

STUDY ON STUDENT TEACHERS' EDUCATIONAL AND PROFESSIONAL ATTITUDES AND EXPECTATIONS CONCERNING THEIR PRACTICAL TRAINING

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Abstract: This article presents the results of a study on student teachers' educational and professional attitudes and expectations concerning their practical training. The study involved 4th-year students in the bachelor degree courses in Pre-school Education and Foreign Language, Pre-school and Primary School Education, Primary Education and Foreign Language at Vratsa Branch of St Cyril and St Methodius University of Veliko Turnovo during the academic year 2017/2018.

The study was conducted within "The Art of Mentoring the Transition from the University to the Educational Institutions" research project of Vratsa Branch of St. Cyril and St. Methodius University of Veliko Turnovo in 2018. The diagnostic tool is a questionnaire that takes into account the results according to the 5-level Likert scale.

A theoretical analysis is made of the key concepts *attitudes, educational and professional attitudes and expectations* in the context of student teachers' practical training. The structure of attitudes and expectations is presented, and a model of their interaction is proposed. Based on this model is the questionnaire by means of which the survey was conducted.

The components of the student teachers' educational and professional attitudes and expectations are analyzed in the study. The data obtained will allow for future improvement of student teachers' practical training.

Keywords: attitudes, educational and professional attitudes, expectations, student teachers, practical training.

1. INTRODUCTION

The attitudes and expectations are with stable characteristics. The research of their components allows to predict their effect over the future professional activities of the today's students. For the lecturers at the universities, the analysis of the educational and professional attitudes and expectations of the student teachers allows to identify the difficulties and problems in the practical training of the students. Their in-time correction is a condition for the future successful professional realization of the students.

The purpose of the present article is to research the educational and professional attitudes and expectations of the student teachers about their practical training. The participants of the research are 34 students fourth course in Bachelor Degree studies of the specialities "Pre-school Education and Foreign Language", "Pre-school and Primary School Education", "Primary Education and Foreign Language" at Vratsa Branch of "St Cyril and St Methodius University" of Veliko Turnovo for the academic year 2017/2018.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. EDUCATIONAL AND PROFESSIONAL ATTITUDES OF THE STUDENT TEACHERS ABOUT THEIR PRACTICAL TRAINING

The attitude is "relatively stable, habitual internal determination or predisposition of the human to a defined reaction type, which determines the actions and experience and most generally can be interpreted as an intermediary unit between the stimulus and reaction" (Речник по психология, 1989: 300). According to G. Piriyov and L. Desev, attitude is the "relation of the person to a given value and the strive to achieve targets, orientated towards it", "readiness to perform an action in a given way" (quote as per Ivanov, 1996). Also, S. Barros and M. Elia determine the attitudes as subjective and psychological preparation for an action (Barros & Elia, 1998).

The quoted definitions show that the main characteristics of the attitude are *stability* and *determination*. These characteristics provide exceptionally valuable information about the personality and this is the reason why the interest in the attitude research is growing. If, initially, the term *attitude* is introduced and analysed in psychology, gradually the interest to it grows and there are researches of the attitudes, performed in the fields of pedagogics and

sociology. In the present research, we are going to step on the fundamental characteristics of the attitudes and their structure, accepted in the psychology. The following three components are established in the structure of the attitudes within the scientific literature:

- cognitive;
- affective;
- conative.

The cognitive component is related to the awareness of the motives for a given behaviour, knowledge of the subject and prediction of the activity. The affective component in the attitudes reflects the emotional assessment of the object and subject of the activity. The conative component reflects the behaviour, directed towards the subject (Ivanov, 1996).

The attitudes' structure is complex and it is difficult to split it in individual components during a research. According to M. Vocht and A. Laherto, "Attitude is a complex psychological construct that cannot be observed directly. Attitudes exist in cognitive, affective, behavioural, professional, personal, conscious and unconscious levels, and many of these are difficult or even impossible to measure (Vocht & Laherto, 2017: 272).

One of the varieties of the attitudes is the *professional attitude*. According to N. Eremina, the term *professional attitude* is "a mechanism for development of personal attitude towards the professional activities". The professional attitude is the attitude of the person to himself/herself, to his/her personal situation, his/her strive, according to that attitude to act in a defined way during the performance of his/her professional duties (Eremina, 2008: 144). In relation to the attitudes of the future pedagogue and psychologist, N. Eremina states that they are two types: *positive and negative*. The *positive professional attitudes* are characterized with:

- high readiness of the students to follow the requirements of the educational program;
- positive emotional attitude to their activities at the university and positive attitudes about the future professional activities;
- the presence of social needs in the student, determining the selection of the profession of pedagogue, psychologist;
- development of professional thinking, reflection and qualities during the professional activities of the student, which correspond to the profession requirements (Eremina, 2008: 145).

The negative professional attitudes, according to the same author are characterized with:

- low level of readiness of the student to follow the requirements of the educational program;
- negative, asocial behaviour of the student within the study group;
- negative emotional attitude of the student towards his practical activities at the university and negative idea about the future professional activity;
- development of qualities within the student, that hinder his/her adaptation to the educational conditions, attempts for avoidance of any loads, avoiding responsibility, consumer attitude towards the profession (Eremina, 2008: 145).

In the present research, where the subject of the research are the attitudes of the student teachers in the practical training, we assume as more appropriate to use the term *educational-professional attitude*. According to G. Akopov and I. Arhipova, a variety of the professional attitude is the *educational-professional attitude* (Akopov and Arhipova, 2017: 71). In its structure, they incorporate the actual content of the educational (study) attitude considering the point of view of the professional attitude. "The emotional-evaluative, cognitive and behavioural component of the educational-professional attitude represent the subjective, imaginary-informational and subjective-motivational characteristics of the person in their dependence on the social development situation, included in the educational environment of the university, orientated towards the preparation for a given profession" (Akopov and Arhipova, 2017: 80-81).

The formation of educational-professional attitudes is a long process. There are different factors, influencing that process. No matter that the university is having the leading role in the formation of the educational-professional attitude in the student teachers during their practical training, we have to note that the society is also influencing the educational-professional attitudes. This position is presented in the model of S. Barros and M. Elia, which presents the process of formation of attitudes in students and teachers through the training programs and continuous teachers qualification (Barros & Elia, 1998).

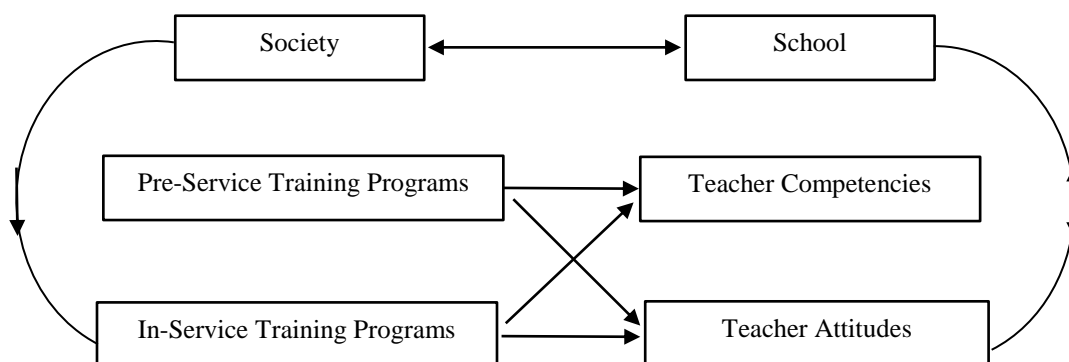


Figure 1. The model of attitudes' formation (S. Barros & M. Elia)

As it can be seen from Fig. 1, the society is influencing the school and the teachers' training programs and their continuous qualification. This is why S. Barros and M. Elia underline the significance of the public recognition for the improvement of the work of the teachers. The teachers' training programs and the programs for continuous qualification contribute to the establishment of competences and formation of attitudes in the teachers. The role of the cognitive component for the establishment of the attitudes is underlined in the quoted model.

The role of the professional attitude of the teachers (and respectively, the establishment of the educational-professional attitude in the student teachers) is significant not only for the transmission of knowledge but also, for the formation of the behaviour of the pupils. And O. Lindseth is having a good reason to write down: "Teachers do not only transmit knowledge, but do also transmit values and attitudes, and thus shape the behaviour of the pupils" (Lindseth, 2006). According to the author, the school must not only be a place for learning but also a pleasant place, i.e. a place for interaction with others, place for development of social and moral skills. The school must provide knowledge, but it also must form values and attitudes and in such a way to form the behaviour of the pupils (Lindseth, 2006).

M. Vocht and A. Laherto are writing about the roles of the professional attitude of the teachers and the acceptance and operation with innovations: „negative attitudes hinder teachers' ability to adopt and operationalize the innovation. To understand educational reforms and make them more effective, teachers' professional attitudes must be investigated and their concerns addressed.“ (Vocht & Laherto, 2017: 271).

In the present research, we assume the thesis of S. Şener, that the quality of the education is dependent on the teacher and in order to prepare the teachers, the attitudes of the students, future teachers, must be studied very well: "The expectations of teachers, their sensitivity, priorities, and values contribute to the quality of education, so the teacher is the most important component of the quality of education in regular and special education. It is essential to prepare well-equipped teachers and this can be realized by learning about teacher trainees' needs, expectations, levels of attitudes and knowledge. It is also necessary to help them acquire ideas related to non-stop learning, perform their jobs enthusiastically and facilitate the development of teacher's attitudes.“ (Şener, 2015: 573). "Since the quality of education is directly related to the quality of teachers, we must consider the necessity of positive attitudes and try to develop teachers' positive attitudes towards to the teaching profession by taking some measures and developing some programs" (Şener, 2015: 579). "Effective attitudes and actions employed by teachers can positively change the lives of students, so it will be helpful to examine teacher trainees' educational experiences, attitude differences and offer them some useful programs, which will illuminate them about what they should or should not do in their future classes. Determining some factors effecting trainees to choose the teaching as a profession, level of their positive or negative attitudes will highlight teacher education programs, implemented in the educational faculties. Finally, it is necessary that teacher training programs need to provide teacher candidates with knowledge and experiences with cultural diversity, and teacher trainers should aim to help trainees be independent individuals, demonstrate positive attitudes, and encourage them to be creative and take responsibility for their development." (Şener, 2015: 579).

2.2. EXPECTATIONS OF THE STUDENT TEACHERS ABOUT THE PRACTICAL TRAINING

The expectation is a "psychological state, related to the occurrence of a future event" (Речник по психология, 1989: 349). Similar to the attitude, the expectation is a predisposition to a certain behaviour, but it is orientated to a future situation. The relation between the terms *attitude* and *expectation* is also reflected in the structure of their construction components.

E. Levchenko states, that the expectation of the subject of the educational activities consist of *cognitive*, *affective* and *conative* components. Due to the fact that the education is also a communication of the students with the lecturers, the structure of the expectations also incorporates the *communicative* component (Levtchenko, 1991: 82). The *cognitive component* of the expectations is the knowledge, related to the study subjects and the knowledge acquired previously from various sources. E. Levchenko calls the knowledge, acquired by the student at the secondary school or incrementally, accidentally, *background* knowledge. The cognitive component of the expectations about the education at the university is based on this *background knowledge*. The *affective component* contains the emotional-evaluative attitude to the educational subject and its attractiveness to the student. The *conative component* is related to the student's behaviour and the presence of the necessity for deepening of the knowledge. The stated three components in the structure of the expectations are closely related. E. Levchenko states that the cognitive component has a leading role. "During the perception of new educational subject (initial shallow perception), the directly perceived (presented by the lecturer and presented in the study books) content of the educational subject is related to the idea about the given educational subject established up to now. The result of the referencing acts as a regulator of the cognitive activities of the subject. The system of expectations is reconfigured, reorganized. The variants of reorganization can be considered as the per the scale *consistency – inconsistency* of the directly perceived educational material and the preliminary idea about it." (Levtchenko, 1991: 82). E. Levchenko presents the options for the reorganization of the cognitive, affective and conative components in the following Table 1 (Levtchenko, 1991: 83):

Table 1. Reorganization of the system of the student's expectations during the perception of new educational subject (E. Levchenko)

Cognitive component	Affective component	Conative component
1. Complete consistency of the perceived content of the educational subject with the idea about it.	The educational subject is evaluated as very easy, not requiring efforts for mastering.	There is no necessity for widening, deepening, systematization of the knowledge of the educational subject, the cognitive activity is minimal.
2. Partial consistency of the directly perceived content of the educational subject with the idea about it.	The educational subject is assessed as interesting, difficult enough, requiring efforts for its mastering.	There is a necessity for widening, deepening, systematization of the knowledge of the educational subject, the cognitive activity is optimal.
3. Complete inconsistency of the directly perceived educational content of the educational subject with the idea about it.	The educational subject is assessed as boring, not interesting, very difficult.	No necessity for widening, deepening, systematization of the knowledge occurs.

The information about the level of realization of the expectations of the students is required and is very significant for the improvement of the educational activities at the faculties, because it allows to see its strong and weak sides through the eyes of the students (Gurina, 2007: 14). As a conclusion of the short theoretical overview of the terms *attitude*, *educational-professional attitude* and *expectations* of the student teachers about the practical training, we assume the following model of interaction between the individual components of the reviewed terms, which we are going to use in the present research:

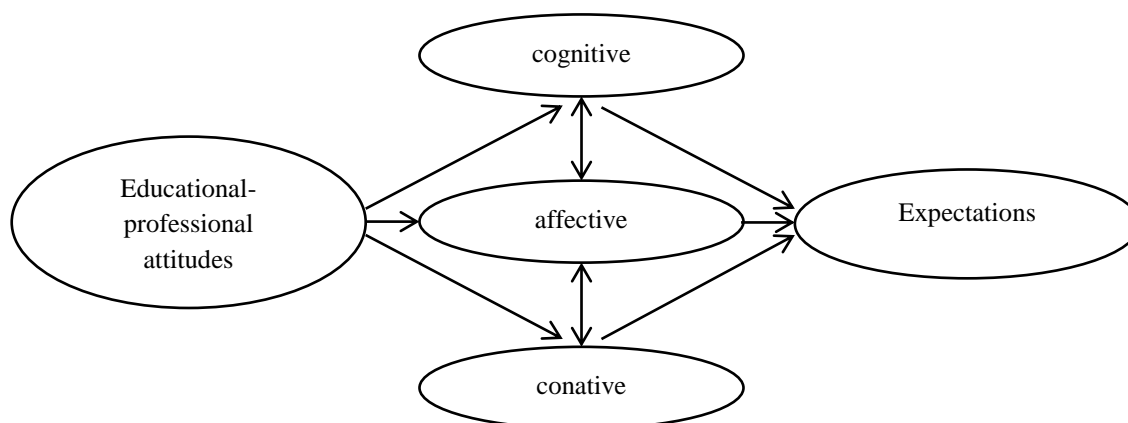


Figure 2. Interaction model of the components of the educational-professional attitudes and the expectations of the student teachers

3. THE DATA

A proprietary questionnaire is used in the research. The statements, that study the educational-professional attitudes and expectations of the student teachers are distributed in 5-stage Likert scale. At the end of the questionnaire there are two statements, which the students must finish with free answers.

The relatively small number of studied individuals limits the drawing of statistically significant data. In our research for the academic year 2017/2018, the number of the graduated students of the stated pedagogical specialities at the University of Veliko Tarnovo St. St. Cyril and Methodius' Branch in Vratsa is 34. So the acquired data, presented in the questionnaire, include the number of the student teachers (n) who have marked the relative answer of the Likert scale and the average value (\bar{x}) of the answers as per the scale.

QUESTIONNAIRE

about the study of the educational-professional attitudes and expectations of the student teachers about the practical training

Statements	Likert scale				
	Completely disagree	Rather disagree	I do not have a definitive opinion	Rather agree	Completely agree
1. I am acquainted with the normative documents in the educational system and I can work with them.			$n = 2$ $\bar{x} = 0,06$	$n = 12$ $\bar{x} = 0,35$	$n = 20$ $\bar{x} = 0,59$
2. I am acquainted with the educational documentation and I can work with it.			$n = 3$ $\bar{x} = 0,09$	$n = 12$ $\bar{x} = 0,35$	$n = 19$ $\bar{x} = 0,58$
3. I am satisfied by the theoretical preparation (pedagogical, psychological, methodological, special scientific preparation), which I have received in order to be able to teach at the kindergarten/school.			$n = 1$ $\bar{x} = 0,03$	$n = 8$ $\bar{x} = 0,24$	$n = 25$ $\bar{x} = 0,74$

4. I am prepared for the establishment of supportive educational environment, contributing to the development of each child/pupil.			$\bar{x} = 0,09$	$\bar{x} = 0,29$	$\bar{x} = 0,62$
5. It will be difficult for me to organize the group/class.	$\bar{x} = 0,41$	$\bar{x} = 0,44$	$\bar{x} = 0,03$	$\bar{x} = 0,12$	
6. The children/pupils will be satisfied with my work.			$\bar{x} = 0,03$	$\bar{x} = 0,35$	$\bar{x} = 0,62$
7. The parents of the children/pupils will be satisfied with my work.			$\bar{x} = 0,06$	$\bar{x} = 0,35$	$\bar{x} = 0,59$
8. I am afraid that the mentor teacher will not be satisfied with my work.	$\bar{x} = 0,5$	$\bar{x} = 0,44$	$\bar{x} = 0,03$	$\bar{x} = 0,03$	
9. The three main priorities of my theoretical preparation are:					
10. In relation to my attitudes and expectations to the practical preparation at the kindergarten/school, I would add the following:					

4. ANALYSIS

From the data, presented in the table, it can be seen that, in relation to the cognitive component of the educational-professional attitudes, the student teachers state that they are acquainted with the normative documents in the educational system and the educational documentation and they are able to work with them. In relation to the knowledge of the normative documentation in the educational system and the skills to work with it, the answer "Completely agree" is marked by 20 student teachers and the answer "Rather agree" is marked by 12 student teachers. In relation to the knowledge of the educational documentation and the skills to work with it, the answer "Completely agree" is marked by 19 student teachers; "Rather agree" by 12 student teachers and 3 do not have a definitive opinion.

The data acquired in relation to the cognitive component in the educational-professional attitude are in logical connection to the data, acquired about the affective component. When there is a good theoretical preparation it is logical to expect the presence of satisfaction. Satisfaction by the theoretical preparation (pedagogical, psychological, methodical, special scientific) for teaching at kindergarten/school is marked by 33 student teachers and 1 does not have definitive opinion.

The conative component of the educational-professional attitudes, related to the behaviour of the student teacher is evaluated through the skills for establishment of supportive environment, contributing to the development of each child/pupil. The answer "Completely agree" is marked by 21 student teachers, "Rather agree" is marked by 10 and 3 do not have definitive opinion.

In the theoretical analysis (and in the model) we stated that there is a connection between the components of the educational-professional attitudes and the corresponding components of the expectations. The data acquired by us confirmed that thesis. The satisfaction from the theoretical preparation in the educational-professional attitudes is in logical correlation with the expectation that the children/pupils, their parents and the mentor teachers will be satisfied with the work of the student teachers. The expectation of the student teachers not to face difficulties with the organization of the group/class is in logical relation to the satisfaction.

At the end of the questionnaire, the student teachers completed two statements with free answers. The priorities of the practical training for the student teachers are:

- professional and personal characteristics – "motivation", "improvement", "discovering and rediscovering of the teaching profession", "patience", "love for the children", "competency", "positiveness", "good communication", "satisfaction";
- professional skills – "skills for control over the children, for calm and active organization of the educational process in the kindergarten", "formation of cognitive skills and habits in the children at pre-school age", "work with the parents for more efficient educational process", "to be prepared for the children every day", "the children to be delighted by the lesson and to ask for more", "both children and me to be satisfied with the work", "full knowledge of the normative documents in the educational system", "good preparation for future realization at kindergarten/school", "organization of the group/class", "work with educational documentation".

The student teachers added the following about the practical preparation at the kindergarten/school:

- opinions, findings – "the practical training for the kindergarten and school was well organized", "it was not so scary", "I thought that the mentor teacher will treat me like a girl that knows nothing, but I was wrong. She accepted me as a daughter of hers and motivated me even more."
- proposals for improvement of the practical training – "a more comprehensive preparation for coping with conflict situations is required", "to achieve understanding between the teacher and parent", "the mentor teacher to provide ideas, advises, not ready developments of pedagogical situations", "the expectations which I had were completely met, but I wished the period of the practice to be longer".

From the acquired opinions we understand that the student teachers appreciate the relations with the mentor teachers and the parents for the efficiency of their work in the practical training. The fact that the student teachers showed pedagogical thinking during the process of the practical training and they are not happy to receive "ready developments of pedagogical situations" is significant for us. No matter of the difficulties faced during the practical training, the student teachers state that "it was not so scary", but would like to have more time for gaining of experience during the process of the practical training.

5. CONCLUSION

The study of the educational-professional attitudes and expectations of the student teachers allows the detection and change of those conditions that hinder the practical training. The analysis of the consequences of the educational-professional attitudes and the expectations of the student teachers is a perspective analysis of the pedagogical activities of the future teachers.

The present analysis showed that the student teachers are satisfied by the theoretical training. Most probably, due to the above fact, they expect that the children/pupils, mentor teachers and parents will be satisfied by their work. Among the priorities of the practical training for the student teachers are positive personal and professional qualities. The proposals for improvement of the practical training show strive for improvement of the pedagogical skills.

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