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Motivations for Choosing a Career and the Expectations of Serbian and Slovenian Preschool Teachers of Their Own Career Development

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Abstract: Studying motivations of teaching professionals for their profession is an important area of research. Knowing motivations is relevant to both school policy and teacher educators in order to tailor initial and further training accordingly, thus enabling individuals to be best equipped to meet the challenges of their careers. In the present article, we were interested in why Slovenian and Serbian preschool teachers choose their profession, how the preschool teachers with different motivations for their choice perceive their profession as a career, what factors they consider to have an impact on their career development, and what expectations they have in relation to it. The study was based on a survey approach and included 289 preschool teachers from Serbia and Slovenia. The results show that among preschool teachers in both countries intrinsic and altruistic motives prevail in their choice of the preschool teaching profession and that their importance increases as the importance of motives of a simplistic view of studies and work decreases. The results indicate that the predominant motivation for choosing preschool teaching as a career plays an important role in the preschool teachers' views of their profession, their identification of the career development factors, and their career expectations and plans. The implications of these findings for preservice and inservice preschool teacher education are discussed.

Keywords: career motivations, preschool teaching as a career, career development, expectations, Slovenia, Serbia.

Introduction

For the effective professional work of teachers, it is important to have both, subject matter knowledge and pedagogical and psychological competence (Marentič Požarnik, 1987; Peklaj et al., 2009; Shulman, 1987; Valenčič Zuljan et al., 2011), while research on effective schools and teacher professional development also highlight the importance of teachers' enthusiasm, commitment to their students' learning and the importance of their professional identity and commitment to the teaching profession (Day et al., 2007; Stronge, 2018). As Heinz (2015) notes in a review of studies, "quality education cannot be achieved without teachers who are motivated, enthusiastic, and truly committed to their students' education and to the teaching profession" (p. 259).

Older and more recent studies cite the importance of a teacher's personality for the quality of their work. When defining the qualities of effective teachers and distinguishing between more and less effective ones, Stronge (2018) specifically highlights the value of teachers' personal qualities and, in particular, the quality of the relationships they have with their students. Studies also point to conceptions, subjective theories and attitudes that preservice teachers bring with them upon entering their studies and that have a significant impact on the education process and the subsequent competence or quality of professional engagement of teaching staff (Šteh, 1999; Valenčič Zuljan, 2007). In this context, motivations for choosing teaching profession, or career choice factors, become an important area of pedagogical research.

According to some studies (Day et al., 2007; Flores and Day, 2006; Huberman, 1993), professional motivation and commitment exerted by teaching staff are linked to their professional identities, professional development, the quality of their teaching and their persistence in the profession. As pointed out by Lin et al., (2012), the knowledge of preservice teachers' motivations for entering teaching represents a knowledge base for developing teacher education policies and programs.

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Career choice is one of the more complex decisions a person has to make; it is influenced by the person's environment and personality. London (1983, as cited in London and Noe, 1997) developed a concept of career motivation and career choice with three strands which, in conjunction with situational conditions, influence the career decisions and behavior of an individual. The concept provides insight into the factors, their relationships and interrelationships that influence a career choice. Career motivation is understood as a multidimensional concept organised into three domains: *career resilience* (resilience and flexibility), career insight and career identification. *Career resilience* is the ability of an individual to adapt to changing circumstances, even when the circumstances are negative and discouraging. The variables, such as self-confidence, need for achievements, willingness to take risks, etc., develop with age and under the influence of the environment. They are developing in childhood and may be further strengthened or diminished later on. *Career insight* is the ability to take a realistic view of oneself and one's profession. This includes variables such as the formulation of clear career goals, knowledge of the shortcomings and weaknesses of the profession, etc. Career identity is the identification of individuals with their professional work. It means organisational and professional involvement and the need of promotion, recognition and leadership. Career identity is the direction of motivation, career insight is the energizing or arousal component, and career resilience is the maintenance or persistence component (Noe, Noe, and Bachhuber, 1990). Career insight and identification develop through information processes. We believe that information days organised by teacher-training institutions, and other forms of pretraining presentations of the profession can have an important influence on these factors. Career resilience, career insight and career identity combine to form a pattern that characterises a person's career motivation. According to London (1983, as cited in London and Noe, 1997), the concept allows to design interventions intended to increase career success and effectiveness.

Overview of research on motivations for choosing teaching as a career

Research on young people's motivation to enter teaching has been going on for more than 100 years. In one of the first studies of its kind, Lowery (1920, as cited in Daniel and Ferrel, 1991) lists the five most important reasons for choosing teaching as a career: a) an opportunity to do socially useful work, b) the joy of work, c) a long-standing desire to become a teacher, d) a general affection for children, and e) the joy of teaching also through other types of work. One of the first meta-analyses to analyse 19 studies (from 1925 to 1987) was carried out by Daniel and Ferrell (1991). They note that most of the studies done were empirical, retrospective, carried out on representative or ad hoc samples, using an interview or a questionnaire that included a list of reasons for the career choice. On the basis of their analysis, they identified the 10 most common reasons for choosing the teaching profession: a) a desire to work with children or young people, b) an adequate pay and assertiveness at work, c) favorable working conditions, d) an interest in a particular subject, e) an opportunity for lifelong learning, f) a possibility of teaching and being employed in other professions, g) work for the benefit of humanity or society, h) an influence of relatives or teacher, i) an interest in the field of education, and j) creativity and stimulation.

A more recent meta-analysis was carried out by Heinz (2015). The author asked the following question: Why do individuals all over the world choose to become school teachers? The paper provides a systematic and conceptual review of empirical research studies exploring student teachers' career motivations and commitment in 23 countries from 5 continents. The author has established that most studies investigating student teachers' reasons for entering teacher education summarise a variety of different factors under three main sources of motivations influencing their respondents' decision: intrinsic, altruistic, and extrinsic reasons. Intrinsic motivations include factors such as enjoyment of teaching, job satisfaction, creativity, and an interest in teaching subject(s). Those factors, which address the characteristics of the teaching job itself, have been identified as most influential on students' choices of teaching as a career in numerous studies. Extrinsic motives involve aspects not inherent in the immediate work, such as salary, status, and working conditions. Altruistic motives entail perceptions of teaching as a valuable and important profession and the desires to support children's development and to make a difference in society.

Intrinsic and altruistic reasons seem to be more frequent in numerous studies originating in the US, Australia, Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, Norway, Canada, the Caribbean, Slovenia, China, the UK, Malaysia, and Hong Kong (termed "developed countries") than in developing countries, where extrinsic reasons are more prominent (Ažman 2013; Watt and Richardson, 2012). Watt and Richardson (2012) also cite sociocultural contexts as an important factor influencing both motivation for a career choice and persistence in a career. Gao and Trent (2009) found a strong representation of extrinsic motives for career choice among Chinese teachers, who mainly showed interest in the teaching profession because of extrinsic rewards (e.g., the skills they acquire when preparing for teaching profession enable them to

move into other professions). Findings by Watt and Richardson (2012) are similar.

Research on the motives of student teachers and teaching staff for choosing the profession in Slovenia (Cencič and Čagran, 2002; Gradišek et al., 2020; Ivanuš-Grmek and Krečič, 2005; Polak and Devjak, 2014; Tašner, Žveglič Mihelič and Mencin-Čeplak, 2017) and Serbia (Marušić, 2013) shows a strong presence of intrinsic and altruistic motives.

Using a sample of 237 students in their second study year at the Faculty of Education of the University in Maribor, Ivanuš Grmek and Javornik Krečič (2005) have identified five reasons for choosing the teaching profession: a) self-actualising reasons (desire for personal and professional growth, useful, influential action), b) altruistic reasons (intrinsic motivation, talent, personal interest), c) material reasons (extrinsic motivation related to studies, promotions, socio-economic aspect, further education), d) aspirational and stereotypical reasons (influence of own and others' aspirations and stereotypes about work), and e) alternative reasons (choice of studies because failing to meet requirements for the desired studies), with the first two having a strong representation.

Results of a research among Primary Education and Two-Subject teacher students at the Faculty of Education, University in Ljubljana (Tašner, Žveglič Mihelič and Mencin-Čeplak, 2017), similarly identify four deciding factors in choosing a teaching profession as a career: a) advantages (i.e., lengthy holidays, convenient working days, relatively good promotion opportunities), b) caring tendency (contribution to a better life in society, desire to help others, learning and passing knowledge to others, as well as liking to work with children), c) gender advantage (profession that is recognised as typical for women, being privileged due to their gender, and wanting to become a principal one day), and d) job security (teaching provides a secure job, a job for an indefinite period, and provides good employment opportunities).

Polak and Devjak (2014) reported on the results of a survey among 71 Preschool Education students in Slovenia, who were mostly driven by internal motives when choosing a study programme: "working with children, personal fulfillment, opportunities for personal and professional development and creativity" (p. 308).

In a more recent study among 176 Slovenian and 171 Croatian primary school teachers, Gradišek et al. (2020) found that the respondents perceived teaching to the greatest extent as a calling, suggesting that socially useful work and investment in their professional identity is of the greatest importance to them.

Marušić (2013) carried out a comparative analysis of the teacher education system in Serbia and Greece to identify motives for choosing the teaching profession. The study showed that personal reasons for choosing a course of study were overwhelmingly the most common reasons for teachers' career choice in both countries (the highest mean values obtained love of young learners, personal interests and skills). Another important finding regarding the choice of studies relates to the claim that teachers in Serbia attach slightly more importance to family values and other influences, such as teachers or the media, than teachers in Greece. On the other hand, the influence of circumstances on the choice—inability to enroll in a faculty or to finance studies—is slightly more pronounced in Greece. A possible explanation is that young people in Serbia are more susceptible to environmental influences when making career decisions, whereas young people in Greece are more independent in making this decision and are not influenced by any factor when it comes to choosing their career. The author also raises the possibility that teachers in Serbia, in contrast to their colleagues in Greece, are more aware of the influence of the family, the environment and the media, which influence them in a direct way. Moreover, it should be taken into account that career choices in the two countries are influenced by differences in enrolment procedures. The difficult enrolling in a Greek faculty may be a reason for the greater expression of the influence of context on the choice of studies in the country. The study therefore shows that personal determinants continue to dominate the reasons for choosing a profession, with teachers in both countries most likely to choose the profession because they like working with young learners, i.e. because they feel the work suits their personality, abilities and interests. However, at another important turning point in their professional career, when they enter the teaching profession, there are other important factors of choice, i.e. objective circumstances (job opportunities, job security, etc.). The influence of external and internal determinants of the career choice is found to converge (i.e., even out); an adult chooses a job and compromises with his/her interests, with the current stage of the life cycle—which mainly involves family commitments—being an important factor. Job opportunities and job security are important factors in a person's choice (ibid).

The motives for choosing the studies and the motives for choosing to take up a particular job are interrelated and have an important influence on the persistence of the individual in the occupation. Sinclair (2008) notes that altruistic and intrinsic reasons are supposed to be beneficial for teacher retention. On the other hand, Bergmark et al., (2018) validly argue that students entering teacher training based on altruistic and intrinsic motives, may leave the occupation when they encounter a reality that does not match their perceptions of the profession (either in terms of the demanding profession or collegial support,

etc.). All this can lead to teacher dissatisfaction, burnout and, ultimately, to leaving the profession. It is therefore important to know and encourage students to know their own career motives on the one hand and the demands of the profession on the other. Information days, where the teaching profession is introduced to potential future students, can already make an important contribution to this. A special role is played by a well-organised teaching practice, in which students learn more about the professional role of a teacher, become increasingly active and independent in this role, and develop the competences that enable them to enter the profession with confidence (Valenčič Zuljan et al., 2011). In addition to learning about the fundamental mission of the preschool teacher, the teaching practice also provides the student with an insight into different kindergartens and the ways in which teaching staff work together and are managed, this being an important element of learning about the possibilities for professional learning and development within the profession and different communities.

Subject of the research

As pointed out by Cencič and Čagran (2002), "it is really those individuals who have made a conscious and deliberate decision to work with children at their most challenging and sensitive stage of development" who should choose to become preschool teachers (p. 107). However, a balance between intrinsic, altruistic and extrinsic motives is suggested in order to encourage teacher retention (Struyven et al., 2013) and their professional development. The majority of the previous research focused on teachers or student teachers. Preschool teaching, however, also represents a teaching profession. Moreover, preschool teachers represent the first subjects of professional, institutionalised education and care of a child outside their primary family, thus playing a crucial role in early childhood education and development in its broadest sense. In the present research, we wanted to research the motives, career perceptions and expectations among preschool teachers in two European countries: Slovenia and Serbia.

The study sought to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. Why do preschool teachers choose their profession?

RQ2. How do preschool teachers perceive the teaching profession as a career?

RQ3. How do preschool teachers assess the importance of different factors influencing career development?

RQ4. What expectations do preschool teachers have in relation to the development of their professional careers?

We were interested in whether there are differences between Slovenian and Serbian preschool teachers with regard to the questions above, and whether there are differences between preschool teachers with different motives for choosing a career with regard to questions 2–4.

Materials and Methods

The research reported was designed as a study, with data collection based on a survey approach using a questionnaire.

Sample

A summary of the most important characteristics is presented in Table 1 for both countries and shows that the samples are similar according to gender and age but quite different according to professional degrees and professional titles.

Table 1
Demographic characteristics as a percentage of Slovenian and Serbian samples

Characteristic	Slovenia (n = 145)	Serbia (n = 144)
Gender		
Female	93.8	92.4
Male	6.2	7.6
Age range (years)		
Up to 20	4.8	.7
21–40	63.4	49.0
41–60	30.3	49.0
61 and above	1.4	1.4
Level of professional degree		
Secondary school or equivalent	12.4	4.1
Teacher diploma	55.2	56.8
Bachelor's degree or equivalent (university)	26.9	16.4
Master's degree (Master of Science) or specialisation	5.5	22.6
Professional title [a]		
No title	46.9	52.9
Mentor	30.3	28.1
Consultant	20.7	8.3
Senior Consultant	2.1	10.7

[a] Approximate translations of Slovene professional titles are given.

Instrument

A bilingual questionnaire was used for the survey, designed exclusively for the purpose of the study. It was first prepared in Slovene, and was then translated to Serbian.

The questionnaire consists of four descriptive rating scales with five response anchors each. The Motives for Choosing Preschool Teaching scale is designed to measure the deciding factors for choosing preschool teaching profession. It consists of 12 items, each with five response anchors ranging from 1 (*not at all important*) to 5 (*very important*). The Career Perceptions scale is meant to measure preschool teachers' perceptions of their own careers. It consists of eight items, each with five response anchors ranging from 1 (*very untrue of me*) to 5 (*very true of me*). The Factors of Career Development scale measures the level of importance assigned to different factors which may influence the development of one's career, while The Career Expectations scale is designed to measure one's expectations and plans in terms of their career development. The first scale consists of 17 items and the second scale of 15 items; both with five response anchors of importance for each item ranging from 1 (*not at all important*) to 5 (*very important*). In addition, preschool teachers' personal characteristics (gender, age, level of education, level of professional degree, years of work experience, and country of residence) are included in the questionnaire.

Data collection and data analysis procedures

The survey was carried out online during a two month period. Response rate was 60%. To establish the structural validity and reliability of the scales, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was carried out on the Slovenian data first. Based on the EFA results, the scales were modified, aggregate variables were formed, and the final scales were tested for reliability. The final models were then run in the Serbian data. Principal component analysis (PCA) was conducted separately on the groups of items from all scales with orthogonal rotation (Varimax). The Keiser-Meyer-Olkin measure (KMO) verified the sampling adequacy for the analysis, KMO ≥ .71 (see Table 2), which is good according to Field (2009). All of the KMO values for individual items were above the acceptable limit of .5 in the analyses (ibid). Bartlett's test of sphericity

for the analyses indicated that correlations between items were sufficiently large for the PCA. The factors that had eigenvalues over Kaiser's criterion of 1 in the initial analysis were retained in the final analysis.

Table 2

Keiser-Meyer-Olkin measure, Bartlett's test of sphericity, percentage of total variance explained by the factors, and Cronbach's alpha for the scales

Scale	Slovenia					Serbia				
	KMO	Bartlett's test		% of variance	α	*KMO*	Bartlett's test		% of variance	α
		χ^2	*df*				χ^2	*df*		
Motives for choosing preschool teaching	.84	704.08***	55	65.92	.65	.80	573.31***	55	58.82	.63
Career perceptions	.77	484.81***	28	66.67	.79	.71	376.45***	28	75.75	.74
Factors of career development	.90	1439.10***	136	69.87	.89	.87	1282.32***	136	72.98	.89
Career expectations	.84	1017.15***	66	72.39	.80	.88	941.40***	66	71.33	.91

Note. The results are presented separately for the Slovenian (n = 145) and Serbian preschool teachers (n = 144). KMO = Keiser-Meyer-Olkin measure.

*** $p < .001$.

Table 3 presents the final loadings after rotation for the Motives for Choosing Preschool Teaching scale. The items that cluster on the same factors suggest that factor 1 represents Intrinsic and Altruistic Motives and factor 2 represents Motives of a Simplistic View of Studies and Profession. One item ("4. Working time suits me") had to be removed from the model due to its lowering of the reliability of the subscale, and one item ("7. The profession has a good reputation in society") had to be left out of factor score due to its high loading on different factors in both countries. The subscales of the final 2-factor model had high reliabilities of .82 or above, except for the Motives of a Simplistic View of Studies and Profession subscale for Serbian data which stands at .66 but is still acceptable.

Table 3
Results from a factor analysis of the Motives for Choosing Preschool Teaching Scale

Motives for choosing preschool teaching	Factor loading			
	1		2	
	Slovenia	Serbia	Slovenia	Serbia
Factor 1: Intrinsic and altruistic motives				
1. It offers the opportunity for creativity and originality	.78	.86		
2. It is socially useful work	.77	.82		
6. I have the possibility of postgraduate studies	.73	.61		
7. The profession has a good reputation in society	.73			.70
10. The profession provides me with a regular income	.68	.70		
5. I like working with children	.64	.86		
12. Preschool teacher's profession encourages and enables professional development throughout my career	.63	.78		
Factor 2: Motives of a simplistic view of studies and profession				
9. Preschool teacher's work is not demanding			.88	.79
11. Preschool teacher profession is a tradition in my family			.80	.49
3. There are long holidays			.76	.61
8. Studies are not demanding			.71	.79
Eigenvalues	4.43	4.30	2.82	2.17
% of variance	40.29	39.11	25.63	19.70
α	.84	.86	.82	.66

Note. The results are presented separately for the Slovenian (n = 145) and Serbian preschool teachers (n = 144). The extraction method was principal component analysis with an orthogonal (Varimax) rotation. Factor loadings below .40 were omitted.

The EFA of the Career Perceptions scale as well as the Factors of Career Development scale showed a structure of factors that cannot be explained meaningfully in a theoretical way. For this reason, we analysed each item of both scales separately.

The EFA of the Career Expectations scale showed a structure of two factors: Continuous Learning and Professional Collaboration and Achieving a Leading Position (see Table 4). Four items had to be removed from the model due to their high loadings on both factors in both countries: "8. Obtaining a second Bologna degree (professional master's degree)", "11. Work closely with faculties that provide teacher training", "13. Preparing training for colleagues", and "14. Participating in changing school policy". The subscales of the final 2-factor model had high reliabilities of .82 or above, except for the Achieving a Leading Position subscale for Serbian data which stands at .70 but is acceptable.

Table 4
Results from a factor analysis of the Career Expectations Scale

Career expectations	Factor loading			
	1		2	
	Slovenia	Serbia	Slovenia	Serbia
Factor 1: Continuous learning and professional collaboration				
6. Participating in international projects and publishing the findings in an international context	.87	.80		
5. Participating in research and publishing the findings in a national context	.85	.80		
15. Active participation in professional associations of preschool teachers	.82	.77		
2. Promotion to higher pay grades	.79	.83		
7. Attendance of professional development courses	.79	.83		
16. Mobility	.79	.75		
1. Promotion to higher professional titles	.79	.81		
3. Possibility to express one's own initiatives (innovating, etc.)	.78	.89		
4. Regular reading of professional literature	.74	.86		
Factor 2: Achieving a leading position				
9. Obtaining a PhD			.88	.73
10. Taking on leadership roles, be kindergarten principal			.82	.82
12. Setting up one's own kindergarten			.78	.74
Eigenvalues	6.36	6.85	2.33	1.71
% of variance	52.96	57.12	19.43	14.21
α	.94	.95	.82	.70

Note. The results are presented separately for the Slovenian (n = 145) and Serbian preschool teachers (n = 144). The extraction method was principal component analysis with an orthogonal (Varimax) rotation. Factor loadings below .40 were omitted.

Results and Discussion

Motivations for choosing preschool teaching as a career

We wanted to know which motives for choosing a career in education are prevalent among preschool teachers. We presented 12 career choice motives to them and asked them to rate how important each motive was in their career choice on a scale from 1 (*not at all important*) to 5 (*very important*). We organised the data separately by country and tested the statistical significance of the differences between them.

Table 5

Means, standard deviations, and Mann-Whitney test for individual items of the Motives for Choosing Preschool Teaching Scale

Motives for choosing preschool teaching	Slovenia		Serbia		*U*	*z*	*r*
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*			
5. I like working with children	4.42	1.06	4.37	1.21	8362.50	−.04	−.00
1. It offers an opportunity for creativity and originality	4.07	1.12	3.99	1.23	8271.50	−.31	−.02
2. It offers an opportunity for socially useful work	3.75	1.06	3.70	1.14	8075.50	−.18	−.01
12. Preschool teacher's profession encourages and enables me to professionally develop throughout my career	3.74	1.14	3.54	1.36	7260.00	−.89	−.06
10. Profession provides me with a regular income	3.24	1.15	3.41	1.26	7179.50	−1.44	−.09
6. I can opt for postgraduate studies	3.16	1.22	3.18	1.26	8007.50	−.19	−.01
4. Working hours suit me	3.07	1.31	3.14	1.39	7791.00	−.46	−.03
7. The profession has a good reputation in society	2.91	1.10	3.14	1.33	7175.00	−1.65	−.10
3. There are long holidays	2.61	1.36	2.84	1.39	7468.00	−1.33	−08
9. Preschool teacher's work is not demanding	2.57	1.42	2.28	1.29	6881.50	−1.57	−.10
8. Studies are not demanding	2.55	1.18	2.73	1.39	7544.00	−.91	−.06
11. Preschool teacher profession is a tradition in my family	2.51	1.48	2.12	1.36	6739.00	−2.14*	−.13

Note. Mean parameter values for each of the analyses are shown for the Slovenian preschool teachers (n = 145) and Serbian preschool teachers (n = 144), as well as the results of Mann-Whitney tests comparing the parameter estimates between the two countries. Effect size r was calculated using the formula $r = \frac{z}{\sqrt{N}}$.

* $p < .05$.

As seen in Table 5, preschool teachers in both countries rated the motives associated with predominantly intrinsic motivation as the most important. On average, they rated the two socalled altruistic motives the highest: Item 5 ("I like working with children"; M_{SLO} = 4.42, M_{SRB} = 4.37) and Item 2 ("It offers an opportunity for socially useful work"; M_{SLO} = 3.75, M_{SRB} = 3.70), which is also confirmed for preservice and inservice teachers by other studies (Andrews and Hatch, 2002; Bastick, 2000; Brookhart and Freeman, 1992; Cencič and Čagran, 2002; Gradišek et al., 2020; Flores and Niklasson, 2014; Hobson et al., 2009; Ivanuš Grmek and Javornik Krečič, 2005; Kyriacou and Coulthard, 2000; Kyriacou and Kobori, 1998; Lin et al., 2012; Polak and Devjak, 2014; Richardson and Watt, 2006; Tašner, Žveglič Mihelič and Mencin-

Čeplak, 2017; Watt and Richardson, 2007, 2012). Two professional motives were also highly rated: Item 1 ("It offers an opportunity of creativity and originality"; M_{SLO} = 4.07, M_{SRB} = 3.99) and Item 12 ("Preschool teacher's profession encourages and enables professional development throughout my career"; M_{SLO} = 3.74, M_{SRB} = 3.54). The latter would suggest that preschool teachers in the study have a mature conception of career, linking career progression to professional growth. It is interesting to note that the professional motive of postgraduate study (Item 6) is on average of medium importance in both countries (M_{SRB} = 3.18, M_{SLO} = 3.16), which is probably due to the fact that legislation does not require a second level of study for employment as a preschool teacher in Slovenia and Serbia.

A slightly more important motive in both countries is that of a regular financial income (Item 10; M_{SRB} = 3.41, M_{SLO} = 3.24), which can be described as a material motive. A study by Richardson and Watt (2006) reached a similar finding. Material motives also include motives in Item 4. ("Working hours suit me"; M_{SRB} = 3.14, M_{SLO} = 3.07), and Item 3. ("There are long holidays"; M_{SRB} = 2.84, M_{SLO} = 2.61), which are on average of medium importance for preschool teachers in both countries.

Motives associated with a predominantly extrinsic motivation were rated lower, which is consistent with other research (Andrews and Hatch, 2002; Bastick, 2000; Brookhart and Freeman, 1992; Cencič and Čagran, 2002; Gradišek et al., 2020; Ivanuš Grmek and Javornik Krečič, 2005; Kyriacou and Kobori, 1998; Richardson and Watt, 2006; Tašner, Žveglič Mihelič and Mencin-Čeplak, 2017; Watt and Richardson, 2007; Watt and Richardson, 2012). The motive of being in a profession with a good reputation in society was shown as more important of these (Item 7; M_{SRB} = 3.14, M_{SLO} = 2.91). Other motives from this group—Item 9 ("Preschool teacher's work is not demanding"; M_{SLO} = 2.57, M_{SRB} = 2.28), Item 8 ("Studies are not demanding"; M_{SRB} = 2.73, M_{SLO} = 2.55), and Item 11 ("This profession is a tradition in my family"; M_{SLO}= 2.51, M_{SRB} = 2.12)—are on average less important or unimportant in the decision to become a preschool teacher (see also Brookhart and Freeman, 1992; Flores and Niklasson, 2014).

The comparison between the two countries showed statistically significant differences among the 11 motives only for the motive in Item 11, that the profession has a tradition in the family, which is on average more important to Slovenian preschool teachers (M_{SLO} = 2.51) than to Serbian ones (M_{SRB} = 2.12).

For further analyses, we grouped the EFA motives into two broad groups of career choice motives (see Table 3): Intrinsic and Altruistic Motives (established by high intrinsic motivation) and Motives of a Simplistic View of Studies and Profession (established by high extrinsic motivation).

The Intrinsic and Altruistic Motives variable (IM) is thus made up of all altruistic and professional motives, as well as the motive of a regular financial income (Item 10), which is theoretically classified as a material motive. Item 4 ("Working time suits me") was excluded from the sum of the values of the motive variables of both motivations, as it is saturated with both EFA factors in both countries. This means that this motive cannot be strictly classified as either an intrinsic and altruistic motive or as a motive of a simplistic view of studies and profession. Thus, similarly to the study by Richardson and Watt (2006), who, with this item, focused on the presence of the "line of least resistance motive", our study has shown that preschool teachers (also) understand this motive through the prism of concern for quality of life and the possibility of spending time with family. In both countries of our study, it appears that this motive was understood in both ways, while the motive of regular financial income seems to be understood predominantly in terms of a concern for quality of life and family, thus both items load also (Item 4) or predominantly (Item 10) on the Intrinsic and Altruistic Motives factor.

The Motives of a Simplistic View of Studies and Profession variable (EM) includes the motive of long holidays (Item 3), which would theoretically be classified as a material motive. Interestingly, the motive of a good reputation of the profession in society (Item 7) is saturated with the factor of Intrinsic and Altruistic Motives for the Slovenian data, and with the factor of Motives of a Simplistic View of Studies and Profession for the Serbian data. For the sake of comparability of country data, we have excluded this item from the sum of the items of the two groups of motives.

In line with the data presented for each item, IM are statistically more important on average for Slovenian preschool teachers (M_{IM} = 3.75, SE = .08) than EM when choosing a career (M_{EM} = 2.60, SE = .10), $_t(116) = 7.89$, $p < .001$. The same conclusion was also reached by the analysis of the Serbian preschool teachers' data (M_{IM} = 3.67, SE = .09 vs. M_{EM} = 2.48, SE = 0.09), $t(110) = 8.17$, $p < .001$. There are, however, no statistically significant differences between the two countries in this respect.

As expected from the above reported results, the correlation between IM and EM when choosing a career as a preschool teacher is negative in both countries (Slovenia: $r[145] = -.341$, $p < .001$; Serbia: $r[144] = -.282$, $p < .01$), meaning that the more intrinsic and altruistic motives are expressed in a person, the less motives of a simplistic view of studies and profession are expressed in that person. It is known that while both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are present in a person, one of them is most often expressed to a greater extent. For the purpose of further analyses, we also defined the

variable of predominant motivation: this was determined for those respondents, for whom the both types of motives were not equally represented (97.7%), but one of the two was predominant; and we analysed the data only for these. Among Slovenian preschool teachers, the share of those with intrinsic and altruistic motives predominating in their choice of preschool teaching profession (IMs) is 81.7%. It is—statistically insignificantly—slightly more numerous among Serbian preschool teachers, 85.2%. The share of preschool teachers with predominant motives of a simplistic view of studies and profession when choosing a teaching profession (EMs) is 18.3% in Slovenia and 14.8% in Serbia.

Preschool teachers' perceptions of preschool teaching as a career

Based on various studies (Hoyle, 1989, as cited in Marentič Požarnik, 1993; Marentič Požarnik, 1993), we developed a scale of 8 items of the characteristics of the profession, which preschool teachers rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (very untrue of me) to 5 (very true of me). We were interested in how preschool teachers perceive the preschool teaching profession and whether their conceptions of their careers differ statistically significantly according to country and predominant motivation.

Table 6

Means, standard deviations, and Mann-Whitney test for individual items of the Career Perceptions Scale

Career perceptions		Predominant motivation				*U*	*z*	*r*
		EMs		IMs				
		M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*			
Performing an important social function	Slovenia	2.67	1.24	4.43	.77	237.50	−5.73***	−.55
	Serbia	3.88	1.75	4.11	1.01	659.00	−.36	−.04
High level of specific knowledge and skills	Slovenia	2.85	1.53	4.41	.64	391.50	−4.17***	−.40
	Serbia	2.00	1.41	4.32	.85	140.00	−5.12***	−.50
Higher or post-graduate education	Slovenia	3.79	1.23	4.18	.78	709.50	−1.10	−.10
	Serbia	4.81	.54	3.88	1.03	313.50	−3.65***	−.36
Developed professional ethics (codes of ethics)	Slovenia	2.90	1.26	4.38	.72	333.50	−4.88***	−.47
	Serbia	1.93	1.39	4.24	.84	142.50	−5.09***	−.50
Ability to work in unpredictable problem situations	Slovenia	2.86	1.39	4.48	.68	323.00	−5.01***	−.48
	Serbia	3.63	1.86	4.09	1.07	685.50	−.10	−.01
Self-improvement through reflective analysis of your experience	Slovenia	2.38	1.16	4.40	.75	159.00	−6.28***	−.60
	Serbia	1.87	1.30	4.32	.76	110.00	−5.44***	−.54
A considerable degree of freedom and autonomy in the choice of working procedures	Slovenia	3.67	1.39	4.19	.82	774.00	−1.30	−.12
	Serbia	2.88	1.82	3.78	1.03	510.00	−1.70	−.17
Joining professional organisations	Slovenia	4.38	1.20	3.81	.90	548.00	−3.09**	−.29
	Serbia	2.81	1.72	3.64	.91	510.00	−1.66	−.16

Note. EMs = preschool teachers with predominant motives of simplistic view of studies and profession when choosing a teaching profession; IMs = preschool teachers with predominant intrinsic and altruistic motives when choosing a teaching profession. Mean parameter values for each of the analyses are shown for the Slovenian EMs (n = 21) and IMs (n = 89) and Serbian EMs (n = 16) and IMs (n = 87), as well as the results of Mann-Whitney tests comparing the parameter estimates between the two predominant motivations, separately for each country. Effect size r was calculated using the formula $r = \frac{z}{\sqrt{N}}$.

** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

On average, Slovenian preschool teachers agree with all the descriptions regarding the perceptions of their careers, rating 7 out of 8 items with an M above 4 (see Table 6). On average, they agree the most

that it is characterised by the ability to work in unpredictable problem situations (M_{SLO} = 4.17), a high level of specific skills (M_{SLO} = 4.12), a university or postgraduate degree (M_{SLO} = 4.11), performing an important social function (M_{SLO} = 4.10), developed professional ethics (M_{SLO} = 4.10), a high degree of freedom and autonomy in the choice of work practices (M_{SLO} = 4.09), and self-improvement through reflective analysis of one's own experience (M_{SLO} = 4.02). On average, they are least likely to agree that their career is characterised by joining professional organisations (M_{SLO} = 3.92).

Serbian preschool teachers also agree on average with all the descriptions of their own career, but slightly less when compared to Slovenian preschool teachers (see Table 6); out of the 8 items, they rated 3 items with an M above 4. On average, the most agreed statements are that they perform an important social function (M_{SRB} = 4.08) and that their career is characterised by higher or postgraduate education (M_{SRB} = 4.03) and the ability to work in unpredictable problem situations (M_{SRB} = 4.02). *M* scores above 3 were given to 5 items which are: "a high level of specific skills" (M_{SRB} = 3.97), "self-improvement through reflective analysis of one's experience" (M_{SRB} = 3.96), "developed professional ethics" (M_{SRB} = 3.90), "a considerable degree of freedom and autonomy in the choice of work practices" (M_{SRB} = 3.64), and "joining professional organisations" (M_{SRB} = 3.50).

The comparison between Slovenian and Serbian preschool teachers showed statistically significant differences in two items: "joining professional organisations" (M_{SLO} = 3.92 vs. M_{SRB} = 3.50, U = 8183.50, z = −2.58, p < .05, r = −.15) and "a considerable degree of freedom and autonomy in the choice of work practices" (M_{SLO} = 4.09 vs. M_{SRB} = 3.64, U = 6112.50, z = −2.82, p < .01, r = −.17). On average, Serbian preschool teachers agree with both descriptions statistically significantly less than Slovenian preschool teachers.

When comparing career perceptions in relation to the predominant motivation for choosing a preschool teaching profession, we find that in both countries, IMs are statistically significantly more likely to agree with most of the descriptions of their own careers on average compared to EMs. Slovenian IMs are on average more likely to agree that their careers are about self-improvement through reflective analysis of their experience (M_{IMs} = 4.40) than EMs, who disagree with this on average (M_{EMs} = 2.38). This difference is even more evident among Serbian preschool teachers (M_{IMs} = 4.32 vs. M_{EMs} = 1.87). In Slovenia, IMs are statistically significantly more likely than EMs to agree on average that their career is characterised by a high level of specific skills (M_{IMs} = 4.41 vs. M_{EMs} = 2.85). The difference is again more pronounced among Serbian respondents (M_{IMs} = 4.32 vs. M_{EMs} = 2.00). Furthermore, Slovenian IMs associate their career with the performance. IMs in Slovenia (M_{IMs} = 4.38) and Serbia (M_{IMs} = 4.24) on average agree that their career is characterised by developed professional ethics, while EMs in Slovenia on average partially agree (M_{EMs} = 2.90) and in Serbia disagree (M_{EMs} = 1.93) with this description.

The exceptions among Slovenian preschool teachers include the item "joining professional organisations", which is on average more highly attributed to their own career by EMs (M_{EMs} = 4.38) than by IMs (M_{IMs} = 3.81), and "higher or postgraduate education" among Serbian preschool teachers, which is on average statistically significantly more strongly agreed with by EMs (M_{EMs} = 4.81) than by IMs (M_{IMs} = 3.88).

Based on the data presented, we conclude that IMs perceive their career as one that requires a high level of knowledge and skills, concern for their own professional development, and developed professional ethics; they prioritise "content". Conversely, EMs do not strongly agree that their careers are about professional development, career development in a "positive substantive sense", but are more likely to be concerned with "form"; it is more about careerism, suggesting greater agreement by EMs than by IMs with the description of their careers as being about joining professional organisations (amongst Slovenian preschool teachers) and having a university or postgraduate degree (amongst Serbian preschool teachers). As the perceptions are linked to individual behaviors (Clark and Peterson, 1986), it can be inferred that while IMs tend to be concerned with their own career development in conjunction with professional growth when choosing a profession, EMs at the time of choosing a career understand career development in the context of achieving external (formal) validation, which reflects in educational attainment, membership of formal associations, etc. In this context, it would be interesting to find out how these two groups of preschool teachers differ in their views on professional development of preschool teachers.

Preschool teachers' assessment of the importance of different factors that influence their career development

Arnold (1997, as cited in Petre, 2015) defines career as "the sequence of employment-related positions, roles, activities and experiences encountered by a person" (p. 938). As stated by Baruch (2004, as cited in Petre, 2015) there is a considerable overlap between individual and organisational roles in the career. Personal characteristics have a strong influence on the choice of occupation, as well as on the career progression and its shaping. Research on the professional development of teaching professionals also points to the important role of social aspects—the work environment, colleagues and management (Day et al., 2007; Valenčič Zuljan, 2018)—in career learning and progression.

We were interested in which factors preschool teachers consider influencing their career development and whether preschool teachers differ in their assessment of the importance of factors influencing their career development depending on the country and the predominant motivation when choosing a career. The respondents were offered 17 items which they rated on a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all important*) to 5 (*very important*).

Table 7

Means, standard deviations, and Mann-Whitney test for individual items of the Factors of Career Development Scale

Factors of career development		Predominant motivation				*U*	*z*	*r*
		EMs		IMs				
		M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*			
1. Life period	Slovenia	2.29	1.01	4.19	.73	136.50	−6.22***	−.59
	Serbia	3.33	1.68	3.80	1.04	539.00	−.79	−.08
2. Gender	Slovenia	4.48	.98	2.96	1.17	280.50	−4.80***	−.46
	Serbia	2.94	1.69	2.30	1.07	524.00	−1.25	−.12
3. Variety of work experience	Slovenia	2.48	1.03	4.30	.68	149.00	−6.09***	−.58
	Serbia	3.88	1.75	3.60	.97	459.00	−1.97*	−.19
4. Level of education	Slovenia	2.57	.98	4.03	.73	214.50	−5.59***	−.53
	Serbia	2.06	1.44	3.89	1.02	231.00	−4.28***	−.42
5. Ambitions	Slovenia	2.38	.87	4.56	.61	52.50	−7.12***	−.68
	Serbia	2.06	1.44	4.38	.84	167.00	−5.06***	−.50
6. Readiness for education	Slovenia	2.48	.75	4.41	.83	95.00	−6.60***	−.63
	Serbia	2.06	1.44	4.41	.72	150.50	−5.22***	−.51
7. Years of service	Slovenia	3.95	1.28	3.50	.81	573.00	−2.07*	−.20
	Serbia	3.69	1.58	3.48	1.01	546.00	−1.09	−.11
8. Aspiration for new career challenges	Slovenia	2.71	1.01	4.22	.71	204.50	−5.56***	−.53
	Serbia	2.25	1.57	4.29	.79	224.00	−4.42***	−.44
9. Competences	Slovenia	2.57	1.08	4.54	.60	121.50	−6.47***	−.62
	Serbia	2.06	1.12	4.38	.83	93.50	−5.79***	−.57
10. Kindergarten climate and culture	Slovenia	2.33	.86	4.34	.73	89.00	−6.59***	−.63
	Serbia	2.13	.96	4.02	.97	126.50	−5.28***	−.52
11. Relationship with colleagues	Slovenia	2.57	.93	4.35	.75	141.00	−6.12***	−.58
	Serbia	2.13	1.15	4.01	.82	138.00	−5.18***	−.51
12. Relationship with the management	Slovenia	2.81	1.03	4.23	.77	242.50	−5.19***	−.49
	Serbia	3.00	1.51	3.83	.91	436.00	−2.15*	−.21
13. Possibility of a better pay	Slovenia	2.80	1.15	3.97	.95	346.50	−3.93***	−.37
	Serbia	2.13	1.36	4.17	1.02	186.00	−4.74***	−.47
14. Management skills	Slovenia	3.57	1.40	3.77	.89	781.00	−.43	−.04
	Serbia	2.33	1.50	4.06	.86	227.00	−4.02***	−.40
15. Communication skills	Slovenia	2.57	1.08	4.48	.75	138.50	−6.31***	−.60
	Serbia	1.75	1.13	4.32	.80	84.00	−5.81***	−.57
16. Desire to promote the professional development of others	Slovenia	3.00	1.27	3.92	.94	469.00	−3.17**	−.30
	Serbia	2.00	1.16	3.96	.98	161.50	−4.96***	−.49
17. Desire to lead	Slovenia	3.48	1.63	3.38	1.02	733.50	−.85	−.08
	Serbia	3.31	1.89	3.39	1.16	609.00	−.24	−.02

Note. EMs = preschool teachers with predominant motives of simplistic view of studies and profession when choosing a teaching profession; IMs = preschool teachers with predominant intrinsic and altruistic motives when choosing a teaching profession. Mean parameter values for each of the analyses are shown for the Slovenian EMs (n = 21) and IMs (n = 89) and Serbian EMs (n = 16) and IMs (n = 87), as well as the results of Mann-Whitney tests comparing the parameter estimates between the two predominant motivations, separately for each country. Effect size r was calculated using the formula $r = \frac{z}{\sqrt{N}}$.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

With an average $M \geq 4$, Slovenian preschool teachers rated four out of the 17 items, while the Serbians rated three items. In both countries, preschool teachers rated 13 items as $M \geq 3$. In both countries, preschool teachers thus rate most of the factors listed as at least moderately important for their career development or "making a career". There are no statistically significant differences between the two countries, with the exception of "gender", which is rated as moderately important by Slovenian preschool teachers (M_{SLO} = 3.26), and unimportant by Serbian preschool teachers (M_{SRB} = 2.40), U = 4379.00, z = –4.71, $p < .001$, r = −28.

On average, the most important factors for career development or making a career are those that are entirely the person's own or that are largely within the person's control: "competences" (M_{SLO} = 4.13, M_{SRB} = 4.00), "ambitions" (M_{SLO} = 4.11, M_{SRB} = 4.00), "communication skills" (M_{SLO} = 4.08, M_{SRB} = 3.90) and "readiness for education" (M_{SLO} = 4.00, M_{SRB} = 4.03). Research by Day et al. (2007) confirms that education—various forms of professional training—has a lasting positive impact on preschool teachers at all stages of their professional development.

The second group of factors for career development is represented by those related to the relationships and climate in the work organisation: "relationship with colleagues" (M_{SLO} = 3.97, M_{SRB} = 3.70), "relationship with the management" (M_{SLO} = 3.93, M_{SRB} = 3.69) and the "kindergarten's climate and culture" (M_{SLO} = 3.92, M_{SRB} = 3.71). As noted in the introduction, climate and relationships between staff are important for quality professional work and development at different points in one's career in education (Day et al., 2007; Javrh, 2008) and especially in the early years (Valenčič Zuljan and Marentič Požarnik, 2014; Valenčič Zuljan and Vogrinc, 2008). Given the importance of "relational items", we are therefore left with the question of what more can be done to foster a learning organisation by kindergartens employing the preschool teachers who participated in the survey (Senge, 1997).

In both countries, preschool teachers also rate as important "variety of work experience" (M_{SLO} = 3.92, M_{SRB} = 3.64). On the basis of an analysis of a number of empirical studies, Clark (1988) states that a teacher is to make an interactive decision every few minutes and concludes that the management of educational activities in practice is very complex, uncertain and full of dilemmas. A similar definition of the professional role of educational workers is given by Doyle (1986), who emphasises the variety and simultaneity of events, the immediacy, unpredictability, public character and developmental orientation of teaching work. Variety of work experience is therefore an important promoter of career development, and it is essential that preschool teachers are aware of the complexity of their professional role and prepare for it accordingly. Among other things, the acquisition of students' professional development competences already during their studies—developing skills of reflection (Pečar, 2012; Šarič and Šteh, 2017) and learning from experience—is thus crucial in a career development perspective.

Preschool teachers in both countries also rate as important "life period" (M_{SLO} = 3.79, M_{SRB} = 3.73), "management skills" (M_{SRB} = 3.79, M_{SLO} = 3.73), "desire to lead" (M_{SLO} = 3.40, M_{SRB} = 3.38), "possibility of a better pay" (M_{SRB} = 3.84, M_{SLO} = 3.73) and "desire to promote the professional development of others" (M_{SLO} = 3.73, M_{SRB} = 3.64). Mentoring and taking responsibility for shaping members of the profession can make an important contribution to the development of these skills and to the realisation of the desire to lead and manage (Javrh, 2008).

Further, we compared the responses in terms of the predominant motivation for choosing a career in education and found statistically significant differences between IMs and EMs for most of them (see Table 7).

The data for both countries show that IMs rate most of the career development factors as more important compared to EMs. The differences in the average rating are largest in both countries for factors that are mostly within the individual's control (items "ambitions", "competences", "communication skills", "readiness for education", etc.); IMs rate them as important or very important on average ($M_{IMs} \geq 4.32$), while EMs rate them as less important or unimportant ($M_{EMs} \leq 2.57$). Similar differences were also found for relational items ("relationship with colleagues", "relationship with the management", and "kindergarten climate and culture") in both countries; IMs rate these as important or very important career development factors on average ($M_{IMs} \geq 3.83$), while EMs rate them as less important or unimportant ($M_{EMs} \leq 3.00$).

Among Slovenian preschool teachers, the exceptions are "gender" (M_{IMs} = 2.96 vs. M_{EMs} = 4,48) and "years of service" (M_{IMs} = 3.50 vs. M_{EMs} = 3.95), and among Serbian preschool teachers, "diversity of work experience" (M_{IMs} = 3.60 vs. M_{EMs} = 3.88), which are rated statistically significantly higher by EMs than IMs. According to the Slovenian data, these are again factors beyond the control of the individual; hence, IMs are more likely to believe that career development is determined by increasing the length of service and experience, and is also determined by gender. In this context, it would also be interesting to find out which gender they consider to be privileged in terms of career development. In their research, Tašner, Žveglič Mihelič, and Mencin Čeplak (2017) found that 3rd and final year student teachers generally perceive male

teachers as having a higher status among colleagues than female teachers. The sample in the research also "displays a trend that men, on average, feel better positioned in relation to women in the teachers' profession overall" (p. 66). Since (preschool) teaching is perceived as a female profession, it would be interesting to further research the underlying reasons for the recognition of gender as an important factor of a preschool teacher's career development; especially, taking into account significant differences in the perceived importance of this factor between IMs and EMs.

Statistically insignificant differences between IMs and EMs in Slovenia emerged in the ratings of the importance of one's managerial skills, which both IMs and EMs rate as important for career development (M_{SLO} = 3.73), and the desire for leadership, which are both rated as a factor of medium importance for career development (M_{SLO} = 3.40). For Serbian preschool teachers, statistically insignificant differences in the ratings of importance for career development were found for the factors of "life period", which preschool teachers rate as important (M_{SRB} = 3.73), "years of service" (M_{SRB} = 3.51) and "desire for leadership" (M_{SRB} = 3.38), which they rate as moderately important, and the factor of "gender", which they rate as unimportant on average (M_{SRB} = 2.40), although there is a trend in the sample to attribute a more important role to it among EMs than IMs, which we confirmed in the Slovenian sample (see Table 7).

Preschool teachers' expectations in relation to the development of their professional careers

Preschool teachers were asked what they expected or planned for their career. For each expectation, they chose their answer on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all important*) to 5 (*very important*). The answers were again compared by country and by the prevailing motivation for choosing a career as a preschool teacher.

Table 8

Means, standard deviations, and Mann-Whitney test for individual items of the Career Expectations Scale

	Career expectations		Predominant motivation				*U*	*z*	*r*
			EMs		IMs				
			M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*			
3.	Possibility to express your own initiative (innovating, etc.)	Slovenia	2.48	.93	4.25	.73	120.50	−6.10***	−.58
		Serbia	2.40	1.55	4.35	.84	200.50	−4.29***	−.42
2.	Promotion to higher pay grades	Slovenia	2.57	.98	4.25	.91	159.00	−5.72***	−.55
		Serbia	2.00	1.41	4.40	.67	127.00	−5.35***	−.53
4.	Regular reading of professional literature	Slovenia	2.57	.81	4.17	.81	151.50	−5.76***	−.55
		Serbia	2.13	1.54	4.14	.91	202.00	−4.41***	−.43
1.	Promotion to higher professional titles	Slovenia	2.81	1.17	4.01	1.01	332.50	−4.04***	−.39
		Serbia	2.06	1.44	4.19	.84	171.50	−4.77***	−.47
7.	Attending professional development courses	Slovenia	2.45	1.15	4.11	.84	184.50	−5.27***	−.50
		Serbia	2.38	1.59	4.04	1.02	256.50	−3.83***	−.38
5.	Participating in research and publishing the findings in a national context	Slovenia	2.62	.92	3.50	1.09	407.00	−3.22**	−.31
		Serbia	2.06	1.29	3.74	1.15	223.00	−4.13***	−.41
16.	Mobility	Slovenia	2.29	1.06	3.57	.98	293.50	−4.34***	−.41
		Serbia	2.06	1.18	3.80	1.00	169.50	−4.63***	−.46
13.	Preparing training for colleagues	Slovenia	3.25	1.16	3.09	.97	660.00	−.31	−.03
		Serbia	4.38	1.26	3.47	1.10	311.00	−3.22**	−.32
8.	Obtaining a second Bologna (Master of Science) degree	Slovenia	2.86	1.39	3.16	1.19	627.50	−1.04	−.10
		Serbia	2.31	1.30	3.90	1.21	240.50	−3.96***	−.39

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Table 8 (Continuation of the table from the previous page)

Means, standard deviations, and Mann-Whitney test for individual items of the Career Expectations Scale

15.	Active participation in professional associations of preschool teachers	Slovenia	2.43	1.08	3.33	1.02	404.00	−3.28**	−.31
		Serbia	1.75	1.07	3.91	1.01	115.00	−5.25***	−.52
6.	Participating in international projects and publishing the findings in an international context	Slovenia	2.43	1.03	3.26	1.06	411.00	−3.12**	−.30
		Serbia	2.25	1.34	3.84	.97	218.50	−4.13***	−.41
14.	Participating in changing school policy	Slovenia	2.43	1.03	3.14	1.22	486.00	−2.41*	−.23
		Serbia	4.31	1.35	3.51	1.13	323.00	−3.05**	−.30
11.	Closer cooperation with preschool teacher training faculties	Slovenia	2.33	.91	3.27	1.08	324.50	−3.28**	−.31
		Serbia	1.94	1.44	3.66	1.13	230.00	−4.05***	−.40
9.	Obtaining a PhD	Slovenia	4.24	1.00	2.55	1.18	223.50	−4.98***	−.47
		Serbia	1.80	.94	3.59	1.31	171.50	−4.37***	−.43
10.	Taking on leadership roles, be a kindergarten principal	Slovenia	3.67	1.43	2.48	1.21	382.00	−3.35**	−.32
		Serbia	4.25	1.39	3.16	1.32	316.50	−3.12**	−.31
12.	Setting up one's own kindergarten	Slovenia	4.52	.87	2.39	1.17	136.50	−5.77***	−.55
		Serbia	1.88	1.46	3.27	1.26	271.50	−3.58***	−.35

Note. EMs = preschool teachers with predominant motives of simplistic view of studies and profession when choosing a teaching profession; IMs = preschool teachers with predominant intrinsic and altruistic motives when choosing a teaching profession. Mean parameter values for each of the analyses are shown for the Slovenian EMs (n = 21) and IMs (n = 89) and Serbian EMs (n = 16) and IMs (n = 87), as well as the results of Mann-Whitney tests comparing the parameter estimates between the two predominant motivations, separately for each country. Effect size r was calculated using the formula

$$r = \frac{z}{\sqrt{N}}$$

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

On average, preschool teachers in both countries rate all their career expectations or plans as important or at least moderately important ($2.76 \leq M \leq 4.01$, see Table 8). They find most important: "possibility to express your own initiative (innovating, etc.)" (M_{SRB} = 4.03, M_{SLO} = 3.85), "promotion to higher pay grades" (M_{SRB} = 3.99, M_{SLO} = 3.87) and "promotion to higher professional titles" (M_{SRB} = 3.83, M_{SLO} = 3.74), "regular reading of professional literature (M_{SLO}, $_{SRB}$ = 3.80) and "attending professional development courses" (M_{SLO}, $_{SRB}$ = 3.75). They assigned the least importance to the plans or expectations related to taking on leadership roles: "setting up one's own kindergarten" (M_{SRB} = 3.03, M_{SLO} = 2.88), "taking on leadership roles, being a kindergarten principal" (M_{SRB} = 3.34, M_{SLO} = 2.76) and "obtaining a PhD" (M_{SRB} = 3.30, M_{SLO} = 2.93).

A comparison between the two countries shows that all career development plans are more important to Serbian than to Slovenian preschool teachers, with statistically significantly higher ratings for items: "preparing training for colleagues" (M_{SRB} = 3.62 vs. M_{SLO} = 3.12, U = 4240.00, z = −3.28, $p < .01$, r = −.19), "obtaining a second Bologna degree" (M_{SRB} = 3.62 vs. M_{SLO} = 3.09, U = 4379.00, z = −3.00, $p < .01$, r = −.18), "active participation in professional associations of preschool teachers" (M_{SRB} = 3.53 vs. M_{SLO} = 3.12, U = 4394.00, z = −2.94, $p < .01$, r = −.17), "participating in international projects and publishing findings in an international context" (M_{SRB} = 3.56 vs. M_{SLO} = 3.07, U = 4262.50, z = −3.13, $p < .01$, r = −.18), "participating in changing school policy" (M_{SRB} = 3.65 vs. M_{SLO} = 2.98, U = 3908.00, z = −3.93, $p < .001$, r = −.23), and "taking on leadership roles, being a kindergarten principal" (M_{SRB} = 3.34 vs. M_{SLO} = 2.76, U = 4608.00, z = −2.41, $p < .05$, r = −.14).

A comparison of the ratings of the importance of the individual modes of care or plans for one's own career between IMs and EMs in the two countries shows that they are on average more important to IMs than EMs in all but a few exceptions. Slovenian EMs, compared to IMs, rate statistically significantly higher the items "setting up one's own kindergarten" (M_{EMs} = 4.52 vs. M_{IMs} = 2.39), "obtaining a PhD" (M_{EMs} = 4.24 vs. M_{IMs} = 2.55) and "taking on leadership roles, being a kindergarten principal" (M_{EMs} = 3.67 vs. M_{IMs} = 2.48). However, compared to IMs, Serbian EMs rate statistically significantly higher "preparing training for colleagues" (M_{EMs} = 4.38 vs. M_{IMs} = 3.47), "participating in changing school policy" (M_{EMs} = 4.31 vs. M_{IMs} = 3.51) and "taking on leadership roles, being a kindergarten principal" (M_{EMs} = 4.25 vs. M_{IMs} = 3.16). The differences in the importance ratings of each expectation are statistically insignificant among Slovenian preschool teachers only for "obtaining a second Bologna degree (Master of Science degree)" and "preparing training for colleagues", while all differences in the ratings between Serbian IMs and EMs are statistically significant.

Based on EFA, we created two new variables for the ways of caring or planning for one's career: Continuous Learning and Professional Collaboration and Achieving a Leading Position, and we aimed to establish whether there are statistically significant differences in these two variables between Slovenian and Serbian preschool teachers, and between IMs and EMs in each country.

Table 9

Means, standard deviations, and Mann-Whitney test for individual items of the Career Expectations Subscales

Career expectations subscales		Predominant motivation				*U*	*z*	*r*
		EMs		IMs				
		M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*			
Continuous learning and professional collaboration	Slovenia	2.54	.89	3.86	.62	143.00	−5.32***	−.51
	Serbia	2.15	1.22	4.06	.66	137.50	−4.56***	−.45
Achieving a leading position	Slovenia	4.14	.76	2.48	1.02	149.00	−5.52***	−.53
	Serbia	2.64	.73	3.33	1.13	362.00	−2.24*	−.22

Note. EMs = preschool teachers with predominant motives of simplistic view of studies and profession when choosing a teaching profession; IMs = preschool teachers with predominant intrinsic and altruistic motives when choosing a teaching profession. Mean parameter values for each of the analyses are shown for the Slovenian EMs (n = 21) and IMs (n = 89) and Serbian EMs (n = 16) and IMs (n = 87), as well as the results of Mann-Whitney tests comparing the parameter estimates between the two predominant motivations, separately for each country. Effect size r was calculated using the formula

$$r = \frac{z}{\sqrt{N}}.$$

* $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

Analysis has shown that continuous learning and professional collaboration are more important for career development than achieving a leading position for both, preschool teachers in Slovenia (M_{SLO} = 3.56 vs. M_{SLO} = 2.87, z = −3.28, $p < .01$) and in Serbia (M_{SRB} = 3.73 vs. M_{SRB} = 3.22, z = −4.22, $p < .001$). Comparison between the two countries shows that continuous learning and professional collaboration are on average important for career development for preschool teachers from both countries, but are statistically significantly more important for Serbian preschool teachers than for Slovenian ones, U = 4293.00, z = −2.26, $p < .05$, r = −.13. In both countries, preschool teachers rated their expectations or plans related to leadership as moderately important on average, but the differences between the two countries are not statistically significant in this case. In both countries, there are statistically significant differences between IMs and EMs in both variables (see Table 9). Among Slovenian preschool teachers, EMs on average have higher expectations related to achieving a leading position (M_{EMs} = 4.14) than IMs (M_{IMs} = 2.48). Conversely, continuous learning and professional collaboration are on average more important for IMS (M_{IMs} = 3.86) than EMs (M_{EMs} = 2.54). Among Serbian preschool teachers, however, both sets of expectations are more important to IMs than to EMs: achieving a leading position (M_{IMs} = 3.33 vs. M_{EMs} = 2.64) and continuous learning and professional collaboration (M_{IMs} = 4.06 vs. M_{EMs} = 2.15).

Conclusions

Both professional competence with in-depth knowledge of the professional role and professional challenges and motivation, in which realistic professional expectations are important, represent crucial characteristics of a quality preschool teacher. A preschool teacher without insight into the possibilities and limitations of a career in preschool education and who does not have realistic expectations of the professional role may experience more stress when entering the profession and facing its reality, which in turn may lead to burnout and earlier exit from the profession, or to staying in the profession with significantly less professional commitment.

The present study has shown that altruistic and professional motives prevail among both Slovenian and Serbian preschool teachers when choosing the educational profession, and that their importance increases as the importance of motives of a simplistic view of studies and the profession decreases. Preschool teachers in both countries generally have a high view of their profession as a career, but Serbian preschool teachers rate it lower compared to Slovenian preschool teachers in terms of its characteristic of joining professional organisations and as a profession with a considerable degree of freedom and autonomy in the choice of work practices. It was also shown that preschool teachers with predominantly intrinsic and altruistic motives in both countries value this profession higher than those with simplistic motives for choosing a career in education, which suggests that preschool teachers with predominantly intrinsic and altruistic motives prioritise content when guiding their career, while those with predominant motives of a simplistic view of studies and the profession prioritise form over content or typically understand the career as careerism. Understanding preservice teachers' motivations for entering the teaching profession creates a knowledge base for developing teacher education policies and programmes (Assunção Flores and Niklasson, 2014). Additionally, knowledge of teaching professionals' views on their careers allows for the optimal promotion of career development of preschool teachers at both systemic and individual levels, and also enables their educators to raise preservice teachers' awareness of career paths in appropriate ways.

Just like pointed out in the work of Baruch (2004, as cited in Petre, 2015), the importance of individual and organisational factors in career development was also evident in our study. Particularly preschool teachers with predominant intrinsic and altruistic motives in both countries are those who identify the most important factors in their career development as those related to their own initiative, such as competence, ambitions, communication skills, and readiness for education. This is followed by factors related to the relationships and climate of the work organisation: the relationship of a preschool teacher with colleagues, with management, and the climate and culture of the kindergarten. In both countries, preschool teachers rate diversity of work experience, life period and managerial skills, as well as a desire to lead, as important factors in career development. The importance attached to the factor of life period in career development reflects the preschool teachers' awareness of the importance of balancing personal and professional aspects, which is an important element of resilience, while the importance attached to the influence of skills and desire for leadership and management among preschool teachers in terms of their career development highlights the importance of mentoring and taking responsibility for shaping the members of the profession. The latter can also be an important factor in the professionalisation of preschool teaching. Among Slovenian preschool teachers, whose motives for choosing a profession were dominated by a simplistic view of studies and the profession, gender was also identified as a factor in their career development. This finding, in the light of data from a recent study among Slovenian future teachers (Tašner, Žveglič Mihelič, and Mencin Čeplak (2017)), which suggests that men feel more respected in the teaching profession than women, leads to the conclusion that it would be worthwhile to research in more detail the actual situation of possible inequality in the position of men and women in the preschool teaching profession in the future. Finally, we found that the career expectations or plans of teachers with prevalent intrinsic and altruistic motives are predominantly focused on the care of their own professional development in terms of continuing professional development, participation in professional associations, and research in national and international contexts, whereas they are less focused on taking up leadership positions.

To conclude, the research sheds light on the role of the nature of the motives for choosing preschool teaching in the perception of the profession as a career: a career with an emphasis on content, with investment in one's own professional development, or a career with a focus on formal promotion, careerism. The nature of the motives for choosing a career also determines whether preschool teachers relate their career development opportunities to factors largely within their control or to predominantly external circumstances beyond their control. These findings support the importance of informing and raising awareness among future preschool teachers about the complexity of the profession and of

developing realistic expectations about their future professional role; they also support the importance of mentoring, of developing professional development competences in gaining insight into the opportunities and constraints of a preschool teacher's career, and in raising awareness of career paths among both future preschool teachers in the course of their studies and those already working in practice.

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Conflict of interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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