Factors Affecting Teachers' Learning Attitudes

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Abstract

The teaching profession is in the focus of unprecedented level of interest due to current social, political and professional debates, nonetheless (or perhaps this is the reason why) those involved have a pessimistic professional vision. It is difficult for them to identify with the growing level of challenges which may strengthen the motivation of teacher attrition. We assume that workplace satisfaction and long-term educational plans are closely linked to the professional vision, which in turn is able to track the motivations of profession loyalty. In order to justify our hypotheses we used a self-edited (online) data collection questionnaire comprising 33 questions, which was completed in the academic year of 2015/2016 by MA students and graduated teachers of similar trainings at University of West Hungary Savaria University Centre and Eszterházy Károly College. In our study we examine the learning needs of teachers in respect of the immediate and extended professional environment based on the responses of 295 qualified teachers.

Keywords : teachers, needs, professional satisfaction, professional environment, work

Introduction

Our research is designed to obtain a detailed picture of teachers' professional satisfaction and their vision. It can provide an objective picture from the aspect of career development which is education-related but independent from the individual as well as a subjective one, based on the effects of dominant factors of teacher's personality. According to practicing teachers, their profession has never been subjected to so much criticism as today. The correspondence to daily requirements originating from the diverse tasks is more and more oppressive to the individual, which hinders the realization of long-term plans. The teachers are responsible for all kinds of activities starting from the general demands of efficient education to school events based on almost direct marketing methods to compete for pupils, however, only a few questions are mentioned about the development of student's personality and education and the continuous (self-) educational challenges of physical and mental improvement of the future generation at social as well as individual level.

Being a teacher means to take a "master," "priest" and "actor" role at the same time (Szebedy, 2005), which requires a balanced, contented personality. "Certain thinking patterns emerge during the pedagogical practice, which help the teacher to make decisions almost automatically. It has turned out that the number of such schemes distinguishes a more experienced teacher from a beginner."(Falus, 2001, p 22).

Professional satisfaction - among others – is also expressed in the decline of the intention of teacher attrition (N. Toth, 2014), as it is proven that "teachers engage in many activities which they are not or only partially prepared for, and which they consider to be far away from their job. This is unfavourable in terms of the conserving force of the profession, mobility as well as mental burnout. "(Chrappán, p 235, 2012). Referring to international studies, Mihály (2010, p 106) concludes that the teacher attrition rate is the strongest among those under thirty and over fifty.

According to Szabó and Lőrinczi (1998) it is not true that "teachers' self-esteem is directly related to job satisfaction," but the reality is that workplace harmony is only closely related to personal factors concerning the " indicators (factors) of atmospheric variables " (p 10).

Method

Hypotheses

Based on the claims of Szabó and Lőrinczi (1998), we assumed that the teacher'svision is now primarily influenced by the general feeling of the workplace and professional aspirations, that is why our assumptions were focusing partly on the professional environment, classroom challenges as well as the self-image and vision (Hercz, 2005) and partly on career building and professional development needs (N. Toth, 2014). We believed that

H1: teacher satisfaction related to workplace environment is in connection with age, and it involves the positive attitude toward the prestige of the profession as well;

H2: as for the educational development aspirations, the impact of work environment can be detected, but the opportunities of career building offered by the promotion system are more determinant;

H3: The preferred training contents represent the interests of the institution stronger than the necessity to overcome individual professional difficulties, the direct effects of previous training experience or the profession as well as working environment.

Respondents

Our survey is accessible through the electronic administration system of the above mentioned institutions. It was aimed at current and former students taking MA courses and postgraduate specialist training courses in the field of pedagogy, who volunteered to fill in the anonymous survey, which was created on Google Drive and shared via URL.

Based on the directory of the institutions involved [University of West Hungary (NymE) and Eszterházy Károly University (EKF)] 864 teachers were asked to contribute to the survey on a voluntary basis, but we only received 295 valid responses till the deadline (December 2015), therefore the *willingness to fill in the survey* determined whether teachers became part of the sample or not.

Table 1. *The sample, and the Proportion of Males and Females*

	N= 295	Proportion (%)
male	60	20.0
female	235	80.0

Since the respondents are graduates of the institutions involved in the survey (graduating between 2013-2015) and current students, who have a full time job, their age and workplace are relevant to the topic.

Two thirds (67.8%) of our sample (N=295) are *above the age of 40* and based on their workplaces (Table 2) most of them work in primary schools or in institutions for special needs education (54.9%), followed by schools involved in secondary education as well (38.0%).

Table 2. *Respondents' Workplaces*

workplace	N= 295	(%)
Kindergarten	2	0.7
Primary school	138	46.8
Primary school and primary arts education school	7	2.4
Primary and secondary school	54	18.3
4, 6 and/or 8 grade secondary school	22	7.4
Secondary technical school	12	4.1
Vocational school	4	1.4
Mixed secondary educational institution	20	6.8
Institution for special needs education	17	5.7
Other (e.g.: adult education, dormitory, music school)	19	6.4

Another feature of the respondents is the geographical location of their workplaces (Figure 1), which is based on the regional characteristics of the two institutions involved in the survey.
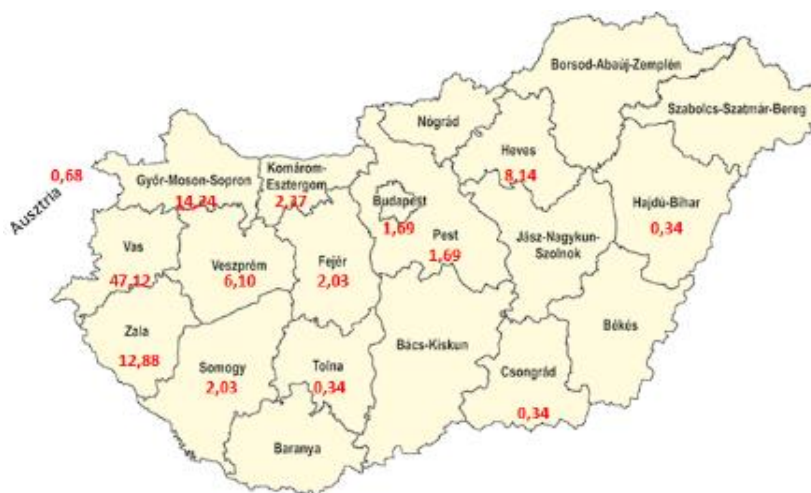

Figure 1. *The georgaphical location of the respondents' workplaces in percentages (N=295)*
(Source of map: *Hungarian Central Statistical Office*, 2015)

Unfortunately, regional comparisons were not possible, because of the uneven dispersion (s=0.5; v=0.3), therefore we could not aim for finding possible correlations with the training institution.

Research Design

The data was collected with the help of a self-made online questionnaire consisting of 33 questions. When constructing the questionnaire our hypothesis was that the indicators of the *number of challenges in the classroom* and the *level of satisfaction with the professional environment* directly allude to the professional wellbeing of the teacher, which partly *indicates the conserving force of the profession*. In the questionnaire, the reliability of the thematic unit (12 items) observing teachers' level of satisfaction is α =0.835.

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The thematic units of the questionnaire are listed in Table 3, and they show that our survey put emphasis on the development of teachers' self-image, vision and carrier building, because we believe that these factors clearly show one's strong attachment to the profession. Moreover, by indicating their needs for professional development they also give us input on how to develop our training strategy.

Table 3. *The thematic units of the questionnaire*

Thematic units	(%)
Self-image, vision and opportunities for development within the profession, carrier building	51.5
Needs for professional development	9.1
Challenges in the classroom	12.1
Professional environment	12.1
Demographic data	15.2
Total	100

Results

Professional Environment

During the analysis we were first and foremost interested in which and how many respondents regard their professional wellbeing as average and above average. We assumed that satisfied teachers feel that they *do not face too many challenges*, *accept the prestige of their profession and their professional environment*, *plan a long-term career* in teaching, therefore they *would like to get further professional training.*

Our data prove that almost half of the teachers (126 people; 42.7%) are satisfied with the equipment ($\bar{x}$=3.4; s=1.0) and personnel ($\bar{x}$=4.0; s=0.9) of their workplace, however, thanks to the high level of relative standard deviation (v1=0.3 és v2=0.2), neither of these qualities are general characteristics of the sample. The satisfaction with these two factors (r=0.42) coincide with each other, ($\chi 2$equipment(32)=36.55; p=0.266 $\chi 2$personnel(32)=34.12; p=0.366) but it *does not depend on the age group, although its significant influence had been assumed.*

The respondents were significantly less satisfied with the moral ($\bar{x}$=1.9; s=1.0) and financial ($\bar{x}$=2.6; s=1.2) appreciation of their profession and their opinions of these factors are similarly low (r=0.45). Based on the data it seems that the introduction of the teacher evaluation system did not contribute significantly to the increase of the profession's prestige ($\bar{x}$=2.3; s=1.2). With our research we managed to show that those who had already taken part in the teacher evaluation process, or were involved in it at that time (97 fő; 32.9%) have a more positive opinion about the moral ($\chi 2$(8)=20.81; p=0.008) and financial ($\chi 2$(8)=39.06; p<0.000) appreciation of their profession.

Comparing the indicators for the satisfaction with the prestige of the profession and the satisfaction with the professional environment we can see that the ratio of those teachers who think more positively of the prestige of the profession because of their positive opinion about their own professional environment is higher (Table 4).

Table 1. *Correlation of satisfaction (N=295)*

	satisfied with professional environment		not satisfied with professional environment
satisfied with moral appreciation of the profession	9.5%	↔	2.7%
satisfied with financial appreciation of profession	28.6%	↔	22.5%
satisfied with teacher evaluation system	22.2%	↔	13.0%

Comparing the answers of those who are satisfied with the professional advancement system with those who accept their professional environment we can state that those who are satisfied with the professional advancement system are more satisfied with the moral ($\chi 2(16)=29.48$; p=0.021) and/or financial ($\chi 2(16)=183.17$; p<0.000) prestige of the profession as well.

It turned out *that higher acceptance of the professional environment* among teachers is mostly *related to the financial prestige of the profession*, while the moral prestige is less important for them. We found a correlation between the level of satisfaction with the personnel and teachers' opinion on the prestige of the profession ($\chi^2(16)=28.69$; p=0.026), but there was only coincidental correlation with teachers' opinion on the equipment ($\chi^2(16)=19.70$; p=0.234).

We could only party prove our hypothesis (H1) stating that teachers' satisfaction with their professional environment - which is strongly influenced by the age of the teachers-directly leads to a positive view of the prestige of profession.

The explanation for this is twofold. Firstly, the evaluation of the professional environment and the age of the respondents did not correlate with each other; secondly the more positive view of the profession by those teachers who are directly involved in the teacher evaluation process shows that the professional advancement system can only raise the prestige of the profession from a financial point of view.

Needs for Training, Professional Development

In the next part of our research we wanted to find out whether the professional environment and the length of the career of the respondents correlate with *their need for professional development* at all, and at what extent. Do the challenges faced in the classroom influence teachers' *motivation to develop themselves*, and how strong is this influence? Is it true that the length of the career has a much greater influence on the need to get training than the professional environment?

To answer these questions we primarily analysed *how motivated teachers are* to learn something new. More than half of the respondents (136 people; 46.1%) got their first or second degree within one or two years or were students at the time of doing the survey, therefore we need to disregard the answers labelled 'in progress' (Figure 2).
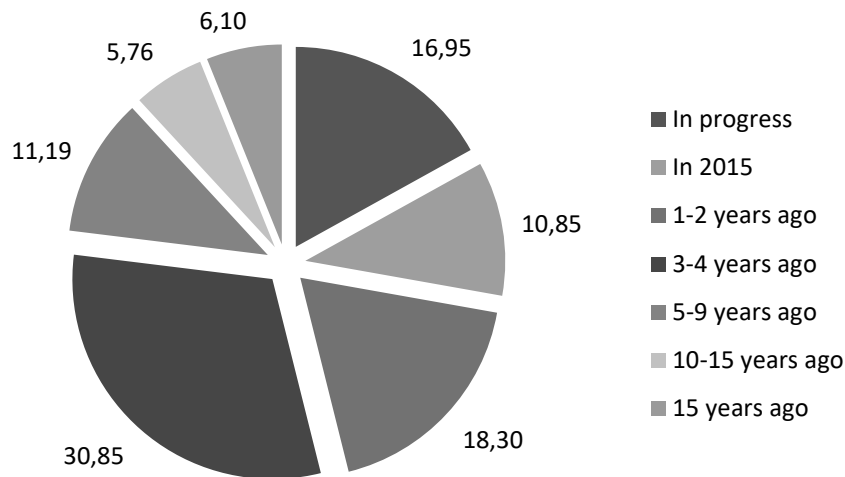
Figure 2. *The year of getting their last degree in percentages (N=295)*

214 people (64.1%)-other than their first degree- have also got supplementary/postgraduate degrees and/or qualifying exams. Moreover, 139 people (47.1%) have taken part in more than ten professional training courses, most of them (274 people, 92.9%) in the past three academic years. (Figure 3)
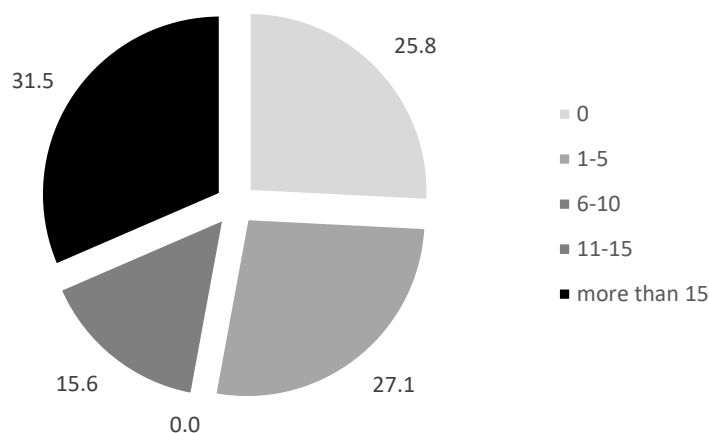

Figure 3. *How many training courses have you taken part in?(N=295)*

According to the teachers the quality of the training courses (measured on a five level scale) was mediocre ($\bar{x}$=3.4; s=0.9; v=0.3). Their satisfaction with the information available ($\bar{x}$=3.5; s=1.0; v=0,3), and the organisation of the courses ($\bar{x}$=3.5; s=0.9; v=0.2) was slightly higher. Although our sample is rather changeable in this respect, the correlation between these three factors is clear (r_1=0.64; r_2=0.56; r_3=0.36).

Talking about the correlation between *the number of training courses completed by the teachers and the components of their satisfaction (organisation, quality, information) with the courses*, we found that correlation was only visible with the component 'information available' (χ^2(12)=41.65; p<0.000). This indicates that teachers do not have the chance to choose a course based on its quality. We assume that *whether they participate in a course depends mostly on their need to follow the regulations rather than on their internal*

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motivation to learn. However, the fact that only 4.4% of respondents (13 people) said that in the previous five years they had not participated in a course which they managed to partly or fully utilise in their teaching *shows the significance of these training courses in teachers' professional development.* This is also verified by the fact that those who learnt useful skills in training courses in the past five years (282 people) took part in 2.2 useful training courses on average in 1.7 academic years.

Figure 4 lists the *obstacles that may prevent teachers from taking part in training courses*. Those respondents (162 people, 54.9%) who were planning to take part in a course expressed their willingness to *take on courses in two fields on average*, but they said that they cannot always do so due to *lack of time* (69.1%), *lack of financial resources* (63.9%), *the distance of the course* (28.2%) and the *training strategy of their institutions* (21.0%). There were only two teachers in our sample who feel that there are no obstacles preventing them from taking part in training courses, however they do not have a commitment to learn. Because of their age and number of degrees, they are not planning to get another degree or do a training course.

In our sample there are a few more obstacles listed: *the lack of supportive environment, the lack of information about training opportunities and low level of motivation*. The 5.2% proportion of this latter factor implies 20 or more years in the profession and participation in 10-15 training courses.
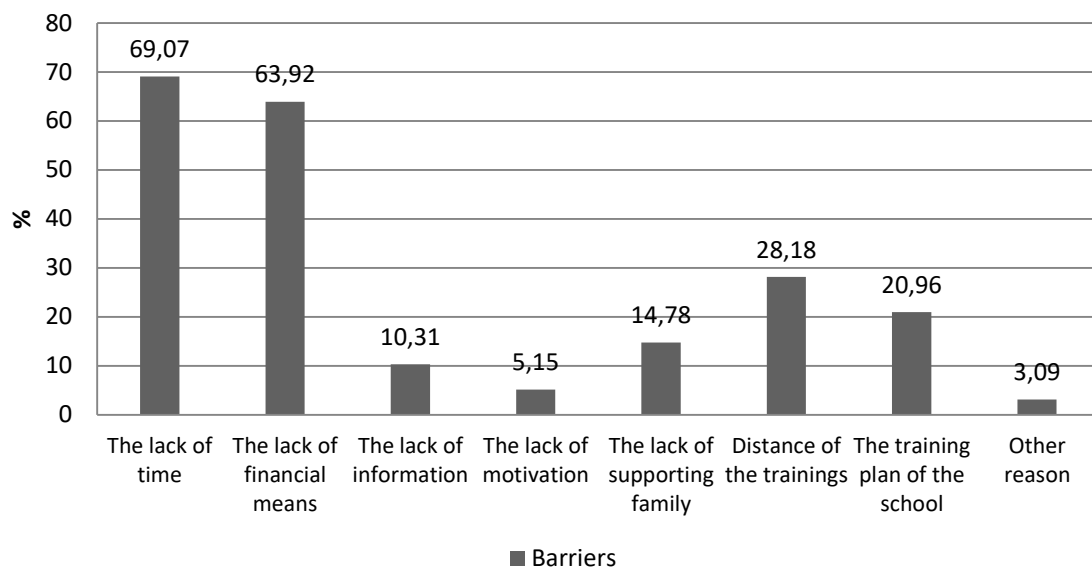

Figure 4. *The obstacles of professional development (N=293)*

Our research showed that those teachers who are less satisfied with their professional environment ($\chi^2(24)=53.78$; $p<0.000$ and $\chi^2(24)=53.40$; $p=0.001$) mentioned having more obstacles in the way of their professional development. The number of obstacles listed is independent of the professional advancement system and the acceptance of financial conditions, however the factors directly influencing teachers' professional vision, such as the *professional environment* or the *opportunities for professional advancement* have significant correlation with *the acceptance of the training strategy of the institutions* (Table 5).

Table 5. *Factors directly influencing the professional vision and the level of identifying with the training strategy of the institution (N=295)*

	Satisfaction with the personnel of the workplace	Satisfaction with the professional advancement system	Satisfaction with the equipment	Satisfaction with the financial conditions
Satisfaction with the training strategy of the institution	$\chi^2(16)=46.76$ $p<0.000$	$\chi^2(16)=36.64$ $p=0.002$	$\chi^2(16)=52.37$ $p<0.000$	$\chi^2(16)=26.94$ $p=0.042$

Analysing the correlation between the needs for learning, the professional challenges and the wellbeing of teachers at their workplaces we can state that those teachers who have plans to learn in the near future (162 people) mentioned 2.7 courses they were interested in on average. However, *a quarter of them (44 people) strongly refuse to take on a course to get another degree*. The background of this can be enlightened by the strong correlation ($\chi^2(48)=102.37$; $p<0.000$) between the previously mentioned *obstacles preventing teachers from taking on courses and teachers' aspiration* for learning (their interest in training courses). As a consequence teachers who are willing to learn need to overcome a lot of obstacles (in their professional and personal lives), therefore they prefer short-term training courses.

Our data proved (H2) the significant correlation ($\chi^2(16)=50.59$; $p<0.000$) between the level of satisfaction with the *professional advancement system* and the *effort made in order to take on a training course*, from which we can infer that these teachers *aim to stay in the profession.* Because of the limited number of items in our sample and because of the particularity of the sample (it is connected only to tertiary education), the result cannot be generalised, however it shows that the degree/qualification received after the training course is a stronger motivational factor for teachers to take on a course than the topic of the course. It seems clear that the *level of satisfaction with the professional environment has a role in teachers' plans to learn* ($\chi^2(32)=47.25$; $p=0.040$), but teachers' opportunities to build their carriers offered by the professional advancement system have a stronger influence ($\chi^2(32)=35.91$; $p=0.029$). The correlation between teachers' aims to get training and the professional environment could only be shown from the personal side ($\chi^2(32)=47.25$; $p=0.040$), which shows that the institution's level of infrastructure rarely leads to the need to develop on the side of the teacher.

Preferred Training Fields and Topics

With our research we also aimed to get a clearer picture of which fields and topics teachers are mostly interested in concerning their plans to develop themselves.

Our results show that almost half of the teachers in our sample (133 people; 45.1%) have no clear view of what type of training they would like to get in the near future. The 162 teachers with a plan to learn gave 202 answers altogether, which ($\bar{x}=1,3$ ideas; $s=0,8$; $v=0,6$ aside) cannot be labelled as characteristic. The answers tend to point in the direction of *accredited courses* (39.6%) and *courses ending with qualifying exams* (37.1%). Postgraduate degree courses are in the third place (15.8%) and Ph. D courses are in the fourth place (7.4%) in the ranking.

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We analysed the correlation between *experiences with training courses and plans to take on another course* and we found that, on the one hand, the available information on the courses correlates with the number of training courses one has finished ($\chi^2(16)=47.93$; p<0.000), as well as with the variety of training courses one is planning to take on in the future ($\chi^2(32)=50.19$; p=0.021). *On the other hand, neither the organisation, nor the quality of the training courses seem to have influence on teachers' level of activity concerning taken and planned courses.* The reasons behind this phenomenon are thought to be the slow dissemination of the opinion teachers have on a given course, the lack of quality control of courses, and the fact that institutions cannot finance the training courses of their employees.

Since, as we have already mentioned, the level of satisfaction with the professional advancement system has a great effect on teachers' motivation to learn, it is everyone's own interest to finance those training opportunities that they know will be beneficial to them. This directs them to tertiary education (postgraduate degree courses, qualifying exams, PhD courses).

The preferences of teachers who are willing to learn (N=162) are shown in Figure 5, which indicates that almost half (45.7%) of those who have clear training plans are motivated solely because they would like to *get a new degree*. Two thirds of the above mentioned teachers are only motivated to do *accredited courses* (35.2%). It is only one fifth (19.1%) of the teachers in the sample who are interested in both types of courses.

(57 people) Accredited courses are preferred exclusively (35,2%)

(31people) Accredited trainings & and new degrees are mentioned (19,1%)

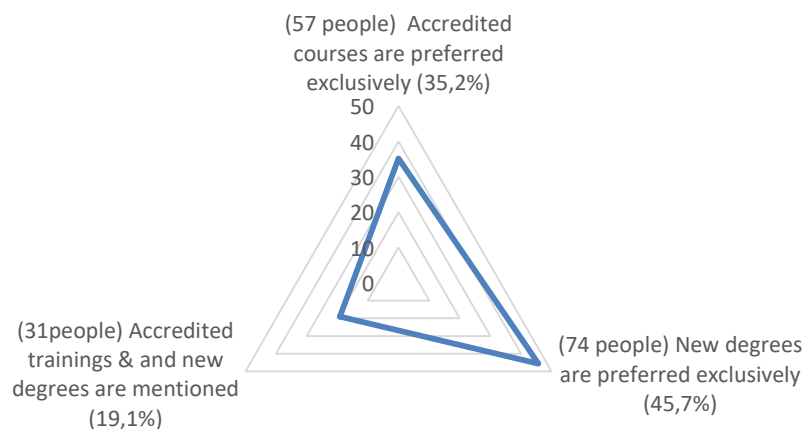(74 people) New degrees are preferred exclusively (45,7%)

Figure 5. *Types of courses teachers who are willing to learn are interested in (N= 162)*

It is because of the professional advancement system that there is a strong interest in *courses giving a post graduate degree*. It needs to be emphasized, though, that –on a five level scale- respondents' level of satisfaction with the current opportunities ($\bar{x}$=3.4; s=1.1; v=0.3) to get a post graduate degree and the conditions ($\bar{x}$=3.3; s=1.0; v=0.3) are only mediocre and both parameters characterize a strongly changeable sample. Even though one's judgement on the two features depends on the individual, it can be shown in all cases ($\chi_1^2(16)=30.02$; p=0.018) ($\chi_2^2(16)=30.00$; p =0.018) that the length of one's career strongly influences one's level of satisfaction. A logical explanation for this may be one's personal inadequacy concerning the obligation to pass a language exam, but this could only be partly proven by our data. The number of language exams is related to one's age ($\chi^2(12)=85.33$; p<0.000), but unrelated to the length of the career ($\chi^2(12)=5.62$; p=0.934). We have no data

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about the subjects the respondents teach, therefore we could not separate foreign language teachers from teachers of other subjects in the analysis of the data.

Table 6. shows the topics respondents find interesting. It is intriguing that 133 people had not yet decided what type of course they would be interested in, whereas there were only 4 people who indicated absolutely no topics they would be interested in.

Table 6. *Topics of courses in order of their popularity*

Topic of training courses	number of people	% (N=291)
modern educational methods	126	43.3
foreign languages	102	35.1
pedagogy, psychology	99	34.0
using the interactive white board	88	30.2
effective classroom management	86	29.6
writing the portfolio	54	18.6
scientific publication	45	15.5
writing bids	43	14.8
creating presentations	27	9.3
others	17	5.8

From the answers we deduced that our respondents are mostly interested in *modern educational methods, foreign languages, pedagogy and psychology, using the interactive white board and effective classroom management.* The answers to the open question 'what other topics would be interesting' showed that respondents are also keen on learning about special needs education, psychology, pedagogy, non-pedagogical topics; moreover they would like to learn about the holistic approach, diagnostics, meditation and yoga.

To find out what the underlying reasons behind the above mentioned choices are, we carried out an examination of the relevant factors, the results of which showed that teachers' plans to do courses in tertiary training institutions are influenced more by their opportunities (or obstacles) to develop themselves professionally, rather than the professional advancement system or financial conditions (Table 7).

Table 7. *Factors represented by the preferred training opportunities (N=295)*

	number of difficulties in professional development	satisfaction with the professional advancement system	satisfaction with the prestige of the profession	satisfaction with the financial conditions
preferred number of training opportunities	$\chi^2(48)=102.37$ p<0.000	$\chi^2(32)=35.91$ p=0.029	$\chi^2(32)=47.25$ p=0.040	$\chi^2(32)=25.44$ p=0.788

Our hypothesis (H3) stating that the preferred topics of the courses represent the aims of the institutions more strongly than teachers' needs to overcome their professional

challenges, their earlier experiences with courses or the direct effects of their professional environment could not be proved by the data we collected. Furthermore, the preferred topics of the courses are independent of teachers' experiences of the organisation and the quality (χ^2(32)=32.92; p=0.422 és χ^2(32)=18.64; p=0.971) of the courses.

It is a fact, however, that the chance to get a higher salary offered by the professional advancement system makes teachers more interested in tertiary education, but this interest is aimed at short-term (2-4 terms) courses.

Conclusion

Since we believe that teachers' motivation to learning correlates to their long term plans concerning their carriers, we carried out this research aiming to discover the factors influencing teachers' attitude to learning.

We put forward three hypotheses relating to teachers' p*rofessional environment, opportunities to advance in their carriers* and *self-development* and we focused our observation on the correlations of certain factors of these fields. Since the data we collected showed inconsistency in some cases, we could not completely confirm our hypotheses.

For example we assumed that the level of satisfaction with the professional environment correlates to the age of the teacher and it also brings about a positive view of the prestige of the profession. Our research, however, disproved that the longer one's carrier is the more satisfied they are with their professional environment, moreover it turned out that positive opinion about the prestige of the profession does not depend on the satisfaction with the professional environment, but the implications of the teacher evaluation system.

The influence of the professional environment on teachers' aspiration to learn was believed to be verifiable, but the opportunities to build one's carrier were thought to be more significant. Our data confirm that the level of *satisfaction with the professional environment has indeed a great role in taking on a training course, however the opportunities to advance in one's carrier offered by the teacher evaluation system have a greater influence*; getting the certificate for completing a training gives more motivation for teachers to take on a course than the topic itself. Our findings coincide with Sági's views (2015), who said that '… there is an active part of teachers, who had already been highly qualified, who got new (specialised) qualifications in the first year of the professional advancement system, in accordance with the new conditions of the system, however other teachers still did not show motivation to learn' (p. 90).

We could not prove that the needs of the institutions have a greater role in teachers' plans to learn than the aspect of the challenges they face, because *topics in connection with methodology, pedagogy and psychology were among the most popular topics in the rank of preferred training topics,* and courses in tertiary institutions are mostly popular if the courses last for only 2-4 terms.

For the two institutions involved in the research, it provided useful information for the development of their future courses, for choosing the target audience and for determining the directions for future research projects.

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