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## MOTIVATION TO COMMENCE STUDIES IN SPECIAL EDUCATION IN THE OPINION OF STUDENTS OF THE PEDAGOGICAL UNIVERSITY OF CRACOW

### Abstract

According to the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education and Polish Central Statistical Office the number of students systematically decreases since 2015. This demographic change was a reason to examine students motivation for undertaking their studies in order to improve educational program and to encourage students to perse higher education. By approaching the subject of “Motivations for Undertaking Special Education Studies in The Opinion of Students at Pedagogical University of Cracow”, the answers were sought to the three following questions: What were the main reasons for choosing studies at Pedagogical University of Cracow? What motivators played a key role for students while selecting field of studies? What student’s personality traits did mainly influence their choice? Research material was collected basing on a self-designed questionnaire. The group of first-year 54 students year were tested, in which 39% didn’t know which specialization they would choose after a one year. The article’s conclusions present key factors motivating students for undertaking Special Education Studies and explain how personality traits influenced their choice.

**Key words:** motivations students, Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education, Pedagogical University of Cracow, Special Education

**Słowa kluczowe:** motywacje studentów, polskie Ministerstwo Nauki i Szkolnictwa Wyższego, Uniwersytet Pedagogiczny w Krakowie, kształcenie specjalne

### INTRODUCTION

In 2015, there functioned 434 higher education schools in Poland, 302 which were private. The total number of students was 1.469.386, including foreign ones (GUS, 2014, s. 29–30). According to the data from the Ministry of Science and Higher Education and the Central Statistical Office, the number of students has been systematically decreasing

since 2005. The prognoses indicate an expected further decrease of the total number of students in Poland (MNiSW, 2013, s. 8). Also the structure of a group of students is undergoing changes — the number of the overall percentage of students of public schools is growing, while the number and percentage of students from private schools is decreasing (GUS, 2015, s. 35). From year to year, the number of foreign students starting their education in Poland is growing. In 2014, there were over 46 thousand foreign students, while about 10 thousand in 2005 (GUS, 2015, s. 35). Foreign students come to Poland mainly from Ukraine, Belarus, Norway, Spain and Sweden (MNiSW, 2013, s. 28). Analysing years 2007 and 2011, we observed a change also in the structure of the share of particular majors. The following sub-groups noted a lower number of new students: pedagogical, humanistic, social, economical and administrative, legal, journalism and information, biological, IT, agricultural, forestry and fishing and services for people. On the other hand, a positive number of new students in the years 2007 and 2011 was noted in the following sub-groups: artistic, physical, mathematical and statistical, medical, social care, engineering and technical, manufacturing and processing, architecture and construction, veterinary, environment protection, transport services, and protection and security (MNiSW, 2013, s. 16).

Interest in learning motivations of candidates for higher education studies is increasing, especially in recent years. A decrease in the birth rate, a lack of students and a low number of them at particular majors make that knowing the main reasons of selecting a school, city and major is extremely important for fellows as well as the whole professional group. The interest in this subject results from the need to study the situation and to determine perspectives for a development of particular cities, schools and majors. The study can facilitate the planning of curricula as well as activities of promotional and marketing character. Thus, it is very interesting to analyse motivations of young people. These persons, when graduating from secondary schools, need to make a decision concerning their future lives. The most often dilemma concerns the choice — to continue the education or to start professional career. Making a decision on the city, school and major is for one a determination of his or her future existence. Selection of major is especially a basic aspect determining the future profession. According to some authors, people selecting the major, should first consider own interests and perspectives of future professional work (W. Jarecki, 2015, s. 136). In general, making this difficult decision is related with numerous problems. The decisive factors include those related with personality, capabilities, ambitions, a will to earn particular amount of money, values, a family situation and other conditions such as economical ones (W. Jarecki, 2008, s. 143).

In order to make such decision easier, candidates search for additional information concerning studies, most often using the Internet (about 50%), 1/3 use numerous sources, while 1/5 do not search for such information at all (A. Kucharski, M. Ligocka, 2012, s. 50). Thus, only 1/3 of young people reach for several reliable sources of information when making such difficult life decision. Others do not search for the information at all or use the most convenient form i.e. the Internet.

There are numerous factors having an influence on the final decision of a future student. Undoubtedly, the prestige can have a great importance at selection of the major,

school and city of studies. Some majors may have a greater or smaller social respect like medicine, law or economics. On the other hand, there are those of a less importance and respect such as pedagogy, library science (Z. Żmigrodzki, 1984, s. 343–344), tourism and recreation. In such situation, making a decision to study a less respected major is more difficult due to a fear of the environment criticism (Z. Żmigrodzki, 1984, s. 344). A stereotypical perception of some studies may result in a smaller number of candidates for such majors.

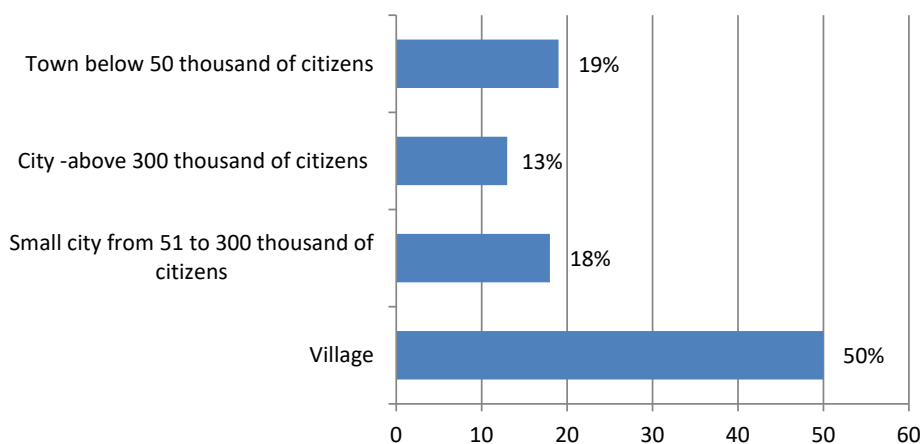
## ASSUMPTIONS AND ORGANISATION OF OWN RESEARCH

Observing the course of recruitment of candidates for special education, we have no other knowledge about a future student apart from his/her name and surname, and results of final exams. We do not know his/her personality and the motivation to become a special educator. The literature presents numerous competences and personality of a special educator which are essential. However, analysing resources of researchers, there are not many studies concerning the motivation of students to commence studies in special education. Thus, there were undertaken studies, the analysis of which should provide answers to questions: *What were the deciding factors? What were motivations of students when selecting the major? What personality traits of respondents had an influence on the selection of special education studies?*

The study was conducted during the inauguration of studies of the first year students of on-site special education studies, teaching specialty, in the academic year of 2016/2017. For the needs of the study, the authorship method of diagnostic survey was used. Respondents individually completed a questionnaire composed of six questions. 54 persons took part in the survey.

Chart 1

Place of residence of respondents before their start of studies

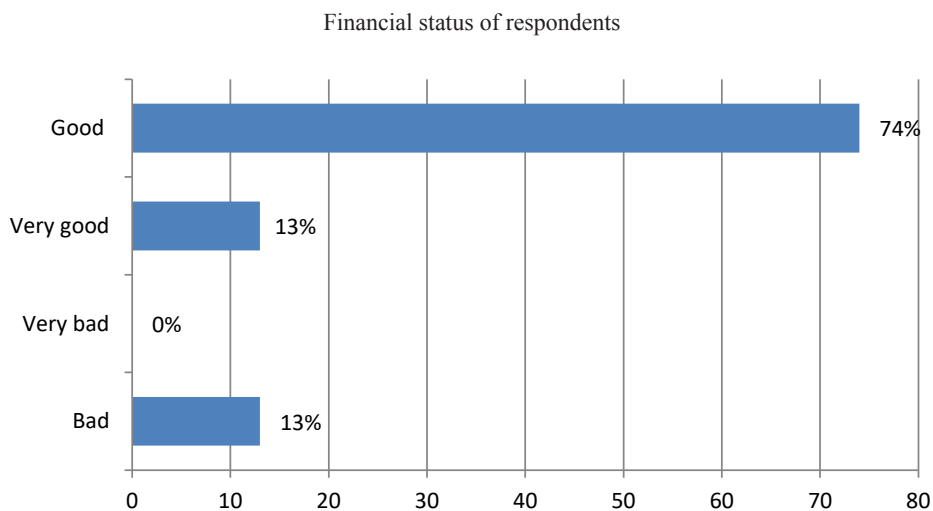


Source: own study.

The group of 54 respondents was composed of women, the most numerous group of which 50% were those living in villages until starting studies in special education. A comparable group was being raised in a town below 50 thousand of citizens (19%) and towns and cities with the number of citizens ranging from 51 to 300 thousand (18%). The least number of respondents came from large cities over 300 thousand of citizens (13%), what is depicted in Chart 1.

Chart 2 presents financial profiles of respondents, which are an important factor in the choice of the study mode (part-time or stationary studies) and city of studies.

Chart 2



Source: own study.

The highest number (74%) declared a good situation. Relatively smallest percentage of students declared poor financial situation (13%) as well as very good (13%). We should note that none of students chose a very bad situation.

### ANALYSIS OF OWN RESEARCH

The first question concerned the specialty students would like to choose after the first year of studying special education. They could mark one of three specialties (deaf education, oligophrenic pedagogy, education of the blind) or to mark answer “don’t know”. The percentage share of answers is depicted in the below table.

The most popular specialty was oligophrenic pedagogy (44%). It is worth to note that as much as 39% respondents stated that they did not know what specialty they would choose. The least selected specialty was education of the blind (2%).

Table 1

## Selection of specialty in special education by respondents

N <sup>o</sup>	Specialties	Research group	
		N – the number of responses given	%
1.	Oligophrenic Pedagogy	24	44
2.	Deaf Education	8	15
3.	Education of The Blind	1	2
4.	Don't know	21	39

Source: own study.

The next question was one of two complex ones, including 15 motivations. Respondents marked what was essential for them when selecting the school and city of studies. They selected one of three answers: important, slightly important, insignificant. Table 2 presents a set of 15 motivations along with their percentage.

Table 2

## Crucial motivations when selecting the school and city of studies by surveyed students

N <sup>o</sup>	Motivations	City						University					
		Important		Slightly Important		Insignificant		Important		Slightly Important		Insignificant	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1.	The distance from home	28	51	10	19	16	30	30	56	7	13	17	31
2.	Prestige of University	23	43	20	37	11	20	33	61	16	30	5	9
3.	Family Traditions	7	13	16	30	31	57	7	13	10	19	37	69
4.	Popularity of the City	12	22	24	44	18	33	9	17	17	31	28	52
5.	City's attractions	17	31	16	30	21	39	12	22	13	24	29	54
6.	Finding a job after graduation	46	85	4	7	4	7	38	70	3	6	13	24
7.	Job perspectives during the studies	34	63	11	20	9	17	29	54	9	17	16	30
8.	Having a relative in a particular city	28	52	13	24	13	24	20	37	11	20	23	43
9.	Scholarship	22	41	17	31	15	28	26	48	15	28	13	24
10.	The major	41	76	2	4	11	20	48	89	2	4	4	7
11.	Advertising campaigns	0	0	19	35	35	65	1	2	19	35	34	63

12.	Choices of other people	7	13	7	13	40	74	3	6	11	20	40	74
13.	Prestige of the City	14	26	26	48	14	26	16	30	15	28	23	43
14.	Popularity of Univeristy	17	31	24	44	13	24	16	30	19	35	19	35
15.	Subsistence expenses	37	69	6	11	11	20	29	54	8	15	17	31

Source: own study.

For the majority of respondents, a crucial motivation having an influence on the selection of the city of studies was a possibility of finding a job after graduation (85%), the major (76%) and subsistence expenses (69%). Nearly a half of respondents chose having a relative in a particular city (52%) and the distance from home (51%). The least important motivations were family traditions (13%) and choices of other people (13%). Advertising campaigns proved to be insignificant (0%) and 65% of respondents regarded them as not important. Similarly as in case of selecting a city, the most important motivation was the major (89%), followed by job perspectives after graduation (70%). Family traditions proved to be unimportant for 69% of respondents, while only 13% regard them as decisive when selecting a school. For nearly a half of students, the same as in case of the city selection, the distance from the home is an important factor when choosing a school.

Students were also asked to mark answers in the second complex question, including 17 crucial motivations when selecting the major. The 18th answer — “other” — allowed respondents to write their own motivation, not included by the survey author. Similarly as in the previous question, they marked one of three answers: important, slightly important, insignificant.

Table 3

Crucial motivations when selecting the major of surveyed students

N <sup>o</sup>	Motivations	The Major					
		Important		Slightly Important		Insignificant	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
1.	Intrests	50	93	4	7	0	0
2.	Prestige	7	13	35	65	12	22
3.	Family Traditions	6	11	21	39	27	50
4.	Popularity	5	9	29	54	20	37
5.	Redispositions	45	83	7	13	2	4
6.	Finding a job after graduation	45	83	9	17	0	0
7.	Scholarship	26	48	20	37	8	15
8.	Choices of other people	3	6	12	22	39	72
9.	Opinion of others	13	24	23	43	18	33
10.	Handicapped person in the family	15	28	9	17	30	56

11.	“I didn’t get into a dream major”	3	6	6	11	45	83
12.	Own disability	1	2	1	2	52	96
13.	Teacher	17	31	14	26	23	43
14.	Voluntary work	27	50	18	33	9	17
15.	Open days	5	9	13	24	36	67
16.	Careers consultant’s suggestions	7	13	13	24	34	63
17.	Media	7	13	16	30	31	57
18.	Other	0	0	0	0	0	0

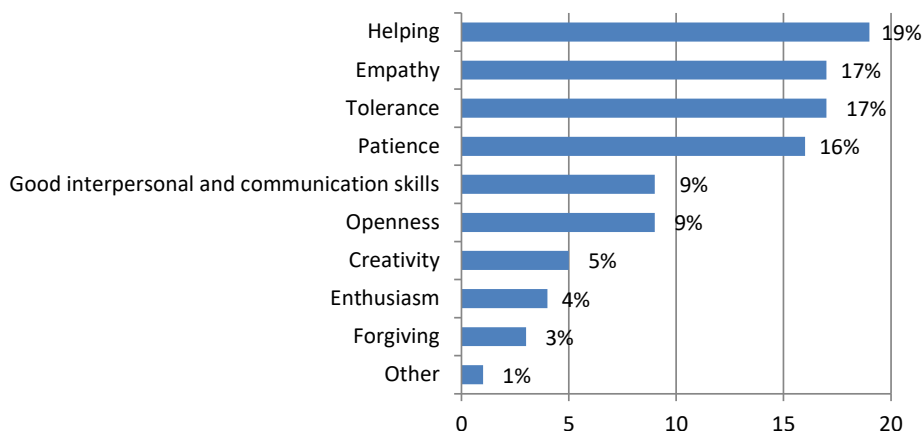
Source: own study.

The vast majority (93%) regarded interests as a crucial motivation when selecting the major. Other significant motivations included predispositions (83%) and possibilities of employment (83%). It should be noted that for a half of respondents, the voluntary work was an essential factor when deciding to study special education. 31% of respondents regarded a teacher as an important motivation to study special education and for 28% it was a handicapped person from their families. The least number of respondents selected own disability as the reason (2%). For 65% of students, the major prestige was less important. Similarly as in case of advertising campaigns, 67% of respondents regarded school open days as not crucial for the selection of the major. None of them stated that the employment possibilities and interests are not crucial at all (0%). What is more, no respondent wrote an own motivation in the field “other”.

Apart from pointing to significant motivations in selection of the city and major of studies, students were asked to determine personality traits which were decisive in their selection of special education studies. Chart 3. presents percentage results.

Chart 3

Personality traits decisive in selection of special education studies

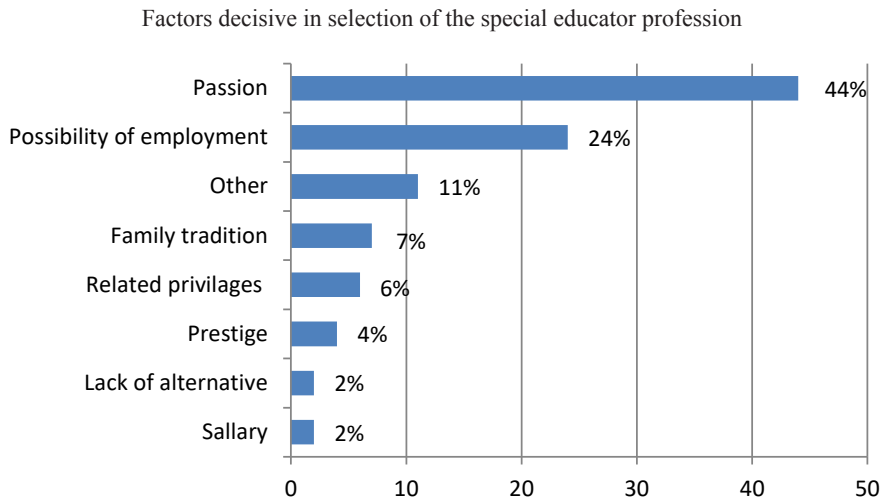


Source: own study.

Most often trait chosen by respondents was helping (19%). Similarly often they selected empathy (17%) and tolerance (17%). Enthusiasm (4%) and forgiving (3%) were rarely noted. Among answers marked “other”, 1% of analysed students pointed to such traits as “compassion” and “perseverance in striving towards the aim”.

The last question of the survey conducted among first year special education students concerned factors decisive in their selection of a special educator profession. The below chart presents a percentage share of the answers.

Chart 4



Source: own study.

The most often factor given by students (44%) was passion. 24% of them selected the possibility of employment. The answer marked “other” was chosen by 11%, most often providing the following arguments: “joy in helping children”, “already acquired experience in working with children”. The least selected reasons (2%) of selecting the special educator profession were a lack of alternative and salaries. Analysing the question more deeply, one can conclude that the vast majority is predisposed to be good teachers, provided that the passion will remain in the course of next years of studies and various experiences.

## DISCUSSION ON RESULTS

The aim of the conducted studies was to obtain answers to the following questions: *What factors were decisive in selecting the school and city of studies? What were motivations of students when selecting the major? What personality traits of respondents had an influence on the selection of special education studies?*

For the majority of respondents, a crucial motivation factor having an influence on the selection of the city of studies was a possibility of finding a job after graduation



(85%), the major (76%) and subsistence expenses (69%). Nearly a half of respondents chose having a relative in a particular city (52%) and the distance from home (52%). The least important motivations were family traditions (13%) and choices of other people (13%). Advertising campaigns proved to be insignificant (0%) and 65% of respondents regarded them as not important. Similarly as in case of selecting a city, the most important motivation was the major (89%), followed by job perspectives after graduation (70%). Family traditions proved to be unimportant for 69% of respondents, while only 13% regard them as decisive when selecting a school. For nearly a half of students, the same as in case of the city selection, the distance from the home is an important factor when choosing a school.

Interests were significant motivations when choosing the major (93%), as well as capabilities (83%) and possibilities of future employment (83%). It should be noted that for a half of respondents, the voluntary work was an essential factor when deciding to study special education. 31% of respondents regarded a teacher as an important motivation to study special education and for 28% it was a handicapped person from their families. Own disability proved to be insignificant (2%), similarly as the major prestige which was a small motivation for 65% of respondents. As in case of advertising campaigns, as much as 67% of students regarded open days as not important when selecting a school. None of them regarded the opportunities of future employment and interests as insignificant (0%), as well as other factors (0%). Personality traits declared at choosing the major are empathy (17%) and tolerance (17%). Enthusiasm (4%) and forgiving (3%) were rarely noted. Among answers marked "other", 1% of analysed students pointed to such traits as "compassion" and "perseverance in striving towards the aim".

Existing studies show that the most often motivation in selecting the major was interests. The respondents were mainly driven by a will to do something they like and regard as proper for themselves. They mentioned also predispositions and a love to study a particular major, as well as a wider orientation on e.g. the humanities. Another important factor was a profession of one of parents, opportunities of employment of just simply a failure to get into a dream major (Z. Żmigrodzki, 1984, s. 346–347).

The research conducted by the University of Warsaw and Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin in cooperation with the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Torun prove that the most significant motivations driving students in choosing studies include: interests (84,5%), talents and propensities (79%), personality development possibilities (77%), a will to work in an interesting and modern profession (52%), a will to help other people (49%), a possibility of conducting scientific studies (17%), and chances for earning good money after graduation (11,5%) (J. Pólturzycki, 2002, s. 20). As far as the selection of school is concerned, the most often reasons of selecting the University of Warsaw by the analysed students included those related with proximity of the home town (67%). Another significant factor was that the university is located in the capital city (60%), as well as the educational level (56%) and school traditions (39,5%) (J. Pólturzycki, 2002, s. 20).

The study determining motivations of Lower-Silesian students conducted in 2006 on a sample of 900 students proves that the most often motivations driving young people when selecting the major were, again, (similarly as in the above mentioned studies) in-

terests (66,6%), chances for finding a job (24,2%), major prestige (20,2%). About 17% of students randomly chose studies, while 10% was driven by a recruitment procedure and orientation done by a secondary school. More distant reasons included advisory of other people, fashion, choices of acquaintances or family traditions (www.wiedzaplus2.ae.wroc.pl, dostęp 12.09.2018). The study conducted by the Central Statistical Office in 2004 indicates that among persons aged below 30, the most popular reasons for choosing the major were interests (69,5%), increasing chances for a good job (60%) and the ease to become a student of a particular major (10,5%) (W. Jarecki, 2008, s. 148). On the other hand, in case of people aged over 30, the dominating factors were interests (79,1%) and increased chances for a good job (43,4%) (W. Jarecki, 2008, s. 149).

The presented survey results concerning a limited sample do not provide grounds to reflect the results in the light of a wider population. What is more, the questionnaire included only selected factors that can have an importance when selecting the city, school and major of studies. However, the analysis includes information concerning motivations of students, presents their personality traits and provides bases for further broadened research in this area. Considering the fact that motivations of students tend to be multi-factorial, and a selection of the city, school and major is extremely difficult and significant for the future life of an individual, it is desired to conduct qualitative research. This will allow us to deeply study the motivations of students.

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Summary

The aim of the conducted work was to obtain answers to the following questions: *What factors were decisive in selecting the school and city of studies? What were motivations of students when selecting the major? What personality traits of respondents had an influence on the selection of special education studies?*

The study was conducted during the inauguration of studies of the first year students of on-site special education studies, teaching specialty, in the academic year of 2016/2017. For the needs of the study, the authorship method of diagnostic survey was used. Respondents individually completed a questionnaire composed of six questions. 54 persons took part in the survey. The article's conclusions present key factors motivating students for undertaking Special Education Studies and explain how personality traits influenced their choice.