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# Motivational Structure and the Risk of Professional Dropout in Pre- school Teachers

Roxana Nicoleta CUREA<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> PhD student at Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, Romania, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Doctoral School of the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences.  
E-mail: [curea\\_roxana@yahoo.com](mailto:curea_roxana@yahoo.com)

**Abstract:** *This empirical study identifies a hierarchy of motivations for choosing a teaching career (in order of intrinsic motivation, motivation by identification, motivation by introjection and extrinsic motivation), investigates the reasons responsible for professional dropout among teachers and their expectations of the education system. In addition, a set of management measures is proposed to increase teachers' motivation.*

**Keywords:** *professional motivation, risk of abandonment*

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## **1. Introduction: Remigration**

### ***Professional motivation***

The success of organizations depends on the motivation of employees. Therefore, in schools the motivation of teachers is an important topic of research. Increasing teacher motivation leads to improved efficiency for both teachers and students (Akuoko et al., 2012). Thus, educational institutions can achieve their goals more easily. When teachers are motivated, educational reforms can be achieved without difficulty, changes are easily accepted, and satisfaction and performance can be increased.

The results of studies on motivation, especially in Western communities (Bastick 2000, Kyriacou et al., 2003, Watt & Richardson, 2007) showed that intrinsic and altruistic motivations played a predominant role in the choice of teaching and teaching career. For example, Kyriacou et al. (2003) observed that teachers in England and Norway chose teaching as a career because it was the most suitable for their personalities. Watt and Richardson (2007) used a comprehensive scale in their research on teachers and found that teaching skills, the intrinsic value of teaching and the desire to make a social contribution were the highest reasons. The triadic model of motivation: extrinsic, intrinsic and altruistic (Kyriacou & Coulthard, 2000) is intensely used. The most popular reasons included in the intrinsic motivation refer to the passion and vocation of the activity in general (for example, the desire to always learn) and the interest to work with children and to transfer information and culture. There has long been evidence that intrinsic motives are more important to teachers than extrinsic motives (Johnson, L., Harrison J., Morgan L., 2005).

### ***Motivation and professional abandonment***

Investing in teachers, in their initial training but also in strategies to reduce professional abandonment seem to be successive dimensions of national development policies. Professional abandonment can have special effects for the individual, but also has special repercussions on the development of society and economy. Leaving the system has clear social and economic disadvantages, both in the short and long term.

Professional abandonment is the result of an accumulation of personal, socio-economic, educational, institutional factors that have as an initial result the initial demotivation and reach the actual abandonment of the system.

According to UNESCO (2009), by 2015 there was a shortage of teachers in half of the world's countries. A natural measure to overcome this deficit could be to increase the share of new teachers in the system. The efforts of many countries to implement strategies that involve material incentives, subsidies, bonuses, increased salaries are well known (OECD, 2005). Also, programs such as America TeachFirst, taken over in the UK and the Netherlands, are examples of the globalization of education systems' efforts to cover their staffing needs.

If the figures indicating dropout rates do not coincide (not even in the same geographical area), most research results consider that the most affected by this phenomenon are young teachers in the first 5 years of career, the teaching profession being compared, plastic but negative, with a “revolving door” (Cooper & Alvarado, 2006, p. 5). Regardless of the percentage, leaving the system involves significant economic costs, in the US alone official reports mention the amount of \$ 2 billion allocated to replace teachers who leave the system (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2005, as cited in Harfitt, 2014).

However, some studies on the phenomenon of professional abandonment indicate that many graduates either fail to teach for even an hour (Luekens et al, 2004; Lindqvist & Nordanger, 2016), or leave the system after a few years (Cooper & Alvarado, 2006; Ingersoll, 2003). In the face of these records, it is confirmed the need for a differentiated approach, an effective strategy to keep teachers in the system.

An alternative solution to reduce professional dropout is the strategies for retaining and supporting teachers in the system. The metaphor used is that of the bucket losing water due to holes, and refilling it is not an effective strategy until the holes are covered (Ingersoll, 2007, p. 6).

Professional abandonment within educational systems, studied by well-known authors, reveals high rates compared to occupations with similar status (Ingersoll, 2003), but also significant social costs. An unstable faculty

can cause institutional and organizational disruption, dramatically affect the quality of school outcomes and have serious financial consequences - \$ 2.2 billion is estimated in 2001 as a U.S. government financial effort to replace teachers who dropped out of the profession (Borman & Dowling, 2008).

Longitudinal research indicates a U-shaped distribution of professional dropouts, the proportion of teachers who give up the system often seems to be correlated with seniority, (Ingersoll, 2001). Thus, young teachers are more involved in this phenomenon, in the 1-5 years of career (Ingersoll, 2003; Cooper & Alvarado, 2006; Hammerness, 2008) but also the elderly (retirement is excluded).

Many teachers decide to leave the profession because they simply do not master it (Fontaine et al., 2012, as cited in Lindqvist & Nordanger, 2016), thus posing the problem of teacher quality. who leave often have a negative image of the profession before entering than those who remain (Wilhelm et al., 2000), but also that the new generations of teachers have other conceptions about career, are no longer dependent on the traditional conception, approach the trajectories nonlinear and mobile professionals and have different career goals than previous generations (Johnson et al., 2005), especially since “teaching attributes are transferable and highly valued by employers in other professions” (Buchanan et al., 2013)

Much of the research on teacher dropout provides statistical explanations (for example, in the US only 40% of graduates still practice, 5 years after graduation), much less are studies that analyze typical patterns of development and individual variations that may cause the decision. The results of some American studies (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Ingersoll, 2001; Luekens et al., 2004) indicate that teachers susceptible to professional abandonment are women, married, working in special education, mathematics or science. There are also studies that discuss financial causes (Johnson et al., 2005; Kyriacou et al., 2003).

Other factors that could underlie the dropout decision are considered organizational characteristics, student discipline issues, overload with uninteresting and bureaucratic tasks (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Kyriacou et al., 2003). Some of these motivations also appeared in a personal research, carried out for the dissertation. We have drawn up a coherent

picture of the possible reasons invoked by the respondents as decisive for the decision to leave the system, in which bureaucracy, tense relations with students and their parents, stress due to external pressures and coercive controls, unmotivated and unbalanced salary of other budgetary categories, lack of appreciation from society, poor management, material conditions, endowment, personal causes (Curea Roxana, "Motivation in teaching career. The role of institutional management in maintaining and developing motivation", 2019, unpublished).

There are studies that suggest that individual expectations prior to professional activity and unfulfilled (for various reasons) in school contexts, have a negative impact on professional satisfaction, and may influence dropout.

Causes identified in the literature and suggestions for solutions. Professional abandonment of teachers has often been studied as an association between individual factors (burnout, demographic characteristics and family characteristics) closely correlated with institutional ones, management support, salary, professional development, relationships with colleagues, student problems (Clandinin et al., 2014).

Thus, the idea that professional abandonment is a unique decision is outdated, but rather a sum of individual and institutional processes, which take place over time. This process, in the sense of assimilating objectives and values.

The advantage of this type of approach is that the results of the analysis can be followed by practical suggestions for solving the problems that lead to the decision to leave; thus, the idea of complex knowledge of teachers is initiated, even in a narrative way, so that the reason for abandonment can be discovered, which is often at the border between internal and organizational motivations.

Canadian authors (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009) identify a wide range of causal issues, ranging from the behavior of educators to their parents, lack of administrative support, salary issues, institutional policies and relationship systems, including mentoring. The picture of the causal dimensions of the phenomenon is completed by the poor quality of the school organization, lack of autonomy or opportunities to participate in decision making,

difficulties in adapting to teaching requirements, difficulties in managing institutional relations, unhealthy school culture, lack of collegiality and support. for beginning teachers, low involvement / behavioral problems of students in the classroom, poor working conditions, lack of teaching resources, no professional learning opportunities, high workload and social isolation (Buchanan et al, 2013).

There is also evidence that good teaching performance and quality of learning are factors that minimize the risk of dropping out (Krieg, 2006). Last but not least, the emphasis is on documentation, external bureaucracy and organization, instead of the quality time spent with students.

Tense working relationships, reduced collegiality, reduced support and access to the expertise and information resources of colleagues can influence decisions to leave the system or, on the contrary, can stimulate staying in the system. The big difference between the theory studied in faculties and the reality in school is one of the causes frequently supported by education theorists, lack of training in managing concrete problems of student groups, as well as student discipline problems or failure to support teachers' decisions by managers. additional work and outside their area of expertise, are issues frequently mentioned as triggers for abandonment decisions.

Among the most frequently cited causes, stress occupies a special place, the teaching profession being considered, according to studies, one of the most stressful (Johnson et al., 2005; Newberry & Allsop, 2017). Globally, teachers report high levels of stress (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Kyriacou et al., 2003; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). The high level of stress experienced by teachers has direct consequences on intention (Klassen & Chiu, 2011), but also on the decision to leave the profession (Newberry & Allsop, 2017).

The in-depth study of the dedicated articles provides a slightly non-unitary picture of the relationship between the variables occupational stress, wear and tear and professional abandonment and, moreover, in most cases the research was conducted from the perspective of intention to leave and not the actual decision. An exhaustive analysis of the phenomenon of professional abandonment would contain a map of psycho-pedagogical

concepts and variables that could positively correlate with the intention but also with the dropout decision.

Leaving the system by teachers has severe implications: lack of qualified teachers, with direct consequences on the quality of learning, financial damage .The identified solutions are related to the collaborative organizational culture, training programs for school managers, the importance and effectiveness of mentoring and induction programs, support and retention of young teachers, integration into an organization or program. High quality education, high-performance initial training, reduced workload, organization of networks for beginning teachers-but also registration and monitoring of the phenomenon are also dimensions of solving this phenomenon, identifiable in the literature (Brok et al., 2017).

The conclusions from the analyzed studies also suggest a successive strategy for the recovery of this phenomenon is also the increase of the share of qualified teachers, with a good teaching competence, engaged in mentoring and induction programs.

The dedicated literature identifies other strategies to reduce professional dropout: capitalizing on the resources of professional associations, emphasis and funding for professional development, support for new teachers, substantial links between schools, universities and school authorities (Buchanan et al., 2013; Ewing & Manuel, 2005).

Assisting, monitoring, mentoring teachers, good knowledge and correct appreciation of their motivational structure, optimal and timely intervention in difficult situations could raise the morale of the profession, as well as induce the most disillusioned to remain "(Cockburn, 1999, p. 235, as cited in Buchanan et al., 2013). Also, the creation of special programs, support and practical learning, correct management of difficulties, "which will prepare the teacher from the beginning for the complications of classroom life" (Bean & Stevens, 2002; Cavanagh and Prescott, 2008; Ensor, 2001, as cited in Buchanan et al., 2013).

The OECD recommends long-term partnerships between different professional organizations, the promotion of positive experiences, participation in mentoring and induction programs, the establishment of collegiate learning environments and facilitators of information transfer,

reduced extradidactic tasks, prospects for advancement, increased autonomy and flexibility (2005, pp. 205-206).

### ***The theory of self-determination***

In this study we will approach the motivation for teaching career from the perspective of self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2009), due to the impact it had in understanding the mechanism of school motivation, the gradual transition from extrinsic to intrinsic, but also due to social influence in the correct perception of human motivation.

The theory of self-determination operates, like many other models, a distinction between extrinsic motivation (determined by instrumental reasons other than the pleasure of the activity itself) and intrinsic (determined by the state of well-being felt during actions). The theoretical and applied novelty is that each motivational form is placed on a frame of an adjustable motivational continuum. The modification of the motivational structure takes place naturally, through the processes of internalization, ie the regulation of behaviors that first depended on external reward and which, under the influence of some factors, turned into intrinsically motivated behaviors. The taxonomy of motivational types, arranged on a continuum as a function of the degree of self-determination, begins with amotivation and ends with intrinsic, highly autonomous motivation. Between the two extremes are extrinsic motivation, introjection regulation (when the previously external motivational source was partially internalized) and identification regulation (internalized form of extrinsic motivation, behavior is already accepted and considered important for oneself. The form with the highest level of autonomy of intrinsic motivation is the integrated regulation, which occurs when the identified adjustments are assimilated to the self.

Usually, intrinsic motivation and regulation by identification are predictors of successive behaviors, and external motivation and regulation of negative outcomes. Important studies (Vansteenkiste et al., 2005) have shown the advantages of autonomous behaviors compared to controlled ones: a higher level of well-being, satisfaction in life, positive emotions, contentment.



If the school environment meets the three essential needs (competence, autonomy and relationships), the result will be a high level of well-being. Thus, the presence or absence of institutional conditions that determine the satisfaction to a satisfactory extent of these basic needs predict the emergence of intrinsic motivation (Deci& Ryan, 2000, pp. 229-230), and lack of well-being will determine an extrinsic motivation. (Chen et al., 2019; Clipa, 2018).

Although, according to the theory of self-determination, extrinsic motivations can be generated for different reasons, the school is put in a position to identify and propose to teachers activities that they perform not as a result of external pressures, but autonomously and with a sense of psychological freedom. The high level of internalization of motivations positively correlates with the level of employment in tasks, increasing the capacity for effort, behavioral effectiveness, increasing well-being.

Thus, the optimal level of challenges, effective feedback, lack of institutional constraints, decision-making autonomy could facilitate the formation of intrinsic motivation. Non-internalized but only imposed goals, deadlines, conflicting relationships within institutions are dimensions of the formation of an extrinsic motivation, with uninvolved and non-autonomous individuals and low results. Self-determination is a predictor of effort and positive results in school work and autonomous behaviors have been shown to be advantageous (in correlational and behavioral studies), involving a high level of well-being (Vansteenkiste et al., 2005).

The study presented below is designed to explore the reasons for choosing to teach, career perceptions, and the major expectations of teachers in the education system. We considered it important to investigate the phenomenon, to identify the basic categories of motivation in which teachers in Romanian pre-university education fall and to propose some practical solutions, possible ways of intervention in order to improve the current situation.

## **2. Methodology**

### ***The objectives of the research***

This study aims to obtain an overview of the reasons for those who chose the teaching career. More precisely, we aim to identify the motivational structure, the expectations of teachers in the system, to check if there is a risk of abandonment and how it can influence the attraction. profession but also retention in the system, by adopting a cumulation of measures of educational management.

### ***Participants***

The experimental group consisted of 60 teachers of preschool education. In addition, 8 kindergarten principals participated in a focus group.

### ***Research instruments***

The Multidimensional Scale of Workplace Motivation was used for data collection (Gagné et al., 2015). The questionnaire is multidimensional, it includes questions related to 5 dimensions: motivation, extrinsic motivation (social and material), motivation regulated by introjection, motivation regulated by identification, intrinsic motivation.

In order to gather information on the possibility of drop-out, the interview was used. Research participants were invited to discuss the possibility of giving up the teaching profession, leaving the system, but also about their expectations from the education system.

For the processing of the data necessary to establish the size of professional abandonment, the method of categorical content analysis was used, the answers being hierarchical in relation to their frequency.

To identify the perception of a group with management expertise, we conducted an interview through the focus-group technique, which was attended by 8 kindergarten principals.

### ***Procedure***

The questionnaire was applied online, in April 2019, via virtual media (dedicated group on FB and messenger). [The online questionnaire can be found here.](#)

### ***Analysis results and comments***

**Table 1.** Components of motivation

<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>Percentages</b>
Intrinsic motivation	82%
Motivation by identification	78%
Motivation by introjection	72%
Extrinsic motivation	18,5%
Amotivation	5%

**Source:** Authors own contribution

### ***Amotivation***

Amotivation, designating the lack of any form of motivation and characterized by the total absence of the link between the results and the actions performed, the extremely low motivational impulse does not appear to be specific to teachers.

Most of the teachers surveyed (95%) do not agree with the statement "I do not make an effort because I actually feel that I am wasting my time at work"; they consider that they make an effort, that the job is not a "waste of time". The cumulative percentage of those who declare that they do not make an effort is very small.

### ***Extrinsic motivation***

As the percentages shows, it is well below intrinsic motivation. However, it would be utopian to believe that teachers are motivated almost exclusively intrinsically. In fact, the two major types of motivation are associated in different proportions, depending on economic and social characteristics. The approval of others, ie "social recognition" is an important factor through the effect it has on self-esteem and, indirectly, on professional performance. , is at a higher level in Maslow's needs. However, the high percentage of teachers in our study who are "little, very little or not

at all interested in the approval of others" suggests that this factor of extrinsic motivation is not defining for the teaching profession. Teachers may feel that their profession is misperceived, that it is underestimated, and that the image of the school is deteriorating. Many studies conclude that low levels of teacher motivation are the result of objective factors, such as: low salary, lack of respect for the teaching profession, bureaucracy, etc. Most of the teachers who answered the questionnaire consider that there is not a very close link between income and effort, as salary income is ensured by the budgetary condition itself. This result is at odds with the classic triad of motivation for teaching careers, in which we find external incentives, such as the desire for job security and a satisfactory income, to be honored. Workplace safety is also part of the extrinsic dimension of motivation. The extrinsic motivation is, as the percentages show, below the intrinsic level (it is also important that the items referred to the safety and stability of the job and the very existence of the salary and not its value), a dimension that will be very present in answers to additional questions.

### ***Motivation by introjection***

Introjection, defined here as partially internalized extrinsic motivation, is a type of controlled, quasi-internalized regulation. Anxiety, shame, guilt, or, in a positive sense, experiencing emotions of pride, self-esteem are important and regulate teachers' behavior. The high percentage of responses agree with these assertions (72%) controlled, it is "partially and rudimentarily internalized" (Boncu & Ceobanu, p. 178).

### ***Motivation regulated by identification***

Most of the teachers consider that the didactic activity tends to harmonize with the important elements, defining for their personality. Personal values are those that give meaning to existence, are the landmarks according to which we define ourselves as personae and the foundation of our decisions and behaviors. Work discipline, effort, persistence are elements correlated with motivation for the teaching profession. Davis and Wilson (2000, pp. 349-353) consider that, although there are several motivating factors, significance-value is one of the most important. A low

level of significance makes the individual detached and apathetic, while an activity in accordance with personal values, considered important, will make him involved and focused.

### ***Intrinsic motivation***

It is the motivation in which the behaviors and the activity find their satisfaction in themselves, the person thus motivated chooses his actions unconstrained, from the pleasure of their realization. The massive percentage of 82% of teachers who consider that they feel good doing their job is psychologically based on the characteristic of intrinsic regulation, on experiencing interest and pleasure for the sake of activity, self-expression, without pursuing personal goals. Teachers perceive their profession as "captivating". The most common reasons included in the intrinsic motivation refer to the passion and vocation of the activity in general, to the interest of working with children and to transfer information and culture, to the desire for constant intellectual development.

Thus, a motivational multifactorial structure of the participating teachers was identified, resulting in an objective overview. Thus, the hierarchy of motivations for choosing a teaching career places on a higher level: intrinsic motivation, motivation through identification, motivation through introjection and extrinsic motivation.

**Professional dropout.** Analyzing the answers to the questions regarding the intention of professional dropout, we found that the reasons frequently invoked by respondents are bureaucracy, tense relationships with students and their parents (with direct effects on deteriorating physical and emotional comfort of teachers), stress due external pressures and coercive controls, unmotivated and unbalanced salary compared to other budgetary categories, lack of appreciation from society, poor management, material conditions, endowment, personal causes.

**Teachers' expectations.** The content analysis shows that most responses (19%) are subsumed to the dimension of improving the quality of content and learning, stability and coherence of the reform. 13% of responses address the issue of increasing (or returning) the status and image of teachers, 12% of respondents consider that the salary is not aligned with

the other budget categories, 10% of respondents consider that the following dimensions need to be improved: infrastructure (resources, facilities, conditions), correlation with the labor market, reduction of bureaucracy and legislative changes in meaning of teacher protection. 8% of teachers believe that the education system should develop opportunities for initial and continuing training, and 3% want to depoliticize the system.

With the help of the 8 managers of preschool education institutions we identified a set of **measures to increase teachers' motivation**. As solutions to improve these problems, we note first of all the investment in human resources, by increasing salaries and motivating teachers to increase the quality of the instructional-educational act, as well as finding ways to attract young people to the teaching profession and keep people in the system with good experiences and results. Obviously, starting from the premise that human potential is the most important resource of an organization, the development of motivational skills, along with other skills means increasing the value of the school and must be perceived as a safe investment in the future. Then, the stabilization of the reform, giving up the frequent changes within the system, creating instability and problems of adaptation on the part of teachers. The minimization of the risk of professional abandonment can be achieved on two different dimensions, both on the part of educational decision-making and institutional management. Regarding institutional management, the study participants propose a series of measures to reduce bureaucracy, to adopt the appropriate type of organizational culture for each school organization, aimed at fully exploiting the individual potential, personal development through training and continuous improvement.

### **3. Conclusions and discussions**

Our expectations, according to which young graduates who will become teachers are predominantly intrinsically motivated compared to extrinsically motivated non-teaching graduates, are confirmed by the results of this research.

As Atkinson (2000, p. 45) observes, there is a positive link between student motivation and teacher motivation. Thus, motivated teachers mean

motivated students. Obviously, the reciprocal is valid: the lack of motivation of the staff can be the main cause of the lack of motivation in the students he works with. This is why motivation is so important for teaching.

1. The motivational structure of teachers places intrinsic motivation on a higher level, followed by motivation by identification, motivation by introjection and extrinsic motivation. In fact, the main intrinsic motivation of teachers seems to be the importance of working with children and helping them to learn (Davis & Wilson, 2000, pp. 349-353). Such motivation is maintained even when we no longer talk about the attractions of the teaching career, but about those things that make those who have already chosen a teaching career to keep it and not migrate to other careers.

2. The main reasons cited by respondents as decisive for the decision to leave the system are bureaucracy, strained relationships with students and their parents, with direct effects on deteriorating physical and emotional comfort of teachers, stress due to external pressures and coercive controls, unmotivated and unbalanced salary compared to other budgetary categories, lack of appreciation from the company, poor management, material conditions, endowment, personal causes.

3. The expectations of teachers in the education system refer to the improvement of the quality of contents and learning, to the stability and coherence of the reform, to the improvement of the status and image of the teacher, to the better remuneration to the improvement of the infrastructure (resources, endowment, conditions). reduction of bureaucracy, depoliticisation of the system and legislative changes to protect teachers and develop opportunities for initial and in-service training.

4. Recommendations for institutional management in order to increase teachers' motivation. Analyzing the ideas of the participants, there are several ways to optimize the motivation of teachers: reducing bureaucratic requirements - achievable by cumulating several commissions at school level, many of them redundant and cumulative; increasing the interest for the professional development of teachers - by enrolling in teaching degrees, participating in training courses (with a special role in improving the level of self-esteem, it is known that increased self-efficacy, awareness of one's own efficiency in a field will increase performance, encouraging

teacher enrollment in the institutional reward system of the activity (merit grading, various scholarships), reducing teacher turnover, complex strategy to improve the image of the institution in the community, by publicizing outstanding results, multifactorial and proactive improvement of institutional management; increasing and diversifying the level of responsibility, known as the positive correlation between the dimensions of motivation and responsibility, taking measures to effectively protect teachers against the aggression of students and parents, increasingly present in the current school landscape al.

Increasing the motivation of teachers and reducing the risk of professional abandonment is the reason why it is important to deepen the investigation on the aspects of motivation for teaching career, to design and use tools to develop the attractiveness of this profession among young graduates (so that valuable human resources wants a teaching career), but also for the professional retention of practicing teachers, with experience and vocation.

Subsequent research could relate the motivational structure and the risk of professional dropout in beginning teachers in pre-university education, studying the extent to which this relationship could be mediated by the quality of school management.

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