TEACHERS AND THEIR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

This article addresses the problem of professional development of teachers. It is important to improve the professional development of teachers in a long perspective. It impacts not only the improvement of their professional knowledge but also stimulates students by building the climate of a "learning" organization; therefore, it supports not only students but also the whole school's community.

The study focused on the relation between teachers' approach and their professional development. There were 85 subjects who participated in the questionnaire survey. They were deliberately selected and took part in an annual course on Educational leadership. The main focus was on teachers and their work values, especially on what influences their decision making process as to participation in various forms of professional development. Also, what are their attitudes towards learning now and in the future. The study also used the GSES (The Self-Efficacy Scale) tool for self-efficacy diagnosis. Research data was collected from respondents at the end of the course. Comparing with other courses organized in this field in Poland, this course has been designed as exceptionally time-consuming for participants. Considering this context allowed us to reflect on how further professional development is perceived by teachers who are seriously burdened with the requirements resulting from participation in such programmed courses. The main conclusion of the conducted research is optimistic. The teachers who participated in the study plan to continue further professional development.

Keywords: Professional development of teachers, motivation, professional development, attitudes towards learning.

1 INTRODUCTION

It is difficult to design a school without thinking about the development of the teachers themselves. One of the challenges facing schools today is how to react to different types of change that are happening in the modern world. We would expect schools to be smart and ambitious and to contribute positively to this changing world through its teaching and its education of young people. This will not be possible without the teacher's own readiness for further professional development and without a positive attitude towards his or her own learning experience. In this article, we will be addressing this issue. The research we conducted concerned itself with the surveyed teachers attitude towards further vocational training, their preferred values, self-esteem, and self-efficacy.

The first part of the article will briefly cover selected theoretical aspects of the professional development of teachers. The next section will be devoted to the presentation of the methodology of our research and the results of the study. The conclusions will be presented in the final section.

1.1 Professional development of teachers

From the point of view of organizational management, staff development is seen as an important sub-strategy for human resource management [1]. As regards the school as an organization in which human development is the purpose of its functioning, teacher development is, by definition, of particular importance. As Henryka Kwiatkowska writes, referring to Habermas – Kohlberg – Erikson's theory, teacher development is a constant feature of the teaching profession. This is because the teaching qualifications are not "complete" - their development is an inalienable property of the teacher's work [2].

The authors investigation into the professional development of teachers proves that a significant determinant in the teacher's professional career, is the stage which determines the needs of each individual. The research shows that teachers go through five distinct phases in their careers:

- Starting a career: initial involvement
With the transition to the next stage in a career, the need for professional development changes; also, the activity and professional interests of teachers themselves change \[4\], \[5\], \[6\] see also \[3\]. From studies conducted in various countries it seems that these stages are fairly universal. Regardless of the consecutive career stages (influenced by factors like age and job seniority), it is worth pointing out the attempts to codify them in Poland by determining the so-called degrees of professional development.

In Polish Educational Legislation, they are defined as follows: trainee teacher, contract teacher, certified teacher and qualified teacher. Career advancement, understood as achieving the next level, is associated, among other things, with higher pay for work and greater employment security. Christopher Ray points out that presenting teacher's professional development as a linear continuum should be treated as simplistic and impractical since it is based on perceiving a teacher not as a human but as an employee pressed into a managed system \[3\]. In this way, meeting the needs of the system may become more important than the teacher's need for development. This notion will also address a unified, formalised and linear plan for the teacher's career path. In this case, the desire to obtain further degrees of advancement on the career ladder does not have to be dictated by the teacher's desire for self-development. On the contrary, it could mean surrendering to institutionalised, formal procedures determining the career path.

Many factors unrelated to a formally defined career path, may inform a teacher's decision to continue professional development. There are various theories of motivation that are well rooted in science (for example, the theories of Abraham Maslow, Frederick Herzberg, John Atkinson, Burhus Frederic Skinner, David C. McClelland, Chris Argyris). These theories are useful in the search for the answer to the question of what motivates teachers to develop their skills.

The research conducted by Joanna Madalińska-Michalak on the professional achievements of teachers shows that teachers' internal motivation is particularly important. It is expressed in two ways: orientation towards the achievement of professional mastery on the one hand and a belief in self-efficacy on the other \[7\]. Ralf Schwarzer, quoted by the author, claims that the level of self-efficacy has an impact on motivation - it may increase or decrease it. People with a strong self-belief choose higher goals and are more persistent in their actions than those with lower self-efficacy \[8\]. Madalińska-Michalak concludes that teachers belief in self-efficacy was composed of factors such as a sense of being in control, self-esteem and belief in success. However, the pursuit of mastery was manifested in two ways. On the one hand, as a passion, giving teachers a sense of satisfaction in regard to their career, a sense of self-fulfillment and a source of personal satisfaction. On the other hand, as a willingness to excel at performing their duties and at the same time to carry out various additional activities that go beyond the duties assigned to them. The author concludes that the stronger the orientation towards achieving mastery, the more involved were the teachers in developing their own abilities and skills. \[7\].

Ryan and Deci, the authors of self-determination theory, point to the role of autonomy in motivation \[9\], \[10\], \[11\], see also \[12\]. They distinguish four types of motivation, differing in the degree of autonomy in different actions. The lack of autonomy refers to the motivation referred to as "external control." In this case, the person takes action as a result of external stimuli, such as a desire to avoid punishment or in expectation of a reward. Non-autonomous motivation may also include actions undertook as the result of an internal coercion (e.g., feelings of guilt). A change in the nature of motivation occurs when a person experiences compliance with his or her own needs, which is not the result of external or internal coercion. Autonomous motivation positively influences perseverance, commitment, and contributes to greater creativity and effectiveness. Therefore, it is important which type of motivation influences teachers when they are making choices about their further professional development. In this context, the importance lies in a sense of self-efficacy \[13\], which encourages greater motivation and effort \[14\], positively affects engagement, encourages the setting of higher goals, the taking on of more ambitious tasks and enhances persistence.

2 METHODOLOGY
The main research questions that researchers were trying to answer concentrated on:
motivation issues in regard to the taking up of professional development activities

the most important values characteristic of the examined group of professional teachers

self-assessments of their professional work to date

These factors have been measured using the General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES), created by R. Schwarzer, M. Jerusalem and Z. Juczynski [15]. The scale measured an individual's assessment of his or her own effectiveness in relation to the aforementioned characteristics. The qualitative assessment of the results obtained using GSES has also proved to be important. The following hypotheses were formulated:

1 The examined group of professional teachers is characterised by a high level of motivation for professional development.
2 Motivation for development is autotelic.
3 In the researched group, values such as freedom, responsibility, reflectivity are particularly important.
4 The researched group of professional teachers make a high self-assessment of their professional work to date.
5 The researched professional group achieve high scores on the GSES scale.
6 A special sense of self-efficacy is emphasised in a persistent continuation of undertaken actions.

The surveyed group.

The study covered a group of 85 teachers (68 women, 17 men), participants in an Educational Leadership course. The teachers represented different types and levels of schools, e.g. primary schools, junior high schools, general upper secondary schools, technical schools and vocational schools, public and private (71 public schools, 10 non-public schools, 4 non-respondents), and different school locations including cities of different sizes and rural areas. There were teachers with less than 5 years of work experience as well as experienced professionals (over 20 years of experience) and various career ranks.

The largest were the group of teachers with over 20 years of experience - 28 persons; and the group of teachers with between 15 and 20 years of experience - 24 persons. As a result, the majority of respondents have reached the status of qualified teachers (58 persons). The least represented was the group of teachers with less than 5 years of experience. The Educational Leadership course was a pilot study for the project “Leadership and Management in Education - development and implementation of the system of education and improvement of directors of institutions / schools”, which was a project implemented by the Center for Development of Education and the Faculty of Management and Social Communication at the Jagiellonian University. The specificity of the group participating in the course also related to the required intensity of implementing the content of the course - the teachers were obliged to take part in 10 Saturday-Sunday congresses, each of which consisted of 16 hours of work. In addition, the participants were required to perform a variety of homework tasks, some of which needed to be completed within a school environment. A diary had to be kept and written and comments shared with other participants on the course. At the end of each course, each teacher designed an individual concept of how a school/institution should operate. It needs to be emphasised that participation in the course required a reconciliation of the teachers duties with the tasks presented in the course.

2.1 Research tools

For the purpose of the study, we designed a questionnaire. The questions related to motivation in professional development, preferred work values, and self-assessment of the participants' work. The questionnaire consisted of 11 questions and respondents' particulars. The second tool used was the Generalised Efficacy Scale (GSES) (R. Schwarzer, M. Jerusalem and Z. Juczynski) [15]. This tool consisted of 10 questions related to assessing self-efficacy and coping with difficult situations. The respondents answered each time on a 1-4 scale. The study was conducted at the end of the course. We used a group administered questionnaire to conduct the study.
3 RESULTS

The results of the study did not confirm the statistically significant correlation between the variables. For this reason, descriptive analysis of the results seems more appropriate. Regarding the motivation of teachers to undertake pro-development activities, it turned out that over 90% of the respondents declared the highest level of positive motivation for taking up professional development. It also turned out that all participants took part in different types of workshop and refresher courses. Among the most important reasons for this were the desire to develop, to strengthen their autotelic motivation, and their sense of satisfaction and success. It is particularly worth emphasising that as many as three-quarters of the respondents declared their willingness to undertake further development. For 85% of teachers, professional work is of great value and 89% of them stress that they like their job, although only slightly more than half have a sense of freedom and professional autonomy. The observers were also curious about what was relevant to the professional work of the teachers. Among the most important factors were job satisfaction and professional development. Both of these factors are connected to autotelic motivation. However, financial gratification as a source of external motivation was indicated in the ranking much less often, as was the need for recognition. Interestingly, promotion was by far the least mentioned source of motivation. According to the teachers, the most important values associated with the profession include development and learning, responsibility, respect, participation and freedom. The reflectivity mentioned in the hypotheses did not score particularly highly. When it came to professional activities, three-quarters of the teachers indicated high self-esteem. Others were not fully satisfied with their competencies, but as the previous answers show, they feel a high need for further development.

In the GSES General Efficacy Scale, the overall study group achieved high results, ranking at 9 and 10 sten scores, indicating a high assessment of efficacy. The respondents declared that they can solve most of the problems they face, that they often find many solutions to their problems, that unexpected situations do not surprise them negatively and that they generally know how to act in unexpected situations. They consider themselves inventive and are calm in the face of environmental challenges. A detailed analysis of the results indicates that the respondents achieved a lower performance score only in the task, which concerned challenging a partner's objections in a given situation, suggesting that the respondents preferred cooperation with others as their working style and did not aim to solve a problem at all costs. The GSES scale is focused on the continuity of an activity, not just planning or initiating activities.

4 CONCLUSIONS

Qualitative performance analysis of the data gathered from the answers to the questionnaire and the GSES Scale indicate a strong and positive sense of motivation towards developing, learning and improving professional qualifications. The group of surveyed teachers, despite the time pressure on their many professional duties, evaluated their actions highly and declared their willingness to continue their further development. This confirms that professional development is particularly important for this group. The prognosis for teachers showing such an attitude is positive. At the same time, the desire for development resulting from autotelic motivation is supported by high self-efficacy, which further enhances their involvement in the actions undertaken, and a willingness to undertake difficult tasks. Because it is based on positive values, it gives teachers the chance to build their roles as educational leaders.

REFERENCES


