

Teacher's Career - Scientific Fiction or Reality

Abstract

—Some people view teaching as a mission, many others consider it as just another job. Teaching profession is publicly perceived as socially valuable and important, a job essential for the development of fundamental societal and human values. However, in 2018 Croatia, one still cannot speak of teaching as a profession. Unlike education policies in some European countries, the historical development of the upgrade to the teaching profession in Croatia lags a bit. In contemporary Croatia the occupation of a teacher is underestimated, both materially and in regard to its status in society. Dissatisfaction with the social status, pessimism and negative attitudes towards the situation in education and advanced ideas can be an obstacle for the pursuit of valuable innovations in education. Teacher is expected to have a high level of enthusiasm. The public perceives that as a basic quality of an educator, rather than expecting a high degree of professionalism.

—General presence of computerization causes cognitive changes that inevitably reflect upon the relationships among the participants in the educational process (Oostendorp, 2003). The text deals with the status of teachers and the acceptance of the educational profession in Croatia as well as the working conditions in the Croatian education. We present research results of attitudes towards the teaching profession and the social status of teachers expressed by students enrolled in the Faculty of Teacher Education, University of Rijeka.

—The UNESCO document Education for All vividly confirms the key role teachers play in the economic development. Thus, it is necessary to concentrate on the positive aspects of the teaching profession, aspiring to change for the better.

Keywords: teacher, educational process, teaching, profession, social status

Comment [ao1]: How is this connected to the topic?

Introduction

By paraphrasing Maxim Gorky, we could say “Teacher! That sounds so mighty!” William Glasser has often emphasized that being a successful teacher is perhaps the most difficult profession in society. Teaching is an extremely dynamic activity; its participants create unusual situations on a daily basis, build mutual relationships, occupy different roles, and focus primarily on the pupils. Petrosky (1992) describes teaching in picturesque terms – as a human play in which it is not only the pupils that play a privileged role, but the teachers are much like the pupils – *the subject of teaching*.

The teaching population occupies a large percentage of the teaching staff in the Croatian education system: in 2015, 11,440 classroom teachers were employed in elementary schools in Croatia. Elementary school work is divided into immediate educational work that consists of regular, supplementary, and elective courses as well as extracurricular activities and other interpersonal work activities such as teaching preparations, writing weekly and monthly syllabi, and so on.

For years, discussions have been led in Croatia about whether the teaching profession is a profession or an occupation. Some consider teaching as a mission, while many consider it work as any other. An occupation is the work that someone does to secure their livelihood, while a profession determines the social status that imposes certain obligations, thus securing its professional anatomy (Haralambos and Holborn, 2002). [1] The basic types of profession (Smerić, 2005, 65) are academic professions oriented towards the scientific community, free professions oriented towards the market and capital professions. The teaching profession falls under the category of *state profession* – service activity dependent on state bureaucracy and local authorities, such as the social workers or medical staff. University diploma is the basic requirement for admission to the profession, which novice teachers need in order to confirm their completion of five-year studies at a higher education institution.

Is the Master’s degree in primary education a sufficient criterion to confirm teaching as a profession? Profession is an activity that is publicly perceived as socially valuable and significant; a job that is very important for the development of fundamental social and human

values. Apart from being accepted in the public, professional knowledge is based on empirical methods of data collection. Qualifications gained throughout education are subject to scrutiny, and education programs enable socialization and acceptance of professional values and culture. A profession is valued in society, presented to its unions, professional associations, and chambers that have their own Code of Ethics. A profession boasts the freedom to make autonomous decisions. Its chambers influence the creation of relevant policies within the profession and offer the possibility of permanent training and certain material reimbursement. The profession, therefore, has its legitimacy in society. Does this also apply to teachers?

Unlike education policies in some European countries, the historical development in upgrading the teaching profession is somewhat lagging behind. This is confirmed by the fact that the teaching profession in Croatia is not sufficiently developed in order to define the corpus of its basic professional knowledge (Vizek et al. 2015). If we asked ourselves whether teachers themselves determine their professional standards, training programs, development and status in society, the answer would be a negative one: teachers still do not define their professional behavior and career scale.

At the beginning of the new millennium, our teachers were unsure of the way in which Croatian education was moving. [2] For the popularization of the profession and the retention of good teachers in the education system, working conditions and salaries must be attractive enough compared to other types of employment that require similar training. For example, the status of teachers in Finland is at an enviable level because their education is highly valued, so the teaching profession is highly valued. [3] “Finish teachers are the best and the brightest, because universities are able to choose the very best due to high standards of entry” (Brown Ruzzi, 2005, 8). Teachers are expected to demonstrate a high level of enthusiasm that the public perceives as the basic quality of the preschool teacher, rather than expecting a high degree of professionalism. This general attitude shows to what extent *teaching* is primarily perceived as an *occupation* and then as a *profession*.

1. Professional teacher culture

When it comes to the way of forming and developing the professional culture of teachers, there is a discrepancy between the *technical rationality* (teacher as the executor of predefined goals, programs, and plans) and *open professionalism* (teacher as a reflective practitioner who encourages and influences changes in the education system). Hargreaves (2000) lists the most important phases in the development of teacher professionalization in contemporary history: from the pre-professional period of the first half of the 20th century to the postmodern or post-professional period of the present. Given that it seems that the situation in the Croatian education is lagging behind, the professional development in Croatia would be at the stage of *collegial professionalism* - organizing a collaborative culture and school reform.

As part of the project *Qualification Standards and Improvement of the Quality of Teacher and Preschool teacher Study Programs* at the Faculty of Teacher Education of the University of Rijeka, [4] a draft version of the Standard for a wholesome qualification of Master of primary education was created. [5] Primary education teachers are expected to include the contents of interpersonal topics of appropriate ages and characteristics of pupils in the design of subject curricula (Krstović, Vujičić, Pejić Papak, 2016). In addition, teachers need to know the development of the scientific discipline and the areas of learning and teaching content in a particular unit.

Novelties have been introduced into the higher education system based on the conclusions of the Yerevan Ministerial Conference in 2015. Apart from the creation of new instruments in the quality assurance systems, the reform also covers teaching, which at the level of higher education should focus more on the students. Instead of the traditional reliance on teacher competences, learning must be focused on the students. Paradigms of study programs are changing as well – focus is no longer on the content and teacher competences, but on the learning outcomes. Student competences must be measurable upon the completion of studies; hence outgoing competences are the learning outcomes – everything that graduates can demonstrate. This refers to the results of university courses, while the competences are the result of the entire curriculum. Learning outcomes signify a conceptual shift toward student-centered learning; they are an objectively measurable learning result.

When it comes to the mother tongue, we distinguish between the linguistic-communicative, socio-humanistic, and artistic area. [6] The teacher should be familiar with

Comment [ao2]: I cannot see the connection to objectives of the study.

national education policies, education reforms, and their impact on the school system, which is a precondition for their professional work and lifelong learning. [7]

1. 2. Teacher as a reflective practitioner

Although the teacher calling is one of the most humane activities, it is also one of the most stressful jobs. Novice teachers and pre-service trainees often experience shock when faced with a restless and lively classroom due to their lack of experience. In a situation of high pressure, teachers' control in the classroom is significantly reduced and the relationship with the students is disrupted. Stress negatively affects the professional development of a person. In well-run schools, principals are aware of the demanding work of their employees and react positively to teachers' complaints of fatigue, not wanting to further exacerbate stress. Although it is a responsible and often stressful work, the teacher calling should be seen as a source of positive emotions and the possibility of self-promotion, self-fulfillment, and development of a business culture (Ivančić, 2008).

The teacher should not perceive everyday situations and tasks in the classroom and the meeting room as a problem; instead of concerns and fears of not fulfilling their tasks, obligations should be perceived as a challenge, an exploration of their abilities and limits. In this way, the preschool teacher builds his/her personality and teacher identity. Like pupils who need more than external motivation, a grade, praise or even a verbal reprimand, intrinsic motivation is key while performing everyday tasks. [8]

Our teachers should not be burdened by superficial generalizations; they should not be discouraged from doing their work because of public opinions. The UNESCO document *Education for All* vividly confirms the key role of the teacher in economic development; it therapeutically advises preschool teachers around the world to avoid succumbing to anger and instead seek to maintain composure. It is necessary to concentrate on the positive aspects of the profession in the pursuit of changes for the better.

Today's generations of students have changed considerably in comparison to generations from thirty years ago. The digital world greatly influences social relationships. Today's pupils live in a very different world from their parents and grandparents, and not only in the context of

changed personal expectations and worldviews. The overall IT presence also causes cognitive changes that are needed to function in a digitized reality. Such changes are inevitably reflected in the relationships inside the family and society, but also in the relationship among the participants in the educational process (Oostendorp, 2003). Older generations of elementary school pupils felt unmatched respect for their teachers and attributed greater authority to them than today's generations – children were once afraid of bad grades and feared their parents' reactions, which is no longer the case and preschool teachers have to adapt to the new situation. With regards to classroom teaching, the role of teachers is changing significantly in modern teaching – the teacher has now transformed from a 'knowledge transferor' into a moderator, trainer, and person who facilitates the pupils' learning process – a *reflective practitioner*. Despite the achievements of modern technology and advanced teaching aids, the teacher remains a crucial factor in the quality of the teaching process. A more frequent use of the new teaching technology has by no means "pushed the teacher out" of the game; the teacher plays a key role in the creation of quality education. This awareness is all the more significant given the importance of education in the social and economic development of each country.

1. 3. Feminization of profession

Not so long ago teachers enjoyed privileged social status along with doctors, lawyers, and members of the clergy. Today, the *teacher* occupation in Croatia is underestimated both in material in status terms. Does the cause of devaluation hide in gender imbalance or the fact that a man in a modern patriarchy seeks a profession with a higher socio-economic status and leaves the teaching profession up to the woman? [9] Feminization of education is a common global phenomenon. Sociologists state that 20th century postmodernism allowed entry into the employment sphere, but it did not eradicate ideologically shaped divisions of social roles and occupations. A certain occupation is feminized if "the number of women working in it has become significant" (Abercombie et al., 2008, 90). Labor sociology has been trying to answer the question of whether feminization of professions is simultaneously an indicator of the crisis of a certain profession. [10] It is important to emphasize that in these "feminized" activities the

work of women is less financially valued. Therefore, the teaching profession can indeed be called a feminized profession.

The feminization of the teaching profession and the age of the preschool teacher are not only the problem of the Croatian education system. According to international research indicators (2013), nearly 70% of teachers are women and the average age of teachers in Europe is 48 years. The current document *The ABC of Gender Equality in Education: Aptitude, Behavior, Confidence* (Education at a Glance 2015, PIAAC and TALIS) has confirmed the existence of gender differences among the teaching staff: there are far more female teachers than male teachers in all countries that participated in the research. [11] The OECD average is 82% of female teachers in classroom teaching and 68% in subject teaching. When it comes to the work schedule, the average working week of a teacher is 38 hours – Italy having the least working hours (29), while teachers in Japan work the most (54 hours). The best paid teachers are in Switzerland, about 64,000 euros a year, and Chinese teachers enjoy the highest respect among the students. [12] It should be noted that the financial aspect, payment of teachers' work, and the equipment of a school do not have to affect the students' satisfaction and their attitude to the school. For example, Macedonian teachers are at the very bottom of the best-paid staff list, but pupils in Macedonia are the most satisfied with their education and school attendance. We would expect the Scandinavian pupils to be the most satisfied, but this is not the case: the relationship between the financial situation and the students' satisfaction with the school is almost inversely proportional in Denmark and Macedonia. Croatian teachers should be aware that both material and tuition fees are only one of the elements (though very important) of their calling, and that extracurricular factors should in no way affect the quality of teaching and their pupils' satisfaction. It should always be borne in mind that teaching is organized for the pupils; children do not attend school because of teachers.

Despite the general attitude that our teachers are dissatisfied, some research points to a wrong perception of the public. Vidić (2009) conducted a survey that showed a fairly decent level of satisfaction with elementary school work. Differences in teachers' satisfaction with regards to work experience and workplace were also investigated. [13] Research participants were most satisfied with the relationship with their associates and the job itself, but the least satisfied with their salary. Data analysis has shown that classroom teachers are generally more satisfied with their work than subject teachers.

Children need satisfied teachers; they should not be burdened with personal problems and worries. We can raise a question that is not difficult to answer: Can a person dissatisfied with their life be a successful and good teacher? It is clear that school satisfaction is the result of the quality work of preschool teachers. The seriousness of work and the importance of education are unquestionable, but this does not exclude enjoying work and teaching. Action that excludes having fun will at some point result in dissatisfaction. Vittorino Andreoli maintains that school should on not account be a burden to teachers and students. It is not a good sign if a teacher does not feel content once he finished teaching a class, and takes the anxiety and stress home. A good indicator of his correct occupational choice is the teacher's mood during the teaching and at the end of the working day. Andreoli (2007) considers that the positive balance in teaching and the level of fun in the work with the pupils is a good indicator of the teacher's condition; therefore he says: "*Dear teacher, ask yourself how much fun you have at school, in your classroom? Do you feel your hard work has been paying off? How much joy do you feel when you participate in it, in the past of a certain group of children...*" (Andreoli, 2007, 25).

2. Characteristics of a successful teacher

Since the school is a *learning organization* in which the pupils are active participants in teaching, the contemporary leader of the teaching process has to be a *reflective practitioner*. It is clear that the working atmosphere in the classroom depends on the teacher, because (s)he is the leader of that process, but it is equally important that the teacher hears and listens to his/her students. In the professional relationship with his/her work, the preschool teacher should not bring his/her personal problems to work and burden the pupils.

One of the most important features a teacher should possess is authority. This human trait brings together different elements of personality and significantly determines the classroom atmosphere. Authority should not be perceived in the context of authoritarianism, strict conduct, threats of punishment, and bad grades; it gives a person credibility based on the persuasiveness, knowledge, and ability to lead a classroom: "*Authority is never authoritarianism blanketed in violence and power threats*" (Andreoli, 2006, 59).

Depending on the quality of teaching and the ability to influence pupils, Flanders (1970) makes a distinction between *direct* and *indirect teachers*. A direct teacher dominates the space, focuses on discipline and order in the classroom, and authoritatively imposes his/her attitudes while teaching and managing student activities, creating an atmosphere of behavior in which students often experience uneasiness. By contrast, an indirect teacher has a more positive impact on the pupils: praise for activity and encouragement to work leaves students with a sense of free expression of their opinions and creates a positive classroom atmosphere. Students have confidence in their teacher because (s)he shows understanding for them and respect for their personality, individuality, and feelings.

In terms of the teacher's relationship with the pupils in the classroom, Anderson and Walberg (1968) mention two forms of behavior, *integrative* and *dominant*. Unlike the dominant attitude in which the teacher demands that the pupils adapt to him/her, not allowing thereby a free development of students' personality, the integrative approach is based on mutual understanding, appreciation, and respect for the individual student traits. In addition to the love for children and teaching and unobtrusive authority with a sense of dedication and self-improvement, a true teacher is a good pedagogue, skilled in planning jobs, uses educational resources, and prudent in solving demanding tasks and conflicting situations.

Brajša (2010) lists four key features of a successful teacher: imaginativeness, emotionality, ambitiousness, and awareness of oneself, one's abilities and (lack of) abilities. Lopez (2011) introduces the term transformational or *T-factor* for excellent teaching. Teachers with a *T-factor* achieve excellent results and achieve the set outcomes in a pleasant classroom atmosphere where students are satisfied because they feel appreciated.

Psychologists state that each person has certain abilities that allow optimal results if they are used functionally, in the right way. Human potential, therefore, is based on "strengths," and if they are timely recognized, they can be used to achieve goals. If the teacher successfully recognizes the driving force of a particular student, it will make it easier for the teacher to encourage him to apply and enable him to fulfill certain goals for mutual satisfaction.

Quality instruction implies a good preparation of the teacher who knows how to plan and organize teaching in the best way. Planned thinking prevents improvisation and lack of substance in teaching, because such an approach can cause negative consequences in the form of non-fulfillment of educational achievements envisaged by the curriculum. The planning of the

teaching process includes the basic determinants of the education process: the selection of teaching subjects in the order of teaching activities, the aims and outcomes of teaching, the choice of teaching methods and teaching tools, and the evaluation of educational achievements. In an effort to fulfill the set goals and education outcomes, the teacher must know *what* (s)he wants to teach, *how* and *when* to teach, and *how* to know if the learning objectives have been achieved (Pollard and Tann, 1993).

Apart from conversations and verbal communication, the teacher influences the pupils the most through his/her own example. Many studies have confirmed the importance of non-verbal signs – as much as 55% of the credibility of the message is transmitted by means of body language, and less than 10% using words (Mehrabian and Ferris, 1967). Just as parents are more credible in non-verbal communication with their children, teachers can play an important role in educating their students with their behavior. In this context, the teachers' attitude towards work and their working environment is important: only a satisfied teacher will do his/her job well, and his/her pleasure will be transferred to the pupils. A dissatisfied teacher will affect children to the same extent, but with different results.

The teacher must be aware of the importance of non-verbal communication. In everyday communication people conceal their true attitudes and thoughts without much difficulty. Pupils hear the teacher's words, but also follow his/her movements, i.e. "body language," therefore, non-verbal communication is sometimes more direct than verbal. The risk in communication can be caused by the mismatch between verbal and nonverbal communication. The teacher-pupil relationship has a significant impact of the intellectual and spiritual development of children because the teacher is a model figure for his/her pupils with regards to his/her actions, conscious and spontaneous, desired and unwanted, which is part of the hidden *curriculum*.

When we think about the quality of education, one of the fundamental goals of each teacher should be to monitor their pupils' maturation and progress. In the professional development of teachers, self-assessment is hoped to be a necessary instrument for permanent monitoring and improvement of the quality of teaching. For professionalism at work, teachers require more than merely formal university education or the gained explicit knowledge to achieve professionalism at work; they must be prepared to systematically analyze and change their work practice, which also reflects their maturity, seriousness, and taking responsibility for their own development (Neuweg, 2008). It is important to possess knowledge, but for teachers it

is the ability to pass on that knowledge that is crucial (Pranjić, 2013). A serious and wise teacher is aware of the fact that learning, research, and work on him/herself do not come to an end with the obtained Master's degree. Indeed, new experience expands the complex horizon of educational challenges that force the individual to re-examine his/her own potential. [14] Pre-service trainees should not be burdened with the level of expertise at the beginning of their working life in school – everybody has to go through the four-grade curriculum multiple times in order to efficiently fulfill the planned goals. [15]

In evaluating extracurricular professional work of teachers, the following activities are taken into consideration: mentoring pupils in state competitions and festivals, conducting professional conferences at school, publishing scientific and professional papers in relevant domestic and foreign journals, lecturing at county teacher assemblies, organizing events, ceremonies, and exhibitions, participation in school research projects, authoring or reviewing textbooks, participation in the work of expert bodies organized by the Ministry of Science and Education, etc. [16]

Encouraged by the observed problems in teachers' immediate work, Barbaroša-Šikić and Češi (2007) undertook a survey as part of the topic *Evaluating the work of the Professional Council of Croatian Language Teachers*, so as to explore the extent to which the process of self-evaluation contributes to the quality of teaching. [17] The aim of their research was to inspect the current situation and evaluate the teachers with regards to the competences they should possess in order to stimulate the development of existing and necessary new competences. Based on the data obtained, it is evident that teachers consider the social competence as the most important competence, while the respondents showed less confidence in the field of monitoring, assessment, and evaluation of students. The analysis of teachers' professional competences confirms the importance of raising awareness of teaching objectives, the criteria for tracking pupils' progress, and developing cognitive skills and communicative abilities of pupils. Authors of this research emphasize the need to systematically conduct teacher training to raise the awareness of the importance of expert and professional competences for quality educational work.

The Institute for Social Research in Zagreb systematically carries out projects related to the professional work of teachers in Croatia. It is certainly worth mentioning the two most important ones: *Professional development of teachers during initial education and pre-service*

training and Professional development of teachers during initial education - longitudinal approach. [18] The starting point of these projects was the idea that for the professional development of teachers it is important to connect the internal and external context in which initial education and pre-service training take place. If during the formal education the student does not reconsider their beliefs about the teaching profession, then teacher education studies will not lead to desirable outcomes. For the professional development of teachers, ~~a the~~the period of pre-service training under the guidance of mentors is very important. This project should look at the nature of professional roles and ways of acquiring teacher competences as a starting point for preparing recommendations in formal education and internship, as well as for the development of lifelong education for mentors. The main objective of the research *Professional development of teachers during initial education - longitudinal approach* was to monitor the changes in motivational and cognitive features of the students enrolled in faculty of teacher education during a five-year period of initial education, which determine their professional identity and perception of the future role of the teacher.

3. Researching students' attitudes towards challenges in teaching

External factors should not place a burden on a teacher's relationship with the students. Dissatisfaction with the social position, pessimism, and negative attitudes towards the situation in education and advanced ideas can be an impediment to the implementation of valuable innovations in Croatian education. Teachers' attitude towards their own educational system has a significant impact on the quality of teaching, the classroom atmosphere, and the relationship with the pupils.

It is not irrelevant to educational policy-makers what kind of population is educated at faculties of teacher education. Are young students ready to face the challenge of teaching in the digital age? Do they feel competent to take on the responsibilities in the job they will be performing and courageous enough to initiate changes in education? While searching for answers to these questions, the author of this paper conducted a research titled *Challenges of the Teacher Profession*.

3. 1. Research methodology

The research was conducted in February 2018 at the Faculty of Teacher Education, University of Rijeka. The respondents comprised first to fifth year students of Primary Teacher Education. The purpose of this research was to determine the students' attitudes about the position of teachers in Croatia, and to point out (warn about) the trends and challenges that teachers encounter in their national context.

3.1.1. *Research objectives*

- to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference in the choice of studies.
- to determine the distribution of results with respect to the students' positive or negative attitudes regarding the social status of teachers in Croatia.
- to determine the distribution of results with regards to the self-assessment of the respondents on the determination to engage in achieving a better material and social status of teachers.
- to examine the students' attitudes regarding the weaknesses and negative characteristics (sides) of teaching.

3. 1. 2. *Research hypotheses*

The researchers had certain expectations prior to conducting the research, and the following hypotheses were set:

H 1: There is no statistically significant difference between the respondents in the choice of enrollment at a faculty of teacher education.

H 2: Respondents do not have a positive attitude towards the social status of teachers in Croatia.

H 3: There is no statistically significant difference in the students' attitudes towards the determination to achieve better material and social status of teachers and their own engagement in it.

H 4: Respondents believe that it is primarily necessary to improve the teachers' material status.

Comment [ao3]: Synchronize research objectives with research hypotheses

3.1. 3. *Research methods and sample of respondents*

The research was conducted on a sample of 161 students of Primary Teacher Education – 33 first-year students, 32 second-year students, 38 third-year students, 32 fourth-year students, and 26 fifth-year students. Among these students, 152 were female and 9 male (5.5%).

For the purposes of research, data were collected by means of a questionnaire consisting of ten questions. The first two questions included specifying the gender and year of studies. In the third question the students could choose between two offered study programs. This was followed by a series of seven statements on a Likert-type scale in which respondents should provide an answer by circling those answers that best describe their point of view. The last question was an open-type question that required a short descriptive answer. The variables included in the research are: students' age and gender, and self-assessment of students' ability to perform activities within the profession. The respondents completed the questionnaire during class. The collected data was organized and entered into the SPSS database. A multivariate method of data processing was used according to Mejovšek (2008), so that the variables were simultaneously processed to obtain a complete and accurate insight into the research problem.

3.2. Results and discussion

The results were obtained by processing data in the SPSS system for statistical calculations. The first aim of the research was to identify possible statistical differences in the choice of studies and faculties. The hypothesis was: *There is no statistically significant difference between the respondents in the choice of enrollment at a faculty of teacher education.* However, the result was rather unexpected: 91 students opted for the answer a) *first choice*, while, on the other hand, as many as 70 students (43.5%) chose the answer b) *not the first choice*. Since there is a statistically significant difference in the respondents' responses, the hypothesis was rejected.

Enrollment in teacher studies was my:					
<i>first choice</i>			<i>not my first choice</i>		
Year of studies	F	M	Year of studies	F	M

first	19	1	first	12	1
second	13	1	second	17	1
third	26	0	third	12	0
fourth	14	2	fourth	14	2
fifth	14	1	fifth	11	0
total	86	5	total	66	4
SUM	91		SUM	70	
%	56.5		%	43.5	

Table 1: Choice of enrollment at the Faculty of Teacher Education

The second aim of the research was to determine the students' attitudes regarding the current status of teachers in the country. The hypothesis was: *Respondents do not have a positive attitude towards the social status of teachers in Croatia*. In this context, two options were offered to the respondents: *The status of teachers in Croatia is satisfactory* and *The teaching occupation is appreciated in contemporary Croatian society*. Most students provided a negative response to the first statement: 51 respondents *fully disagreed* and 91 respondents *mostly disagreed* with the offered option (88% of respondents). The outcome was similar for the second statement: 46 respondents *fully disagreed* with it and 85 respondents *mostly disagreed* with the offered statement (81% in total). The high percentage of negative responses confirmed the second research hypothesis.

The third aim was to ascertain the distribution of results with respect to the respondents' determination to participate in achieving better material and social status of teachers. The hypothesis was: *There is no statistically significant difference in the students' attitudes towards the determination to achieve better material and social status of teachers and their own engagement in it*. The respondents were offered the following statements: *I am ready to take on the responsibility for improving the social position of teachers* and *I am certain that through my dedication and determination I will achieve greater rights as well as better material and social status of teachers*. While a large number of respondents (77) *fully agreed* with the first offered statement (48%), only a half of that number of respondents (35) *fully agreed* with the second statement (22%), while as many as 45 respondents (28%) did not have an opinion about their

role in improving the social status of teachers. Therefore, the third hypothesis was partially rejected.

Students' attitudes regarding the weaknesses and negative characteristics of teaching were examined with the fourth aim of the research. The hypothesis was: *Respondents believe that it is primarily necessary to improve the teachers' material status.* The respondents could write their answer to the open-type question: *Write what would, in your opinion, have to change in the Croatian education regarding the teaching profession?* Based on the obtained feedback, the responses were grouped according to the frequency of occurrence:

- Teacher salary needs to be increased. (49 respondents)
- The awareness of the importance of teachers and their contribution to society should be raised. (29)
- It would be good to introduce enrollment exams, reduce enrollment quota, and select the best students. (17)
- It is necessary to establish a Chamber of Teachers. (10)

Other observations referred to the teachers' accelerated retirement, introduction of additional pedagogical training, salary bonuses and awards for quality individuals, implementation of additional teacher evaluation, media coverage of positive developments in schooling, better school equipment, etc. The initial hypothesis was partially confirmed, however, in addition to material difficulties, the respondents also highlighted the social component – the perception of the teaching profession in the public eye. They are highly critical of enrollment quotas and the selection of applicants at faculties of teacher education.

Research results encourage reflection. This primarily applies to the student population – the fact that the faculty of teacher education was not the first choice of studies to a large number of respondents is worrying. This brings into question the interest of future teachers to work at school as well as the education of new generations. Respondents generally share the same attitudes about the current status of teachers in the country and in that sense they have no illusions. They are aware of the current state of the teaching profession that is not appealing to the younger generation, the need to change public perceptions and improve the status of teachers in society.

When it comes to the respondents' determination to achieve a better material and social status of teachers and their own engagement in achieving results, most respondents are ready to

take on the responsibility for improving the social position of teachers (48%). There is a far greater percentage of undecided respondents: almost one third of the respondents do not have a firm attitude about their own role in initiating changes in education. This fact correlates with the percentage of students who have chosen teacher studies and points to a certain passivity of future teachers to possible reforms in the Croatian education system.

It is important to emphasize that no statistically significant deviations were identified in the students' attitudes with regards to age and gender.

With their answers to the last question the students have confirmed the seriousness of the survey approach and the maturity of thinking about the shortcomings of Croatian education. The students reiterated the anticipated reference to the material underpayment of the teaching staff by highlighting key problems such as: the need to change the negative trend of poor selection of students upon enrollment, the need to establish a Chamber of Teachers, and the need to influence the public opinion regarding the teaching profession. Thus, apart from the material component, the respondents demonstrated a developed social awareness of the inevitable implementation of essential education reforms.

Conclusion

The postmodern period brings with it numerous dangers, primarily the pressure of politics as well as the enormous expectations which society has from education. The reception of the teaching profession in Croatia, the experience of a society and the social status of a teacher cannot under any circumstances leave a person indifferent, but they cannot be a decisive factor in self-esteem, faith in the teaching profession, hope in change, and committed work in career development. The syntagm "teaching career" sounds over-emphasized because "career" is associated with power, wealth, and social influence, all that is currently lacking in the teaching profession, but material abundance and social status are not the only condition of human satisfaction and happiness.

A person working in education should keep track of the changes in the world and act accordingly so as not to feel socially excluded. Although the status of teachers in Croatia is not at an enviable level (which is demotivating to future preschool teachers), only motivated

individuals can be genuinely interested in lifelong learning. The need for professional training is at the top of teaching priorities in Croatia. Above it are the quality of the teaching process, material conditions, and school atmosphere. [19] With a professional approach to teaching, the teacher defends the dignity of his/her profession. Teachers should be enabled to act independently and competently as critical intellectuals in accordance with the professional standards and ethical rules of the educational profession, in the best interests of the pupils with whom they collaborate in the teaching process.

As part of the *Croatian Qualifications Framework*, it is necessary to produce documents for the professionalization of the teaching profession as well as the Code of Ethics for teachers. It is essential to develop a model and introduce a system of (re)licensing system to acquire and retain a permit to work in education. Therefore, firstly, it is necessary to define the competence standards required for the professionalization of teaching. Professional standards should improve the teaching profession, and it must regulate itself. Then the phrase “reflective practitioner” will come to life in full context, signifying the professionalization of teachers, the profession that promotes change, and appropriately influences them with the appropriate social status. [20]

References

1. The main constituents of a profession (Horvat, 1989) are: the existence of systematized knowledge and skills that can be transmitted through teaching, organized system of training and examination of candidates' knowledge, orientation towards providing public services, self-control of the profession based on a Code of Ethics, existence of a special language of profession, and specialized communication channels and titles as an important element of the profession.
2. Comparative studies of elementary school teachers' attitudes towards the status of teachers and the direction of Croatian education 2003/2004 (on a sample of 391 respondents) and 2010/2011 (N = 340) have offered interesting answers. In the school year 2003/2004, 44.3% of the respondents thought that the Croatian education was going in the right direction, while 31.2% of them saw this differently; as many as 24.5% of the respondents were indecisive. Seven years later, the trend of negative attitudes has intensified: as many as 51% of the respondents stated that Croatian education was going in the wrong direction, as opposed to only 9.7% of respondents who believed it was going in the right directions, while 38.8% of the respondents remained undecided, which was worrying. It can be concluded that the education policy has implemented certain measures which have significantly influenced the respondents' attitudes. It is interesting how teachers perceive their position in society. The percentage of positive attitudes of elementary school teachers in the school year 2010/2011 was quite high: 24.7% of the respondents opted for the answer *well* and 60.6% of them for *satisfactory*. A minority of 14.7% of respondents maintained that the status of teachers was *unfavorable*.
3. Teachers have a great pedagogical autonomy; in their teaching practice they can choose any method of teaching and teaching material in accordance with their students' abilities. Since Finnish schools do not have standardized student testing, teachers' role in evaluating pupils' skills is crucial (Ouakrim-Soivio, 2014).
4. The main goal of the project was to systematically define a group of teacher and preschool teacher competences so that their occupation and qualification standard could be entered into the Croatian Qualifications Framework register. The project envisages a standardization of occupations and qualifications of teachers and preschool teachers through a reconstruction of graduate level degree programs of integrated studies in Primary School Education. The most important elements required to enter into the teaching profession are as follows: competences,

profile, scope, and quality assurance whereby the determinants of the qualification framework of the European High Education Area have been respected. The application of this project should contribute to the quality of formal education of teachers and preschool teachers.

5. The results of the projects in the area of education titled *Development of Teacher Qualification Standards as a Basis for the Introduction of a Licensing System for Teachers* were used as the basic starting point for the development of a Standard for a wholesome qualification of Master of primary education (Grant scheme - IPA Component IV Operational Program for Human Resources Development, measure 3.1. - Further development and implementation of the Croatian Qualifications Framework).
6. Master of Primary Education is able to plan out the teaching process (daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly) and to elaborate within the framework of the school curriculum on other forms of teaching, thereby being aware of the didactic-methodical legitimacy of the learning and teaching process.
7. The professional development of teachers implies systematic learning and improvement with the aim of raising the quality of their own work according to ethical principles and professional rules. The basic premise of improving one's own practice is the ability to apply a systematic research approach. The teacher should have methodological knowledge in planning and carrying out empirical research, such as organization, data collection and analysis, defining the research problem in the teaching practice and selecting appropriate research method, interpreting the obtained results, and structured professional/scientific work. In addition, it would be desirable to suggest the promotion of practice based on research results.
8. During her latest book presentation, *Child – Researcher and Creator (Dijete - istraživač i stvaralac)*, in 2016, the prominent Croatian professor Anka Došen Dobud gave an inspiring speech about her experience of working with children. She emphasized that besides love, one should know how to carefully monitor the child, observing thereby his or her interests and needs. If in his or her work the preschool teacher does not succeed in shaping the child into a self-educator, he or she has not fully satisfied the educational goal. Education does not only consist of giving or receiving; education is the constant encouragement of the child and helping him to raise himself.
9. Which parameters are used to assess the financial attractiveness of an occupation or profession? According to research, the job is more prolific the more men do it. Among other things, preschool teaching jobs are financially unattractive. In Croatia, only 1% of men work in preschool institutions, while in Europe the average number of male employees in preschools is between 4 and 8% compared to women.
10. According to data obtained from the Central Bureau of Statistics for 2009, the proportion of women who graduated from higher education institutions in Croatia has increased significantly in the last fifty years: from 31.8% in 1960 to 58.1% in 2007. In the field of education, there is a great gender differentiation, so that among the *science of education* graduates in 2007, 80% of the total sample consists of women, and in the field of *preschool and school teachers* only 4.8% are men compared to as many as 95.2% of graduate women! Source: www.dzs.hr.
11. Interestingly, there are also gender differences in employment at the university level. In all countries except Finland, Latvia, and Russia, there are fewer women than men. The OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) average shows that 42% of the teaching staff in academic and scientific research programs are women.
12. In 2015, teachers in Ireland, Cyprus, and Austria had the highest salaries - around 60,000 euros a year, while teachers in Latvia and Bulgaria were paid the least - less than 5,000 euros a year. The

average annual salary of Croatian teachers in primary education in that same year was around 15,000 euros.

13. Data analysis was performed on a sample of 205 respondents in 7 elementary schools in Croatia.
14. Covey (2009) cites numerous issues within people's self-assessment of their work and influence on people around them. Self-assessment requires examinees honesty and openness to assess their own habits, virtues, and weaknesses in work. Some of the questions are: Can my mood be subject to my obligations? Am I aware of the personal paradigms and effects my behavior has on the results I achieve in my life? Do I seek new creative ways to solve problems in various situations and do I appreciate different attitudes of other people? How do I respond to constructive criticism of my work? etc.
15. The Rulebook cites the following elements of evaluating the success of teacher's work with the students: methodical creativity in teaching; application of contemporary forms and methods of teaching and using modern sources of knowledge; achieved results in the educational work with students; pupils' achievements and their abilities to independently learn and engage in continuing education; promoting human rights and caring for a healthy environment; cooperation with teachers, parents, and representatives of the school's social environment, who participate in improving the quality of life of young people.
16. Each activity carries a certain score value that is required for the appointment of a teacher-mentor and teacher-advisor. The Rulebook lays down the process of evaluation of teaching aids carried out by an appointed Advisor from the Education Agency through insight into the work of the staff and the required pedagogical documentation of the apprentices in the process of assessing the quality of their work at school. Teaching includes professional and conceptual knowledge and skills, such as planning and preparation for teaching, teaching performance, classroom atmosphere and discipline during the class, evaluation of student achievements and self-assessment of one's own work.
17. On a sample of 336 teachers of all age groups in the northwestern part of Croatia, the examination was conducted during five cycles of professional training in the period from January to June 2006.
18. Vlasta Vizek Vidović was the project coordinator. For more see:
<http://www.idi.hr/projekti/profesionalni-razvoj-ucitelja-tijekom-inicijalnog-obrazovanja-i-pripravnistva/>
19. These are the results of a one-year project *Contemporary Approach to Professional Training*, conducted by the Education Agency in 2009.
20. *Supporting teacher competence development, for better learning outcomes*, European Commission, 2013.

Bibliography

- Anderson, HH., Walberg, HJ. Classroom climate and group learning. *International Journal of Educational Sciences*. 1968;2;175-180.
- Andreoli, V. Lettera a un insegnante. Milano: BUR Biblioteca Univ. Rizzoli; 2007.
- Brajša, P. Umijeće vođenja. Pula: C.A.S.H.; 2010.
- Brown Ruzzi, B. Finland Education Report. National Center of Education and the Economy. New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce; 2005
- Covey, SR. *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. New York: Simon and Schuster; 2009.
- Češi, B., Barbaroša-Šikić, M, editors. *Komunikacija u nastavi hrvatskoga jezika*. Jastrebarsko: Naklada Slap; 2007.
- Glasser, W. *The Quality School Teacher*. New York: Harper Perennial; 1992.
- Flanders, N. A. *Analyzing teaching behavior*. Reading: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co.; 1970
- Haralambos, M, Holborn, M. *Sociologija: teme i perspektive*. Zagreb: Golden marketing; 2002.
- Hargreaves, A. Mixed emotions: teachers' perceptions of their interactions with students. *Teaching and Teacher Education*. 2000;16;811-826.
- Horvat, A. Profesionalizacija bibliotekarskog zanimanja. *Vjesnik bibliotekara Hrvatske*. 1989;32(1-4);103-113.

Krstović, J., Vujičić, L., Pejić Papak, P, editors. Standardi kvalifikacija i unapređivanje kvalitete studijskih programa odgajatelja i učitelja. Rijeka: Učiteljski fakultet Sveučilišta u Rijeci; 2016.

Mehrabian, A., Ferris, S. (1967). Inference of attitude from nonverbal behavior in two channels. *Journal of Consulting Psychology*. 1967;31;248-252.

Neuweg, GH. Šutnja znalca, Strukture i granice iskustvenog znanja. Zagreb: Erudita; 2008.

Ouakrim-Soivio, N. What the assesment of learning outcomes in history and social sciences are telling about textbooks, teaching materials and methods that are used during the lessons?. *Andragoški glasnik*. 2014;18(1);9-23.

Petrosky, A. To teach (Literature)?, in J. A. Langer (ed.). *Literature instruction: A focus on student response*. Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English.1992;163–205.

Smerić, T. Sparta usred Babilona: sociologijski aspekti vojne profesije. Zagreb: Hrvatska sveučilišna naklada; 2005.

Pollard, A, Tann, S. *Reflective teaching in the primary school*. London: The Open University; 1993.

Pranjić, M. *Nastavna metodika u riječi i slici*. Zagreb: Hrvatski studiji Sveučilišta u Zagrebu; 2013.

Vidić, T. Zadovoljstvo poslom učitelja u osnovnoj školi. *Napredak*. 2009;151(1);7-21.

Vizek Vidović, V. Užitek učenja, a ne samo ocjena. *Školske novine*. 2009;36;9-11.

Vizek Vidović, V. at all, editors. *Cjeloživotno obrazovanje učitelja i nastavnika: višestruke perspektive*. Zagreb: Institut za društvena istraživanja; 2015.