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UNDERSTANDING TEACHING CAREER PREFERENCES: THE ROLE OF MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS AMONG PRESERVICE TEACHERS

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Abstract
The issue of why preservice teachers choose and/or dislike teaching has gained significance in the current scenario of teacher shortages and decreasing interest in the profession. Despite the mention of the previous studies of intrinsic, social and utility-based motivations, the role of these factors in relation to each other is not clear. This study examined how motivational factors shape teaching career preferences among preservice teachers. A quantitative cross-sectional design using secondary data was applied to a sample of 202 teacher education students in Japan. Motivational variables based on the FIT-Choice framework were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation, t-tests, and regression analysis. The results showed that perceived ability (M = 5.61) and personal utility (M = 5.49) were the highest-rated motivations, while intrinsic motivation was lower (M = 2.66). Students who preferred teaching reported significantly higher social utility (p = 0.013), intrinsic motivation (p = 0.034), perceived ability (p = 0.014), and personal utility (p < 0.001). Correlations with career preference were weak, with personal utility showing the strongest negative association (r = -0.26). Regression analysis confirmed that only personal utility significantly predicted career preference (β = -0.104, p = 0.001). These findings suggest that teaching career preference reflects a layered motivational structure in which practical considerations increase attractiveness but do not necessarily support long-term commitment.

Keywords: *teaching career preference, preservice teachers, motivation, FIT-Choice, teacher education*

1. Introduction

Higher The profession of teaching is generally considered to be a supporting profession to both human and societal development. It has a key role in the development of educational systems and in the provision of knowledge, skills, and values between generations (Liu, 2017). Today, education has been more associated with a wider spectrum of social and economic prosperity, which once again underscores the significance of an effective and inspired teaching staff (Razinkina et al., 2020). The quality of teachers is thus closely related to the effectiveness of educational systems since they directly determine the education of students and their overall results. There has been a growing global concern about the quality of teaching and enhancing teacher preparation. The quality of instruction is linked to better student success, equity, and general success in education (Darling-Hammond, 2021). The teacher education programs are important processes that offer the skills needed to be a good teacher, so that the future teacher is ready to address the evolving educational needs (Ubogu, 2020). Nevertheless, in spite of those initiatives, the problem of recruitment and retention of teachers remains a persistent issue in many countries. The issue of teacher shortages has become a major issue in different systems of education, and it is a problem of concern that is not only a lack of supply, but also a loss of interest in the profession. These deficits are not only quantitative but also pertain to readiness and the long-term dedication of those joining the teaching profession (Sutcher et al., 2019). The recent debates have also highlighted that the problem goes beyond the number, indicating more profound issues related to motivation, career appeal, and professional sustainability (Craig et al., 2023). The reasons behind people wanting to teach or not have thus emerged as a highly important point of investigation. Motivational factors interact in a complicated pattern to determine the choice of teaching as a profession. Teaching is said to be a profession that is value-oriented, which brings together individual desires and social duty (Baltusite & Katane, 2017). People can be attracted to teaching because it seems to be meaningful to them, or they feel competent, or they want to help society. Past studies have demonstrated that the motivation of preservice teachers is directly connected to their attitudes toward the profession and its role in society (Bergmark et al., 2018). Many studies have often found intrinsic motivation to be one of the major motivators to join the teaching profession. Teachers who take an interest in teaching and find pleasure in the work they do with students are more likely to be more committed and engaged. These motivations relate to positive teaching behaviors and may impact student outcomes via supportive and encouraging classroom settings (Zou et al., 2024). Meanwhile, perceived ability or self-efficacy is also significant, and one is more likely to follow the career and occupation that he or she believes they are good at and capable of.

Besides intrinsic issues, there are also other personal utility considerations that determine the choice of a teaching career. These are things like work-life balance, career stability and job security. Although these factors can help to increase the appeal of teaching, they do not always affect them identically and can be different in different people and conditions (Toropova et al., 2021). On the same note, the perception of work-life balance and self-efficacy has also been found to impact how individuals can lean towards teaching as a profession, with both individual and situational aspects contributing a lot (Blackburn et al., 2017). The Factors Influencing Teaching Choice (FIT-Choice) model provides an orderly way of making sense of all these motivations. It models teaching career choice in terms of intrinsic, social, and utility-based values, as well as perceptions of ability and alternative career choices. Empirical research on this framework shows that motivations are complex and situational, with various factors playing off to influence career choices (Salifu et al., 2018). Likewise, expectancy-value frames underline that the career decisions of people are predetermined by their beliefs regarding their abilities and the importance they assign to the occupation (Cheng et al., 2020).

Even though the current research has made a great contribution to the research on teaching career motivations, there are still certain limitations. First, many studies are focused on the individual motivational factors, rather than the interaction of the motivational factors. Second, the results of different studies are frequently contradictory, especially the proportions of intrinsic, social, and utility-oriented motivations. Third, few studies have combined various methods of analysis, including descriptive analysis, correlation, group comparison, and predictive modeling to gain an in-depth picture of teaching career preferences. These gaps provide the necessity of a more comprehensive analysis of motivational influences.

To address these gaps, the current study will focus on exploring the importance of motivation factors in influencing teaching career preferences among preservice teachers. In particular, the study aims at determining the prevailing motivational factors, the relationships between motivation and career preference, the differences in motivational profiles of those students who and those who do not, as well as the determination of the predictive role of motivational variables on career preference.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This was a quantitative, cross-sectional study design employing analysis of secondary data. This method was suitable considering the aim of testing how the motivational factors are related to career preference among the teacher education students. No manipulation of variables was done, so the non-experimental design was selected. Patterns, associations, and differences between groups were analyzed using the available data.

2.2 Data Source

The variables used in this research were retrieved from a publicly accessible dataset created by Saito (2024). The data is a collection of teacher education students in Japan and is about their beliefs and attitudes towards teaching as a profession. It contains Likert-scale items that are consistent with the Factors Influencing Teaching Choice (FIT-Choice) framework that accounts for intrinsic motivation, social utility, personal utility, perceived ability, and fallback career considerations.

The dataset offers a methodical foundation for studying the relationship between these motivational factors and career preferences.

2.3 Sample and Data Preparation

The sample included 202 teacher education students pursuing higher education in Japan. The respondents were at various levels of their academic journey, and this included first-year and fourth-year students. The sample represents those who are either about to start or are thinking about joining the teaching career, and therefore, it is appropriate to explore career-related motivation among a population of preservice teachers.

2.4 Measures

The items used to derive motivational constructs were based on the FIT-Choice framework. Because of the difference in internal consistency among subscales, composite scores and item scores were combined in the analysis. The social utility was operationalized as a composite construct, which means the provision of motivations concerning contributing to society and working with students. The other dimensions, such as intrinsic motivation, perceived ability, personal utility, and fallback career, were measured with the help of certain items that reflect the main points of each construct. The measures of all variables were on a seven-point Likert scale, with high scores implying a high level of agreement with the motivational statements. Career preference was considered the outcome variable, and it reflected the desired occupational direction among the participants.

2.5 Data Preparation

Preparation of data was done by screening for completeness/consistency. All metadata and non-analytic rows were eliminated, and all variables were turned into numbers. Missing values were verified in the dataset, and there were no significant missing data in the variables analyzed. Where construct reliability was lacking, items chosen as single indicators were retained, and composite variables were formed by averaging the relevant items.

2.6 Data Analysis

To answer the research objectives, statistical analyses were carried out. Means and standard deviations were used as descriptive statistics to generalize the motivational patterns. Relationships among the variables were analyzed using Pearson correlation analysis. Independent samples t-tests were carried out to measure the differences in motivation between students who liked teaching and those who did not. A multiple linear regression analysis was used to achieve the predictive power of motivational factors on career preference. The method enabled the analysis of multiple predictors simultaneously and the interrelationships between variables being controlled. All statistical analyses were conducted using conventional statistical methods that are appropriate for the analysis of quantitative data by means of surveys.

3. Results

3.1 Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics were calculated to check the general distribution of motivational factors among the participants. Table 1 demonstrates that the most rated motivational dimensions were personal utility (M = 5.49, SD = 1.60) and perceived ability (M = 5.61, SD = 1.27). The social utility was moderate (M = 4.23, SD = 1.04), meaning that the participants tended to place an important value on the social impact of teaching. Conversely, intrinsic motivation was relatively smaller (M = 2.66, SD = 1.53), indicating that the enjoyment or natural interest in teaching was not as strong in the sample. There was moderate fallback career motivation (M = 3.31, SD = 1.85).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

Variable	Mean	SD
Social Utility	4.23	1.04
Intrinsic Motivation	2.66	1.53
Perceived Ability	5.61	1.27
Personal Utility	5.49	1.60
Fallback Career	3.31	1.85

Figure 1 presents the mean scores of the motivational variables. The visual pattern reinforces that practical considerations and perceived competence are more prominent than intrinsic interest in shaping teaching motivation.

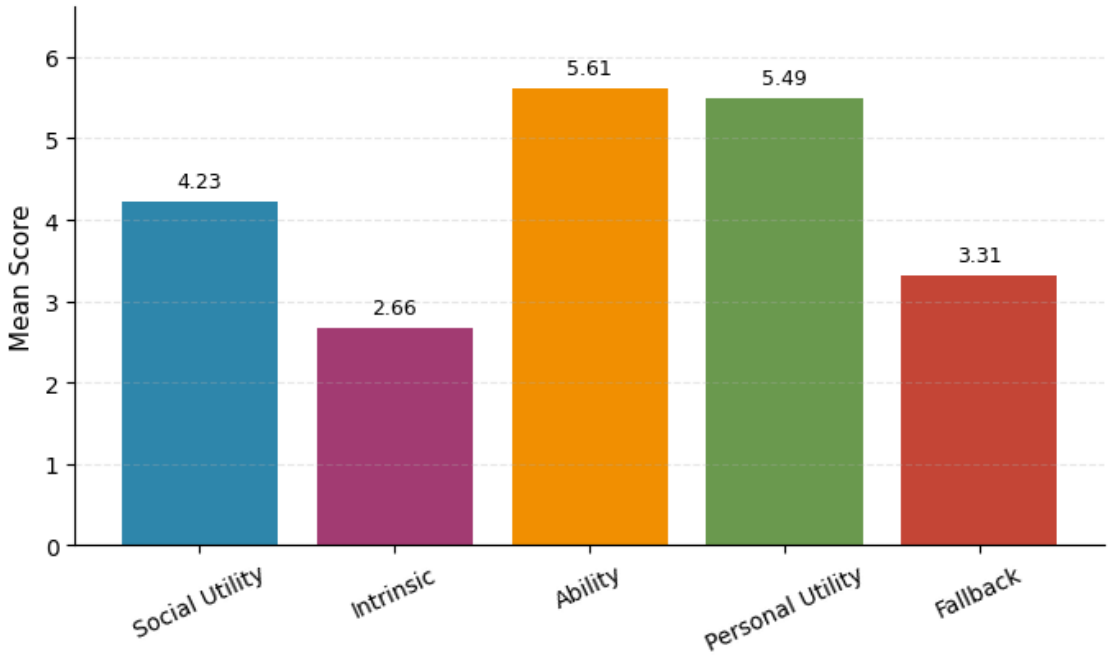

Figure 1. Mean Motivation Scores

3.2 Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis was done to analyze the relationships between motivational variables and career preference. The motivational constructs were mostly positively related, as shown in Table 2. Moderate positive correlations were observed between social utility and perceived ability (r = 0.48) and intrinsic motivation (r = 0.41), which implies that students who were more concerned about the social value of teaching were also more likely to report increased confidence and interest.

In terms of career preference, the variables all had weak negative correlations. Of these, personal utility exhibited the most negative relationship (r = -0.26), meaning that increased focus on practical benefits is related to the reduced chances of choosing teaching as a desirable career. The other variables, such as perceived ability (r = -0.14), social utility (r = -0.10), intrinsic motivation (r = -0.09) and fallback career (r = -0.08), indicated relatively weak correlations.

Table 2. Correlations Among Study Variables

Variable	Social Utility	Intrinsic	Ability	Personal Utility	Fallback	Career Preference
Social Utility	1.00	0.41	0.48	0.39	0.34	-0.10
Intrinsic	0.41	1.00	0.12	0.14	0.26	-0.09
Ability	0.48	0.12	1.00	0.29	0.14	-0.14
Personal Utility	0.39	0.14	0.29	1.00	0.03	-0.26
Fallback	0.34	0.26	0.14	0.03	1.00	-0.08
Career Preference	-0.10	-0.09	-0.14	-0.26	-0.08	1.00

A graphical representation of these relationships is shown in Figure 2, which highlights the relative strength of associations between motivational factors and career preference. The figure particularly emphasizes the comparatively stronger negative relationship associated with personal utility.

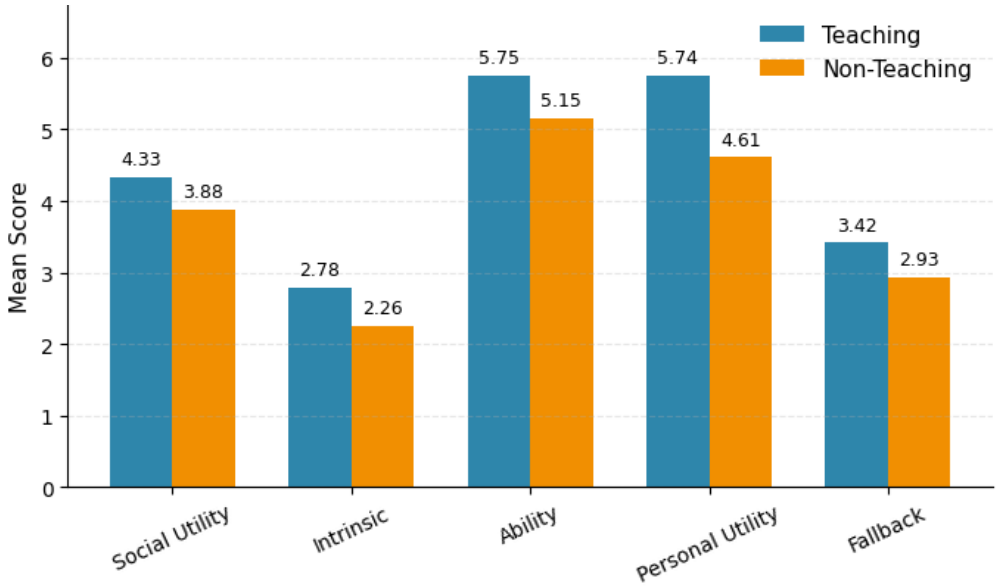

Figure 2. Correlation with Career Preference

3.3 Group Differences in Motivation by Career Preference

Independent samples t-tests were used to evaluate differences between students who preferred teaching and those who did not. Table 3 indicates that a number of statistically significant differences occurred. Students who preferred teaching reported significantly higher levels of social utility (M = 4.33 compared to 3.88, t = 2.56, p = 0.013), intrinsic motivation (M = 2.78 compared to 2.26, t = 2.16, p = 0.034), perceived ability (M = 5.75 compared to 5.15, t = 2.53, p = 0.014), and personal utility (M = 5.74 compared to 4.61, t = 4.06, p < 0.001). There was no statistically significant difference in fallback career motivation (p = 0.113).

Table 3. Group Differences Between Teaching and Non-Teaching Students

Variable	Teaching (M)	Non-Teaching (M)	t	p
Social Utility	4.33	3.88	2.56	0.013
Intrinsic	2.78	2.26	2.16	0.034
Ability	5.75	5.15	2.53	0.014
Personal Utility	5.74	4.61	4.06	< 0.001
Fallback	3.42	2.94	1.60	0.113

These differences are further illustrated in Figure 3, which shows consistently higher motivation scores among students who prefer teaching, with the largest gap observed in personal utility.

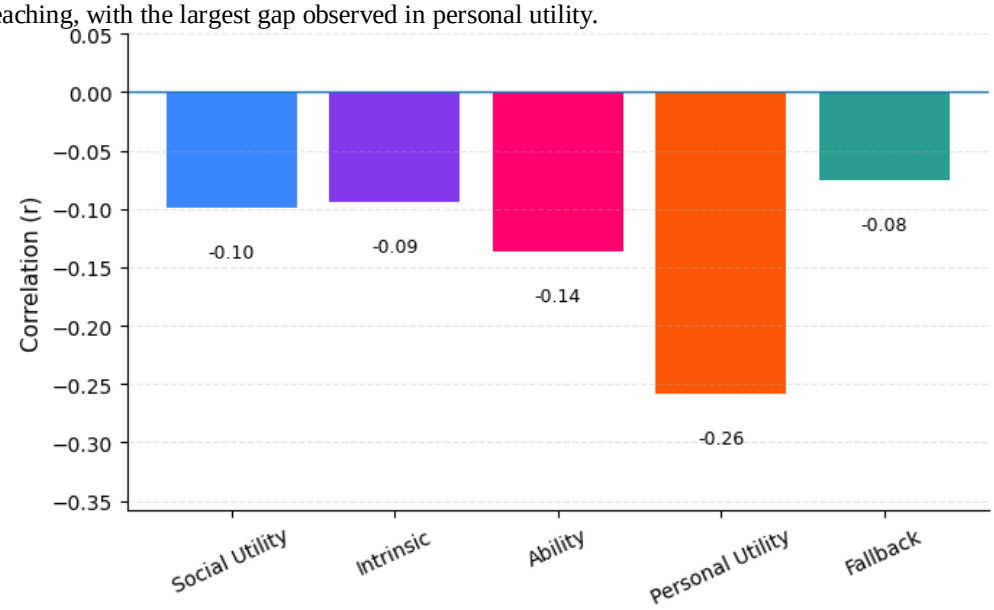

Figure 3. Motivation by Career Preference

3.4 Regression Analysis

A multiple linear regression was done to investigate the predictive impacts of motivational variables on career preference. The resulting overall model was statistically significant (F = 3.46, p = 0.005), and it explained nearly 8.1% of the variance in career preference (R^2 = 0.081). The only predictor that was statistically significant was the personal utility motivation

(β = -0.104, p = 0.001). The negative sign of the coefficient shows that the greater the motivation of the personal utility, the lower is the probability of selecting the teaching career as a preferred occupation. The other variables, such as social utility, intrinsic motivation, perceived ability and fallback career, were not significant predictors. In general, the regression findings indicate that though various motivational variables vary among groups, when these two variables are put into consideration, personal utility has a significantly distinct effect.

A multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the predictive effects of motivational factors on career preference. The overall model was statistically significant ($F = 3.46$, $p = 0.005$), explaining approximately 8.1% of the variance in career preference ($R^2 = 0.081$). Among the predictors, only personal utility motivation emerged as statistically significant (β = -0.104, p = 0.001). The negative coefficient indicates that higher personal utility motivation is associated with a lower likelihood of choosing teaching as a preferred career. Other variables, including social utility, intrinsic motivation, perceived ability, and fallback career, were not statistically significant predictors. Overall, the regression results suggest that although multiple motivational factors differ across groups, personal utility plays a uniquely influential role when these variables are considered simultaneously.

4. Discussion

The results show that there is an intricate and, in some cases, conflicting motivational framework that defines teaching career preference. Despite the descriptive evidence that perceived ability and personal utility are accorded high weight by preservice teachers, the inferential test results show that the two factors do not work in a homogenous way when taken into consideration in relation to career preference. In particular, the difference between the results of the group comparison and regression indicates that there is a considerable dynamic: the motivations, which appear to be positively correlated with teaching on a descriptive level, do not necessarily work as independent predictors when these factors are considered.

One of the key results of the research is the personal utility. Despite the fact that students who chose teaching had a higher personal utility score, it has proven to be a negative predictor with a significant impact on the regression equation. It is an indication that, when motivations are considered at the same time, personal utility can indicate a more instrumental orientation to teaching, as opposed to a strong sense of commitment to the profession. That is, although such practical advantages as job security or job stability can make teaching appealing, they may not be able to maintain an evident inclination towards teaching once other motivators are considered. This difference between descriptive eminence and predictive power is key to the explanation of the development of career choices. The fact that the correlations between motivational variables and career preference are relatively weak also confirms that there is no one dominant factor that can be used to explain teaching choice. The results, instead, indicate that motivational effects are diffuse and intertwined, and each one has a small, but not decisive, effect. This interpretation is supported by the low explained variance in regression model which means that other contextual or experience factors are likely to contribute. The other factor is that of social utility and perceived ability. The two variables were quite larger in students who desired teaching but neither one was significant predictor in the regression analysis. This trend indicates that these factors can be enabling factors as opposed to direct drivers. Teaching has a social contribution that the students who see it as a valuable activity and who are assured of their capabilities are more likely to get oriented towards teaching; however, these factors may not be the most important in relation to career choice when they are used in combination with other factors. This underscores the need to consider motivation as a stratified concept as opposed to a group of independent predictors.

High social utility among the students who choose teaching is in line with the prior studies highlighting the significance of altruistic and socially-based motivations in the selection of a teaching career. Research has demonstrated that the value-driven nature of the profession is an additional factor that often motivates preservice teachers to contribute to learners and society (Asriani et al., 2022). On the same note, the positive images of teaching as a socially significant profession have been found to be associated with major determinants of entering the profession (Lomi & Mbato, 2021). Meanwhile, the comparatively minor role of intrinsic motivation in career preference prediction is in contrast with the literature that emphasizes the importance of interest and enjoyment as key factors influencing teaching selection. Although intrinsic motivation is crucial, it seems to be situational and does not necessarily become a prevailing predictor in the presence of other factors (Tustiawati, 2017). This indicates that the intrinsic interest alone might not be the factor that could be used to explain the career decisions in modern teacher education settings. The two-sidedness of personal utility that is witnessed in this research is especially interesting. Some of the practical factors that have been reported in the past to attract people to teaching include job security and work-life balance (Al-Yaseen, 2018). The current results however indicate that the above factors may not be translated into a greater career commitment particularly when they are investigated in conjunction with other motivations. This aligns with the fact that the motivations of teaching are complex and can consist of both idealistic and pragmatic factors, which do not always coincide (Mukminin et al., 2017). The results also echo the studies on the importance of perceived competence and self-efficacy on instructional motivation. Despite the higher perceived ability of students who prefer teaching, it did not significantly contribute to the regression model; it is possible that confidence alone does not dictate career choice (Ismail and Jarrah, 2019). Likewise, previous studies show that subject interest and motivation have complex interactions, with their effect potentially depending on context and measurement (Glutsch and Konig, 2019). This nearly stratified construct of teaching motivation is also backed by the fact that researchers have found that career choice does not occur through a single pathway, but through a number of overlapping factors (Hennessy and Lynch, 2017).

These findings have a number of implications for teacher education and policy. To begin with, the recruitment strategies can no longer afford to focus on either practical benefits or intrinsic passion separately. Rather, a more moderate approach

is required that considers the co-existence of various motivational orientations. Second, teacher educators must concentrate on growing professional identity and commitment through connecting the practical aspects of the role with the larger social mission. This could assist in bridging the divide between attraction and long-lasting preference. Third, the influence of perceived ability implies that chances to acquire early teaching experiences and skills are significant. Increasing the level of confidence of students in their teaching abilities can facilitate their orientation towards the profession, although this may not be a direct predictor of career choice. Lastly, the results suggest that the policy interventions focused on enhancing the attractiveness of teaching must not only focus on the external incentives but also on the motivational framework of potential entrants.

There are a couple of limitations to be viewed. The secondary, cross-sectional data does not allow one to form causal relationships and to exert control over the measurement design. Moreover, some constructs had low internal consistency, which could have compromised the accuracy of the measurements because of the reliance on the selected items. The fact that the explanatory power of the regression model is relatively low also indicates that important variables were not factored in.

Further studies ought to utilize more detailed measurement frameworks and investigate motivational frameworks through high-level analysis methods. Longitudinal studies would be particularly beneficial in the context of the analysis of the evolving motivations with time and their influence on the actual career decisions. Also, including contextual factors such as the institutional setting, the labor market situation, and social factors would provide a more detailed view of the career choice in teaching.

5. Conclusion

Career preference teaching proves to be a multi-dimensional decision, which is influenced by value-based and instrumental motivation. The results indicate that preservice teachers indicated moderately high perceived ability and personal utility, and social utility was moderately high, and intrinsic motivation was relatively lower. Students who had teaching preferences were more motivated on most dimensions, particularly social utility, perceived ability and personal utility. However, when these elements are considered jointly with each other, it was only personal utility that was a very strong predictor of career preference, and in an inverse manner. This is a pointer that practical considerations can be used to make teaching desirable without necessarily leading to a long-term commitment to the profession. These results emphasize the need to learn to view teaching motivation as a multi-dimensional rather than a monolithic concept. Teacher education and recruitment programs should therefore stop the tunnel mentality that either altruism or pragmatism alone brings about career choice. The focus should be more on the aspects of strengthening the professional identity, perceived competence, socially meaningful motives and realistic career expectations. These incentives require a more concerted effort to enable them to enter the teaching career sustainably and make the job more attractive in the long run.

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