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Arduous admissions and a precarious profession: student teachers' pre-admission demotives

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ABSTRACT

Sustaining the attractiveness of the teaching profession to recruit committed students to teacher education is a global policy issue. However, in many parts of the world, the teaching profession has become less attractive. Also in Finland, where teacher education has traditionally been highly attractive, several programmes have recently suffered from a substantial decrease in the number of applicants. The current paper addresses the phenomenon by investigating student teachers' pre-admission demotives. A total of 146 freshly admitted student teachers in primary teacher education in two universities wrote texts concerning the reasons for turning down primary teacher education and the profession during the application period. Thematic qualitative analysis revealed that demotives were connected to 1) arduous admissions, 2) deterministic training and 3) a precarious profession. The majority (54%) of participants expressed demotives connected to the above themes: concerns about the profession were the most frequent followed by doubts concerning admissions. By focusing on demotives the study fills the current gap in existing literature. The results can be implemented when outlining the measures to increase the attractiveness of the teaching profession, developing recruitment strategies and admission procedures, and designing more effective and meaningful teaching and learning in teacher education.

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Student teachers; demotives; teacher education; teaching; admissions

Introduction

In many parts of the world, the teaching profession has become less attractive, and thus, shortages of competent teachers in schools can be observed (European Commission, 2021; Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2020). Therefore, more effort and means have been suggested to ensure the attractiveness of the teaching profession and to entice young people to enter initial teacher education. Since estimates that 69 million new teaching posts need to be created at primary and secondary level to reach 2030 education goals (United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, 2016), sustaining the attractiveness of teaching in order to recruit committed prospective teachers is a global policy issue.

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In Finland, teacher education programmes, such as primary and special education teacher programmes, have traditionally been remarkably attractive. For example, only 11% of applicants were admitted into primary teacher programmes during the 2010s (University of Helsinki, 2020). Nevertheless, in the latter part of the decade, the number of applicants in several teacher education programmes decreased substantially. In primary teacher education, the number decreased to almost half compared to the peak years: from more than 8000 applicants during 2013–14 to under 5000 applicants in 2019. Although the decline was reversed in spring 2020 and there have still been approximately six times more applicants compared to those for degree places, the collapse has been severe. It has raised concerns in Finnish universities offering initial teacher education and among stakeholders, such as the Trade Union of Education in Finland and the Ministry of Education and Culture, which has also produced a report on the attractiveness of teacher education (Heikkinen et al., 2020). Despite the many speculations on what is alienating more young people from teacher education and the profession, there is still very little evidence which sheds light on the process observed.

In this paper, we aim to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon by investigating freshly admitted student teachers' pre-admission demotives. Demotives "are the negative counterparts of 'motives': a motive increases an action tendency whereas a demotive decreases it" (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, p. 138). By pre-admission demotives we conceptually refer to the reasons student teachers had for turning down primary teacher education and, thus, the profession during the application period. Previous studies investigating student teachers' motivations for choosing the teaching profession have mainly been based on quantitative methods with surveys asking respondents to rank or choose the suggested factors that apply to them, while very little research has been based on entirely qualitative data (Fray & Gore, 2018; Heinz, 2015). Researchers have argued for the benefits of letting student teachers express their authentic motives to obtain rich, in-depth and nuanced findings, rather than using predetermined categories that do not allow the detection of new motivational factors (Bergmark et al., 2018; Klassen, Al-Dhafri, Hannok, & Betts, 2011). In our study, we emphasise openness by using written texts, in which student teachers were able to freely recall their doubts and concerns during the application period, accordingly allowing the variation of demotives to be elucidated.

Despite the bulk of research exploring the motives for entering teaching, scarce attention has been paid to the demotives linked to career choice. As Fray and Gore (2018) aptly state "understanding reasons why students are not interested in teaching would also provide important insights to inform policies and strategies designed to attract people to teaching" (p. 158). By focusing on student teachers' demotives and also addressing the characteristics of teacher training, perspectives that are mainly missing from professionally fixed studies concerning career choice, retention and turnover, our study fills the gap in existing research. Understanding student teachers' (de)motives creates a knowledge base for development of initial teacher education policies and programmes (Flores & Niklasson, 2014).

Literature review: motives for entering and reasons for leaving

Although this study focuses on student teachers' demotives, it is essential to summarise the research on motives for choosing a teaching career as well as reasons for leaving the profession. Although career choice is dependent on several factors, the existing syntheses

of research indicate three main categories of motivations influencing student teachers' career decisions: altruistic, intrinsic and extrinsic (Fray & Gore, 2018; Heinz, 2015). Although there is no universal pattern of motives (Klassen et al., 2011) and all motivation categories in turn have been suggested to be the primary influence for choosing a teaching career (Fray & Gore, 2018; Heinz, 2015), a balance has been suggested: altruistic and intrinsic motives have been described as the main motivators, and extrinsic motives as complementary motivators (Struyven, Jacobs, & Dochy, 2013).

Individuals that enter the teaching profession for *altruistic* motives want to make a contribution to society (Flores & Niklasson, 2014; Mtika & Gates, 2011) by helping and supporting children and adolescents (Struyven et al., 2013). This so-called "service theme" has traditionally been associated with teaching and is linked to perceptions of teaching as a special mission of moral worth (Lortie, 1975). *Intrinsic* motives are grounded on wanting to feel competent and/or to satisfy curiosity and cover factors such as interest in or enjoyment of teaching (Heinz, 2013; Mtika & Gates, 2011), desire to work with children or adolescents (Flores & Niklasson, 2014) and engagement with or feeling accomplished in a specific subject(s) (Gao & Trent, 2009; Manuel & Hughes, 2006). *Extrinsic* motives involve aspects not inherent in the immediate work. They are related to lifestyle choices, such as the opportunity to balance work and family commitments (Struyven et al., 2013), flexible working hours (Aksu, Demir, Daloglu, Yildirim, & Kiraz, 2010; Jungert, Alm, & Thornberg, 2014) and holidays (Aksu et al., 2010; Struyven et al., 2013), or conditions of work, such as job-security (Aksu et al., 2010), reliable income (Jungert et al., 2014) and job opportunities (Flores & Niklasson, 2014).

Beyond the traditional conceptualisation of motivations as altruistic, intrinsic, and extrinsic, several additional factors have been recognised. First, a sense of personal suitability, such as subject knowledge and suitable character traits, has been proved to be an influential factor on teaching career choice (Heinz, 2013; Richardson & Watt, 2006). Second, prior teaching experiences have been identified as a positive influential source on the decisions to become a teacher (Heinz, 2013; Klassen et al., 2011; Richardson & Watt, 2006). Third, parents, relatives and friends influence the decision to become a teacher (Flores & Niklasson, 2014): having a parent, sibling or a close relative working as a teacher favourably predisposed student teachers towards the profession (Drudy, Woods, & O'Flynn, 2005). In contrast, teacher education entrants have also experienced strong social dissuasion from a teaching career (Richardson & Watt, 2006). Fourth, teaching can sometimes be entered more reluctantly, following failure to gain admission to more desirable fields or lack of financial support (Su, Hawkins, Huang, & Zhao, 2001) or when teaching is perceived only as a fallback career (Klassen et al., 2011; Mtika & Gates, 2011).

Nevertheless, the lack of diversity and underrepresentation of several groups in the teaching body indicates that progression into the profession may contain various barriers that diminish equity of access to teaching. Studies have recognised and considered possible reasons for the underrepresentation in the teaching body of people with a migrant or minority background (Donlevy, Meierkord, & Rajania, 2016) and of socially disadvantaged groups, such as people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, with disabilities and/or members of the LGBTQ+ community (Keane, Heinz, & Eaton, 2018). In addition, the low proportions of male teachers, especially in the lower levels of education, have been investigated, although the underrepresentation of a traditionally power-holding group does not easily fit into the teacher diversity context where underrepresentation is typically conceptualised within contexts of disadvantage and inequities (Heinz, Keane, & Davison, 2021).

Studies examining teacher turnover behaviour and intentions have identified several factors connected to leaving the profession. A close relationship between working conditions and teachers' exit rate has been observed by Dupriez and colleagues (2016). For example, heavy workload (Korthagen, 2004; Räsänen, Pietarinen, Pyhältö, Soini, & Väisänen, 2020), working constantly under pressure (Buchanan, 2010) and a perception that working conditions are evolving in a negative direction in terms of financial resources or diverse expectations (Heikonen, Pietarinen, Pyhältö, Toom, & Soini, 2016) have been connected to teachers' turnover intentions. Also related to turnover intentions are the challenges to teachers' perceived autonomy caused by accountability-based policies emphasising top-down decision-making and regulation in the school system (Kraft, Marinell, & Yee, 2016; Räsänen et al., 2020).

In addition, perceived alienation from professional goals, values or ideals (Korthagen, 2004; Räsänen et al., 2020), lack of perceived support (Buchanan, 2010; Korthagen, 2004; Kraft et al., 2016), poor salary level (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Buchanan, 2010), classroom management and discipline issues (Buchanan, 2010; Heikonen et al., 2016) and challenges in social interaction with school staff, parents or educational stakeholders (Räsänen et al., 2020) have been identified as significant factors in turnover intentions. Also, experiencing the profession as an impasse with no or limited opportunities for career advancement or professional learning and growth has been suggested as a reason for leaving teaching (Gallant & Riley, 2014).

Methods

Research context

Teachers in Finland are regarded as professional experts with substantial autonomy to plan, implement, and revise their teaching within the national curriculum, and as having a great sense of individual responsibility for the learning and well-being of their pupils (Mikkilä-Erdmann, Warinowski, & Iiskala, 2019). Primary teachers complete a five-year university Master's degree in education after which they receive a formal qualification to teach grades 1–6 (pupils between 7 and 12 years of age). The structure of teacher education is legislated: primary teacher programmes involve a total of 300 credits including at least 60 credits of multidisciplinary studies on school subjects, such as mother tongue, mathematics, arts and crafts, and at least 60 credits of teachers' pedagogical studies (Teaching Qualifications Decree, 986/1998).

Keen competition for the limited number of degree places has led to the misconceptions that primary teacher education "typically attracts applicants with excellent secondary-school diplomas" (Malinen, Väisänen, & Savolainen, 2012, p. 570) and that Finland "build[s] high-quality teaching forces by recruiting the best high school graduates into education institutions" (OECD, 2015, p. 2). Previous myths concerning the earlier learning outcomes of students in Finnish primary teacher education, however, have been debunked in a recent study suggesting that applicants and admitted students have weaker matriculation exam grades compared to the university average (Vilppu, Mankki, Lähteenmäki, Mikkilä-Erdmann, & Warinowski, 2021). Similar discourse using superlatives has been detected also in Australia, where new policies are attempting to ensure that only the "best and brightest" are selected for the teaching profession (Gore, Barron, Holmes, & Smith, 2016).

Primary teacher programmes aim to meet the selection challenge through a two-stage process. The first stage is based on a national written multiple-choice exam and matriculation exam grades. In 2019, when the data was collected, the written exam was based on academic articles from the educational sciences and was the only pre-selection method. However, from 2020 onwards more weight has been given to the matriculation exam in the admission process with 60% of applicants for the second stage being invited on the basis of their matriculation exam grades and 40 on the basis of their performance on the written exam. Also, the material in the written exam is only handed out at the beginning of the exam. Both of these pre-selection changes are responses to the national recommendations by the Ministry of Education and Culture for higher education institutes to lighten up the admission process, to reduce the demanding preparation requirements for the entrance exams and thus to facilitate the transition into higher education. The best applicants in the first stage are invited to the second stage, i.e., an interview-based aptitude test in which teacher educators assess applicants' communication and interpersonal skills, and aspirational commitment to the teaching profession (Mankki, Mäkinen, & Rähä, 2020).

Participants and data collection

The study was conducted in two Finnish universities providing primary teacher education. The data was collected in September 2019 at the beginning of the academic year during the very first lectures for newly admitted students. Altogether 146 teacher students participated in the study, which was nearly a fifth of the students admitted to Finnish-speaking primary teacher programmes in 2019 (University of Helsinki, 2020).

Participants were instructed to recall their thoughts and intentions during the application period and write a text addressing the following questions: "Did you consider the option of not applying for primary teacher education? If so, what kind of reasons did you have for not applying? Why could these reasons have made you turn down teacher education?" Participants wrote their anonymous texts on Microsoft Forms using laptops or mobile devices (no one selected the option of writing on a sheet of paper). No word, time or other limits were imposed, and student teachers were able to freely and privately express their doubts and concerns, which enabled in-depth and trustworthy data to be obtained. Research ethical guidelines were followed: participation in the study was voluntary and participants gave their informed consent in the e-form by choosing whether their text could be used in the current study (yes or no). Participants were informed about the aims of the study, how the data was planned to be analysed and presented in the publication, and the significance of their participation in gaining information on the attractiveness of the teaching profession.

Data analysis

A thematic qualitative approach was adopted in the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the first phase, texts not including demotives were removed. After telling that "applying was self-evident for me" or "I didn't consider any alternatives" some participants reflected on the reasons why somebody else might not apply for teacher education. Nevertheless, these speculations were seen as insufficient to provide information on student teachers' personal

demotives and thus removed. In addition, texts suggesting other teaching professions, such as subject teacher, special education teacher or early childhood educator, as the only alternative, were removed, because teacher education, in general, appeared to be the only option for these participants. Altogether 38 texts were removed in the first phase.

In the second phase, the texts expressing doubts about 1) university studies in general, 2) starting new studies, 3) losing the first-timer quota place in upcoming higher education admissions, 4) financial matters, and/or 5) moving to another city, were removed. These texts addressed higher education studies in general and therefore provided all-embracing information on demotives affiliated to teacher education and the teaching profession. In addition, texts in which participants expressed their interest in other professions and fields, but without specifying the differences, advantages or disadvantages compared to teacher education or the profession, were removed. Altogether 29 texts were removed in the second phase. Consequently, 79 texts were included in the third and final phase. In other words, 54% of all participants had personal demotives connected to teacher education or the teaching profession.

In the third phase, texts were subjected to data-driven and inductive analysis, i.e., coding and classifying were conducted based on the data instead of predetermined categories. The demotives were coded and grouped into categories based on their differences and similarities. Categories were then merged into themes. Themes and categories were reviewed and refined in an iterative process to enhance their coherence and distinctiveness. The level of abstraction increased as the analysis proceeded: the data was coded mainly using expressions taken directly from the texts, but the categories and themes were defined and named on a more conceptual basis.

Results

Student teachers' demotives were grouped into three themes which we have called: 1) arduous admissions, 2) deterministic training and 3) precarious profession. In the following, a more detailed description of each theme and the categories it includes will be presented in chronological order starting from admissions, proceeding to training and eventually to the profession. The frequencies are displayed to illuminate the commonness of various demotives among the participants. Total frequencies exceed the number of texts included in the final phase of the analysis because some participants expressed multiple demotives and these were classified into different categories.

Theme 1: arduous admissions

In theme 1, demotives connected to admissions were addressed. Category 1a *admission disbelief* ($f = 11$) refers to student teachers' perception that gaining admission into primary teacher education is difficult. A large pool of applicants pursuing a degree place with a small chance of being selected questioned the sense of applying: "I almost skipped applying because I thought that I wouldn't have a chance to get in. I had heard many stories about how many apply for years before they get into primary teacher education." In line with the perception that gaining access might take several application rounds, inexperience and youth were seen as significant reasons for rejection, which raises doubt and uncertainty especially among younger applicants: "I thought I would never get in on

my first try and straight from general upper secondary school.” In addition, factors such as absence of a matriculation examination certificate, lack of skills in art and physical education, or not participating in a preparatory course were perceived as decreasing the probability of gaining access to training.

Those who had unsuccessfully applied earlier for primary teacher education without gaining access had experienced *earlier admission disappointments* (category 1b, $f = 6$), which had caused doubts and reconsideration during the application period, as the following extract points out: “This was the fifth time that I applied for primary teacher education. Therefore, I’d already started to suffer from lack of faith and despair. Would it be easier to get into some other institution or programme?”

The entrance examination was experienced as demanding *onerous preparation* (category 1c, $f = 8$) that puzzled the participants. Particularly the written exam based on pre-material was perceived as demanding: “I considered the option. I didn’t properly have time to study the material for the written exam. I thought about whether I should even apply if I can’t succeed in the exam.” One participant described the tactical manoeuvre applicants are sometimes forced to make due to the onerous preparation required when choosing their intended field: “If I had decided to apply to study psychology I would not have applied for primary teacher education. I wouldn’t have had enough time to study for the entrance examination for both programmes.” In addition, some participants questioned the face-validity of a demanding written exam that was experienced as emphasising “memorising” and “cramming” and as having limited connection to the profession, which called into question their willingness to apply for the programme.

Theme 2: deterministic training

In theme 2, demotives were connected to primary teacher education. The theme contained only one category, *deterministic training* ($f = 3$), which represents the critical perspective on the occupational orientation of the programme, as the extract indicates:

I considered other options and initially applying for this programme as a first choice was not probable. Based on this training I will graduate precisely as a primary teacher and will likely end up as a teacher of grades 1 to 6 in a primary school. The opportunities to shift to other fields are fairly limited. In comparison, many other university programmes offer much broader possibilities to work in different positions and environments.

In this category, primary teacher education was experienced as something destined to lead to a stable, but predetermined, permanent and one-way option to work precisely and specifically as a primary teacher. Since for some individuals teacher education provides insufficient diverse career opportunities, the programme is regarded as a professional impasse.

Theme 3: a precarious profession

Theme 3 connects pre-admission demotives to the teaching profession. One of the most frequently expressed reasons for not applying for teacher education was *insecurity about personal suitability* (category 3a, $f = 17$) for the profession: “I have been doubtful about whether I could act as a primary teacher and could I really manage in this profession.” For

example, lacking the “right” personality, strengths or characteristics, suffering from learning disabilities and experiencing health problems (physical or mental) were brought up when reflecting on suitability for the profession.

Perceived insecurity is closely linked to the view of teaching as a *demanding and burdening profession* (category 3b, $f = 39$), which was the most frequently expressed demotive: “Yes I considered it because there are so many demands on the teacher nowadays and so many responsibilities as an educator.” The profession was perceived as becoming more challenging, and multifaceted, and participants regularly expressed concern about the increased workload and the risk of teacher burnout, as in the following extract:

In the media, there is constantly news and stories about teachers’ exhaustion and the challenges they face in coping. Before applying, I thought whether it’s sane to study for a profession in which many become really exhausted. The challenges of coping in the teaching profession could have made me give up applying for primary teacher training, since I value health and well-being.

Although demotives towards the profession were expressed as based on applicants’ own work experience as a school assistant or a supply teacher, or warnings and discouraging remarks from relatives or other acquaintances working in schools, clearly the most frequently mentioned source for demotives was the media and how the profession and school is presented in public discussion, as expressed in the previous extract. Graphic news coverage was described as “frightening and causing re-consideration of the dream of being a teacher.” The following characteristics were mentioned as burdening aspects of the profession (in descending order of frequency): 1) reduced resources and large class sizes, 2) defiant and disrespectful pupils, 3) restrictions on disciplinary measures, 4) demanding and disparaging guardians, 5) increased workload due to inclusion policy and reformed curriculum, and 6) indoor air problems and mould in school buildings.

Demotives linked to the profession also addressed *salary and employment* (category 3 c, $f = 15$). Compared to other similarly educated fields and professions, the salary level as a primary teacher was seen as unattractive: “The reason I weighed up my decision was the salary. As a primary teacher my salary will be considerably smaller than in many other academic fields.” The salary was described as low in particular when compared with the workload, challenges and responsibilities of the profession and with the level of education and length of training. One participant also raised concern about future employment prospects due to the falling birth rate and diminishing age groups.

Discussion

In this study, we aimed to gain a better understanding of the attractiveness of teacher education and the profession by investigating newly admitted student teachers’ pre-admission demotives. The majority of the demotives were closely linked to the challenges, multifaceted demands and intense workload in the profession which have also been connected to teacher turnover in several in-service teacher studies (e.g., Borman & Dowling, 2008; Dupriez et al., 2016; Heikonen et al., 2016; Räsänen et al., 2020). Since the study was focused on demotives, many of the findings present a reversed or divergent perspective compared to the bulk of studies examining student teachers’ motives to enter the teaching profession. For example, confidence in personal teaching abilities (Heinz,

2013; Richardson & Watt, 2006), prior teaching experiences (Heinz, 2013; Klassen et al., 2011; Richardson & Watt, 2006) and relatives and friends (Flores & Niklasson, 2014; Drudy et al., 2005; cf. Richardson & Watt, 2006) have been identified as influential factors in teaching career choice. In this study, insecurity about one's own personal suitability, prior experience of the challenges in a teacher's work and social dissuasion were recognised as factors alienating from the profession.

Significant educational reforms, such as establishing an inclusion policy in schools and renewing the national core curriculum, were initiated in Finland during the last decade. These reforms, combined with declining results in the Programme for International Student Assessment (OECD, 2019), have been the focus of public debate concerning schools and teaching. In addition, teacher fatigue, harassment and negligence dominate the news concerning teaching and thus demonstrate the negativity bias noticeable in the mainstream media. Although the constant need to develop teachers' working conditions, well-being and opportunities for professional learning have been rightfully called for in policy implications in comparative international (e.g., European Commission, 2021; OECD, 2020) and national reports (e.g., Heikkinen et al., 2020) and several studies (e.g., Flores & Niklasson, 2014; Manuel & Hughes, 2006; Mtika & Gates, 2011), the attractiveness of the profession is also largely dependent on the narratives. The negative narrative contributes an image problem that (unfoundedly) deters effective teachers from choosing a career in teaching (Gore et al., 2016). Ulmer (2016) has called upon teachers, educational researchers, and other stakeholders to stake a greater claim in public debates to provide a counter-narrative to derogatory representations of the teaching profession. For instance, during the application period in March 2021, The Trade Union of Education in Finland (n.d.) has met the challenge and produced a social media and TV campaign called *Tehdään tulevaisuuksia* (*Shaping futures*) to provide a platform for presenting teachers' authentic stories and the meaningful and rewarding aspects of teachers' work using the hashtag #sitoutunut (#committed). In this era, education providers, schools and individual teachers have a chance to give valuable insights about the profession on social media – a profession with which approximately 90% of teachers in Finland and in the other OECD countries are, all in all, satisfied (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2020).

In addition to the profession, many of the student teachers' demotives were connected to admissions. Although the status of the desired programme may trigger the willingness to pursue a degree place for some, awareness of the strict competition and lack of belief in gaining access produced demotives among the participants. Again, a counter-narrative is required to support the profession's attractiveness and reduce the groundless demotives linked to admissions. First, universities should stress that the weight of the pre-selection written exam has been reduced and the exam pre-material abolished in order to convince potential applicants of the lightened admission process and the fact that they are no longer "forced" to make tactical manoeuvres when deciding in which entrance examinations to invest time and effort. Second, instead of underlining the demanding admission process and elusive degree places, it could benefit the attractiveness of teacher education to state that access to even the most desired teacher education programmes can be gained even with poor previous outcomes and different learning strategies (Vilppu et al., 2021). Still, in order to diversify the teaching population, universities need to identify and abolish the potential access barriers in admissions, concerning for example gender, minority background or disabilities.

Although pre-admission demotives were mainly connected to the profession and admissions, a few demotives linked to training were also observed. Compared to many other university programmes, primary teacher education has a strong professional orientation with a rather strict, legislated study structure. This was understood as providing only a deterministic, one-way career option with limited opportunities for employment in other sectors. Skills acquired in primary teacher education were not deemed transferable to and valuable in other professions (cf. Gao & Trent, 2009), and teacher education was seen more as an impasse. However, the low frequency of demotives connected to training indicates that the characteristics of teacher education are either not yet recognised in the admission phase or they just do not generate pre-admission demotives the way admissions and the profession do.

The results of this study can be implemented when outlining measures to increase the attractiveness of teacher education and the profession, developing recruitment strategies and admission procedures, and designing more effective teaching and meaningful learning in teacher education. Since the results indicate that student teachers frequently have demotives connected to training and the profession, more time and space should be created in the teacher education curriculum for student teachers to share and communally address their misgivings and scepticism concerning their career decision, aided by guidance from teacher educators. Guided sessions would give teacher educators a superb forum to understand the variety of (de)motives student teachers have when entering teacher education, thus creating meaningful opportunities for them (Flores & Niklasson, 2014; Heinz, 2015; Manuel & Hughes, 2006) and dismantling the misconceptions so as to help students create realistic expectations for their studies and the profession. A better understanding of individuals who choose teaching as a career and early support in initial teacher education might have a far-reaching positive impact on retention and reduce teacher turnover (Klassen et al., 2011).

Although the pre-admission demotives described in this paper can be presumed to also exist among potential applicants, the variation in demotives could have been increased by including a larger pool of applicants to participate in the study instead of limiting it to only those admitted to the programme. However, the data collection was not linked to the high-stakes selection phase due to trustworthiness issues. Since applicants have prepared, and have even been taught in preparatory courses, to demonstrate and prove their suitability and commitment to the teaching profession in the entrance examinations, they were seen as unwilling to reveal their personal demotives in the admission phase. In the worst case, the data collection could have been understood as a hidden part of the exam despite reassurances to the contrary. From this perspective, linking data collection to the admissions would also have posed an ethical challenge for the study. The fact that participants were asked to recall their demotives from a few months earlier might have had an impact on the credibility of the texts.

Additional research is required to gain deeper understanding of why people are *not* interested in teaching or teacher training. Given the centrality of teachers to society, we highlight the importance of further theoretical and empirical research on why people reject the teaching profession. The shortcomings identified from the vast body of research on motivation to teach can be applied to research on demotives as well: more research recognising background variables and the structural differences in teacher education

should be conducted (Fray & Gore, 2018, see also Bergmark et al., 2018; Struyven et al., 2013). Also, current research that takes into account the COVID-19 crisis, which has posed an unprecedented challenge for teachers and teacher education worldwide, is needed to illuminate the reasons behind the fluctuations in statistics.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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