the University of Helsinki are organised in the Faculty of Education, which requires potential students to take an entrance examination. Pedagogical studies last for one year and include two periods of teaching practice as well as courses in subject didactics and educational sciences.<sup>6</sup> All courses in linguistics and literary studies are organised in the Faculty of Humanities.

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<sup>3</sup> However, a Master's degree is slowly becoming mandatory in all European countries, although there are differences between teaching levels (European Commission 2013b).

<sup>4</sup> The division between elementary and subject teachers is slightly different in the two countries. Elementary school teachers in Estonia teach most or all subjects to grades 1–4, sometimes to grades 5–6 as well. Starting from grade 7, subject teachers take over. Elementary school teachers in Finland are responsible for grades 1–6. Subjects are taught by subject teachers in secondary and upper-secondary schools from grade 7 onwards.

<sup>5</sup> The curriculum consists of studies related to the major subject (39 ECTS), pedagogical studies (24 ECTS), optional courses (6 ECTS) and a Master's thesis (15 ECTS). The pedagogical courses are organised at the Institute of Education within the Department of Social Sciences.

<sup>6</sup> In 2014, when the research was carried out, pedagogical studies (60 ECTS) at the University of Helsinki consisted of the following courses and teaching practice: Psychology of development and learning (4 ECTS); Special education (4 ECTS); Introduction to subject teaching (10 ECTS); Basic practice in Teacher Training School (7 ECTS); The teacher as a researcher seminar: research and methods (6 ECTS) +

In Estonia, teacher training has been one of the least popular choices among school leavers at the upper-secondary level in the past ten to twenty years. Law, economics and the political sciences have been the most popular choices, whereas only 4% of potential students are interested in education and would want to work as a teacher. The choices of students are, of course, highly affected by attitudes in society. Only 14% of teachers in Estonia felt that society valued their work enough. The OECD average is 30%, but in Finland the proportion is 60%. (Valk 2016.)

Admissions to teacher-education programmes in Estonia decreased by a quarter in the 2010s (Pärismaa 2014). The Master's-level training programme for teachers of Estonian language and literature at the University of Tartu accepts 15 students. These places are filled, but there are so few applicants that it is not possible simply to choose the best. Courses of study for kindergarten and elementary-school teachers (grades 1–6) are popular, but currently the biggest need is for teachers of sciences.

Thus far the teaching profession has been attractive in Finland. It has been particularly hard to get into teacher education for elementary school (grades 1–6): only 11.1% of applicants to the University of Helsinki were accepted in 2016 and 13.8% in 2019 (University of Helsinki 2016, 2019). The situation is slightly different in the case of subject-teacher programmes.

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pedagogical thesis (4 ECTS); Social, historical, and philosophical foundations of education (5 ECTS); Evaluation and development of teaching (7 ECTS); Applied practice (5 ECTS); Master's-level practice in the Teacher Training School (8 ECTS). Certain changes were made to the syllabus in Autumn 2017 but the number of credit points remained the same.



#### **4. Research questions, survey data, and research methods**

The research questions in this article are: How strong is the motivation to become a mother tongue and literature teacher amongst Estonian and Finnish student teachers? What attitudes do student teachers have towards research? How do they perceive the status of teachers in society?<sup>7</sup>

In order to examine student teachers' motivation to become mother tongue and literature teachers, and to compare the results from two neighbouring countries, we conducted a survey based on an e-questionnaire among students at the University of Tartu, Estonia, and the University of Helsinki, Finland, at the end of the 2014 spring term. The end of the term was chosen for the study because at that point the students were nearing the end of their one-year pedagogical studies.

The survey was targeted at all students in the mother tongue and literature teacher-training programmes. In Tartu, the total number of students in the program during the year of our research was 26, and the equivalent number in Helsinki was 37. All Estonian students completed the questionnaire (100%), as did 35 of the 37 students in Finland (95%).<sup>8</sup>

The questionnaire comprised 27 statements that were created on the basis of motivation research described earlier in this article.<sup>9</sup> The

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<sup>7</sup> Within the scope of this article, we did not have the opportunity to go through the responses to all our statements.

<sup>8</sup> All the student teachers in Estonia were women; five of the 35 Finnish students who filled in the questionnaire were men.

<sup>9</sup> The statements were: 1) I have a calling to teach. 2) I have always wanted to become a teacher. 3) I have always wanted to become a mother tongue and literature teacher. 4) I do not have other career plans. 5) I also have a previous degree. Which? 6) Teaching mother tongue and literature is an attractive profession. 7) Teaching mother tongue and literature is a respected profession in society. 8) Teaching mother tongue and literature is an important profession in society. 9) Teaching mother tongue and literature is a profession which I could also use elsewhere than in teaching. 10) I like teaching very much. 11) I want to constantly develop my teaching. 12) The teacher should be acquainted with new research in the field. 13) I believe I will be interested

statements were planned to express both the intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions of the teaching profession of mother tongue and literature, and to cover students' ideas about the societal status of the profession in both countries. In addition, the importance of research in the teaching profession was examined, as it is strongly emphasised in teacher education at the University of Helsinki. The e-questionnaire was not tested or validated beforehand, which is clearly a drawback. However, students reported no problems or misunderstandings when they filled in the survey.

The students expressed their opinions about each statement on a scale ranging between one and four (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = moderately disagree, 3 = moderately agree, 4 = strongly agree). There was also space for comments after each question, and students could ponder about their answers and comment on the statements without a time limit. They filled in the questionnaire partly during their lessons (especially in Estonia) and partly during their free time. Answering the questionnaire was not compulsory, and individual students could not be identified in the answers. Neither did answering the questionnaire affect their course assessment in any way.

We obtained both quantitative and qualitative data from the survey. Because the data were relatively small and a fine-grained quantitative

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in doing research about my own job in the future. 14) It is important to teach mother tongue and literature. 15) Finno-Ugric languages and their literatures are part of mother tongue and literature education. 16) Multilingual and multicultural issues are also important in the tuition of mother tongue and literature. 17) Pupils are an important motivator in teaching. 18) The possibility of producing new teaching materials is an important motivator in teaching. 19) Constantly gaining new knowledge about the subject – language and literature – is an important motivator in teaching. 20) The possibility of affecting young people's lives is an important motivator in teaching. 21) Long vacations are an important motivator in teaching. 22) The social community in schools and organising work smoothly is an important motivator in teaching. 23) Moral and ethical aspects are important in teaching. 24) A good salary is an important motivator in teaching. 25) The content of teaching is more important than a good salary. 26) I am ready to change my profession or learn a new one in the future. 27) I am optimistic about my teaching profession in the future.

analysis was not the aim of the study, we used the rather simple statistical data produced by the e-questionnaire system and subjected it to comparative analysis. Because the data does not include mother tongue and literature students from all the other universities in Estonia and Finland, the results and the differences between the Estonian and the Finnish student groups are not generalizable.

Qualitative data consisted of comments that students could add after each statement. These comments were analysed by comparative content analysis (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018), and some examples will be discussed in the following section. Finnish students wrote 160 comments (on average 5.9 comments per statement, variation from 2 to 13), whereas Estonian students wrote 59 comments (on average 2.1 per statement, variation from 0 to 5).<sup>10</sup> The length of the comments varied from a couple of words to several sentences. Also, although our data is a few years old, it has not lost its relevance: the questions of motivation and career choice are permanent issues in teacher education.

We decided to give the results of our analysis in percentages, not in factual numbers. This helps the reader to proportionate students' opinions about the statements to each other better than factual numbers, and it also helps to compare the results between the two countries. This decision should be kept in mind when reading our analysis.

## **5. Results: What motivates students to become mother tongue and literature teachers?**

In the following, the questionnaire results are discussed according to the students' answers and comments. We start with the attractiveness of the teaching career and proceed to statements that students in both countries found motivating for their career choice.

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<sup>10</sup> The length of the questionnaire affected the Finnish students' eagerness to write comments: there were many more comments concerning the first nine statements than later.

### **5.1. Teaching the mother tongue and literature is an attractive profession**

In our data, the attractiveness of teaching the mother tongue and literature among the Finnish student group was clearly stronger than among their peers in Estonia. 91% of Finnish students regarded the profession as strongly (44%) or moderately (47%) attractive, whereas the percentage among the Estonian students was 62 (35% strongly agreed + 27% moderately agreed). Only 9% of the Finnish students disagreed with the statement, whereas 39% of the Estonian students moderately disagreed with it: therefore, the percentage of Estonian students who did not find mother tongue and literature teaching very attractive was rather high. This raises questions about their motivation to become teachers: however, there is research evidence that many student teachers are still thinking about their career choice (see, Reeve & Su 2014). All in all, both the Finnish and the Estonian respondents' overall positive attitude towards a teaching career runs counter to the trends in Europe today (European Commission 2013b: 47).

### **5.2. I have always wanted to become a mother tongue and literature teacher**

There were interesting differences between Estonian and Finnish students also when they responded to this statement. Estonian students had a much stronger orientation towards teaching from their early years on: 23% of them strongly agreed and 31% moderately agreed with the statement (54% altogether). In contrast, only 3% of the Finnish students strongly agreed with the statement and 29% moderately agreed (32% altogether); this means that the great majority of Finnish students had not had a life-long orientation towards mother tongue and literature teaching.

### **5.3. Teaching the mother tongue and literature is important**

All of the Estonian respondents strongly agreed with the statement "Teaching the mother tongue and literature is important". Of the Finnish respondents, 91% strongly agreed with this, and 9% moderately agreed, which is a slightly surprising result: subject teachers usually find their own subject very important. Because of the small sample size, there is clearly a need for further research on this matter.

One of the Estonian students emphasised that studies in the native language and literature equip pupils with the skills they need in life:

- (1) If a pupil does not know his or her native language it is difficult for him or her to acquire new knowledge, because language is the means through which knowledge is generated. Learning about literature develops empathy, as well as discussion and analytical skills. Without these skills it is difficult to cope later in life. (ES)

In both countries, most students thought that Finno-Ugric languages and literatures are part of mother tongue and literature education: 24% of Estonian students strongly agreed and 58% moderately agreed with the statement, and the equivalent numbers among Finnish students were 24% and 53%.

### **5.4. Pupils are a strong motivator for teaching**

In both countries, all students agreed either strongly or moderately with the statement that the relationship with pupils and the interactive nature of the profession are a very strong motivator for a career choice. Understandably, such an attitude is not subject-specific but is common among all student teachers: teachers find most satisfaction in working with and caring for the young (Bergmark et al. 2018; Bullough & Hall-Kenyon 2012; Kyriacou & Coulthard 2000; Moreau 2015). The students commented:

- (2) The pupils are the reason for doing this work. For the teacher who encourages pupils to study the subject, their progress is also a great source of motivation. (ES)

In a comparative study between French and English teachers by Moreau (2015), working with children was a key motive for English secondary school teachers, while French teachers expressed a strong interest in the subject. No such distinction could be made between Estonian and Finnish student teachers because they showed a very strong interest both in the subject matter and in working with the young. As Rots et al. (2010) point out, orientation towards pupils also has other outcomes: students with higher teacher efficacy beliefs and stronger learner-orientation are more likely to have a stronger intention to enter teaching and a higher commitment to teaching itself.

Contributing to the betterment of society is generally important for teachers (Eren & Vefa Tezel 2010: 1417; Lin et al. 2012: 229; Löffström & Poom-Valickis 2013: 105). This opinion also came up in our data:

- (3) I want a profession that is useful to society and allows me to be in touch with people. (FS)

### **5.5. Deepening one's knowledge continuously is an important motivator for this profession**

The possibility of deepening one's expertise in language and literature studies was also a very strong motivator for the teaching career in both countries. Among the respondents, 96% (54% + 42%) of those in Estonia agreed with the statement, compared with 88% (47% + 41%) in Finland. Sometimes an interest in the subject itself is a key motivator for pursuing a career as a subject teacher (Moreau 2015: 406–409).

A minority of Finnish students (12%) did not express a research orientation and did not consider deepening one's knowledge a major motivator for joining the teaching profession. 4% of the students in Estonia were of this opinion.

- (4) If one were mostly interested in acquiring knowledge in a subject area, then it might be worthwhile considering a career in research, or something else. For me, gaining pedagogical insight is the central motivating factor in a teacher's career. (FS)
- (5) Yes, the teacher, too, is a life-long learner. (FS)
- (6) It is natural that new knowledge and skills are acquired during the teaching job, but the degree of new skills and knowledge should be reasonable. (ES)

The attitudes of teachers towards research are strongly connected to their professional development, which could be defined as professional growth as a result of gaining experience. In other words, it is a career-long learning and researching process focused on their own work and their teaching (Hansen 1995: 131, 132). Choosing a profession can also be seen as choosing an educative environment for oneself: in life-long learning, education does not end with graduation (Higgins 2005: 450). The teacher-education programme at the University of Helsinki is very strongly research-based, emphasizing also teachers' own research-oriented attitude towards teaching (Jakku-Sihvonen & Niemi 2006), whereas a research orientation is not thus far so explicit in Estonian teacher education.

#### **5.6. The teacher must keep track of new research in the field**

Despite the lack of an explicit research orientation in teacher education at Tartu University, the Estonian students were slightly more committed to research than their Finnish peers: they all agreed either fully or moderately with the research statement (62% + 38%), compared to almost all (53% + 44%) among the Finnish sample.

- (7) In the eyes of pupils, the teacher is an expert in his/her field and can answer all their questions. It is therefore important for teachers to keep up-to-date with new research findings in language and literature. (ES)

Some of the Finnish students expressed negative opinions about, or were reluctant to engage in, research. The survey statement refers to research in the subject fields rather than pedagogy, which may have affected the responses. Nevertheless, some students only seem to connect research with their subject field, whereas pedagogy seems to them to mean only practical skills. Although these respondents were a small minority, the result is not flattering to Finnish teacher education, as the students had completed practically all of their pedagogical studies at the time of answering the questionnaire.

- (8) I think the most important thing is to concentrate on pedagogical skills. You can get acquainted with research if you have time. (FS)
- (9) In my opinion, the value of research is a bit overrated because research doesn't really help in practical teaching. In any case, you don't have time for everything, and even without keeping up with new research the teacher of mother tongue and literature has enough work to do in her/his free time. (FS)

#### **5.7. I will be interested in doing research in my own work in the future**

About 80% of the Finnish respondents and 60% of the Estonians expressed an interest in doing research as part of their work in the future, which shows a very strong or strong research orientation. According to former studies, teacher research can have numerous positive outcomes for teacher efficacy, teaching practices, and pupil motivation, among other things (Zeichner 2006: 317–318).

For some students, orientation towards research was rather a question of attitude:

- (10) I'm not interested in doing real academic research, but practical, research-oriented reflection on my own work would be interesting. (FS)



- (11) If possible, I definitely want to be a teacher who does research. I believe it expands one's horizon. It is an interesting and value-adding activity. (ES)

### 5.8. Long vacations are a strong motivator

The long holidays in the teaching profession have traditionally been a source of jokes as a motivator for a career choice. Among our respondents, 70% of the Finnish students and 65% of the Estonian students considered the long vacations a good motivator in terms of becoming a teacher. However, only a minority of students strongly agreed with the statement: 35% of the Estonian and 29% of the Finnish students, which shows that this extrinsic motivator is not decisive for their career choice.

- (12) As teaching is always an intensive job, I believe that a long vacation is, first and foremost, necessary. (ES)

One Estonian student noted that the teacher has time for professional development in the summer, which indicates a strong commitment to the work:

- (13) A long vacation is great, but it is likely that a lot of time will be spent in the summer on reading and educating oneself, for which there might not be so much time during the school year. (ES)

Some students also mentioned positive teaching experiences as an important motivator, as found by Richardson & Watt (2005; see also Heinz 2015: 269). In several cases, the teacher-education programme in itself and the teaching practice provided the motivation:

- (14) I never thought I would become a teacher but during my pedagogical studies I've realised that I enjoy teaching. (FS)
- (15) I didn't have a definite plan to become a teacher, but the teaching practice went well and now I feel that I am ready to dedicate myself to this job. (ES)

One Estonian student pointed out the importance of positive role models in teaching, which is one of the motivators for career choice expressed in research literature as well (Reeve & Su 2014):

- (16) I have been interested in literature since my childhood, and I became interested in language later. In my choice to become a teacher of Estonian language and literature I was influenced by my own teachers, who set a great example. (ES)

### **5.9. I have a calling to teach**

Only a minority of the respondents in both countries strongly agreed with this statement (about one third, 31%, of Estonians and one fifth, 21%, of Finns). The majority of students in both countries responded that they had a moderately strong calling (42% of Estonians and 53% of Finns). As a whole, 73% of the Estonians and 74% of the Finns responded that they had a calling for the profession, which means that almost one third of the students participating in the teacher-education programmes in both countries did not agree with the statement. These responses may, of course, be at least partly attributable to the use of the controversial term ‘calling’: as stated earlier, the concept is rather rare in contemporary research, although it seems to be more neutral in French and English contexts (see, Moreau 2015). Some Finnish students criticised the term:

- (17) Calling to teach sounds old-fashioned to me, somehow too deterministic. (FS)
- (18) For me, ‘calling’ does not always mean a passionate attitude towards teaching, although it is that as well. There are moments when ‘calling to teach’ simply means a feeling that ‘this just happens to be the right alternative for me, because for me it is the easiest way to exist, work and develop myself further.’ (FS)

Relatively many students summed up their thoughts about career choice in general. It became clear how intrinsic, altruistic and extrinsic motives were combined in their argumentation (Han & Yin 2016; Heinz

2015; Kyriacou & Coulthard 2000; Löfström & Poom-Valickis 2013: 105). Bergmark et al. (2018) note that mixed motives are beneficial for a teaching career:

- (19) I'm heading for this profession for practical reasons: the possibility of making a lot of choices on my own, reasonable working hours, interest in the subject matter. Also, on the basis of my experiences as a substitute teacher, I feel I'm quite a good teacher. (FS)
- (20) I have not always wanted to be a teacher since childhood. First, I drifted into studying the Finnish language and then I took the entrance exam for pedagogical studies in order to get a 'safe job'. However, the more I think about it the more certain I am that this is what I want. (FS)

## **6. Student teachers' opinions about the teacher's role in society**

Young people's motivation to become teachers depends on the attitudes to and views about the profession in society. We asked what the students thought about opinions in their society: How valued and how important is the teaching profession?

### **6.1. Teaching mother tongue and literature is a valued profession in society**

There was a clear distinction in the views of the Finnish and the Estonian students on this issue. Among the Finns, 88% of the respondents thought that teachers of mother tongue and literature were respected in society (12% strongly agreed, 76% moderately agreed, 12% moderately disagreed). In contrast, the majority of Estonian respondents (54%) disagreed either moderately or strongly with the statement. Not one of them agreed strongly with it, but 46% moderately agreed:

- (21) It seems that mother tongue and literature teachers are thought to have a central role in schools. In my opinion, these teachers are valued

primarily because in their teaching they place value on language and literature, which are major assets for such a small nation. (ES)

The teaching profession has traditionally been among the most highly valued in Finnish society. Teachers have achieved high scores in all polls concerning the status of different professions (see e.g., Lähteenmäki 2017).<sup>11</sup> However, the most recent studies indicate that the situation is starting to change (Trade Union of Education in Finland 2016, Luukkainen 2019).<sup>12</sup>

(22) In my experience, teachers are not very highly valued. But maybe the teachers in my own subject are valued above the average. (FS)

## **6.2. Teaching mother tongue and literature is an important profession in society**

Although Estonian and Finnish students had divided opinions about how much mother tongue and literature teachers were valued in society, their views about the importance of the profession in society were strong: the majority of students believed their future career was important in society. Among the Estonian respondents, 96% either strongly or moderately agreed with the statement (85% + 12%):

(23) It is the teacher who shares knowledge about the language and the main works of literature. An Estonian must be able to write correctly in her/his mother tongue and be acquainted with the basic works of Estonian literature. (ES)

All Finnish respondents agreed either strongly (82%) or moderately (18%) with the statement, but their comments focused on the teacher's role in general, not on subject-specificity:

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<sup>11</sup> “Presidents as well as bank robbers go through school, and so do their children. The teacher must act in a determined manner during all societal turmoil”, as one of the interviewees said (Ilta-Sanomat 2010).

<sup>12</sup> Over 66% of all Finns and 75% of teachers think that the status of the teaching profession has declined over the past ten years.

- (24) You can do much good but also cause much harm by teaching. It depends on the teacher and her/his values and attitude to learning. The school system would also benefit from more critical and societal discussion.

### **6.3. A good salary is an important motivator for a career in teaching**

Although most of the Estonian respondents considered the work itself more important than the salary, the salary should not be underestimated. Almost 89% of them considered the good salary a strong or moderate motivator for pursuing a career in teaching, compared to about 53% of the Finnish respondents.<sup>13</sup> In Estonia, teachers' salaries are amongst the lowest in Europe (European Commission 2013a):

- (25) Given that teachers' salaries are not very high in Estonia, inner motivators have to be enough. (ES)
- (26) Because the teacher's job is demanding, the salary should also be rather good. If the salary was very low I would feel that I and my work were under-valued. Despite this, I chose this profession in the first place because of my vocation, the salary was the second priority. (FS)

### **6.4. The work itself is more important than a high salary**

The majority of students in both countries attached more importance to teaching itself than to a high salary. This result, too, shows the weight of their intrinsic motivation and is in line with research that emphasises

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<sup>13</sup> In Estonia, the average monthly salary in all professions in 2014 was 1,005 euros (Orula 2015); in 2016, the average salary of teachers in Estonia was 1,210 euros (HTM 2017: 18). The average monthly salary in Finland in all professions in 2011 was 3,132 euros (Kangasniemi et al. 2014), whereas the average salary among teachers of Finnish language and literature in 2016 was approximately 3,995 euros (Kuntatyönantajat 2017), which was clearly above the average. It must be noted, however, that the statistics are based on salaries attached to permanent jobs. Many teachers in the early stages of their careers work part-time or as substitutes, with lower salaries.

its importance for the teaching career (Heinz 2015). However, the Estonian participants were somewhat more sceptical about this: 31% agreed fully and 46% moderately, whereas the respective percentages among the Finnish respondents were 50 and 38. No Finnish students thought that a good salary was more important than the work itself, although one Estonian student expressed this opinion:

(27) When you consider that good teachers dedicate a lot of time and knowledge to their work, it seems fair that the salary paid for this job should reflect this. This is supported by the fact that the teacher has many roles: in addition to transferring knowledge, he or she is also somebody that pupils can trust, a mentor, a leader in the classroom, and so on. (ES)

(28) As I said, you cannot teach if you only think about money: there are other things that are more important (such as what is good for the pupil, and for learning). (FS)

### **6.5. I do not have other career plans**

Despite the fact that most students in both countries showed a strong or a moderately strong motivation to teach, a surprising number of them were hesitant about becoming teachers at the end of their pedagogical studies: half of the Estonian (50%) and almost two thirds of the Finnish (65%) students had future career plans other than teaching.

When asked about career change using a different wording (“I’m ready to change my profession or learn a new one in the future”) a clear majority of the Estonians agreed either strongly (31%) or moderately (54%), whereas the willingness to change career was smaller among the Finnish students (6% agreed strongly and 50% moderately). In the light of these two statements, half of the Estonians agreed strongly or moderately that they had other career plans, and 85% of them were ready to change profession in the future. It would appear that about half of the students had concrete plans to change career, and the majority of them were ready to do that.

Among Finnish students, 65% had other career plans than teaching, and 56% declared they were willing to change career in the future. These results are partly contradictory, but all in all they indicate a hesitant attitude towards the teaching profession.

The fact that the majority of students in both countries either had other career plans or were ready to take them up, can be interpreted in at least three ways. First, the results may indicate that the teacher-education programmes have failed in terms of motivating students to pursue a career in teaching. Second, a more positive explanation is that teacher education focusing on mother tongue and literature gives students expertise they can apply in several professions. According to the respondents' comments, such expertise includes communication, interaction and problem-solving skills. This is exemplified in their comments on their other career options, which include being an editor in a publishing company, a journalist or an author:

(29) If I could choose freely I would like to become an author, but that is not a serious career plan. (FS)

There is also a third reason for hesitation about taking up a teaching career: European analysis verifies that the workload on top of the teaching activity and the growing number of responsibilities affects the attractiveness of teaching in both Estonia and Finland (European Commission 2013a).

Exceptionally, one Finnish student regarded teacher education as a hindrance for professional mobility and success:

(30) I'm also thinking about other possibilities and I've done and applied for other types of work. At the moment I'm inclined to go into teaching, but I think it won't be easy to get work anywhere with this qualification. Even if I'm only a student teacher people think of me as a teacher and I think this stops me from getting other types of work. There's also tough competition for all teaching positions. (FS)

## 7. Conclusions and limitations

We are aware of the limitations of our study. Our data represents 100% (Estonia) and 95% (Finland) of all mother tongue and literature student teachers in spring 2014 at the universities of Tartu and Helsinki, but the data set is small. A longitudinal study covering several years, representing all teacher education units in both countries, would be needed to obtain a trustworthy picture of the research subject. In such a case, the questionnaire itself should be re-examined beforehand, and possibly planned according to a former motivation scale used by researchers before (e.g. Watt & Richardson 2012; Watt et al. 2012). A wider statistical analysis with cross-relations could also reveal new aspects of the data. It should also be noticed that students commented on statements given to them. Although they had the opportunity to add their own comments on each statement, another type of data collection, e.g. interviews, may have brought up other aspects of their motivation.

However, our analysis is of value as a case study, representing the authentic voices of practically a whole generation of mother tongue and literature student teachers at the universities of Tartu and Helsinki. It offers their views on reasons for becoming teachers, and it also allows one to draw certain conclusions and identify needs for further research and teacher education development.

Estonian students in our data had a much stronger life-long orientation to become mother tongue and literature teachers than their Finnish peers (54% of Estonians strongly or moderately agreed with the statement, compared to 32% of the Finns). However, when asked about the call to teach in general, the majority of the respondents in both countries (Estonia 73%, Finland 89%) responded they had a strong or moderately strong calling to teach. A clear majority of them also think that teaching mother tongue and literature is very important in society (Estonia 100%, Finland 91%). In particular, students find working with the young motivating, which is in line with previous research (Bergmark et al. 2018;



Bullough and Hall-Kenyon 2012; Kyriacou & Coulthard 2000; Watt et al. 2012: 804).

However, quite a few students hold the door open for other professions at the end of their pedagogical studies (Estonia 50%, Finland 65%). There are certain contradictions in the two sets of responses: the Estonian respondents had a weaker calling but fewer other career plans, whereas the Finnish respondents had a stronger calling but were more hesitant about working as teachers.

It remains unclear why such a large proportion of the students were uncertain about becoming a teacher during the final stages of their teacher education (see, Reeve & Su 2014). Our survey did not allow a resolution for this dilemma, but some tentative suggestions can be made. The students gave credit to their teacher-education programmes for promoting many useful skills, not only pedagogical ones, which widened their professional choices beyond 'only' teaching in schools. This as such is a positive outcome and highlights the value of pedagogical competencies in many fields of society.

A clear majority of the Finnish students (70%) and a slightly smaller majority of Estonians (65%) considered the long vacations a motivator for their career choice. The respondents in both countries thought the long vacations were justified. A good salary was a stronger motivator for the Estonians than for the Finns: almost 89% of the Estonian respondents considered a good salary a strong or moderate motivator, compared to about 53% of the Finnish respondents. This clear distinction in students' opinions calls for more research. Subject teachers' salaries are above the average income level in both countries, but more markedly in Finland.

The respondents in both countries expressed strong commitment to following current research in their subject field. They also showed a rather strong research orientation: they were ready for life-long learning and for conducting research on their own work. All the respondents in Estonia (62% + 38%), and almost all in Finland (53% + 44%) agreed either fully or moderately with the research statement. Surprisingly,

the amount of pedagogical research that is explicitly included in their teacher-education syllabi does not affect their attitude towards research, which they seem to connect mainly with subject-specific research within language and literature (or even more surprisingly affects it in a negative way).

The great majority of respondents in both countries thought that the teaching of mother tongue and literature was important on the societal level. The most significant difference was in attitudes towards the social status of the profession. The majority of the Estonian respondents (54%) thought that mother tongue and literature teachers were not at all or only somewhat valued in society, and 46% thought they were moderately valued. None of them wholeheartedly agreed that society valued the profession; despite this, a clear majority of them responded they had always wanted to become Estonian language and literature teachers. The Estonian state shares these students' concerns about the lack of respect for and interest in the teaching profession, and some steps have been taken to improve the situation. The profession is widely publicised, and there are scholarship programmes for teacher training and financial support for novice teachers.

The majority of Finnish respondents (89%), on the other hand, thought that the profession was valued or moderately valued, and 12% thought it was somewhat valued. Nobody rated it as not being valued at all. All in all, respect for mother tongue language and literature teaching was clearly on the negative side in Estonia but very clearly on the positive side in Finland. As far as respect for teaching as a career is concerned, Estonian attitudes are more common globally than those expressed in Finland, which could be seen as an exception. A lack of respect and appreciation in society is an issue of growing concern for teachers worldwide (Dinham & Scott 2000).

There are no simple answers to the question why the societal status of teachers varies so much in Estonia and Finland. Historically, the teaching profession has had a high status in both countries. The national movements in both countries in the 19th century were closely connected

to the rise of education and culture in the national languages: Estonian (instead of German and Russian) and Finnish (instead of Swedish and Russian). In both countries, the teaching profession has been of great significance and has held high societal status. Teachers have traditionally been active in their local communities and initiators of many projects within the fields of culture, sports and education (Salminen 2018).

However, the different political fates of the countries in the 20th century, and the Soviet occupation of Estonia until 1991, may partly explain the current situation. Currently, both countries function in two languages (Estonian – Russian, Finnish – Swedish), but the respective roots and effects of bilingualism differ considerably: this, too, would need more research in the pedagogical context. According to Moreau (2015: 402), the influence of national contexts and the social structures that shape career choice should be emphasised more, while not forgetting individual agency, and our study confirms this notion in the Estonian-Finnish context.

It has also been pointed out that in today's Estonia the teachers themselves are largely responsible for diminishing the prestige of the teaching profession in that they consider their job difficult, stressful and poorly compensated (Valk 2016: 9–14). Young people's perceptions of the profession are to a great extent based on their own school experiences (Bergmark et al. 2018). If these are positive, there is more interest in working as a teacher in the future (Valk 2016). It remains to be seen whether Estonia's growing success in the PISA ratings will affect the societal status of teachers.<sup>14</sup>

The respondents in both countries commented on the decisive role of their teacher-education studies and school practicums in their career choice (Richardson & Watt 2005). Some of them mentioned how their motivation for teaching had developed during their pedagogical studies despite the fact that they were previously less enthusiastic. However, new

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<sup>14</sup> According to the results of OECD PISA 2015 and 2018, the scores achieved by 15-year-olds in Estonia are the highest in Europe and they rank among the top scorers worldwide (OECD 2015, OECD 2018a).

ways should be found to attract students in their subject departments to take courses in teacher education. This is especially important in Estonia, where the lack of qualified teachers has become a problem and the majority of those working in schools represent older generations. Cooperation between subject faculties and teacher-education programmes should be strengthened, and teacher education should be made more visible and tempting as a career choice.

All in all, it could be stated that Estonian and Finnish student teachers responded to most of the survey statements along more or less the same lines. The majority (Estonia 75%, Finland 90%) had a positive attitude and good motivation in terms of joining the teaching profession, which gives them a promising start for a successful and efficacious career. Recent research (see Bullough & Hall-Kenyon 2012: 8–9) emphasises the concept of hope and hope narratives in connection with teaching. Judging by Estonian and Finnish students' responses to our survey, elements that raise motivation in the profession of mother tongue and literature teaching are, foremost, the relationship with pupils, the possibility of deepening one's expertise in language and literature studies, and the importance the students see in the field itself and its value for society as a whole.

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## “En koskaan ajatellut ryhtyväni opettajaksi”

### Virolaisten ja suomalaisten opiskelijoiden motivaatio äidinkielen ja kirjallisuuden aineenopettajan ammattia kohtaan

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Helsingin yliopisto<sup>1</sup>, Tartu Ülikool<sup>2</sup>

Artikkeli perustuu kyselytutkimukseen, joka suoritettiin Tarton yliopiston ja Helsingin yliopiston äidinkielen ja kirjallisuuden aineenopettajiksi opiskeleville opiskelijoille kevätlukukaudella 2014. Kyselyn tarkoituksena oli selvittää opettajaopiskelijoiden motivaatiota ryhtyä äidinkielen ja kirjallisuuden opettajiksi. Opiskelijat ottivat kantaa muun muassa siihen, kuinka houkutteleva ammatti heidän mielestään on ja kuinka tärkeänä he pitävät vuorovaikutusta oppilaiden kanssa, oman ammattitaidon kehittämistä, pitkiä lomia tai palkkausta. Lisäksi selvitettiin, mitä opiskelijat ajattelevat oman oppiaineensa yhteiskunnallisesta merkityksestä ja arvostuksesta. Opiskelijoilta kysyttiin myös heidän suhtautumisestaan käsitteeseen kutsumus, joka on arkisessa kielenkäytössä opettaja-ammatin yhteydessä varsin yleisesti käytetty.

Kaikki aineen opettajaopiskelijat molemmissa yliopistoissa saivat e-lomakkeelle laaditun kyselyn, johon vastattiin Virossa viroksi ja Suomessa suomeksi. Virolaisista opiskelijoista siihen vastasi 100% (26 opiskelijaa), suomalaisista 95% (35 opiskelijaa 37:stä). Kysely koostui 27 väittämästä, joihin opiskelijat reagoivat asteikolla Pitää täysin paikkansa, Pitää jokseenkin paikkansa, Ei juurikaan pidä paikkaansa, Ei pidä lainkaan paikkaansa. Jokaista väittämää oli mahdollisuus kommentoida kirjallisesti. Kyselystä saatiin sekä kvantitatiivista että kvalitatiivista aineistoa, jota on analysoitu sisällönanalyttisesti. Aineiston pienuuden takia tulokset eivät ole yleistettävissä, mutta tapaustutkimuksen

tulokset antavat viitteitä opiskelijoiden motivaatiosta suuntautua äidinkielen ja kirjallisuuden opettajan ammattiin. Lisäksi ne antavat virikkeitä opettajankoulutuksen kehittämiseen.

Sekä virolaiset että suomalaiset opiskelijat olivat valtaosin joko erittäin tai jokseenkin motivoituneita tulevaan ammattiinsa, ja aivan erityisesti heitä motivoivat oppilaat sekä mahdollisuus jatkuvasti syventää omaa ammatillista osaamistaan kielen ja kirjallisuuden opettamisen parissa. Opiskelijat myös pitivät omaa ainettaan erittäin tärkeänä sekä yhteiskunnassa että henkilökohtaisesti. Opiskelijoiden käsitys ammatin arvostuksesta naapurimaissa erosi kuitenkin selvästi toisistaan: virolaisten mukaan äidinkielen ja kirjallisuuden opettajan ammattia arvostetaan valtaosin vähän tai ei juurikaan, kun taas suomalaiset vastasivat ammatin olevan yhteiskunnallisesti joko erittäin tai jokseenkin arvostettu. Molemmissa maissa aineenopettajien palkkaus kohoaa yli keskipalkkojen, mutta opiskelijoiden näkemykset palkkauksen tasosta jakautuivat.

Vaikka molempien maiden opiskelijat pitävät äidinkielen ja kirjallisuuden opettamista yhteiskunnallisesti erittäin tärkeänä ammattina, huomattavalla osalla heistä oli muitakin urasuunnitelmia tai ainakin valmius vaihtaa alaa joskus tulevaisuudessa. Virolaisista puolet ja suomalaisista noin kaksi kolmasosaa ilmoitti, että heillä on opettamisen lisäksi myös muita urasuunnitelmia. Toisaalta esimerkiksi kustannusalalla ja muissa töissä, joita mainittiin avoimissa vastauksissa, on opettajan pedagogisista opinnoista myös hyötyä. Jääkin pohdittavaksi, johtuuko opettajaopintojensa loppusuoralla olevien opiskelijoiden epävarmuus opettajan ammatista pedagogisten opintojen epäonnistumisesta opiskelijoiden motivointiin vai siitä, että niistä on sovellettavaa hyötyä useilla aloilla.

**Avainsanat:** äidinkieli ja kirjallisuus; opettajaopiskelijat; opettajankoulutus; motivaatio; ammatinvalinta; kansainvälinen vertailu; Viro; Suomi