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Factors influencing the selection of university studies in early childhood education

Factores que influyen en la elección de estudios universitarios de educación infantil

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Abstract

This research analyzes the factors that may influence the moment in which students opt for university studies oriented to Early Childhood Education teaching. An exploratory and descriptive cross-sectional research was designed, under a non-experimental quantitative approach and with a non-probabilistic convenience sampling. A total of 157 university students from public and private institutions participated in the study, which was conducted using a questionnaire with 4 dimensions and 31 items. The vast majority agreed that the Early Childhood Education stage is important for children's development, this being the most important factor when opting for university studies leading to teaching at this stage. It is concluded that intrinsic motivations are the most influential on students, although the family and close context can also be determinant.

Keywords: Early childhood education, educational qualifications, preschool teacher education, preservice teacher education, university students.

Introduction

The selection of a particular degree to pursue university studies includes a set of elements that are interrelated and that are part of personal identity. This selection is a process in which the interested party reviews his or her professional future and links it to his or her own interests and aptitudes. In the case of teaching degrees, this selection is influenced by the value attached to teaching and by personal and vocational inclinations (Stellmacher et al., 2020). Deciding to pursue studies in the Bachelor's Degree in Preschool Education (hereinafter IE), is an

Resumen

Esta investigación analiza los factores que pueden influir en el momento en el que los estudiantes opten por estudios universitarios orientados a la docencia en Educación Infantil. Se diseñó una investigación transversal exploratoria y descriptiva, bajo un enfoque cuantitativo no experimental y con un muestreo no probabilístico por conveniencia. Un total de 157 estudiantes universitarios de instituciones públicas y privadas participaron en el estudio, que se realizó mediante un cuestionario de 4 dimensiones y 31 ítems. La gran mayoría coincidió en que la etapa de Educación Infantil es importante para el desarrollo de los niños, siendo éste el factor más destacado a la hora de optar por estudios universitarios conducentes a la docencia en esta etapa. Se concluye que las motivaciones intrínsecas son las que más influyen en los estudiantes, aunque el contexto familiar y cercano también puede ser determinante.

Palabras clave: cualificación académica, educación infantil, estudiante universitario, formación de docentes de preescolar, formación preparatoria de docentes.

opportunity to review the factors that may influence when making this decision, since the identification of these may allow a reading on what the student really identifies as determining elements or the motivations surrounding professionalization for that educational stage and hence the importance of recognizing the reasons for selecting the IE degree. This can be identified at the beginning of the studies (García-Poyato et al., 2018) since, at that moment, students can express with an important level of concreteness, those aspects that have allowed them to

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recognize their interest in these studies and, in addition, it implies an adaptation with a view to a professional training (Restrepo, Sánchez, & Castañeda, 2020). Students who enter the IE career already have references with respect to the teaching work and have certain ideas about what will be developed in their studies, in addition to linking them to their interest in becoming professionals (Stenberg & Maaranen, 2020).

The university context and one's own experience in studies makes the interrelation between students serve for the maturation of what professionalization as an IE teacher implies (Pérez Ferra et al., 2018; Cachón et al., 2022), this means that the socialization of life experience, of different realities and points of view, will help the student to outline his or her identity as a future professional, while recognizing what has influenced when making the decision to prepare professionally. The influence of individual and contextual factors are interrelated (Guerra Bilbao & Lobato Fraile, 2015) so that the selection of a particular degree does not respond exclusively to an individual decision, but rather, elements that correspond, for example, to the social vision of the profession, contact with the future work context, personal motivation, particular tastes, altruistic motives, interculturality in undergraduate studies in IE, among others, intervene (Rubio Gómez et al., 2019).

This research presents the findings found regarding those factors that have been at the moment that students decide to do university studies in IE. First, a review of the scientific literature is made in the theoretical framework and then the quantitative methodology designed to develop this study is presented. Subsequently, the results and the discussion based on the research findings are presented in order to reach the final balance as a conclusion. Now, why is it important to know the factors mentioned above? Basically, for two reasons: the first has to do with the need to go deeper into the aspects that can condition or influence people at such an important moment as the selection of university studies, in this case in IE. In this sense, being able to analyze and discover what surrounds that moment and what can have an impact can show that not always what is publicly commented is what really happens and the most suitable way to discover what happens is precisely to investigate the phenomenon. The second reason revolves around the ability to design studies that can guarantee personalized attention to students, but this cannot be achieved if there is no in-depth knowledge of the scope and influence of the

context and what society expects from teachers who will be part of the development of a country while continuing with the interest of considering the student as the center of attention of the University. Finally, with this research we hope to offer elements for discussion that can strengthen future studies that consolidate the generation of new knowledge about the pedagogical process at the University.

Theoretical Framework

Navarro & Soler (2014) refer to three dimensions that are combined in students when they opt for IE studies: psychological-introspective dimension (interest in what they choose to study and the need for personal self-realization), instrumental dimension (satisfaction of economic needs, social recognition of the teaching profession, job opportunities, among others) and professional dimension (interrelation of the previous dimensions from the professional practice). The identification of these dimensions will serve to outline from a deep critical and reflective process (Gairín Sallán et al., 2019) the revision of the curricular approach of the degrees to visualize to what extent what students expect from their studies, according to Rojas, Estévez & Macías (2018), students can often lean in favor of extrinsic motivations and these can become demotivating.

University studies have a curricular design that theoretically allows interdisciplinarity, but students in the first courses may come to feel that they do not visualize the importance of the degree design, the usefulness of the subjects and the relationship between them (Pérez Ferra et al., 2018). This allows moving towards what these same authors point out and that is that the curricula have a dichotomous relationship between humanistic training and efficiency training, while the interest in teacher training in IE is observed from the need to respond to changes of political, economic and social order (Acosta-Marroquín, 2020), in addition to the fact that the dynamics of adaptation and change is typical of higher education (Cubero-Ibáñez & Ponce-González, 2020; Herrera, Mohamed & Cepero, 2016).

In the studies consulted, there is great agreement that vocational motives are those that exert the greatest influence when students choose the IE Degree (Briones, Palomera, & Gómez-Linares, 2021; Cobano-Delgado Palma, Llorent Bedmar, & Navarro Granados, 2020; Falcón Linares, & Arraiz Pérez, 2020; Guerra Bilbao & Lobato Fraile, 2015; García-Poyato et al., 2018;

Luzón-Trujillo & Montes-Moreno, 2018; Rodríguez, González & Gutiérrez, 2019; Gallardo & Vázquez, 2016). In addition, the reasons for choosing university studies are undergoing a certain evolution that tends more towards labor (Navarro & Soler, 2014) since they would be looking for an increase at an economic and social level (Canal & Rodríguez, 2020), also recognizing that the close context (family and friends) influences the permanence in the studies and their selection (Coppari et al., 2019). Other researches expose various aspects that also have an influence, such as: contact with the school environment and family experiences (Guerra Bilbao & Lobato Fraile, 2015), liking for children (Briones et al., 2021; Rodríguez, González, & Gutiérrez, 2019), impossibility of accessing other studies, family ties with teachers, or a notable professional interest (García-Poyato et al., 2018), the relationship between gender and choice of IE studies (González Alba et al., 2021),

or the fact that IE studies are short and easy (Luzón-Trujillo & Montes-Moreno, 2018).

Rutten & Badiali (2020) identify three categories that should be used to recognize the elements that most influence students' decision to pursue a degree in IE. These three categories are: 1) intrinsic motivation, 2) extrinsic motivation and 3) altruistic motivation. However, for these researchers, the results obtained allow them to affirm that intrinsic and altruistic motivations are the most predominant, among which are: making a difference in each student, training future citizens of the world, the desire to serve students through education in values and interest in teaching in IE based on personal experiences. These researchers point out that the least influential factor was the presence of a teacher in the family. At a global level, the general trend among the authors reviewed can be observed (see Table 1):

Table 1
Identified factors influencing the selection of IE studies (various authors)

Author	Factors identified
Navarro & Soler (2014)	Interest in university studies and personal self-realization. Satisfaction of economic needs, social recognition, job opportunities.
Rojas et al., (2018)	Extrinsic motivations
Coppari et al., (2019)	Personal tastes of students. Close context (family and friends)
Briones et al. (2021); Rodríguez et al., (2019)	Vocational reasons
Cobano-Delgado Palma et al., (2020)	
Falcón Linares & Arraiz Pérez (2020)	
Guerra Bilbao & Lobato Fraile (2015)	
García-Poyato et al., (2018)	
Luzón-Trujillo & Montes-Moreno (2018)	
Gallardo & Vázquez (2016)	Tendency towards work, increase of economic and social level.
Navarro & Soler (2014); Canal & Rodríguez (2020)	Contact with the school environment and family experiences
Guerra Bilbao & Lobato Fraile (2015)	Taste for children
Briones, et al., (2021); Rodríguez et al., (2019)	Impossibility of access to other studies, family ties with teachers, or a notable professional interest.
González Alba et al., (2021)	IE studies are short and easy
Luzón-Trujillo & Montes-Moreno (2018)	

Note: table prepared by the author (2023).

Table 1 shows a general tendency identified in the scientific literature reviewed, which is that intrinsic factors are the origin of the motivations that students have when choosing university studies in IE. A significant number of authors agree that vocational reasons are the most determinant, however, there is an inclination to accept that together with the vocational aspect there is also the influence of some factors that

have to do more with the immediate context and to achieve a better job and professional improvement, however, the vocational aspect is the element with the greatest presence among the research reviewed. The current situation of the IE teacher, his or her social recognition or possible job improvements, besides being recognized by the students, has not prevented them from opting for these university studies. Thus, the critical and

reflective process can have a transforming effect on thinking and teaching practice (Agirre, López-de-Arana, & Martínez, 2022). This idea allows relating the reference that IE students have regarding what surrounds the future teaching practice, with those initial expectations linked to a possible personal fulfillment and high satisfaction from the vocational (Cantón Mayo & Téllez Martínez, 2017).

It is clear, then, that the humanization of teaching and the corresponding university studies must be considered when training teachers at the university level. That is, the human aspect that translates into the vocational aspect is not in vain present in a substantive way in the scientific literature and this responds to a fundamental reason: scientists have ratified that when students decide to be professionally trained as IE teachers, they seem to have as a motivational starting point, the teaching vocation and categorically, they identify this teaching vocation almost automatically by liking children. However, this statement is not far from recognizing the great challenges facing IE teaching in the present and in the future. Even though we may think that we do not have the best conditions or the best social recognition, the students, according to the research analyzed, present elements that allow us to infer that their interest in teaching (teaching vocation) overcomes any unfavorable situation.

Methodology

The general objective of this research was to explore those factors that may influence university students at the time of deciding to pursue a degree in IE. To this end, three specific objectives were established: 1) to recognize the reasons for deciding to study a degree in IE, 2) to identify the support and possible external influence received regarding the decision to study a degree in IE, 3) to know the opinion of students regarding the vision they have of IE as an educational stage.

Design: according to Hernández Sampieri, Fernández & Baptista (2010), this is an exploratory and descriptive cross-sectional research, since the aim was to explore a set of variables at a given time, as well as their possible impact on the population under study. Since there was no manipulation of variables, it is a non-experimental quantitative approach, since the phenomenon is observed without generating a deliberately provoked situation.

Population: university students in the first year of the Bachelor's Degree in IE in two universities located in Madrid, one of which is public and the other private.

Instrument: a specific instrument was designed for this study, which consisted of a questionnaire organized from 4 dimensions: 1) information about the participant (8 items), 2) Motives for pursuing the IE Degree (9 items), 3) Support in the decision to pursue the IE Degree (6 items), 4) External influence regarding the decision to pursue the IE Degree (6 items), 5) External vision regarding IE (10 items). Dimensions 2, 4 and 5 were adjusted to the Lickert scale with 5 points (1= totally disagree and 5= totally agree), while dimension 3 was adjusted to the same scale, but modifying the classification: 1= never, 5= always. (Rositas Martínez, 2014).

Procedure: The sampling was non-probabilistic by convenience. The students were informed of the object of the study whose responses were completely anonymous. The instrument was provided by means of a QR code to facilitate the response process from the students' own mobile devices.

Data analysis: SPSS Statistics (version 26, IBM International Business Machines Corporation) was used.

Results and Discussion

Of the 157 students who participated in the study, 86% belonged to a private university (n=135) and 14% to a public university (n=22). Of the 157 students who participated in the study, 54.8% (n=86) studied in the blended mode, 22.9% (n=36) in person and 22.3% (n=35) online, with a mean age of 28 years (SD=7.74), although the highest frequency was 22 years and 4.43 years of teaching experience, although the highest frequency was one year of experience. Of the overall total, 41.4% have a job as a classroom teacher, 29.9% are not employed at the time of participating in the study, while 19.1% have a job in the school context, but not as a teacher. Finally, 9.6% have a job, but not in the school context. On the other hand, 73.2% of the participating students do not have any family members involved in teaching (SD=0.444). In addition, 98.1% have not abandoned other studies to enroll in the IE degree, while 88.5% have previous studies, most of them (86%) being studies related to teaching (see Table 2).

Table 2.
Sociometric variables of the sample

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	M	SD
Age	157	18	48	27,92	7,774
Experience	157	1	27	4,43	5,608
Modality	157	1	3	1,99	,675
Previous_studies	157	0	1	,89	,320
Teaching_studies	157	1		1,25	,650
Abandonment_of_other_studies	157	0	1	,02	,137
Teachers_in_the_family	157	0	1	,27	,444
Employment_status	157	1		2,62	1,293
University_type	157	0	1	,14	,348

Note: table prepared by the author (2023).

The data obtained indicate that 82% of the students consulted are in complete agreement that one of the most relevant reasons for choosing the IE degree is that this stage is important for the development of people (Etapa_imp) (M=4.76, SD=.582). On the other hand, the liking for children also obtained an outstanding result of 73.9% (Yes_children) (M=4.61, SD= ,806). However, the teaching vocation aimed at this educational stage is placed as the third reason for the selection of this university degree with 67.5% (Voc_inf) (M=4.45, SD= ,936) while, for this same indicator, 10.2% partially agree that this is one of the reasons for pursuing the aforementioned studies. The intention to become a professional in the IE stage, although it obtained a percentage that tends to be considered as a reason for pursuing the degree, a certain dispersion observed does not allow us to categorically place it as a majority option among the students.

The results show that 53.5% of the students consulted agree that they did not choose these studies because they were easy to pass (Fac_aprob) (M=1.80, SD= 1.02) although 17.2% partially agree that they chose these studies because they were easy to pass. In addition, 86.6% totally disagree in considering that they have opted for these university studies because they could not choose another degree (No_other) (M=1.26) (SD= ,777), however, 45.9% totally disagree with respect to choosing these studies because it is a career with easy employment opportunities (Fac_labor) (M=1.92, SD= 1.00) and with which they can obtain more opportunities (More_opor) (M=3.40, SD= 1.57). Regarding the possibility of obtaining sufficient income with this degree, the concentration of the data indicates that the students are inclined to disagree (Revenues) (M= 2.51, SD= 1.249) (see Table 3).

Table 3.
Item, label, Mean and SD of dimension 2: Motives for doing the IE Degree

Item	Label	M	SD
Taste for children	Yes_children	4,61	,806
Job opportunities	Fac_labor	1,92	1,00
Ease in studies	Fac_aprob	1,80	1,02
Inability to opt for other studies	No_other	1,26	,777
Job opportunities	More_opor	3,40	1,57
Professionalization in EI	Prof_stage	4,30	1,028
Vocation for the EI stage	Voc_inf	4,45	,936
EI as an important stage in children's development	Etapa_imp	4,76	,582
Sufficient income as an EI teacher	Revenues	2,51	1,249

Note: table prepared by the author (2023).

With respect to the support in the decision to study the Bachelor's Degree in IE, 73.9% of the student's state that they have always received family support (Family_Support) (M=4.46, SD=

1.077) while the support received from friends and close non-family members stands at 68.2% (Support_friends) (M=4.47, SD= ,958). However, the support received from teachers

with whom the students consulted have contact, corresponds to 58.0% (Teacher_Support) with an $M=4.18$ and $SD=1.174$, that is, between almost always and always. Of the three percentages, the lowest corresponds to the support received from teachers. Of the three percentages, the lowest percentage corresponds to the support received from teachers. 72.0% of the students say that they are doing their university studies because they feel they have a teaching vocation, regardless of

the support received (Del_decidid) ($M=4.59$, $SD= .751$), and 75.8% say that they have never considered abandoning their studies, 8% stated that they had never considered abandoning their studies because they had not received support (Aband_noapoy) ($M=1.46$, $SD=.951$) and 50.3% could recommend the IE degree based on their own experience (Recommendation) ($M=4.23$, $SD=.940$) (see Table 4).

Table 4.
Item, label, Mean and SD of dimension 3: Support in the decision to pursue a Bachelor's degree in IE

Item	Label	M	SD
Family support	Family_Support	4,46	1,077
Support from close non-family members	Support_friends	4,47	,958
Teacher support	Teacher_Support	4,18	1,174
Vocation regardless of the support received	Del_decidid	4,59	,751
Abandonment due to lack of support	Aband_noapoy	1,46	,951
Recommend to others to study the EI Degree	Recommendation	4,23	,940

Note: table prepared by the author (2023).

When observing the data corresponding to the external influence regarding the decision to pursue studies in the Bachelor's Degree in IE (see Table 5), 40.8% of the students totally agree that they have received positive influence from one or more members of the family at the moment of deciding to pursue the university studies referred to above (Family) ($M=3.74$, $SD=1.326$), however, 39.5% recognize having received positive influence from friends in the close context (Friends) ($M=3.74$, $SD=1.321$) and 36.3% recognize having received positive influence from one or several teachers they have

known throughout their lives (Teachers) ($M=3.38$, $SD=1.257$). On the other hand, 26.1% disagreed with the statement that they had not received any influence at the time of deciding to pursue these university studies (No_influence) ($M=2.64$, $SD=1.345$), at the same time they totally agree in feeling at ease with their studies (55.4%) (Agusto_est) ($M=4.37$, $SD= .819$) and regardless of the opinion of others, they remain firm with the objective of continuing with their university studies (Follow_est) ($M=4.76$, $SD= ,545$).

Table 5.
Item, label, mean and SD of dimension 4: External influence on the decision to pursue a degree in IE.

Item	Label	M	SD
Influence of one or more family members	Family	3,74	1,326
Influence of one or more close persons	Friends	3,74	1,321
Influence of known teachers on school life	Teachers	3,68	1,257
No influence from any person	No_influence	2,64	1,345
Pleasure in studying EI	Agusto_est	4,37	,819
Continuity in studies, regardless of the opinion of others.	Follow_est	4,76	,545

Note: table prepared by the author (2023).

32.5% of students think that society does not recognize IE as a fundamental part of the school stage (Company_recon) ($M=2.45$, $SD= 1.112$), while 33.1% disagree in recognizing that families know of the importance of IE for the education of their children (Impor_families) ($M=2.71$, $SD= 1.133$) (see Table 6). Regarding the social

recognition of teachers at this educational stage, the results are mostly inclined to disagree with the social recognition that these teachers receive (39.5%) (Reconoc_soc) ($M= 2.21$, $SD= 1.119$). Quite similar proportions are observed when evaluating the recognition of these teachers as university professionals, i.e., the majority

consider that they are not recognized as such (Teachers_PU) (35.7%) (M=2.49, SD= 1.119) and that the work benefits are not in accordance with the relevance they have (35%) (Benefic_lab) (M=2.22, SD= 1.048). However, for these students, the vision held regarding IE seems not to be a determining factor when making the decision to pursue university studies (31.2%) (Vision_ref) (M=2.54, SD= 1.233).

Together with the above, 59.3% partially agree or disagree in recognizing that IE teachers

influence the way in which society recognizes them (Teachers_influy) (M=2.88, SD= 1.134), while 64.3% agree or totally agree that families influence the social vision held regarding the early childhood stage (Visión_soc) (M=2.88, SD= 1.134). On the other hand, 66.8% agree or totally agree that the Public Administrations influence the social vision of IE (AA_PP) (M=3.89, SD= 1.060) while 63.7% partially agree or agree that the students of the Degree in IE influence this vision (Students_vision) (M=3.63, SD=1.070).

Table 6.

Item, label, Mean and SD of dimension 4: External vision regarding IE

Item	Label	M	SD
Social recognition of IE	Company_recon	2,45	1,112
Importance of IE by families	Impor_families	2,71	1,133
IE teachers and their social recognition	Reconoc_soc	2,21	1,056
IE teachers and their recognition as university professionals	Teachers_PU	2,49	1,119
Working conditions and benefits of teaching in EI	Benefic_lab	2,22	1,048
The vision of IE and its reference in the selection of the Degree	Vision_ref	2,54	1,233
EI teachers influence the way they are recognized	Teachers_influy	2,88	1,134
Families' view of IE	Vision_soc	3,90	,886
Public administrations and vision on IE	AA_PP	3,89	1,060
Undergraduate students in IE and the social vision of the stage.	Students_vision	3,63	1,070

Note: table prepared by the author (2023).

With a large majority, the participating students coincide in considering the IE stage, which is important for children's development, as the most decisive reason when deciding to pursue studies in the IE degree (82.8%) (Cobano-Delgado, et al., (2020); Falcón Linares, & Arraiz Pérez, (2020) who state that vocational reasons are the most influential with respect to the selection of the IE degree. That is to say, in the results observed in this research, the teaching vocation directed to the infant stage, is located in 67.5% being the third influential factor. While the importance of the infant stage in the development of children is found to be the most important element in terms of its importance for studying the degree, as stated by Rutten & Badiali (2020).

Among the studies reviewed, there is coincidence at the time of identifying those factors that influence the decision to study teaching in IE, but the difference lies only in pointing out the main factors. Thus, among the results obtained in this research are, in addition to the main factor exposed in the previous paragraph, the liking for children (73.9%), the teaching vocation for the stage (67.5%) and the interest in becoming a

professional in the EI stage (59.2%) coinciding with the research of Briones et al. (2021); Cantón Mayo & Téllez Martínez, 2017; Rodríguez et al., (2019) and Rutten & Badiali (2020). Considering that IE studies are easily approved as one of the reasons for studying, as well as the vision of earning income or increasing the economic level once this degree is obtained, are not factors that can be understood as determinants, although the studies of Luzón-Trujillo & Montes-Moreno (2018) suggest that these factors may become so. 73.9% of the students affirm that they have always received support from their close family at the moment of deciding to study teaching in IE. This result obtained coincides with the studies of Coppari et al. (2019). The same occurs with the support of friends (68.2%), however, it may be a point of revision that the support received from teachers with whom one has contact is not a mostly notable aspect among the students (58.0%). This result does not contrast completely with the studies of García-Poyato et al. (2018) since these researchers show that family contact with teachers can become a determining factor, but it is not categorically concluded that the teachers with whom one has

contact can exert influence when making the decision to study the IE degree.

A notably significant majority of students do not consider abandoning their studies in the event of not receiving support. That is to say, 86.6% have never or almost never considered this possibility, with which, these students show a deep conviction before the proposed objective once they have started their studies therefore it is in agreement with what Navarro & Soler (2014) express since it corresponds with the presence of the psychological-introspective dimension, and with Rutten & Badiali (2020) when intrinsic motivation is observed as predominant since 72% of these students claim to have a teaching vocation regardless of the support received, and 79% would always or almost always recommend others to study the IE degree.

The results indicate that 36.3% totally agree that they have received influence from teachers with whom they have had contact; however, the distribution of the data reviewed indicates that it is not an influence that is categorically present. It is true that there is a tendency to assume that it has been received, but, for example, it is a significantly different proportion with respect to the influence received from families (61.8%). This data contrasts with Rutten & Badiali (2020) who state that the least influential factor is the family, when in this case, it stands out that the family is the most influential factor, at least in the students consulted. Similarly, the influence of friends represents 39.5% which coincides with what was investigated by Coppari, et al., (2019). This means that the family context, the close social environment and the professors with whom one has contact do influence the students' decision to study a degree in IE, but with different levels of influence, i.e., not all influence in the same way nor are they equally decisive. The students consulted are of the opinion that, regardless of the support received, they remain firm in their interest in continuing their studies. This is evident in the results: 80.3% totally agree, which corresponds with the studies of Navarro & Soler (2014), and 84.1% feel comfortable with their studies, coinciding with Stenberg & Maaranen (2020). In general, no significantly different differences were observed among students with respect to ascription by type of university.

Among the extrinsic factors, students accept that public administrations have influence regarding the vision held about IE as a stage which, coincides with Rojas et al. (2018) and Guerra Bilbao & Lobato Fraile (2015) in affirming that

contextual factors also come into play when opting for university studies. Students show disagreement when expressing themselves about the social recognition of the teaching profession, and as university professionals. Navarro & Soler (2014) point out the need to increase social recognition and economic level as elements that can influence. This contrasts with the results obtained since, despite the fact that students totally disagree with the current working conditions and benefits of IE teachers, as shown by Cantón Mayo & Téllez Martínez, (2017), they continue to opt for these university studies, without forgetting that to some extent, according to the students, the same stage teachers and families influence the vision and social recognition of IE.

Conclusions

For the students consulted in this research, intrinsic motivations are the most influential at the time of deciding to study for a degree in early childhood education. Thus, considering IE as an important stage in the development of children is presented as the main factor, without failing to recognize that a liking for children, the teaching vocation for this educational stage or the interest in becoming a professional in this stage, are also factors that exert their influence. In short, as mentioned at the beginning, it is a matter of intrinsic motivations.

However, the context can also become an influential factor and it will depend on each personal reality, as this context can determine to a certain extent the decision to take the step to study IE at a professional level. This does not prevent students from recognizing the reality of IE and what accompanies it, for example, the social recognition of this stage, the working conditions and opportunities, among other elements. Thus, regardless of those situations that can be improved, the students have expressed their personal conviction about any circumstance, therefore, and considering that these are students who are beginning their studies, a strong individual component has been present, which is manifested in this case by the inclination to prepare themselves at the university level to teach in IE.

Now, for these students, the family has been the main point of support at the time of undertaking their studies, as well as an important degree of influence from friends and the close non-family context, however, the teachers who have been present throughout their school life, as well as those with whom they are currently in contact,

have not been the main motivational reference for initiating their studies in IE. This idea, together with the possible general improvements for IE and the social vision that may be held about this stage, has not prevented students from remaining firm in their objective, therefore, it can be said that the teaching vocation emerges regardless of the circumstances, regardless of the fact that over time this teaching vocation may mature and resize towards other spheres of teaching activity.

Among the limitations of this research, the following can be mentioned: a) the need to have a greater number of investigations designed exclusively for the IE stage, b) delays in sending the answers by the students, c) possibly the instrument could have been reduced in terms of the number of items in order to facilitate the students' answers, d) bureaucratic procedures that could have prevented the students from gaining access to a university at the time. As future lines of research, we can propose, for example, studies on the perspective of undergraduate IE students once they have completed their studies, analysis of the entry and exit situation of students once they have graduated, the correspondence between the undergraduate IE curriculum and the promotion of critical thinking as a teaching competence, the influence of the practicum as a training element for IE students, research competence and its presence in undergraduate studies, or gender identity and the teaching practice in IE.

Finally, one of the major findings of this research is undoubtedly to certify that no matter how adverse the circumstances may be and that a not very encouraging panorama may possibly appear at some point, the teaching vocation will appear sooner or later. The trigger for this teaching vocation to appear can be found in different contexts, but society has the duty to ensure that teacher training, as well as the recognition of its social relevance, is translated into attention from a deep respect for teaching and from the commitment to the training of citizens.

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