Teacher career motivation in special education in China

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Teacher career motivation as a whole has increasingly drawn attention in theory, research and practice. However, studies on teacher career motivation in special education have not been extensively conducted. One might assume that, due to the nature of special education, the motivation of teachers who have made their decisions to work with learners with diverse educational needs might differ in certain aspects from those working in general education. For this assumption to be evidence based, especially in a context like China, investigations into this research area would be necessary, appropriate and crucial, though a full recognition of it is yet to be reached.

Research on teacher career motivation in the international context
Since the early 1980s, research on the shortage and quality of teachers gradually drew interest in work values and job motives. Teacher career motivation has been extensively studied in many developed countries (Younger, Brindley, Pedder and Hagger, 2004; Hargreaves, 2007; Richardson and Watts, 2005, 2006; Malmberg, 2006; Cameron, Berger, Lovett and Baker, 2007; OECD, 2005). In addition, attention has been attracted to the international comparative research in this area (Kyriacou, Hultgren and Stephens, 1999; Sharma, Forlin, Loreman and Earle, 2006). Notably, Bennell and Akyeampong (2007) synthesize 70 main findings and recommendations of an international research project on teacher motivation and incentives in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. The United Nations Educational Scientific Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 2006a, 2006b) has also attached great importance to the study of teacher career motivation, in the hope of attracting, developing and retaining effective teachers in less developed countries.

Within the body of the theories on motivation, some have outstood the rest with their strong empirical validation once they are applied to the domains other than psychology. The incentive value of theories on motivation has inspired relevant research on teacher career motivation. Meanwhile, research in this domain has further developed the motivation theories. For example, Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT, Wigfield and Eccles, 2000) was the basis for the development of Factors Influence Teaching - Choice Scale (FIT-Choice, Watts and Richardson, 2007) in investigating teacher career motivation in an Australian context. Work context factors (Frase, 1992) are generally believed to prevent job dissatisfaction and clear the road of the debris that block effective teaching. However, some research (e.g., Gorard, See, Smith and White, 2006) argues that financial incentives have much less appeal than is
often assumed. Besides, the recent trend of changing career to teaching (Richardson and Watts, 2005; Priyadharsini and Robinson-Pant, 2003) is also an interesting phenomenon deserving attention as it explains the intrinsic and altruistic motivations for career choice.

Other theories like Self-Determination Theory (SDT, Ryan and Deci, 2000, 2002; Deci and Ryan, 2007) were tested not only in laboratories but in work organizations to study employees’ career motivation. SDT has enlightened practices and policies focusing on motivating studies through sanctions, rewards and evaluations. Whilst SDT proposes that extrinsic motivation can vary greatly from controlled to autonomous regulations (Deci and Ryan, 1985), the amotivation or unwillingness is seldom reported in literature on teacher motivation to distinguish from passive compliance to active personal commitment.

**Research on teacher career motivation in special education**

Special education teachers are valued mostly for their commitment to serve a vast dimensional group of children with educational needs, which is one of the most hardest and most complicated jobs in the field of education (Payne, 2005). Notable studies related to teachers in special education include, among others, teacher attitudes concerns and confidence for inclusion (Chong, Forlin and Au, 2007; Martinez, 2003). Given this is recognized as such an important area, few international studies have been carried out to understand pre-service teachers’ concerns and preparedness for teaching diverse learners (Sharma, Forlin, Ioreman and Earle, 2006). Among the existing studies, limited literature describes the feelings and thoughts of teachers in special education (Chen 2005), although in general teacher career motivation research, the impact of emotions on the personal well-being has been investigated (e.g., Hayes, 2003). ‘Few studies examine how teachers’ motivation can either affect directly their teaching behaviours or mediate the effect between contextual factors and teaching behaviours’ (Pelletier, Se’guin-Le’vesque and Legault, 2002:187). Even fewer focus on the special teachers’ motivation for their career choices.

In studying why people decide to work in special education to clarify the problems and challenges met by the teaching profession, Kearns and Shevlin (2006) identify that special initial training for teachers is no longer favoured in Ireland (p25). Interestingly, seeking the points of view of new special education students from the Norwegian sample, Hausstatter (2007) noticed that the main motivation for teaching in special education was that special education teachers are highly sought after in the Norwegian labour market. The desire to help people with special needs was not always foremost. Though some did mention philanthropic reasons and the theoretical side of this type of education, as highlighted in his study, considerations of the labour market had the greatest priority over other concerns. This is in contrast with the findings of a wave of altruism influencing teachers to take on the challenges from general teacher career motivation research (Richardson and Watts, 2005, 2006).
Research question: What are teachers’ motivations of entering special education in China?

Studies on teacher career motivation in special education have not been extensively conducted. Consequently, little is known about, for example, whether market-driven tendency has strengthened the role of education in promoting the intergenerational income mobility and social equity, or whether policies, culture, attitudes have more influence on the choice of professions in China (Liu and Wang, 2006). This paper, which is an interim report of my PhD study on teacher career motivation and professional development in special and inclusive education in China, focuses on Chinese special teachers’ career motivation in special education. Concerning the nature of and the low priority attached to special education, I had a strong curiosity in investigating the driving forces of teachers in their choice of working in special education. As little is published about special teachers in China, the research design was based largely on an analytic review of the existing literature on motivation theories and career choice research from a wider world as a comparison of the research context in China. The research was then conducted to find evidences for my assumption that teachers in China may lack an intrinsic motivation in teaching in special schools for the reasons briefly described above. Therefore, the key research question is: What are teachers’ motivations of teaching in special education? The study aimed to seek teachers’ self-determination or FIT (Richardson and Watt, 2006) in their career choice and their retention in the career by encouraging voices from special teachers themselves. The findings, still tentative at this phase of the study, are hoped to contribute to the limited body of knowledge on special teacher education in China and elicit future research to ‘explore together strategies to attract and retain high-quality teachers’ (OECD, 2001). The study aims to seek teachers’ self-determination (Ryan and Deci, 2002) in their career motivation by encouraging Chinese teachers’ voices hoping that new knowledge can be socially constructed for future international comparative studies.

Methods

To obtain an overview of the research topic, the research was set on purpose in a city in the eastern part of China belonging to the second tier area of the country in terms of economic strength. Rich in culture and history, education aspiration is high in this area. Special education is assumed to be better developed with regard to the number and quality of teachers compared with economically disadvantaged regions in China (Deng and Holdsworth, 2007). The city well represents the overall development in China in the recent two decades, especially in economy. The sample was purposive and selective. Data were collected from a semi-structured open-ended questionnaire survey administered to three cohorts, namely, student teachers in a university (N=565), teachers from 7 mainstream schools of different educational levels (N=326) and teachers from two special schools (N=37). 44 teachers from the mainstream schools and special schools were interviewed. The selection of the two special schools was that they are the only ones in the area with a population of about 620,000. The schools accommodate children with learning difficulties and sensory impairments from different socio-economic family
backgrounds, depending on the availability of placement in the schools.

Ethics clearance was obtained from each cohort prior to the research. The questionnaire was administered to all the teachers in the special schools (N=40). The response rate was 93%. 22 teachers were invited to participate in the open-ended interviews during their school day, which were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Data were also gathered from teacher stories, observations and school documents for triangulation purposes. The teachers in the study varied in age, gender, subject matter, and length of teaching experiences. I focused on the teachers’ individual perceptions and experiences together with common patterns and elements that recurred across the different interviews. The years of their teaching experiences in the special schools varied from over 30 years to 3 months. I divided them into three groups based according to their years in special education from less than 10 years (N=9), about 10-20 years (N=6) and over 20 years (N=7).

The interviews were used to capture some in-depth understanding of their career choices, their teaching experiences and their perceptions and attitudes of working with children with special needs. 3 teachers from each age group were purposely selected from the voluntary participants as case study sample for their typicality and commonality among the participants. This selection was based on the concept of ‘three waves of teacher reform’ in China from 1980s to present (Zhou and Reed, 2005). In particular, the first wave focused on the increasing of the number of teachers, also called ‘repairing’ period (Paine and Fang, 2006) from the damage in teacher education caused during the Cultural Revolution from 1966-1976. Whilst in 1990s, the focus was on the quality of teachers and since 2000, the focus was shifted to teacher professional development as the targets were basically met after the first two waves.

As expected, the proportion of teachers aged less than 30 years (67 %) is much higher in the school for children with learning difficulties than that in the school for children with sensory impairments (40%). The formal one was established in late 1980s. The first school of this specialty in China was founded in Shanghai in 1979 (Potts, 2003). The reason for the large proportion of new teachers can be attributed to the preliminary stage of development in terms of education opportunities for children with learning difficulties.

Findings
1. Most of the teachers received little or no training on special education, with some having no teaching qualification or degree to start their career.
Table 1: Interview data from special schools (N=22)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years in special schools</th>
<th>With initial training on special education</th>
<th>With teaching qualification or degree to start with</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20+:</td>
<td></td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36%</td>
<td></td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10+:</td>
<td></td>
<td>27%</td>
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<td>27%</td>
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<td>10:-</td>
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<td>36%</td>
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<td>36%</td>
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A very limited number of teachers had received special training before they started to work in the special schools. A teacher with about 30 years’ teaching experience in the school for children with sensory impairments began her teaching career in the school with a junior school certificate.

To be quite honest, this has to do with my parents. My parents are deaf and dumb. They worked here [special school]. We grew up in this school. We ate and lived with the students here. Then I went to the countryside to work. When my father retired, I was given a job opportunity. The then educational bureau asked me where I would like to be placed: mainstream schools or kindergartens… which one I would choose. At that time, though I was 20 years old, I was very immature. If I went to work in other places, I thought I would feel unfamiliar with the situation and I was afraid as I went to the countryside right after I finished my junior middle school. I did not even go to senior middle school before I was asked to go and work in the countryside. Since I was given a teaching position, comparatively, I knew myself well how much knowledge I had. I did not dare to go to other schools. I thought I’d better stay in this school since I knew the school well and it would be a piece of cake for me to teach here.

Case 1, ST-10

2. Most of the teachers were extrinsically motivated, with some amotivated.

Table 2 is a comparison of the factors influencing teaching choice from the survey data (N=36): Why did you choose to be a teacher, and the interview data (N=22): Why did you choose to be a teacher in special school?

Table 2: Percentage of factors influencing teaching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey data: Why teaching N=36</th>
<th>Interview data: Why special school N=22</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parental influence</td>
<td>Being recruited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family economic pressure</td>
<td>Government’s city dwelling policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like children/teaching</td>
<td>Job opportunity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government’s city dwelling policy</td>
<td>Health/family concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job opportunity</td>
<td>Supply for the retiring parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childhood dream</td>
<td>Like children/teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transmit knowledge</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
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Note: The participants were encouraged to give multiple reasons for their career choice. The table summed up the factors. The percentage is therefore more than 100% in both data sets.

In China, social conformity and collective decision-making predominates. Thus parental and family expectations are more salient factors in the career decision-making process in China (Mau, 2000; Oyserman et al., 2002). The data show a high percentage of potential influence in the participants’ career choice. Besides, being recruited ranks the highest from the interview data. Reasons for being recruited, a very controlled motivation (Ryan and Deci, 2002) for career choice, include, but not limited to, academic scores, school merge, government/school needs, and job promotion. The government’s city dwelling policy for people living in the countryside areas and supply for the retiring parent had a strong influence in teachers’ career choice as well as parental influence. Whilst teachers articulated intrinsic motivation for teaching in general, once it came to the teaching in special school, this intrinsic reason no longer seemed as important motivation. The change is obvious from the survey data of like children/teaching (16%) to the interview data (9%).

3. Extrinsic motivations become less controlled and more autonomous with the years of experience working in special schools. This is much better evidenced in the interview data with teachers’ narrative accounts about their career experiences.

I did not apply for that. I did not think about that. But that college recruited me without my consent. I applied to study teacher education…No. I was not [happy]. I did not know anything about it at all. I did not want to teach mentally retarded children. I would like to teach children in mainstream schools. I had never thought that I would be teaching mentally retarded children. I did not want to go there [teachers’ college].

At the beginning I was not used to that. But when we were in third years, we had teaching practice in schools. I got to be used of that. I got to understand that it was not too bad to be a teacher like that.

Discussion

1. Quality and number of teachers in special education in China
The Teacher Act (National People’s Congress, 1993) was a milestone as it, for the first time ever, officially recognised teaching as a profession in China. Great importance has been attached in the government’s agenda to the training of teachers (MoE, 2001, Article 10; Zhou and Reed, 2005). Teachers’ social status was thus enhanced. Nevertheless, Due to the nature of special education, in this densely populated country with unique socio-cultural embedment and unbalanced economic strengths in diverse regions, special teacher education in particular, has been encountering enormous challenges in its development (Wang, 2004).
One of the most pressing problems facing special education is arguably the scarcity of well qualified teachers (Gan, 2004). The greatest concern with teacher education under the new economic system is the sources of students (Yang and Wu, 1999:168). Although the Government has repeated its policy of encouraging talented young people to study to be teachers, the quality of students in teacher education institutions is declining. The best students in terms of academic studies tend to enter other universities as they are more interested in professions in which a better income is available. The statistics by the Ministry of Education of China (MoE, 2003) illustrate the current situation. Among 30,349 teachers and staff in special schools, there were only 48 teachers with graduate attainment, 3,757 with undergraduate attainment and the rest had lower educational backgrounds. Given the government’s policies and initiatives in teacher education, only about 50% of the teachers and staff had received some special training to be qualified in special education (MoE, 2003). This well explains why the number of teachers with initial special education training was so insignificant (14%) in my research. The government’s figure has little significance compared with the total number and qualification of teachers in other education sectors in the country. By 1999 the percentage of primary education teachers holding a tertiary qualification reached 12.8, although the World Education Indictors’ mean was 63.9 (Organisation for Economic Co-operation Development/UNESCO, 2001). In 2002, the percentage reached 30.9 (Wang, 2004:12), which contrasts with the International Labour Organisation and UNESCO’s report of less than two out of ten (Siniscalco, 2002).

In addition, the number and quality of teachers is incomparable with the mounting number of children with special educational needs, given there are no reliable figures available as special education used to and still is considered as the education for the disabled (Chen, 2005). Moreover, there is little awareness about learning difficulties of children (Wang, 2007), for example, autism and/or Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder, and social, emotional and behavioural problems, just to name some. Teachers’ limited knowledge and expertise lead to more children being excluded or disengaged in class. This indicates that diverse educational needs of children may not be addressed properly if any, or at all, for the insufficient number and poor quality of teachers in the line.

The criteria for teaching set in the Teacher Act (1993) are not demanding enough as it only focuses on the qualification (Wang, 2004). This is different from many other countries, where a teaching certificate is mandatory before prospective teachers can get a permanent teaching position. Whilst in China, a large number of teachers were recruited (Li, 1999) with the minimum required qualification for teaching. That is, graduates from junior secondary schools are trained in either a 3- or a 4-year programme to be prepared for mainstream primary education. The minimum requirement for teaching in secondary schools is a bachelor degree without necessity of a teacher training certificate. This is in contrast with developed countries where individuals pre-qualify for entry into the teaching market conditional on certifications from the state authority and/or holding a graduate degree in education.
Below is quoted from the interview with a teacher having no teaching qualification, no training or willingness to start teaching in the special school for children with sensory impairments:

Interviewer: So did you choose this school?
Interviewee: Well, what shall I say? You can erase this part after listening. Actually, at that time we did not want to be teachers. I did not like to be a teacher.
At that time, banks held exams for those people who missed universities. I took that exam and I got good marks. They liked those who could not go to universities. They wanted me and I wanted to go. But the local education authority said that I could not go to the just because my mother was a teacher and she was retiring. I could only go to a school. I was surprised to hear the news. I asked why? But… I did not like to be a teacher….
She emphasised that external factors would not have an impact on her intrinsic motivation. This aligns with the findings in the studies in a Western context that external manipulations undermine quality engagement, whereas those foster interest, value, and volition result in both greater persistence and better quality learning (Deci and Ryan, 2007).

_No, I will not give up my dream just for pay, or other things. I will not give up. Special education is so different. Fortunately, I learned some knowledge in health centre where I got to know people with special needs. It is not an easy job. One needs to have a heart of love for children._

ST-16

Another intrinsic factor is the influence by teachers and the passion to influence students. This finding differs from Watts and Richardson’s (2007) that few student teachers regard teachers’ influence as an important factor in their career choice. The following account is complicated in that the teacher had her original intrinsic motivation changed to great amotivation and back to more autonomous regulation which could be a mixture of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. I would consider this change as a natural reaction caused by the negative social image of special teachers. As she stayed along in the school, her initial intrinsic motivation overcame her self perception of special teachers and enabled her to have altruistic motivation in her career.

_When I was in primary school, I repeated Grade 1 as I was poor in health. My family was poor and my parents were busy. So we children were dressed in shabby clothes. My teacher looked down upon me. I was not happy and I would not accept the attitude from the teacher. I decided to study hard. At the end of the first term, nobody got marks as good as mine. At that time, they chose model students according to the marks. So I was chosen. The second term, we had a new teacher. That teacher was especially kind to me. So I determined to be a teacher. I wanted to be a teacher who would never judge their students according to the clothes they wear, the families they are from. I would love my students with all my heart. So now in my class, I love each and very one of them. When they do things wrongly, I would only blame them in my heart why you did that. My teachers in my junior years were good ones and I am lucky that all my teachers were good ones later in my study life. But the first teacher I had had great impact on me and later, when I finish my junior middle school, I applied to study in junior teachers’ college and I decided to be a teacher and a good teacher. That is why I am now a teacher._

Case 2, ST-22

Interviewee: Why did you choose this school, then?
Interviewee: _I should say that I did not know I should teach here. When I got the offer, I did not even know the school. I was very surprised. My mother was also surprised. I asked why I should go to this school for children with speech impairment. I figured out and told my mother that it must be the training course which ran in that school for newly qualified teachers. At that time, my mother used some relations to get_
me into another school. I could have four choices of going to mainstream schools. I felt quite secured and I believed that I would teach in a good school. But my documents were not distributed to the four schools. The local education bureau kept the documents. I was asked to come to this school.

Interviewer: Have you ever thought of leaving the school?
Interviewee: Yes, I did. In the first year, I tried hard to leave the school. I almost succeeded by using relations. But I changed my mind. I told myself to try to work here. Later I got used to it and later I did not want to leave.

4. Extrinsic motivation
First of all, many teachers mentioned that they were recruited passively because of their entrance examination scores. Kyriacou, Hultgren and Stephens (1999) identified that in some countries like South Africa, as reported in Chuene, et al. (1999), an important factor of career choice for many student teachers as they regard a degree-based teacher training course as an alternative access to higher education. Most of the student teachers in their study were motivated mainly by a desire to gain a diploma rather than a desire to become a teacher. This was echoed loud in my study as either being recruited or no choice. If a student’s university entrance examination scores were not high enough to be enrolled in any other programmes, they would normally join teacher education programmes since the rejection rate for application is very low. This is in contrast with the teacher education recruitment system in some Western countries (e.g., Gorard, See, Smith and White, 2006), where a fairly amount of applicants considering teaching as a career are rejected.

We [classmates] asked each other why we were here [Teachers’ college]. Many of them did not know before they were recruited to that college, either. Some of them failed to get offers to be in teacher education programmes for mainstream schools. So they had to get themselves into the college. At least it was also a college...

In Hung, Chung and Ho’s (2000) study, ninety percent of students opted to continue into higher education on completion of senior secondary education. It is evident that students acted in accordance with predictions in the human capital theory in making their choice of higher education or work in the market-oriented sector of China. This pattern of educational choice has important bearing in developing countries. This fits into the human capital theory (Becker, 1964) in that education is understood as investments in increasing economic returns and in increasing the place of individuals in the competitive labour market. In China, schooling is a form of human capital investment. Human capital is constructed from schooling years per capita (Liu and Li, 2006:449).

Second, rural-urban migration was considered as a critical factor in the career choice.
The migration decision of an individual is made by weighing the expected income or utility of migration against that of no migration. From 1953, people in China were classed as rural or urban residents. Rural residents were denied rights of city dwelling, mainly to stop them migrating to towns. System now faces abolition in 11 out of 23 provinces. To control rural-urban migration through administrative means, China relied on the Hukou or household registration system coupled with a ration system on staple food in urban areas (Liu, 2008). Although that policy successfully warded off unplanned migrations, it has been criticised as an unfair development policy that promotes industrial growth at the expense of the agricultural sector and urban development at the expense of the rural sector. It is also contrary to the principle of economic efficacy that requires free movement of human resources across different regions and sectors.

Another teacher entered the special school for children with learning difficulties at the beginning of its establishment in later 1980s with a low self identity and little sense of achievement or job satisfaction. She represents her generation who sought chances for migration from rural to urban areas under the government’s city dwelling policy. To her, teaching was just as a job.

*I used to be in the county. Then I was transferred to this city. I taught a few years in a primary school. That school was then merged to another school. At that time, I was not in good health and my younger child had just had a medical operation. So I asked to work here. It is not because I was lazy. It is because there was no fierce competition in this school. It is the truth. It is obvious that in mainstream schools, there were so many classes and lot of competition. At that time, there were quite a few teachers like me who came to this school….Young teachers did not want to come here. We were then in our 40s. We really did not want to do too much. Next year I will be 56 and I can retire, too. That will be the end of my career life.*

In addition, regional divisions in China can be made using different criteria. A broad geographical regional grouping is the division between coastal and non-coastal provinces. Educated workers migrated to the coastal regions after reform (Liu and Li, 2006:450). Economically advantaged provinces continue to enjoy substantial advantages in educational provision. The huge discrepancies between cities and counties make the policies from the central government difficult to be implemented to the same degree nation-wide. The competition for opportunity and new wealth in China is fierce. The unbalanced development in economic prosperity causes flows of well-educated and competent people to the economically dynamic areas for better paid jobs.

Frase (1992) argues that measures relying on external rewards have been insufficient, teacher compensation, including salary, benefits, and supplemental income can have relation to long-term satisfaction with teaching as a career. Income disparities in China decreased both across provinces and areas from 1978 through 1984. After 1984 there was an increase in disparity across areas (Zhang, 2001). Given the increasing demand for teachers in
special education, those who have received special education training are looking for other options to avoid working with children with special educational needs as a result of low social status and unattractive financial situation.

Third, supplying for retiring parent was the main reason for being in the special schools for some teachers. Little has been reported in and out of China concerning career motivation. During the ten years’ Cultural Revolution, school leavers from cities were demanded by the government to work in the countryside areas to be ‘re-educated’. The period of their stay varied from years to permanence. Lucky ones had to wait for their turns to be able to move back to the cities for further education or work opportunities. Chances could be that their parent was retiring from his or her work place. So the offspring could be the substitute for the parent. The following account of the career motivation in special education of one teacher with almost 30 years’ teaching experience depicted that part of history. It also well reflected broader social and political changes in China. Although only 14% of teachers related their motivation to their parent's retirement, in fact, from the survey data, 6 out of 37 teachers were the replacement of their parents. This is a big figure as in city mainstream schools, this is less seen after the over 20 years’ teacher reform. In other words, mainstream schools are more demanding in terms of teacher qualification and degrees. This finding is important in that literature has never reported the phenomenon which is arguably the cultural aspect in a special historical transition from planned economy to market economy policy only found in China in late 1970s to 1980s.

Interviewer: So you came to this school just because your mother was a teacher?
Interviewee: Yes, I did. We [pointed at two other teachers in the office] came to this school for the same reason. We learned from teaching after that.

Substantial efforts have been made to improve the quality of existing teachers, especially those who missed their education and training during the Cultural Revolution. Since 1982, many higher and adult education institutions charge people from other areas, but teachers are financially supported by the government. They are encouraged to take part in any form of continuing studies that enhance their knowledge and skills as teachers. The teachers who supplied for their parents in my study all got teaching certificates to be qualified to teach in the schools at the time of the research.

In addition, job opportunity in a city was seen as the only motivation for some young teachers in the competitive job market. Shortage of teachers is keenly felt in remote and rural areas as opposed to urban and more developed areas (Li, 1999: 187). The economic treatment of teachers in some areas is unsatisfactory, many talented young people refuse to study to be teachers and many young teachers try to leave their teaching positions for somewhere else (Yang and Wu, 1999). However, the unattractive social and economical status of the teaching profession in China (Li, 1999) still attracts those who
want to increase their human capital would unwillingly get themselves in teacher training programmes to secure a job opportunity in a city upon graduation.

It has to do with my job assignment, just a job. I was not interested in the school. No. No. No.

ST-14

5. Amotivation
A sense of achievement, a job satisfaction, or emotional well-being is ranked high in the Western literature on career motivation. Research has studied teacher career motivation from teachers’ personal well-being perspective (Hayes, 2003; Song and Xu, 2006) to explore the impact of school experience upon their motivation for teaching. Studies suggest that in addition to equipping trainee teachers with curriculum knowledge and teaching skills, more attention needs to be paid to their emotional welfare as ‘good teaching is charged with positive emotions’ (Hargreaves, 1998: 835).

However, the teachers in my research seemed to ignore the practical day to day feelings towards teaching in the special schools. The ignorance was interpreted as their lack of power in school system, the nature of special education, or simply their lack of passion for their profession.

Actually, if you look at the numbers of the students we teach… for me, I taught them from the first year of primary school. They are now in their 9 years, all these years, I just teach these children. For the nine years, I am with them daily, what do you expect? This is a small school as you can see, I spend my days and years here with these children… they do not even greet back to us when we greet them. Am I motivated?! ST-6

Moreover, teachers were not enjoying high social status as they expected. As the country moves further along the line of a market economy and accordingly more people are becoming more money-driven in their value orientation, it is inevitable that ‘teachers and the poor profession will receive less respect from the public’ (Li, 1999: 186). Moreover, this phenomenon has also had tremendous negative effect on pre-service teacher education. At present, most talented youth show little interest in teaching and has undermined teachers’ morale.

Data from the current study on teachers’ social status were in consistent with Cunningham and Oliver’s (2007) findings about teachers’ feelings of depressed status within the profession because of school classifications and labels.

…when people knew that I was from the school[special school], I was always regarded as… even now when I go to headteacher training courses, when people know that I am from the special school, they always have a kind of attitude… you know…not good attitude.

Case 3, ST-15

This embarrassment was not caused by teachers’ self perception, but by the social attitudes towards children with special needs, which lead to the low social status of special teachers (Hargreaves, 2007)
Job mobility is another factor which had caused the unwillingness of teachers working in special schools. Recent studies show that there is a growing regional imbalance in China (Liu and Li, 2006: 450). In the pre-reform years in China, school leavers and university graduates were assigned to a job in a particular region and affiliated to a particular institution. Job mobility has increased since economic reform. However,

_The education bureau does not allow you to have the transfer frequently. If you want to go to other school, the school has to pay money to our school as the teacher was trained in our school and the teacher has to pay money to our school for the training. In fact, those who came to our school, they do not have relations which they could use for them to be placed in a better school. If they did not have that relationship when they were assigned to our school, they normally do not have relations later. So it will be comparatively difficult for them to be transferred to mainstream schools._

Case 3, ST-15

**Implication and conclusion**

Understanding teacher motivations for choosing teaching has implications for teacher education planning and curriculum design, teacher recruitment authorities and government and intergovernmental planning and policy decisions (Watt and Richardson, 2007). Whilst a considerable amount of research findings from developed countries tend to highlight altruistic reasons for choosing teaching as a career, this study suggests that extrinsic motivation tends to be prioritized in Chinese special teachers’ career choice. This motivation can be influenced by a number of interpersonal, social and environmental factors of self-concept, life experiences, interests and/or abilities and have long-term consequences on their professional life, well-being and their social situation (Creed and Wong, 2006).

This initial finding from the current study is concurrent with the research on career decisions that cross cultural factors are important contextual determinants (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1996). Unlike individually oriented Western cultures, in China, collectivism culture emphasizes group conformity and mutual obligations, where community goals and ethics are placed above personal goals and competencies (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002). Career choice is thus less related to personal rights, wellbeing of the self and immediate family, and personal autonomy and accomplishments but more to the work context factors (Fraser, 1992). Although there is a dramatic decrease in teacher shortages and significant improvement in teacher quality, there are still concerns of teachers’ motivation in special education in China. I believe that the less positive motivation will continue to prevail, critically affecting the services provided for students with disabilities.

A small scale research as such in a context of a city in China, the limitation is obvious in terms of the generalization of the findings. However, the study has strived to provide a useful basis for further exploration of why people choose teaching in a special school as a career, which in turn, may illuminate the attraction, recruitment and retention of teachers in special education.
References


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