



Why people choose teaching: A scoping review of empirical studies, 2007–2016

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Research in this field is overwhelmingly framed in terms of motivation.
- Societal influences have received relatively little programmatic attention.
- Participants in most previous studies had already chosen teaching.
- Greater attention to social norms and structures is warranted.
- Studies of why people choose not to teach may also be instructive.

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ABSTRACT

Who enters teaching and why are questions of immense social and political importance throughout the world. This paper presents a scoping review of empirical studies, published between 2007 and 2016, that addressed influences on the choice of teaching as a career. Seventy articles were analysed descriptively and substantively. Our overview of the nature, extent, and range of research published in these articles highlights that most studies focus on motivations for teaching, with intrinsic and altruistic motivations most commonly identified. We argue that a broader range of theoretical perspectives could add fresh insights to the question of why people choose teaching.

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1. Introduction

The past decade has seen increasing international focus on the quality of teaching in schools (McKenzie, Santiago, Sliwka, & Hiroyuki, 2005; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development; [OECD], 2011), often manifest in concerns about who enters teaching (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Ewing & Manuel, 2005; Feng & Sass, 2016). Understanding factors that influence the choice of teaching as a career thus provides an important empirical basis for attracting teachers, developing teacher education policies and programs, and improving the overall quality of teaching (Flores & Niklasson, 2014; Lai, Chan, Ko, & So, 2005). Many researchers

have sought to understand what attracts individuals to the profession (Richardson & Watt, 2006; Thomson & Palermo, 2014) and important syntheses of research on this topic have been provided by Brookhart and Freeman (1992) and Heinz (2015). However, no previous publication, to our knowledge, has employed the methodology of a scoping review.

In this review, we provide a structured overview of empirical research that focuses on factors that influence people to consider or take up teaching as a career. We limit the review to empirical studies published during the past decade in order to establish a contemporary foundation for future research. Our aim in this paper is not to undertake a full systematic review (Andrews, 2005). Rather we seek to ascertain the extent and nature of research investigating influences on why people choose teaching as a career. Unlike a systematic review, a scoping review provides a “snapshot of a particular area” (Booth, Papaioannou, & Sutton, 2012, p. 19) and does not make any assessment of the quality of the research

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(Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). Instead, scoping reviews typically aim to: examine the extent, nature, and range of research activity on a particular topic or question; summarise and disseminate research findings; and, identify gaps in the existing research (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005).

2. Methods

Peer reviewed empirical articles that met the following inclusion criteria were identified for the review: (a) published in English; (b) during the decade from January 2007 to December 2016; and, (c) with a participant sample limited to school students, pre-service teachers, and/or student teachers prior to graduation from initial teacher education (ITE). We excluded articles involving current teachers, in order to keep the task manageable and because of the current policy emphasis on those who enter teaching.

Databases searched were *Educational Resources Information Centre (ERIC)*, *Science Direct*, and *Google Scholar*. Search terms were consistent across all databases and included: who chooses teaching; influences on teaching; reasons for teaching; teaching career; career choice teaching; motivations for teaching; pre-service teacher motivation; teaching career; FIT-Choice.¹ From the initial database search, a total of 1244 articles were identified, from which 340 duplicates were removed. Titles and abstracts for the remaining articles were assessed for relevance. At this point, 53 papers were found to meet the inclusion criteria and were retrieved and read in full to further assess their applicability. Most of the papers excluded during this stage did not include empirical research or were focused on practising teachers.

Upon completion of the database search, a reference list search was carried out on all relevant articles. We continued this process until saturation point was reached and no new articles were identified (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). The reference list search added 25 articles.

Finally, a manual search was conducted of all journals that contained three or more relevant articles. Journals included in the manual search were *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, and *Journal of Education for Teaching*. Three additional articles were added to the review as a result of this process. The final scoping review included 70 articles. An overview of this review process is provided in Fig. 1.

The 70 articles, including citation details, were downloaded and added to EndNote. Details of each article were entered into an Excel file including the author/s, journal, country/ies of origin, sample size, and methodology (see Appendix). The articles were uploaded to NVivo for reading and coding by both researchers to identify the nature of the research (also summarised in the Appendix).

3. Descriptive overview

Given space restrictions we cannot provide an in-depth review of all 70 articles. Instead, in line with the intent of a scoping review, we provide a brief descriptive overview of our sample, followed by a substantive analysis.

- *Country of origin.* Of the 70 articles, nine studies were conducted in the United States, eight in Australia, and eight in Turkey. A further six articles included cross-national research in two or more countries; six were conducted in Hong Kong and four in The Netherlands.
- *Year of publication.* Across the time period from 2007 to 2016, the greatest number of articles were published in 2014 ($n = 16$),

followed by 2012 ($n = 13$), and 2013 ($n = 8$). The increased volume of publications in the second half of the decade we investigated signals increased interest in this area of research in recent years.

- *Methodological approaches.* Quantitative methodologies were the most prominent approach to the research ($n = 45$) at more than three times the number of qualitative studies ($n = 13$) and mixed method studies ($n = 12$). Sample sizes varied considerably with quantitative samples ranging from 74 to more than 18,000 participants, qualitative samples ranging from six to 63 students, and mixed method studies from 25 to more than 4000 participants.
- *Journals.* The 70 articles were published in 41 journals. *Teaching and Teacher Education* contained the most articles ($n = 11$), followed by the *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education* ($n = 7$), and the *Journal of Education for Teaching* ($n = 6$).
- *Participants.* Most studies collected data from pre-service teachers ($n = 41$) or student teachers ($n = 21$). School students were included in only eight articles.
- *Research focus.* The vast majority of articles focused on motivations for teaching as a career ($n = 63$). A much smaller number of articles focused on societal influences on who is interested in teaching ($n = 7$).

4. Substantive overview

4.1. Motivations for teaching

In 63 of the 70 articles motivation was named as a primary explanatory focus. Typically, these studies have divided motivation into types, such as altruistic, intrinsic, and extrinsic. Other studies have explored motivation in terms of 'adaptive' and 'maladaptive' strategies (for example, Bruinsma & Jansen, 2010; Fokkens-Bruinsma & Canrinus, 2012a) or used motivational constructs to model factors influencing the choice of teaching (FIT-Choice) as a career (for example, Watt & Richardson, 2007).

4.1.1. Altruistic, intrinsic, and extrinsic motivation

In this review, more than half of the articles relating to motivation utilized traditional conceptualisations of altruistic, intrinsic, and/or extrinsic motivation ($n = 43$), providing clear evidence of the substantial role this scholarship has played in understanding influences on the choice of teaching as a career.

Some researchers have found that altruistic reasons for teaching are the single most important influence (Bakar, Mohamed, Suhid, & Hamzah, 2014; Massari, 2014; Reeves & Lowenhaupt, 2016; Thomson, 2013). 'Service to others' was a key reason pre-service teachers gave for their interest in teaching (Osguthorpe & Sanger, 2013; Yüce, Şahin, Koçer, & Kana, 2013). Other altruistic motivations included the desire to: help and support students (Chung & Huang, 2012; Jungert, Alm, & Thornberg, 2014; Pop & Turner, 2009; Struyven, Jacobs, & Dochy, 2013); make a difference (Afrianto, 2014; Gao & Trent, 2009; Gu & Lai, 2012; Struyven et al., 2013); contribute to society (Afrianto, 2014; Azman, 2012; Bullough & Hall-Kenyon, 2011; Chong & Low, 2009; Flores & Niklasson, 2014; Jungert et al., 2014; Mtika & Gates, 2011); and, answer a calling (Bullough & Hall-Kenyon, 2011; Chong & Low, 2009; Low, Lim, Ch'ng, & Goh, 2011; Osguthorpe & Sanger, 2013). More recent research from Israel found that a combination of altruism and narcissism was central in the motivation to teach (Friedman, 2016).

Intrinsic motivation was also found to be a primary influence on the choice of teaching (Klassen, Al-Dhafri, Hannok, & Betts, 2011; Sinclair, 2008). A passion for teaching and interest in the subject matter were often cited as key intrinsic reasons (Struyven et al.,

¹ Factors Influencing Teaching (FIT)-Choice scale (Watt & Richardson, 2007).

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