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Preservice Teachers' Interests and Perceptions of the Teaching Profession: A Review of Factors Influencing Career Choices

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ABSTRACT

Research Problem: Across both high-income and emerging economies, teacher shortages stem less from an absolute scarcity of trained graduates than from failures of recruitment, distribution and retention, and Indonesia's large, decentralised system faces the same structural difficulty. Although the motivations behind career choice are well theorised, evidence from Indonesian pre-service teachers remains scarce.

Research Purposes: This study describes pre-service teachers' interests in the teaching profession, examines their perceptions of its demands and rewards, and identifies the internal and external factors shaping their career choices.

Research Methods: An online questionnaire of closed-ended items, supplemented by interviews, was administered to pre-service teachers at several Indonesian universities. Responses were analysed descriptively and the reported percentages examined for internal consistency.

Results and Discussion: A personal desire to become a teacher (42%) was the leading reason for choosing a teacher education program, followed by family advice (39%) and perceived job availability (19%). Respondents rejected the notion that teaching is easy and 85.6% were sceptical about salary, yet 64.3% agreed that the profession offers many opportunities, 75.0% agreed or strongly agreed that teaching is enjoyable, and 75.0% were confident in their own ability to teach. Intrinsic interest therefore coexists with candid recognition of workload and compensation deficits. Every Likert percentage proved to be a multiple of one twenty-eighth, implying an effective denominator of about 28 rather than the 100 claimed.

Research Implications and Contributions: The study situates Indonesian evidence within the FIT-Choice framework and social cognitive career theory, showing that intrinsic attraction and extrinsic skepticism must be addressed together. Recruitment and retention policy should treat pay, workload and status as one problem, and teacher education should build the efficacy beliefs that sustain commitment rather than assuming positive perception is sufficient.

Keywords: interest, career choice, teaching profession, pre-service teachers, teacher shortage

INTRODUCTION

The teaching profession occupies a pivotal position in the formation of a nation's human

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capital, yet the supply of qualified teachers has become a persistent concern across both high-income and emerging economies. What is striking about contemporary shortages is that they seem less from an absolute scarcity of trained graduates than from failures of recruitment, distribution, and retention, so that the problem is better understood as a structural condition than as a temporary imbalance (Sutcher et al., 2016). The same difficulty travels across very different systems: reviews of world-language teacher education document shortages sustained over decades and continents (Burke & Ceo-DiFrancesco, 2022), and policy analyses of national systems reach comparable conclusions about the fragility of the teacher pipeline (Donitsa-Schmidt, 2025). Thomas Dotta et al. (2025) crystallise this body of evidence in an integrative review that attributes the declining attractiveness of teaching to high early-career attrition, an ageing workforce, and shrinking pools of applicants to teacher education programmes. If the profession is to be replenished, attention must therefore turn to the motivations and perceptions that shape the initial decision to teach, rather than to recruitment targets alone.

That decision carries particular weight in Indonesia, where the education system is vast, decentralised, and engaged in continuous reform. Madrasah education, which combines religious and general instruction, has been reorganised to strengthen national character and to respond to technological and social change (Sudarto, 2023), while teacher education for madrasah ibtidaiyah has been reshaped to embed Islamic values and prepare graduates for an increasingly complex society (Wastyanti & Susetiyo, 2025). These reforms intensify the demands placed on teachers and raise the stakes of who chooses to enter the profession. Career decision-making among Indonesian university students is further complicated by generational shifts, since millennial and post-millennial cohorts display distinctive difficulties in settling on a career path (Murniarti, 2019), and work values differ measurably across generations in ways that shape which occupations are found meaningful (Prawitasari, 2018). Understanding who chooses teaching, and why, is thus inseparable from the wider Indonesian project of strengthening educational quality.

Interest and perception sit at the centre of this question. Interest is generally treated as an internal drive that mobilises individuals towards a career and sustains the acquisition of the competences it requires, whereas perception refers to the beliefs and evaluations that people attach to a profession. Research on prospective teachers shows that the two constructs interact: perceptions of the profession's demands and rewards shape whether initial interest is consolidated or abandoned (Kan, 2015), while the status and socio-cultural beliefs attached to teaching can either encourage or discourage entry where the occupation is undervalued (Mwangi, 2024). Because pre-service teachers stand at the threshold of the profession, their motivations and perceptions are a strategically important object of study; investigations of pre-service English teachers, for instance, show that the reasons for choosing teaching are entangled with burnout tendencies that form well before employment begins (Küçük, 2023). The challenge, then, is not merely to record whether students are interested in teaching, but to understand how their perceptions of its workload, remuneration, and opportunities qualify that interest.

The study of teaching-career choice is anchored in several converging traditions. Social cognitive career theory holds that interests and choices emerge from the interplay of self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and the supports and barriers present in a person's environment (Lent et al., 1994), a framework that has been used to interpret generational differences in career decision-making in Indonesia (Prawitasari, 2018). The FIT-Choice framework complements this account by specifying the motivational factors, including intrinsic value, social utility, perceived ability, and the costs and demands of teaching, that distinguish those who enter teacher education (Watt & Richardson, 2007). Expectancy-value theory similarly emphasises how expectations for success combine with the subjective value assigned to a task to predict persistence (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002), while developmental accounts such as circumscription and compromise explain how social background progressively narrows the occupational options that young people regard as acceptable (Gottfredson, 1981).

The quality of motivation matters because the reasons behind a career choice carry consequences. Self-determination approaches distinguish intrinsic from extrinsic

motivation and show that the two are differently associated with sustained engagement rather than being simple opposites (Sansone & Tang, 2021). Within teaching, that distinction is consequential, since intrinsic and social-utility motives predict career optimism and protect against burnout in the first year of practice (McLean et al., 2019). These findings frame interest and perception not as static traits but as beliefs that teacher education can either reinforce or erode, which is precisely why the perceptions held by pre-service teachers deserve analytical attention.

Comparative evidence has accumulated on which motives dominate, and it complicates any assumption that teaching attracts a uniform motivational type. Studies of Estonian and Finnish student teachers identify intrinsic value and the desire to work with children as leading motivations, while also revealing nationally specific weightings of social utility and fallback intentions (Taimalu et al., 2021); Cuban trainee teachers, assessed with a culturally adapted FIT-Choice instrument, present a comparable but not identical motivational profile (King, 2023). Such variation suggests that motivational structures are sensitive to labour-market conditions and cultural expectations. Beyond individual motives, the decision is socially embedded: parents act as gatekeepers whose willingness to encourage teaching is predicted by their beliefs about its rewards (Christensen et al., 2022), and perceptions of prestige and esteem have been linked directly to the persistence of teacher shortages (Klimek, 2019). Newer cohorts of language teachers are also shown to renegotiate their perceptions of the profession against a backdrop of declining status and expanding responsibilities (Tran-Thanh, 2026). Read together, this literature establishes that career choice in teaching is multiply determined, yet it also exposes how rarely those determinants are examined together within a single non-Western sample.

Three gaps follow from this reading. First, the dominant evidence base is drawn from Western and high-income contexts, and detailed accounts from Indonesian teacher education students remain comparatively scarce, particularly ones that consider general and madrasah preparation within the same frame. Second, much existing work isolates a single determinant, whether motivation, self-efficacy, or family influence, rather than examining how intrinsic interest, social pressure, and economic reasoning coexist and sometimes pull in different directions within one cohort. Third, the perceptual dimension of career choice, meaning how pre-service teachers themselves weigh the workload, remuneration, and opportunities of teaching against their personal aspirations, is frequently inferred from instrument scores rather than explored in respondents' own terms. The present study addresses these gaps by combining a survey with interviews, situating numerical patterns within participants' interpretive accounts. Its novelty lies in documenting, for a single Indonesian sample, the tension between strong intrinsic interest and sober assessments of the profession's material conditions, and in showing how that tension informs career intentions.

Accordingly, the study pursues three objectives: to describe the interests that pre-service teachers hold towards the teaching profession, to examine their perceptions of its demands and rewards, and to identify the internal and external factors that shape their career choices. These objectives translate into the research questions guiding the analysis. What motivates Indonesian pre-service teachers to enrol in teacher education? How do they perceive the teaching profession in terms of workload, compensation, opportunity, and personal capability? And how, in their own accounts, do interest and perception combine to influence the decision to become a teacher?

The contribution of the study is threefold. Theoretically, it situates Indonesian evidence within established motivational frameworks such as social cognitive career theory and FIT-Choice, testing their reach in a context where family influence and status considerations carry distinctive weight (Lent et al., 1994; Watt & Richardson, 2007). Empirically, it supplies multi-method evidence on a population whose aspirations will determine the country's future teaching workforce, complementing comparative work conducted elsewhere (Taimalu et al., 2021). Practically, its findings speak to teacher education institutions and to policymakers concerned with recruitment and retention, indicating where preparation programmes might respond to the doubts and perceptions that shape pre-service teachers' commitments.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Perspectives on Career Choice

Career choice has been theorized through parallel traditions whose differences matter for how teaching is understood. The expectancy-value account holds that individuals select careers according to their expectancies of success and the value they attach to a domain, making motivation a cognitive appraisal rather than a fixed trait (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). Social cognitive career theory (SCCT) refines this by modelling interest as the product of self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations, which shape goals and action (Lent et al., 1994). The two share a cognitive architecture but differ in emphasis: expectancy-value foregrounds assigned value, SCCT domain-specific confidence. A developmental strand instead argues that aspirations narrow across childhood as individuals incorporate self-concept and perceptions of prestige, with choice later requiring compromise against perceived barriers (Gottfredson, 1981). Self-determination research adds that the quality of motivation, not merely its quantity, governs persistence (Sansone & Tang, 2021), while a more rationalist account treats career decisions as investments in expected returns under human capital theory (Caire & Becker, 1967). Career choice is therefore best treated as the joint product of confidence, value, developmental narrowing, and economic calculation rather than a single measurable attitude.

Tests of SCCT beyond its vocational setting clarify which components travel. Among senior high school students, self-efficacy, outcome expectations, environmental supports and barriers, and interest jointly predict STEM career aspirations (Dorsah, 2026), suggesting the core cognitive variables are robust while supports and barriers must be specified locally. Applications of the same choice model to rural undergraduates pursuing STEM degrees and to career changers in volatile labour markets confirm that self-efficacy and work values jointly determine perceived employability (Al-Asfour & Barhate, 2026; Rino, 2023), and the framework has likewise been used to interpret the motivations and decision-making processes of women entering engineering (Santos, 2022).

A distinct literature shifts attention from the content of choices to the process of deciding. Career maturity and decision-making self-efficacy are negatively associated with decision-making difficulties, so confident, developmentally advanced students settle on a path more easily (Duru, 2022), a relationship that has been traced through career outcome expectations and career maturity as well (Youngju, 2024). Content models such as SCCT and expectancy-value cannot explain indecision, while process models are silent on the attractions of a field such as teaching; a gap persists in integrating the two, and pre-service teachers in Indonesia have rarely been studied through either frame, since work on Indonesian students' career decision difficulties has seldom been connected to teacher education (Murniarti, 2019).

Motivations for Choosing Teaching

The dominant instrument for why people enter teaching is the FIT-Choice framework, which decomposes motivations into intrinsic value, social utility value, personal utility, and ability beliefs, and also captures perceptions of the profession (Watt & Richardson, 2007). Its principal insight is that teaching attracts on social utility value, the chance to shape children and contribute to society, as much as on intrinsic enjoyment (Richardson & Watt, 2016). Cross-national applications reproduce this profile with contextual modulation: student teachers in Estonia and Finland share a common core of motivations but differ in emphasis (Taimalu et al., 2021), and a culturally adapted FIT-Choice scale applied to 340 Cuban trainees likewise identified intrinsic and altruistic motives as dominant (King, 2023). Convergence lends credibility to the framework, yet divergence in salience warns against treating motivation profiles as universal.

A persistent debate concerns whether teaching functions as a genuine first choice or as a fallback entered when preferred options are unavailable. Evidence of strong intrinsic and altruistic motivations among pre-service teachers exists, though for English teachers in Turkey these are linked to student burnout levels (Küçük, 2023), which complicates a simple positive reading. That early motivations are consequential is shown by findings that motivations recorded during training predict burnout and career optimism in the first year

of teaching (McLean et al., 2019). Contrary to a purely fallback reading, a prospective study found the choice to enter the profession develops during training rather than being settled beforehand (Rots et al., 2010), and an integrative review confirms the profession's appeal rests on intrinsic and social-value features that must be deliberately cultivated (Thomas Dotta et al., 2025).

Extrinsic and policy-sensitive factors supply much of the tension in this debate. Structured training programmes measurably raise teachers' motivation, professional development, and self-efficacy, showing motivation responds to intervention rather than being fixed at entry (Saeed & Aneesa, 2023). If training, compensation, and conditions can shift motivation, then deciding to teach is not a single moment of attraction but an ongoing negotiation between intrinsic value and perceived rewards. The literature remains divided over how much weight extrinsic factors deserve, with some studies foregrounding salary and security and others subordinating them to intrinsic and social utility value, a contested balance the present study enters.

Perceptions of the Teaching Profession and Occupational Prestige

Perceptions of the profession are analytically distinct from motivations for entering it, and the two do not move together. Large-scale ratings of teaching's prestige, status, and esteem among United States high school seniors and undergraduates show that teaching scores modestly on status even as respondents recognise its social value, and prestige and esteem have been linked directly to persistent teacher shortages (Klimek, 2019); prospective teachers themselves hold largely favourable perceptions while acknowledging the profession's difficulties (Kan, 2015), and among pre-service students in Kenya status perceptions are entangled with socio-cultural beliefs, making prestige locally variable (Mwangi, 2024). The recurring pattern is that intrinsic and moral attractions coexist with a recognition of diminished external standing.

Because others mediate career entry, family perceptions function as gatekeepers. Parents' willingness to encourage their children to consider teaching is predicted by a small set of beliefs about the profession, so the supply of future teachers is filtered through influential adults rather than formed by candidates alone (Christensen et al., 2022). These perceptions are embedded in labour-market conditions that vary across systems: analyses of teacher supply in the United States attribute projected shortages to attrition as much as recruitment (Sutcher et al., 2016), and a quarter-century of employment data shows shortage is substantially a retention phenomenon, with exits eroding an initially well-supplied workforce (Ingersoll et al., 2019). Policy analysis in Israel reaches compatible conclusions, locating shortages in structural failures of preparation and retention (Donitsa-Schmidt, 2025). Perceptions of the profession thus cannot be read as private attitudes alone; they respond to the observable conditions of pay, workload, and status that institutions can alter.

Teacher Self-Efficacy and Professional Identity

Self-efficacy, the belief in one's capacity to organise and execute the actions needed to attain a goal, recurs as the pivot between motivation and persistence. Higher teacher self-efficacy is linked to supportive classroom processes, better student adjustment, and teachers' own well-being (Zee & Koomen, 2016). The commitment and turnover intentions of practising and pre-service teachers alike are influenced by self-efficacy and job stress (Klassen & Chiu, 2011), so efficacy is a precursor training can shape. Drawing on the sources specified by Bandura, pre-service teachers' self-efficacy changes over preparation and particular sources drive which changes occur (Pfitzner-Eden, 2016), while domain-specific evidence shows general confidence poorly predicts confidence for particular tasks (Haverback & McNary, 2015). Support from teacher educators also strengthens the link between resilience and academic self-efficacy among pre-service English teachers (Feng & Hu, 2026), so teacher education shapes the beliefs sustaining entry into the profession (Korthagen, 2010). Perceptions of the continuing professional development available to serving teachers, in turn, influence whether that early confidence is sustained once in post (Widayati et al., 2021).

Professional identity, the companion construct, concerns how individuals come to see themselves as members of the occupation. Investigating identity formation through SCCT,

Byram et al. (2021) found it gradual and shaped by individual and contextual factors. Efficacy supplies the evidence on which identity claims rest; identity supplies the motivation to persist when efficacy is challenged. What remains under-theorised is how identity and efficacy develop among pre-service teachers in Indonesia, where religious values, institutional reform, and distinctive teacher education pathways may yield a configuration not captured by models developed elsewhere.

The Teaching Profession in Indonesia: Supply, Status, and the Policy Context

Indonesian research on careers has concentrated first on the decision difficulties of young people entering higher education: millennial university students exhibit identifiable patterns of career decision-making difficulty, yet this work is barely connected to teacher education specifically (Murniarti, 2019). The institutional environment has meanwhile undergone intense reform, with madrasah reform repositioning religious schooling within the national system and altering the professional context pre-service teachers anticipate (Sudarto, 2023). Madrasah education has also been reconfigured around sustainability and environmental awareness, adding further expectations to the teacher's role (Zuhriyah, 2024).

A second, policy-oriented strand examines recruitment and management as levers on quality. Recruitment dynamics and internship programmes affect teacher performance, with placement mediating the relationship, so returns to recruitment depend on deployment (Triyono et al., 2026), and mentor teachers play a central role in the professionalism of Teacher Professional Education participants (Arifuddin et al., 2025). Professional development and the teacher professional allowance have been shown to raise the competencies of religious education teachers, treating material incentives as instruments of quality improvement (Pu'ad et al., 2025), while compensation reappears as a mechanism in which job satisfaction mediates the salary-loyalty link (Cholid et al., 2025). Research on teacher professional learning activities similarly treats structured professional development as a lever for raising the quality of teaching (Rani et al., 2023).

A distinctive feature of the Indonesian context is the religious and community dimension of teaching, adding a value layer largely absent from Western career-choice models. Integrating Islamic values into learning in Islamic elementary teacher education is treated as a strategy for preparing a generation equipped for rapid technological and social change (Wastyanti & Susetiyo, 2025). Taken together, the Indonesian evidence establishes a rich policy context but leaves a clear gap: the motivations and perceptions of pre-service teachers are rarely connected to the theoretical machinery of FIT-Choice, SCCT, and expectancy-value that dominates the international literature. The present study addresses that gap by situating pre-service teachers' interests and perceptions within a framework in which motivational values, self-efficacy, and perceptions of working conditions jointly shape the intention to enter and remain in teaching, yielding the expectation that intrinsic attraction is tempered by scepticism about compensation, and self-efficacy moderates the link between perception and career intention.

METHOD

This study is presented as adopting a qualitative approach intended to build a structured understanding of pre-service teachers' interests in and perceptions of the teaching profession. In practice, however, the design and the instrument that carries it are quantitative: the data are gathered through a closed-ended online questionnaire and are reported as percentages, with the original text additionally claiming regression. Labelling a largely descriptive survey as qualitative is a genuine methodological tension, and it is stated here rather than smoothed over, because it shapes how the findings should be read.

The research setting is teacher education in Indonesia. Participants were pre-service teachers currently enrolled in teacher education programmes at various universities and higher education institutions across the country, spanning elementary, middle, and secondary preparation pathways. This heterogeneous population is appropriate in principle, since student teacher cohorts vary considerably in motivation and background across institutions and national contexts (Taimalu et al., 2021), but it also means that the sample is not anchored to a single programme, campus, or region.

The stated target population was approximately 100 student teachers, and the sample was described as randomly selected from the participating teacher education programmes. Because sampling was conducted through institutional channels and voluntary online response, the practical result is closer to a convenience sample than to a strict probability sample, and the study does not report a response rate. This matters for interpretation: without a known sampling frame, the extent to which respondents represent Indonesian pre-service teachers as a whole cannot be established.

The primary instrument was a specially designed online questionnaire consisting of closed-ended items aimed at measuring students' interests in and perceptions of the teaching profession, together with a set of demographic questions. The perceptual items used a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The abstract also refers to interviews, but the method narrative does not specify how interviewees were selected, how many were interviewed, which protocol guided them, or how the interview material was analysed; this gap is reported as it stands rather than filled in. The questionnaire is not described as pilot-tested or validated. Established instruments such as the FIT-Choice scale show the value of validating attitudinal measures before they are used to make claims about career choice (Watt and Richardson, 2007), and this study does not report an equivalent process, so the correspondence between the items and the constructs they purport to measure remains undemonstrated.

Data were collected online through an online survey platform. Respondents were contacted by email or through the e-learning platform used by their universities and were asked to complete the questionnaire within a specified timeframe. Collection proceeded within that scheduled window, as reported by the authors.

For analysis, the original text states that the data were examined using statistical techniques, beginning with descriptive analysis to profile students' interests and perceptions, and then regression analysis to evaluate factors that may influence those interests and perceptions. Two problems arise here and are reported without altering any figure. First, the study is framed as qualitative while its analytic core is statistical, so the paradigmatic label and the method do not align. Second, and more consequentially, every Likert-item percentage reported is an exact multiple of 1/28 (3.571 percent), which implies an effective denominator of roughly 28 respondents rather than the 100 student teachers claimed in the abstract; the reasons-for-choice item, by contrast, sums to 100 percent and is consistent with a denominator of 100. This reporting inconsistency is retained as described and, because the effective denominator is small, it directly constrains generalisability. A denominator near 28 also leaves almost no statistical power, so the stated regression analysis cannot be sustained on this sample; no regression coefficients, fit statistics, or significance tests are reported, and none are reconstructed here.

On the dimensions of trustworthiness, the study reports no reliability coefficients, factor structure, or validity evidence for the questionnaire, and no triangulation between the survey and the interviews is documented. Given that preservice teachers' self-efficacy and perceptions are known to shift during training and to depend on how they are measured (Pfitzner-Eden, 2016; Zee and Koomen, 2016), the absence of such checks limits confidence in the instrument. Participation was voluntary and informed, and no personally identifiable data are reported; only aggregate, anonymous responses are presented, which is consistent with the ethical handling of an anonymous questionnaire. Taken together, the findings should be read as exploratory, describing the perceptions of a small responding group rather than offering statistically generalisable or causally supported conclusions about pre-service teachers' career choices.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Reasons for Choosing a Teacher Education Program

The first set of results identifies three reasons why respondents entered a teacher education programme: a personal desire to become a teacher (42%), family advice (39%), and the abundance of job opportunities for teachers (19%). Because these three categories sum to exactly 100%, this item is internally consistent with the study's stated sample and can be read

as a distribution of primary motives; the same arithmetic coherence does not extend to the Likert items reported below, whose effective denominator proves far smaller.

The dominance of the desire to become a teacher (42%) is theoretically consequential. Under expectancy-value theory, individuals select tasks they expect to succeed at and value highly, and subjective task value comprises intrinsic value, attainment value, utility value and cost (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). The FIT-Choice framework refines this architecture for teaching specifically, distinguishing intrinsic value, personal utility value, social utility value, altruism, and a distinctly different 'fallback career' motivation (Watt & Richardson, 2007). A personal desire to teach is best read as a blend of intrinsic value and altruism, and it is precisely this blend that the international literature identifies as protective: McLean et al. (2019) found that career choice motivations in teacher training predicted later burnout and career optimism in the first year of teaching, while King (2023), applying an extended FIT-Choice scale to 340 Cuban trainee teachers, and Taimalu et al. (2021), comparing 718 Estonian and 322 Finnish student teachers, both reported intrinsic and altruistic factors as the leading motives in very different national contexts. That the same pattern reappears in Indonesia is therefore not idiosyncratic but consistent with cross-national evidence, and it suggests that recruitment messaging built on intrinsic and altruistic appeal is likely to resonate more strongly than purely instrumental framing (Richardson & Watt, 2016).

Family advice at 39% signals that entry into teaching is heavily socially mediated. Aslan and Kabasakal (2026) showed that family influence on career choice among emerging adults operates indirectly through career stress, and Christensen et al. (2022), using structural equation modelling of parental perceptions, demonstrated that parents' beliefs about teaching strongly predict whether they encourage their children towards the profession. The prominence of family influence in the present data is consistent with the collectivist decision-making context documented among Indonesian university students, whose career difficulties are shaped by relational expectations rather than autonomous preference alone (Murniarti, 2019). This is a double-edged finding: family endorsement is a powerful recruitment channel in this setting, but it also raises the possibility that a portion of the 39% entered teaching to satisfy others rather than from self-concordant interest, a distinction that matters for long-term retention. Evidence that training shapes motivation and self-efficacy (Saeed & Aneesa, 2023), together with prospective evidence that the decision to enter teaching develops during preparation rather than being settled beforehand (Rots et al., 2010), indicates that entry motives can be consolidated or eroded during training, and that motivational profiles vary across national contexts (Taimalu et al., 2021).

The smallest motive, the perception of abundant job opportunities (19%), is where the FIT-Choice construct of fallback career becomes analytically useful. Job security and labour-market demand are extrinsic personal-utility considerations that human capital theory explains as rational investment in a field with predictable returns (Caire & Becker, 1967). The framing here is prospective: respondents anticipate demand rather than assert intrinsic attraction. Hung et al. (2024) found that the motivations with which students enter teacher education shape their self-regulated learning skills once enrolled, which implies that the 19% whose motive is essentially instrumental may require different academic support than the intrinsically motivated majority. Read together, the three reasons reproduce the field's established motivational asymmetry: intrinsic value and social utility dominate, extrinsic career security trails behind, and a 'fallback career' orientation persists as a minority motive whose effects surface later in the career (Thomas Dotta et al., 2025).

Figure 1 shows that 50.0% of respondents somewhat disagreed that teaching is an easy job, 39.3% disagreed, 7.1% agreed, and approximately 3.6% strongly disagreed. No strongly-agree response is visible in the chart. These figures do not support the separate 89% figure reported in the source text; the discrepancy cannot be resolved without checking the original response data, so the 89% figure is not treated as a confirmed result.

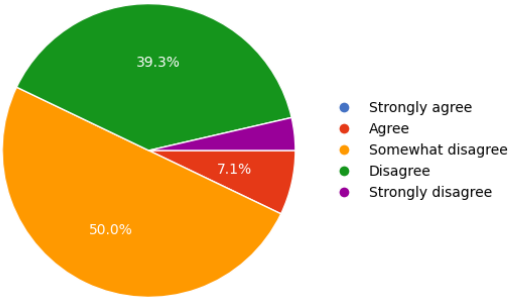


Figure 1. Responses to the statement that teaching is an easy job

With that caveat stated, the substantive signal is nonetheless meaningful and aligns with a well-documented body of work. The overall distribution nevertheless indicates that respondents recognise teaching as cognitively and emotionally demanding. Klimek (2019), surveying over 1,100 respondents on teaching's prestige, status and esteem, found that perceptions of difficulty and undervaluation are entangled, and Kan (2015) reported that prospective teachers' perceptions of the profession centre on its responsibility rather than its ease. Michońska-Stadnik (2019), using qualitative data from trainee language teachers, showed that reflection on the profession's negative aspects occurs at the very start of training, and Mwangi (2024) found that Kenyan pre-service students' perceptions are shaped by socio-cultural beliefs about status rather than by the intrinsic difficulty of classroom work alone. Tran-Thanh (2026) adds that Generation Z teachers perceive the profession as carrying escalating responsibility amid declining authority. Two implications follow: a realistic appreciation of difficulty is a prerequisite for informed career choice rather than a deterrent to it, and because the strongly-agree category is non-trivial, a sub-group holds expectations that may be unrealistic and therefore faces elevated risk of early disillusionment.

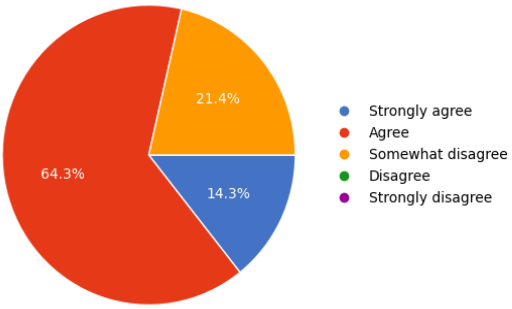


Figure 2. Perceived opportunities in the teaching profession

As shown in Figure 2, 64.3% of respondents agreed that the teaching profession offers many opportunities, 21.4% somewhat disagreed, and 14.3% strongly agreed. The figure therefore indicates a generally positive perception, although the response distribution should be interpreted descriptively.

The positive majority is best explained by anticipated labour-market demand. Donitsa-Schmidt (2025), in a policy analysis of teacher shortage in Israel, and Yamasaki (2025), documenting Japan's declining competition in teacher recruitment examinations, both show that system-level shortages translate into real openings for entrants; Lyonga (2026) reports the same dynamic in Cameroon's public secondary schools, where chronic shortage coexists with weak recruitment and retention. Triyono et al. (2026) situate these openings within an Indonesian human-capital framework, showing that recruitment dynamics and internship programmes shape later teacher performance through the mediating mechanism of placement. The 12.3% who strongly agreed likely express occupational optimism: an expectation not merely of vacancies but of progression, a

perception that Thomas Dotta et al. (2025) identify as central to the profession's attractiveness. The 21.4% who somewhat disagreed are the more cautious group; their scepticism is not irrational given documented attrition, and Castillo (2023) argues that persistent shortages are rooted as much in retention failure as in recruitment failure, which means opportunity must be communicated as sustainable career prospect rather than simple job availability.

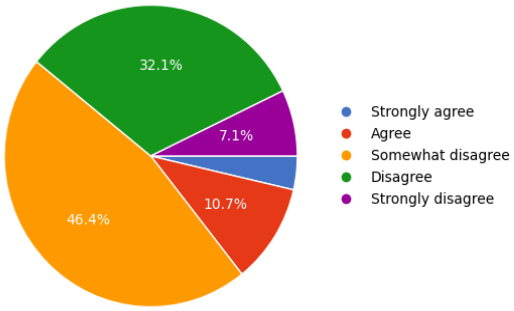


Figure 3. Perceptions of teachers' salaries

Figure 3 presents responses to the statement that teachers' salaries are very promising. The chart shows 46.4% somewhat disagreed, 32.1% disagreed, 7.1% strongly disagreed, 10.7% agreed, and approximately 3.6% strongly agreed. The three negative categories total 85.6%, while the small strongly-agree slice is not labelled in the original chart; percentages are reported descriptively.

This finding locates the sample squarely within the international evidence on teacher pay and occupational prestige. Gutiérrez-Banegas and Olivera Pérez (2026), studying teacher job satisfaction during the pandemic in Mexico, found that although salary mattered, its influence was mediated by working conditions and intrinsic factors, a nuance that warns against reading pay dissatisfaction as a purely financial judgement. Cholid et al. (2025) demonstrated, in Indonesian Muhammadiyah schools in Samarinda, that job satisfaction mediates the relationship between salary and teacher loyalty, which converts the present perception into a concrete retention risk: if entrants already doubt that pay will be adequate, their commitment is fragile from the outset. Klimek (2019) links perceived remuneration directly to status and esteem, and Day et al. (2009) show that commitment over a teaching career fluctuates with professional and personal conditions rather than remaining fixed, implying that early salary scepticism is not necessarily terminal if working conditions improve. Cahyani and Ubaidillah (2024), however, caution that the evidence on stress, satisfaction and motivation remains mixed, which is precisely why the confidence of this sample's negative judgement deserves scrutiny. From a human capital perspective (Caire & Becker, 1967), a profession widely believed to under-reward its workers should rationally attract fewer investment-oriented entrants, and it is notable that even the 19% who cited job availability were not deterred by pay expectations. Compensation and prestige therefore emerge as the binding constraint on the attractiveness of teaching in this context, not the intrinsic appeal of the work itself.

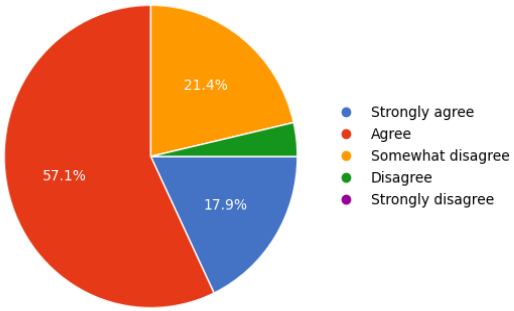


Figure 4. Perceptions of teaching as an enjoyable job.

Figure 4 show that 57.1% agreed teaching is an enjoyable job and 17.9% strongly agreed, giving a combined positive response of 75.0%. A further 21.4% somewhat disagreed and approximately 3.6% disagreed. These results indicate that most respondents anticipated finding teaching enjoyable, although some expressed reservations.

The pattern maps onto the classic intrinsic–extrinsic distinction. Self-determination theory holds that intrinsic motivation, grounded in interest and enjoyment, predicts sustained engagement more reliably than externally controlled motivation (Sansone & Tang, 2021), while expectancy-value theory positions enjoyment as a core component of intrinsic task value (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). The 57.1% who agreed express anticipated enjoyment that is consistent with the prosocial and emotional rewards documented in the motivation literature. There is also a predictive dimension: McLean et al. (2019) found that career choice motivations forecast career optimism in the first year of teaching, so the enthusiasm recorded here is not merely attitudinal but potentially consequential for persistence. The 21.4% who somewhat disagreed are the more instructive group, because their hesitation captures the pull side of the push–pull dynamic. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2016) demonstrated that teacher stress and self-efficacy jointly predict engagement, emotional exhaustion and the motivation to leave the profession, and Zee and Koomen (2016) synthesised evidence that teachers' self-efficacy beliefs shape classroom processes, student adjustment and the teachers' own well-being. Direct evidence from Indonesian and regional samples supports this reading, since workload and coping stress predict burnout among special-needs teachers (Wijaya & Prastuti, 2021), workload is associated with burnout and reduced teaching effectiveness (Canete, 2025), and self-efficacy moderates the strength of the workload-burnout relationship (Dewi, 2024). The hesitation of this fifth of the sample is thus plausibly a rational forecast about workload and emotional demand rather than a rejection of teaching's intrinsic rewards. Korthagen (2010) argues that the difference teacher education can make lies in helping trainees integrate these competing considerations, which suggests the task is not to amplify enjoyment but to prepare students for the conditions under which enjoyment can be sustained.

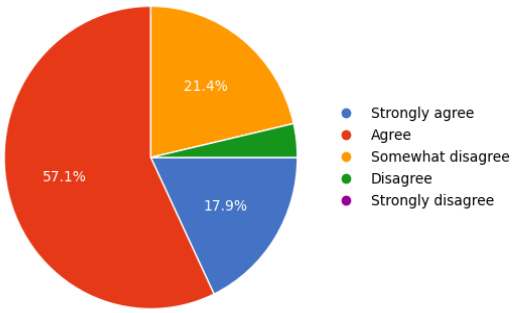


Figure 5. Self-perceived ability to become a teacher

Figure 5 shows respondents' self-perceived ability to become a teacher. A total of 75.0% expressed confidence, comprising 57.1% who agreed and 17.9% who strongly agreed. A further 21.4% somewhat disagreed and approximately 3.6% disagreed. The result indicates generally positive self-perceived ability, although confidence was not unanimous.

This result is best interpreted through teacher self-efficacy, the belief in one's capacity to organise and execute the actions required to accomplish specific teaching tasks. Bandura's four sources of self-efficacy — mastery experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion, and physiological and affective states — provide the analytical frame, and Pfitzner-Eden (2016) showed empirically that these sources predict latent change in preservice teachers' self-efficacy over training, which means the confidence reported here is a developmental state that teacher education can deliberately shape. Yough (2019) demonstrated that structured interventions can tap these sources to raise preservice teachers' sense of efficacy, and Haverback and McNary (2015) cautioned that self-efficacy is domain-specific rather than global, so a general belief in one's ability to teach may mask weaker confidence in particular subject or instructional domains. The broader consequences are substantial: Zee

and Koomen (2016) linked teacher self-efficacy to classroom processes and teacher well-being, and Klassen and Chiu (2011) found that self-efficacy shapes occupational commitment and the intention to quit among both practising and pre-service teachers. The 21.4% who somewhat disagreed are therefore the priority population; Duru (2022) connected career decision-making self-efficacy to reduced decision-making difficulty, a relationship traced more specifically through career outcome expectations and career maturity among nursing students (Youngju, 2024), and Lent et al. (1994) proposed that self-efficacy and outcome expectations jointly determine career interests and choices, so the confidence gap is also a career-choice gap. Feng and Hu (2026) add that informational support from teacher educators strengthens the translation of resilience into academic self-efficacy among preservice English teachers, pointing to a concrete and modifiable lever. Saeed and Aneesa (2023) similarly report that teacher training programmes raise motivation, professional development and self-efficacy together, which supports embedding mastery and vicarious experiences systematically into Indonesian teacher preparation rather than leaving confidence to accrue incidentally.

Synthesis, Cross-Cutting Patterns and Limitations

Taken together, the six findings describe a coherent motivational profile with one structural weakness. The sample is driven primarily by intrinsic interest and family socialisation, values the work as enjoyable and demanding rather than easy, believes itself capable of teaching, and yet is decisively sceptical about remuneration and, to a lesser degree, about the reliability of career opportunities. This combination is precisely the configuration the international literature identifies as high-risk for attrition: strong intrinsic entry motives coupled with low extrinsic satisfaction (McLean et al., 2019; Thomas Dotta et al., 2025). The concern is not that these future teachers lack enthusiasm but that their commitment rests on a single motivational pillar. Korthagen (2010) frames the resolution as integrative teacher education that connects personal meaning to professional reality, and Saeed and Aneesa (2023) provide evidence that structured training can lift both motivation and efficacy. In the Indonesian and Islamic-education context specifically, where the profession carries both religious and civic significance, integrating those values could reinforce the altruistic and social-utility motives that already dominate the sample while realistic compensation policy addresses the extrinsic deficit (Wastyanti & Susetiyo, 2025).

These conclusions must be qualified by substantial limitations in the source data. The most serious is the denominator problem. Every Likert percentage fits an exact fractional pattern consistent with 28 respondents, whereas the reported sample is 100 student teachers; the reasons-for-choosing item, by contrast, sums to 100%, so the two item types appear to rest on different denominators. A denominator of 28 is far too small to support anything beyond descriptive inference, and no generalisation to the wider population of Indonesian pre-service teachers is warranted. Compounding this, the reporting itself is inconsistent in at least three identifiable ways: the 89% figure for the 'easy job' item appears in no diagram, the salary sum is stated as 85.5% when the reported components total 85.6%, and the 12.3% opportunity figure is the only Likert value that is not a multiple of one twenty-eighth. The original text also double-counted combined agreement on two items, an error corrected above. Additional constraints are that the stated qualitative approach is paired with a statistical descriptive analysis and that the divergent response categories are never cross-tabulated with respondent characteristics. These limitations do not invalidate the descriptive picture, but they reduce it to a preliminary, locally bounded indication. What the data can support is a set of testable propositions, not firm conclusions: that intrinsic and familial motives dominate entry into teacher education in Indonesia, that extrinsic dissatisfaction is the principal vulnerability, and that self-efficacy and enjoyment are the levers most amenable to intervention during training. Confirmatory work with a properly specified sample, a stable denominator, and harmonised reporting is the necessary next step.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to examine pre-service teachers' interest in the teaching profession, their

perceptions of the profession, and the factors influencing their career choices. The findings indicate that intrinsic motivation was the primary reason for entering teacher education. Personal desire to become a teacher was the most frequently reported factor, followed by family advice and perceived employment opportunities. These results suggest that career decisions were influenced by personal vocation, social influence, and perceived job availability.

The findings also show that interest in teaching did not necessarily reflect a wholly positive perception of the profession. Although most respondents did not consider teaching to be an easy occupation and expressed concerns about salary, many still perceived the profession as enjoyable and offering various opportunities. In addition, most respondents expressed confidence in their ability to teach. This suggests that pre-service teachers may maintain a strong interest in teaching while remaining aware of challenges related to workload and financial reward. Therefore, positive perceptions alone may not be sufficient to ensure retention in the profession.

Several implications can be drawn for teacher education programs and policy. Teacher education curricula should present the realities of the teaching profession clearly while also strengthening pre-service teachers' self-efficacy and professional commitment. Given the influence of family on career choice, engagement with parents and school counsellors may also support teacher recruitment. Furthermore, concerns regarding salary should be addressed through comprehensive policies that consider remuneration, workload, and professional status.

This study has several limitations. The perceptual data were based on a small effective sample, which limits the generalisability of the findings. In addition, the study used a descriptive design, so the results do not allow causal inferences. Several reported figures were also inconsistent or could not be verified from the presented diagrams. Future research should use larger and more transparent samples, validated instruments, and longitudinal designs to examine the factors that influence teachers' persistence in the profession beyond their initial interest.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Nurul Fatonah: Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal Analysis, Writing - Original Draft, Writing - Review and Editing. Hanny Latifah: Data Collection, Investigation, Writing - Original Draft. Hilda Ainissyifa: Data Collection, Formal Analysis, Visualization. Yufi Mohammad Nasrullah: Methodology, Investigation, Writing - Review and Editing. Noordin Bin Mamat: Supervision, Validation, Writing - Review and Editing. Shafira Nur Rahmah: Data Collection, Project Administration, Visualization. Alvi Chairiah: Translating and Lay outing.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to the research, authorship, and publication of this article.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The data that support the findings of this study are not publicly available because the survey data contain participant information and are subject to ethical restrictions, but they are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

AI USE DECLARATION

Artificial intelligence tools were not used to generate the research design, data, analysis, or findings presented in this article. AI-assisted tools were used solely for language editing and improving the readability of the manuscript. The authors reviewed and verified all AI-assisted output, take full responsibility for the content of the article, and remain accountable for its accuracy and integrity.

ETHICAL CLEARANCE

This study used an anonymous, voluntary online questionnaire that collected no identifiable personal data and did not involve human participants in an interventional sense; formal ethical clearance was therefore not required. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and took part voluntarily, and their responses were handled anonymously and confidentially.

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