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Exploratory survey on academic motivation and career intentions among Students in Special Psychopedagogy

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Abstract

The purpose of the present survey is to examine the extent to which students at the University of Bucharest (UB), Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences (FPES), enrolled in the Special Psychopedagogy (SPP) program, genuinely intended to pursue this major and to what degree their chosen specialization aligns with their professional aspirations. The first objective is to determine whether the interviewed students had initially chosen this specialization, or they were redirected to it through the redistribution process. The second objective is to identify their professional and career options, as well as to determine how many of the students intend to continue their academic journey and to what level. A total of 71 students took part in the research, aged between 19 and 51 y.o., 95.8% of whom were female and 4.2% male. All participants are students of the FPES, SPP program, University of Bucharest.

The main findings indicate that although less than half of the respondents have selected SPP as their first option upon admission, over 85% of them expressed a desire to work in the field of Special Psychopedagogy. A better understanding of how students choose their specialization and how this correlates with their career intentions can help to improve several aspects such as the quality of teaching, the relevance of practical activities, opportunities to work with people with disabilities, and the sense of belonging to a real professional community.

Keywords: special psychopedagogy, student, studies, career, professional aspirations, education, teacher, special educator, people with disabilities, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, FPES, SPP

Introduction

Between vocation and compromise

In general, when choosing an educational and professional path, young people face a multitude of internal and external factors that influence their decisions: personal interests, social and family pressures, labor market opportunities, as well as the structure of the educational system. Ideally, the choice of a university major should reflect a conscious decision based on personal interests, values, and aptitudes relevant to the chosen field (Super, 1990; Holland, 1997). However, studies indicate that reality often differs: many students end up in certain specializations not due to intrinsic motivation but as a result of a compromise influenced by contextual factors (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Deci & Ryan, 2000).

A conclusive example in this regard, is the specialization in Special Psychopedagogy (SPP), which, although a field with a profound social mission, often attracts students who initially intended to enroll in other specializations – particularly Psychology – but were not admitted. Thus,

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for some students, SPP may not represent an authentic vocational choice but rather an alternative, more accessible option in terms of admission. This situation is reflected in informal observations and frequent interactions among student groups, where many report that they did not explicitly wish to become specialists in special education. Only a few appear to have manifested genuine interest in this field from the beginning and intend to pursue a career as special educators or psychopedagogues.

Therefore, the central issue of this study is the extent to which choosing the Special Psychopedagogy specialization reflects an authentic vocational choice or rather an incidental one.

Academic motivation and career intentions

According to the **Self-Determination Theory (SDT)**, human motivation exists along a continuum, ranging from extrinsic motivation – driven by external rewards or social pressures— to intrinsic motivation, characterized by the joy of learning or genuine interest in the field (Deci & Ryan, 2000). For students who choose Special Psychopedagogy as a secondary or compromise option, motivation is expected to be predominantly extrinsic. While extrinsic motivation can sustain short-term engagement, it is less durable and more vulnerable to academic challenges or failures.

In contrast, intrinsic motivation is associated with sustained engagement, deep learning, and perseverance in achieving professional goals (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Studies show that students entering educational programs with extrinsic motivations tend to exhibit lower involvement in practical activities and weaker identification with the profession's values (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). In Special Psychopedagogy, this may manifest as a lack of identification with the role of special educator or even reluctance toward the challenges involved in working with individuals with special needs.

However, university experience can reshape initial motivations. Through direct contact with beneficiaries of special education, practical activities, and involvement in social projects, some students may discover meaning and professional satisfaction in a field they had not initially considered. This process may facilitate a transition from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation, fostering the development of an authentic professional identity and a lasting commitment to the profession.

Choosing the specialization in special psychopedagogy within the Romanian educational context

In Romania, the admission system to Faculties of Psychology and Educational Sciences requires candidates to rank specializations according to their preferences and their admission grade average, or the grade obtained at the baccalaureate exam. Psychology is generally perceived as a prestigious and competitive specialization, with a limited number of publicly funded seats compared to the number of applicants. This often leads many candidates to choose *Special Psychopedagogy* as a secondary option, without a thorough understanding of the field's specific nature. Consequently, Special Psychopedagogy becomes, in practice, a fallback choice for a significant percent of candidates, directly influencing the profile of the admitted students.

This trend is reinforced by the absence of a coherent vocational guidance system in pre-university education. In most cases, students do not benefit from personalized career counselling, and decisions regarding further studies are often based on incomplete perceptions, family or peer influence, and perceived chances of admission. Moreover, the level of awareness regarding the field of special education is low, with few students truly understanding the practical implications of a career in this area.

Statistical data indicate that Special Psychopedagogy is a specialization with a relatively large number of available seats, and the required admission average is generally lower than for other related specializations, such as Psychology or Primary and Preschool Education Pedagogy (PPEP). This situation contributes to the perception that Special Psychopedagogy is a safe backup option, which may lead to a decrease in the perceived prestige of the specialization and to general demotivation among students who do not identify themselves with this field.

A comparative study from 2023 analyzes the level of satisfaction and motivation for choosing a career in special psychopedagogy among students from 2023 (Group 1) compared to those from 2005 (Group 2) (Vartic, 2023). In both groups, personal choice prevailed regarding the career options, with less than a quarter of students in Group 1 being influenced by family, teachers, or friends—unlike Group 2, where more than a quarter were influenced in making their decision about specialization. We may conclude that the field is becoming increasingly well-known, and students now tend to choose it out of genuine interest rather than because of external pressure.

However, when asked about the extent to which students perceived themselves as suitable for this field, only 12% of students in 2005 believed that the choice did not fit them, while in 2023, nearly 18% of students felt the same, despite their decision being a personal one, uninfluenced by external factors.

Another difference was observed in the priorities of the two groups: in 2005, the most important aspects students considered in choosing a profession were self-esteem and respect received from others. In 2023, students prioritized the attractiveness of the profession and its material advantages, with self-esteem ranking only third.

Thus, the study concluded that students continue to enroll in the Special Psychopedagogy program by personal initiative, and that their new motivations align with “the characteristics of the new generation of students” (Vartic, 2023, p. 8).

Implications of the incongruence between choice and aspiration

The lack of alignment between academic choice and professional aspirations can have significant consequences for students’ educational and professional trajectories. These include lack of interest in specialized subjects, low academic performance, feelings of alienation from the professional community, or even dropping out of studies. Such difficulties may also have emotional repercussions, leading to decreased self-esteem, feelings of uselessness, or professional frustration.

On the other hand, there are situations in which students, although initially motivated by external factors, gradually develop a coherent professional identity within the field of special education. This positive evolution is influenced by several factors: the quality of teaching, the relevance of practical activities, opportunities to work with individuals with disabilities, the support offered by teachers and peers, and the sense of belonging to a genuine professional community. In such cases, the initial choice becomes an opportunity for personal discovery, and engagement in a socially impactful profession contributes to higher personal and professional satisfaction.

The need for research

Within this context, the present research becomes relevant, as it aims to systematically investigate the motivations and aspirations of students enrolled in Special Psychopedagogy. It is essential to understand whether they truly wish to pursue this specialization, what plans they have for the future, and to what extent they envision themselves working in a field that promotes the social and educational inclusion of individuals with special needs.

By analyzing these aspects, the study contributes not only to clarifying the current profile of students in Special Psychopedagogy, but also to identifying directions for intervention aimed at improving vocational counseling, curriculum design, and higher education policies.

Methodology

Participants and procedure

All respondents are students at the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Special Psychopedagogy Program, University of Bucharest. The study included 71 students aged between 19 and 51 years (95.8% of the respondents were between 19 and 22 years old). Of these, 95.8% are female and 4.2% male.

The questionnaire is standardized, consisting of ten closed-ended questions (with two to five items each), three semi-open questions with multiple-choice options plus an open “Other” field (later coded), and one question about age – for which mean, standard deviation, and minimum/maximum values were calculated. Five questions addressed socio-demographic variables (gender, age, background, education, and occupational status). Prior to use in the study, the questionnaire was piloted on ten students.

Before answering, each participant received the survey link, either through student groups or via invitations shared by professors during class. Students who agreed to participate read and signed the GDPR consent form. Participation was voluntary and unpaid. The completion time did not exceed ten minutes. Out of 240 students who received the link, 71 chose to respond. The distribution by study year was as follows: Year I – 14 respondents (19.7%), Year II – 56 respondents (78.9%), Year III – 1 respondent (1.4%). Given the unbalanced distribution by study year, no analyses were conducted based on this variable. Data collection took place between May 26 and June 1, 2025.

Collected data were transferred, verified (for completeness and consistency), and processed using **SPSS 26 (IBM Corp., 2019)**.

Research instruments

The research instrument used was a standardized questionnaire designed by the author and administered online (via Google Forms).

Socio-demographic data were collected through specific questions regarding respondents’ gender, age, education, place of origin, and occupational status.

Intent regarding the specialization was measured using four closed-ended, single-choice questions. Current general interests and future professional options were identified through two semi-open questions with four and five items respectively, plus the open “Other” option.

Prior to administration, the questionnaire was tested on ten students to identify and correct possible inconsistencies or reformulate items for better clarity and understanding.

Research Design

The present study is exploratory, quantitative, and employs a cross-sectional, descriptive, correlational design.

Results

Descriptive statistics

The tables below present frequencies, means, standard deviation and Pearson correlation between the initial intention and the intentions after graduation.

Sample structure

Table 1.

*Table of Frequencies
(number of respondents and %)*

| Respondent gender | | N | Percent |
|--------------------------|--------------|-----------|----------------|
| Valid | Male | 3 | 4,2 |
| | Female | 68 | 95,8 |
| | Total | 71 | 100,0 |

Most students enrolled in Special Psychopedagogy program are female (over 95%).

Table 2.

Table of Frequencies (number of respondents and Percent), average, standard deviation, minimum and maximum, total sample and sample without age extremes (over 38 years old – three cases)

| Age | N | Percent | Total sample | | Students below 38 years old |
|--------------|-----------------------|----------------|---------------------|--|------------------------------------|
| Valid | 19 | 8 | 11,3 | | |
| | 20 | 39 | 54,9 | | |
| | 21 | 19 | 26,8 | | |
| | 22 | 2 | 2,8 | | |
| | 38 | 1 | 1,4 | | |
| | 44 | 1 | 1,4 | | |
| | 51 | 1 | 1,4 | | |
| Total | 71 | | 100,0 | | |
| | | | Age | | |
| | N | Valid | 71 | | 68 |
| | | Missing | 0 | | 0 |
| | Mean | | 21,24 | | 20,22 |
| | Std. Deviation | | 5,052 | | ,688 |
| | Minimum | | 19 | | 19 |
| | Maximum | | 51 | | 22 |

In our sample, the average age of the respondents is 21,24 years with a minimum age of 19 and a maximum of 51. When excluding the age extremes (three cases – over 38 years old), the mean age decreases to 20.22 years.

Table 3.

Table of Frequencies (number of respondents and %)

| Last graduated school | | N | Percent |
|------------------------------|-----------------|-----------|----------------|
| Valid | Highschool | 68 | 95,8 |
| | University | 2 | 2,8 |
| | Master's degree | 1 | 1,4 |
| | Total | 71 | 100,0 |

Most of the surveyed students are enrolled in their first undergraduate program (95.8%). Only 4.2% (three respondents) reported having previously completed another university degree or a master's program.

Table 4.

Table of Frequencies (number of respondents and %)

| Place of origin | | N | Percent |
|------------------------|--------------|-----------|----------------|
| Valid | Urban | 46 | 64,8 |
| | Rural | 25 | 35,2 |
| | Total | 71 | 100,0 |

Approximately two-thirds (64.8%) of respondents come from urban areas, while the remaining 35.2% are from rural areas.

Table 5.

Table of Frequencies (number of respondents and %)

| Year of study at SPP | | N | Percent |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|-----------|----------------|
| Valid | Anul I | 14 | 19,7 |
| | Anul al II-lea | 56 | 78,9 |
| | Anul al III-lea | 1 | 1,4 |
| | Total | 71 | 100,0 |

The distribution across the three years of study is unbalanced: 78.9% (N=56) are second-year students, 19.7% (N=14) are in their first year, and only 1.4% (N=1) are in their third year.

Table 6.

Table of Frequencies (number of respondents and %)

| Do you have a job? | | N | Precent |
|---------------------------|--------------|-----------|----------------|
| Valid | Yes | 33 | 46,5 |
| | No | 38 | 53,5 |
| | Total | 71 | 100,0 |

Nearly half (46.5%) of the students reported having a job.

Table 7.

Table of Frequencies (number of respondents and %)

| Respondent's occupation | N | Percent |
|--|----------|----------------|
| Working in SPP area | 12 | 36,4% |
| Working in educational field | 11 | 33,3% |
| Working in a different area (not linked with the areas above) | 4 | 12,1% |
| Working in a different area, but in organizations that support individuals with disabilities | 5 | 15,2% |
| Others, what exactly? | 3 | 9% |
| market research specialist | 1 | 3% |
| tech support | 1 | 3% |
| not mentioned | 1 | 3% |

Base: 33 respondents who declared they do have a job

Table 8.

Table of Frequencies (number of respondents and %)

| Type of working contract | | N | Percent | Valid Percent |
|---|----------------------|-----------|----------------|----------------------|
| <i>Base: 33 respondents who declared they do have a job</i> | | | | |
| Valid | Full time contract | 11 | 15,5 | 33,3 |
| | Part time contract | 20 | 28,2 | 60,6 |
| | Working occasionally | 2 | 2,8 | 6,1 |
| | Total | 33 | 46,5 | 100,0 |
| Missing System | | 38 | 53,5 | |
| Total | | 71 | 100,0 | |

Among those employed, more than half work in areas related to their field of study. Specifically, 36.4% are employed in the field of Special Psychopedagogy, 15.2% work in organizations that support individuals with disabilities but do not perform activities specific to special psychopedagogy, 33.3% are employed in the broader educational field, and 15.1% are engaged in other professional domains. Only 33.3% reported working full-time.

Overall, the **students sample** consists mainly of females, with an average age of about 21 years, most of them being first-time undergraduates (over 95%), the majority from urban area (around 65%), and nearly half (around 47%) being employed.

General interests

Table 9.

| <i>Table of Frequencies (number of respondents and %)</i> | N | Percent |
|---|----|---------|
| Academic interests | 58 | 81,7% |
| Recreational interests | 54 | 76,1% |
| Volunteering | 31 | 43,7% |
| Social interests | 58 | 81,7% |

The **general interests** of Special Psychopedagogy (SPP) students include both academic and social activities (81.7%), while 76.1% are interested in recreational activities, and 43.7% express interest in volunteering.

Intentions regarding study and professional career

Initial option – at university admission

Table 10.

Table of Frequencies (number of respondents and %)

| Initial option | N | Precent |
|---------------------------------|----|---------|
| Valid Psychology | 32 | 45,1 |
| Primary and Preschool Education | 7 | 9,9 |
| SPP | 31 | 43,7 |
| Pedagogy | 1 | 1,4 |
| Total | 71 | 100,0 |

Table 11.

| Have you been admitted? | N | Precent |
|--------------------------------|----|---------|
| Valid Yes | 35 | 49,3 |
| No | 36 | 50,7 |
| Total | 71 | 100,0 |

Among the students surveyed, 56.3% stated that their first choice at admission was a specialization other than Special Psychopedagogy, and 49.3% reported being admitted to their first choice.

Table 12.

Table of Frequencies (number of respondents and %)

| Second option | N | Precent |
|---------------------------------|----|---------|
| Psychology | 9 | 12,7 |
| Primary and Preschool Education | 4 | 5,6 |
| SPP | 36 | 50,7 |
| Pedagogy | 5 | 7,0 |
| No second option | 17 | 23,9 |
| Total | 71 | 100,0 |

Table 13.

Table of Frequencies (number of respondents and %)

| | N | Precent |
|-----------|----|---------|
| Education | 1 | 5,9 |
| SPP | 16 | 94,1 |
| Total | 17 | 100,0 |

Base: 17 respondents who stated there were no second opinion

Special Psychopedagogy was the **second option** at admission for 50.7% of students, while 23.9% indicated that they did not have a second option. All students whose first choice was **Psychology** selected **Special Psychopedagogy** as their second option.

Tabel 14.

Table of Frequencies (number of respondents and %)

| Third option | | N | Precent |
|---------------------|---------------------------------|----|---------|
| Valid | Primary and Preschool Education | 4 | 5,6 |
| | SPP | 3 | 4,2 |
| | Pedagogy | 11 | 15,5 |
| | No third option | 53 | 74,6 |
| | Total | 71 | 100,0 |

Only 4.2% (N=3) stated that Special Psychopedagogy was their **third option** at admission.

Regarding their **initial choice at admission**, **less than half** of the **students targeted Special Psychopedagogy (43.7%)**. At the same time, approximately 45% initially aimed for Psychology, while about 10% intended to enroll in Primary and Preschool Education Pedagogy (PPEP).

The distribution of responses concerning admission to the first option is relatively balanced between “Yes” and “No”: **about half (49.3%)** declared that they were **admitted to their first choice**.

A percentage of **50.7%** reported that **Special Psychopedagogy** was their **second option**, while approximately **24%** had **no second option**, and **74.6%** reported having **no third option**. Among those who declared that they **did not have a second option**, **94.1% (N=16)** are **students who had chosen Special Psychopedagogy from the beginning**. Thus, it can be stated that almost all students who decided to study Special Psychopedagogy made this choice out of genuine interest, not as an alternative to another specialization and without an alternative option within the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences (FPES).

Students whose **first option** was SPP selected **Psychology** as their **second option in 25.8%** of cases, while **more than half (51.6%)** had **no second option**.

All students whose **first option** was **Psychology** chose **Special Psychopedagogy** as their **second option**. Among these students, **90.6%** declared that they had been **rejected from the Psychology specialization**. However, 9.4% (N=3) stated that Psychology had been their first option, that they had been admitted, but they are currently enrolled only in Special Psychopedagogy (and not simultaneously in Psychology).

Intentions regarding academic path / professional trajectory

Table 15.

Tables of Frequencies (number of respondents and %)

| Intentions after graduation | Work as a teacher/educator in mainstream education | Work as special education teacher, speech therapist, or another occupation within the field | To continue my studies in one of the Special Psychopedagogy programs | To continue my studies in Psychology | To pursue further education in Educational Sciences | Others, what exactly?* |
|------------------------------------|--|---|--|--------------------------------------|---|------------------------|
| N | 20 | 61 | 39 | 11 | 6 | 5 |
| Precent | 28,2% | 85,9% | 54,9% | 15,5% | 8,5% | 7% |

* “To continue my studies in Social Work”, “To pursue a degree in Visual Arts at UNArte,” “To explore several fields such as HR or Occupational Psychology”, “To complete a psychotherapy course that grants a professional license” (2 respondents).

According to the study’s results, approximately **86%** of the surveyed students declared that they **intend to work in one of the SPP-related fields** (special education teacher, speech therapist, or another occupation within the field). Moreover, **over half expressed the desire to continue their studies in one of the Special Psychopedagogy programs**. Approximately **28%** of students **intend to work as teachers or educators in mainstream education**. Around **16%** **plan to continue their studies in Psychology**, and about **9%** **wish to pursue further education in Educational Sciences**.

A more detailed analysis shows that approximately 94% of respondents whose first option was Special Psychopedagogy intend to work in the SPP field, while about 61% wish to continue their studies in the same field. About 16% expressed the intention to pursue studies in Educational Sciences/Pedagogy, while only 9.7% wish to work as teachers/educators in mainstream education.

Hypothesis Testing

H1. *If students are enrolled in the Special Psychopedagogy program (SPP), then most of them initially targeted admission to SPP rather than to other specializations (Psychology, PIPP, or Pedagogy).*

To test this hypothesis, we analyzed the percentage of those who reported having Special Psychopedagogy as their main option compared to those who had other options at admission.

H2. *Among students who initially targeted admission to other specializations:*

- i. Most of those who targeted **Psychology** will choose to work as special education teachers, psychotherapists, or speech therapists (the classical SPP specializations);*
- ii. Most of those who targeted **PPEP** or **Pedagogy** will aim for positions as teachers or educators.*

Table 16.

First Admission Option – Psychology

Tables of Frequencies (number of respondents and %)

| Post-graduation intentions: | To work as a special education teacher, speech therapist, or in another SPP-related specialization | | To continue studies in one of the SPP specializations | |
|-----------------------------|--|---------|---|---------|
| | N | Percent | N | Percent |
| No | 7 | 21,9 | 16 | 50,0 |
| Yes | 25 | 78,1 | 16 | 50,0 |
| Total | 32 | 100,0 | 32 | 100,0 |

Base: 32 respondents who declared Psychology as their first choice

Table 17.

First Admission Option – Primary and Preschool Education Pedagogy or Pedagogy

Tables of Frequencies (number of respondents and %)

| Post-graduation intentions: | To work as a special education teacher, speech therapist, or in another SPP-related specialization | | To continue studies in one of the SPP specializations | | To continue studies in Education | |
|-----------------------------|--|---------|---|---------|----------------------------------|---------|
| | N | Percent | N | Percent | N | Percent |
| No | 1 | 12,5 | 4 | 50,0 | 7 | 87,5 |
| Yes | 7 | 87,5 | 4 | 50,0 | 1 | 12,5 |
| Total | 8 | 100,0 | 8 | 100,0 | 8 | 100,0 |

Base: Eight respondents who declared PPEP or Pedagogy as their first choice

H3. *Approximately 30–40% of SPP students will choose to work in the field of Special Psychopedagogy.*

This third hypothesis is **refuted** by the study results. According to Table 15, approximately **86%** of students stated that they intend to work in Special Psychopedagogy, and over half (about **55%**) wish to continue their studies in the same field.

H4. *The professional trajectory students intend to pursue after completing their undergraduate studies strongly correlates with their initial specialization choice.*

Table 18.

The correlation between initial options and intentions after graduation was assessed using the **Pearson correlation coefficient**.

Pearson correlation between the variable measuring the first admission option and the post-graduation intentions

| Correlations | | What was your first choice? | Teacher/educator in mainstream education | Post-graduation intentions | | | |
|---|---------------------|-----------------------------|--|---|---|--------------------------------------|---|
| | | | | Special education teacher, speech therapist, or in another SPP-related specialization | To continue studies in one of the SPP specializations | To continue my studies in Psychology | To continue my studies in a specialization within Educational Sciences / Pedagogy |
| What was your first choice? | Pearson Correlation | 1 | -,202 | ,214 | ,071 | -,207 | ,256* |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | ,090 | ,073 | ,554 | ,084 | ,031 |
| | N | 71 | 71 | 71 | 71 | 71 | 71 |
| Teacher/educator in mainstream education | Pearson Correlation | -,202 | 1 | -,377** | -,314** | -,182 | ,035 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | ,090 | | ,001 | ,008 | ,130 | ,773 |
| | N | 71 | 71 | 71 | 71 | 71 | 71 |
| Special education teacher, speech therapist, or in another SPP-related specialization | Pearson Correlation | ,214 | -,377** | 1 | ,284* | -,050 | ,123 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | ,073 | ,001 | | ,016 | ,676 | ,307 |
| | N | 71 | 71 | 71 | 71 | 71 | 71 |
| To continue studies in one of the SPP specializations | Pearson Correlation | ,071 | -,314** | ,284* | 1 | -,316** | -,234* |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | ,554 | ,008 | ,016 | | ,007 | ,050 |
| | N | 71 | 71 | 71 | 71 | 71 | 71 |
| To continue my studies in Psychology | Pearson Correlation | -,207 | -,182 | -,050 | -,316** | 1 | -,130 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | ,084 | ,130 | ,676 | ,007 | | ,280 |
| | N | 71 | 71 | 71 | 71 | 71 | 71 |
| To continue my studies in a specialization within Educational Sciences / Pedagogy | Pearson Correlation | ,256* | ,035 | ,123 | -,234* | -,130 | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | ,031 | ,773 | ,307 | ,050 | ,280 | |
| | N | 71 | 71 | 71 | 71 | 71 | 71 |

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**.. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Discussion

For the first hypothesis, based on Table 10 presented in the previous pages, we can state that the study results disconfirm this hypothesis, showing that less than half of the respondents (43.7%) reported that Special Psychopedagogy was their first option at university admission.

Regarding the second hypothesis, the data confirm point (a). Indeed, the majority of those who initially aimed for admission to Psychology (78.1%) stated that they intend to work in the field of Special Psychopedagogy. A percentage of 50% intend to continue their studies in Special Psychopedagogy, and only 25% report that they wish to continue their studies in Psychology.

Point (b) of the second hypothesis appears to be disconfirmed. The data should be interpreted with caution, as the sub-sample consists of only eight individuals. Among them, 87.5% ($N = 7$) reported that they intend to work in one of the SPP fields, while 75% ($N = 6$) would choose to work as teachers/educators in mainstream education. Half of these respondents stated they would continue their studies in an SPP program, and only 12.5% ($N = 1$) would pursue further studies in Educational Sciences/Pedagogy.

According to the Pearson correlation table, this fourth hypothesis is disconfirmed. The initial study option does not strongly correlate with students' career or academic intentions. To identify whether a correlation exists between the first admission option and respondents' intentions after completing their undergraduate studies, we used the Pearson correlation coefficient.

The analysis reveals a single statistically significant correlation. Specifically, between the first specialization option and the intention to continue studies in a different domain, there is a moderate, positive, statistically significant correlation, $r = 0.256$, $p = 0.031$. This suggests that, in our sample, students who selected a particular specialization as their first option tend to be more likely to intend to continue their studies in a different field. This finding is consistent with earlier analyses, considering that although only 47.3% of respondents chose SPP as their first option, at the time of the study nearly 86% reported that they intend to work in the field of Special Psychopedagogy.

For the remaining variables included in the Pearson correlational analysis, the observed correlations were weak and statistically non-significant ($p > 0.05$). Thus, no meaningful associations were identified between the first specialization option and the intention to work as a teacher/educator ($r = -0.202$, $p = 0.09$), to work as a special education teacher/speech therapist ($r = 0.214$, $p = 0.073$), or to continue studies in the same field ($r = -0.207$, $p = 0.084$; $r = 0.071$, $p = 0.554$).

Conclusions

The present study reveals that although less than half of the students initially intended to pursue a degree in Special Psychopedagogy, at the time of data collection more than 85% of respondents reported that they wish to work in the field of Special Psychopedagogy after completing their undergraduate studies.

We may speculate that students enrolled in the Special Psychopedagogy program, regardless of their initial admission choice, experience a high level of satisfaction with the quality of instruction. This appears to motivate them and foster a strong desire both to pursue a career in Special Psychopedagogy and to continue their studies in this field.

Thus, we may state that the quality of education within this specialization—both in terms of theoretical foundations and opportunities for professional practice—plays a decisive role in helping students discover new interests and, importantly, develop new life aspirations. The career opportunities offered by a specialization in Special Psychopedagogy are diverse, which further encourages students as future practitioners.

We consider that the Department of Special Psychopedagogy within the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences at the University of Bucharest has significant potential to attract future students and to continue its development.

The sample used in this study is relatively small, and we do not possess sufficient data to confirm that it reflects the socio-demographic structure of the broader population of SPP students. Additionally, the distribution across years of study is unbalanced. For these reasons, we recommend conducting new longitudinal studies (over a minimum of three years) with the aim of confirming or refuting the present findings and examining the stability of career and academic intentions among SPP students over time. Future samples should more closely reflect the actual characteristics of the SPP student population at the University of Bucharest, be larger to increase accuracy, and be balanced across years of study.

Such research would allow for the identification of potential shifts in perceptions regarding the Special Psychopedagogy specialization or career intentions. A set of questions designed to obtain detailed feedback on the academic experience would also be highly valuable. These studies could be complemented by qualitative research, such as focus groups, to explore the emotions, thoughts, and deeper perceptions underlying students' decisions regarding career paths or further study within Special Psychopedagogy.

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