



Teacher education is a deeply pedagogical process rooted in values, ethics, and the social purpose of schooling. Globally, it sits at the core of educational quality and fairness, as research in comparative and international education demonstrates: the training of teachers directly influences students' learning chances, social inclusion, and the democratic aims of schools. Teachers are not simply transmitters of curricula, but active professionals whose convictions, reflective skills, and ability to manage the complexities of classroom life give shape and substance to the educational experience itself.

The pedagogical dimension of teacher education frames teaching as a relational, context-aware, and ethically grounded profession rather than just a set of procedural skills. From a research perspective, this demands robust research methodologies that can critically examine the complex realities of schools and inform evidence-based policies. Equally important is the connection between theory and practice, which helps to bridge the persistent gap between universities and schools.

The contributions gathered in this volume reflect the richness and diversity of experiences showcased during the ATEE Spring Conference 2024, held at the University of Bergamo from May 29 to June 1, 2024. The volume presents 70 selected papers out of more than 300 presented by researchers representing over 40 countries.

This broad spectrum of studies highlights promising directions that can inspire renewed inquiry and concrete proposals aimed at improving contemporary educational systems.

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Teacher education research in Europe: trends, challenges, practices and perspectives

May 29th - June 1st, 2024
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Edited by Nicole Bianquin and Francesco Magni





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BOOK OF PROCEEDINGS

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Table of contents

Introduction

Francesco Magni, Nicole Bianquin, *Back to the Core: Rediscovering the Power of Teacher Education Research* 7

Teacher education and pedagogical perspective in uncertain times: history, theory, policies and practices

Brigitta Bekesi, Eva Ulbrich, Tony Houghton, Jana Trgalova & Zsolt Lavicza, *The Reflected Double Tetrahedron Model: Project-based learning in teacher training* 11

Andrea Dessardo, «*The Italian didactic secret*». *Teachers' education according to Giuseppe Lombardo-Radice's thought* 19

Ylenia Falzone & Alessandra La Marca, *Lifelong Learning for Mongolia: Occupational Health & Safety project (3L4MHOS)* 25

Ylenia Falzone, Benedetta Miro & Elif Gülbay, *Teachers and Artificial Intelligence: Developing Digital Citizenship Skills* 31

Eleonora Florio, Tanu Biswas, Ilaria Castelli & Letizia Caso, *Bleak Pedagogy: A new term unveiled from research on Adultcentrism* 38

Deirdre Harvey & Maria Campbell, *Promoting and supporting learner resilience in the hospital school* 44

Aggelos Kavasakalis & Angeliki-Despoina Varouxi, *Reasons and beliefs of (Greek) teachers for participating in an MSc relevant to their profession* 54

Semih Kaygisiz & Hanife Akar, *Challenges Head to Train Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teachers* 62

Sabina Leoncini, *Gender Stereotypes between School and Guidance: A Look at European Regulations and Vocational Education in Italy* 69

Silvia Maggiolini & Elena Zanfroni, *Emergency and people with intellectual disabilities. Teachers' training in the LEBEL proposal* 77

Cristina Miralles-Cardona, María C. Cardona-Moltó & José M. Esteve-Faubel, <i>Gender-responsive teaching: What strategies are teacher educators using for gender mainstreaming implementation?</i>	83
Benedetta Miro & Alessandra La Marca, <i>Service Learning in teacher education for soft skills development</i>	93
Georgia Natsiou & Melpomeni Tsitouridou, <i>Reflecting together online and offline: A systematic review on the types of peer reflection activities in teacher education</i>	102
Laura Parigi & Maria Elisabetta Cicognini, <i>Exploring the Transformative Impact of Teacher Professional Development on Student-Centered Assessment Approaches</i>	109
Francesca Pileggi, <i>Non-cognitive competence and critical-creative skills. A critical review of the current perspectives</i>	116
Francis J. Prescott-Pickup, <i>Finding a successful teacher identity: the role of the mentor-mentee relationship</i>	122
Nathanaili Valbona, <i>Analyzing poor academic performance of Albanian pupils in PISA</i>	129
Elena Zanfroni, <i>Problematic behaviours and classroom management: teachers' representations</i>	137

Teaching and learning challenges and professional development

Monica Banzato, <i>Attitudes of Humanities Students and Aspiring Teachers Toward Quantitative Educational Research: An Introductory Study</i>	146
Ane Bergersen, <i>Global awareness and professional teacher competence through student mobility from Norway to Zambia</i>	152
Barbara Bocchi, Elena Bortolitti & Paola Damiani, <i>Informal Support Teacher Networks: training and self-training between Communities of Practice</i>	160
Barbara Bocchi, Elena Bortolitti, Paola Damiani, Giuseppe Filippo Dettori & Barbara Letteri, <i>The use of artificial intelligence (AI) in inclusive learning: an exploratory investigation</i>	167
Virginia Capriotti, <i>The Impact of Teaching and Learning Centers (TLCs) on Initial Teacher Education Programs in Italy</i>	176
Giorgia Coppola, <i>From Burnout toward Pedagogical Teacher Education. A communities perspective</i>	183
Alexandra Efstathiades, Christiane Gesierich, Christian Rudloff & Anna Kapsalis, <i>FOOTT PRINTTS: Advancing Quality Standards in Teacher Training</i>	189

Elena Gabbi, Ilaria ancillotti & Maria Ranieri, <i>Rethinking digital competences for teaching in the Post-Covid Era: A participatory approach</i>	197
Marco Giganti, <i>Emergency Remote Teaching and Teacher Training: The Role of Implicit Beliefs in Lasting Educational Change</i>	205
Hege Knudsmoen & Mette Birgitte Helleve, <i>Develop teachers' professional identity through global internship</i>	212
Charlotte Kohlloffel, <i>Opening the black box of writing instruction in times of change: insights from Italian secondary school teachers</i>	220
Regine Lehberger, <i>A learning-design to promote reflection and digital media skills for professionalisation of teacher students</i>	229
Marica Liotino, Taiwo Isaac Olatunji, Marianne Grace Araneta, & Monica Fedeli, <i>Reflective Practice in MOOCs: Exploring the Role of Tutors and Fostering Teacher Professional Development</i>	236
Cristina Lisimberty & Katia Montalbetti, <i>Guiding students from lower to upper secondary: a challenging and shared task for families and schools</i>	244
Sabrina Natali, <i>Rethinking teacher training in emotional education through sports</i>	256
Sara Nosari & Emanuela Guarcello, <i>The question of non-cognitive skills and the cheetah's coat perspective</i>	262
Alessandro Oro, Ira Vannini & Elisa Guasconi, <i>A formative assessment framework to develop primary school pre-service and in-service teachers' video analysis programs</i>	271
Federica Pelizzari & Simona Ferrari, <i>Exploring Coding and Educational Robotics in Primary Schools. Results and Perspectives from an Action Research Approach to Teaching Innovation</i>	278
Annfrid Rosey & Tove Leming, <i>Internationalization in Teacher Education: How can student practice in Southern Africa contribute to strengthening the professional work as teachers in Northern Norway?</i>	293
Stefano Spennati, <i>Educating on complexity at the time of transition</i>	300
Chiara Urbani, <i>Collaborative and epistemic advances: a study on teacher agency</i>	305
Gerd Wikan, <i>Global Teachers and Practicum in the Global South. A study of Long-Term Impact of International Practicum in Namibia</i>	312
Franco Zengaro & Sally A. Zengaro, <i>Teachers Reflect on Their Identities as Former Students and Future Teachers</i>	318
Sally A. Zengaro & Franco Zengaro, <i>Supporting Active Learning in Online Learning: Creating a Culture of Care</i>	326

Inclusion in teaching and learning processes and school improvement

Luca Angelone & Federica Festa, <i>Cultivating Inclusive Education: A Collaborative Journey of Secondary School Teachers in Promoting Cognitive and Linguistic Accessibility through Picture Books and AAC</i>	333
Luca Ballestra Caffaratti, Cecilia Marchisio, Alessandro Monchietto, Alessandro Zanzo & Marco Secchia, <i>The Use of Artificial Intelligence in Secondary Schools: Experiences in Initial Teacher Training</i>	340
Daniele Bullegas & Martina Monteverde, <i>Theory into practice: exploring teacher perceptions about Early Intervention in the Italian school system</i>	346
Sara Cecchetti & Nicole Bianquin, <i>The work plan (Plan de Travail) as an educational device that addresses everyone's needs. A survey of teachers' and pupils' perspectives</i>	354
Federica Cilia, Jeanne Kruck, Marie-Hélène Plumet & Mélina Dell'armi, <i>Well-Being and Social Participation of Autism Spectrum Disorder Students at University: the impact of Atypie Friendly Inclusion Program</i>	362
Alice Di Leva & Federica Festa, <i>The Student Voice in teacher training, an investigation into the inclusiveness of European practices</i>	370
Ilaria Folci & Anna Monauni, <i>Differentiation in Preschool. Pedagogical Issues and Best Practices</i>	378
Mabel Giraldo & Fabio Sacchi, <i>Planning the transition to adulthood for students with disabilities: knowledge, perceptions, challenges from STRADE teacher training program</i>	384
Jørgen Klein, Ann Sylvi Larsen & Tove Grete Lie, <i>'People are people' - An investigation of long-term impacts of an international practicum</i>	393
Daniela Maccario & Annamaria Garibaldi, <i>Helping to learn. What are good practices of educational intervention? Structure and preliminary results of a participatory research study</i>	400
Cecilia Marchisio & Alessandro Monchietto, <i>Improving Inclusive Education: The Turin Model of Collaboration between Schools, Universities and Communities</i>	405
Francesca Placanica, Rosa Sgambelluri & Alessandra Priore, <i>Life Designing and inclusive prospects in Italian schools</i>	411
Ilaria Ravasi, <i>Preventing early school leaving. Perspectives of intervention research between school and territory</i>	417

Digital innovation and artificial intelligence (AI): schools, teachers and students between real and virtual world

Valentina Berardinetti, Michele Ciletti, Andreana Lavanga & Giusi Antonia Toto, <i>Digital Innovation and Artificial Intelligence in Museum Education: perspectives, debates and psychological implications</i>	424
Roxana-Madalina Cristea, <i>Investigating the Relationships between In-service Teachers' Technology Pedagogy Content Knowledge and Virtual Learning Environment Success</i>	432
Francesca De Vitis & Marcello Tempesta, <i>Touch in small hands. Responding to the challenges of technology in childhood 0-6</i>	439
Silvia Larghi & Edoardo Datteri, <i>Programming errors and the attribution of intentionality to educational robots</i>	445
Juliana Elisa Raffaghelli, Francesca Crudele, Laura Foschi & Graziano Cecchinato, <i>Let me introduce open education... Facilitating Prospective teachers' understanding of open Education through an ai-based tool</i>	453
Alice Roffi, <i>Digital technologies and collaborative activities for science teaching in the upper secondary school: a qualitative study on teacher's perspective</i>	464
Alice Roffi, Gabriele Biagini, Stefano Cuomo & Maria Ranieri, <i>Development of teachers' competences on Learning Design and on supporting student's Self-Regulated Learning in the lower secondary school</i>	472
Marcello Tempesta, <i>Teacher education and motivation culture</i>	481

School & work and the role of teachers in Vocational Education and Training

Maria Concetta Carruba, Mariateresa Cairo & Magdalena Tsoneva, <i>Comparative Analysis of Inclusive Education Practices in Italy and Bulgaria: Reflections from the Erasmus Plus ASuMIE Project</i>	488
Valerio Ferrero, <i>Teacher Education as a Game Changer: Non-Traditional Factors of Inequality and the Role of Teachers for Equity</i>	494
Anna Granata & Valerio Ferrero, <i>Beyond Patriarchy: Teaching Profession, Gender Issues and Teacher Education in Italy</i>	502
Paola Zini & Dalila Raccagni, <i>Teacher training and well-being best practices: the 3H project</i>	508



POSTER SESSION

Antinea Ambretti, Chiara Gamberini & Arianna Fogliata, *Integration of the Sincrony method in physical education during school age in the digital era* 517

Francesca Finestrone, *Music as an inclusive tool for promoting a sustainable Culture* 523

Francesca Finestrone, Francesco Pio Savino, Leonardo Palmisano & Giusi Antonia Toto, *Nature Connection and Music in Early Education: Insights from the CNS-ch Scale and TEAL Methods* 532

Paula Matijašević, Bruno Matijašević, Ana Žnidarec Čučković & Vesna Babić, *Kinesiologists' and Coaches' Self-Assessment of Their Pedagogical Competences* 538

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Reasons and beliefs of (Greek) teachers for participating in an MSc relevant to their profession

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Abstract

The present paper is based on a broader survey of teachers' reasons and beliefs for participating in a teacher education MSc program. It also explores their reflections on their experiences as postgraduate students. All participants in the research were already professional teachers in public education, working in both primary and secondary education. Two groups (6 primary and 6 secondary teachers) were formed during the research to compare their beliefs pointing out possible differences or similarities. The research conducted through semi-structured interviews. At this paper, we focus on the central research question: What are the reasons and motivations based on which the participants, who were already employed as teachers, chose to undertake an MSc in Teacher Education?

Keywords: teachers' education; lifelong learning; motives; criteria; challenges.

1. Theoretical issues

The use of the term motivation is essentially related to the attempt to explore the reasons that motivated someone to take action, i.e. what it was that prompted teachers to attend a postgraduate programme at university. To identify the reasons that led the research participants to make this decision, this is directly relevant to the study of the criteria based on which they chose to attend a postgraduate course at university. More generally, according to Billett (2010), there is a wide range of motivations that motivate individuals from the desire for personal improvement and the pursuit of interaction with other fellow human beings, to financial motivation and the cultivation of a flexible and, more importantly, multidimensional work profile.

The extent to which the learner's motivation influences the educational process is quite important. According to a study conducted by Kellaghan et al. (1996), (as cited in: Harlen & Deakin-Crick, 2003, p. 171) learners who are motivated by external factors - i.e. factors beyond their personal development - tend not to assimilate in depth the new knowledge offered to them even though their performance and degree of participation in the programme may seemingly be exemplary.

Focusing on attendance in university programmes, an important role is played by: a) the age of the individual, b) the education he/she has already participated in up to that point and c) the economic situation of the individual in combination with his/her social status (Norman & Hyland, 2003). Aspin & Chapman (2000) also identify three primary reasons as motivations in relation to participation in Lifelong Learning (LL): a) the expectation of improved earnings, b) personal development and c) the wider impact of LL on society.

Based on the foregoing, two categories of trainees could be identified according to their motivation: (i) trainees motivated by an inner need for development and improvement and (ii) trainees motivated by factors and expecting results beyond personal improvement, such as advancement to a higher job position.

2. Methodology

In the context of the topic under study, it was considered that qualitative research is more relevant to the direction in which the topic will be approached. The research tool that was used is semi-structured interviews.

Through the semi-structured interviews, the researcher can approach each participant's experience as unique, while the research itself gives us the opportunity to capture the different perceptions that the participants have acquired and to deepen our analysis of them. Also, a key feature -and advantage- of this method is that it gives the process a sense of freedom through the form of a type of conversation between the interviewer and the interviewee (Korres, 2017).

The research sample included primary and secondary school teachers who, as already professional teachers, decided to attend an MSc programme. The total number of interviewees was twelve (12). To compare the findings between primary and secondary teachers, the total population of twelve teachers was divided into two sub-groups. The first group is composed of six teachers who work in primary education (referred to as I. 1-6), while the second group consists of six teachers who work in secondary education (referred to as I. 7-12).

The relative research questions were:

1. What are the reasons, motivations and criteria on the basis of which the research participants, who were already been working as teachers, chose to attend a postgraduate course of study?
2. How do the teachers who took part in the survey describe their experience of participating in the programme?
3. Are there differences in the reasons, criteria and motivations for choosing to attend a postgraduate programme between primary and secondary school teachers?

3. Analysis - Findings

The interviews of teachers in both sub-groups followed the same interview axes created for the survey. The research interview discussion axes were as follows:

- a) interviewees' beliefs about participation in Lifelong Learning;
- b) reasons - incentives - criteria for selection and participation in the MSc;
- c) experience and satisfaction of the interviewees from their participation in the MSc.

3.1 Axis (a)

Regarding the preference of the interviewees for participating in a university programme, overall, all of them stated that the university played a catalytic role in their decision to acquire new knowledge. While none of them seemed to have been in doubt as to whether the training they attended would take place within a postgraduate programme within the university.

I.3: «Well yes where would I do it outside (laughs)? ... it definitely worked positively that it was within the university because I felt a security, I had thought about that before I started. [...] I trusted the institution».

I.9: «Look if it wasn't the university for what reason to choose it? There wasn't—for me there is nothing more powerful no more powerful weapon to the citizens than the university. The university, not that there is. To me it is a sacred space, fully qualified, providing us with everything we are with its good, with its bad, with its shortcomings. But for me, its positives are not, cannot be drowned out by anything. You mean with the university».

While it seems that the fact that university teaching staff are considered the most suitable and qualified also plays an important role in the choice of the primary teachers who participated.

I.4: «I think the people who organize it have more knowledge and are more qualified and more organized».

Finally, among the responses of primary school teachers, there was a perception that the university would help their development and their status within the school unit, even after the end of the programme they participated in.

I.2: «First of all I wanted a prestige in my workplace, that is to say I wanted a subject e which would give me a paper e which among my colleagues but also among my pupils and parents would make me more knowledgeable, more e in today's standards, more up to date».

While some stated that they did not wish to obtain any training but considered it necessary for their development to obtain a postgraduate diploma, which of course only the university could provide. This perception was common to both groups.

I.4: « [...] I was looking for a postgraduate degree at university».

I.6: «Yes, I had decided that I wanted to go to a postgraduate programme, and so I did.[...] I think that the university and the postgraduate programme e is a more complete, a more complete form of further education, so to speak».

3.2 Axis (b)

The second axis explores the reasons, motivations and criteria that prompted the interviewees to choose to continue their studies. It also seeks to understand the rationale behind their choice of the programme they eventually attended.

Regarding what prompted the interviewees to continue their studies, given that all the interviewees were already working in the public formal education sector, all of them were working in schools.

The perception that the knowledge they possessed was not sufficient was often encountered in the first group (primary school teachers). While they noted that, the time that had elapsed since obtaining

their degree created an uncertainty about updating their knowledge. In addition, although they were already working in education they wished to obtain more creditable qualifications:

I.1: « [...] for specialization but (smiles) it's also about getting more formal qualifications».

I. 2: « [...] I wanted a recognition in my work, [...] I wanted a subject which would give me a paper [...] which among my colleagues but also among my students and parents would make me more knowledgeable, more up to date because the knowledge I had acquired had passed the years and I felt that I needed to renew myself».

Many of the teachers said that they felt that their degree and this first stage of their studies in general had not equipped them with as much knowledge as they would have liked, either because in practice they had encountered some difficulties in teaching. This was met in the responses of both groups:

I.2: «the knowledge that I had gained had been passed down the years and I felt that I needed to refresh so I chose this».

I.3: « [...] I felt that I had not learned anything».

The feeling that their first level of study was no longer enough appeared more frequently in the responses of secondary school teachers:

I.8: «At that time, I thought a postgraduate degree was necessary. That is to say, I considered that my degree alone did not meet the requirements of the profession and that is why I wanted to do a postgraduate degree. [...] when one starts to do some training, it's as if one gets used to it, as if one gets addicted in a way».

I.10: «First of all what, what made me continue my studies is that I wanted to expand my knowledge in the field that I was involved in[...] and that I think has a direct impact on the quality of life, not only my personal and my family's life, but also the educational work, the educational function that I perform».

Participants also stated that their main motivation was their professional recognition. While it was noted in both groups that gaining new knowledge and new qualifications would act as an aid to climbing the hierarchy.

I.4: « [...] I will say the love for learning, for studying, um of course it helps me both professionally and salary-wise and in my professional advancement[...] first I put my love of learning, let's say, first and then the use of them as a professional tool».

I.5: «My first degree did not help me to be able to climb up in the education sector to higher levels[...] an upgrade in our educational status».

I.12: «Initially I thought that objectively with a degree I could not do anything I knew this I knew that it was now the time and my age such that I knew that a degree was not enough. I was late in getting started of course because I didn't know what I wanted».

Among the responses in the secondary school teacher group, there was a statement that attending a programme after completing basic studies, even after some years of professional career, seemed to be a natural progression.

I.9: « [...] as long as I was studying and as long as I was watching, I liked other things. It doesn't mean you do one thing and that's it».

I.10: « [...] that I wanted to broaden my knowledge in the field I was involved in».

It was further articulated that despite the experience and familiarity they had gained with the subject, they still noticed areas that needed improvement».

I.11: «needs of education, the practice, the educational practice, gaps, deficiencies».

On the choice of the programme they participated in over all the others offered. Interviewees largely stated that they were looking for a way to gain expertise and felt that the programme they participated in was the appropriate means to gain it».

I.1: « [...] I chose it as a specialization if I happen to have a child with learning difficulties to know how to manage it, how to deal with it».

I.8: «That I wanted specialization, that's what I wanted. That I wanted this one because it provided me with expertise in my subject, it provided me with expertise in the new curricula in the new teaching methods and programs».

3.3 Axis (c)

Regarding whether the criteria, reasons and motivations based on which each interviewee chose the programme in the first phase, after its completion, are confirmed, most participants answered positively. As the interviewees of the second group

At the same time, in the group of secondary school teachers, it was more noticeable that through their further education they aimed to diversify their working conditions and, in essence, their professional development.

I.7: « [...] I chose it on the basis that it would help me in my professional development [...] it helped me e in my tenure, in my appointment, e and it also helped me in the classroom».

I.12: «Yes and to be honest I have no regrets at all that I did it and I think that's what led me to the position I'm in now».

Some of the interviewees noted that although they were generally satisfied with the programme, they would have preferred it to give more time and space to developing practical skills through internships. This belief was most pronounced in the interviews with primary school teachers.

I.1: «Well yes, I find that they are responding just that okay it's now a transition from the theory that the courses had we are moving into practice in the classroom, so I'm also saying that I would like there to be more practical training».

However, some of the participants did not seem to be fully satisfied. Typically, they mentioned their concerns about whether the knowledge they gained was applicable and would be of use somewhere in their professional life.

While others seemed to feel that the programme did not meet their expectations. At the same time, the importance of including some kind of practical training in the training programs was again stressed.

I.3. « (laughs). In my mind I had it in mind as something very different, I thought that e would learn things from it. I didn't. I only learned when we went to practice».

It was also noted that although the training was a personal initiative of the interviewee, it was made difficult by the demands and expected results of the programme.

It appears that for some of the participants the programme did not meet their expectations at all. Characteristics from the interviewees in the first group:

I.3: «The programme was extra boring[...] I feel that I didn't get anything. [...] In my mind I had it as something very different, I thought I would learn things from it. I didn't. I only learned when we went to the internship».

Other interviewees noted the difficulty of combining their family life with the demands of the programme.

It was also mentioned that there could have been a better relationship between the programme and new technologies, or even in cases where new technologies and specialized programs were used by trainees there could have been more explanation of their use and exploitation by programme staff. Finally, the issue of the fees that trainees were required to pay in order to participate in the programme was also raised.

I.8: «It was quite expensive though[...]It was quite a lot of pressure, and quite a lot of work [...]It was quite a demanding project, but from there, it was worth it».

During the discussion, the interviewees also analyzed the climate among the participants in the programme. Regarding the relationships that developed between the participants. In general, it was observed that the interviewees developed good working relationships with the other participants in the programme.

I.7: «Very good, we always had very good cooperation, very good relationships».

I.9: «Look at that and just that we had all that every weekend all together, in there; there were friendly relationships, a lot. And with our teachers. We've done our traveling; we still get together».

While the majority mentioned the fruitful interactional relationships that developed between participants.

I.2: «Generally with everyone - with all participants was positive».

I.5: «Interaction, cooperation, we understood that we all had the same questions, the same anxieties, the same curiosity, the same needs for training, that all of us in our schools are facing the same problems».

Several of them noted that they developed friendly relationships with other participants which they maintain to this day, and they consider that since they were educational participants in the project, this is helpful in their later scientific life as an advisory network.

There were also interviewees who reported an uneasy relationship between the participants of the programme.

I.3: «The atmosphere because we were inexperienced people was very... diverse. [...] that is very lukewarm things, there was no bonding. It was something that was for everybody that was a process».

I.11: «The relationships were a bit strange, [...] I didn't know anybody, there was a competition».

4. Answering research questions (R.Q.)

4.1 1st R.Q.

All participants seem to agree that a teacher's knowledge should not remain static and that it should keep pace with new educational standards. While it is mentioned that often this is something that is predetermined by the system itself. It is therefore apparent that among the participants it is considered important that the teacher periodically returns to the position of trainee. While quite an important motivation among the interviewees seems to have been the feeling that only their undergraduate level of education was insufficient or that their knowledge needed an update.

The interviewees seemed to factor into the decision to continue their studies both the need to feel knowledgeable among their peers and believing that it would give their position in the classroom prestige both towards their students and the students' parents. Among the participants, there were also cases where their family or social environment had been a driving force and supportive context for continuing their studies. While favorable treatment from the work environment also benefited both the completion of the programme they were already involved in and their desire to participate in another in the future.

The analysis of the interviews showed that all participants relied on the credibility and prestige of a postgraduate programme within a university institution for this continuous acquisition of new knowledge. In addition, some participants stressed that an important criterion for their choice was the university itself. In several cases their choice was to participate in a MSc at the university they had attended in the MSc. Even interviewees who revealed that one of the main reasons for participating in a Lifelong Learning programme was to move up the hierarchy or to strengthen and enrich their formal qualifications, highlighted as an important reason the credibility of the university as an institution both in terms of programme organization, course content, level of knowledge and finally the certainty of the excellent training of the lecturers. A concern is raised by the fact that some of the participants seem to have been significantly motivated by a professional insecurity. That is, they went for further training as a guarantee for their professional stability.

Those on the other hand who postponed their entry into a further education programme were cited by interviewees as having to bear the financial costs of participating in such a programme. Among other things, it was mentioned that although they had arrived at the subject they wished to train in, and had chosen the programme they wanted to join, they had to wait to be able to finance their studies.

4.2 2nd R.Q.

An important motivation for the final choice of the programme they would participate in seemed to be the flexibility of the programme. This was the second most important criterion for selecting the programme, right after the subject matter it dealt with. This was fully justified by the fact that the participants were working alongside their postgraduate training process. Furthermore, participants who stated that the programs they participated in provided a flexibility in the structure of the course schedule (weekend attendance, distance learning) seemed to feel more confident in the choice they made and more satisfied with their participation in the programme.

Participants reported that their main source of information received from friends or colleagues, with internet searches acting as a supplement to this information.

In evaluating their experience of the programme, trainees also reported negative aspects. In particular, the perception that the programme was too theoretical and did not include a sufficient period of practical training was more frequently expressed. This fact, in addition to dissatisfaction with the structure of the programme, seemed to cause a feeling of insecurity among some of the participants as to whether they themselves would be able in the long term to put into practice and reconfigure their teaching.

In addition, several of the participants were not satisfied with the use of new technologies in their participation in the MSc. Many of the teachers expected that a further training would also update their technological knowledge in terms of the use of new technologies in the classroom. Teachers who reported having this expectation seemed disappointed with this aspect of their experience while participating in the MSc.

There were also instances where participants indicated that they were not satisfied with the programme they participated in and that it did not meet their expectations of it at all when they started. In these cases, the participants' only motivation for completing the programme was to obtain a Master's degree and thus enrich their CVs.

In terms of their relationships with other participants, participants' beliefs ranged generally from neutral to excellent. There was, of course, a feeling that the atmosphere between participants in the programme was characterized by a degree of competition, which did not indicate the development of closer working relationships. The most interesting finding is that participants felt that through their participation in the programme and their cooperation within it with their fellow students, they were able to build a network of colleagues with high standards of training. This also seems to give them a sense of security about solving possible issues that may arise, in the sense that they can refer to the network they have developed through their participation in the MSc, for pedagogical advice or suggestions about teaching.

4.3 3rd R.Q.

In this R.Q. we investigated whether differences (and similarities) were observed in the responses of the survey participants of the two different groups (primary and secondary teachers).

Regarding their view on Lifelong Learning in a general context there seems to be agreement that every citizen benefits from acquiring new knowledge and skills. Especially if this knowledge and skills are acquired in the context of a structured programme.

However, primary teachers believe that they ought (as an obligation) to return to training from time to time. Secondary teachers group they decide to return to training in the broader view of professional development.

It is observed that in the primary teacher group, the opinion of the students' parents seems to be an important motivator. In the sense that teachers seemed to feel more strongly the need to present themselves as knowledgeable and innovative in the eyes of their students' parents. On the other hand, in the group of secondary school teachers, teachers seemed to attach great importance to new developments regarding teacher qualifications. While they appeared to feel to a greater extent than primary teachers the need to enrich their CV, not uncritically with new training but motivated largely by the acquisition of new qualifications.

Regarding the reasons why primary teachers chose to continue their studies, they seem to have been motivated by the need for training, as well as the attempt to acquire the necessary knowledge to deal with possible specificities in the teaching of their students, for which they did not feel fully adequate only from their knowledge at the first-degree level. In the group of secondary school teachers, the most dominant perception was the desire to acquire additional qualifications with the aim of climbing the hierarchy. An element that was also observed in the group of primary teachers.

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