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Motivation and Preferences of Primary School Teachers in the Field of Continuing Education

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Abstract

The article focuses on the opinions of primary school teachers teaching the subject of Practical Education: on the offer, motivation, and preferences in the field of further education. The main objective was to find out in which topics and forms teachers would need to innovate their knowledge. The data were obtained using an electronic questionnaire, which was sent to 1,186 primary schools and completed by 196 teachers from all over Slovakia. The results showed that while teachers perceive the courses offered by state institutions as partially sufficient, they consider the courses offered by other educational institutions to be more attractive and suitable. Their main motivation for education is an internal need and desire for self-development, followed by the possibility of salary advancement. Teachers prefer innovative and refresher training, which is delivered remotely using online workshops. Conversely, they are least interested in traditional lectures and conferences. In terms of content, they are most interested in acquiring new knowledge, innovative methods, and practical skills.

Keywords: primary school teachers, preferences, continuing education, questionnaire

Introduction

Teacher professional development is a complex process that helps teachers to continuously improve. Its main goal is to deepen their knowledge and skills, acquire new qualifications, and develop their abilities so that they can teach more effectively or hold higher positions, such as in school management.

This process involves various types of education, such as:

1. Acquiring new qualifications for higher career levels.
2. Verifying teachers' existing skills so that they can advance to a higher level in their careers.
3. Study and training necessary to meet the qualification requirements for other roles.

It is important that teachers actually use and evaluate the skills they have acquired in practice. This process is regulated in Slovakia by Act No. 138/2019 Z. z. However, professional development is not just about formal education. It also includes professional practice and creative activity of the teacher, scientific and research work and publishing activity, and, of course, self-education and the routine performance of work activities, which also contribute to the continuous development of the teacher's expertise.

Several experts have addressed the topic of professional development for teachers and agree that it is a key tool for improving the quality of education. Pivovarčiová (2021) emphasizes that professional development should be a systematic process in which teachers set their own goals and create plans with the support of the school. Managers should provide them with individual attention and support.

Osvaldová and Vrabcová (2021) add that lifelong learning for teachers is not just about offering courses, but about a comprehensive system linked to career growth. Although the concept of a "learning organization" is ideal, schools often fail to implement it due to bureaucracy, lack of teamwork, and poor teacher participation in decision-making. A high-quality and diverse range of courses is essential for teacher development.

Research by authors such as Stronge and Hindman (2003) confirms that effective teachers acquire these skills and qualifications before entering the profession. However, the findings of Gul, Kanwal, and Khan (2020) and Bawaneh and Ali Khaled (2020) are mixed, as they did not find a strong correlation between qualifications and teaching approaches. Nevertheless, Darling-Hammond et al. (2001) and Wayne and Young (2003) found a strong relationship between teacher certification and student achievement, particularly in subjects such as Mathematics and reading.

Many teachers participate in continuing education, but their motivation may not always be professional development. Some do so only because it is a mandatory requirement of their employer. A study conducted by Sadeghi and Richards (2021) in Iran examined what professional development activities English teachers engage in and what motivates them to do so. They surveyed 24 teachers from public schools and private language institutes and came to the following conclusions:

1. Teachers from public schools were almost never involved in further education.

2. Teachers from private institutes were much more active. Their activities included consultations, online courses, watching educational videos, and studying English as a second language textbooks.

Teachers' motivations varied, ranging from no motivation at all to specific goals such as improving their own English or obtaining qualifications to teach at university. Ideally, of course, teachers would engage in continuing education primarily to improve their teaching skills.

Aim and methodology of the research

At the first level of primary schools, the educational area of Man and the World of Work is currently represented by the subject Practical Education, which is included in the curriculum for the third and fourth grades of primary school. The subject is usually taught by primary school teachers. The aim of the research was to find out the opinions of primary school teachers on their motivation and preferences in the area of further education, in which topics they would need to innovate their knowledge and in what form. We chose a questionnaire of our own design as the research tool. The questionnaire contained demographic data: region, age, qualifications for teaching subjects, and the following items:

1. How do you rate the educational offerings of state institutions?
2. How do you rate the educational offerings of other educational institutions on the market that offer education in the field of education?
3. What motivates you to pursue further education?
4. Select the type of education that would suit you best
5. What is your preferred form of continuing education?
6. How would you like to be educated?
7. How would you not like to be educated?
8. What would you like to learn during continuing education?

The questionnaire was electronic and sent by email to all primary schools (1,186 schools) (Statistical Yearbook, 2023). The questionnaire was to be completed by primary school teachers. We received 196 fully completed questionnaires.

Research results

The questionnaire was completed by respondents from all regions. The Prešov region had the highest representation, while respondents from the Bratislava region had the lowest representation (Table 1). We often encounter a similar distribution of respondents in educational research.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents by region

Region	%
Banská Bystrica region	11
Bratislava region	4
Košice region	16
Nitra region	18
Prešov region	21
Trenčín region	6
Trnava region	8
Žilina region	16

The Bratislava region is usually the least represented in research samples. This is probably because teachers there are inundated with various questionnaires from other universities, of which there are many in the Bratislava region.

The age structure of respondents consisted of 11% of teachers under 30, 19% of teachers aged 31 to 40, 34% aged 41 to 50, 33% aged 51 to 60, and 3% of respondents aged 60. Of the 196 respondents, 61% were qualified to teach primary education. The remaining 39% of respondents reported teaching qualifications for other subjects (most commonly biology, chemistry, technology), special education qualifications, or educator qualifications.

The first piece of information we wanted to find out from the respondents was their experience with continuing education courses organized by state institutions, (Figure 1).

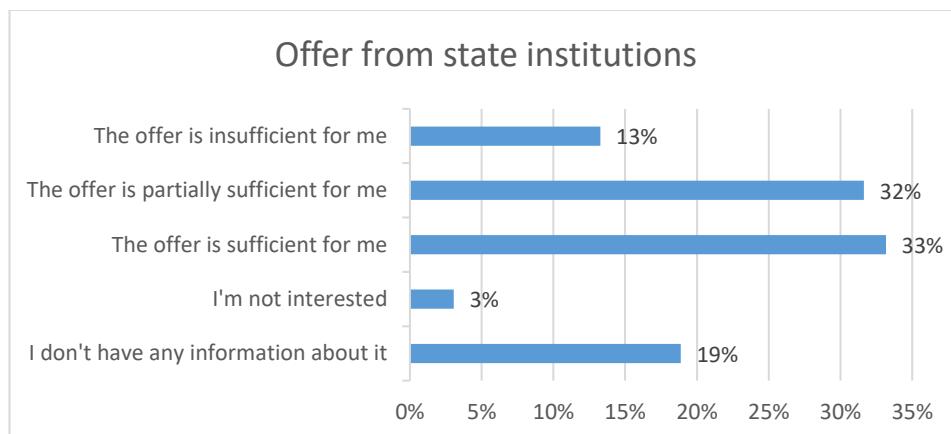


Figure 1. Evaluation of courses offered by state institutions

We found that primary school teachers consider the range of continuing education courses organized by the state to be sufficient (33%) or partially sufficient

(32%). For 13% of respondents, the offer is insufficient, and as many as 19% of respondents have no information about these offers. 3% of respondents are not interested in the training offer – these are teachers approaching retirement who are no longer interested in further training.

This number is repeated in the next item, which asked whether the range of continuing education courses for teachers offered by other educational institutions is sufficient (Figure 2).

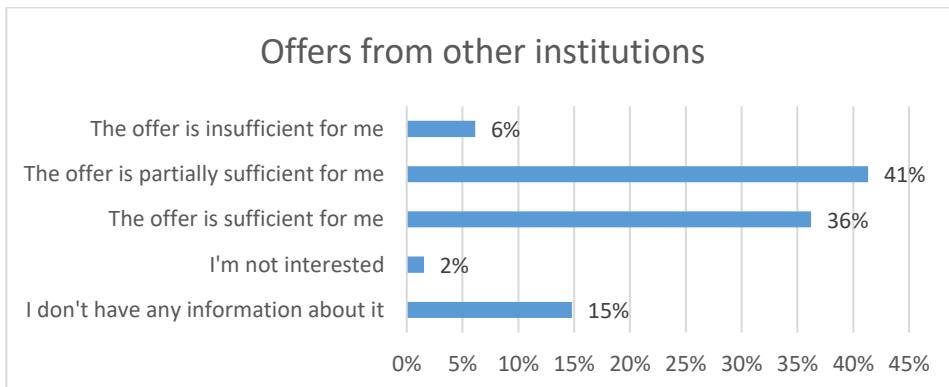


Figure 2. Evaluation of courses offered by other institutions

The range of courses offered by external institutions is sufficient for 36% of respondents and partially sufficient for 41% (Figure 2). Of course, primary school teachers must have professional competencies in all educational areas, they make up a large part of the teaching community, and therefore the range of courses on offer should be commensurate with this. Comparing the respondents' answers to this and the previous item, we can conclude that respondents consider the courses offered by other educational institutions (other than state institutions) to be more suitable and attractive for their further education.

The next item in the questionnaire examined the motivation of primary school teachers to pursue further education, (Figure 3).

Most respondents cited their own inner conviction and the need to learn as their motivation (65%). Another large group were those respondents who were motivated to pursue further education by the prospect of advancing to a different career level and thus a higher salary (45%). The needs of the school are taken into account by 38% of respondents when planning their further education, and 11% of respondents expect to be placed in a different career position after completing their education (Figure 3).

We also surveyed respondents about their preferred type of education, (Figure 4). They could choose from the following options: specialization, pre-certification, innovation, refresher, and other, where they could add their own choice.

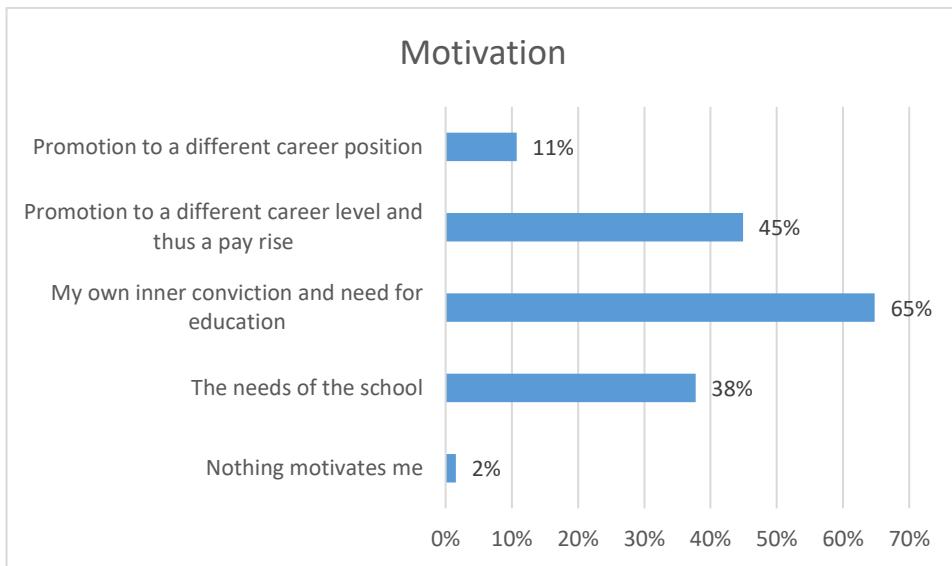


Figure 3. Respondents' motivation for further education

Most respondents prefer innovative (61%) and refresher training (27%). Other types of training were represented significantly less, with specialised training at 4% and pre-certification training at 7%.

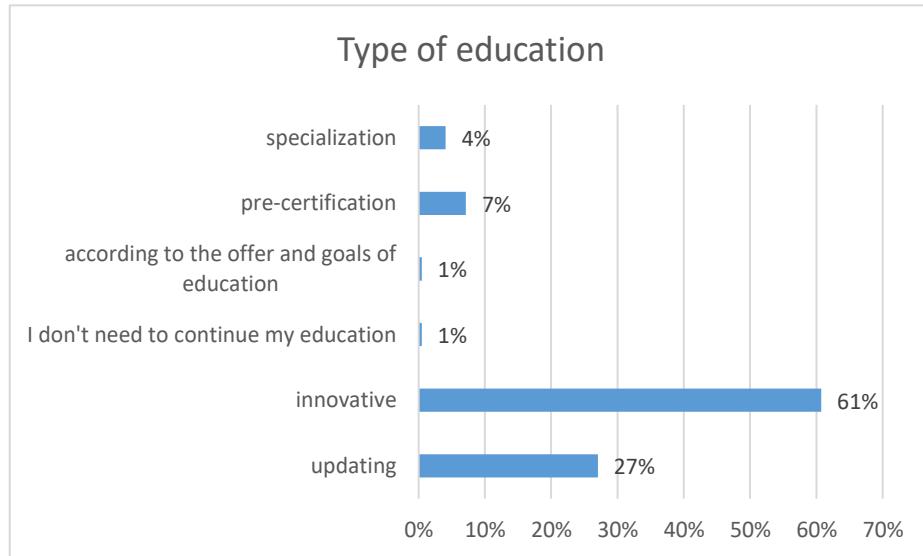


Figure 4. Preference for type of training

In the "other" option, respondents indicated "depending on the offer of objectives and training" or expressed the opinion that they were not interested in further training (Figure 4).

Another item in the questionnaire focused on the form of training that would suit respondents, (Figure 5).

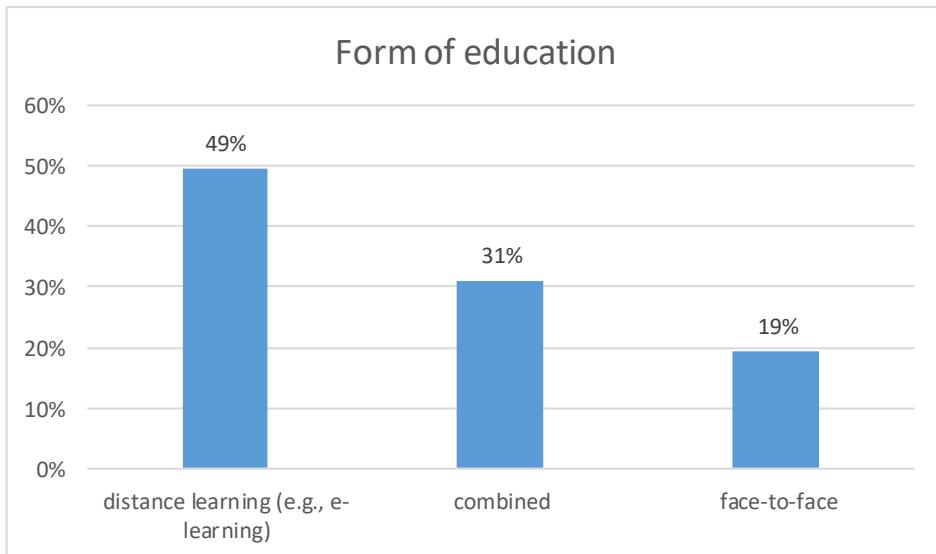


Figure 5. Preferences for the form of education

Almost half of the respondents prefer distance learning, e.g., in the form of e-learning. 31% prefer a combined form of education, and only 19% of respondents favored face-to-face education (Figure 5).

When specifying the form of education, respondents could choose from the following options: conference, online workshop, lecture, workshop, and they could enter their own option in the "other" option, (Figure 6).

The preferred training methods are workshops (34%) and online workshops (40%). 20% of respondents would choose lectures for training and 5% would choose conferences. The "other" option reflected a lack of interest in training as well as the possibility of alternating training methods (Figure 6). Another item verified the respondents' answers by asking about training methods that did not suit them. Respondents identified conferences (43%) and lectures (28%) as the least suitable methods of education. The previous answers were thus fully confirmed.

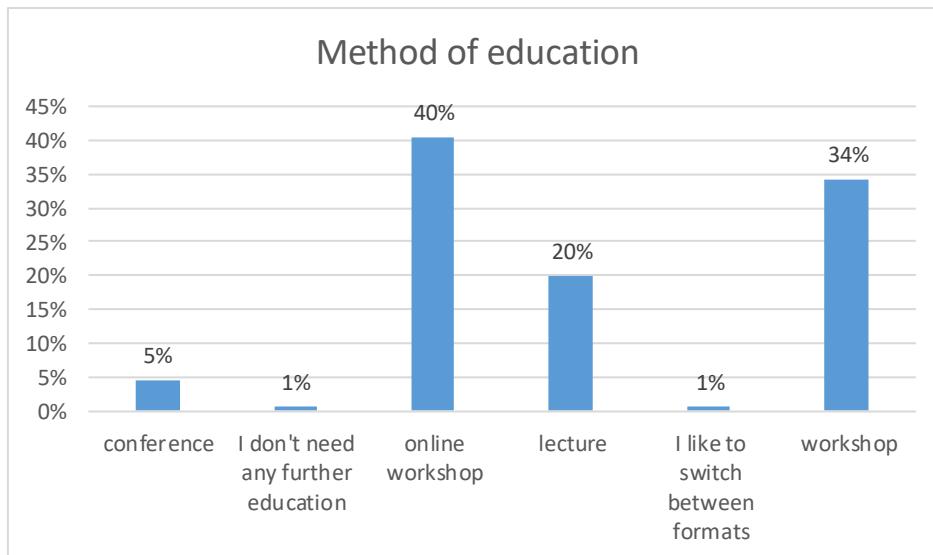


Figure 6. Preferences for training methods

We gave respondents the opportunity to write in an open-ended question what they would like to learn in further education, (Figure 7).



Figure 7. Topics of interest in continuing education courses

The majority of respondents chose the answer "new knowledge, trends" (32%), innovative teaching methods (22%) and practical matters (10%). Eighteen percent of respondents did not indicate any preferences in the area of continuing education, and 3% are not even interested in continuing education (Figure 7).

The results show that teachers rate the continuing education offered by state institutions as sufficient (33%) or partially sufficient (32%). An even larger proportion of respondents (36% and 41%) consider the offer from other educational institutions to be sufficient or partially sufficient, which indicates that they consider this offer to be more attractive.

The main motivation for further education for most teachers is their inner conviction and need to learn (65%), with the possibility of salary progression also playing an important role (45%).

In terms of training preferences, teachers most prefer:

- type of training: innovative (61%) and refresher (27%),
- form of training: distance learning (almost 50%) and combined learning (31%),
- method of training: online workshops (40%) and workshops (34%).

Conversely, respondents indicated that conferences (43%) and lectures (28%) were the least suitable methods. In an open question about training topics, respondents most often mentioned an interest in new knowledge and trends (32%), innovative teaching methods (22%), and practical skills (10%).

Conclusion

The research showed that primary school teachers have strong intrinsic motivation for further education, especially when it is linked to innovation and the acquisition of practical skills. Their preferences lean towards modern and flexible forms, such as distance and combined learning courses with an emphasis on interactive online and traditional workshops. Conversely, traditional forms of education, such as lectures and conferences, are the least attractive to them.

The results show that although there are training opportunities offered by both state and non-state institutions, primary school teachers consider the opportunities offered by non-state institutions to be more suitable and attractive. There is a clear need for training programs to be more tailored to the specific needs of teachers, with an emphasis on the practical applicability of new knowledge and methods. Understanding these preferences and needs is key to developing relevant and effective continuing education programs that will be attractive to teachers and at the same time help them improve the quality of the teaching process.

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