

MAGDALENA BARTOSZEWICZ

University of Białystok

ORCID – 0000-0003-1562-3625

## WORKING IN KINDERGARTEN THROUGH THE EYES OF PRESCHOOL EDUCATION TEACHERS – MOTIVES FOR CHOOSING THE PROFESSION, DAILY EXPERIENCES, NEEDS\*

**Introduction:** Work of teachers holds significant societal importance, particularly in the realm of early childhood education. Teachers play a crucial role in shaping the development and abilities of young children, supporting their social, emotional, and cognitive skills. Good teachers are not only an expert in their field but also responsible individuals who promote values and act as a guide in the learning process. Unfortunately, the teaching profession is often misrepresented, leading to devaluation of its prestige and improper perception of its role, negatively impacting the authority of teachers.

**Research Aim:** The objective of this study was to learn about motives for choosing this profession and to explore the daily experiences of preschool teachers in their work.

**Method:** The research was conducted using a qualitative approach, employing interviews with a group of six preschool teachers.

**Results:** The analysis of the research findings allowed for understanding the motives behind choosing the teaching profession, as well as the significant areas of daily work in preschool and the key challenges faced.

**Conclusions:** The research results suggest that teaching is a consciously chosen profession. On the other hand, the observed challenges in the work of preschool teachers lead to lower job satisfaction. Moreover, the teaching profession is increasingly socially underestimated.

**Keywords:** preschool education teacher, preschool education, job satisfaction, teacher authority

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## INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that the work of teachers is of great social importance, which is unfortunately often drowned out by the image of teachers created in the media. The work of pre-school education teachers plays a key role in shaping the development and education of the youngest children. Pre-school is an important environment where children acquire social, emotional and cognitive skills that will have an impact on their functioning in society. Working in the teaching profession “offers an incredible opportunity to work with someone who will change and simply grow up. Teachers don’t just work for here and now. The teaching effort also pays off for the future” (Sokołowska, 2007, p. 5). Therefore, working with children to support their development and nurture them must be entrusted to properly prepared and qualified individuals.

The teacher should remember that the highest value for him or her is the welfare of the child understood first as the primacy of the development of his or her personality in place of the primacy of his or her knowledge. When teaching and educating, i.e. bringing about intended changes in the personality of the pupils, with their work, he/she supports parents. Together with them, he/she is co-responsible for the health, integral personal development of their pupils, for preparing them for life in a globally and ethically diverse society. (Rusiecki, 2004, p. 9)

In addition, several characteristics of a good teacher are distinguished (Błądowska, 2010):

- being an expert as someone who develops skills and updates knowledge in their field, as well as guiding children’s learning,
- being a mature personality, empathetic, supportive, accepting, but also knowing their strengths and weaknesses,
- to be a responsible adult who is active and pursues the common goals of their educational institution, with highly developed social skills,
- to be a person who supports the creation of a system of values, who is aware of the importance of his/her work in the development and upbringing of the child, who supports the construction of the child’s view of the world,
- being a promoter of learning activities, creating a subjective atmosphere for learning,
- being a guide in the teaching and development process, supporting children’s learning, encouraging exploration.

It is worth adding that there is probably no pedagogical system in the world that neglects the role of the teacher in the educational process (Kaczmarczyk and Kątny, 2010).

There is a lot of discussion around the teaching profession. Under different types of articles, posts about working in this profession, one can read many nega-

tive, stereotypical comments about teachers. They are often written by people who have nothing to do with the teaching profession and base their comments on simplistic misconceptions. It is noticeable that often people who are not directly involved with the profession speak out on the issue of teachers' work, while teachers themselves are not heard. Sometimes teachers' work is perceived as relatively easy, consisting only of fulfilling predetermined duties (Michalak, 2010). Moreover, in the public's opinion, teachers are perceived as shunned, with constant claims to educational authorities, with few working hours, and in addition with breaks from work guaranteed by law. This portrayal of the teaching profession certainly does not contribute to creating a positive image of the profession, and unfortunately only fuels the spiral of hatred towards teachers. As a consequence, it may influence the weakening of the teacher's authority at work. It is emphasized that the devaluation of the profession and a critical attitude towards teachers' work is currently being observed (Królikowska and Topij-Stepińska, 2014).

## RESEARCH PROBLEM AND GOAL

The aim of the research was to find out the motives for choosing the career of a teacher and the daily experiences of female pre-school education teachers in their pre-school work. The following research problems were identified:

What were the motives for choosing the teaching profession by the female pre-school teachers?

How do pre-school education teachers perceive working in a pre-school?

How working with children is perceived by the female pre-school teachers?

How female pre-school teachers perceive collaboration with parents?

What challenges do the female pre-school teachers face in their daily work?

## METHOD AND SAMPLE

An interview was used to carry out the research, as this form allows for more detailed, developed answers and also gives the researcher an opportunity to ask additional questions, which would not be possible in case of a survey. During the interviews, female respondents were asked the following questions:

1. Why did you choose this profession?
2. Would you choose it again? Why "yes"? Why "not"?
3. How did you perceive the work of a teacher in the past versus now?
4. In your opinion, how is the job of a teacher perceived by the public?
5. How do you see yourself in your relationship with the children you work with?
6. How do you see yourself in your relationship with parents? What does cooperation look like?

7. Which of these aspects of the work (children, parents) is the most difficult? Why?
8. What challenges do you face in your work on a daily basis?
9. What do you consider to be your greatest professional success and what do you consider to be a failure?

Such questions were chosen because they give respondents the opportunity to make elaborate and comprehensive statements and to find out their perceptions of working in their profession.

Six female pre-school education teachers working in pre-school institutions in Białystok took part in the study. They were teachers with different levels of professional promotion and with different length of service – from 3 to 30 years in the profession. These were chosen in order to analyze the viewpoints of female teachers differing in years of professional experience.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

At the outset of the analysis of the research results, I will point out that seniority was not a differentiating factor in the respondents' statements, as their answers and perspectives on their work were very similar. The interview began with a question about the motives for choosing the teaching profession. In almost every case, becoming a teacher was the fulfilment of a childhood dream to work in this profession. The female teachers interviewed confirmed that in their childhood they enjoyed spending time "playing school", creating lesson diaries and inventing tasks for their younger siblings in the process. This is indicated by the following responses:

As a child, I really enjoyed playing school, creating lesson diaries and making up different tasks for the children.

I have always been drawn to teaching [...] My first games as a child were teaching others. I had a journal created by myself.

In addition to spending time playing teacher and a love of looking after younger siblings, the choice of teaching was also influenced by the profession of one respondent's mother, who was also a teacher.

Children have always been present in my life. As a young person I used to take care of my younger siblings, I enjoyed it a lot. I also enjoyed playing teacher. Besides, my mother is also a pre-school education teacher, so the teaching profession has pretty much always been with me.

One lady interviewed indicated that she started working as a teacher because she felt a calling to do so:

I think you have to have a calling to work as a teacher. I always knew that I wanted to work with children and that such a job would give me a lot of satisfaction. I was not wrong. [...] And this certainty is still in me today.

The above responses may indicate that the choice of the teaching profession was related to family circumstances, as well as the manifestation of traits and predispositions related to the teaching profession, and a sense of vocation for the profession. I am inclined to conclude that the presence of such elements is a strong basis for the teaching profession.

There was also one response indicating that the decision to study pedagogy and then to choose the teaching profession was made because one of the respondents did not know what she wanted to do in her life, and she found working with children enjoyable. Describing the work of a teacher as pleasant may reflect a rather stereotypical view of the profession, which is often typical of people who do not work in this profession.

I decided to study pre-school pedagogy because I didn't quite know what I wanted to do and I found that working with children could be interesting and enjoyable.

In the case of one female teacher interviewed, choosing this profession was a coincidence that turned out to be an alternative to her original plans.

One day I found myself in the nursery room by chance. I saw how colourful and pretty it was. I thought I could become a teacher. Although I dreamt of another profession, but the funds didn't allow it.

However, consideration of choosing the teaching profession again is no longer so obvious. As the respondents indicated that they like their job, they would choose this profession again. On the other hand, they would not, because it is a low-paid and not very prestigious job, and above all socially undervalued.

On the one hand, yes, I would choose this profession again because working with children brings me a lot of pleasure. [...] On the other hand, I would not choose this profession because of financial issues.

It's a really difficult question. I like this job. It was my dream... If it was a better paid job and more prestigious, then I would definitely choose it again.

In addition, there was also an indication that this is a job that carries a great deal of responsibility and a huge amount of work, and that the wages are not commensurate with this.

It is a really difficult, hard job. The earnings are not commensurate with the amount of responsibility and the number of duties that come with the job.

One of the teachers interviewed talked about her approach to work, which helps her to function on a daily basis and to treat her work as a passion.

If you like your job, you don't overwork a day and that's how I approach it. I don't think about going to work, I think about going to the kids.

The teachers emphasized that they have seen and felt changes in the perception of the teaching profession over the years. In talking about this, they referred to memories of their childhood years and the early days of their work.

I think when I was of pre-school, school age the teacher was more respected. I myself thought that the teacher was someone important, highly placed. Now, on the other hand, I get the impression that not every parent counts with the teacher's opinion.

I think the teacher used to be treated with more respect by the parents, he was an authority.

Authority can be associated in different ways. However, I think that in this case the female teachers wanted to emphasize the importance of their presence in the child's upbringing as experts in the field of pedagogy. Most pedagogues take a favourable stance towards authority as a factor that positively influences the upbringing and development of the child (Błędowska, 2010). Of course, we are referring to authority as a person with the right training and qualifications to do so, to guide the development and upbringing of children, to give guidance to parents, to be the person to whom parents can always turn with a question.

The teachers were asked how they see themselves in their relationship with their pupils. In their statements, they emphasized the importance of respect, trust, fairness. They also talked about accompaniment in development.

I think I have a very good relationship with my children. I always try to treat them the way I would want to be treated myself.

I want to be someone for the children to trust, to confide in, to joke with.

The subjective approach to their pupils definitely resonates in the statements of the female teachers.

I try to take children seriously, with respect and an individual approach. I also appreciate children for their smallest actions and I like to listen to what they have to say. I am their companion on the path of education and upbringing.

One might be inclined to conclude that the teachers' relationship-building with the children is guided by Janusz Korczak's thought – "There are no children – there are people", which is alluded to in the following statement by one of the teachers:

I treat children first and foremost as people. I don't infantilize or belittle their problems.

The importance of building a relationship between the teacher and the child is summed up by Kwiatkowska's (2010) words about how the teacher's bond with the child, and their understanding, is very likely to influence what occurs in the child's world of thoughts and feelings. It is clear that a child's acceptance, a warm relationship full of kindness and an emotional bond will have a positive effect on the development of the pupil (Błądowska, 2010; Jakubowicz-Bryx, 2014).

The teachers were asked to describe their cooperation with the parents of their pupils. They see this aspect as the most problematic part of their work. In their statements, the teachers emphasized that there are more and more parents who hide their children's problems, who do not inform the teachers about their child's diagnosis, which makes it difficult for the teachers to plan their work, to choose the right help for their child.

Parents hide their children's problems, they don't want to talk to us, they don't give us information about their children having been diagnosed and then you don't know how to help the child, how to work with them?

Cooperation with parents is also a source of stress for teachers. Particularly when parents present a demanding attitude.

I often get stressed when talking to parents, for example, when I have to pass on information about a child's bad behavior.

There are also claimant and demanding parents who cannot accept any comments about their child's behaviour, in their perception the teacher is always the bad guy. Such parents are difficult to work with.

Working with parents is very difficult, more difficult than working with children. I have the feeling that parents expect us teachers to do everything, that we are the ones who will teach everything, bring up everything, solve problems. Parents forget that these responsibilities belong to them as well.

The teachers interviewed also mentioned that they also encounter parents who are open, cooperative and involved in the life of the preschool group, but they focused most on parents who offer resistance to cooperation. The teachers' frequent highlighting of the difficulties they encounter in cooperating with parents may indicate the large scale of this problem. A good relationship between teachers and parents will foster the adoption of a common direction for the child's educational activities. After all, both parties should care about the welfare of the child. It is emphasized that cooperation based on mutual respect and trust between both parties strengthens the social bonds in the child's environment, which ultimately has a positive effect on optimizing the child's development (Bulera and Żuchelkowska, 2006; Karwowska-Struczyk, 2013; Jakubowicz-Bryx, 2013; Leżańska and Płóciennik, 2021).

Working in a kindergarten poses many different challenges, which were highlighted by the teachers interviewed. In their daily work, they have to deal with exposure to illness, as children often come to the kindergarten with colds. In addition, the teachers also indicated that they struggle with working in a noisy environment, which is very tiring. Keeping children interested in activities is also one of the challenges.

A difficult challenge in the day-to-day work of female teachers is the need to reconcile multiple responsibilities at once.

I actually do several jobs at once. As well as being a group teacher, I'm also a helper and a janitor all in one for one paycheck. I have to deal with pouring soups, drinks, helping a child to change when needed. There is no help in our house for this. I have to manage somehow.

However, the most difficult challenge in the work of female pre-school education teachers is working with children with special educational needs.

More and more difficult cases are happening that we don't quite know how to work with.

Difficult situations happen, many children need individual attention, the right conditions, which is difficult to provide with a group of 16 and one teacher. Let alone with more children.

The teachers were also asked about the successes they achieve in their daily work. In their statements, they pointed to seemingly simple things such as the children's joy in attending the kindergarten. The professional successes of the teachers are related to both educational and educational activities, which is really the essence of their work. The day-to-day successes contribute to the teachers' feelings of professional satisfaction.



The relationships I have been able to create within the group, between me and the children, but especially between the children themselves.

When I enter the room, the children are happy and ask if I will be there all day tomorrow. This is a huge sign of affection.

My success is that the children are happy to come to pre-school, they feel safe, they are smiling, they are happy, they trust me to take knowledge from the classes.

It's nice for me if someone comes up to me, says to me, because they get confused, "granny", "mum", which also means they trust me, they feel comfortable, safe.

In the older groups it is, for example, an improvement in learning to read or writing letters more neatly, while in the younger groups it is remembering to roll up your sleeves when washing your hands. Both are great successes – primarily for the child, but also for me.

Maybe it's the fact that, after a dozen years or so, my alumni and their parents recognize me and can say "good morning".

When asked about failures at work, most teachers could not give examples of such situations. Only one lady admitted that she once had a group that she could not handle.

I had a group that blew me and the other teacher's mind. We just couldn't cope mentally, but these were children with problems, not yet diagnosed, and the lack of cooperation from the parents was an additional complication.

The above statement shows that a teacher's job can be really challenging and can be exhausting to undertake and can lead to powerlessness.

The teachers' statements clearly echoed the needs they felt on a daily basis. The teachers pointed to material needs related to a larger room and facilities for teaching aids. They also emphasized the need for smaller group sizes, especially when there is not a teacher aide assigned to the group. Teachers drew attention to the excessive amount of paperwork they have to complete at the expense of spending time with the children. In addition, one teacher, when asked what needs she felt she had in her daily work, pointed first to the children's needs rather than her own, saying that through a flurry of extra activities, the children lacked time for free play.

Because of the multitude of extra-curricular activities, children don't have time to play freely. There's a push now, I don't know if it's the management or the parents, to have as many activities as possible, and that's not the point. Sometimes there's not even that moment to sit down with the children and talk about the day, and they need that too.

In their statements, female teachers indicated that they liked their work. However, changes would be needed in some aspects to create more comfortable, satisfactory working conditions. One teacher admitted that although she likes her job, she is thinking about early retirement.

I like my job, but I'm really tired now. I'm thinking more and more about taking early retirement.

A very perceived need of female teachers, is the need for social recognition. The social opinion circulating about teachers, in addition to unsatisfactory salaries, can be a demotivating factor and a disincentive to work.

Certainly our profession is very undervalued in terms of society and income [...]. It seems to me that given the nature of the work, the responsibility we have and how much work, effort, time we put into preparing, we are a very undervalued profession.

## CONCLUSIONS

Undoubtedly, the teaching profession is a particularly important profession because it carries the responsibility of nurturing, developing and educating the young ones. Although it was not an easy task to invite female teachers to participate in the research, it was definitely felt in the interviews that female teachers wanted to be heard. Interviewing the female teachers provided an insight into their perspectives and perception of their work. Teachers, regardless of their seniority, highlighted similar issues. I think there is no doubt that the situation of teachers and their working conditions should improve. Groups that are too large, lack of teacher support, working in noisy environment, exposure to illnesses, difficulties in communicating with parents, in addition to unsatisfactory pay and lack of social recognition can be psychologically debilitating and demotivating factors. Research in the field of pre-school education teachers' perceptions of their work makes it possible to highlight various aspects of the profession, such as the educational role, the planning and implementation of activities, the relationship with children, parents, as well as teachers' daily work needs. An insight into these issues can contribute to the planning of measures to improve the working conditions of pre-service teachers, which, in turn, can influence the quality of pre-service education.

## LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

I think it is worth exploring the topic further and continuing the research by inviting a larger group of female and male teachers, which would allow us to create a broader view of the work in the kindergarten, to get to know the feelings and needs of this professional group. In addition, it would also be worth considering conducting a similar survey of teachers working at higher educational levels in order to compare the situation of teachers at different levels and find out about their needs in terms of their daily work.

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## PRACA W PRZEDSZKOLU W POSTRZEGANIU NAUCZYCIELEK EDUKACJI PRZEDSZKOLNEJ – MOTYWY WYBORU ZAWODU, CODZIENNE DOŚWIADCZENIA, POTRZEBY

**Wprowadzenie:** Praca nauczycieli ma społeczne znaczenie, szczególnie w obszarze edukacji przedszkolnej. Nauczyciele odgrywają kluczową rolę w kształtowaniu rozwoju i umiejętności najmłodszych dzieci, wspierając ich społeczne, emocjonalne i poznawcze zdolności. Dobry nauczyciel to nie tylko ekspert w swojej dziedzinie, lecz także odpowiedzialna osobowość, która promuje wartości i pełni rolę przewodnika w procesie uczenia się. Niestety zawód nauczyciela często jest nieprawidłowo ukazywany, co prowadzi do zaniżania jego prestiżu i niewłaściwego postrzegania roli, wpływając negatywnie na autorytet nauczycieli.

**Cel badań:** Celem badania było poznanie motywów wyboru zawodu nauczyciela wychowania przedszkolnego oraz poznanie codziennych doświadczeń nauczycielek wychowania przedszkolnego w pracy w przedszkolu.

**Metoda badań:** Badania przeprowadzono w nurcie jakościowym, wykorzystując metodę wywiadu pogłębionego na grupie sześciu nauczycielek edukacji przedszkolnej.

**Wyniki:** Analiza wyników badań pozwoliła na poznanie motywów wyboru zawodu nauczyciela oraz istotnych obszarów codziennej pracy w przedszkolu, jak również kluczowych wyzwań.

**Wnioski:** Wyniki badań skłaniają ku stwierdzeniu, że praca w zawodzie nauczyciela jest pracą z wyboru. Z drugiej strony zaobserwowane wyzwania w pracy nauczycielek w przedszkolu prowadzą do odczuwania niższej satysfakcji z pracy. Przyczynia się do tego również fakt, że zawód nauczyciela jest coraz częściej niedoceniany społecznie.

**Słowa kluczowe:** nauczyciel wychowania przedszkolnego, edukacja przedszkolna, satysfakcja z pracy, autorytet