

## **Pre-service teachers' motives for choosing physical education (PE) as a career: What exactly do PE teachers do?**

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### **Abstract**

In Kenya teaching is regarded as a profession characterized by high professional preparation, turnover and attrition. It is also an academic discipline as the individuals involved are required to receive in academic subjects. The purpose of this study was to determine the motives for choosing teaching as a career among pre-service Physical Education (PE) teachers in two Kenyan universities. Data were collected through self-administered questionnaires from 85 teacher trainees. The data were analysed through t-test and one-way ANOVA to determine the effects of selected demographic factors (age, gender, year level and parental social economic status: SES) on motives for selecting PE. Findings showed that the teacher trainees chose PE due to various reasons such as fun and enjoyment (95.3%), PE is interesting (94.1%) and offers diverse opportunities (89.4%) and the motives with the least influence were encouragement to pursue PE by significant others such as friends, parents and secondary school teachers. The motives for choosing teaching PE did not differ significantly across on age, gender, year level and parental SES. It is concluded that the pre-service teachers are likely to continue teaching PE in the light of their strong convictions that they made a wise career choice. Educational planners and administrators should incorporate the trainee teachers' motives in future marketing and student recruitment campaigns.

**Keywords:** Motives, physical education, teaching, career.

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### **Introduction**

Teachers are a professional group as they give priority to service rather than monetary incentives and they feel accountable for all actions and outcomes of the teaching-learning experience. In teacher training, teacher trainees learn the official requirements (e.g. subject knowledge and technical competence) through formal means (e.g. lectures, assessments and school based teaching practice). However, they also learn what it means to be part of the profession by acquiring shaped perceptions, values, beliefs attitudes, behaviours and

practices (Gabbe, Bury & Elston, 2004) through informal actions like interacting with other teachers.

Realizing the importance of teacher training in shaping the character of future teachers, it is necessary to establish trainee teachers' viewpoints on salient motivating factors which account for their choice of the teaching career. Moran *et al.* (2001) had identified three categories of motives which influence student-teachers' preference of teaching as a career. These motives were categorized as intrinsic, extrinsic and altruistic factors. Intrinsic factors include job-related factors like the nature of the job (it provides an avenue for life-long learning), the perceived good job fit and the many opportunities that the job appears to offer. Internal rewards such as enjoyment and satisfaction, interest, intellectual development, belief in teaching as a mission and as tool to repair and improve society. Vallerand and Ratelle (2002) indicated that intrinsic motivation for an activity is displayed when the activity is undertaken out of interest, enjoyment or inherent satisfaction. On the other hand, extrinsic motivation relates to activities undertaken for reasons other than interest in the activity. Extrinsic motivation includes the benefits and perks offered such as good remuneration and having holidays with own children; attractive salary, stability and security. Lastly, altruistic factors go beyond any tangible benefits that the teaching profession has to offer. Examples of altruistic motivation include deep passion to teach, great love for children and desire to make a difference in the lives of children (Moran *et al.*, 2001; Vallerand & Ratelle, 2002).

Lawson (1983) has identified a number of socializing factors which shape Physical Education teachers' knowledge, beliefs, perceptions, attitudes, behaviours and practices about the purpose of its content and teaching approaches. These include childhood and adolescent experiences. Experiences in Physical Education and sport (both in and out of school), success in education and sport as well as interactions with Physical Education teachers, coaches and other practitioners in the physical activity and sport context with which the prospective teachers comes into contact are all influential (Green, 1998). Research has shown that many Physical Education teachers are motivated to enter the profession because of their experiences and success in sport as opposed to PE (Stidder & Hages, 2006). Research equally suggests that beliefs about PE developed prior to teaching, has relatively little impact on trainee teachers (Curtner-Smith, 2001). Research has also found that teacher training does not tend to challenge trainee teachers' values and beliefs about PE and in teacher training many trainee teachers confirm rather than modify their values and beliefs (Solmon & Ashy, 1995).

Childhood and adolescent experiences in sport and PE through which trainee teachers are initiated into teaching PE, learning on the job once qualified as teachers and social experiences outside work are all strong factors in the

socialization of PE teachers. Mounting evidence suggests that students enter undergraduate education with a surface approach to learning, motivated by the desire to meet minimum requirements with minimum effort and this is maintained throughout the teacher training programme (Vermunt,1996). As new entrants to PE having experienced limited exposure to the PE curriculum at school and mostly sports and games taught in a traditional way, teacher trainees are unclear and lack understanding in matters pertaining to their functions and responsibilities at school.

It is generally assumed that teacher trainees have already developed diverse conceptions about teaching PE before joining the Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE) career. Research studies have reported that teacher trainees are recruited into PE due to sport training and achievement, teaching affinity, better opportunities of getting a job and encouragement by significant others (Lawson, 1983; Dewer, 1989; Chung, 2006). Lawson (1983) asserts that occupational socialization of pre-service teachers starts with the phase of acculturation which illustrates the importance of biographical experiences such as gender and parental socio- economic status.

Spittle, Jackson and Casey (2009) identified five factors of becoming a PE teacher as confident interpersonal reasons, sport and physical activity, low perceived demand, role model and family. They indicated that students were most likely to become PE teachers because they enjoyed working in a school setting and wanted sports and physical activity to be part of the job. This is consistent with the findings of previous studies whereby people who desire to work in people focused occupation (Dewer & Lawson, 1985) enjoy working within a school setting, while people with a desire for a sport-related job typically endure the PE teaching component of the job for their preferred activity which is coaching sport (Hutchinson, 1993). Research on prospective teachers in the US and Britain shows that their motives for choosing a teaching career are both altruistic and intrinsic. Yong (1995) showed that extrinsic motives were the determinants for teacher trainees entering teaching in Japan. Similarly, Chan (1998) found that the major motives for enrolling in teacher education programmes were mainly extrinsic. Chan (2003) also found that the three major motive factors for in-service teachers to take up teaching as a career were extrinsic, intrinsic and influence from others. Goh and Atpulthasamy (2001) reported the top reasons motivating student teachers as altruistic in nature and included preferences such as love for working with children, the love for teaching, the opportunity to influence young lives for the better, the intellectual stimulation provided by the job and perception that teaching is a noble profession. Developing intrinsic motivation among pre-service teachers is important from the perspective of teacher recruitment particularly since teaching is a profession struggling to attract and maintain new graduates with an estimated attrition rate of 30% for early career teachers

(e.g. within 3 years of commencing work) (O'Brien & Goddard, 2006). From the foregoing it appears that little research has been conducted on the motives for choosing PE teaching as a career in Africa.

The professional standing of PE teachers has sometimes been a subject of discourse in some countries. Some people wonder what right some PE teachers have to call themselves teachers. Others feel that the vast majority of PE teachers in schools today are dedicated professionals particularly in terms of the important functions of PE teachers in schools. Some statements portray the PE teacher in a negative manner; some contend PE as a subject requires very little or no preparation. What is it that defines their jobs? Do PE teachers perform the functions of other subject teachers such as helping every learner to fulfil their potential? Or do they just throw the learners a ball and tell them to get on with it while they attend to their private business?

While it may be difficult to defend these viewpoints, we cannot lose sight of the fact that the PE teachers can claim to be responsible for developing the learners holistically – physical, psychological, physiological, moral and social developments – qualities which no one discipline can single-handedly achieve (Brooke, 2001). The development of motoric characteristic in the learner and on which other developments – academic, social, physiological, psychological and so on depend, can be attributed to PE and the PE teacher (Campbell, 2001).

Studying motivation for entering PE teaching career is important for the purposes of being able to predict retention rates in the profession and also matching the motives for entering the profession and measures to be taken by policy implementers to make PE teaching attractive. The findings of the study will provide the necessary feedback required to determine how interested teacher trainees really are in furthering themselves in teaching PE. The outcome of this study will lead to more purposeful TEPE programme that can be designed for pre-service P.E teachers. Thus, the primary purpose of this study was to identify the motives for choosing PE as a teaching career among pre-service teachers. A secondary purpose of the study was find out the extent to which the pre-service teachers' motives were influenced by factors such as of age, gender, year level and parental social economic status.

## **Methodology**

### *Research design and study sample*

A descriptive survey technique was used to collect data from 85 participants drawn from two universities in Kenya which teach PE and sports as an academic discipline, specifically Kenyatta University and University of Nairobi. The subjects' demographic data are summarised in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Demographic details of the subjects

Category		Responses	
		n	%
Gender	Male	48	56.5
	Female	37	43.5
Age	18-20	20	23.5
	21-23	57	67.1
	24-26	8	9.4
Year of study	1	38	44.7
	2	27	31.8
	3	10	11.8
	4	10	11.8
Sponsorship	Government	52	61.2
	Own	33	38.2
Teaching experience	Yes	20	23.5
	No	65	76.5

Results in Table 1 indicate that 48 (56.5%) male and females 37 (43.5%) students aged 18-20 years (23.5%), 21-23 years (67.1%) and 24-26 years (9.4%). The highest percentage of the respondents were in the first year of study (38; 44.7%) followed by the 2<sup>nd</sup> year (27; 31%), while a combination of 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> years were 10 (11.8%) each. Most of the respondents (61.2%) were government sponsored while 38.2% were self-sponsored. Twenty (23.5%) participants had some previous teaching experience while 65 (76.5%) had no teaching experience.

### *Research instrument*

A self-administered questionnaire was used for data collection. The questionnaire was constructed by the researchers after robust review of literature on motivation and PE teaching. The questionnaire had two sections. Section A sought the participants' bio-data of age, gender, year of study and family background factors such as parental education and occupation. Items in Section B were designed to elicit information on the motivating factors for the participants' choice of PE teaching as a career. The section had 17 motives which were weighted on a Likert type response scale: Strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D), strongly disagree (SD) and undecided (U). The questionnaire was validated by a team of PE specialists who were competent in research methodology and sport psychology. The draft questionnaire was modified based on the comments from the experts and their suggestions were incorporated before it was pilot-tested. Piloting was done with 20 sport science students which yielded a substantial reliability coefficient of 0.80 (split half method).

*Data analysis*

The collected data were processed using SPSS and reported as means, standard deviations and percentages. Independent t-test and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were utilized to test the differences and effects of demographic factors on the student-teachers' motives for choosing PE as a career.

**Results and Discussion**

Data on the family background including size and parental SES are presented in Table 2, which shows that the majority of the students' family sizes were 3-5 (41.2%) followed by 1-3 (22.4%) and 31(36.5%) came from families with over 6 people. A total of 39 (45.9%) participants' fathers had college education and 20 (23.5%) possessed university degrees. In contrast, 20 (23.5%) participants' mothers had secondary education while 43 (50.6%) attended colleges.

**Table 2:** Family background factors and parental SES

Family size	N			%
1-3	19			22.4
3-5	35			41.2
Over 6	31			36.5

  

<b>Parental education</b>					
Level of education	N	Father		Mother	
		%	n	%	n
No formal education	2	2.4	2	2.4	
Primary	8	9.4	14	16.5	
Secondary	11	12.9	20	23.5	
College	39	45.9	43	50.6	
University	20	23.5	6	7.1	

  

<b>Parental occupation</b>					
Occupation	N	Father		Mother	
		%	n	%	n
Professional	7	9.7	5	6.9	
Managerial	3	4.16	-		
Skilled	6	8.3	3	4.16	
Commercial/business	16	22.2	09	12.5	
Armed forces/police	3	4.16	-	00	
Health workers	3	4.16	6	8.3	
Teaching	20	27.7	19	26.38	
Farming, housewife and others	14	19.44	30	69.44	

Regarding the fathers' occupation, majority (20; 27.7%) were teachers followed by businessmen, while 14 (19.44%) were farmers or engaged in other jobs. At least 30 (69.44%) mothers were engaged in farming or were full time house wives followed by 19 (26.38%) who were teachers. It is noteworthy that a substantial number of the student-teachers' parents were also teachers. The participants' motives for choosing PE teaching career are outlined in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Motives for selecting physical education as a teaching subject

Motive	Response alternative					
	Disagree		Undecided		Agree	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
1. Teaching P.E is interesting	2	2.35	3	3.5	80	94.1
2. Lot of free time and long holidays	38	44.7	10	11.76	37	43.5
3. Encouraged by parents	56	65.88	7	8.2	22	25.88
4. P.E offers self-enhancement opportunity	2	2.35	8	9.4	75	88.2
5. Highly challenging career	19	22.3	6	7.0	60	70.5
6. Is a nice profession	2	2.35	9	10.5	74	87.0
7. Diverse study opportunities	1	1.17	8	9.4	76	89.4
8. Suitable salary	13	15.29	21	24.7	51	60
9. Committed people	3	3.5	14	16.5	68	80
10. Need to become a Physical Educator	9	10.5	9	10.5	67	78.8
11. Good discipline	17	20	9	10.5	59	69.4
12. Did not have a better choice	61	71.7	13	15.29	11	12.9
13. Successful in sports	26	30.5	6	7.0	53	62.35
14. Fun and enjoyment in P.E	2	2.35	2	2.35	81	95.3
15. Opportunities for travel	4	4.7	8	9.4	73	85.88
16. Encouraged by friends	44	51.7	14	16.5	27	31.76
17. Encouraged by secondary school teachers	65	76.5	11	12.9	09	10.5

Table 3 shows that the major motives for the students choosing PE teaching as providing fun and enjoyment (95.3%), PE is interesting (94.1%) and offers diverse study opportunities (89.4%), has self-enhancement opportunities (88.2%) and provides opportunities for travel (85.8%). The least important motives for the students were lack of encouragement by secondary school teachers (10.5%), did not have a better choice (12.9%), encouragement by parents (25.88%), encouragement by friends (31.76%) and free time and long holidays in PE (43.5%).

From Table 4 it is evident that the motives for the PE student-teachers did not differ significantly based on gender ( $t=0.462$ ,  $df=83$ ;  $p>0.033$ ) institution and sponsorship for university studies. However, t-test values yielded slightly significant differences regarding the motives of PE students between those who were pursuing PE as a major and minor subject.

**Table 4:** t-test on the comparative motives of PE students (by gender, institution type, subject type and sponsorship type)

Category		n	$\bar{x}$	Sd	t	df	p
Gender	Male	48	72.4	8.6	-0.91	83	.756
	Female	37	70.4	7.7			
Institution	KU	21	75.4	9.2	2.28	83	.455
	UON	38	70.2	7.8			
Combination	Major	74	71.5	8.7	.462	83	0.033*
	Minor	09	72.9	3.5			
Sponsorship	Government	52	70.1	7.8	-2.27	83	0.965
	Self	33	74.2	8.4			

\* Significant at 0.05

ANOVA summary on the other variables, i.e. age, year of study and parental SES is presented in Table 5.

**Table 5:** Summary of ANOVA

Category	Mean	SD	F	Df	p- value
Age	71.76	8.2	.98	84	.038*
Year of study	71.76	8.2	1.63	84	0.187
Fathers education	72.06	8.18	1.191	79	3.22
Mothers education	71.76	8.2	1.029	84	.398
Fathers occupation	71.90	8.5	1.253	68	0.262
Mothers occupation	71.25	8.22	0.776	75	0.639

\* Significant at 0.05.

Results in Table 5 indicate that there were significant differences in the motives of PE students based on age ( $F=0.98$ ,  $df=84$ ;  $p<0.05$ ) while year of study and parental SES did not return significant differences.

## Discussion

The findings show that given the gender balance attained in this study, i.e. comparable number of males and females who took part in the study, it is apparent that females also pursue PE as a teaching career. This is contrary to popular beliefs that PE and sport is a male-dominated discipline (Njororai, 1996). Therefore, it was of interest to this study to find out the underlying reasons for this trend. Of equal importance is the good number of students (38.2%) who were self-sponsored in the study. This can be attributed to the fact that there are numerous opportunities for teaching PE in the private sector upon graduation and these students may have assumed that PE might be an easy subject for them to pursue. This could also be explained in the light of the fact that many students pursue a degree programme in PE through continuing education. This trend is not far-fetched as 23.5% of the respondents had some

previous teaching experience. Indeed, Stidder and Hages (2006) observed that if students enjoyed PE and sport lessons at lower levels of education, they are likely to pursue related courses in the future.

The social economic status (SES) of the students' parents as measured by parental level of education and occupation showed that they came from diverse backgrounds. It was observed that 41.2% of the respondents had large families (3 to 5 persons). It could be possible that some of the family members may be involved in PE and allied disciplines. Findings of previous studies have shown that the family is a significant factor in the selection of the teaching profession (Smelinski, 1993).

The major motives, which spurred the subjects into PE teaching, included fun and enjoyment, interest, study opportunities, self-enhancement opportunities and travel. These findings are consistent with those of Belka, Lawson and Lipnickey (1991) who reported that among the highest attraction to PE teaching were having fun at work, helping others and continued physical activity – which have all been classified as intrinsic motives. These factors relate to interpersonal reasons such as opportunity to work with young people, the joy and satisfaction in witnessing a child's learning process and being able to make a difference to their students and to society at large (Synder, Doerr & Pastor, 1995). In Hutchinson's (1993) study the seven most significant factors/attractors to choosing PE teaching as a career were interpersonal, service continuation, time compatibility, material benefits, desires to become physically active and desire to coach sports. Similarly, student teachers are motivated by intrinsic rewards such as opportunity to express creative abilities, the enjoyment of challenges and responsibilities associated with PE and sports, the opportunity for continued learning and growth and the chance to fulfil a lifelong dream (Philips & Hatch, 1999). Pelletier, Seguin and Legault (2002) findings also revealed that students who choose PE teaching for interpersonal reasons were more likely to be intrinsically motivated and this may be related to best professional performance.

The least rated motives for choosing PE as a career among the subjects included lack of encouragement by parents, secondary school teachers and friends. This is a very interesting scenario as parents have been credited to be instrumental in the socialization process. However, Richardson and Watt (2005) found that the low rankings of the family and influence of significant others and using teaching as a fallback career, to be the lowest ranked reasons for choosing PE teaching as a profession. Furthermore, the lack of encouragement by significant others (parents, teachers and friends) to pursue PE could be attributed to the marginalised status attributed with the subject in the curriculum. This contradicts the findings of Ilaiyan, Zidan and Zidan (2000) which indicated that parents' recommendations and the influence of family and relatives were

the two dominant factors in the process of selecting teaching as a profession. However, the findings of this study contradict those of Goh and Atpulthasamy's (2001) which showed that lowest on the priority list were reasons such as there being no other choice and the perception that the job was easy.

Indeed, an interesting finding of this study was that the motives for choosing PE did not differ significantly between institutions, gender, sponsorship for university education, year of study and parental SES. These findings concur with those of Goh and Atpulthasamy (2001) in which no significant gender differences were found among student teachers across the different programmes while those with no teaching experience were significantly more motivated by altruistic reasons perhaps because of their previous job encounters. However, in this study the male student teachers placed more emphasis on extrinsic factors compared to their female peers. In a related study, it was found that the oldest group differed significantly from younger participants. The younger group was also mostly influenced to join the profession upon prodding by their teachers, families and close friends (Goh & Atpulthasamy, 2001).

Significant differences regarding the motives for choosing PE were apparent among minor and major students. The student teachers who were pursuing PE as a minor subject returned higher means on the motives for choosing PE. The lack of influence of parental SES on PE teaching motives contradicts Smelinski's (1993) observations that relations between family income and professional activities of its members where adults from low-income families exhibit lower professions and education ambitions even when they possess high skills were important. Templin, Woodford and Mulling (1982) reported that people who identify with teachers choose PE as profession to either emulate a good teacher or be the antithesis of a bad teacher with whom they identify. Those who have teachers in the family and who subsequently become teachers are said to have been at least partially facilitated into teaching through family continuity and people who become teachers because they could not meet the demands of their preferred career do so due to their blocked aspirations. Faigen, Meshiah and Walli (1991) observed in their study that about half of the parents of teacher trainees in Israel come from low SES and professional classes such as clerks and low-skilled workers.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The findings of the study indicated that the motives for choosing PE as a career were varied and according to the personal interests of the trainee teachers. The motives are not also influenced by gender, year of study, age and parental SES. The major motives for the choosing PE as a career are generally intrinsic in

nature. It is therefore, recommended that potential employers of PE graduates should take cognisance of these results and come up with promotional strategies to reinforce the student-teachers' motives for choosing PE as a career. The lack of influence of PE teachers' parents, secondary school teachers and friends on their career choice of PE teaching seems to support the widely held notion that PE is marginalised in Kenyan education system and society at large. The lack of influence of the selected demographic and institutional factors on the student-teachers' motives seems to suggest that they were a homogenous group determined to pursue PE as a chosen career due to the similar intrinsic motives. Consequently, university teacher educators should promote and reinforce such positive values among PE students. Future studies could use different measurement scales to assess the motives of trainees in choosing PE as a career. Establishing the motives of teaching PE among in-service teachers and the relationship between their motives and commitment to the teaching of the subject in Kenyan schools will be worthwhile.

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