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Future Primary and Preschool Teachers between a Tendency to Adjust and a Tendency to Innovate²

Extended summary

The goal of the research presented in this paper was to determine and analyze the structure of grouping the pre-service primary and preschool teachers into the categories of adaptors, innovators, and the so-called “bridgers” according to KAI model, and to examine the relation of expression dimensions of innovation/adaptivity to the relevant characteristics of the respondents.

Teachers at all levels of education must possess an entrepreneurial mindset, be open to innovations and new ideas and skills to support the innovation and creativity of students, but also to know how to work within the framework of the set standards. KAI theory (Kirton Adaption-Innovation Theory) states that people differ in their approach to problem solving, decision-making, and attitudes towards changes. This theory argues that these differences are the consequence of the innate characteristics of every individual. According to Kirton, each individual will have his/her own position somewhere on the scale between efficient, rigid adaptors and undisciplined and massive innovators. The author believes that adaptors tend to do things in a better way, while innovators tend to do their work in a different way.

The study included 204 students - pre-service primary and preschool teachers. A standardized KAI (Kirton Adaption-Innovation Inventory - KAI) was an instrument used for data collection. The KAI scale consists of 32 items that measure the individual style of problem

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solving. Within the total number of items, 11 items refer to the behavior related to the innovative pole, and 21 items refer to the behavior related to the adaptive pole.

The results showed that almost half of the respondents belong to bridgers - people who simultaneously have the characteristics of innovative and adaptive cognitive styles. The smallest number of respondents belongs to innovators in a narrow sense - only 6%, while the majority of the surveyed student population can be included in the category of adaptors in a narrow sense - 46%, and people with a combination of adaptive and innovative style of problem solving, decision-making and attitudes towards change - 48%. Accordingly, approximately the same number of future teachers have adaptive or combined styles, and the minimum number of them are predominantly innovators. It was established that more successful students also achieve higher scores, moving in the direction of the pole of adaptivity. A slight difference was also observed in favor of graduate students in increasing adaptivity, i.e., reducing the level of innovativeness.

It was concluded that the majority of respondents are consistent in carrying out their tasks, they are systematic, conscientious, responsible and tend to conform to social norms, rules and principles. On the other hand, the readiness to make the leap from the known framework and support the change, when the circumstances so require, should be encouraged among the pre-service primary and preschool teachers. The students of senior years, as well as the students with a better academic achievement, are more inclined to respect the authorities, the rules and norms of behavior, they are more consistent, systematic and less prone to risk-taking, compared to the students of the second year who proved to be open for new ideas, free-spirited, and, to a greater extent, indifferent to the opinion of their environment. This may present a signal that it is necessary to review the curriculum for the education of the primary and preschool teachers, in order to encourage the improvement of educational potential and innovativeness of the future primary and preschool teachers, which is an important prerequisite for understanding and developing the innovativeness of children and pupils.

Keywords: KAI model, innovators, adaptors, bridgers, pre-service primary and preschool teachers.

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