

ABSTRACT

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Teachers make a most important and tangible contribution toward the quality of teaching and learning that takes place in classrooms. The state of a teacher's mental health is one indicator of how well he/she would perform in the classroom. The career needs and aspirations of teachers are closely linked up with their contentment or otherwise; a more contented teacher is one whose needs and aspirations have been met. Even the likelihood of achieving one's aspirations and meeting one's needs generates more positive and favourable attitudes. A contented teacher service is therefore essential for the improvement of education. A survey of the professional aspirations of teachers in Sri Lanka can be considered important particularly in today's context of widespread frustration and dissatisfaction among teachers.

The present study investigated the professional aspirations of graduate teachers as indicated by their job satisfaction, frustration, their estimation of the social status of teachers, and, commitment to the profession. The sample of teachers surveyed were categorized according to a number of variables; their sex, geographical location of schools in which they serve, their age, teaching experience, Civil status, academic and professional

qualifications. Whether each of these variables significantly correlated with their professional aspirations was another focus of this study. The nature of the attitudes of graduate teachers towards the profession was also examined. Based on these findings, suggestions were made to improve conditions bearing upon the professional aspirations of graduate teachers in Sri Lanka.

Three hundred graduate teachers from the Gampaha Education region formed the sample of this study. It was inclusive of male and female, rural and urban, more and less experienced, Arts and Science, trained and untrained graduates.

Data was gathered through questionnaires administered to the entire sample, and by interviews with a selected sample. Part I of the questionnaire solicited respondents' biographical data, part II of the questionnaire included 21 items covering the five main areas investigated, as detailed above, Part III of the questionnaire was an attitude scale of the Likert type.

Relationships between the variables studied were examined by correlational analysis of data using the chi-square test of significance. In analysing the data from the attitude scale, the mean of scores was considered the point of origin of distribution, to

determine whether an attitude score was favourable or less favourable. A score falling above the mean was considered a favourable attitude, and a score below the mean, an unfavourable attitude.

The second technique used in the study was that of interview. The drawing up of the interview schedule was guided by items in the questionnaire; interview data was presented where appropriate, along with the analysis of responses to relevant items in the questionnaire.

The findings of this study indicate that graduate teachers have high professional aspirations. Both the questionnaire and the interview findings indicate that a majority of the male graduate teachers and science graduate teachers aspire higher than the female graduate teachers and the Arts graduate teachers. It also revealed that a majority of the male respondents are dissatisfied with the teaching profession. In comparison the majority of female teachers are relatively satisfied. The majority of male graduate teachers tend to be more frustrated than their female counterparts. Science graduates in general are more frustrated than the Arts graduates. It was clear that a majority of the male teachers have an unfavourable estimation of the social status of the teacher.

A majority of teachers did not assign first place to the teaching profession in their scale of job preferences and their estimation of the social status of the teacher in Sri Lanka in general is low. The study also indicated that female teachers profess a higher commitment to the profession than their male counterparts.

The study highlights the fact that graduate teachers in general are dissatisfied with the teaching profession. A large percentage of them look upon teaching as a stop gap till they find jobs that offer brighter prospects. Low salaries, unfair promotions, poor working conditions in schools, inadequate furniture and over crowded classrooms, were typical of the schools in which these teachers served. These would have contributed to their dissatisfaction.

Teachers share with parents the responsibility for moulding the character of the young, and they must be treated with courtesy and respect if they are to regain their status in society. They must at least be able to anticipate the likelihood of achieving their aspirations if they are to perform their duties satisfactorily. It is therefore of paramount importance to look into their aspirations and endeavour to ensure that at least some of them are fulfilled.