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Motives behind Finnish student teachers' career choices

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Abstract

Student teachers' motivation to apply for teacher education at Finnish universities and universities of applied sciences were studied. This is important because the teaching profession has started to be less attractive in recent years. A total of 760 student teachers responded to a questionnaire, and their responses were analyzed using content analysis and the narrative approach. Extrinsic, intrinsic, and altruistic motivators were found. The most common narratives were 'A desire to teach' and 'Professional development'. The most common motivators among early education and class teacher students were that they liked to be with children and were fascinated by teaching and learning. Subject teacher students considered their subject as an important motivator, and special education teacher students were interested in challenges in learning. The motivator for students at universities of applied sciences, involving professional teacher education and vocational special needs teacher education, was the need to obtain a teaching degree to retain their current job. In addition, many liked to teach their interest area. Various motivators and their meaning to teachers as well as ways to attract students to the field are discussed.

Keywords: teacher student, motivation, career, university, university of applied sciences

Introduction

The focus of this study is on student teachers' career choices. We ask why students studying at universities or universities of applied sciences (UAS) have chosen a teaching career in Finland, or, in other words, what motivated them to start teacher education. To understand better the context of our study, we start by presenting briefly the Finnish education system.

In Finland, pre-primary education is one year before primary education. School starts at the year the child becomes seven years old. Primary education lasts six years and lower secondary education three years. After this comprehensive education, students can choose either general or vocational upper secondary education (Finnish Ministry of Education, 2023). Teachers and special needs teachers for kindergarten and general education are educated at universities, while professional teachers and vocational special needs teachers supplement their studies at UAS.

Teacher education has long been an attractive career option in Finland. However, in recent years the number of applicants has been declining in both universities and UASs (Grönberg and Jouhiaho, 2019; Heikkinen et al., 2020). The popularity of the teaching profession has also been decreasing globally, and many countries are experiencing a shortage of qualified teachers as well as issues retaining current staff (Lindqvist et al., 2022; Sutcher, Darling-Hammond and Carver-Thomas, 2016; Wang and Wang, 2022). The motivation to become a teacher is often connected to students' views of teaching as a profession, which are influenced by several sources, such as their own experiences at school, desire to affect the development of children and young people, or images in the media of teachers' work (Bergmark et al., 2018; Wang and Houston, 2021; Wang and Wang, 2022). Students' image of the teaching vocation is not necessarily positive due to teachers' workload, emotional stress, low salary, and low social status (Wang and Houston, 2021; Wang and Wang, 2022). Concern about the current decreasing interest in the teaching profession motivated us to study what still attracts students to choose teacher education.

A survey by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture (Heikkinen et al., 2020) asked 6310 secondary school students to rate the attractiveness of teacher education as a future pathway. The work of a teacher was valued, and the possibility of working with children and youngsters was highly appreciated. In addition, the possibilities to have independence in one's own work and have a meaningful job in the future were seen as positive. The results indicate that the teaching profession was attractive because of the nature of teachers' work and its significance to society. Nevertheless, teachers' deteriorating working conditions, for example, more and more students in need of support and fewer resources, have diminished this attractiveness. The report concludes that conditions must be improved and support for new teachers needs to be increased to retain current teachers and recruit new ones (also Heikkinen et al., 2020).

A study of Finnish statistics regarding various teacher education applications between 2015 and 2020 suggests that the number of students applying for special teacher education has been quite stable (Heikkinen et al., 2020). Nevertheless, the number of applicants to class teacher and early childhood training programs has gone down each year, except in 2020, when there was a minor increase.

Moreover, the number of applicants to professional teacher education has dropped considerably in recent years, despite a small rise in 2020. The authors of the report conclude that the autonomy of the teaching profession needs to be protected and that the attractiveness of the profession and the possibilities of recruiting qualified teachers are best guaranteed by developing working conditions (ibid.).

There are many reasons why studying motivation to undertake teacher education is important. In an Australian study (Whiteford et al., 2021) of mathematics teacher students' motivation, one conclusion was that when recruiting students, more than one motivator is good from the perspective of the student. When the motivator is, for example, a love of the subject or a desire to change society, it can fade when the teacher enters the classroom. According to 189 student teachers in Wales, the main motivator for choosing a teaching career was their own teaching ability and suitability for the profession as well as the intrinsic rewards the profession offers (Davies and Hughes, 2018). In addition, once the degree is obtained, motivation to stay in the profession is important. For that, teachers need to be supported and their work needs appreciation (Canli and Karadag, 2021).

The aim was to study the motivation to apply for teacher education given by students who are studying in different teacher-training programs at universities and UAS. As the participants in our study are from both institutes, it is possible also to give a rare comparison of motivations. We look for narratives of various teacher student groups about why they apply to teacher education and how they describe their motivation.

Theoretical perspectives on motivation to undertake teacher education

There are many theories of motivation. However, the content theories of motivation include Maslow, Alderfer, Herzberg and McClelland. These theories focus on the specific factors which motivate people (Acquah et al., 2021). Alderfer's Existence, Relatedness and Growth (ERG) theory is an extension of Herzberg's and Maslow's theories, and it concurs with Maslow pertaining to the hierarchical structure of human needs (Shikalepo, 2020). In ERG human needs are classified in three categories. First, the existence needs correspond to Maslow's psychological and safety needs; second, relatedness corresponds with Maslow's belongingness and self-esteem needs; and third, the growth needs concern an individual's intrinsic desire to grow and fulfill human potential (Shikalepo 2020; Acquah et al., 2021). Knowing about motivation is important for teacher educators and school employers to recruit and retain students and teachers (Shikalepo, 2020).

Several studies have classified the motivations to become a teacher into intrinsic, extrinsic, and altruistic (Giersch, 2021; Roness and Smith, 2010; Watt and Richardson, 2007). Intrinsic motivation refers to inner reasons: a drive to seek challenges, extend and exercise one's capabilities, and do something that is interesting. Intrinsic motivation is about spontaneous interest and exploration (Ryan, 1995; Ryan and Deci, 2000). Candidates for teacher education are often highly motivated by the intrinsic benefits of teaching, such as supporting children and developing society (Moss, 2020; Wang and Houston, 2021; Wang and Wang, 2022). Extrinsic motivation has more external sources, such as issues related to status, the appreciation of others, or long holidays. Many ordinary activities people must do are

extrinsically motivated. Extrinsic motivation refers to an activity carried out to attain some separable outcome. It can also derive from general appreciation or the desire for a good salary or certain social benefits. Altruistic motivation is connected to society, including a belief that, in this case, the work is worthwhile and important for the development of a common social good through the education of children and young people (Bauer et al., 2018; Kasser and Ryan, 1996; Ryan and Deci, 2000).The Factors Influencing Teaching Choice scale (FIT-Choice scale), developed in Australia, has been used when studying motivation (Watt and Richardson, 2007). The main factors in the FIT-Choice model are prior teaching and learning experiences, intrinsic career value, personal utility value, and social utility value. In the FIT-Choice scale, intrinsic value refers to the enjoyment a person gains from performing a certain task, and personal utility value refers to how a certain task can be of use in the future to a person. Social utility value includes a powerful desire to make a social contribution (Watt and Richardson, 2007; Wigfield and Eccles, 1992, 2000). As part of the model, fallback career is also a possibility, meaning the student has taken up teacher education due to not succeeding in gaining a place in another study program. Thus, the FIT-Choice model goes beyond the classical division of the three motivations (see also Goller et al., 2019; Watt and Richardson, 2007).

Motivation to apply to teacher education

According to OECD (2018a), the background of 15-year-olds who did and did not want to become teachers differed. More girls, more non-immigrants, and more students with a longer parental education favoured teacher education (OECD, 2018a). Nevertheless, the number of applicants to university-based teacher education in Finland has been high. In 2021, just 15% of applicants to special teacher programs, 6% of those to class teacher programs, and 11% of those to early education programs were accepted (University of Helsinki, 2021), indicating that admission to teacher education is still competitive and gaining a study place is challenging. Respectively, in UAS about 34 % of applicants were accepted to Häme University of Applied Sciences (HAMK) and 32 % to Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences (JAMK) on professional teacher education programmes. In vocational teacher education, about 50% of applicants were accepted in both UAS (HAMK, 2021; JAMK, 2022).

Individual motivation to enter the teaching profession is complex and situational (Wang and Wang, 2022), and motivations can vary from culture to culture (Bergmark et al., 2018). A Turkish study of 104 student teachers found that participants seemed to be mainly motivated by altruistic reasons and prior teaching experience to study for a degree in teaching (Ekin et al., 2021). Another study, examining the motivation of 414 primary school teachers, found that the most positive motivational factor was the pupils, while motivation was decreased by class crowding (Yildiz and Kiliç, 2021). Often, the motivation is a combination of intrinsic and altruistic motivators (Rutten and Badiali, 2020). Many studies of motivation focus on certain subjects, such as why individuals become mathematics teachers (Whiteford et al., 2021) or language teachers (Wong, 2020).

The motivation to apply for teacher education was compared between Finnish (n=203) and German (n=187) students using the FIT-Choice model (Goller et al., 2019). The research question asked whether the model could be replicated and whether there were differences between the students'

motivation in these countries. The two countries considered have different education systems and different PISA results (OECD, 2018b), which makes the comparison even more interesting. The results showed that the factor structure in the model could be replicated, and that motivation varied according to teaching area. For example, students training to become preschool teachers had their own motivation: They did not apply to teacher education due to factors such as 'more time for family' or 'prior teaching experience'. Nor did they think that teaching is highly socially valued and respected. In terms of country, the German students based their choice more on strongly extrinsic motivation such as job security, future salary, and time for family as well as on external reasons such as social influence or as a fallback solution. In Finland, teaching is a highly respected profession, and it is difficult to gain a place in a training program. The Finnish system seems to attract students who are motivated to fulfil their intrinsic social utility values but does not attract students who want to maximize personal utility values (Goller et al., 2019).

Berger and D'Ascoli (2012) used the FIT-Choice model to investigate professional student teachers becoming vocational education teachers (VETs) as a second career in Switzerland. A total of 483 in-service student teachers, who already had a few years of teaching experience, participated in this study. As a result, ability, intrinsic value, and social utility value dimensions were the dominant determinants, whereas personal utility value dimensions were among the least important. VET teachers believed their job to be challenging and requiring of expertise, which was considered more important than benefits such as salary or social status. Altogether, the results provide a picture of VET teachers as adaptively motivated with a strong commitment to teaching.

Teacher education in Finland

Teacher education for class, special, and subject teachers in Finnish universities is a 300-credit master's degree which lasts about five years and a 180-credit bachelor's degree for early childhood education teachers. However, many students go on to study at the master's level to have more career options in the future (Engbäck, 2022). Class teachers' main subject is educational sciences, and for special education teachers, the major subject is special education. Subject teachers' degrees usually include studies in two subjects taught at school and 60 credits in pedagogical studies (National Study Info, 2022a). After taking a degree in teaching, it is also possible to complete a one-year special education degree for 60 credits; thus, there are two ways to gain a special teaching degree at university. The one-year degree has a similar number of credits as the teaching degrees gained at the UAS. However, the content is different (Takala et al., 2021; University of Oulu, 2022).

At UAS, professional teachers work in vocational education and training or in higher education. To become a professional teacher, it is necessary to have a prior degree, usually a master's degree, and three to five years of work experience in one's own field. Professional teacher education and vocational special needs teacher education consist of 60 credits and take approximately one year. Studies are organised as multiform learning, so the students can study while working (Isacsson et al., 2018). To be able to apply for vocational special needs teacher education, an applicant must have teacher education

and at least five months' subsequent work experience as a vocational teacher (National Study Info, 2022b).

Methodology

Aim and study design

The aim of this study is to respond to the following questions: 1) What are the main motivations of various teacher student groups to apply to teacher education? and 2) What kind of narratives of motivation can be found in the data?

We use data from two questionnaires: The first ('Data set 1') was administered before Covid-19, in spring 2019, and the second ('Data set 2') was administered in spring 2022 (see Appendix). A similar electronic questionnaire was administered both times to student teachers. Data set 1 was administered to three universities (Helsinki, Oulu, and Turku) and five UAS (Hämeenlinna, Jyväskylä, Tampere, Oulu, and Helsinki). Data set 2 was administered to one university (Oulu) and two UAS (Hämeenlinna and Jyväskylä). Two reminders were sent both times.

The questionnaires included one question about motivation and several about support needs, which are excluded from this study. Here, we use the background questions regarding participants' age and area of study. The research question applied to the data gathered from the questionnaires was formulated as follows: *Why did you apply to your current teacher education program?* This question was identified while we wanted to compare and learn more about the motivation of different types of teachers.

To guarantee the current research met ethical guidelines, the address to the Privacy Notice concerning this research was made available to all respondents, and permission to undertake the research was asked for and received from the educational dean of the faculty at the universities and from the dean of the school of professional teacher education at the UAS.

Participants

All data from the universities were collected from students who wanted to become early childhood educators and early childhood special educators working at kindergartens as well as from class, special, and subject teacher students working at compulsory schools or general upper secondary schools. The data at the UAS were collected from students seeking to become professional teachers or vocational special needs teachers. The questions can be seen in the Appendix. At the universities, all student teachers in their first and second year of study were involved. Students who had studied longer were excluded as it was thought they might have forgotten their motivation for applying. In the UAS, all students studying a one-year teacher degree during the academic year 2021–2022 were involved.

All participants are listed in Tables 1 and 2. Data set 1 consists of 480 participants, and Data set 2 consists of 280 participants. Of these, 506 are from the universities and 254 from the UAS. Most students were studying to become class teachers or professional teachers (Table 1).

Table 1: Data set 1 - Respondents to the electronic questionnaire from the universities and UAS in 2019

Student teachers at universities	N
Early childhood education teacher	87
Early childhood special education teacher	4
Class teacher	125
Special education teacher (5-year program)	30
Special education teacher (1 extra year)	16
Subject teacher	98
Student teachers from UAS	
Professional teacher	102
Vocational special needs teachers	18
Total	**480**

In Data set 1, the mean age of university students was 28 years, (standard deviation (SD) 7.8). However, the mean age of the one-year special education students was 40 (SD 9.2), so they were the oldest university students. The mean age of students at the UAS was 46 years (SD 7.6). Covid-19 changed many issues, and we wanted to determine whether it also changed motivation to apply for teacher education, which is why we collected new data in spring 2022, listed in Table 2.

Table 2: Data set 2 - Respondents to the electronic questionnaire from the universities and UAS in 2022

Student teachers from universities	N
Early childhood education teacher	40
Early childhood special education teacher	17
Class teacher	42
Special education teacher (5-year)	13
Special education teacher (1 extra year)	4
Subject teacher	30
Student teachers from UAS	
Professional teacher	109
Vocational special needs teachers	25
Total	**280**

In Data set 2, the mean age of university students was 27 (SD 8.8). In addition, the mean age of one-year special education students was 48 (SD 5.6). The age difference was also significant in this group (p<.001). The mean age of students at the UAS was 46 (SD 8.8)., At the universities, there is a total of about 700 students in the first and second study years, and the response rate was low (24%). At the two UAS, there are about 800 students, and the response rate was also low (17%).

Method

The responses in Data set 1 and Data set 2 varied in length from few words to 85 words. We understood these answers as narratives through which participants shared their own motivation to apply for teacher education. A combination of content analysis and the narrative approach (Lieblich et al., 1998; Schreier, 2012) was used to analyse the responses. According to Lieblich et al. (1998), content analysis is a classical method for analysing narrative materials. First, a data-driven content analysis was carried out. During the analysis, the main motivators were sought, and similar kinds of mentions were coded into the same category. The coding was undertaken by two researchers individually and for each student teacher category separately. When the categories were determined, these two researchers compared them; only minor differences were detected, mainly in wording. After this, two other researchers from the field checked the categories, and thus the trustworthiness of the results, and verified them using their extensive experience in the field and as researchers (see also Lieblich et al., 1998). From the most common categories of motivation, main narratives (Bruner, 2004) were designated. In addition to the narratives, we study the data based on the factors of the FIT-Choice model and use them as our theoretical frame.

We have followed the principles accepted by the Finnish national board on research integrity (TENK), that is, meticulousness, integrity and accuracy in conducting this research, and in presenting our results. (TENK, 2019, 2023) The data privacy notice for scientific research participants (EU General Data Protection regulation Art 13 and 14) was available on the first authors' homepage and the link to it was given in the questionnaire. It included all necessary information about the anonymity and voluntariness of the research.

Results

Teacher students' top motivators

The descriptive statistics will first be presented by giving the top motivators. After that the narratives are presented.

Motivation varied according to teaching area and many students named more than one motivator as can be seen from the quote below.

> "The world is made better one child at a time. A desire to work with children and with learning, be a safe adult, give the keys to build a good future. Clear profession, regular working and vocation times, the rhythm of the work is probably suitable for a family life (I do not yet have my own family, but it is one of the biggest dreams of the future)." (Data 1, Class teacher student, 258)

However, the top three motivators were easy to find from each teacher student group. Sometimes the first and the second motivating issues were difficult to separate, while both were mentioned as important (Tables 3 and 4).

Table 3: Top 3 motivators to take up teacher education of different student teacher groups in universities in Data set 1 and Data set 2, (Sp.ed. = special educator)

Student groups	TOP 1	TOP 2	TOP 3
Early educator, N=127	Desire to be with children / to teach children	Professional development	Permanent job
Early childhood Sp.ed. N=21	Professional development	Special needs	Permanent job
Class teacher, N=175	Dream and desire to teach/ to be with children	Meaningful job	Future effect
Special teacher 5 yrs, N=43	Desire to help, support and be with children	Special needs	Permanent job
Special teacher 1 yr, N=20	Professional development	Special needs	Permanent job
Subject teacher, N=128	Desire to teach own subject	Permanent job	Meaningful job

The main motivators for university students were desire to be with children and to teach them, special needs in table three include desire to support and help children. Also, professional development was an important motivator, and teaching was seen as a meaningful work and a possibility to affect the future society via children. The students at the UAS had different motivators (see table 4).

Table 4: Top 3 motivators for the two student teacher groups in UAS in Data set 1 and Data set 2

Student groups	TOP 1	TOP 2	TOP 3
Professional teacher, N = 211	Permanent job	Desire to teach	Professional development
Vocational special needs teacher, N = 49	Professional development	Permanent job	Desire to help

The possibility of getting a permanent position as well as professional development and a desire to teach were strongly present here. The vocational special needs teacher students had been working as professional teachers before, so professional development was obvious for them. However, we want to point out that the students at the UAS are older, which can influence motivation. In addition, the path to professional and vocational studies is not often as clear as that to university studies. Student teachers at the UAS already have some professional degree and some work experience. Their work had opened up their interest in and the possibility of teacher education.

A comparison of Data set 1 and Data set 2 did not reveal any remarkable differences. The two confirm each other, as the motivators were so similar in both sets of data. Covid-19 did not seem to affect the students' motivation, apart from a small increase in the number of career changers. However, the number of such cases was too small to base any conclusions on it.

Narratives of various student teacher groups

Together seven main narratives were told in the whole data. They were the: 1) *I like children and young people* narrative, 2) *desire to teach* narrative, 3) *professional development* narrative, 4) *qualification* narrative, 5) *social input* narrative, 6) *helping* narrative, and 7) *career change* narrative. Below we discuss these narratives in relation to teacher student group. We also mention some minor narratives at the end.

I like children and young people's narrative

In this narrative, the early childhood education, early special education, and class teacher students mentioned that they wanted to study in teacher education while they gained a great deal of joy from working with children and young people. These students wanted to see how young people develop and how they as future teachers, could promote their learning. In addition, children were seen as energizing and inspiring.

> "I have always wanted to work with children and youngsters. My own teachers were inspiring and motivating. I miss the joy children have." (Data 2, Early childhood education teacher students 213)

> "I like to work with children. I receive power and positivism for life and working with them is mainly rewarding and nice." (Data 1, Class teacher students 126)

As students at the UAS instruct adults, and sometimes young people as well, this narrative was thin among this group. Mainly intrinsic motivations (see Watt and Richardson, 2007) were present in this narrative, in both data sets.

Desire to teach narrative

A strong desire to teach was a common topic in several narratives. Many students in every student teacher group said that teaching as a profession is a significant, independent, and interesting job. The number reporting this perception varied, and it was most common among early educators and class teacher students. Some students, most commonly class teacher students but also students from the UAS, mentioned they had long dreamed of becoming a teacher. Many had had near relatives as teachers over generations.

> "I have always dreamed of teaching as a profession. I like people, serving, helping, and I like to challenge myself. I am organized and I think I am suited to it because of this." (Data 1, Early childhood education teacher student 269)

> 'Class teacher as a profession has always been my dream, and being a teacher is common among my relatives." (Data 1, Class teacher student 7)

> "Working as a teacher has always interested me. It is a natural continuum to my previous studies." (Data 2, Professional teacher student 100)

Subject teacher students also wanted to teach; many had liked teaching and aimed to become a teacher for a long time. However, this desire was often, but not always, linked to their subject, which they wanted to share with young people. The desire to teach was also connected with their own experiences of teaching as a pupil, which were not very good, and this led to a desire to offer better quality teaching.

In addition, this narrative included several mentions of teacher students' personal qualities which were seen as valuable; issues mentioned included the student being 'teacher material' and 'having the skills teachers need'. This narrative had mainly intrinsic motivators in both data sets.

Professional development narrative

This narrative is about a personal need to develop professional skills. Those students who studied special education at both institutes wrote about professional development. Many of these students had been working as unqualified special education teachers and had noticed that they need more skills to cope with diversity. These students were also interested in learning difficulties and other challenges. Nevertheless, without further study, they could not manage at work. They saw education as a form of professional development.

> "I need the training to be able to lead my young and adult students in day and evening education. The employer did not have a professional special teacher, so I had to act and start to study." (Data 2, 1-year Special education teacher student 75)

> "I realized that I need deeper knowledge and tools to guide pupils with special needs." (Data 2, 1-year Special education teacher student 81)

> "I wanted to improve my know-how." (Data 1, Vocational special teacher student 489)

Class and subject teacher studies last five years and are often a trainee's only, or usually the first, degree. This might explain why class and subject teacher students did not mention professional development. Professional utility values were present (see Goller et al., 2019).

Qualification narrative

This narrative is about the motivation to get a qualification, a degree, to be formally competent. Subject teacher students considered taking a teaching degree to be a more stable and feasible choice than becoming a researcher; so it was a kind of insurance. It offered the possibility of having a permanent job with proper benefits such as a decent salary, long holidays, and quite short days. They pointed also strongly to the importance of their own subject. However, variation existed among participants, and many of these students also stressed that teaching is an important career.

> "I wanted a 'proper' profession, meaning feeling secure and not qualifying just as an 'expert'. I also genuinely like school as a work environment, and I love to teach young people. But originally, the most important reason was the need to feel secure." (Data 1, Subject teacher student 285)

For professional teacher students, the primary motivator in studying for a degree was a desire to be competent. For vocational special needs teacher students, the need for extra knowledge and skills was among the top reasons. In both student groups at the UAS, many said that their employer had asked, and sometimes ordered, them to study for a teaching degree. The degree would allow them to obtain a

permanent job. However, these participants must have liked their field because they were ready to study a one-year, 60-credit degree for its own sake. Also, a few immigrant teacher students studied to become qualified in the Finnish education system.

> "I applied when my boss strongly recommended it in order to be qualified." (Data 1, Professional teacher student 418)

> "(I applied) because I am currently teaching as an unqualified teacher. Qualification has an effect on salary and makes it possible to get a more motivating job." (Data 2, Professional teacher student 165)

> "To become a competent teacher in Finland." (Data 2, Professional teacher student 159)

This and the previous narrative had elements of personal utility value (see Goller et al., 2019), such as benefitting from a degree in teaching later. This was mentioned mainly by professional teacher students and subject teacher students.

Social input narrative

All student groups mentioned that they wanted to develop society through their work as teachers promoting the development of the next generation. They also saw shortcomings in society which they wanted to affect by educating good future citizens. This narrative was thin and present mainly in the responses of university students. Several comments were also made about being a model of a trustworthy adult, which can be interpreted as making society a better place for children.

> "The subject I teach is interesting. I really wish to teach the same issues to youngsters. I feel that I can play my part in developing and understand society. This happens by raising kids to be well-adjusted citizens." (Data 2, Subject teacher student 215)

> "While I received good teaching in my time, the skills of today's new professionals is an issue I want to have an effect on with my own actions." (Data 1, Professional teacher student 421)

Among early childhood teacher students, this narrative was focused more on developing the workplace, but among class teacher students, it was focused on the development of society as a whole.

> "I noticed when I was working as a children's nurse that only some children received the attention they wanted, and those who were easy-going and active by character received all the attention. I wanted to change this." (Data 1, Early childhood education teacher student 235)

> "I want to be part of forming and affecting future society. I want to teach good values, like the social, ecological, and economic values of sustainable development." (Data 1, Class teacher student 51)

This narrative also had an element of supporting and helping children and young people. Among special education teacher students, the focus was on both children and society. Students of special education, but also class teacher students particularly, mentioned that they want to support pupils who struggle with learning or with some social issues.

"I wanted to serve justice through my work and also make sure that everyone receives support for their studies. I am interested in social issues." (Data 2, Special education teacher student, five-year studies, 2)

Social utility value and altruistic motivators (see Goller et al., 2019; Watt and Richardson, 2007) were present in this narrative, for example in the form of giving back to society what one has received or promoting the development of a better society.

Helping narrative

This narrative was mostly present in the university students' responses, however, some students from the UAS also mentioned helping as a motivation. Sometimes this and the previous narrative were combined in the same response, so they overlapped.

"A dream profession. I want to be a safe adult for children and help them in learning and growing." (Data 1, Class teacher student 19)

"I want to work with people and help others….in this profession I can best benefit from what I know to help others." (Data 1, Subject teacher student 340)

"I have always wanted to be a teacher and I am fascinated because I can help others." (Data 2, Early education teacher student 103)

"I want to help students in this field." (Data 1, Professional teacher student 398)

This as well as the previous narrative had some similar elements. Both had social utility value and altruistic motivators.

Changing career narrative

Wanting to change profession was often named by early years educators who had been working in kindergartens as child nurses but wanted more pedagogical knowledge and responsibility. In addition, this narrative was told by students who had experienced stress at their previous work and wrote that teachers' work could be less stressful, or during the pandemic, they had time to think of changing career and changed it.

"I wanted to move elsewhere from the hectic business world." (Data 1, Class teacher student 62)

"I worked as a child nurse at a kindergarten… but I did not receive pedagogical counselling to feel like a competent employee when I was alone in challenging situations...The work of a nurse is also temporary, and I thought that as an early years educator, I would be more likely to get a job." (Data 1, Early childhood education teacher student, 215)

Extrinsic motivation (Watt and Richardson, 2007) as well as elements of personal utility values can be seen here.

Minor narratives

While the data sets were large, minor narratives (Georgakopoulou, 2007) were also present. One could be called "Guaranteed employment narrative" and a typical comment was: "It is easy to get a job (as a teacher)" (Data 1, Subject teacher student 315). Also studying as a hobby was mentioned: "As a

counterbalance to work, pleasant things to do" (Data 1, Professional teacher student 26). In addition, drifting into a teaching career was sometimes mentioned: "By accident, there were studies available and finance, because there was a shortage of Sami teachers" (Data 2, Subject teacher student 42). However, all of these were not frequent, so they cannot be seen as major narratives.

To conclude, it is important to say that one student could have several motivations and many of the seven main narratives can partly overlap each other.

Discussion

In this study, we had two aims. First, student teachers at the universities and universities of applied sciences (UAS) were asked what motivated them to choose a teaching career and we studied these motivational factors in relation to the elements of the FIT-Choice model (Watt and Richardson, 2007). Second, we studied what kind of narratives students wrote about their motivation.

The most common motivations to apply for teacher education differed among students at the two institutes, universities and UASs. A desire to be with children and young people as well as a desire to teach were the two most common reasons for teacher students at universities, while a desire to get a permanent job, a desire to teach and professional development motivated UAS teacher students. Additionally, professional development was the main motivator among one-year-special needs teacher studies in both institutions. Special education in the degree added interest to special needs and towards supporting and helping pupils. A meaningful job and possibilities for professional development were appreciated in all teacher student groups.

Seven different main narratives were found. These narratives were called: I like children and young people, desire to teach, professional development, qualification, social input, helping, and changing career. In addition, such a big data set also included minor narratives such as teachers guaranteed employment or studying teaching as a hobby. A few respondents had also drifted into a teaching career without a significant motivation, so a thin drifting narrative could be recognised. Nevertheless, among the large amount of data gathered for this study, these students were exceptions.

It was possible to see extrinsic, intrinsic, and altruistic motivators for applying for a teaching career. In addition, the FIT-Choice model's (Watt and Richardson, 2007) personal utility value was mentioned. Comparable results were achieved by Rutten and Badiali (2021) and by Lähdesmäki (2021), who used part of our data set 1. Social utility value was present to a slight extent in every student group at the university but not among students at the UAS. One reason for this may be that students at the latter were older than the others and had, perhaps, already given, or found ways to give, their contribution to society. These students studying at the UAS and the one-year special education students studying at the universities differed from other university students as they already had a professional degree, at least a few years work experience and were older. Most of them expressed that they needed more knowledge and skills to perform their job better. Differences in motivation between these students and others may be partly explained by their age and existing work experience. The three elements mentioned in Alderfer's Existence, Relatedness and Growth (ERG) theory, can also be seen in the

motivation of teacher students. Especially the need of existence, which can be compared to Maslow's safety need; the teaching profession was safe and sure (Maslow, 1970; Shikalepo, 2020).

The teaching profession is still an attractive career, and the emphasis in Finnish teacher education on education science as well as research methods attracts applicants and supports teachers' pedagogical thinking and autonomy (Chung, 2023). The attractiveness of teacher education varies in other countries, too, and one issue affecting this can be the privatisation of schools. In the neoliberal policy paradigm great emphasis is placed on economic functions of education, links between education, the economy and markets. This has led, for example, to competition for pupils and teachers between private and public actors and the marketisation of education in Sweden (Lundahl et al., 2013; Springer et al., 2016).

The demands of inclusive education (UNESCO, 1994) can also be one reason in making the teacher profession less attaractive. It demands collaboration, instructional strategies and several other agentic moves from the teacher, all of them not very clear to teachers (Miller et al., 2022). The increasing workload of teachers as well as the contradictive demands can influence the motivation to apply to teacher education (Spicksley, 2022). The teaching profession needs both pulling and holding force, otherwise, it can become a challenge to recruit committed students (Mankki and Kyrö-Ämmälä, 2022).

Personality and life circumstances have a considerable influence on career choice today. Issues such as salary growth or promotion possibilities are not the only ways to retain teachers at work. In a German study (Stellmacher et al., 2020), trainees who wanted to become vocational teachers (n=30) had a strong subject-specific motivation, and trainees for comprehensive schools (n=49) had a strong educational interest. Our results resemble those of Stellmacher et al. (2020). Our results are also in line with those achieved by Lindqvist, Thornberg and Lindqvist (2021). They studied the motivation of special education teacher students in Sweden. Their motivation varied from altruistic and intrinsic motivations in trying to achieve better teaching skills and supporting pupils 'at risk' to extrinsic ones such as boosting one's career or getting away from a classroom setting (Lindqvist et al., 2021).

Teachers have received additional tasks, and inclusion has brought pupils with special needs into many classes. Many teachers say they cannot manage all these tasks (Nykänen, 2021; Takala and Sirkko, 2022). Fewer and fewer newly graduated teachers believe they will work their entire career in the teaching profession without any career change, career development or professional side path (Alifrosti et al., 2022).

Motivation is often based on experiences and expectancies regarding the profession. Altruistic motivation has been, and still is, one reason to start teacher education. However, it is thin, and extrinsic and intrinsic motivators are stronger. Are they strong enough for individuals to keep their motivation despite the reality at work? Recruiting and retaining teachers needs action from school authorities and governments. The conditions at work need to be addressed to keep teachers motivated. Love of children and youngsters and the desire to teach and undertake continuous learning are valuable characteristics for a teacher and need to be cherished and supported.

Limitations and future research

The current study had limitations: First, it had a strong regional focus and thus it cannot be directly transferred to other school systems in other countries. Second, the response rate per institute was low. Nevertheless, we had quite a large data set and similar kinds of results have been found elsewhere (Lindqvist et al., 2021; Berger and D´Ascoli, 2012) so our results can be regarded as reliable.

Future research on motivation needs a follow-up; how do motives develop during education and later in the profession? This could be done using both questionnaires and interviews including questions about motivation types and about retaining and recruiting students and teachers in the future to avoid teacher shortage.

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Appendix

A questionnaire for student-teachers at the Universities and Universitiy of Applied Sciences, 2019–2020 and 2021-2022

This questionnaire is designed to identify any learning difficulties of student teachers, and motivation to study to become a teacher. This survey will help to develop teacher education to become more inclusive. The questionnaire will be responded anonymously and the results will be used in teaching and research articles. Please allow about 10-20 minutes to complete the survey.

The questionnaire is produced by special education units at the Universitiy of Oulu (OY), and at the Häme University of Applied Sciences (HAMK). Professor Marjatta Takala (OY) is responsible for the questionnaire on the university and PhD Anu Raudasoja (HAMK) is responsible for the questionnaire on the university of applied sciences. Thank you in advance for your responses. If you have any questions, please contact Marjatta Takala. Information on the security of this study is available at the homepage of Marjatta Takala.

BACKGROUND QUESTIONS:

1. **I am studying to become**
   ـــــــ classroom teacher

   ـــــــ classroom teacher (with a separate special education teacher's degree)

   ـــــ special education teacher (5-year major)

   ـــــــ separate 1-year special education teacher's degree

   ـــــــ early childhood teacher

   ـــــــ early childhood special education teacher (2-year master's degree)

   ـــــــ subject teacher

   ـــــــ vocational teacher

   ـــــــ vocational special education teacher

   ـــــــ other, which _____

2. Age: My age in years _____.

3. Gender : _____ Female; _____ Male: _____Other

4. Did you have any other training before starting your teacher training? If so, which one?

_____

5. Where are you studying to become a teacher?

_____ at a University ; _____ at a University of Applied Sciences

SURVEY QUESTION (other survey questions removed while not used in this study)

Please tell us **why did you apply to study your current teacher training?** (more space was given in the questionnaire) _____