

INDUCTION INTO THE TEACHING PROFESSION FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF BEGINNING TEACHERS

Darinka Kostadinova

St. Cyril and St. Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo – Vratsa Branch, Republic of Bulgaria;
kostadinova_d_h@abv.bg

Larissa Gruncheva

St. Cyril and St. Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo – Vratsa Branch, Republic of Bulgaria;
larissa.gruncheva@gmail.com

Abstract: This paper contains the results of a study on the beginning teachers' attitudes and expectations regarding their induction into the teaching profession. The study was conducted in 2018 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 Tarnovo.

The beginning teacher's transition from pre-service university training to the teaching profession is a complex and dynamic process. Knowing and understanding the needs of the neophyte teacher is the best way to overcome the hardships of the induction period and to ensure his/her effective socialization into the teaching community.

The paper examines the nowadays aspects of this transition, the problems concerning the successful adaptation of early career teachers to the profession, summarizes the neophytes' views on the priorities in teachers' practical training, analyzes their expectations and attitudes towards a successful career start. The beginning teacher's transition from the university to the educational institution is a unified, time-taking and continuous process which is aimed at building personal qualities, professional competences, knowledge, skills and habits, adequate both to the personal needs of the novice teacher and to the requirements mandatory for the job. The motivation factors are the basis for winning professional recognition. Mentorship plays an important role in building a quality teacher. It is an integral part of the new teacher's integration to the profession, of his/her overall professional development and continuous improvement.

Keywords: beginning teacher, expectations, attitudes, adaptation, integration to the professional community,

1. INTRODUCTION

The first steps in a career, i.e the induction period, is a period characterized with a systematic methodical support aimed at the smooth introduction of the new recruits to the specific context of a profession.

Teaching is among those professions which place the most pressure on their newest recruits and that is the reason why induction programs for beginning teachers throughout the first 1-2 years of their career is not just necessary but a mandatory component of the neophyte teachers' acculturation into the teaching profession.

Induction programs for beginning teachers all over the world are aimed at: alleviating pressures that beginning teachers face; reducing attrition rates among neophyte teachers during the first 1-2 years of their career; facilitating the transition from pre-service university training into the profession; creating conditions for continuing learning; building quality teachers. Beginning teachers' retention plays a key role to the sustainable and smooth functioning of the educational system.

As far as Bulgaria is concerned, an issue of recent years is the generational change among teachers in the Bulgarian educational system. According to the National Statistical Institute, 68598 pedagogical specialists worked in the Bulgarian system of secondary education during the 2017/2018 school year. Only 1.36% out of them are aged up to 29 years while teachers aged 60+ constitute 11.23% (the sum is less than 100 because 57.6% of teachers aged 29 - 55 are not included). Creating conditions for well-balanced age structure of staff ensures continuity among the teams of teachers, in this way providing opportunities for breaking stereotypes and archaic pedagogical formulations. Thus comes to the fore the need to ensure the transition from the university to the educational institution where the beginning teachers start their career. And also - the need of smooth adaptation to the profession and sustainability on the position occupied.

This need is further emphasized by the requirements of the new regulatory framework in education and the high public expectations from teachers nowadays.

2. CONTEMPORARY ASPECTS OF THE TRANSITION FROM THE UNIVERSITY TO THE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

With the adoption of the new Pre-school and School Education Act in 2015 (effective since 01.08.2016), new unified state requirements concerning the training of specialists with university education were approved in Bulgaria, regulating the acquisition of teaching professional qualifications. These were set out in the Regulation on the State Requirements for Acquiring Teaching Professional Qualifications (promulgated in The State Gazette, No. 89 of 11.11.2016, in force since the 2017/2018 school year; adopted by Council of Ministers Decree No. 289 of 07.11.2016).

Teacher training at university encompasses an educational minimum of theoretical and practical preparation. "The professional and practical training of teacher-to-be students is a mission of the university and the programmes in the Pedagogy professional field. It guarantees future teachers' quality training and their successful start in the professional realization and career development. " [1]

Practical training takes place in real (field) conditions - kindergartens and schools from the pre-school and school system. This provides a direct link between the university and the future workplace of the students graduating the pedagogical majors. The practical part of the trainee teachers' preparation is fundamental and ensures the connection with their successful professional realization in the future.

In order for this to happen, the accent should be placed on the beginning teachers with their expectations and attitudes as the bearers of theoretical training and professional competence allowing them to be successful teachers. This, in turn, is a precondition for the generational change in the teaching community and is an expression of care for modern and quality education.

3. THE PROBLEMS OF BEGINNING TEACHERS' SUCCESSFUL ADAPTATION INTO THE PROFESSION

The adaptation of beginning teachers is related to the acculturation of neophytes into the the teaching profession peculiarities as well as into the educational system reality.

According to a team of psychologists from St. Cyril and St. Methodius University, the factors for successful adaptation of new teachers to the school environment are as follows: 1. *Motivation to perform a certain professional activity*; 2. *Characteristics of the environment*; 3. *Good university training*; 4. *Pedagogical and psychological knowledge and skills, culture of communication that are acquired in the process of maturation*; 5. *School management*; 6. *Social prestige of the profession*. [20]

The motivation factor is the first and most important factor for successful adaptation. The motivation and the desire with which people work a particular job is largely based upon their attitudes and expectations. The dictionary defines **attitude** as *a feeling or opinion about something or someone, or a way of behaving that is caused by this; the way you feel about something or someone, or a particular feeling or opinion*. [15] In psychology (social psychology), attitude is cognition, often with some degree of emotional valence, which reflects the classification and evaluation of objects and events. They are hypothetical constructs, manifested in conscious experience, behaviour, and physiological indicators. *Attitudes are sometimes regarded as underlying predispositions, while opinions are seen as their overt manifestations*. [17] **Expectation**, on the other hand, is synonymous with *hope, anticipation, looking forward*. [15] It is define as *expecting, awaiting, the feeling that good things are going to happen in the future; the feeling of expecting something to happen*. [16]

"The fact is that school is not the place where students most motivated to work with children would go, but once in the school environment through force of circumstances, they are further motivated to perform specific pedagogical functions." [20]

During the period of adaptation and induction, beginning teachers are supported by mentor teachers. The mentor teacher's role is to guide the new teacher's participation in the educational process and assist his/her performance by providing methodological support thus stimulating the beginning teacher's professional enhancement and career development and making induction effective. Therefore, knowing well the successful adaptation factors combined with the beginning teachers' expectations and attitudes come to the fore since this could be the "life belt" to help the early career teacher retain in the teaching profession and see his/her professional future in it.

4. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study is to examine and analyze the beginning teachers' expectations and attitudes concerning the transition from the university to the educational institutions (kindergartens / schools) in the context of current public expectations and normative regulations.

In order to achieve this goal, several research tasks have been set:

1. to analyse the early career teachers' opinion regarding their expectations and attitudes towards their teaching performance;

2. to present and back with arguments summaries and conclusions on the process of effective adaptation in the profession as well as on possibilities for beginning teachers' professional recognition and development.

The survey was organized as part of a project of St. Cyril and St. Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo - Vratsa Branch. It was conducted in the period April - June 2018 via an online questionnaire.

The questions and statements in the questionnaire are focused on the essential aspects of the teaching profession, they are in accordance with the successful adaptation factors and directed at a kind of self-evaluation of the readiness for work, which in turn corresponds to the new teachers' abilities to cope with the challenges of the teaching profession.

For the purposes of the study, the Likert scale was chosen which allows for collecting more accurate information from respondents, and also helps in identifying areas of learning that require specific improvement. In this way, the survey could also serve as a means to provide feedback information from graduate students.

The open-ended questions of the questionnaire enable respondents to specify their opinions and to share ones on topics not covered by the questionnaire, which may refer to essential aspects of teachers' attitudes and expectations.

The survey respondents are 51 beginning teachers with 1 to 3-year professional experience who work in kindergartens and schools. Teachers working at different stages of the educational system were anonymously and willingly involved in the survey. 53% of the respondents are school teachers, and the other 47% are kindergarten teachers.

The educational institutions which are the respondents' working places are located in different settlements: 66% in big cities, 35% in small towns and 9% in villages.

The respondent beginning teachers hold bachelor qualification degree. They have graduated programmes with different majors. Most of them - 67% - have graduated with a major in "Pre-school and primary school education". The rest of the majors are presented as follows: Primary school education, Pre-school education, Primary school education and foreign language, Bulgarian language and history, Psychology. These majors cover to a large extent the ones that are studied in the Vratsa branch of Veliko Tarnovo University (which suggests that the respondents are former alumni of the branch in Vratsa). It is noteworthy that teachers predominantly continued their MA in the same major or a different one which, however, might have an upgrading role to their basic training thus ensuring best performance results. This is a good indication in terms of the sustainability of their orientation to the teaching profession.

Twenty-four (that is 47%) respondents work as kindergarten teachers, the rest are, respectively, school teachers (20% of them are primary school teachers), two respondents are primary school teachers in Bulgarian language, one is an English teacher, one works as a teacher in the full-day organization of study and one is a school pedagogical advisor.

52% of the respondents work on a permanent employment contract, 47% - on a temporary employment contract.

A contract of indefinite duration such as the permanent employment contract, gives the employee security and is a good basis for professional development. What practice shows is that when beginning teachers work on short-term temporary employment contracts (or as replacements), in short time large percentage of them make their way to another profession.

54% of the respondents have up to one year of work experience, 13% - up to 3 years and 23% up to 2 years.

Probably, teachers with 3 years of experience do not consider themselves as beginning teachers, especially if this work experience is without interruption. Beginning teachers with up to 1 year of work experience were most willing to participate in this survey and possibly in various discussions on this topic which they are interested in. It is noteworthy that, given the opportunity to answer open-ended questions, theirs are the most descriptive answers.

5. ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS FROM THE STUDY ON THE BEGINNING TEACHERS' EXPECTATIONS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS THEIR INDUCTION INTO THE TEACHING PROFESSION

The high quality of my theoretical training helps me to get quickly oriented in the school environment.

Academic competence of the pedagogical specialist (i.e the teacher) is at the basis of his/her professional competence. The respondent beginning teachers also consider this part of their training as meaningful and basic.

Although their opinions are distributed throughout all the levels of the Likert scale, the positive ones clearly stand out: 54% of the respondents strongly agree or agree that the quality of their theoretical training is high. It is noteworthy that, in spite of the fact that "strongly agree" is the predominant opinion, respondents who are hesitant between two opposite levels "agree" and "disagree" are evenly distributed - 26%. Perhaps such opinions are provoked by their (in)ability to put what they have learned into practice. It is also possible that performance hardship may cause uncertainty and confusion - 12% of young teachers have no firm opinion.

Those 8% of respondents who categorically do not consider the quality of their theoretical training as high, are most alarming. Their opinion probably is based on the academic results of those beginning teachers and might be related to various difficulties in the the acquisition of academic knowledge.

The responses from the negative end of the scale cause justified concern and require additional support regarding the deficit reporting and overcoming. Part of such support should be to develop a plan by the mentor teacher together with the beginning teacher for the latter's adaptation and future development.

I am familiar with the normative documents concerning the educational system and I am able to work with them.

Another serious hesitation in the beginning teachers' opinions refers to knowing the normative documents. The respondents' opinions are polarized, albeit with a slight predominance of the positive ones. This opinion is a reflection of the general opinion among the teaching community in Bulgaria. The introduction of the new Pre-school and School Education Act in 2016 led to a complete change of the entire regulatory framework in education. The new 19 state educational standards in fact refer to essential aspects of the education system. Adopting them in short time, in 2016, led to difficulties caused by the lack of their timely and full understanding thus causing uncertainty among teachers.

The mentor teacher helps me get acquainted with educational and school documentation and work with it.

It is more than natural that the legislation change in the educational system logically should lead to new educational and school documentation. Experienced veteran teachers recognized as a priority the need to get acquainted with the new school documentation and began to get familiar with the the changes about it. This has been highly appreciated by their beginning teacher colleagues. 42% strongly agree that they rely on their mentors to get acquainted with school and educational documentation and to work with it.

Single positions reflecting some different opinions are related to the absence of a mentor. Three of the respondents have not worked with a mentor teacher.

For effective professional realization, I need to know my rights and obligations.

It is definitely the opinion of beginning teachers that there is a direct connection between knowing their rights and obligations and the effective performance of work duties. The reasons for this could be found both in the different personal orientation of the young generation of people and in the continuous improvement of the organizational culture of educational institutions. School management is increasingly committed to better regulation of teachers' rights and obligations, compliance with Labour law regulations through clearly defined rules. Getting a beginning teacher familiar with their personal job description and an educational institution's Rules of procedure, is an effective way, confirmed by practice, to guide them in the organization of the institution's activity and their own place in it. The respondents' confidence results from the fact that they already know these documents.

My active participation in all school / kindergarten activities is desirable and well accepted.

The beginning teachers' activities in different school activities is desirable and well accepted. This is confirmed by their opinions.

I am prepared to create a supportive learning environment that promotes every child / student's development.

During their university studies, students in Education acquire fundamental psychological, pedagogical and specialized methodological training in planning, organizing, conducting, managing and controlling educational activities at the different stages of the secondary education system, as well as theoretical knowledge and practical

skills in the field of education and development of children with special educational needs. Trainee teachers are prepared to know and use diagnostic tools and corrective procedures to provide specialized assistance in cases of personal development and socialization problems with children and pupils. This accent in the initial training of teachers and in the educational policy of the country as a whole, is taken into account by the beginning teachers surveyed. They feel very well prepared to work with different children.

It is difficult for me to manage the group / class.

Managing processes in individual groups or classes is an essential component of the modern teacher's functional characteristic. A large percentage of respondents find this totally or rather difficult - 36%.

There is a good reason to believe that these are mostly kindergarten beginning teachers. Due to the age specificity of children in the kindergarten, the management of a children's group, especially if it is a newly established one, may be particularly difficult for beginning teachers. Establishing the necessary order, the teacher's skills to engage learners and to stimulate co-operation between them is related both to the ability to understand child's behaviour and to the knowledge of specific techniques for controlling and directing communication. All this requires not only knowledge but also practical experience and knowing well your learners.

It is noteworthy that despite the short professional experience, 54% of the new teachers surveyed do not have any difficulties in managing a class or a children's group.

Children / students will be satisfied with my work.

The survey has shown that beginning teachers possess high degree of confidence in resolving some of the key issues of today's education: children's satisfaction with teachers' work and engaging parents as partners in the educational process.

It is assumed that the absence of a generational gap between beginning teachers and parents contributes to the effective communication with children and their parents.

My work is positively appreciated and this stimulates my desire to work as a teacher.

Positive assessment coming from the surrounding environment is always stimulating and inspiring. 84% of beginning teachers consider their work to be positively appreciated and they accept this with satisfaction.

The fruitful cooperation with the principal, the colleagues and the mentor teacher makes me feel safe.

82% of beginning teachers enjoy fruitful collaboration with the principal, other teachers and mentors and this fact gives them a sense of security.

In the transition from the university to the educational institution, new teachers feel encouraged and supported.

The categorical opinion of teachers about the fruitfulness of professional co-operation contrasts with the shared assertion of 36% of them for lack of support and encouragement by the pedagogical team of the educational institution.

Mentorship entrusts mentor teachers with additional tasks and pressure.

It can be supposed that new teachers do not feel sufficiently supported in those innovative solutions they have, which do not correspond to established educational practices in the educational institution. It is probably because of this, that they consider the work of the mentor teachers to be more burdensome in terms of the need to further read, accept and test new educational technologies.

The three main priorities of my practical training are:...

Beginning teachers rank the main priorities of the effective practical teacher training, as follows: 1. Knowledge, good theoretical preparation. 2. Skills, good methodological and practical training. 3. Favourable environment for development and creativity. 4. Motivation, desire, dedication, will, perseverance. 5. Trust, security, stability, positivism. 6. Confidence, independence. 7. Good communication and positivism. 8. Being familiar with current models of pedagogical interaction and good pedagogical practices. 9. Teamwork, good co-operation and coordination, collaboration and partnership.

What more would you add to your attitudes and expectations?

The beginning teachers' expectations and attitudes are complemented by freely shared personal opinions, largely their emotions related to the transition from the university to the teaching profession such as: worrying about the first meeting with children; the lack of a mentor teacher or having one who does not provide sufficient support; insufficient openness of mentors to teachers are overburdened.

We also find some suggestions regarding the reality in preschool and secondary education institutions (reducing the number of children in groups up to 20-25, there should be one more teacher then there are more than two children

with special educational needs in a group), and those concerning higher education (updating the curriculum content according to the new needs in education, acquainting the students with the basic documentation which pedagogical specialists should work with, studying Management of the class as a separate discipline at university).

The main concerns of new teachers are whether they will be well received by other teachers; whether knowledge will meet opportunity.

6. CONCLUSION

The study shows the following:

Beginning teachers think that they are well received by children and their parents; they appreciate the need for high quality theoretical and practical training, including work with children with special educational needs; they feel well accepted and appreciated, but do not think they are sufficiently supported in their efforts to establish themselves as good professionals;

They have a positive **attitude**: to work and win professional recognition; to know and respect their rights and responsibilities;

Their **expectations** are related to: supporting an innovative style of organization and management of the educational process; getting ready to work with educational and school documentation; applying the existing regulatory framework in education.

There were no significant differences in the opinions of teachers with experience of up to 1 year and those with experience up to 3 years. The only exception is related with the greater confidence in the class management by the more experienced teachers and the mentor teachers' support of those who are new to the profession.

The most important according to the respondent beginning teachers is: mutual respect, good team work and the belief that patience may lead to building up knowledge, achievements and professional success.

The message of the beginning teachers: The love for children can teach you everything.

According to the novice teachers, if their expectations and attitudes are positive and provoked by the love for children, the initial hardships are easy to overcome, and their establishment in the profession - guaranteed.

REFERENCES

- [1] Gaydova, R, "Bazovoto partnyorstvo – praktiki, problemi, resheniya" in: *Pedagogicheski almanah* (2013), Vol. 21, 2, VTU, pp. 201 – 209. Retrived from: <http://journals.uni-vt.bg/almanac/bul/vol21/iss2/12> (04.08.2017)
- [2] Grachyova, E. Y., "Osobennosti nastavnichestva nachinayushtego uchitelya v sovremennoy shkole Germanii" in: *On-line Journal for Pedagogy*. February 2012. Retrived from: <http://www.emissia.org/offline/2012/1747.htm> (01.08.2017)
- [3] Kostadinova, D, "Preddiplomnata pedagogicheska praktika – sreda za samorazvitie i profesionalna podkrepa", co-authored with A. Ilieva, in: CD with papers and presentations from a national scholarly and practical conference *Vodim badeshteto za raka*, Veliko Tarnovo, 2017. „Az-Buki“ Publishing House, ISBN 978-619-7065-14-5.
- [4] Luchkina, T. V. "Povayshenie professionalnoy kompetentnosti nachinayushtego uchitelya posredstvom nastavnichestva: zarubezhnyy opyt", *Professional Education in Russia and abroad* Vol. 6, 2012 "Sovremennaye tendentsii razvitiya professionalnogo obrazovaniya". Retrived from: <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/povyshenie-professionalnoy-kompetentnosti-nachinayuscheho-uchitelya-posredstvom-nastavnichestva-zarubezhnyy-opyt>
- [5] Maralova, E.A, "Strategiya za ratsionalizatsiya na profesionalnata podgotovka na pedagozite po preduchilishtno obrazovanie" in: *Pedagogicheski Almanah* Vol. 21, 1, VTU, 2013. p. 206. Retrived from: <http://journals.uni-vt.bg/almanac/bul/vol21/iss1/> (04.08.2017)
- [6] Mihova, M, "Problemat za podgotovkata i kvalifikatsiyata na uchitelite v obrazovatelna politika na evropeyskiya sayuz" in: *Yubileyna mezhdunarodna nauchna konferentsiya 30 godini Pedagogicheski fakultet*", Veliko Tarnovo, 2014. pp. 78-85. ISBN 978-619-00-0352-6. Retrived from: <http://da.uni-vt.bg/pubinfo.aspx?p=13328> (25.07.2017)
- [7] "Naredba № 12/01.09.2016 g. za statuta i profesionalното razvitie na uchitelite, direktorite i drugite pedagogicheski spetsialisti"
- [8] Thematic data "Obrazovanie i uchene prez tseliya zhivot" of the *National Statistical Institute*, Retrived from: <http://www.nsi.bg/bg/content> (27.07.2017)

- [9] Shtorts, M., A paper presented at *Mezhdunarodna konferentsiya „Liderstvo za raven dostap i kachestveno obrazovanie“*, organized by the World Education Forum in Bulgaria, 2015.
- [10] Tsokov, G., “Mentorstvoto na novonaznachenii pedagogicheski spetsialisti, kato politika nasochena kam effektivnoto upravlenie na choveshkite resursi v uchilishtnoto obrazovanie”. Retrived from: <https://worldeducationforum.bg.wikispaces.com/file/view/Prezen+nastav+Plovdiv.pdf> (09.08.2017)
- [11] Module from a training package for mentors as part of the *Mentoring za vazrastni programme, Loenadrdo Da Vinchi* programme coordinated by the Municipality of Slieven. Retrived from: http://www.developmentzone.net/builder/cms/spaw/uploads/files/Training%20Pack_Short.pdf (07.08.2017)
- [12] Pre-school and School Education Act, 2015
- [13] Naredba za darzhavnite iziskvaniya za pridobivane na profesionalna kvalifikatsiya “uchitel”
- [14] Talkoven rechnik na balgarskiya ezik. <http://talkoven.onlinerechnik.com>
- [15] Rechnik na balgarskiq ezik. <https://rechnik.chitanka.info/>
- [16] Cambridge dictionary of English language. <http://dictionary.cambridge.org>
- [17] Encyclopaedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/science/attitude-psychology>
- [18] Rechnik po psihologiya
- [19] Kearney, S. (2014). Understanding beginning teacher induction: A contextualized examination of best practice. *Cogent Education*, 1(1), 967477. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2014.967477>
- [20] Tasevska, D., Petrova, K., Chavdarova, V. (2018). Psychological prerequisites for adaptation of young teachers. The Role of Mentoring. *Psychological Review* ISSN 0033-295X – paper in the printing process.

