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Dropout of Young Teachers from the Education System: Motivations, Risk Factors and Possible Solutions

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Abstract: This article discusses social, pedagogical, and managerial aspects of young teachers’ integration into the education system with a research focus on the issue of “young teachers dropping out” of the school system in the first years of their careers. This article further analyses the motives and risk factors which influence the process of teachers’ integration into the school environment. Possible solutions are sought to mitigate the risk of teachers permanently leaving the educational system. The need for developing a comprehensive system to support the successful professional adaptation and development of novice teachers - from their academic preparation and teaching practice, to their active period of professional consolidation and career development - is outlined. This article is based on up-to-date data of the implications of the issue within the education system of Israel. A mixed methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative research approaches, is used for the purpose of this research. The quantitative data aim to provide a macro-level picture of the process of attrition in the teaching profession in terms of teacher and educational institution characteristics. The qualitative part of the research includes an analysis of a number of documents on the policy of the Ministry of Education of Israel on teachers leaving the profession.

Keywords: Teacher preparation and qualification; Teacher's career development; Adaptation of novice teachers, Teacher-mentor, Mentor.

Introduction

The preparation and qualification of today's teachers are on the agenda of educators, researchers, and management actors at various levels. Over the past two decades, the search for solutions to improve the quality of the overall process

of producing good teaching professionals has taken on new dimensions. Transformations in various spheres of human life require adequate solutions concerning the theoretical and practical preparation of future teachers. The need to create and maintain a well-functioning system to support the young teacher in the process of adapting to the educational system has been recognized. The aim is to recruit pedagogical specialists with high and sustainable motivation for professional-pedagogical work, with readiness for gradual and consistent actions to improve their skills and competences. The process of professional and personal adaptation of young teachers needs a targeted long-term strategy to create a supportive environment linked to the care of skillful accompaniment of the novice pedagogical professional. Mentoring, the role of the mentor in the complex path of a young teacher's adjustment to the educational system, should be approached with particular care. It is a matter of managing actions at different levels of the education system, which are aimed at providing the necessary conditions for successful adaptation and lasting integration and retention of young professionals in the school environment. Such important conditions are: a good school climate; an emotionally and mentally favourable environment; adequate evaluation of professional teaching work according to clear criteria and indicators; financial stability; career development opportunities; technical and technological provision of the school environment; care for the physical and mental health of the teacher.

A natural consequence of a teacher's failure to adapt is his or her dropping out of the educational system. In this paper, we aim to analyze the motives, risk factors, and possible solutions to tackle the phenomenon of teacher attrition. The analysis and conclusions are based on actual data from the last two years, coinciding with the dramatic events of the Covid-19 pandemic crisis in the real dimensions of the education system in Israel. The authenticity of the observations, the objectivity of the analysis, and the conclusions drawn are supported by the fact that one of the authors of this article is an active teacher in the Israeli education system, immersed in the real situation of teaching in Israeli schools at present.

Our research thesis is related to the firm conviction that the building, development, and consolidation of strong teaching staff in a modern school is possible if synergetic complementarity and enrichment are achieved between the stages of 1) the academic preparation and qualification of teachers; 2) the acquisition of skills and competencies in the real situation of teaching within the pedagogical practice of students - future teachers; 3) the professional accompaniment of trainee teachers by mentor teachers in the first years of their training

Each of the mentioned stages in the development of a pedagogical specialist has its value and, placed in adequate mutually reinforcing relationships with the other stages within an overall system, can lead to qualitative changes in the realization of the modern teacher.

Research Rationale

In November 2021, principals and teachers in Israel sounded the alarm: the educational system is collapsing and they fear a disaster. Students are running wild, teachers are abandoning the profession, educational psychologists are collapsing under the load, the Ministry of Education is failing to provide the necessary response, and parents are paying a heavy price. Teachers and principals from the center of the country are saying how the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has harmed the educational system: “The reality is violent and destructive; we need the support of the system.” [1]

The educational system is having difficulties in the post-coronavirus era. After two years of disconnection and leaving the frameworks, and with the beginning of the current school year, educators, psychologists, and parents from the center of the country claim that there is a serious educational crisis. Students find it difficult to return to routine and to readjust to the framework, they run wild, and educational staffs are powerless. Following the reports of the schools on the difficult phenomena of physical violence, online violence, vandalism, smoking, doing drugs and drinking alcohol, the Minister of Education convened an emergency discussion on the issue, with the participation of psychologists and educational counsellors and senior officials at the Ministry of Education and instructed that an action plan be created.

The status of teachers in Israel is one of the lowest in the economy. Teachers invest their souls in education but are treated disparagingly by students’ parents in particular and by the public in general.

Most teachers invest their soul in education but are treated disparagingly, even by the state, which does not provide fundamental physical conditions for teachers, such as a spacious teachers’ room, storage space for books and study aids, or a quiet corner for conversations with students. Is there another public sector in the country that finances the coffee for itself? Every self-respecting workplace has a coffee machine at the employees’ disposal. This is not the case with teachers in Israel; each teacher must pay a sum of money out of her pocket. Not to mention teachers receive ridiculously low salaries, which are not commensurate with the investment that all teachers invest not only in their work at school but also in many hours after work hours in conversations with parents, in the preparation of lesson plans, in teacher training courses, and school meetings.

Some of the students’ parents are dismissive of the educational system and see it first and foremost as a place to “store” the children, and not as a place of tremendous value in the education of the future generation. They expect teachers to do their work as parents, to set for their children the boundaries they do not succeed in setting and are not capable of setting, and they expect teachers will educate the children that they did not succeed in educating. Education begins

from home from an early age, and when a problem occurs with the child, they blame this failure on teachers and not on themselves.

Parents calling or sending messages to their children during lessons leave the child with a sense that everything is allowed, and thus they subvert the teacher's authority. When the child sees that his parents do not observe the rules of cleanliness in the public domain and do not obey the safety rules and traffic laws, then it is impossible to expect the child to behave differently at school.

Israel's dropout rate for novice teachers has leaped by around 60% in three years. The shortage of teachers in the Israeli educational system derives from the employment conditions for young teachers, as indicated by the salary report of the Ministry of Finance. Based on data from the Central Bureau of Statistics, the number of young teachers (with up to five years of experience) who have left the education system or gone on unpaid leave for more than a year has risen by 60% in three years, according to this report. Conversely, the percentage of experienced teachers who left was found to be on a downward trend compared with the years before the coronavirus pandemic.

Teachers dropping out of the educational system is a social phenomenon that has broadened in recent years in different countries in the Western world. [2] Many teachers, mainly at the start of their teaching careers, tend to permanently leave teaching, including a significant number of trained teachers. This phenomenon has a negative influence on the activity of the educational system [3];[4] and on the achievement of educational equality of opportunities. [5]

This phenomenon is compared to a “silent crisis” in the literature. [6] This severe crisis is not accorded an adequate public response. Ingersoll [7] calls the phenomenon of teacher departure a “revolving door”. In his opinion, the door in the field of education is perpetually revolving, since a constant proportion of teachers, close to a third, is all the time in the process of moving between schools or in the process of leaving the profession, for reasons other than retirement. He maintains that initiatives for the broadening of the recruitment of teachers will not solve the problems of the personnel in teaching if a policy to solve the problem of dropping out among teachers is not formed.

In Israel, the rates of dropping out are published partially and not methodically. These data address the temporary departure from the educational system and regular departure and are published in a few of the statistical annual books for Israel by the Central Bureau of Statistics. The existing data indicate high attrition rates in the Jewish sector relative to the Arab sector. The lack of accessible data on the topic of dropping out of teaching in the past decade limits the understanding of the social and educational implications of the phenomenon. For this reason, there is limited discussion of the implications of systemic processes that have occurred in the educational system since the year 2000, to facilitate the induction of new teachers and also to prevent dropping out of the

profession, such as the implementation of the induction program in teaching and the New Horizon Plan.

The present research study seeks to draw a picture of the phenomenon of dropping out among teachers in Israel in the first stages of education and to refer to the perspective of the teacher (individual level) and the perspective of the educational system (systemic level). Previous research studies focused mainly on the first aspect. On the level of the teacher, the research study seeks to learn about the motives for the departure from the profession (the teacher's socio-demographic, occupational, and motivational characteristics) and about the relationship to the characteristics of the educational institutions (schools and preschools). On the systemic level, the research study seeks to examine the educational policy regarding the examined issue, as it is reflected in the declared policy of the Ministry of Education (Director General's Circulars) and as it is carried out in actuality.

Theoretical Background

Dropping out of teaching is examined in the professional literature in the framework of the examination of the rates of turnover in the education system. Turnover addresses the annual rate of teachers who leave their position in the education system.[8] In this context, the accepted distinction among the researchers is between attrition and migration, when attrition is defined as leaving the teaching profession when not retiring ("leavers": Ingersoll [9]). Attrition may be permanent or temporary. Temporary attrition teachers choose to return to teaching after a period in which they do not engage in the profession. It is important to note that in the annual report of the attrition rates it is difficult to differentiate between permanent attrition and temporary attrition since temporary attrition becomes clear after a certain period when the teacher decides to return to teaching. Therefore, the attrition rates published by the authorities refer, in most cases, to the teacher's left of the teaching profession without distinguishing whether this departure is permanent or temporary. Migration addresses the transition between educational institutions in the same district or a different one ("movers": Ingersoll [10]). One way or another, the teacher continues to work in the field of teaching, but she does so in another educational institution. The present research study focuses on the first issue, dropping out of teaching – permanently.

Theoretically, it is possible to explain attrition from the teaching profession from an organizational perspective through models from the field of labor and management. Research studies from these fields indicate that the occupational environment influences the individual's integration into the organization, commitment to the position and the organization, and level of motivation to advance the organizational goals [11];[12]. It is further established to be associated with the individual's emotional experience and physical health

[13];[14]. In addition, the organizational environment also influences occupational turnover, or in other words, the decision to remain or to leave the position and the organization. [15]

Two models in this context enable the explanation of the phenomenon of attrition in teaching. The first model is the Job Demands-Resources Model [16], which engages largely in the influence of the work environment on the individual. The second model is the Rewards-Resources Model [17], which is derived from an economic perspective and the human capital theory. These models are described in the following in their implementation in the teaching field.

The first model, the Job Demands-Resources Model, assumes that the different occupational positions link together two dimensions: demands and resources. The occupational demands address the physical, psychological, social, and organizational aspects of the position, which obligate cognitive or emotional physiological effort. The occupational resources address physical, psychological, social, and organizational aspects of the position, which are related to the achievement of the organization's goals and the individual's occupational advancement, as well as the moderation of the position demands and occupational demands. According to this model, the demands and the resources build two different intertwined processes. The first is the energetic process, according to which many occupational demands, for the most part excessively, harm the employee's emotional and physiological resources. They lead to burnout that creates health problems among employees.

The second process is a motivational process, according to which occupational resources cultivate a high level of engagement in the position and in the organization, and this sparks commitment to the organization (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). The energetic process largely predicts the leaving of the position or the organization, and the motivational process predicts perseverance in the position or the organization.[18]

In addition, it is important to note that a lack of resources may lead to burnout, regardless of the level of occupational demands, and this leads to low commitment to the organization. This model was examined and confirmed in the field of teaching. [19] Many teachers who choose to teach encounter many difficulties early in their careers that cause a sense of burnout and often this leads to quitting the profession [20] [21].

The demands faced by the teacher at school are many. The teacher is expected to demonstrate mastery of pedagogical knowledge and skills, manage a class, lead students to good achievements, act according to the organization's norms, and even work along with the rest of the teachers. These demands make it difficult for teachers, and especially for new teachers who are already in their entrance into the position are expected to function like experienced teachers. [22]

Dealing with students is the most significant difficulty for teachers. This dealing requires them to make considerable effort that entails for the most part

feelings of frustration, stress, and exhaustion [23]. Furthermore, a load of tasks during and after the work day (Theobald, 1990) [24]; and dealing with a large number of lessons (Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson, 2005) hastens among many the decision to leave the teaching profession.

Alongside the many demands on teachers, teachers have more than a few resources that help them in their work and moderate the burnout process. The support and cooperation of the school staff and the school principal are the most significant resource for the teacher. These constitute emotional support and assistance in the position assignments. [25] Teachers who received the support of this type tended to remain in the system. Occupational autonomy and involvement in the decision-making processes also constitute resources for teachers. Research studies demonstrate that the democratic management style and involvement in educational decisions reduce the tendency to leave the profession. [26]

To summarize, empirical research studies among teachers indicate that successfully dealing with position demands and mainly with students, alongside the support of colleagues and principals, teamwork, and an organizational structure with a democratic nature, increases the commitment to the educational institution and the tendency to persevere in teaching.

The second model, through which it is possible to explain the influence of the work environment on occupational turnover, is the Resources-Rewards Model. [27] This model is derived from the human capital theory, and it is focused on the decision-making processes among workers. It assumes that the decision to remain in a certain position or to change it is based on rational economic considerations of cost-benefit calculations. In other words, a decision of this type is associated with the gap between the resources of the individual, the worker (such as human capital, abilities, and experience), and the rewards of the position (such as salary, advancement opportunities, challenge, and prestige), when workers aspire to realize their resources fully and to convert them into economic and social goods. They greatly expect that the position rewards be relative to the resources they bring to the organization. This model, therefore, addresses the individual as a rational actor, who makes independent decisions regarding his occupational career with cost-benefit calculations.

According to this model, workers who perceive the relationship between their resources and the occupational rewards to be fair will choose to remain in their present position. In contrast, workers who perceive this relationship as insufficient will choose, for the most part, to leave the position and gain another one, which will provide them with higher rewards. [28]

The main resources with which the individual comes to the job market are human capital and experience. Regarding human capital, empirical findings indicate a non-uniform trend regarding the influence of teachers' human capital on attrition from the profession. Research studies indicate a negative relationship

between the teachers' level of education and the chances of dropping out of the profession. [29]

Other research studies indicate a positive relationship between the level of education and the tendency to leave teaching [30]. However, teachers who attained high achievements during their academic studies [31] and teachers who have specialized in the fields of mathematics and the sciences [32] tend greatly to leave teaching. The main reason lies in the fact that in these fields the structure of opportunities in the job market is greater.

When it comes to experience in the field, research shows a U-shaped curve in everything related to leaving a teaching job, depending on experience in the profession. Research studies show that attrition characterizes young teachers (up to the age of thirty) with low experience and skilled teachers who are close to retirement age (around the age of fifty). [33] [34] [35] [36] The most significant occupational characteristic related to teaching attrition is the salary.

Data indicate that teachers' salary in developed countries is the lowest comparing to other professional area. [37] One of the significant reasons for teachers quitting [38] [39] [40] [41] [42] [43] [44] [45] contends that the influence of salary is stronger among young teachers, who tend to examine more rewarding occupational options, in comparison with the salary of their colleagues in other fields and among teachers nearing retirement, who seek to ensure their pension funds.

The two models described previously can be implemented in the teaching profession. Research studies indicate that teachers will choose to remain in teaching if this is attractive for them in all that pertains to the relationship between the occupational demands of the system and the clients (students and parents) and the human capital and experience and the resources allotted in the occupational environment and the social and economic reward. An occupational environment, which does not support the teachers' functioning and promotion and is not commensurate with their abilities, will increase the teachers' tendency to find an occupational alternative.

Research Objectives

1. To map the factors motivating teachers to leave the teaching profession and through them to characterize the teachers who are found at the risk of dropping out of the teaching profession.
2. To examine the policy of the educational system in all that pertains to the issue of teachers dropping out of the teaching profession and how it helps them deal with this phenomenon.

Research Questions

1. What are the factors motivating teachers to drop out of the teaching profession in the first stages of their professional career (the first five years), with

reference to their personal characteristics (personal story, socioeconomic and occupational background) and the characteristics of the educational institutions in which they work?

2. What is the declared policy in the educational system on the systemic level (the Ministry of Education), on the district level (supervision), on the municipal level (departments of education in the local authorities), and on the institutional level (schools), in all that pertains to the issue of teachers dropping out of the teaching profession and how does it help them cope with it?

Research Design

The two research objectives will be examined using a mixed methods approach, which combines quantitative and qualitative research approaches.

The first research objective. The quantitative data aim to provide a macro-level picture of the process of attrition from the teaching profession over time in terms of teacher and educational institution characteristics. These data are based on the data of the Central Bureau of Statistics (follow up after the career of teachers in different years) and the Ministry of Education (follow up after teachers in the “New Horizon” Program). In both cases, these are representative samples of the teaching workers in Israel.

The second research objective. The quantitative part is held using the distribution of questionnaires to the training teachers in the schools. These questionnaires include questions on their perception of the motives for dropping out of teaching, as well as aspects associated with their dealing with this issue. The qualitative part includes collection of documents about the declared policy of the Ministry of Education regarding the departure of teachers with relevant positions in the Ministry of Education, in the district supervision, in the Teachers’ Union, and the Education Administration in the local authorities and of school principals. Data of this type will provide an opportunity to study the stated policy of those with a role in the education system regarding teacher attrition and the actual handling of this problem, as well as the gap between stated and actual policy.

Conclusion

The prospective work program will focus on collecting data among teachers who have quit teaching, through questionnaires and interviews with those in charge at the Ministry of Education in the districts and local authorities, and on analyzing the results to draw an overall picture of the phenomenon in Israel and the risk factors and motivations for this phenomenon. The aim is to help address this phenomenon, which is leading to the collapse of the education system in Israel.

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