

TEACHER EDUCATION STUDENTS IN MINORITY AND MAJORITY EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Language, education, and politics are three factors that are closely related to one another and play a crucial role in the life and survival of minority communities. In this paper questions of minority education are touched upon. The standard and efficiency of minority schools have several aspects, but basically it is the personal characteristics of the teachers and their professional and pedagogical training that can make their work successful. This is the main reason why teacher education has become the primary concern of higher education in a minority environment, so much more so given that teacher education is a part of education that reproduces itself and its higher or lower quality can determine all the other aspects of education. Needless to say, then, that teacher education in a minority setting, as well as the future teachers themselves, should be examined from several perspectives. The present study focuses on the analysis of what has motivated teacher education students to choose this career, what pedagogical values they consider to be of primary importance and what goals they would like to achieve in the future. We are convinced that teacher education students begin to consider their future aims at an early stage during their studies. What we aim at is not just a description of the present situation or a presentation of case studies but also the representation of the factors which are hidden behind the different phenomena; therefore our results are interpreted in a majority vs minority context. The empirical data are taken from the IESA-TESSCEE II. 2014 database based on the questionnaires completed for the project “Regional networks providing professional services and research support for teacher education in the North Plain region” (Hung. abbreviation: SZAKTÁRNET). The data were collected from the state-funded regular and self-financed students of the higher education institutions that can be found within the catchment area of Debrecen University, both in Hungary and beyond the borders (Ukraine, Romania) in the autumn of 2014. The survey included 1729 people that had just begun their university studies or were close to graduation. What the results clearly show is that the differences between the groups of students follow from variables appearing at context level. The contextual factors present in the countries, the potential of their education systems and other social effects affecting the student population have created different types of community orientation, which will shape the aspects of their pedagogical work in the future.

INTRODUCTION

Hungarian ethnic minority groups have existed in the Carpathian Basin since the Trianon Treaty, which concluded the 1st World War. To date, none of these minority communities is homogeneous, neither in terms of their socio-demographic nor their economic situation, not to speak of their numerical proportion. It follows from these different features that the educational processes that characterise them also diverge (Csete et al., 2010), but what can be stated in general is that their share in school education and the results they achieve lag behind those of the majority nation in every region, a tendency which is growing ever stronger and more noticeable in higher education as well (Keller, 2004; Molnár & Molnár D., 2005; Veres, 2013). This phenomenon may have several underlying reasons. On one hand, the countries of the region are characterized by a delayed expansion in education compared to the general European expansion processes (Kozma, 2011). On the other hand, there is a shortage of available courses and institutions in the native language. The negative influence of demographic processes cannot be neglected either. Many choose a majority institution or begin their university studies in Hungary, in the expectation of a successful career (Keller, 2004; Molnár & Molnár D., 2005; Veres, 2013). The key aspect of education in the native language is teacher education for the minorities, since teacher education is the self-reproducing element of the whole education system. Under favourable conditions it either generates a spiralling rise in standards or reproduces itself, but its various levels can also mutually damage each other. The failure of public education affects higher education, and vice versa (Csete et al., 2010). What Barabási adds to all this is that the quality of teacher education is most illustrative of the quality of the education system as a whole (Barabási, 2002). That is the reason why the present paper is designed to examine teacher education and teacher education students beyond the borders from various points of view. The fundamental question raised in the paper is closely connected to the course of research that has yielded results proving that teachers' mastery exerts a measurable influence on students' school careers, especially in educational environments that pose a challenge (Bacsikai, 2013; Sági & Ercsei, 2012). What we argue for is that students belonging to ethnic minorities are in a situation that can be considered specific, therefore the role of their teachers is increasingly important. Previous research has provided unequivocal evidence that minority communities experience several disadvantages, which has considerably diminished the popularity of careers embedded in the national culture or involving local commitment (Takács, 2015). Under such circumstances the question of who will become pedagogues for minority communities is undoubtedly a pressing one. Our research will target the recruitment of pedagogues, their impact on student communities as well as their social adaptation to the career chosen and their commitment to it. The present research is also aimed at examining the teacher education programmes for Hungarian ethnic minorities, the social backgrounds that students come from, the motivations behind their choice of this career, and the values and goals that they think are closely related to education and that they intend to reach. What we strive to achieve in our analysis is not only a description of the current circumstances of minority teacher education, or a presentation of case studies, but also an understanding of factors influencing all this at a contextual level; therefore the results will be interpreted in a minority-majority relationship.

In a minority environment a teacher is expected to perform a so called extended role, since minority education in the native language has many more functions than majority education. Where do minority teacher roles and the expectations raised derive from? The question can be answered by considering the general social claims made on the education system and (claims made by communities in the narrower sense of the word). The functions and duties teachers are expected to fulfil can be described in the broadest sense on this basis. Perhaps it is in Trencsényi (1988) that the most comprehensive discussion of roles can be found and in which a tripartite division is presented. He holds the view that the roles teachers perform are determined by their emotional involvement in their work and by their relationship to their pupils. Trencsényi's typology, complemented with Zrinszky's (1994) pedagogical model and interpreted in a minority context, makes it clear that minority teachers and institutions of education have many more responsibilities to help their pupils with the processes of socialization than do their colleagues working in majority education. It follows from this that minority teachers' work as instructors and educators receives heavier emphasis than it does in a majority environment. Research in the sociology of education, however, rarely pays any attention to the components of minority education. We are convinced that the educational values and pedagogical goals of teacher education students begin to emerge as early as during their training period. In the empirical part of the study I will concentrate on these features.

MINORITY AND MAJORITY TEACHER EDUCATION STUDENTS IN A CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT

In the analysis below, the data concerning the sample of teacher education students are given in a majority vs minority comparison. Hungarian students living in Hungary, Romanian students living in Romania and Ukrainian students living in the Ukraine are listed as belonging to the majority, whereas ethnic Hungarian students living in the Subcarpathian region, Partium, in Transylvania and in the Székely region make up the minority group. This typology shows the following distribution:

Table 1. Number of minority and majority teacher education students.

	N=
Minority teacher education students	288
Majority teacher education students	268
Total:	557

Source: TESSCEE II. 2014 (N=557)

One of the greatest differences between the two groups lies in their respective social backgrounds. It is taken as a fact by research in educational sociology that the families students come from closely interrelate with their academic career, because "what young people coming from families with different backgrounds receive in terms of financial and procedural support as well as intellectual encouragement depends greatly on the level of the parents' learning" (Pusztai, 2015, p. 77). Although the structure of education has been

expanding continuously both in Romania and in Ukraine in recent years and the level of education has also been rising, upward social mobility is mostly single-step and is mainly due to structural changes, and is still favourable to the majority society. The education of minority parents gradually decreases from lower to higher levels, for which the Soviet-type restrictive education policy with its intention to eliminate ethnic minorities is responsible (Csata, 2004; Molnár & Molnár D., 2005). Our data corroborate the trends of previous years and clearly show that the parents of majority students are more highly qualified, with a significantly greater proportion ($p \leq 0.05$) of fathers and mothers having graduated from university or college than those in minority families.

Experts in the sociology of education no longer debate the fact that the ambition of an individual to enter higher education is shaped by several circumstances besides cultural factors. The social capital that a family has accumulated appears as a source of power which can even supersede the determining force of cultural capital (Pusztai, 2004; 2009). The extent of social capital within the family was determined by the frequency of the 12 activities listed in the questionnaire in such a way that those filling it in could give a score from 1 to 4 (1 meaning 'rarely' or 'never', as opposed to 4 meaning 'very frequently').

Table 2. Social capital within families belonging to different nationalities (average values on a four-grade scale).

How often do your parents	Minority (N=288)	Majority (N=268)	Anova
Talk with you	3.2	3.42	**
Talk with you about culture, politics, public issues	2.63	2.72	ns
Talk with you about books and films	2.52	2.6	ns
Talk with you about a teacher's career	3.01	3.24	**
Ask you about your free-time activities	2.92	3.17	**
Involve you in housework	3.19	3.11	ns
Inquire about your studies	3.16	3.32	ns
Inquire about your friends	2.49	2.42	ns
Give you financial support	3.13	3.26	ns
Organize and share cultural programmes with you	2.51	2.63	ns
Encourage you in your studies	3.12	3.25	ns
Contact your teachers/instructors	1.95	1.64	***

*** $p \leq 0.001$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, * $p \leq 0.05$

Source: TESSCEE II. 2014 (N=557)

The results show that although minority parents are less educated than majority parents, they are more energetic in certain activities: they contact their children's teachers more frequently, they are more interested in who their friends are and involve them in housework more often. While it is true that minority parents talk about a teacher's career, urge their children to study harder or demand an account of their achievements less often, even these values are relatively high (above 3). It can be concluded that minority parents lag behind in activities that really require a higher level of social capital but, realizing the

importance of higher education studies, they try to do their best in any way they can to support their children in becoming successful students

Earlier research reveals that the minority students in the region have less financial capital than their majority peers. We also included the objective and subjective economic indicators in our research by measuring consumer durables. Considering these indices, neither the subjective, nor the objective indicators show any remarkable difference. Over three quarters of the student population questioned said that “they have got everything”. Out of ten durable consumer goods, majority students owned an average of 5.8, while their minority peers had 5.6, which is not a significant difference. It should be added immediately that the subjective judgment of one’s financial position is based on a system of values in every particular case. A student and/or his family would hardly be satisfied with their economic situation in a community in which material values are given primary importance.

In a minority environment, denominational affiliation is crucial not only from a religious perspective but also to national identity. Studies in the sociology of religion state that the level of religiousness is the highest in those post-socialist countries where commitment to a religion also serves as a basis of national identity, as in the Ukraine or Romania (Doktor, 2007; quoted in Pusztai & Fényes, 2013). A result published in an earlier study makes it clear that denominational affiliation as a contextual variable has a decisive influence on the performance of minority students in the different dimensions of their studies (Márkus, 2014a; 2014b).

The database used for the present study has also supplied ample material for the analysis of students’ religiousness along several dimensions. We have examined their denominational affiliation and the self-evaluation of their religiousness as well as the practices of their individual and public worship. What our results demonstrate is that minority students are more active in all spheres of religiousness. More of them belong to a denomination than their majority peers. It is worth mentioning that only 1% of the minority students said they did not belong to any denomination, whereas this rate exceeded 10% in the majority group. The self-evaluation of the extent to which they consider themselves religious also reveals a higher proportion of those who follow the rules prescribed by a Church and of those who practise individual worship. In comparison with this, the proportion of minority students is smaller than that of the majority group in non-religious categories. The questionnaire also measured the degree of individual and collective religiousness. What makes collective religiousness important is its clear and unequivocal function in laying down values and norms. Individual worship, on the other hand, helps integrate this function with one’s own character, which makes it very important in a minority setting (Pusztai, 2009). Forms of individual and collective worship (frequency of prayer, attending church services) also reveal considerable differences between the two groups. Three quarters of the minority students attend religious community events daily or at least once a week, whereas their majority peers do so much less frequently (38.3%). Differences of a similar magnitude can be found in individual worship practices (75 vs 43.5%). The divergence in each case is significant and the data reflect the tendency verified by historical experience: “Hungarian ethnic minorities regard religion and its institutions as the safest means of keeping their own cultural roots and use them to maintain their identity partly because there are hardly any other means available” (Tomka, 2000, p. 14).

In what follows, I will touch upon how motivated students are to engage in their studies. As mentioned before, to be a minority teacher is especially problematic, since the obligations included in it are undoubtedly context-dependent and are determined by particular values. That is why it is important to examine what is was that motivated people who chose this career and what educational values and goals they consider to be of special importance.

The questionnaire contained 15 statements, all concerning different aspects of motivation. The interviewees were asked to indicate if they had been motivated by any of these factors. Then the motivations were arranged in an order according to how frequently they had been chosen. The conclusion arrived at was that both groups of students had opted for a teacher's career because they wanted to acquire more knowledge and, later, to have better prospects of finding employment. Differences between the minority and majority groups arose in the respective languages of studies, the prestige of a subsequent career and future personal contacts. We also sought the causes of these differences. Later analysis unequivocally showed that minority students made less conscious decisions when it came to choosing a major. In this group, the proportion of those who would like to take up a job as a teacher in all circumstances after graduation is significantly ($p \leq 0.05$) lower (49.5%; in the majority group it is 72.7%). It is probably the narrower spectrum of training in Hungarian beyond the borders that is to be blamed for this, because it is dominated by teacher education rather than training in other fields. It is typical of minority students to first choose a course in the native language, then select a professional field from those offered, i.e. when making choices they are not governed by their belief in the importance of working as a teacher.

In the rest of the present analysis, some basic questions regarding the students' future pedagogical work such as educational values and goals will be dealt with. In the research, responses were sought as to what students considered to be their most important pedagogical task; how they thought it met the challenges presented by their communities and by society. Furthermore, the questions were designed to find out if there were any special features typical of either minority or majority students on the basis of teachers' functions and roles. A sense of responsibility and sincerity were the chief values to be handed down (considered to be very important by 60% of the interviewees in both groups); what, however, deserves special attention is that nurturing children to be independent, unselfish and loyal were much more important for those in the minority group than for the majority. Respect for others, hard work and economy were also more highly valued by these respondents.

Further analyses highlighted other issues as well. Using factor analysis, we separated four types of value orientation¹: general humanistic, leadership-oriented, community-spirited religious, and conformist attitudes (the last representing an approach adapting to social routine). The general humanistic attitude regards values such as sincerity, responsibility and self-reliance as fundamental. The values articulated for the community-spirited type are religious faith, unselfishness and obedience. Finally, the conformist type prefers good behaviour, politeness and tolerance.

Factor analysis can be considered to be successful in itself, since it reveals certain normative structures. It can be statistically verified that there are latent structures to which students' educational values are attached.

1 Factor analysis, Varimax rotation, the four factors cover 57.8% of the full variance, KMO=0.924

In the next section of the analysis I transformed the individual value preferences into a scale from 0 to 100, in which 0 indicates that the given type of orientation is not characteristic of the students at all, while 100 means that all the student population acknowledges it. The comparative study of minority-majority value orientation revealed that a humanistic approach to education is typical of both groups. Minority students ranked community-spirited religious values second, whereas for those in the majority group conformity and leadership orientation came last.

The average values differ remarkably only for community-spirited religious orientation, being much more typical of the minority than of the majority. For the former, the ‘handed down’ values such as religious beliefs, obedience, unselfishness and loyalty are more important than they are for the majority.

*Table 3. Comparison of minority and majority value orientation types
(average values on a 100-grade scale).*

	Humanistic**	Leadership	Collective (community- spirited) religious***	Conformist*
Majority (N=210)	79.99	47.05	58.88	69.2
Minority (N=231)	76.58	44.92	67.01	66.44

*** $p \leq 0.001$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, * $p \leq 0.05$

Source: TESSCEE II. 2014 (N=557)

As far as educational goals are concerned, it is important to understand their importance, which means that they should be clearly set. It is really vital to find out what pedagogical tasks are regarded as essential by the teachers of the future from either group and how they can respond to the challenges of society and to those of their smaller communities. Another key issue in carrying out pedagogical programmes is the distribution of tasks between school and family, which should be based on consensus (Pusztai, 2011). Using factor analysis, we distinguished four types of student orientation, which can be considered a result in itself.² The success of factor analysis in this survey (see the data on students’ educational values) means that students are beginning to form a clear idea of the most important aspects of education.

The different types of student orientation were given the following labels: cooperative, innovative, instruction-centred, and a fourth which represented an extended interpretation of a teacher’s role. What can bring about a cooperative pedagogical approach is expert communication and cooperation with the parents as well as other members of the teaching staff. The innovative type is characterized by commitment to new educational trends and methodological diversity. As opposed to this, instruction-centred orientation is represented by students who put a special emphasis on conveying knowledge and skills development in their work. Finally, teachers with an extended interpretation of their roles believe that paying attention to their pupils’ personal problems is almost as important as transmitting new knowledge.

² Factor analysis, Varimax rotation, the 4 factors cover 65% of the whole variance, KMO=0.932

In the table below students' preferences are presented on a scale from 0 to 100, in which 0 indicates that the orientation type is not typical of the students at all, whereas 100 means that the given orientation type covers all the students. The comparison of the minority-majority orientation types reveals that in both groups the cooperative approach is dominant, but innovativeness is also an example they would like to follow. Marked differences can be seen between the instruction-oriented attitude and the extended perception of a teacher's role. In the pedagogical styles of majority students instruction-oriented techniques are given primary preference, which means pedagogical work in the classroom, including the transmission of knowledge and development of skills. As for minority students, they are inclined to accept an extended role for the teacher, allowing for the formation of pupils' personalities as well as establishing a closer relationship with them.

Table 4. Comparison of minority and majority students' orientation types (average values on a 100-grade scale).

	Cooperative	Instruction-oriented	Extended role	Innovative
Majority (N=120)	77.96	74.9	37.72	73.49
Minority (N=157)	76.34	70.47	41.62	73.79

*** $p \leq 0.001$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, * $p \leq 0.05$

Source: TESSCEE II. 2014 (N=277)

SUMMARY

In my study, I have undertaken a comprehensive analysis of teacher education students coming from both the ethnic minority and the ethnic majority. I have examined the students' social background, their motivation for having chosen a teacher's career as well as their future pedagogical goals and the values they regarded as important. Our results have shed light on essential differences between the majority and minority students in each particular case. Research experience gathered over many years has been corroborated by the large discrepancies in the social status of the representatives of the two respective groups. Minority parents' level of education and material welfare lag behind those of their majority counterparts. On the other hand, there are significantly more religious students, who also practice their religion, in the minority group. This fact is in accordance with historical experience and, apart from religion functioning as an orientation towards particular values, it is also viewed as a means of expressing one's identity.

As far as the choice of a major and a future career are concerned, minority and majority students differ mainly in the language of instruction, in the prestige of a future career and in the connections that can be built later on. However, it is generally true that most of them are motivated by their higher education studies, the acquisition of advanced knowledge and the attainment of a more favourable position on the labour market after graduation. The differences in their future pedagogical goals and educational values depend on the diversity of influences deriving from their social positions and the minority communities

they belong to, which result in diverse types of community orientation. This is the reason further research should also include the regional differences between communities living beyond the border.

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