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# The Role of Academic Motivation, Life Aspirations and Self-congruence in the Professional Intentions of Teacher Education Students

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The article presents the results of the study of the influence of psychological factors on the professional intentions of teacher education students. The training of students for their future work at schools is very important. Considering intentions as a motivational phenomenon, the authors apply self-determination theory. A research hypothesis explains that the intention of students to work at schools is indirectly related to self-congruence. The mediators of this relationship may include satisfaction with the profession, intrinsic academic motivation, and the aspiration to contribute to the community. 240 students (aged 17 to 25 years, 67% girls) were recruited for the study. The results of the structural equation modeling confirmed the hypothesis of a mediated relationship between the intention to work at schools and self-congruence. Satisfaction with the profession and intrinsic academic motivation function as mediators of this relationship. The aspiration to contribute to the community is related to the intention to work at schools, but it does not mediate the relationship with self-congruence. From a practical perspective, it is important to support students' satisfaction with the profession and their intrinsic academic motivation during their study in order to strengthen their aspiration to work at schools.

**Keywords:** professional intentions; students of pedagogical universities; self-determination theory; intrinsic motivation; life aspirations; autonomous functioning; self-congruence.

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## Роль академической мотивации, жизненных стремлений и самоконгруэнтности в профессиональных намерениях студентов педагогического вуза

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Представлены результаты исследования проблемы влияния психологических факторов на профессиональные намерения выпускников педвузов. Актуальность проблемы обусловлена необходимостью совершенствования подготовки студентов педвузов к работе в школе. Рассматривая намерения как мотивационный феномен, авторы опираются в своем исследовании на теорию самодетерминации. Гипотеза исследования: намерение выпускников педвузов работать по полученной специальности опосредованно связано с самоконгруэнтностью. Медиаторами этой связи могут быть удовлетворенность профессией и побуждения автономного характера: внутренняя академическая мотивация и стремление внести вклад в жизнь сообщества. Выборку составили 240 студентов педвуза (возраст от 17 до 25 лет, 67% девушек). Результаты структурного моделирования подтвердили гипотезу об опосредованной связи намерения работать по полученной педагогической специальности с самоконгруэнтностью. Удовлетворенность профессией и внутренняя академическая мотивация являются медиаторами этой связи. Стремление внести вклад в жизнь сообщества связано со стремлением работать по профессии, однако оно не опосредует связи с самоконгруэнтностью. С практической точки зрения важно, что для укрепления стремления работать по специальности в ходе обучения студентов необходимо поддерживать их удовлетворенность выбранной профессией и внутреннюю академическую мотивацию.

**Ключевые слова:** профессиональные намерения; студенты педвуза; теория самодетерминации; внутренняя мотивация; жизненные стремления; автономное функционирование; самоконгруэнтность.

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## Introduction

According to authoritative international studies, the crucial factor in the school education quality is the teacher qualification [1]. This means that for its growth it is critically important that the most capable and qualified graduates come to work in schools in the future. However, teacher education students have a weak orientation to work in schools [13], and the low percentage of graduates' employment in education is considered as one of the serious problems of teacher education in the country [8]. The idea of double negative selection has become popular, according to which the worse applicants get into pedagogical universities, and the worse university graduates get jobs in schools [6; 7; 12]. Supported by data on Moscow universities [12], this idea is criticized for ignoring the somewhat different situation in other regions [6]. The question of whether pedagogical universities successfully provide schools with new personnel continues to be discussed in both scientific and administrative environments [7-9]. An important aspect of this problem is the life plans of students, since "the determining factor of successful employment is not the problems of schools, but the professional intentions of graduates" [9, p. 60].

Studies of professional intentions and plans of teacher education students are often descriptive and have no solid theoretical background [2; 12; 13]. Professional intentions are directly related to the vocational choice motives and academic motivation, so it seems that the most relevant theoretical framework for such study is one of the leading approaches in modern psychology of motivation — self-determination theory [16]. Self-determination (autonomy) is discussed here at different levels of abstraction. It can be considered as a general personal disposition, which has a wide range of implications, and as intrinsic life aspirations common for different spheres of life. At a specific level, self-determination can be analyzed as activity-specific autonomous motives [16].

A relatively specific level of analysis in this context is the motivation of educational and professional activity. Intrinsic academic motivation as the most autonomous type of motives is considered among the most important indicators of teacher education students' readiness for working at schools [11]. The positive consequences of intrinsic motivation for professional activity are well known, for example, it is closely related to job satisfaction and involvement in the activity [10]. In teach-

ers, autonomous (including intrinsic) motivation not only contributes to well-being and less susceptibility to stress but is also combined with a preference for teaching styles that support students' autonomous academic motivation [17].

At a more abstract level, the factors important for professional intentions include external and intrinsic life aspirations. The most interesting among the latter is the aspiration to contribute to the life of the community. The previous studies showed that not only the degree of autonomy of aspirations, but also their "social breadth" was of great importance [14]. Given the social importance of the teaching profession, we can expect that such socially oriented intrinsic aspiration is important for its choice and intention to work at schools.

At an even more abstract level of analysis, a common source of intrinsic life aspirations and intrinsic motivation for various activities may be a personal disposition, manifested in the tendency to feel autonomous and able to make free choices in various situations. Although situational factors that determine the (un)satisfaction of the need for autonomy have received most research attention, there is also growing interest in relatively stable individual differences in whether autonomous or under pressure and control one feels in different situations [19; 20]. Such differences in dispositional autonomy are considered in studies on "autonomous functioning" [20]. People with salient dispositional autonomy tend to evaluate their actions as autonomous and self-regulated, or at least as consistent with their own interests and values [20].

Various methods have been proposed to assess dispositional autonomy, among which the best known in our country is the Index of Autonomous Functioning questionnaire [20]. It measures three indicators of dispositional autonomy: self-congruence

(or authorship), interest-taking and low susceptibility to control [5; 20]. Self-congruence is a central element of dispositional autonomy. A self-congruent person feels that he is the "author" of his own behavior, the decisions and the choices he makes. His/her actions are perceived as congruent with personal goals and values, rather than being a forced response to circumstances or expectations of others. Interest-taking refers to the willingness to respond with interest to external events and internal experiences, contributing to a greater awareness and understanding of self. Susceptibility to control, which is less characteristic of highly autonomous people, refers to the tendency to feel less freedom of choice in various situations.

These indicators are considered as various aspects of a common construct — autonomous functioning, but their interrelationship is moderate. In the original version, the factor loadings of the three primary factors of the questionnaire on the general factor are moderate (0.32—0.58) [20]; the internal consistency of the whole questionnaire also has a rather modest value ( $\alpha=0.65$ ), despite high values for individual scales [18]. This suggests that the indicators of autonomous functioning are relatively independent components with different implications. This conclusion is confirmed by their very different correlations with other indicators [5; 20]. Following the authors of the questionnaire, we tend to consider self-congruence as the most important indicator of autonomy, as evidenced by the closest correlations of the need for autonomy and autonomous causal orientation with self-congruence [20]. According to the authors of the Russian version of this questionnaire, the self-congruence scale shows the highest correlations with external validity criteria, such as, for example, satisfaction with choice [5].

The relationship of autonomous functioning to vocational and career choice has not often been the subject of research. Nevertheless, its importance for the choice of a college major and subsequent success in its development has been established [21]. Given these data and findings from past research on the relationship of self-congruence with intrinsic life aspirations [20] and subjective quality of choice [5], we assumed its important role in the conscious and autonomous choice of a teaching profession, which is expressed in the aspiration not only to receive a teacher education but also to subsequently work as a teacher. It can be expected that self-congruence mediated through autonomous motives (intrinsic academic motivation, aspiration to contribute to the life of the community) supports satisfaction with the chosen teaching profession and aspiration to work at schools.

The purpose of the study presented in this article was to establish the role of academic motivation, life aspirations and self-congruence in the professional intentions of teacher education students.

The following research objectives were addressed:

- 1) organizing and conducting a survey of teacher education students using appropriate questionnaires;
- 2) analyzing correlations between the measured psychological variables;
- 3) testing fit to the obtained data of the hypothetical structural model, in which the intention to work at schools is related to self-congruence through satisfaction with the profession and autonomous motivations: intrinsic academic motivation and the aspiration to contribute to the life of the community. Given the popularity of the idea

of double negative selection [6; 7; 12], an additional objective of the study was also to assess the relationship between academic achievement and students' intention to work at schools.

### Sample and research methods

**The sample** comprised 240 1st—5th year teacher education students (mean age  $M=20.58$ ;  $SD=1.66$ ; 17—25 years old), including 79 (33%) males and 161 (67%) females who participated in the voluntary online survey. They are full-time students in groups with various teacher training profiles.

**Methods.** *The Teaching Career Preference Scale (TCPS)* was compiled for this study from two direct and two reversed items (see Appendix) with a 10-point response scale to assess the subjective probability of different career options<sup>1</sup>. The use of such a response scale allows for an interpretation of the final score as the subjective likelihood of pursuing a teaching career. A one-factor model with the addition of the covariance between the two reverse items shows good fit to the data:  $\chi^2=0.01$ ;  $df=1$ ;  $p=0.921$ ;  $CFI=1$ ;  $TLI=1$ ;  $SRMR=0.001$ ;  $RMSEA\leq 0.001$ ; 90% confidence interval (CI) for RMSEA: 0—0.062;  $PCLOSE=0.942$ ;  $N=240$ . Internal consistency coefficients along with descriptive statistics for all measures and scales are summarized in the table below. The final scores for each scale were calculated as the mean value of responses to its items.

*The "Academic Motivation Scales" questionnaire* by T.O. Gordeeva and colleagues [4] was used to assess the academic motivation of students. It contains three scales of intrinsic motivation (motivation to know, achievement motivation and self-development motivation), three

<sup>1</sup> Further details and results of the statistical analysis along with the raw data are provided in the repository (see <https://doi.org/10.48612/MSUPE/z6hx-714v-3e51>).

scales of external motivation (self-esteem, introjected and extrinsic motivation) and an amotivation scale.

The “*Aspirations Index*” questionnaire by T. Kasser and R. Ryan in the adaptation of T.O. Gordeeva and colleagues [3] was used to assess the main life goals (aspirations) of students, reflecting their most fundamental and deepest features of the motivational sphere. It includes three scales of intrinsic aspirations (self-expression, relationships, community) and three scales of external aspirations (image, fame, influence).

The “*Self-congruence*” scale from the “*Index of Autonomous Functioning*” questionnaire [20] adapted by S.N. Kostromina and colleagues [5] was used as an indicator of dispositional autonomy. The scale consists of five direct items.

*Satisfaction with the chosen profession of a teacher* was measured by single-item measure: “Rate on a 10-point scale how satisfied you are with the chosen profession: (1 — not satisfied at all, 10 — satisfied to the maximum)”.

Students’ *academic achievement* was assessed by asking about the average grade for the last session, which was asked to be transferred from the university’s information database available to students.

**Data Analysis.** The analysis was performed using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, Mann-Whitney U-test, Kruskal-Wallis test and structural equation modeling. Calculations were performed in the R statistical analysis environment, and structural modeling was carried out in Mplus 8 (using MLR estimator). The following boundary values indicating acceptable (good) fit were used: CFI>0.90 (0.95), RMSEA<0.08 (0.06), SRMR<0.08 (0.06) [15].

## Results

The distribution of answers on the TCPS scale (Fig. 1) is close to symmetric ( $As=-0.38$ ), with the median value ( $Me=5.5$ ) coinciding with the center of the ten-point scale. Hence, there is no salient tendency to prefer or avoid teaching career in this sample; these alternatives are, in general, equally probable.

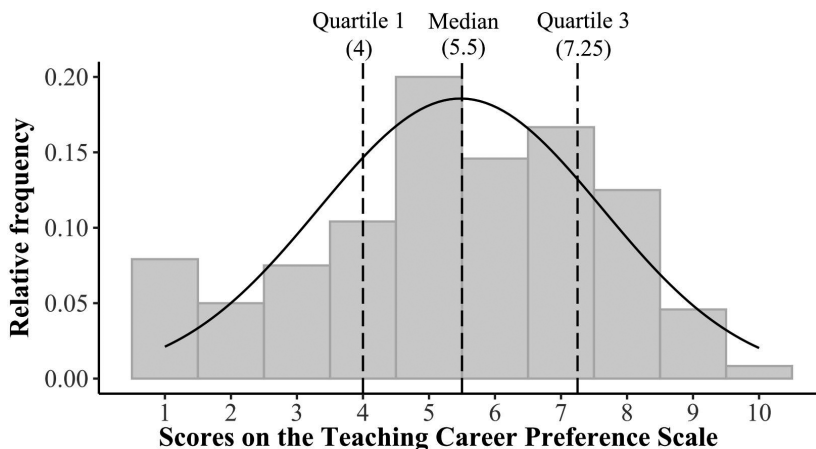


Fig. 1. Distribution of scores on the Teaching Career Preference Scale (TCPS) along with the expected normal distribution curve

Analysis of the scores on the TCPS scale in students of different years of study (Fig. 2) indicates that there are no statistically significant differences (Kruskal-Wallis test  $\chi^2(4)=4.53$ ;  $p$ -not significant).

Correlations show that TCPS is statistically significantly and directly related to satisfaction with the profession, indicators of intrinsic academic motivation and aspiration to contribute to the community (see table). At the same time, it shows inverse relationships with external motivation and amotivation. Self-congruence is directly related to autonomous types of motivation and inversely related to amotivation. It is also related to all intrinsic life aspirations but shows the highest correlation with the aspiration to contribute to the community. No statistically significant correlations of TCPS and satisfaction with the profession with academic achievement were found.

Analysis of correlations with age demonstrates that older students have less salient motivation to know ( $-0.20$ ;  $p \leq 0.01$ ), achievement motivation ( $-0.14$ ;  $p \leq 0.05$ ), self-development motivation ( $-0.23$ ;  $p \leq 0.01$ ) and self-esteem motivation ( $-0.14$ ;  $p \leq 0.05$ ). Meanwhile, they have slightly higher amoti-

vation ( $0.20$ ;  $p \leq 0.01$ ). The academic achievement of men ( $M=4.02$ ) is lower than women ( $M=4.42$ ): these differences are statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.001$  ( $U=8722$ ;  $Z_U=4.43$ ). They also have lower self-esteem motivation, introjected motivation and external motivation (all significant at  $p \leq 0.05$ ). Women also show higher level of life aspirations on the Self-Expression ( $U=7774.5$ ;  $Z_U=2.68$ ;  $p \leq 0.01$ ) and Image ( $U=8725.5$ ;  $Z_U=4.41$ ;  $p \leq 0.001$ ) scales.

To test the hypothesis, a structural model was developed in which the teaching career preference factor was considered to be dependent on satisfaction with the profession, academic achievement, and the factors of self-congruence, intrinsic academic motivation, aspiration to contribute to the community. The latter two were assumed to be dependent on the self-congruence factor. After preliminary estimation of such a model with modification indices, the covariance between the two items of the TCPS scale formulated in reverse form was added to the model. The final model (Figure 3) has good fit indices:  $\chi^2=155.67$ ;  $df=110$ ;  $p=0.003$ ; CFI=0.968; TLI=0.960; SRMR=0.063; RMSEA=0.042; 90% CI for RMSEA: 0.025—0.056; PCLOSE=0.821;  $N=240$ .

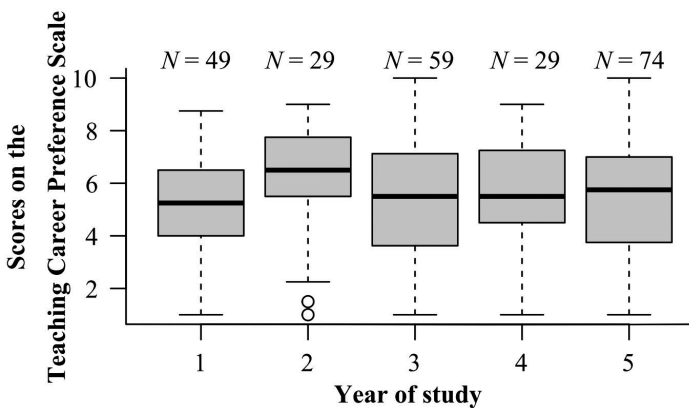


Fig. 2. Teaching Career Preference Scale (TCPS) scores in groups of different years of study: the line inside the rectangle is the median, the lower and upper edges of the rectangle are the 1st and 3rd quartiles, the edges of the dotted lines are the minimum and maximum without outliers, the circles are outliers

Table

**Intercorrelations and descriptive statistics for measured variables (N=240)**

Variables and measures	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
1. Teaching Career Preference Scale (TCPS)	—																
2. Academic achievement	0,08	—															
3. Satisfaction with the profession	0,57**	0,12	—														
4. Self-congruence	0,20	0,14	0,35**	—													
<i>Academic motivation scales</i>																	
5. Motivation to know	0,39**	0,19	0,54**	0,42**	—												
6. Achievement motivation	0,28*	0,20	0,43**	0,41**	0,79***	—											
7. Self-development motivation	0,36**	0,24*	0,48**	0,45**	0,84**	0,81**	—										
8. Self-esteem motivation	0,20	0,27**	0,34**	0,34**	0,60**	0,58**	0,76**	—									
9. Introjected motivation	0,05	0,19	0,03	0,05	0,10	-0,01	0,19	0,45**	—								
10. External motivation	-0,26**	-0,02	-0,26**	-0,19	-0,32**	-0,38**	-0,22*	0,03	0,54**	—							
11. Amotivation	-0,46**	-0,19	-0,59**	-0,41**	-0,71**	-0,59**	-0,65**	-0,46**	-0,05	0,39**	—						
<i>Scales of the «Index of aspirations» questionnaire</i>																	
12. Self-expression	0	0,15	0,04	0,32**	0,2	0,18	0,25**	0,19	0,13	-0,03	-0,13	—					
13. Relationship	0,01	0,21	0,11	0,26**	0,10	0,05	0,16	0,22*	0,26**	0,18	-0,14	0,45**	—				
14. Community	0,22*	0,14	0,34**	0,38**	0,31**	0,28**	0,33**	0,35**	0,23*	-0,05	-0,32**	0,25**	0,44**	—			
15. Image	-0,01	0,13	0,05	0,13	0,21	0,18	0,24**	0,38**	0,28**	0,18	-0,13	0,15	0,31**	0,26**	—		
16. Fame	-0,04	0,14	0,15	0,30**	0,19	0,19	0,25**	0,28**	0,14	0,03	-0,15	0,18	0,23*	0,32**	0,63**	—	
17. Influence	-0,06	0,15	0,11	0,18	0,14	0,18	0,24*	0,24*	0,07	-0,08	-0,14	0,24*	0,24**	0,24**	0,47**	0,74**	—
Cronbach's $\alpha$	0,77	—	—	0,81	0,91	0,90	0,89	0,88	0,74	0,70	0,89	0,70	0,78	0,73	0,83	0,82	0,86
Mean	5,48	4,28	6,9	3,52	3,61	3,22	3,5	3,33	3,18	2,79	2,22	6,4	6,33	5,39	3,91	3,84	4,39
Standard deviation	2,15	0,65	2,31	0,84	1	1,03	1,05	1,14	0,96	1,01	1,08	0,81	1,03	1,29	1,62	1,57	1,65

Note. Significance: \* —  $p \leq 0,05$ ; \*\* —  $p \leq 0,01$ . The level of significance have been corrected according the Holm's procedure for multiple hypotheses testing. Numbers of variables in columns correspond to numbers in rows.



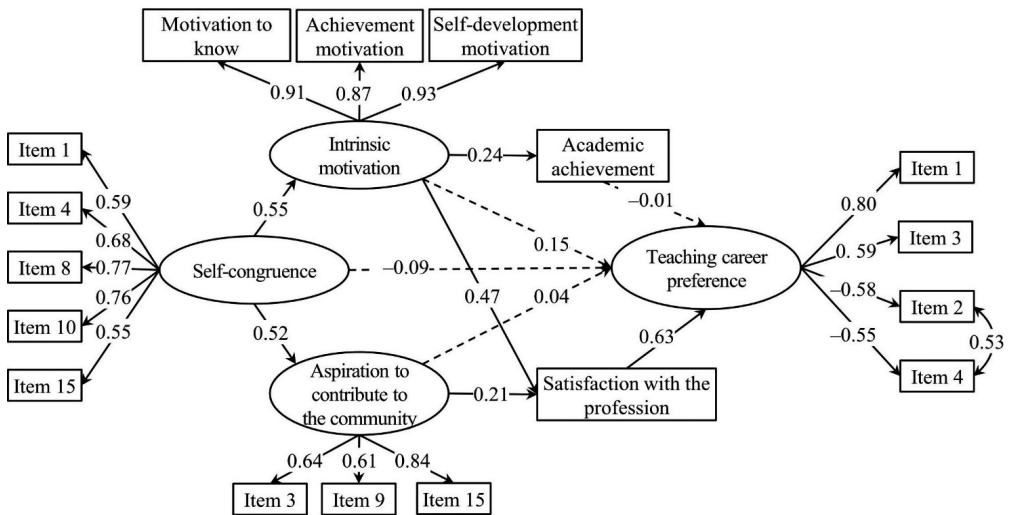


Fig. 3. Structural model of the relationships between teaching career preference, satisfaction with the profession, academic achievement, aspiration to contribute to the community, intrinsic motivation, and self-congruence: all standardized coefficients except those on the dashed lines are statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.05$ , residuals are omitted for parsimony

The model demonstrates that the relationships of all variables and factors with teaching career preference are fully mediated through satisfaction with the profession, which is a critical factor in career plans. The bootstrap analysis of mediated effects shows that statistically significant are the relationships of teaching career preference with intrinsic motivation ( $0.30; p \leq 0.001$ ), aspiration to contribute to the community ( $0.13; p \leq 0.05$ ) and self-congruence ( $0.23; p \leq 0.001$ ). However, of the two mediating relationships of self-congruence with teaching career preference only one is significant: through intrinsic motivation ( $0.16; p \leq 0.001$ ). The second path coefficient through the aspiration to contribute to the community showed only a borderline level of significance ( $0.07; p = 0.06$ ).

### Discussion

The results of the study confirmed the assumption about the importance of stu-

dents' self-congruence as a central indicator of dispositional autonomy for teaching career preference. The perception of one's behavior as self-congruent, based on internal values and goals, is closely related to autonomous motives and aspirations, which act as important factors of satisfaction with the chosen profession and teaching career preference. Although there is no direct impact of self-congruence to teaching career preference, its mediated effect was found to be quite significant. The conclusion about the important role of dispositional autonomy in professional preferences agrees well with the data of other studies [21].

In our study, the absence of a significant correlation between teaching career preference and academic achievement casts doubt on the possibility of negative selection [7; 12] at the stage of transition from higher education to work at school. According to our data, satisfaction with the profession,

which is not related to academic achievement but has a common factor — intrinsic academic motivation — is of primary importance for professional plans. Despite some decrease in intrinsic motivation and growth of amotivation in senior years of study, our sample did not show a decrease in the intention to work at school, in contrast to the data of V.S. Sobkin and O.V. Tkachenko [12].

The study shows that the associations of teaching career preference with intrinsic motivation, aspiration to contribute to the community, and self-congruence are mediated through satisfaction with the profession. It is concluded that satisfaction with the profession and its determinant intrinsic academic motivation must be supported during higher education to strengthen aspiration to work in the profession. In contrast to academic motivation, aspiration to contribute to the community and self-congruence are likely to be little influenced by the university environment. However, these factors also deserve attention: a scientific analysis of their development in the process of school and university education can be useful in psychological support of vocational choice and career planning.

The limitations of the study include the correlational design, which does not allow us to conclude with certainty about the causal nature of the identified relationships, the moderate representativeness of the sample collected in a single teacher training university, and the lack of control for other variables that are likely to be important for career planning: support in vo-

cational choice from parents and teachers, past experience in professional education, and others. Also, a limitation is the use of solely self-reported data on students' career plans. Future studies will have to find out how well the declared career plans correspond to the actual employment after graduation, and to what extent it is possible to predict employment based on the characteristics of students' motivational sphere.

### Conclusion

The results of the systematic study of motivational factors of professional intentions of teacher education students allow us to conclude that the intention to work at schools is largely determined by the features of the motivational sphere and is not related to academic achievement in the university. The study is the first to demonstrate the significant role of self-congruence as an indicator of dispositional autonomy in satisfaction with the chosen teaching profession and the desire to work at schools. From a practical point of view, it seems important to support autonomous academic motivation and satisfaction with the chosen profession for preparing students for real teaching and strengthening their intention to work at schools. Since self-congruence as a central indicator of dispositional autonomy of the personality predicts intrinsic motives and life aspirations that prompt the choice of teaching profession, it is of great interest to further investigate its role for vocational choice and career planning and the possibilities of its development.

### Appendix

#### Teaching Career Preference Scale

*Please answer the questions below.*

1) On a 10-point scale, rate the probability that after graduation you will go to work in a school as a teacher in your field of study (1 — I will definitely not go, 10 — I will definitely go): \_\_\_\_\_

2) Estimate on a 10-point scale the probability that after graduation you will go to work as a teacher in other spheres, for example, private schools/kindergartens, institutions of supplementary education, colleges, universities, etc. (1 — I will definitely not go, 10 — I will definitely go): \_\_\_\_\_

3) On a 10-point scale, rate the likelihood that after graduation you will go to work in another field unrelated to the teaching profession (1 — I will definitely not go, 10 — I will definitely go): \_\_\_\_\_

4) Rate on a 10-point scale the likelihood that you will try to change jobs/careers, even after taking a school job (1 — absolutely definitely not, 10 — yes, definitely): \_\_\_\_\_

*Calculating the results.* When calculating the total score, the answers to tasks 3 and 4 are inverted using the formula: 11-answer. Then the average value of the answers to all 4 tasks is calculated.

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