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Career Perspectives of Teacher Education Students: Choice, Satisfaction and Expectations

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Abstract: The aim of this study was to examine the perceptions of the teaching profession, satisfaction with the choice of a study programme, and desirable work values in students in their final years of various areas of teacher education studies. The study participants were 443 students in their final year of teacher education studies in the Republic of Croatia. The participants filled out the questionnaires designed to examine their intentions of finding a job in their professional field, their satisfaction with the chosen study programme, the perception of the support received from their surroundings, their satisfaction with a study programme, and the perception of the teaching profession and desirable work values. The findings have shown that students tend to rank highly expert career and high demand of the teaching profession, while they give the lowest ranking to the social status of teachers and their salary. Statistically significant differences were found in almost all of the examined variables with regard to the area of study (interdisciplinary, humanistic, STEM, social). The perceptions of students who intend to find employment in schools are statistically different in comparison with those of students who do not intend to or who are not sure whether they would work in schools, with regard to their satisfaction with the chosen study programme and studies, and their perceptions of the important work values. The logistic regression analysis results indicate that satisfaction with the chosen study programme is the most important factor contributing to students' intentions to find employment in school. The findings highlight the importance of strengthening professional orientation and providing support to students during their studies, while future research should further examine the factors underlying satisfaction with the choice of a study programme.

Keywords: *intention of performing work, perceptions of the teaching profession, satisfaction with the choice of a study programme and studies, teacher shortages, the importance of work.*

Introduction

A vast body of research confirms that teachers are the most important factor associated with school that has an impact on student learning and academic success (Chetty et al., 2014). In spite of that, throughout the last two decades, numerous education systems around the world have been facing shortages of qualified teachers in schools (Nguyen et al., 2020). Considering the current teacher short- ages and teacher demand, it is estimated that by 2030, there will be a shortage of approximately 44 million teachers in primary and secondary schools on the global level (UNESCO and International task force on teachers for education 2030, 2024). This teacher shortage points to a need to understand thoroughly the factors that influence teacher retention and their professional motivation.

In the available literature, teacher turnover has been analysed from two complementary dimensions: teacher attrition and teacher migration. Teacher attrition includes leaving the teaching profession, while teacher migration implies a change of school or workplace within the same school. Contrary to attrition, teacher retention implies a decision to stay in the teaching profession, either performing the same job in the same school or performing the same job in a different school (Gundlach et al., 2024). Though it may seem that a change of school does not reduce the total number of in-service teachers, research reveals negative consequences of such changes affecting both teachers and their colleagues (Hahs-Vaughn and

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Scherff, 2008; Ingersoll, 2001), while teacher attrition has a much more significant impact.

Teacher attrition as a result of teachers leaving their profession results in many consequences, including the financial costs arising from their replacement and training of new teachers. These costs may range from 10,000 to 20,000 dollars per teacher (Allen et al., 2016; DeFeo et al., 2017). Apart from the teachers who have already gained work experience, more attention is paid to teacher education students who do not plan to work in schools upon completion of their studies. Elstad et al. (2021) define turnover intention as a student's intention to leave the teacher education studies or the teaching profession after they have completed the studies. Research findings from Belgium indicate that only 69 – 95% of teachers with a university degree decide to find employment in a primary school, 64 – 78% of them are willing to start working in lower grades of secondary school, and only 21 – 46% plan to find a job in higher grades of secondary school (Rots et al., 2014).

According to a report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2019), teacher shortage and lower teacher education studies enrolment rates are among the greatest challenges education systems are facing on the global level. In order to solve this problem, the researchers point to a need to examine the motives which affect one's decision to enrol in teacher education studies (González Sanzana et al., 2024). Goller et al. (2019) claim that motivation for choosing the teaching profession is a predictor of the teacher education students' success, as their motivation has a significant influence on their engagement in the studies (Kissau et al., 2019), commitment to their profession (Fokkens-Bruinsma and Canrinus, 2014), and persistence in the teaching career (McLean et al., 2019). Therefore, it can be concluded that motivated teachers are a key factor influencing the quality of any education system.

In the Republic of Croatia, no comprehensive research on the shortage of qualified educators has not been published, although some studies indicate a shortage of educators and a decreased interest in enrolling into teacher education studies. Domović and Drvodelić (2025) emphasize the continuing shortage of all subject teacher profiles (Grades 5 – 8 in primary school), especially in the STEM area. Previously conducted studies were mostly focused on examining the work of novice teachers and/or teachers with longer work experience. However, there is still a lack of studies focusing on the analysis of teacher education students' perceptions. Therefore, with the aim of filling the research gap, this study will focus on examining the perceptions of teacher education students in various areas of study and analysis results. It will facilitate a deeper understanding of the choice of a study programme, satisfaction with the chosen study programme, the perceptions about the teaching profession and desirable characteristics of the future profession, which will create important implications for potential future actions.

Theoretical framework

The choice of a study programme

In order to comprehend the motives for choosing the teaching profession, the literature frequently presents the FIT (Factors Influencing Teaching)-Choice model developed by Watt and Richardson (2007). This model was used in the study as a conceptual framework and it encompasses multiple dimensions. For the purposes of this study, various scales were used to assess the choice of a study programme (Social dissuasion, Satisfaction with the choice of a study programme) and the perceptions of the teaching profession (Social status, Salary, Expert career, High demand). Fokkens-Bruinsma and Canrinus (2012) point out that there are other motives for choosing the teaching profession mentioned in the literature, such as material aspects (job stability), professional aspects (interest in a certain scientific area or school subject), and altruistic aspects (love and responsibility for improving the well-being of children and young people). The decision to choose the teaching profession can also be made under the influence of people from the immediate social environment who may offer support and encourage a person to enrol into teacher education studies (Richardson and Watt, 2006).

Satisfaction with a study programme

Providing students with quality study programmes and additional services is crucial for the survival of higher education institutions in an environment which has become increasingly competitive (Lapina et al., 2016; Paul and Pradhan, 2019). Student satisfaction is positively related to motivation, academic achievement and student retention at the faculty (Duque, 2014; Mihanović et al., 2016; Nastasić et al.,

2019). It also has a positive impact on the rating of educational institutions and student achievement. A majority of scientists perceive student satisfaction as a multidimensional construct (Duque, 2014; Wach et al., 2016; Wong and Chapman, 2023). Wong and Chapman (2023) list eight aspects of student satisfaction which they classified into three categories: academic (satisfaction with the study programme and the teaching process), institutional (satisfaction with the educational institution, the learning space and equipment at the university, and the support offered), and student life at university (satisfaction with their own learning process, the overall university experience and overall student life at university). Other important elements of student satisfaction mentioned in the literature are: university climate, student-oriented teaching, empathy, teacher competencies, curriculum, student-student interaction, student-teacher rapport, group size, lectures held according to the schedule, and the availability of the teaching materials (Douglas et al., 2006; Elliot and Healy, 2001; Wong and Chapman, 2023).

The perception of the teaching profession

Young people shape the professional identity of a future teacher even before they embark on their academic career. The initial professional identity is influenced not only by personal factors but also by a broader social context observed by a young person, such as how much the teaching profession is appreciated in the society or what attitudes people important to them (parents, peers) have regarding the teaching profession (Torres-Cladera et al., 2021). Before opting for the teaching profession, young people have gained an extensive experience of the teaching profession as students. It also includes their interest in the courses, academic achievement, peer interactions and interactions with their teachers, as well as their overall impression of school. Social dissuasion and personal experience may either encourage or discourage them to choose the teaching profession (Bergmark et al., 2018).

Motivation for teaching is crucial when choosing the teaching career, both during the course of teacher education studies and later on in the teaching career itself (Sinclair, 2008). Intrinsic and altruistic motivation are dominant when choosing the teaching profession (Tang et al., 2015). However, Sinclair (2008) points out that intrinsic motivation and enthusiasm may subside over time, as teachers are overwhelmed with work and are not provided with the necessary support in their working environment, resulting in teacher attrition (Kim and Cho, 2014).

Desirable work values

Numerous concepts are being studied with regard to the workplace context, including work values. Analysing the relevant scientific literature, Lyons et al. (2010) describe work values as general beliefs about the relative desirability of various aspects of work (e.g., working conditions, salary, autonomy) and work-related outcomes (e.g., achievement, prestige). Work values may be considered as internal expressions of various needs or outcomes which individuals are trying to meet or achieve with their work, including intellectual, social, and status needs, needs for respect and self-realization. Work values indicate what each individual finds important in their work (Kuron, 2015). They organize work values in hierarchical order, according to their importance, and use the set hierarchy as a reference point when making decisions related to work and career (Lyons, 2010). There are also numerous classifications and approaches to measuring workplace values, but in general, they can be classified into the following categories: intrinsic, extrinsic, altruistic, and prestigious workplace values (Lyons and Kuron, 2014) and this study measures work values across these established dimensions.

The aim and problems of the study

The aim of the study was to examine the perceptions of the teaching profession, satisfaction with the choice of a study programme and the study programme itself, and desirable work values of students in their final year of teacher education studies; to determine if the above-mentioned characteristics with regard to the area of study and intentions to enter the teaching profession upon completing the studies differ, and to examine to what extent the mentioned factors predict the students' intention to enter the teaching profession upon completing their studies.

In line with the aim of the study, the following questions were posed:

1. Are there differences in the perceptions of the teaching profession, satisfaction with the study programme and desirable work values with regard to the field of study?

2. Are there differences in the perceptions of the teaching profession, satisfaction with the choice of the study programme, satisfaction with the study programme itself, and the desirable work values with regard to the intention of finding employment in school upon completing the studies?
3. Which factors (perception of the teaching profession, satisfaction with the choice of the study programme, satisfaction with the study programme itself, and desirable work values) account for the explanation of the intention to find employment in school upon completing the studies?

Methods

Participants and procedure

A total of 443 students in their final year of teacher education studies in the Republic of Croatia participated in the study. Potential outliers were identified based on absolute z-scores ≥ 3.29, resulting in the exclusion of nine participants. The removal of these participants did not alter the main findings of the study. The final sample consisted of 434 participants, of whom 365 (84.1%) were female and 69 (15.9%) were male. The average age of the participants is 23 years (M_{age} = 23.05; SD_{age} = 1.35). As in a majority of teacher education studies it takes five years to earn a master's degree in a particular field, the participants in this study were only students in their fourth of fifth year of study. The sample comprised 274 (63.1%) students in their fourth year of integrated graduate studies or in their first year of graduate studies, and 160 (36.9%) students in their fifth year of integrated studies or in their second year of graduate studies. The greatest number of participants, 57.8% (*n* = 251), are involved in interdisciplinary studies, 13.6% (*n* = 59) in humanities, 13.6% (*n* = 59) STEM, and 15% (*n* = 65) in social studies. Most participants (77.4%; *n* = 336) enrolled into the faculty which was their primary choice, while 22.6% (*n* = 98) study at a teacher education faculty which was not their first choice. In Croatia, senior students in secondary school make a list of 10 study programmes according to their personal preferences, while the actual faculty enrolment depends on their results in the school-leaving exams, and, at some faculties, on additional entrance exams.

The study was conducted via an online questionnaire, during the regular teaching period at faculties. A QR code containing the link to an online questionnaire was sent to professors at teacher education faculties, and they distributed it to students during regular classes. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, in line with the research code and approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Teacher Education, University of Zagreb. Before filling out the questionnaire, the participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time. It took about 10 minutes to fill out the questionnaire.

Measuring instruments

Sociodemographic questions included were used to collect data about participants' age, gender, year of study, the faculty and area of study, as well as the city in which they study, and the academic title they will earn upon graduation. In addition, the participants provided answers to two questions relating to their choice of a study programme (*When choosing your desired study programmes, was this study programme your first choice?*) and intention to work in their profession (*Do you plan to find employment in school when you graduate?*). The possible answers were: *yes*, *no*, and *not sure*.

The choice of a study programme. In order to examine the perceptions of the choice of a study programme, *FIT-Choice Scale* items were used (Watt and Richardson, 2007). The scale had already been translated into Croatian (Jugović et al., 2012) and two factors were extracted: Social dissuasion and Satisfaction with choice. Each factor consists of three items (e.g., *Did others influence you to consider careers other than teaching?; How satisfied are you with your choice of becoming a teacher?*). The participants assessed their answers on a five-point Likert-type scale, points ranging from 1 – *not at all* to 5 – *extremely*. Exploratory factor analysis was performed and, in line with the Kaiser-Guttman criterion, two factors were extracted with eigenvalue greater than 1, explaining 68.78% of variance. The obtained factor structure is in line with the original scale. The calculated internal reliability coefficients were α = .755 for the first factor, and α = .765 for the second factor.

Satisfaction with a study programme. Satisfaction with a study was measured using seven items, five of which were taken from the *Student Satisfaction Questionnaire* (Wong and Chapman, 2023) (e.g., *How satisfied are you with your study programme?*), while two items were added relating to overall satis-

faction with a study programme and education (e.g., *Do you consider that, upon completion of your studies, you will be fully qualified for independent work in school?*). The participants used assessment ranging from 1 – *not at all* to 5 – *extremely*. The performed exploratory factor analysis pointed to the single-factor solution, explaining 52.03% of variance. The factor reliability coefficient is α = .830.

Perceptions of the teaching profession. 15 items taken from the *FIT-Choice Scale* (Watt and Richardson, 2007), that is, from its Croatian version (Jugović et al., 2012), were used to examine the perceptions of the teaching profession. The performed exploratory factor analysis extracted four factors: Social status, Salary, Expert career, and High demand. The Social status factor consists of 5 questions (e.g., *Do you believe teaching is perceived as a high-status occupation?*), the Salary factor consists of 3 questions (e.g., *Do you think teaching is well paid?*), the Expert career factor consists of 4 questions (e.g., *Do you think teaching requires high levels of expert knowledge?*), and the High demand factor consists of 3 questions (e.g., *Do you think teachers have a heavy workload?*). The participants assessed the questions on a five-point scale, ranging from 1 – *I strongly disagree* to 5 – *I strongly agree*. The four extracted factors explained 67.49% of variance. However, a simple single-factor structure which would match the original questionnaire was not obtained. Three questions had low factor saturation and were removed from the analysis. The obtained reliability coefficients had the following values: α = .789; α = .883; α = 883; α = .612. Since the obtained reliability coefficient α = .612 for the High demand factor was lower than the recommended value of .70, the average inter-item correlation (AIIC) was calculated additionally. The obtained value .454 exceeds the normal recommended range, pointing to a high level of homogeneity among items. As Cronbach's alpha can underestimate reliability in shorter scales, and average AIIC is a more stable internal consistency indicator, it was justified to retain and interpret this factor (Streiner et al., 2024).

Desirable work values. The *Lyons Work Values Survey* (*LWVS*; Lyons, 2003, 2010) was used to examine the desirable work values. The survey contains 25 items which were translated into Croatian language and adapted to Croatian context. The survey measures four dimensions of the desirable work values: cognitive (includes characteristics such as diversity within the job, promotion prospects, a sense of achievement); instrumental (suitable working hours, job security, benefits, etc.); altruistic (good colleagues, helping people, entertaining environment, etc.), and prestige (authority, prestigious job, influence, etc.). The participants assessed the importance of each individual future job characteristic on a five-point scale, from 1 – *not important at all* to 5 – *extremely important*. The performed exploratory factor analysis extracted four factors, in line with the original survey, explaining 55.26% of variance. The obtained reliability coefficients had the following values: α = .859; α = .818; α = .797; α = .684. As reliability value for the prestige factor was slightly lower, the average inter-item correlation (AIIC) was calculated additionally, with value of .354, which points to a satisfactory item homogeneity and is a justification for retaining and interpreting this factor (Streiner et al., 2024).

Results

The results of the descriptive analysis of all variables are presented in Table 1. Regarding the intention to find employment in school, 65.9% of participants reported that they planned to find employment in school upon graduation, 9.4% did not plan to do so, while 24.7% were undecided. A full theoretical range was achieved in almost all variables, which indicates that participants with low and high values of the measured constructs were included in the sample. The social dissuasion dimension refers to a perception of being encouraged by one's environment to choose teacher education studies and is normally assessed as moderate, while satisfaction with a choice of a study programme and satisfaction with a study programme itself are, on average, above the theoretical centre of the scale. In the perceptions of the teaching profession, the lowest ranking was given to the social status and salary, while expert career and high demand ranked highest. Among the desirable work values, those that were given the highest ranking were the cognitive, altruistic, and instrumental dimensions, while the prestige dimension was given a more moderate ranking. The skewness and kurtosis values of the continuous study variables were within a range considered acceptable for the assumption of normality (Kline, 2011).

Table 1. *Descriptive statistics of the variables (N = 434)*

Variable	Theoretical range	Observed range	*M*	*SD*	Skewness	Kurtosis
Social dissuasion	1 - 5	1.00 – 5.00	2.61	0.96	0.465	-0.247
Satisfaction with the choice of a study programme	1 - 5	1.33 – 5.00	3.75	0.82	-0.561	-0.003
Satisfaction with a study programme	1 - 5	1.29 – 5.00	3.18	0.62	-0.493	0.589
Perceptions of the teaching profession						
social status	1 - 5	1.00 – 4.40	2.49	0.67	0.106	-0.208
salary	1 - 5	1.00 – 5.00	2.09	0.84	0.378	-0.445
expert career	1 - 5	2.67 – 5.00	4.42	0.48	-0.722	0.574
high demand	1 - 5	1.50 – 5.00	4.08	0.66	-0.514	0.349
Desirable work values						
cognitive	1 - 5	1.38 – 5.00	4.33	0.54	-1.079	1.965
instrumental	1 - 5	1.71 – 4.29	3.95	0.40	-1.740	2.030
altruistic	1 - 5	1.71 – 5.00	4.23	0.56	-0.868	1.032
prestige	1 - 5	1.50 – 5.00	3.55	0.71	0.011	-0.349

In order to examine whether there are statistically significant differences in student perceptions with regard to the area of study, the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted (Table 2). Given the unequal group sizes, the assumption of homogeneity of variances was assessed using Levene's test. For the variables for which the assumption of homogeneity of variances was met, the standard one-way ANOVA was conducted, whereas Welch's ANOVA was used when this assumption was violated. For post-hoc comparisons, Scheffé's test was applied following the standard ANOVA, while the Games–Howell test was used following Welch's ANOVA. To control the Type I error rate associated with multiple comparisons, the Bonferroni correction was applied. Thus, differences were considered statistically significant at $p < .0083$ for an overall significance level of .05 and at $p < .0017$ for an overall significance level of .01.

The post-hoc analysis revealed statistically significant differences in encouragement to choose the teaching profession, satisfaction with the choice of a study programme, and satisfaction with studies. Students in the STEM area report the highest level of encouragement from their environment to choose the teaching profession, while students in social studies report the lowest level. These two groups differed significantly (*Cohen's d* = 0.50), indicating a moderate effect size.

Students in the interdisciplinary studies seem to exhibit the highest level of satisfaction with the choice of a study programme, and differed significantly from students in the humanities (*Cohen's d* = 0.62), STEM (*Cohen's d = 0.49*) and social studies (*Cohen's d = 0.45*), with moderate effect sizes. In student satisfaction with the studies, a statistically significant difference was determined between the students in social studies and students in interdisciplinary areas (*Cohen's d = 0.52*), indicating a moderate effect size.

With regard to perceptions of the teaching profession, salary received the lowest overall rating. Students in the interdisciplinary areas reported the lowest rating of salary, and differed significantly from the students in humanities (*Cohen's d = 0.66*) and social studies (*Cohen's d = 0.55*). In addition, STEM students differ significantly from students in social studies (*Cohen's d = 0.62*). Although the perception of teacher status received a relatively low rating overall, students in social studies reported a slightly higher rating, than students in the STEM (*Cohen's d = 0.86*), interdisciplinary (*Cohen's d = 0.81*) and humanities (*Cohen's d = 0.65*) areas, with moderate to large effect sizes. When assessing the demands of the teaching profession, students in social studies reported the lowest rating, and differed significantly from

students in the interdisciplinary area (*Cohen's d = 0.87*), the humanities (*Cohen's d = 0.76*) and STEM (*Cohen's d = 0.94*). These differences corresponded to moderate to large effect sizes.

With regard to the desirable characteristics of the future profession, statistically significant overall differences were found for cognitive, instrumental, altruistic and prestigious characteristics, however, the overall effect sizes were small. For the cognitive characteristics and prestige, although the overall differences were statistically significant and associated with small effect sizes, the post-hoc analysis did not reveal statistically significant differences between any individual areas of study following the Bonferroni correction. Similarly, statistically significant overall differences with small effect sizes were found for instrumental characteristics (Welch's $F(3, 125.857) = 3.744$, $p = .013$) and altruistic characteristics (Welch's $F(3, 123.856) = 6.199$, $p = .001$). However, the post-hoc analysis did not reveal statistically significant differences between individual areas of study after applying the Bonferroni correction.

Table 2 . *Differences in perceptions with regard to the area of study (N = 434)*

	Area of study													
	A		B		C		D							
	N = 251		N = 59		N = 59		N = 65		ANOVA	p	F	p		η_p^2
Variable	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	F (3.430)		Welch			
Social dissuasion	2.64	0.92	2.46	0.94	2.96	1.05	2.31	0.94	5.455	.001*	/	/	C - D	.037
Satisfaction with the choice of a study programme	3.93	0.79	3.41	0.86	3.51	0.90	3.60	0.65	10.103	.001*	/	/	A – B, C, D	.066
Satisfaction with a study programme	3.09	0.64	3.31	0.61	3.19	0.53	3.40	0.52	5.438	.001*	/	/	A - D	.037
Perceptions of the teaching profession														
social status	2.41	0.65	2.50	0.65	2.37	0.67	2.91	0.60	11.322	.001**	/	/	D – A, B, C	.073
salary	1.94	0.80	2.42	0.92	1.98	0.75	2.47	0.81	11.036	.001**	/	/	A – B, D C - D	.071
expert career	4.41	0.49	4.44	0.42	4.51	0.50	4.35	0.49	1.324	.266	/	/	-	.009
high demand	4.17	0.63	4.10	0.64	4.19	0.56	3.59	0.71	15.327	.001**	/	/	D – A, B, C	.097
Desirable work values														
cognitive	4.42	0.51	4.24	0.53	4.23	0.51	4.18	0.63	6.091	.001	/	/	-	.035
instrumental	4.00	0.35	3.97	0.34	3.88	0.40	3.78	0.57	/	/	3.744	.013	-	.038
altruistic	4.33	0.49	4.10	0.62	4.11	0.55	4.05	0.69	/	/	6.199	.001*	-	.045
prestige	3.65	0.71	3.33	0.64	3.31	0.71	3.57	0.71	5.731	.001	/	/	-	.038

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Group *A* – interdisciplinary area of study; B – humanistic area; C – STEM; D – social studies area

The following research task was to examine whether there were differences in the examined variables with regard to students' intentions to find employment in schools. Given the unequal group sizes, the assumption of homogeneity of variances was assessed using Levene's test. For the variables for which the assumption of homogeneity of variances was met, the standard one-way ANOVA was conducted, whereas Welch's ANOVA was used when this assumption was violated. For post-hoc comparisons, Scheffé's test was applied following the standard ANOVA, while the Games–Howell test was used following Welch's ANOVA. The analyses revealed statistically significant differences between the observed groups with regard to satisfaction with the chosen study programme, satisfaction with studies and in the assessment of the importance of individual desirable characteristics of future profession (Table 3).

Table 3. *Differences in perceptions with regard to intentions to find employment in school (N = 434)*

	Employment intention											
	A		B		C							
	N = 286		*N* = 41		*N* = 107		*F*	*p*	*F Welch*	*p*		η_p^2
Variable	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	*(2.431)*					
Social dissuasion	2.63	0.96	2.73	0.98	2.51	0.94	0.987	.374	/	/	-	.005
Satisfaction with the choice of a study programme	4.10	0.62	2.47	0.77	3.32	0.62	/	/	125.787	.001**	A -B, C	.412
Satisfaction with a study programme	3.25	0.56	2.87	0.79	3.12	0.64	/	/	5.461	.006*	A -B	.035
Perceptions of the teaching profession												
social status	2.49	0.66	2.49	0.72	2.48	0.67	0.014	.986	/	/	-	.000
salary	2.10	0.82	1.98	0.88	2.12	0.88	0.448	.639	/	/	-	.002
expert career	4.45	0.46	4.34	0.61	4.34	0.48	2.640	.073	/	/	-	.012
high demand	4.11	0.62	4.02	0.84	4.01	0.70	/	/	.916	.404	-	.005
Desirable work values												
cognitive	4.40	0.49	4.34	0.51	4.16	0.62	8.252	.001*	/	/	A - C	.037
instrumental	3.98	0.37	3.92	0.31	3.86	0.49	/	/	3.043	.052		.017
altruistic	3.60	0.70	3.55	0.77	3.40	0.72	3.101	.046	/	/		.014
prestige	4.31	0.53	4.02	0.71	4.08	0.54	9.743	.001*	/	/	A – B, C	.043

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Group *A* – students who intend to find employment in school upon graduation; Group B – students who do not intend to find employment in school upon graduation; Group C – students who have not yet made a decision whether to find employment in school or not.

Statistically significant differences were found in the perceptions of satisfaction with the chosen study programme (Welch's $F(2, 96.895) = 125.787$, $p < .001$). Students who intend to find employment in schools upon completing their studies are more satisfied with their choice of the study programme than students who did not have such intentions (*Cohen's d* = 2.33) and those who were undecided (*Cohen's d* = 1.26), indicating very large effect sizes. Statistically significant differences were found in the perceptions of satisfaction with studies (Welch's $F(2, 93.426) = 5.461$, $p = .006$). Students who intend to find employment in schools upon completing their studies are more satisfied with their studies than students who do not intend to find employment in schools (*Cohen's d* = 0.56), indicating a moderate effect size. Students who intend to find employment in school differed statistically significantly from undecided students in their assessment of the importance of desirable characteristics of their future profession (*Cohen's d* = 0.44), indicating a small effect size. Regarding the importance of prestige, students who intend to find employment in school differed statistically significantly from those who do not have such intentions (*Cohen's d* = 0.46) and those who are undecided (*Cohen's d* = 0.42), whereby small effect sizes were determined as well. No statistically significant differences were found for the remaining examined variables between the observed groups according to the applied criterion of statistical significance.

The following research task was to determine the extent to which the examined variables contribute to students' intentions to find employment in school. The multinomial logistic regression was employed for data analysis (Table 4), as the criterion variable comprised three categories. The "yes" category was used as the reference category, and the model estimated the likelihood of being in the "no" and "undecided" categories relative to the "yes" category. The regression model was statistically significant, $\chi^2(26) = 245.52$; $p < 0.01$. Goodness-of-fit tests indicate a satisfactory fit of the model to the data. Neither the Likelihood Ratio Test, $\chi^2(840) = 864.10$; $p > 0.05$, nor Pearson's test, $\chi^2(840) = 486.16$; $p > 0.05$ were statistically significant. To assess the goodness of fit of the multinomial logistic regression model, three standard pseudo-R^2 measures were examined: the Cox and Snell, Nagelkerke's and McFadden's R^2. The Cox and Snell R^2 was .432, Nagelkerke's R^2 was .530, and McFadden's .336, indicating a satisfactory model fit and an improvement over the intercept-only model. The Likelihood Ratio Tests showed that only satisfaction with the choice of a study programme ($\chi^2 = 182.49$, $p < .001$) and cognitive work values ($\chi^2 =$

6.93, p = .031) made statistically significant contributions to the model. None of the remaining predictors significantly improved model fit (all p > .05). The model correctly classified 74.0% of the cases overall. Classification accuracy was highest for students intending to work in schools (91.3%), followed by those not intending to work in schools (61.0%), whereas prediction accuracy was considerably lower for undecided students (32.7%). Multicollinearity diagnostics indicated no evidence of problematic multicollinearity among the predictors. Tolerance values ranged from .540 to .913, while Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values ranged from 1.095 to 1.853.

Table 4. *Results of multinomial logistic regression predicting employment intention*

	no vs. yes			undecided vs. yes		
Variable	***Exp(B)***	**95% *CI***	p	***Exp(B)***	**95% *CI***	***p***
gender	0.27	0.09 – 0.86	.026	0.66	0.33 – 1.31	.235
first choice	0.75	0.25 – 2.26	.612	1.09	0.58 – 2.07	.779
Social dissuasion	1.16	0.70 – 1.92	.568	0.85	0.64 – 1.13	.272
Satisfaction with the choice of a study programme	0.01	0.01 – 0.03	.001*	0.13	0.08 – 0.22	.001*
Satisfaction with a study programme and its quality	1.34	0.58 – 3.13	.493	1.26	0.75 – 2.09	.381
Salary	1.28	0.69 – 2.40	.432	1.13	0.79 – 1.61	.494
High demand	0.66	0.32 – 1. 37	.267	0.88	0.56 – 1.38	.587
Status	2.28	1.01 – 5.17	.047	1.13	0.81 – 2.11	.264
Expert career	1.55	0.55 – 4.38	.412	1.16	0.60 – 2.23	.666
Cognitive work values	4.07	0.86 – 19.13	.076	0.72	0.30 – 1.76	.477
Instrumental work values	1.09	0.20 – 5.77	.921	1.29	0.53 – 3.16	.570
Altruistic work values	0.73	0.25 – 2.17	.473	1.04	0.52 – 2.11	.902
Prestige	0.43	0.18 – 1.04	.062	0.69	0.42 – 1.14	.153

Note. The reference category for the criterion variable was “yes”. OR = odds ratio; CI = confidence interval.

Estimates of the individual parameters are presented in Table 4. For the “no” category, relative to the “yes” reference category, satisfaction with the choice of a study programme was statistically significantly associated with students’ intentions of finding employment in school. An odds ratio (OR) below 1 indicates that higher satisfaction with the choice of a study programme was associated with a lower likelihood of being in the “no” category relative to the “yes” category. In this comparison, gender and perceived status of the teaching profession were also statistically significant predictors. For the “undecided” category relative to the “yes” reference category, satisfaction with the choice of a study programme was likewise statistically significantly associated with the students’ intentions of finding employment in school. As satisfaction with the choice of a study programme increases, the likelihood of being in the “undecided” category decreased relative to the “yes” category. None of the other individual predictors reached statistical significance in this comparison.

Overall, the multinomial logistic regression results indicate that satisfaction with the choice of a study programme was the most consistent predictor of students’ intentions of finding employment in school. A higher level of satisfaction with the choice of a study programme was associated with lower likelihood of indecisiveness or the intention not to find employment in school in reference to employment intentions. Gender and perceived status of the teaching profession were statistically significant only in the comparison between the “no” and “yes” categories, whereas the other examined predictors did not make statistically significant contributions to these comparisons.

Discussions

This research provides an insight into perceptions of various dimensions of the teaching profession in students. Students assessed lowest the salary and social status dimensions of the teaching profession. This is not surprising, as many researchers have pointed to low perceptions of the teaching profession with regard to their salary and social status in a majority of countries (e.g., Lehtinen et al., 2025; Watt and

Richardson, 2012), which eventually results in a low status of this profession on a global scale (Ia Velle, 2019). Although there have been efforts to acknowledge teaching as a profession and to assign it a high social status, it still largely remains a semi-professional occupation (Hargreaves and Flutter, 2019). Furthermore, a relatively low assessment of the social dissuasion factor indicates that participants were not influenced to a great extent by other people in their environment to consider choosing a different career instead of the teaching career. It can be assumed that they had autonomy when they were choosing their future profession. The findings obtained in other studies indicate that the choice of the future profession is significantly influenced by the relationships with peers and parents (Owusu et al., 2021; Suryani and George, 2021). Contrary to that, a high assessment of the perception of the expert career dimension reveals that students frequently associate the teaching profession with a high level of expert and content knowledge, as well as with a wide range of professional skills, mostly those relating to teaching, demonstration, and communication. A similar pattern was detected by Puklek Levpušček and Depolli Steiner (2024), whose findings show that students in Slovenia give a high ranking to the teachers' expertise, but a lower ranking to their social status and the material component of the teaching profession, which reflects imbalance between the demands and reward in the teaching profession.

Within this first research question, we analysed the differences in the perceptions of the teaching profession, satisfaction with a study programme and desirable work values with regard to the area of study. The obtained findings point to several patterns which enable a deeper understanding of student attitudes to the teaching profession. It has been shown that there are no significant differences in the perceptions of the expert career between students in different areas of study, which suggests that expertise is considered a universal and an unquestionable value. In addition, differences were detected neither in the perceptions of the cognitive dimension of the desirable future job nor in the importance of prestige in the future job. It is interesting to note that students in the STEM area believe that they were encouraged to choose the teacher education studies the most, in which they differ from students in the social studies area. Such result is indicative because in Croatia, as in other parts of the world, students are less likely to opt for teacher education studies within the STEM area, which eventually results in a lack of qualified teachers in schools (Domović i Drvodelić, 2025). As for the students in the disciplinary studies, who are primary teacher education students, they seem to be most satisfied with the choice of a study programme and significantly differ from students in humanities, social and STEM areas. The reason for that is that primary education teachers' employment prospects are relatively limited to primary school. Students are aware of this fact, and those who enrol in the primary teacher education studies already know what their future job will be, unlike students in other areas of study who have more employment prospects upon completing their studies. At the same time, students in interdisciplinary studies are least satisfied with their study programme. Gibson (2010) points out that the most powerful factors which affect student perceptions of the overall satisfaction with a study programme are: the quality of teaching, the skills and knowledge gained, and the curriculum. There are also many non-academic factors, such as students' feeling of belonging and the perception of responsibility and care of the educational institution for its students. Wong and Chapman (2023) found that informal interaction between students is significantly associated with satisfaction in all of the three examined aspects – academic, institutional, and student life at university. Since numerous factors can have an impact on the satisfaction with a study, it is necessary to carry out more research in order to identify the reason for such assessment. Regarding the desirable work values, students in interdisciplinary studies give the highest ranking to all dimensions, including prestige. This indicates that they are developing a clear and positive professional image of the teaching profession and that they are aware of the high demands and social status of their future job, which can reflect their previous professional orientation and focus on the future employment in primary school.

Within the second research question, we examined the differences in the perceptions of the teaching career, satisfaction with the choice of a study programme, satisfaction with the study programme, and desirable work values, with regard to the intention to find employment in school upon completing the studies. About two-thirds of participants intend to find employment in school, but one-third of students, although they have enrolled into teacher education studies, either do not intend to or are not sure if they would find employment in school. The obtained findings indicate that the intention to find employment in school is an important differentiating factor in perceiving the study programme and the teaching profession. The students who intend to work in school upon completing their studies show a higher level of satisfaction with their choice of a study programme and overall study experience, and have a more posi-

tive perception of the cognitive demands and social status. It should be pointed out that the intention of finding employment in school is most profoundly influenced by the choice of a study programme, which has been expected, as these students' professional aspirations relating to the study programme and future employment coincide. Such results suggest that positive professional orientation during the course of study contributes to a higher sense of purpose and value of the chosen educational path. Similar patterns have been noticed in international research. For example, Roness and Smith (2009) claim that a significant number of students in teacher education studies in Norway express insecurity about entering the teaching profession, which proves that professional decision about entering the teaching profession is not always stable or simple. An integrative literature review conducted by Thomas Dotta et al. (2025) shows that the teaching profession is still appealing to candidates motivated by intrinsic reasons and social usefulness, but that external factors such as low salary, demanding working conditions and limited promotion prospects are huge obstacles. In addition, Wang et al. (2022) found that teacher education students in Scotland often exhibit ambivalent attitudes to choosing the teaching career, acknowledging on the one hand professional fulfilment and social value of the profession, and emphasizing the negative aspects associated with workload, stress, salary, and social status on the other. In line with that, the findings of this study can be interpreted in a broader context of global trends which point to a complex relationship between professional ideals and real working conditions in the teaching profession.

With regard to the third research question, we tried to determine the factors important for explaining the intention to find employment in school upon completing the studies. Although satisfaction with the choice of a study programme and cognitive work values significantly contribute to the logistic regression model, the obtained results indicate that the satisfaction with the choice of a study programme variable is the only variable statistically significantly associated with the intention of finding employment in the teaching profession. The cognitive work characteristics relating to professional growth, goal achievement and overcoming intellectual challenges are important for all three groups of participants (those who intend to find employment in school, the undecided participants, and those who do not intend to work in school), but are not critical. In other words, the students who are satisfied with choosing teacher education studies are more likely to plan to find employment in school. This finding confirms the importance of early satisfaction with the chosen profession and identification with the chosen study programme as key factors in the process of shaping professional intentions. A positive experience throughout the study may increase the inclination to the teaching profession, while dissatisfaction or doubts regarding the choice of a study may result in a lower level of interest for continuing the teaching career. Contrary to the expectations, the perceptions of salary, social status, high demands of working in school or the prestige related to the teaching profession have not proved to be significant for the intention to find employment in school. This finding suggests that the decision to stay in the profession does not solely depend on the external or material factors but also on intrinsic motivation and satisfaction with one's professional choice.

In brief, we identified various dimensions of choice and employment in the teaching profession which Croatian teacher education students perceive as significant, depending on the area of study and their intentions of finding employment in school upon graduating from university. Unlike numerous other studies emphasizing the importance of social, material or individual factors for finding employment in the teaching profession (e.g., Dündar, 2014; OECD, 2018; Pavin Ivanec, 2020; Sutcher et al., 2019), this study has shown that the choice of a study programme is of crucial importance for the intention of finding employment in school. Research on motivation for teaching is frequently focused only on the individuals who have already decided to enter the teaching profession (See et al., 2022). The current findings contribute to the literature by suggesting that research should encompass the population of high school students who have not yet made such a decision.

Conclusions

A high social status associated with the teaching profession is of key importance for the entire society. Lately, more and more attention has been paid to teacher shortage at all levels of education, both in Croatia and around the world. However, most research has been focused on the teachers who found job in the teaching profession and on their plans to stay in or leave school, or on the teachers who abandoned the teaching profession and the reasons leading to such a decision. Since the trend to give up the intention of finding employment in the teaching profession has been noted in teacher education students, the aim of this study was to examine the perceptions of the teaching profession, satisfaction with the choice of a study programme,

satisfaction with a study programme, and desirable work values in students in their final year of study.

The findings indicate that there are differences in a majority of the examined variables with regard to the area of study, which is important to take into consideration when designing educational policies and strategies for attracting student teachers. It has been specially pointed out that satisfaction with the choice of a study programme is crucial for the intention to find employment in the teaching profession. This finding suggests the importance of strengthening professional orientation and providing support to students during their studies in order to help them identify with the teaching profession. Future research should be focused on a more thorough examination of satisfaction with the choice of a study programme construct, which could be multidimensional and associated with a range of personal and contextual factors. In order to prevent teacher shortage, which is already present in Croatia, primarily in the STEM area, it is necessary to act systematically and meaningfully at the national level to increase interest in enrolling into teacher education faculties.

However, the study has certain limitations. Although students from all Croatian universities participated in the study, the sample is not representative, so the generalization of the findings should be done with caution. A cross-sectional study design does not facilitate drawing conclusions on causal relationships nor monitoring the changes in the employment intentions throughout a certain time period. Secondly, the research was based on the data collected based on self-assessment, which may have involved certain bias in the answers provided by the participants. Thirdly, the gender structure was unequal, as female students made up a majority of the sample, which may limit the possibility of generalizing the results. Finally, the expressed intention of finding employment in school does not have to necessarily result in the actual decisions on employment upon completing the studies. Future longitudinal research might therefore examine if the employment intentions change over time and to what extent they reflect the actual professional choices.

Despite the limitations, the findings of this study contribute to a better understanding of the student teachers' perceptions of professional and career perspectives and can be taken as a basis for shaping the measures which would encourage greater interest for the teaching profession and contribute to its better social status. The obtained results enable practical insights which may be considered a starting point in designing a systematic, comprehensive and long-term solution at the national level which would, taking into account the quality and the status of the teaching profession, include creating high-quality teacher education study programmes and a policy for attracting, employing and retaining teachers in the teaching profession.

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Conflict of interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Institutional Review Board Statement

This study was conducted according to the ethical standards of the University of Zagreb Faculty of Teacher Education (251-378-01-25-2).

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, T.V., I.K., and M.Đ.; methodology, T.V.; formal analysis, T.V., I.K., and M.Đ.; writing—original draft preparation, T.V., I.K., and M.Đ.; writing—review and editing, T.V., I.K., and M.Đ.; funding acquisition, T.V.; supervision, T.V. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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