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CAREER MOTIVATION OF HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study has been conducted on 25 teachers teaching high school students. The objective of this study was to understand the career motivation of teachers in choosing teaching as a career; the altruistic motive of teachers and the perception of teachers about their contribution to the holistic development of students. Every teacher who was part of the research were interviewed in depth and satisfactory answers to the research objectives was received.

KEYWORDS

Career motivation, teaching career.

INTRODUCTION

Teachers are the pillars of the society. Teachers play a major role in how students perceive the world around them and also on how much enthusiasm students show towards learning and development. Good teacher- student interaction is crucial in linking academic success with personal achievement. Teachers must guide students in aligning their personal goals with academic goals. Students who receive this positive influence of guidance and mentoring from teachers develop stronger self confidence and greater personal and academic success than those without such guidance and mentoring. My own research guide has been a mentor and guide for students all of whom have transformed to be fine teachers and self learners for life. This quality of being able to mentor and guide is implicit and is one of the most important roles that a teacher must be motivated to play. If every teachers is successful in playing this role effectively, the energy and creativity of students would be positively channelled and our society would witness lesser acts of crime. When teachers impart value based education passionately our society would become a safer place to live in.

Teaching profession has undergone tremendous transformation in the last few years. Today teachers are expected to play multiple roles like that of second parent at school, mentor, event planner, a counselor, soft skills trainer apart from imparting bookish knowledge. In order to fulfill all these teachers have to be updated on a variety of subjects. The dynamism in a teacher has become crucial in order to be accepted as a role model and teacher.

RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Careers are not solely based on individual autonomous actions but actually are the outcomes of various forms of social coordination. Today people do not work for one organization for the course of their entire lifetime. Changing jobs has become the norm. Individuals must personally work on their career by networking, pursuing specialized education; understand their self actualization need and planning their career strategically. In most professions money becomes a major motivating factor for people to choose it as a career as well as for people to strategically plan their career moves. Teachers in India are one of the most poorly paid professionals. Yet, we find every B.Ed. College in India flooded with applications and we also find lots of people leaving a cushy job to pursue teaching as a career. So, I was curious to understand what factors motivate people to choose teaching as a career and to remain in this profession. I also wanted to understand the level of career resilience teachers have to adapt themselves to the dynamism of the teaching career in India.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Career Motivation: Career motivation refers to the willingness of an individual to exert high levels of efforts towards career goals in order to satisfy some individual need. The individual comes to define his or her self image in terms of this goal and it becomes the focal point of their life and career. London and associates (e.g. London 1983, 1985, 1993; London & Mone 1987; London & Stumpf 1982) have researched career motivation and its dimensions. They found empirical evidence for three basic dimensions of career motivation, which are career resilience, career insight and career identity. Resilience provides the personal drive to continue trying in the face of obstacles, insight reflects a strong understanding of oneself and the work environment, and identity channels the individuals energy, behavior and performance towards a specific set of career objective.

Career Identity: This is how central one's career is to one's identity. Career identity consists of two sub domains: work involvement and desire for upward mobility. Work involvement dimensions, which should be positively related to career identity, include job involvement, professional orientation, commitment to managerial work, and identification with the organization. Also, individuals who are high on career identity are likely to find career satisfaction to be more important than satisfaction from other areas of life (primacy of work). The upward mobility sub domain includes the needs for advancement, recognition, dominance, and money. It also includes ability to delay gratification, which should be negatively related to desire for upward mobility.

Career Insight: This is the extent to which the person has realistic perceptions of him or herself and the organization and relates these perceptions to career goals. Goal flexibility and need change should be inversely related to career insight. Other relevant dimensions like goal clarity, path goal clarity, social perceptiveness, self-objectivity, realism of expectations, career decision making, and future time orientation should be positively related to career insight.

Career Resilience: This is a person's resistance to career disruption in a less than optimal environment. To understand the meaning of career resilience more clearly, it should help to have a conception of its opposite—career vulnerability. This is the extent of psychological fragility (e.g., becoming upset and finding it difficult to function) when confronted by less than optimal career conditions (e.g., barriers to career goals, uncertainty, poor relationships with coworkers). Being high on career resilience (low on career vulnerability) does not mean that the person is insensitive to such environmental conditions, but rather that he or she will be able to cope more effectively with a negative work situation. The dimensions under career resilience fall into three sub domains. One is self-efficacy, which includes the dimensions of self-esteem, need autonomy, adaptability, internal control, need achievement, initiative, need creativity, inner work standards, and development orientation. Another sub domain is risk taking, including risk taking tendency, fear of failure, need security, and tolerance of uncertainty and ambiguity. The third sub domain is dependency. This includes career dependency, need for superior approval, and need for peer approval. It also includes competitiveness, which should be negatively related to the other dependency dimensions. Individuals will be more resilient the higher they are on the self efficacy and risk taking dimensions and the lower they are on the dependency dimensions. Those low on career resilience are likely to be motivated to avoid risk, be dependent on others, seek structure, and avoid situations in which organizational outcomes depend on their behavior. Those high on career resilience are likely to do the reverse—take risks, be independent of others, create their own structure, and thrive on situations in which outcomes are contingent on their behavior.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main research question was to understand what motivates and inspires teachers teaching high school students and how many of the teachers have chosen teaching profession out of passion for teaching. The other research objectives are:

- 1) To understand the career identity, career insight and career resilience of high school teachers
- 2) To understand how situational factors influence a teacher's career

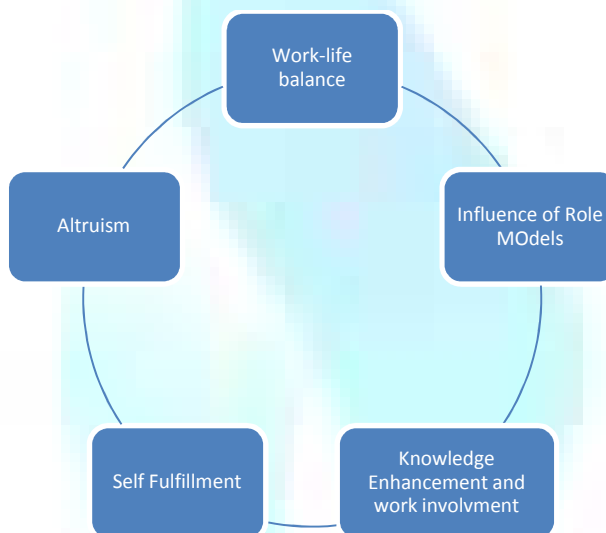
- 3) To understand how a teacher's career decisions are based on individual characteristics and situational factors
- 4) To know teachers perception about how they are contributing to a students' holistic development
- 5) To find out the altruistic motives of teachers

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to understand the motivation of teachers I have conducted a deductive study based on semi structured in depth interview technique. The epistemological issue concerning in this research is the relationship between the researcher and the research participants, and its connection between facts and values. I have adopted the empathic neutrality approach, a position that recognizes that research cannot be value free but which advocates that researchers should try to make their assumptions, biases and values transparent, while striving as far as possible to be neutral and non- judgemental in their approach. Believing in the view that the social world is fundamentally different because it is open to subjective interpretation, I have carried out this study and I am analyzing it based on my interpretations after my interactions with the research participants. My research is based on interpretivism where knowledge is produced by exploring and understanding the social world of the people studied, focusing on their meanings and interpretations. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is concerned with capturing people's accounts and reflections to explore and interpret the meanings attached and the sense that is made of them (Smith et al 2009).

The socio- cultural background of the research participants in my study is that all the participants have been in the profession of teaching for a minimum of 3 years to a maximum of 12 years. An attempt has been made to include equal number of male and female participants to get answers to the research questions. An in depth interview was conducted with the participants using a semi structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was prepared based on the different career motivation variables identified and explained by different researchers worldwide. All the participants are currently engaged in high school teaching in Bangalore city. The participants belong to middle class background and all of them have received most of their education in non- metro city. The parents of all the participants have either been engaged in agricultural activity or have held middle order posts in government organizations. So, the economic background of all the participants can be said to be average. All the teachers interviewed are currently employed in a convent school run by Christian missionary and are teaching students of classes 8 to 12. Since this is a qualitative study a total of 25 teachers were interviewed for getting answers to the research questions. Based on the career motivation dimensions I have enlisted five career motivating factors for teachers to choose teaching as their profession.

ANALYSIS



SELF FULFILLMENT

All the teachers interviewed except 1 said that being a teacher gives them a sense of respect and identity in the society. They strongly believe that their social image has greatly enhanced since they have entered into the profession of teaching. Family members, relatives, and people of the neighbourhood believe that teachers are knowledgeable so often the participants are consulted by others on various issues ranging from career related decisions to parenting tips and also understanding of health reports. Each and every teacher said that he/she is greatly involved in the job of teaching and is highly satisfied in the job. All the teachers believed that having expert knowledge in the subject one is teaching is very important and necessary. Every teacher said they make all possible attempts to enhance their knowledge in their subject to acquire further expertise. These discussions help us to understand that teachers love their job and have developed a positive self image due to the respect they get from others around them which is based on the profession they have chosen. Self fulfillment is expressed by teachers when parents and students express their love for teachers in different ways and set teacher as a role model in their life. The belief that they as a teacher have contributed to the mental and intellectual development of the students has monumental positive impact on the self identity of teachers.

KNOWLEDGE ENHANCEMENT AND WORK INVOLVEMENT

Every teacher said he/she is greatly interested in and love the job of teaching and is also highly satisfied with their job. Every teacher felt one must have indepth knowledge in the subject one is teaching. They all identified with a particular area of specialization and were keen to continuously enhance their knowledge in that area for acquiring more expertise. None of the teacher interviewed identified with the organization they worked for. The organization played no role for their identity or self image but their job certainly does play a major role in all of them experiencing a positive self image. Teachers mentioned clearly that managements of educational institutes in Bangalore did not value their services so they are not emotionally attached to the organization. They also mentioned that since Bangalore city is growing so mushrooming of schools gives them an opportunity to easily get a better job whenever they feel a need.

All teachers were satisfied with their career because they are happy they are utilizing their knowledge for the development of students and thus contributing effectively in social development. Moreover a teaching career helps them to effectively integrate their personal and professional life. Their career choice provided them with enough time to take care of their family needs and also upgrade their qualification. The vacations and public holidays were are a boon for teachers to enhance their knowledge and qualification and invest quality time with their family. The regular workshops and orientation programmes held, develops their knowledge, skills and attitude.

There was a strong gender difference in the desire for upward mobility. All the male teachers showed a positive desire for upward mobility and all the female teachers showed a negative desire towards upward mobility. Financial motivation for the female teachers seemed very less compared to the financial motivation for the male teachers. Female teachers were very contented with the job they are doing and do not aspire for any higher post. In fact some of the female teachers said they would refuse to accept the post of a Principal or coordinator if offered because this would rob them of their love of teaching. But the male teachers were very keen to move ahead in the educational industry. They said they would change organization mainly for better financial and positional benefits. Every male teacher aspired to be a Principal or Director of some institute in the future.

None of the female teachers had set any career goal. So, the path goal clarity was not significant. The female teachers were happy they were contributing towards student development. The maximum change the female teachers aspire is moving from high school teaching to teaching Pre-University students. None of the female teachers showed any desire to start a new career or to modify their current career. But, in contrast the male teachers desired higher pay and position in the future. The male teachers were clear about their career path and their career goals. All the male teachers are pursuing a research programme in order to be eligible for higher positions in the future. The aspect worthy of appreciation is that none of the teachers want to leave academic field. All showed a positive career insight and negative career flexibility. Since, the teachers were employed in a convent school the ones who aspired for career advancement were very clear they were working here only to gather experience and would quit as soon as they get a good opportunity. The other teachers who did not want career advancement were happy to be in a convent environment as they are confident that in such a set up they would never be offered any higher roles so they can forever continue with their love for teaching.

Every teacher had a strong self objectivity with accurate understanding of their personal strengths and weaknesses and motives. The realism of expectations about career outcomes was also very clear to all of them. To quote one teacher who said, "Being a teacher in a convent school for long time, I can never dream of building a bungalow or buying a luxurious car. I must move out from such an institution to fulfil my material dreams." Thus the male teachers are anticipating a bright future for themselves and are working sincerely towards it by getting higher qualification and adding their skill set.

Teachers opined that in recent years career vulnerability is increasing and career resilience is decreasing in teaching career. The main reason for this is that in recent years teaching has become a very demanding career. Though teachers do not experience stress but they feel that teaching demands a lot of their time and energy. Teaching has become a demanding career due to the introduction of the CCE pattern of education which involves numerous documentation and tests. This has robbed the fun of teaching with freedom. Teachers experience a positive self image. The respect teachers receive from the members of the society plays a significant role in the development of positive self image. Autonomy that teaching offers is precious and this gives teachers a chance to be creative and effective in the classroom while teaching the subject. Such autonomy may not be possible in most other careers. A teacher experiences a sense of achievement when she is appreciated by her students and their parents. Teachers are said to be low on career resilience as they prefer the formal structure that are seen in educational sector in India. Teachers are low on risk taking abilities. This is the reason most teachers with many years of teaching experience do not prefer the new systems in the education sector. They feel that the new system has destroyed the learning desire among students and has made most students complacent and not competitive.

Teachers do not feel that they can influence their career outcomes. Managements of educational institutes and internal politics within educational institutes only influence career outcomes. Education managers do not recognize the talent of teachers and do little to manage talented teachers. This is the reason for high attrition in schools in Bangalore city. Teachers find it challenging when they have to teach slow learners and students who refuse to learn. Even a slight development in such students fosters a sense of achievement for the teachers. Teachers find their job interesting due to the continuous learning experience this profession offers. A teacher is a lifelong student which immensely motivates academically oriented people. Teachers say that parent- teacher partnership is most important for the holistic development of the students. Teachers feel emotionally upset when students do not respond to their efforts to develop them. The job of teachers is set in a very structured environment where employment is very secure and there is no threat to job security. Teachers experience no competitiveness from their peers as each teacher is independent in their job and have their own responsibilities.

INFLUENCE OF ROLE MODELS AND WORK ENVIRONMENT

Teachers have a mentor outside their place of work who guided them in their career. Teachers did not expect nor depend on their organisation's superior to guide them in their career advancement. None of the teachers were emotionally dependent on authority figures, but all teachers were emotionally dependent on coworkers. Most of the teachers clearly said that they preferred to work in this school due to the emotional attachment and support they received from their colleagues. This factor is very important for overall growth and development of the organization. All the teachers also mentioned that they were motivated towards teaching profession due to their favourite teacher during their school or college days.

Many elements of a person's work environment are likely to be important to career motivation. These include staffing policies and procedures, leadership style, job design, group cohesiveness, career development programs, and the compensation system, to name a few. Career decisions and behaviors include generating alternative courses of action, seeking information about them, evaluating the information, setting goals, making decisions to behave in various ways, and carrying out the decisions. The processes of setting career goals and making career decisions are cognitive but are manifest in observable actions.

ALTRUISM

Altruism means unselfishness as the principle of action. Teachers felt a strong need to make a social contribution by shaping the future of children and adolescents. Every teacher expressed a deep desire to work at the grass root level to impart value based education to children and adolescents of all sections of the society. One teacher who had recently attended a workshop on imparting value based education said that every subject teacher must creatively bring in values and life skills in their classroom and develop the morals of the students. Most teachers had chosen to work in this school because 50% of the students of this school belonged to families whose children were first generation education receivers. So, teachers experience satisfaction in contributing their meager bit for upliftment of society.

WORK- LIFE BALANCE

This factor is undoubtedly one of the most important reasons for choosing teaching as a career specially among mothers working as teachers. The long vacations and all the public holidays that teachers enjoy give an opportunity for teachers to integrate their personal life and work demands perfectly. This time also provides opportunity for teachers to enhance their knowledge by pursuing higher studies and attending workshops and programmes. No other job provides this flexibility so for mothers this becomes a major motivating factor to choose this as a career.

In the above discussion I have tried to analyze and understand the major career motivation factors of high school teachers. I have attempted to interpret the career motivation of teachers by understanding their individual characteristics in a social environment .

SUGGESTION AND CONCLUSION

Teacher motivation can be kept at its peak if managements of schools consider the following aspects:

- 1) Foster the enhancement and dissemination of knowledge to teachers thus fulfilling their need to acquire knowledge
- 2) Respect and protect the freedom of teachers to act with professional independence, thus fulfilling the need for creative expression and effectiveness
- 3) Society must foster the prestige and status of the teachers and provide better status and pay to teachers to keep them committed.
- 4) It must be understood that teachers dedicate their services with an altruistic motive so they must be recognized for this trait.

Teaching career in India has witnessed phenomenal changes in the past few years. Changes in the educational pattern where focus is on holistic and integrative development has made teaching a dynamic job; the increased intellectual capabilities of students due to easy availability of information has thrown open a new set of challenges for teachers to tackle. Teachers have to engage in forethought, intentional action, self reflection and self reaction to be able to participate actively in their own career development and effectively contribute to social development.

To conclude it can be said that most teachers teach because they are passionate about the career they have chosen. The altruistic motive is one of the most important factors which inspire teachers to remain committed to teaching profession.

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