

Socio-Psychological Factors Influencing the Choice of Teaching as a Career: A Study of Post Graduate Students in Delhi

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ABSTRACT

This study responds to the current challenge of inadequate supply of teachers in Indian higher education. The present study is an attempt to ascertain the choice of post graduate students for teaching and explore the factors influencing the choice of teaching as a career in higher education. A survey was carried out on a sample of 303 post graduate final year students selected through a multistage stratified sampling technique. Results revealed that approximately one-third of the students were inclined towards teaching profession. A significant difference was found between academic stream and inclination towards teaching. Further, significant differences were also found across professions in terms of job preference, economic benefit, freedom of work and job security. While, career choice of teaching was found to be influenced by various socio-psychological factors, no evidence was adduced to support gender influence. The findings have implications for policy makers and educationists for attracting and retaining talent in teaching profession.

Key words: Socio-psychological factors, career choice, teaching profession, higher education, academic stream

Introduction

In confronting the many challenges that the future holds in store, humankind sees in education an indispensable asset in its attempt to attain the ideals of peace, freedom and social justice. The tireless quest for knowledge in all fields of thought and human endeavour

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is quite evident in the Indian Education system. In the quest for development, higher education assumes great importance, for it provides the cutting edge and there is no doubt that higher education has a significant contribution to economic development, social progress and transformation of the Indian economy into a knowledge economy. The massive expansion of higher education to 1500 universities nationwide to increase the gross enrolment ratio of at least 15 per cent by 2015 as envisaged by National Knowledge Commission (2006) makes qualified and competent teacher a prerequisite for its efficacious expansion and calls for a serious attention. The new dimension of education, which makes it an integral part of the national development, cast great responsibility on the teacher. At the core of the learning enterprise, a teacher if enabled and empowered, would lead and shape the reinvention of the organisation into a genuine learning organisation. Therefore, there must be a conscious effort to attract and retain talented teachers by providing attractive salaries along with incentives and rewards for performance. This is also essential as talented students have far more lucrative choices in other professions in India and abroad.

The social and economic aspirations of the general population continue to grow apace with the fast changing scenario. Though the salaries undoubtedly are an element of the profession's attractiveness, non-pecuniary conditions and rewards are crucial, too. These include both realisation of personal potentials and the services rendered to the society at large. Likewise, the process of career choice is the result of interaction among various forces. In India, career choice is influenced by various social and psychological factors comprising of influence of significant others, prestige, gender, socioeconomic status, and educational background.

Perusal of the extant literature revealed the influence of various factors on career choice. Arulmani, Van and Eastan (2003) indicated that career belief and socio-economic status influence the career decision of high school students in India. Another study by See (2004) pointed out that those with less educated parents are more likely to choose teaching as a career. In another study, Chan, Chan and Sang (2002) found significant relationships between students' interest in teaching and demographic characteristics. Recently, Kumar and Sharma (2008) indicated nominal pay packages as one of the important reasons behind the shortage of faculty in universities. The determinants have been explored repeatedly with

similar results. Within the framework of Social Cognitive and Social Learning theory, the present study aims to ascertain the choice of post graduate students for teaching across academic streams and explore the socio-psychological factors influencing the choice of teaching as a career in higher education.

Methodology

The sample was drawn from three central universities in Delhi i.e. Jawaharlal Nehru University, Jamia Millia Islamia University and Delhi University. The sample was selected through multistage stratified sampling technique, according to the various academic streams, disciplines and gender. Since the population of students in various disciplines is too large, initially the sample was fixed at 10 per cent of the population enrolled in various academic streams. But the researcher could succeed in collecting data from a slightly larger sample; therefore the actual size of the sample i.e. 13 per cent is slightly larger than the size envisaged. Thus, a total sample of 303 PG final year students represented 13 per cent of the population enrolled in three Universities in Arts, Science and Commerce Stream in the session 2007-08. The sample of arts stream was selected from Delhi University and Jawaharlal University whereas the sample of science and commerce stream was selected from Delhi University and Jamia Millia Islamia University (Table No. 1).

TABLE 1
Percentage of total sample to Population enrolled (2007-08)
in three Universities by Academic Stream

<i>Academic Stream</i>		<i>University</i>	<i>Population</i>	<i>Sample</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Arts	Languages	DU + JNU	647	64	10
	Social Sc.	DU + JNU	918	123	13
Science		DU + JMI	612	92	15
Commerce		DU + JMI	216	24	11
Total			2393	303	13

10 per cent and 13 per cent of the sample constituted from the Languages and Social Sciences respectively in Delhi University and Jawaharlal Nehru University. From the Science and Commerce stream a sample of 15 per cent and 11 per cent respectively was taken from Delhi University and Jamia Millia Islamia University (Table No.1). The academic stream of Social Science included Political Science,

History, Sociology, Geography, Economics and Psychology, under languages-English, Hindi and Sanskrit were covered and Physics, Chemistry, Biology and Mathematics constituted the Science stream.

TABLE 2
Showing no. of respondents by gender and academic stream

Gender	Academic Stream				
	Arts		Science	Commerce	Total
	Language	S. Sc.			
Male	37	67	43	14	161
Female	27	56	49	10	142
Total	64	123	92	24	303

With regards to gender, a total of 161 (53%) males and 142 (47%) females constituted the total sample of 303 students (Table No.2). A self-developed questionnaire comprising 57 questions was administered to identify the important factors influencing the decision to choose the teaching profession and perceptions about teaching as a career in relation to other careers. The questionnaire comprised of both closed and open ended questions covering eight broad areas relating to teaching profession- personal information, socio-economic status, job preference, status of teaching profession, fostering dynamism in the profession, attracting and retaining talent, qualities essential for good teachers and factors viewed necessary to improve the status of teachers. The data were analysed quantitatively by computing percentage and employing chi square tests and other salient trends were highlighted through qualitative analysis.

Results

The analysis of the data revealed that out of a total sample of 303 students only 31 per cent were inclined towards teaching, representing 30 per cent males and 32 per cent females. A Chi Square test revealed no significant difference between *gender* and inclination towards teaching. Further, an analysis of data across *academic streams*, indicate that a larger number of students from the Arts Stream were inclined towards teaching (37%) followed by the students from the Science stream (23%) and Commerce stream (17%). Chi square tests showed a significant difference between academic streams and inclination towards teaching at .05 level (Table No.3)

TABLE 3
 χ^2 Value for inclination towards teaching
 across gender and academic stream

Variables		Inclined	Not Inclined	Total	χ^2
Gender	Male	48 (29.81)	113(70.18)	161 (53%)	0.23
	Female	46 (32.39)	96 (67.60)	142 (47%)	
	Total	94 (31.02)	209 (68.97)	303 (100)	
Academic Stream	Arts	69 (36.89)	118 (63.10)	187 (61.71)	8.16*
	Science	21 (22.82)	71 (77.17)	92(30.36)	
	Commerce	4 (16.66)	20 (83.33)	24 (7.92)	
	Total	94 (31.02)	209 (68.97)	303 (100)	

*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01

Job Preference, in terms of order of priority on a list of ten professions reveal that Civil Services was the most popular career across various academic streams and Teaching occupied the second position. A Chi Square test showed a significant difference at 0.01 level for job preference among the professions (Table No.4).

TABLE 4
 χ^2 Value across professions in terms of job preference,
 economics benefits, freedom of work and job security

Variables	Professions					χ^2
	Civil Services	Teaching	Management	Self Employment	Others	
Job Preference	127 (41.91)	94 (31.02)	5 (7.26)	55 (1.65)	55 (18.15)	167.25**
Economic Benefits	128 (42.24)	9 (2.97)	69 (22.72)	20 (6.60)	77 (25.41)	151.68**
Freedom of Work	77 (25.41)	84 (27.72)	7 (2.31)	104 (34.32)	31 (10.23)	106.39**
Job Security	142 (46.86)	91 (30.03)	11 (3.63)	12 (3.96)	47 (15.51)	207.19**

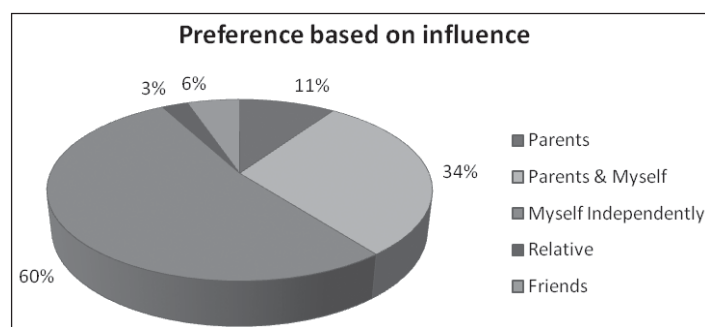
*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01

Further relative ranking of various professions in terms of *economic benefits*, placed teaching much lower compared to other professions, as hardly 3 per cent of students rate it at first rank, whereas Civil Services occupied the first place as rated by 42 per cent of respondents. With regards to *freedom of work*, Self Employment was occupied the top position as rated at first rank by 34 per cent respondents, whereas the position of teaching is enhanced (second

position) in comparison to Civil Services which was placed at third position. With regards to *job security*, teaching again lagged behind Civil Services and was placed at the second position. Further, Chi Square test indicated a significant difference across professions in terms of first ratings for job preference, economic benefits, freedom of work and job security at .01 level (Table No.4).

The *Socio-economic status* of respondents was examined on the basis of the levels of income and educational background of the parents. The major proportion of the students inclined towards teaching fell in the category of low level of income (63%), while in contrast few students came from high-income parents. Further, *Educational background of the parents* of those inclined towards teaching seems to be low, as only 22 per cent of their parents have acquired the qualification of post graduation. *Self efficacy* also seems to be a pertinent factor in the choice of teaching as a career which is evident from the responses of almost half of the students who are inclined towards teaching seems to have strong beliefs about their ability to teach well. Since career choice is a very crucial turn or threshold in the life of an individual, the significant others in one's life, like parents, friends and relatives, play a significant role in influencing the decisions of one's career. With respect to *influence of significant others* on career choice of students, a large segment i.e. 60 per cent of the students indicate that they made the decision about their career independently, whereas 34 per cent of the students state that their decision is based on a joint consensus with their parents, whereas influence of parents accounted to only 11 per cent. On the other hand, influence of relatives and friends seems to be negligible i.e. only 3 per cent and 6 per cent respectively (Fig. 1).

FIGURE 1
Preference based on influence of significant others



Prestige factor is also considered important in Indian society while choosing a career. About 73 per cent of the students affirm that teaching profession receive *adequate respect and recognition* in society today. However, a five point rating scale, indicate an average rating and none rated it very low. A little less than one fourth placed it at a high echelon. Hence, it may be inferred that status of teaching is not perceived as low since it is rated at that level by a negligible number of students, whereas in contrast 18 per cent rate it very high. On inquiring about *why teaching is not chosen as a career?* Almost 75 per cent of those not inclined towards teaching stated low salary as the main reason for not choosing teaching as their career. The qualitative information may be gathered from Table No.5.

TABLE 5

Excerpts from narratives of students from academic streams on the theme “Why did you not choose Teaching as your Career?”

- Low salary is the main reason of not choosing Teaching.
- It is a low paid job.
- It is because, teaching is something like repeating the same syllabus again and again, there is nothing new to learn. It is not practical enough.
- In teaching, we do not get lucrative salaries, which could be available in other professions. Moreover, in teaching profession, I can never get opportunity to spend holidays abroad.
- Because of low salary.
- There are many factors which stop me to choose teaching as a career such as work load, low status in society, low recognition, seems static, negative perception from society, less respect by students etc.
- It is the last option for me, since salary package is not good enough.

The salient trends that emerged from the narratives in Table No. 5 are that besides *low salary*, the availability of other options offering lucrative salaries was also important reason for not choosing teaching as a career. Other deterring factors were work load, low status in society, low recognition, static profession, negative perception from society, less respect by students and the monotonous and mechanical nature of the job. Almost half of the students are of the opinion that

one of the most imperative factors accountable for deterioration of status of teaching is 'Salary and Service conditions'.

Discussion

A range of forces work together to facilitate or thwart career choice. It is against the backdrop of this tightly interwoven fabric of various socio-psychological factors that career choices seem to be expressed in the Indian context.

Positive and negative values could be attributed to career within the social-cognitive environment, created by prevailing ideologies and experiences of the community. Further, prestige and respectability are factors which have marked influence on career choice. It has been reported in the literature that beliefs about the prestige attributes of a career significantly influence career choice behaviour (Akhilesh, 1991; Desai & Whiteside, 2000), which has been confirmed by the present study. It seems that careers which are accorded lower prestige are also accorded lower dignity. Hence, in order to win the respect of their parents and peer, students may choose to enter a particular occupation, not because they would enjoy the work, but because they want to be deemed worthy of respect by virtue of their future occupational membership (Arulmani, 2005). The findings of the present study seem to align with prestige perceptions.

An interesting finding is related to the socio-economic background of the students, as the results confirm a trend that has been revealed by past research, which suggests that those opting for teaching tend to come from a low socioeconomic background. The present study replicated the findings of Arulmani, Van and Eastan (2003) which highlighted the influence of career belief and socio-economic status on the career decision. The beliefs held by young people from economically and socially disadvantaged backgrounds seem to predispose them to lower levels of occupational aspirations as compared to their more privileged counterparts. Further, our findings are also consistent with the findings of See (2004) which indicate that those with less educated parents are more likely to choose teaching as a career.

The findings of the present study pertaining to gender disparity with respect to inclination towards teaching appears to be in conflict with the findings of Singh, (2006) indicating that higher proportion of women students preferred academic career as compared to men students, as well as Chan et. al. (2002) who found significant

difference between students gender and interest in teaching. This discrepancy may be explained in the past by the notion that teaching is, by tradition, a feminine profession and over the years the mindsets of people have gone through a sea change, in response to evolving social ideologies.

The Indian child rearing practices family structure, hierarchical social organisation and value systems promote social support and interdependence. But, with the advent of industrialisation and urbanisation there has been an enormous change from the past, in the values, child rearing practices, family structure etc. which is evident from findings of the present and past research. Findings of Arulmani (1995), indicate that 46 per cent career choices were based on parental influence as against 12 per cent influence indicated in our study. And individual's decision making with the help of parental inputs had occurred amongst 24 per cent of the individuals, whereas it is about 33 per cent in our study. There is striking divergence in respect of independent decision making, which is fifteen times more now, than what it was in 1995. So, we may infer that in a time gap of about thirteen years, young persons have become more independent in taking career decisions and the spectrum of a combined decision of parents and children has increased. This seems to illustrate a blending of the influence of significant others with the young person's emerging individuality.

As reported by Bereiter and Freedman, (1962) that ability is the major determinant of occupation choice is confirmed by our study indicating beliefs of high self efficacy having more probability of inclination towards teaching. The study concurs with the findings of Chan, et. al. (2002) with respect to relative ranking of teaching to other professions occupying one of the first three positions among top three careers, most wanted by students and a significant difference between academic streams and interest in teaching. In a similar study, students' decision to teach or not was found to be related to their subject of study at the university. Social sciences students were two and a half times more likely than those doing science and maths to choose teaching as a career (See, 2004).

Deterioration of status in teaching profession has been indicated in the present study which is also acknowledged by a recent government report indicating a perceptible decline in the popularity and status of the teaching profession (GOI 2006). It also indicates that salary, service conditions and allowances are responsible for the decline of teachers' status similar to our study.

Conclusion

Compared to other industries, teaching does not offer lucrative career in terms of monetary benefits, as a result only few talented people get attracted towards teaching. Further, there is a general feeling among members of the society that a teacher is not receiving due recognition. The very fact that, compared to many other professions, teaching is not getting equivalent material benefits is an index of comparative neglect of the teacher. There is a need to identify the factors these students believe are the most important and then demonstrate that teaching meets these factors. This sets the stage to focus on recruitment and induction process, assessment of training needs and supportive working conditions to substantially enhance the status of the teaching profession. The task of the policy formulators in any country will be ensuring that the country rises to this challenge to compete in the global knowledge economy.

In this present study, an attempt is made to provide an insight into the perceptions of post graduate students of central universities regarding teaching as a career choice in higher education, to assist policy makers and planners in making informed decisions regarding improvement in the status of teaching profession. Thus, clear directions emerge from this research that policy makers must address effective ways to provide an attractive salary package and lift the status of teaching profession at par with other professions, in order to attract talented persons to this profession. It is found that broader professional concerns about pay, prestige and career opportunities continue to figure into individual teachers' choices. Therefore, policymakers must take seriously the long-range challenges of increasing teachers' salary and developing differentiated careers that reward expertise and encourage advancement. Without some changes, talented students and committed teachers will continue to turn away from teaching. Academics must receive sufficient remuneration according to the global standards. In many, perhaps most, countries salary levels have not kept up with inflation and the academic profession has lost ground to other professional occupations. Today, prospective teachers have access to occupations offering high pay and status; comfortable and well-equipped work setting; continuous training; and opportunities for rapid career advancement. Thus there is no guarantee that they will choose teaching over other options. Nor do they necessarily expect to teach for the long term; serial careers are the norm, and short-term employment is common.

Therefore, the challenge of recruiting teachers to meet the shortage is unprecedented, in both nature and scope.

In the current scenario of globalised world Teaching profession needs a revamping of the policies of personnel management in terms of recruitment, salary and service conditions, promotional avenues, grades and cumulative economic benefits in the career span and performance appraisal.

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