Hverjir fara í kennaranám og hvers vegna? Viðhorf grunnskólakennaranema og framhaldsskólanema


Efnið: Kennaramenntun, norræna kennaramenntun, viðhorf til kennararstarfsins
Who wants to enter teacher education, and why? The views of student teachers and secondary school students

ABSTRACT

This article is based on the findings of qualitative and quantitative research focusing on the views of those who entered the teacher education program at the Faculty of Teacher Education in the University of Iceland in 2009, as well as a group of students in their last year of secondary school. More precisely, the research sought to extract the participants’ views toward teacher education and compulsory school teaching. The research also examined the background of first year student teachers whose aim was to teach at grade school levels.

The research was conducted in the schoolyear 2009–2010. A questionnaire was submitted to 118 students in their first year of teacher education, focusing on education in compulsory school, and to 44 secondary school students during their final year of study. In addition, focus groups were interviewed, comprising members from above-mentioned groups. The focus group was arbitrarily chosen, in total twelve student teachers and fifteen grade school students.

This study is part of a comprehensive Nordic research project conducted at the behest of The Nordic Council of Ministers and simultaneously launched in five different countries: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, under the auspices of Danmarks Evalueringssinstitut (EVA) and Danmarks Pædagogiske Universitet (DPU). The report, Rekrutteringsproblematisken på de nordiske læreruddannelser (Norræna ráðherra-nefndin [Nordic Council of Ministers], 2010) provides a detailed account of the central findings of the research. The current article draws on those findings as it compares the Icelandic results to those from the other Nordic countries.

The findings of the research bring to light that the Icelandic student teachers comprised a relatively homogenous group; 83% women and 17% men. Here, Iceland stood out, with the highest proportion of female students in the department of compulsory school education. 98% of the secondary school students were native Icelandic speakers, the educational level of their mothers was higher than their fathers’, and most of the student teachers within the focus group had a close relative who was a teacher. Guðbjörg Vilhjálmssdóttir’s (2005) findings concerning adolescents’ views on grade school reveal that boys considered the work of grade school teachers less respectable than the girls did, and similarly, the boys found the job less interesting, entailing less responsibility, and being more “feminine”. Furthermore, the importance of diversity in relation to teachers’ cultural and religious backgrounds has been observed by Hanna Ragnarsdóttir and Hildur Blöndal (2007). They contend that this is the only means by which the necessary cross-cultural skills can be created within schools.

Moreover, the findings of the research disclosed that the student teachers favored studies focusing on cooperation rather than studies involving competition; they also
preferred practical programs which offered more possibilities for diverse positions, but were not as highly appreciated. The questionnaire revealed that Icelandic secondary school students considered the teacher’s knowledge of his/her own subject the most important aspect; they believed that the same subjects were taught in teacher education as in secondary school; however, the former delved deeper into the material than the latter. On the other hand, the Icelandic student teachers noted social skills as the most important aspect of a teacher’s competence. The Finnish student teachers stood out in this regard, since they alone thought that pedagogy was the hard kernel of teachers’ professionalism.

The secondary school students did not believe that teaching was well suited for them. Salaries were too low. They felt, however, that the profession was important. 92% of Icelandic student teachers agreed that this profession is imperative for society. The secondary school students agreed. There was, however, a perceptible difference in relation to teachers’ respect within society: 40% of student teachers believed that grade school teachers enjoyed little or very little respect.

In the questionnaire, 93% of student teachers strongly agreed, or agreed, to the statement that teachers had flexible working hours, and that, as a teacher, there would be enough free time for the family. However, there emerged a clear gender difference in the student teachers’ answers: 90% of women felt it was very important, or somewhat important, to have enough time to attend to the family along with work, whereas only 23% of men were of this opinion. Around 78% of student teachers strongly agreed that teaching was an interesting profession which offered an avenue for personal development; 22% agreed with these statements.

A majority of Icelandic student teachers, or 58%, stated that the reason for choosing their education related to the profession itself; its challenges and diversity. Around 16% claimed that their choice was due to responsibility and potential influence, 11% referred to job security and 8% mentioned the working hours. However, salary was the major factor that spoke against the profession as such.

Young people’s views regarding teaching give rise to optimism and hope, but also concern, because they do not seem to view teaching as an exciting profession.

Keywords: Teacher education, Nordic teacher education, teaching

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Halla Jonsdottir (halla@hi.is) is adjunct at the School of Education, University of Iceland. She holds a master’s and licentiate degree from University of Uppsala in history of ideas and science. Her main research fields are didactics, professionalism, history of education, multicultural education and philosophy.