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Motivational Profiles of Gen Z PPG Prajabatan Students in Indonesia: A Midpoint-Benchmark FIT-Choice Study

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Abstract:Background: Teacher supply and early-career sustainability remain pressing concerns, and understanding why Gen Z preservice teachers choose teaching is crucial for both policy and career guidance. Yet, evidence from Indonesia's PPG Prajabatan pathway is still limited, particularly regarding whether teaching is pursued as a first-choice career or a fallback option. **Aim**: This study profiled Gen Z PPG Prajabatan students' motivations for choosing teaching using the FIT-Choice framework and highlighted "non-fallback orientation" as a key interpretive lens. **Method**: A cross-sectional quantitative descriptive survey was administered to 370 Gen Z preservice teachers in an Indonesian teacher professional education program. Responses used a 7-point Likert scale, and a midpoint-benchmark strategy (test value = 4) was applied through one-sample t-tests alongside descriptive statistics. **Results**: The motivational profile was dominated by high prior teaching/learning experiences, intrinsic career value, and ability beliefs, while the fallback career dimension was comparatively low and statistically below the midpoint, indicating that teaching was generally not construed as a second-choice option. Most other constructs were statistically above the midpoint, suggesting broad endorsement of FIT-Choice motivational domains, with program-entry factors showing a smaller effect. **Implications**: Findings support career guidance practices that consolidate intentional commitment by strengthening self-efficacy, sustaining intrinsic value, and leveraging formative teaching experiences, while proactively managing expectations about task demands and professional returns to support retention.

Keywords: FIT-Choice; Gen Z; preservice teachers; midpoint-benchmark; non-fallback orientation

1. INTRODUCTION

The crisis of teacher supply, renewal, and professional sustainability has become a global concern because learning quality depends heavily on the availability and commitment of competent teachers, particularly during the early career phase. This challenge is not only a matter of headcount, but also of occupational attractiveness, workload intensity, and perceptions of professional returns that shape individuals' decisions to enter, remain in, or exit teaching. (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2012). In Indonesia, ongoing reforms aimed at strengthening teacher quality and the broader education system signal sustained policy attention; however, policy interventions will have limited impact if they do not resonate with the motivational realities of prospective teachers (Chang et al., 2014; Jalal et al., 2009). Accordingly, understanding why individuals choose teaching should be treated as both a career guidance issue and an education policy issue, rather than merely an academic preference. A robust motivational framework is therefore required to read teacher career-choice patterns with greater precision and translate them into actionable strategies for teacher education programs and career guidance services.

This issue becomes even more salient when the population of interest is Generation Z, who are entering professional pathways with work values and career expectations that may

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differ from those of previous cohorts, including a stronger emphasis on meaning-making, personal development, and flexibility. In career motivation research, value preferences and cost–benefit perceptions have long been recognized as central to career choice and persistence, including in socially demanding occupations such as teaching (Conley, 2012; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). For Gen Z, potential tension may emerge when aspirations for social contribution and purposeful work encounter the realities of heavy job demands, administrative burdens, and uncertain professional recognition, which can shift career orientation toward a "first-choice" pathway or, conversely, a "fallback" option (Perez et al., 2014). This situation calls for motivational mapping that goes beyond measuring "high versus low interest" and instead captures the value structure, perceived capability, and social contexts that shape career decisions. Hence, the study of Gen Z teachers' career choices requires an analytical lens capable of accommodating the complexity of motivations and professional perceptions.

One widely used framework for profiling motivations to become a teacher is the Factors Influencing Teaching Choice (FIT-Choice) model, grounded in the expectancy–value tradition, which conceptualizes career choice as an interaction between the value attached to teaching and beliefs about one's likelihood of succeeding in the role. (Richardson & Watt, 2014; Watt & Richardson, 2007). FIT-Choice supports multidimensional motivational profiling through constructs such as intrinsic career value, social utility value, personal utility value, ability beliefs, socialization influences, and a fallback career orientation, alongside perceptions of occupational demands (task demand) and returns (task return) (Watt et al., 2012a; Watt & Richardson, 2007). Across contexts, this model helps differentiate candidates who choose teaching based on meaningful vocation and perceived competence from those whose choice is shaped more strongly by pragmatic considerations or social pressures. (Richardson & Watt†, 2006; Watt et al., 2012a). Prior evidence also indicates that motivational variation relates to professional engagement and plans, making the framework relevant to career development interventions and retention strategies. (Eren & Tezel, 2010; Fokkens-Bruinsma & Canrinus, 2014). In this sense, FIT-Choice offers a conceptually and practically strong basis for interpreting prospective teachers' career direction in an diagnostically valuable way.

Nevertheless, there remains a need to expand the evidence base in the Indonesian context, especially for the Pendidikan Profesi Guru Prajabatan (PPG Prajabatan), which differs in important ways from conventional undergraduate teacher education routes. As a teacher professional education program, PPG Prajabatan may include candidates with varied academic experiences and career trajectories, meaning that motivations for entering teaching may reflect more mature commitment—or a strategic career transition (Berger & D'Ascoli, 2012; Jarvis &

Woodrow, 2005). International studies suggest that program context and early-career pathways shape both determinants of teaching choice and perceptions of the profession (Gao & Trent, 2009; Jugović et al., 2012). At the policy and institutional level, profiling motivations among PPG Prajabatan participants is therefore crucial for designing more targeted career support—both to strengthen professional identity and to help candidates calibrate expectations regarding the demands and returns of teaching. Moreover, interpretive approaches that enable a clear assessment of whether motivational scores tend to fall above or below a neutral benchmark can facilitate translation of research findings into practice-oriented recommendations. For these reasons, research that profiles Gen Z motivations explicitly within Indonesia's PPG Prajabatan pathway remains necessary to address an evidentiary gap and enhance the utility of the findings for career guidance services in teacher education institutions.

Responding to this need, the present study employs a midpoint-benchmark approach, comparing tendencies in motivational constructs to the scale midpoint as an interpretive reference point, so that motivational profiles can be more readily translated into implications for career guidance and program management. (Watt & Richardson, 2007). Conceptually, this strategy aligns with expectancy–value logic and can be complemented by social cognitive career theory, which highlights the role of self-efficacy and outcome expectations in career decision-making. (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Lent et al., 1994a). Based on preliminary indications from the PPG Prajabatan context, there appear to be strong endorsements of intrinsic value, prior teaching/learning experiences, and perceived ability, alongside indications that teaching is less often framed as a "fallback" option, although some institutional-entry factors may be more moderate. (Sekolah Pascasarjana UNNES, 2025). Accordingly, this study aims to map the motivational profiles of Gen Z PPG Prajabatan students in Indonesia using the FIT-Choice framework and midpoint-benchmark interpretation to generate more precise recommendations for career guidance within teacher education institutions. Specifically, the study addresses three research questions in an integrated sequence: RQ1 how do Gen Z PPG Prajabatan students' FIT-Choice dimensions profile descriptively, RQ2 how do these dimensions tend to compare with the midpoint benchmark, and RQ3 which dimensions appear most salient and what do they imply for career guidance and PPG program management; the next section details the methodology used to answer these questions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Teacher career choice is increasingly discussed alongside teacher recruitment and retention because education systems depend not only on attracting candidates but also on

sustaining their commitment through early professional transitions (Ingersoll, 2001; UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2012). A growing body of research shows that motivations for entering teaching are heterogeneous and can relate to later engagement, satisfaction, and persistence, making motivation a consequential "career variable" rather than a merely attitudinal preference(Fokkens-Bruinsma & Canrinus, 2012). In this context, it is helpful to distinguish those who select teaching as a clearly preferred career from those who enter teaching as a contingency plan when other options are constrained. This distinction matters for career guidance because it shapes the type of support needed: identity-strengthening and mastery-building for committed entrants, versus decisional clarification and realistic pathway planning for contingent entrants. Accordingly, the notion of **non-fallback orientation**—choosing teaching as a valued first choice rather than a second-best option—becomes central to understanding the quality of career commitment among preservice teachers. Framing teacher career choice through this lens helps connect motivational profiles to actionable interventions for recruitment and retention strategies.

Expectancy–value theory provides a coherent foundation for explaining why a person treats a career as a primary pathway rather than a fallback: decisions emerge from expectations for success and the subjective value (and perceived costs) attached to the task or role (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). When individuals believe they can succeed and regard teaching as intrinsically meaningful or socially important, teaching is more likely to be construed as a preferred career, even in the face of alternative opportunities. Conversely, when expected success is uncertain, or the perceived costs outweigh the benefits, teaching may be endorsed only as a pragmatic backup, especially under labor-market or social pressures. (Conley, 2012). This theoretical logic aligns with expectancy–value interpretations of teacher motivation that emphasize how values and expectancies jointly shape the choice to teach and the nature of aspirations within teaching. (Richardson & Watt, 2014). The framework, therefore, supports a conceptual move from "how motivated are candidates" to "what kind of commitment does their motivation represent." In that sense, **non-fallback orientation** can be interpreted as the behavioral implication of strong expectancies and high task values, while fallback-oriented choices often signal weaker expectancy–value configurations. This distinction is theoretically meaningful for career guidance because it invites differentiated supports that target either value clarification, efficacy building, or cost management.

Within teacher education research, the FIT-Choice model has become a widely used framework for operationalizing motivational determinants of teaching choice in ways that are compatible with expectancy–value assumptions (Watt & Richardson, 2007). FIT-Choice

captures multiple value and belief components—such as intrinsic career value, social utility, personal utility, and ability beliefs—alongside contextual influences (e.g., socialization) and perceptions of the profession (e.g., task demand and task return), thereby enabling "motivational profiling" rather than single-factor explanations (Richardson & Watt†, 2006). Crucially for the present manuscript's throughline, FIT-Choice includes a **fallback career dimension** that explicitly measures the extent to which teaching is viewed as a second-choice option (Watt & Richardson, 2007). This dimension provides a direct window into the "second-choice logic" that other motivation models often only infer indirectly. Comparative work using FIT-Choice across countries shows that motivational structures are both broadly interpretable and context-sensitive, supporting the value of profiling approaches for policy and practice (Watt et al., 2012a). From the perspective of **non-fallback orientation**, the fallback dimension is particularly diagnostic because it differentiates candidates who endorse teaching for valued reasons from those whose choice reflects constraint-driven substitution, with different implications for guidance and retention.

Despite its conceptual usefulness, empirical discussion of fallback as a distinct motivational signal often remains underdeveloped compared with that of intrinsic or social utility motives, partly because many studies foreground the strongest positive motives and treat fallback as an ancillary motive. Yet evidence suggests that motivational configurations—including perceptions of demands and returns—relate to professional plans and engagement, implying that fallback is not a trivial supplement but a meaningful component of how entrants imagine their career futures. (Fokkens-Bruinsma & Canrinus, 2014). Moreover, FIT-Choice research indicates that motivations, perceptions, and aspirations can differ across subgroups and entry routes, strengthening the rationale for examining fallback more centrally rather than assuming it is uniformly low or inconsequential. (Watt & Richardson, 2008). Cross-national FIT-Choice comparisons also highlight that "why teaching" is shaped by labor markets and status structures, which may amplify or dampen fallback tendencies depending on perceived alternatives. (Watt et al., 2012a). For interpretation and practice, the key point is that **non-fallback orientation** speaks to the *quality* of commitment—whether teaching is chosen as a meaningful vocational direction—rather than only the *intensity* of positive motivations. This emphasis warrants a more explicit theoretical and empirical focus on fallback when developing career guidance recommendations for preservice teachers.

The relevance of non-fallback orientation becomes sharper when considering Gen Z's emerging work values and career expectations, which are frequently described as combining purpose seeking with strong preferences for growth, flexibility, and psychological safety in the

workplace (Michael Dimock, 2019; Seemiller & Grace, 2016). Generational analyses caution that "generation" is not destiny, yet they consistently suggest that younger cohorts may prioritize meaningful impact and development opportunities while simultaneously expecting responsive organizational support (Lyons & Kuron, 2014; Rudolph et al., 2021). Teaching can align with Gen Z's meaning and social-impact values, potentially reinforcing a non-fallback choice when candidates perceive teaching as a vehicle for contribution and identity realization. At the same time, the profession's well-documented workload, accountability pressures, and contested reward structures can create an expectancy–value tension that may push some candidates toward fallback logic if costs loom large relative to perceived returns. In Indonesia's professional preparation context, a teacher professional education program may attract candidates who already self-select into teaching with clearer values and stronger vocational narratives, which could foster a **non-fallback orientation** even among a cohort that generally desires flexibility. Therefore, examining teaching choice in Gen Z requires integrating work-value considerations with a transparent conceptual marker—fallback versus non-fallback—to interpret whether teaching is viewed as a primary career commitment or a contingency plan.

To support transparent interpretation of such markers, a midpoint-benchmark approach can be used as an interpretive strategy that evaluates whether endorsement of motivational constructs tends to sit above or below a neutral reference point on a response scale. While the statistical mechanics belong in the methods section, conceptually the approach strengthens interpretability by anchoring motivational statements to a clear benchmark, reducing the risk that "high" or "low" is defined idiosyncratically or post hoc (Furr, 2011). In applied psychological measurement, benchmarking and effect-size thinking are often recommended to communicate practical meaning beyond significance testing, primarily when researchers aim to produce actionable implications. (Jacob Cohen, 1988; Lakens, 2013). In the present context, midpoint benchmarking is particularly relevant because it provides a straightforward way to characterize endorsement versus rejection of the fallback dimension without overclaiming causal relationships. This interpretive clarity is important for career guidance stakeholders who need understandable indicators for screening, counseling, and program design. Specifically, the midpoint-benchmark lens makes **non-fallback orientation** more communicable as a practical indicator: if fallback endorsement trends below a neutral benchmark, teaching can be interpreted as a non-contingent career preference in a way that is accessible to practitioners. Consequently, this approach helps translate motivational profiling into guidance actions that target commitment consolidation, realistic expectation management, and retention-oriented supports.

Finally, the Indonesian context and the specific pathway of PPG Prajabatan strengthen the need for a focused lens on non-fallback orientation because teacher professional education may involve diverse entry routes, including candidates treating teaching as a second career or a deliberate professional shift (Berger & D'Ascoli, 2012). Career development perspectives such as social cognitive career theory and career construction theory help explain how self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and identity narratives can consolidate a primary career choice, while also clarifying why some candidates remain fallback-oriented when confidence or value alignment is weak (Lent et al., 1994b; Savickas, 2013). Policy and system-level factors also shape the attractiveness and perceived returns of teaching in Indonesia, influencing whether candidates interpret teaching as a stable, meaningful pathway or a constrained alternative (Chang et al., 2014). These perspectives do not replace FIT-Choice; instead, they offer interpretive support for translating motivational profiles into career guidance strategies that address both personal beliefs and contextual affordances. Against this backdrop, the present manuscript argues that investigating Gen Z preservice teachers in Indonesia through a FIT-Choice profiling lens, interpreted via midpoint benchmarking, can illuminate when and how teaching is constructed as a primary career choice. Put differently, the literature suggests that **non-fallback orientation** should align with more substantial intrinsic value, ability beliefs, and formative teaching/learning experiences. At the same time, perceptions of task demand and task return may condition whether such orientation is sustained over time. This conceptual framing provides the rationale for the subsequent methods section, which details how motivational profiles and the non-fallback indicator are examined within the PPG Prajabatan context.

3. METHODS

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative descriptive design using a cross-sectional survey to profile the motivational characteristics of Generation Z preservice teachers enrolled in Indonesia's PPG Prajabatan pathway at Universitas Negeri Semarang (UNNES). The study is grounded in the FIT-Choice framework, which conceptualizes teaching choice as a multidimensional configuration of values, beliefs, and perceptions aligned with expectancy–value assumptions. (Watt et al., 2012a; Watt & Richardson, 2007). To enhance interpretability for applied stakeholders, we adopted a midpoint-benchmark approach, operationalized through one-sample t-tests comparing each construct score against the scale midpoint (test value = 4) (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). The rationale is that midpoint benchmarking allows a transparent

characterization of whether a motivational construct is endorsed (above midpoint) or rejected (below midpoint) at the cohort level, supporting practical translation for career guidance and teacher education program development. As the study aims to map "motivational profiles" rather than to test causal pathways, the design prioritizes descriptive clarity, replicability, and alignment between conceptual constructs and analytic decisions.

3.2 Context and Participants

The study was conducted within the PPG Prajabatan program at UNNES, an Indonesian teacher professional education program designed to prepare preservice teachers for entry into the teaching profession. For an international readership, PPG Prajabatan can be understood as a professional preparation route that emphasizes pedagogical competence, practicum-related experiences, and program-based socialization into teaching, distinct from conventional undergraduate teacher education trajectories. The target population comprised Generation Z preservice teachers enrolled in the program during the data-collection period. Inclusion criteria were: (a) active enrollment in PPG Prajabatan at UNNES, (b) belonging to the Gen Z cohort based on year of birth criteria used in contemporary demographic classifications, and (c) provision of informed consent. Exclusion criteria included incomplete consent, duplicate submissions, and non-Gen Z cohort membership. Participants' demographic characteristics (e.g., gender, age range/mean, central/subject area, and cohort/semester) are reported in Table X.

A sample of N = 370 was obtained from an estimated program population of approximately 1,000 preservice teachers. Sampling followed a random sampling approach to enhance representativeness within the accessible population. Specifically, a roster of eligible participants was compiled in coordination with program administration, and potential participants were randomly selected to receive invitations. Replacement procedures were used when selected individuals declined or were unreachable, while maintaining random selection principles to the extent feasible. Participation was voluntary, and no academic consequences were associated with participation or non-participation. This sampling strategy is consistent with the study's descriptive purpose—namely, to characterize a cohort-level motivational profile rather than to infer causal relations.

3.3 Instrument and Measures

Data were collected using a questionnaire adapted from the FIT-Choice scale, which has been widely used to examine motivational factors underlying teaching career choice across contexts. (Watt et al., 2012a; Watt & Richardson, 2007). The instrument assessed key FIT-Choice dimensions, including intrinsic career value, social utility value, personal utility value,

ability beliefs/self-perception, socialization influences, fallback career, and perceptions of the profession regarding task demand and task return. Where applicable in the adapted version, additional subdimensions typically associated with FIT-Choice (e.g., satisfaction with choice) can be reported as part of the measurement structure; the final construct list used in this study is provided in the instrument appendix (Appendix A) and summarized in Table X. Responses were recorded on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). As an illustrative example, an intrinsic value item assesses the extent to which respondents agree that teaching is personally enjoyable and fulfilling. (Watt & Richardson, 2007).

The instrument was administered in Indonesian. We followed translation and cultural adaptation guidelines commonly recommended for cross-cultural survey instruments, including forward translation, expert review for semantic and conceptual equivalence, and, where feasible, back-translation checks to minimize construct drift (Author, Year). Content validity was supported through expert judgment involving teacher education and career guidance specialists, who reviewed item clarity, cultural appropriateness, and alignment with FIT-Choice dimensions. Reliability was evaluated using internal consistency indices for each construct; Cronbach's alpha (and/or McDonald's omega) values are reported for all scales (α ranged from 1 to 7). Construct validity evidence was established through alignment with the FIT-Choice theoretical structure and prior validation work; if confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted, model fit indices and factor loadings are reported in the supplementary materials (Watt et al., 2012a). If the adapted instrument contained reverse-coded items, these were recoded prior to computing composite scores to ensure interpretive consistency across constructs.

For analysis, scale scores were computed as the mean of items within each construct, consistent with standard practice in FIT-Choice applications (Watt & Richardson, 2007). Higher scores reflect stronger endorsement of the underlying motivational belief or perception domain. Missing responses at the item level were handled using a prespecified rule: if a respondent completed at least a minimum proportion of items within a construct (e.g., $\geq 80\%$), the construct score was computed using available items; otherwise, the construct score was treated as missing. This rule is reported transparently to support replicability and to avoid inflating precision through ad hoc imputation.

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted during the academic term in which participants were actively enrolled in PPG Prajabatan at UNNES. The survey was administered primarily online using a secure form link distributed to invited participants; where internet access constraints

existed, a supervised completion option was provided to ensure equitable participation. Participants received a brief study description outlining the research purpose (profiling motivations for teaching choice), the voluntary nature of participation, and confidentiality protections. Informed consent was obtained electronically prior to accessing the questionnaire, and respondents were allowed to discontinue at any point without penalty. Typical completion time was approximately 7–12 minutes, depending on reading speed and response patterns.

Data quality screening was performed prior to analysis. Duplicate submissions were identified using non-identifying technical markers (e.g., timestamp patterns and response similarity checks) and removed while preserving the first valid entry. Missing data were examined at both the item and construct levels to determine whether nonresponse was random or patterned. In addition, extremely short completion times and invariant response patterns (e.g., selecting the same option across nearly all items) were flagged as potential inattentive responding; cases meeting predefined exclusion criteria were removed from the analytic dataset. These procedures were implemented to balance data integrity with the ethical obligation to avoid over-filtering legitimate responses (Author, Year).

3.5 Data Analysis

All analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version X). Descriptive statistics were computed for each FIT-Choice construct, including mean, standard deviation, and observed range, to describe the motivational profile of the cohort. The central analytic feature was the midpoint-benchmark approach: one-sample t-tests were performed for each construct to evaluate whether its mean differed from the midpoint of the response scale (test value = 4). This benchmark is substantively interpretable for a 1–7 Likert scale because it represents a neutral/undecided position, making “above midpoint” interpretable as endorsement and “below midpoint” interpretable as rejection at the cohort level (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). For each test, we report t-statistics, degrees of freedom, p-values, and 95% confidence intervals for the mean difference, consistent with quantitative reporting standards. To support practical interpretation, effect sizes were also calculated using Cohen’s d for one-sample comparisons ($d = (M - 4) / SD$), and interpreted using conventional guidelines while emphasizing context-sensitive meaning rather than rigid thresholds (Jacob Cohen, 1988; Lakens, 2013).

Assumption checks were conducted to evaluate the appropriateness of parametric testing. Normality of construct score distributions was assessed using visual inspection (histograms and Q–Q plots) and, where appropriate, Shapiro–Wilk tests. Given the sample size ($N = 370$), the central limit theorem provides robustness for mean-based inference even when

mild deviations from normality are present, but extreme skewness or outliers were examined to ensure that results were not driven by a small number of influential cases (Author, Year). Outliers at the construct level were reviewed using standardized z-scores and boxplot diagnostics; sensitivity checks were conducted when needed by comparing results with and without flagged cases. The familywise risk of Type I error due to multiple midpoint comparisons was addressed using a transparent correction strategy; specifically, we applied the Holm adjustment to p-values as a less conservative alternative to Bonferroni while still controlling the error rate. All tests were evaluated using an alpha level of .05 (two-tailed). Interpretations emphasized directionality relative to the midpoint benchmark to characterize motivational endorsement patterns, consistent with the study's objective of describing motivational profiles rather than testing causal hypotheses (Watt & Richardson, 2007).

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The study followed standard ethical principles for research involving human participants. Participants provided informed consent prior to participation and were informed that their responses would be used only for research purposes. No personally identifying information was collected in the analytic dataset, and data were stored on password-protected systems accessible only to the research team. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time prior to submission, and contact information for the research team was provided for questions or concerns. These procedures were intended to ensure confidentiality, minimize risk, and uphold transparency consistent with international expectations for Scopus-indexed publication standards.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Descriptive Results: Motivational Profiles

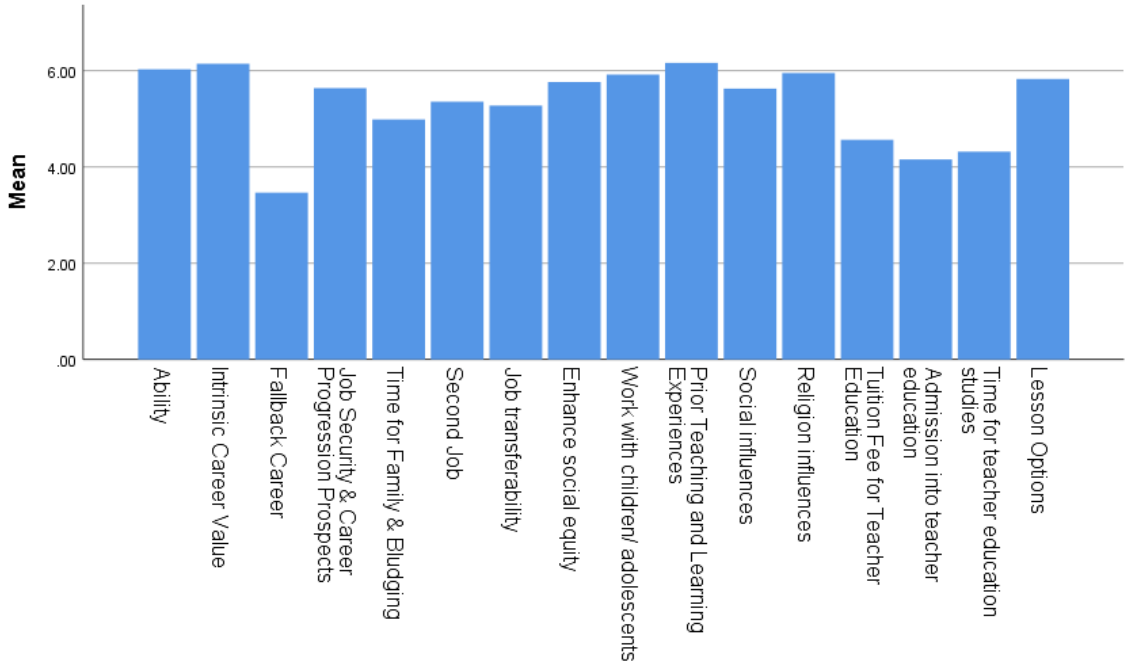
Table 1 summarizes the descriptive profile of FIT-Choice dimensions for Gen Z preservice teachers enrolled in the Indonesian PPG Prajabatan pathway (N = 370) using a 1–7 Likert scale. Three dimensions emerged as the most highly endorsed: prior teaching/learning experiences (M = 6.1615), intrinsic career value (M = 6.1432), and ability beliefs (M = 6.0271), suggesting a profile anchored in internalized meaning, competence beliefs, and formative exposure to teaching-related experiences (Richardson & Watt, 2014; Watt & Richardson, 2007). In contrast, fallback career was the least endorsed dimension (M = 3.4648), indicating that participants, on average, did not frame teaching as a second-choice option. Interpreted substantively, this pattern is consistent with motivational configurations in which teaching is valued in its own right rather than chosen primarily due to constraints or lack of alternatives

(Watt et al., 2012). For career guidance and teacher education, such a configuration matters because motivational profiles can shape both commitment trajectories and the kinds of supports needed during professional formation (Fokkens-Bruinsma & Canrinus, 2014).

Table 1. Descriptive

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Ability	370	6.0271	.81647	.04245
Intrinsic Career Value	370	6.1432	.85741	.04457
Fallback Career	370	3.4648	1.46126	.07597
Job Security & Career Progression Prospects	370	5.6372	1.01749	.05290
Time for Family & Bludging	370	4.9845	1.01192	.05261
Second Job	370	5.3549	1.17349	.06101
Job transferability	370	5.2743	1.16278	.06045
Enhance social equity	370	5.7639	1.00513	.05225
Work with children/ adolescents	370	5.9203	.91661	.04765
Prior Teaching and Learning Experiences	370	6.1615	.83644	.04348
Social influences	370	5.6254	1.03547	.05383
Religion influences	370	5.9496	.95557	.04968
Tuition Fee for Teacher Education	370	4.5649	1.48884	.07740
Admission into teacher education	370	4.1550	1.46936	.07639
Time for teacher education studies	370	4.3180	1.35350	.07037
Lesson Options	370	5.8257	1.07447	.05586

Figure 1.



The salience of prior experiences and intrinsic value also aligns with broader accounts of teacher motivation that emphasize the role of early mastery- and identity-relevant experiences in consolidating a teaching self-concept (Eren & Tezel, 2010; Richardson & Watt†, 2006). From an expectancy–value standpoint, high intrinsic value reflects strong task value, whereas high ability beliefs map onto expectations for success, both of which are theorized to strengthen sustained engagement in a chosen pathway (Conley, 2012; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). Importantly, the low endorsement of fallback career complements these high scores by indicating that the motivation to teach is not merely intense but also qualitatively oriented toward a primary career commitment. While the descriptive pattern does not by itself establish durability over time, it provides a coherent basis for interpreting why teaching may be construed as a meaningful and viable career direction for this cohort (Watt & Richardson, 2007). Figure 1 (motivational profile visualization) is referenced to illustrate the contrast between the high internal/identity-based drivers and the low fallback orientation. The next subsection formalizes these tendencies through midpoint-benchmark testing.

4.2 Midpoint-Benchmark Tests (One-Sample t-Tests)

To strengthen interpretability beyond descriptive labels, the study applied a midpoint-benchmark approach by comparing each construct to the scale midpoint (test value = 4) via one-sample t-tests, as reported in Table 2. This approach allows the results to be communicated in a practically meaningful way: scores statistically above the midpoint indicate endorsement of a motivational belief, whereas scores below the midpoint indicate rejection of that belief as

a typical driver in the sample (Jacob Cohen, 1988; Lakens, 2013). The benchmark results for core dimensions were consistent with the descriptive profile, showing that ability beliefs were statistically higher than the midpoint, $t(369) = 47.756$, $p < .001$, and intrinsic career value was also statistically higher than the midpoint, $t(369) = 48.081$, $p < .001$ (Watt & Richardson, 2007). Prior teaching/learning experiences likewise exceeded the midpoint, $t(369) = 38.975$, $p < .001$, reinforcing the centrality of formative experiences in participants' motivational narratives. By contrast, fallback career was statistically below the midpoint, $t(369) = -7.045$, $p < .001$, supporting the interpretation of a non-fallback career orientation as a distinctive feature of the sample (Watt et al., 2012b). Effect sizes for each comparison should be reported alongside these tests to communicate the magnitude of deviation from the benchmark (Lakens, 2013).

Table 2. Result one sample t-test

	Test Value = 4					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Ability	47.756	369	.000	2.02705	1.9436	2.1105
Intrinsic Career Value	48.081	369	.000	2.14319	2.0555	2.2308
Fallback Career	-7.045	369	.000	-.53522	-.6846	-.3858
Job Security & Career Progression Prospects	30.950	369	.000	1.63716	1.5331	1.7412
Time for Family & Bludging	18.713	369	.000	.98446	.8810	1.0879
Second Job	22.210	369	.000	1.35495	1.2350	1.4749
Job transferability	21.081	369	.000	1.27432	1.1555	1.3932
Enhance social equity	33.757	369	.000	1.76395	1.6612	1.8667
Work with children/ adolescents	40.298	369	.000	1.92027	1.8266	2.0140
Prior Teaching and Learning Experiences	49.707	369	.000	2.16149	2.0760	2.2470
Social influences	30.194	369	.000	1.62541	1.5196	1.7313
Religion influences	39.244	369	.000	1.94957	1.8519	2.0473
Tuition Fee for Teacher Education	7.298	369	.000	.56486	.4127	.7171
Admission into teacher education	2.029	369	.043	.15497	.0048	.3052
Time for teacher education studies	4.519	369	.000	.31797	.1796	.4563
Lesson Options	32.684	369	.000	1.82568	1.7158	1.9355

In addition to these core dimensions, most constructs were statistically higher than the midpoint ($p < .001$), indicating generally strong endorsement of FIT-Choice motivational and perception domains in this cohort (Fokkens-Bruinsma & Canrinus, 2014; Watt et al., 2012a). A notable nuance concerned "admission into teacher education," which was only marginally above the midpoint, $t(369) = 2.031$, $p = .043$, suggesting a small but statistically detectable tendency for program entry to be endorsed as a factor, albeit not among the strongest drivers. This pattern is substantively plausible: entry into a professional program can facilitate commitment and identity consolidation, yet it may not be the primary source of motivation when intrinsic values, competence beliefs, and prior experiences are already strongly endorsed (Berger & D'Ascoli, 2012; Richardson & Watt, 2014). Consistent with the midpoint-benchmark logic, the key interpretive contribution of Table 2 is not simply whether constructs differ from the midpoint, but how that directionality characterizes the motivational profile as endorsing teaching for valued reasons while rejecting the notion of teaching as a backup plan. Because the midpoint-benchmark approach is designed to aid translation into practice, Figure 2 (benchmark-based visualization) can support stakeholders in quickly identifying domains for reinforcement (e.g., sustaining intrinsic value) versus domains that require monitoring (e.g., perceptions related to demands and returns) (Watt & Richardson, 2008). The following discussion focuses on the theoretical and practical meaning of the non-fallback orientation as the manuscript's central novelty.

4.3 Discussion: Interpreting the Non-Fallback Orientation

The most consequential interpretive signal in the profile is the rejection of fallback career, which suggests that these Gen Z preservice teachers do not, on average, construe teaching as a second-choice option, but rather as a valued and intentional career direction. In FIT-Choice terms, low fallback endorsement is analytically important because it captures the "second-choice logic" explicitly, distinguishing strong primary commitment from pragmatic substitution when other opportunities are limited (Watt & Richardson, 2007). From expectancy–value theory, a non-fallback orientation is consistent with configurations where task value (especially intrinsic value) and expectations for success (ability beliefs) are both high, making the choice robust to alternative opportunities and perceived costs (Conley, 2012; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). This matters because research on teacher pathways often emphasizes positive motives without clarifying whether teaching is chosen despite alternatives or because alternatives are constrained; the fallback dimension helps clarify that qualitative difference in commitment (Watt et al., 2012a). In other words, the present pattern suggests not only "why

teaching" but also "how teaching is positioned" within a person's career narrative—as a chosen identity project rather than an expedient fallback. Such positioning is highly relevant to career guidance, where counselors aim to support coherent career construction and realistic commitment formation rather than mere entry decisions (Savickas, 2013).

The prominence of prior teaching/learning experiences provides a plausible developmental mechanism for non-fallback orientation, because early exposure can cultivate both competence beliefs and identity alignment with the teaching role. Prior experiences may function as mastery- and meaning-building episodes that strengthen both perceived fit ("I can do this") and subjective value ("this matters to me"), thereby reducing the likelihood that teaching is framed as a default option (Eren & Tezel, 2010; Richardson & Watt†, 2006). This interpretation is also consistent with social cognitive career theory, in which self-efficacy and outcome expectations shape interests and choices, particularly when individuals have repeated opportunities to test and validate their capabilities in relevant contexts (Lent et al., 1994a). Although the present study does not model causal pathways, the co-occurrence of high ability beliefs and low fallback endorsement aligns with the theoretical expectation that stronger self-beliefs and value alignment support intentional career choice (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Lent et al., 1994a). In the Indonesian PPG Prajabatan context, which involves professional preparation and program-based socialization, participants may have already engaged in reflective evaluation of teaching as a career, further strengthening a non-fallback stance (Berger & D'Ascoli, 2012). Importantly, this is not to claim that all entrants will remain in teaching, but rather that their entry is less likely to be explained by "lack of alternatives" and more likely to be explained by "valued commitment," which is a different starting point for retention-oriented supports (Watt & Richardson, 2008).

The marginal role of "admission into teacher education" ($p = .043$) further refines the narrative: program entry appears to matter, but it is not the primary motivational engine relative to intrinsic value, ability beliefs, and prior experiences. This suggests that admission may operate more as a contextual facilitator than as a core value driver, consistent with views that institutional pathways can consolidate, formalize, or legitimize an already-forming vocational identity (Richardson & Watt, 2014; Savickas, 2013). For Gen Z, whose career values are often described as balancing purpose with developmental and contextual support needs, an education program may serve as a structured arena for professional identity reinforcement without being the initial reason for choosing the pathway (Michael Dimock, 2019; Seemiller & Grace, 2016). At the same time, the broader teacher labor-market and working-condition realities remain relevant: even when entry is non-fallback, sustained commitment can be threatened if perceived

demands and returns become misaligned over time (Watt & Richardson, 2008). This is particularly important given evidence that teacher attrition is shaped not only by initial motives but also by organizational conditions and professional support during early career stages (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Ingersoll, 2001). Therefore, the non-fallback orientation should be interpreted as a strong starting point—an asset for career guidance and program design—rather than a guarantee of long-term retention.

4.4 Practical Implications for Career Guidance and Teacher Education

The results suggest that career guidance in teacher education should move beyond generic encouragement and instead build on the identified profile: strengthening competence-based confidence, sustaining intrinsic value, and deepening meaning-making grounded in authentic teaching-related experiences. A first implication is the use of FIT-Choice-informed profiling as an early diagnostic tool within PPG Prajabatan to identify candidates' motivational configurations, including the critical distinction between non-fallback and fallback orientations (Watt et al., 2012a; Watt & Richardson, 2007). When candidates exhibit strong ability beliefs and intrinsic values, guidance can focus on consolidating professional identity through reflective practice, mentoring, and structured opportunities to connect values to enacted pedagogy, which aligns with both expectancy–value logic and career construction approaches (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Savickas, 2013). A second implication is targeted self-efficacy support: although ability beliefs are high on average, sustaining them across challenging practicum and early teaching experiences requires mastery experiences, feedback, and modeling, consistent with social cognitive career theory (Lent et al., 1994a). In this way, career guidance can treat high ability beliefs as a resource to be protected and stabilized rather than as a static trait. Critically, the non-fallback signal can be used to prioritize retention-oriented guidance that assumes intentional commitment while preparing candidates for predictable early-career stressors (Fokkens-Bruinsma & Canrinus, 2014; Watt & Richardson, 2008).

A second set of implications concerns expectation management around task demands and returns, because even highly committed entrants can become vulnerable to disillusionment when working conditions undermine perceived professional value. The teacher retention literature suggests that organizational supports, workload manageability, and professional respect are key predictors of turnover, making "realistic job preview" and contextual coping strategies essential components of career guidance (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Ingersoll, 2001). For Gen Z, who are often characterized as valuing psychological safety, growth opportunities, and work–life integration, guidance may need to explicitly address how these expectations can be negotiated within school realities, including boundary-setting, professional

collaboration, and continuous learning plans (Michael Dimock, 2019; Seemiller & Grace, 2016). FIT-Choice profiles can inform such counseling by clarifying whether candidates are primarily motivated by social contribution, personal utility, or intrinsic meaning, which in turn can shape how counselors frame coping and career development strategies (Richardson & Watt, 2014; Watt et al., 2012a). Importantly, adopting a non-fallback orientation does not eliminate the need for institutional care; rather, it creates a high-value opportunity for programs and schools to invest in candidates whose entry is intentional. Program leaders can use midpoint-benchmark summaries to communicate cohort-level motivational assets and potential risk zones to stakeholders in practicum schools, encouraging mentorship structures that support early career sustainability (Watt & Richardson, 2008). In this sense, the results point toward a "commitment-consolidation" model of guidance that leverages non-fallback orientation while proactively managing cost and demand perceptions.

Finally, the findings have implications for the design of PPG Prajabatan itself as a professional education pathway that can nurture intentional teacher career choice. Given the strong role of prior teaching/learning experiences, programs may benefit from structured experiences that strengthen teaching identity, such as guided microteaching, school-based inquiries, and reflective portfolios that link personal values to professional practices (Richardson & Watt†, 2006; Savickas, 2013). Because admission into teacher education appears only marginally endorsed, the program's added value may lie less in "selecting" motivation and more in "transforming" motivation into sustained professional commitment through formative feedback and supportive communities of practice (Fokkens-Bruinsma & Canrinus, 2014). Moreover, in contexts where teacher reforms and certification systems shape professional incentives, aligning program support with policy realities can help candidates reconcile aspirational motives with structural conditions, potentially protecting against later attrition (Chang et al., 2014; Jalal et al., 2009). These implications are consistent with the view that retention begins before entry: it begins when professional preparation actively supports coherent identity development and realistic expectancy–value alignment. Therefore, the non-fallback orientation documented here should be treated as a strategic asset for teacher education institutions and career guidance providers, warranting deliberate reinforcement rather than passive celebration (Watt & Richardson, 2007). The next subsection acknowledges limitations that bound these implications and identifies directions for more explanatory research.

4.5 Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the results. First, the study is based on a single institutional context within Indonesia, which may limit generalizability to

other teacher education institutions or regions where labor-market conditions and program structures differ (Watt et al., 2012a). Second, the design is cross-sectional and relies on self-report measures, which capture perceived motivations at one time point but cannot determine how stable non-fallback orientation is across practicum and early career transitions. Third, while midpoint-benchmarking improves interpretive clarity, it does not substitute for richer measurement validation work; future studies should more thoroughly examine construct validity, including confirmatory factor analysis and measurement invariance across relevant subgroups (e.g., gender or disciplinary background) (Watt & Richardson, 2007). Finally, because the study focuses on descriptive profiles and benchmark comparisons, it does not test predictive relationships between motivational profiles and outcomes such as teaching satisfaction, well-being, or retention intentions. These boundaries should be made explicit to avoid overextending the implications beyond what the data support.

Future research can extend this work in at least three ways while staying aligned with the present manuscript's central contribution. Multi-site studies across Indonesian institutions could assess whether the non-fallback orientation is robust across diverse contexts and policy environments, and whether variations in task demand/return perceptions moderate that orientation over time (Chang et al., 2014; Watt & Richardson, 2008). Longitudinal designs that follow candidates from program entry through induction years would be especially valuable, given that teacher attrition is known to concentrate early in the career and is shaped by organizational conditions as well as personal motives (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Ingersoll, 2001). In addition, explanatory modeling could be pursued in future research—such as examining how intrinsic value, ability beliefs, and prior experiences jointly relate to non-fallback endorsement and later persistence—provided that measurement quality is established through CFA and invariance testing (Watt et al., 2012a). Complementary qualitative work could also deepen understanding of how Gen Z candidates narrate "non-fallback" as identity and meaning, enriching the interpretation of FIT-Choice profiles without contradicting the quantitative approach (Savickas, 2013). Collectively, these directions would help move from benchmarked profiles toward a fuller account of how intentional teacher career choice becomes sustained professional commitment in Indonesia's evolving teacher education landscape (Richardson & Watt, 2014).

5. CONCLUSION

This study profiled Gen Z preservice teachers in Indonesia's PPG Prajabatan pathway using FIT-Choice and a midpoint-benchmark approach, revealing a coherent pattern of

motivational endorsement. The core findings indicate that prior teaching/learning experiences, intrinsic career value, and ability beliefs were strongly endorsed, while fallback career orientation was low and benchmarked below the midpoint, suggesting that teaching was generally not framed as a secondary option. Midpoint comparisons further showed that most motivational constructs were positioned above the neutral benchmark, reinforcing that the cohort's commitment is characterized by value-based and competence-aligned motivations rather than constraint-driven substitution. A more modest benchmark pattern for program-entry factors implies that admission may function as a contextual facilitator of professional identity rather than the primary driver of career choice.

These findings imply that career guidance in teacher education should move beyond generic encouragement and instead adopt FIT-Choice-informed profiling to differentiate support needs, especially to strengthen self-efficacy and sustain intrinsic value through reflective practice and mentoring. They also highlight the importance of "realistic job preview" and expectation management regarding task demands and returns, so that non-fallback commitment can be translated into sustained engagement during practicum and early-career transitions. Future research should extend this work through multi-site and longitudinal designs to test the stability of non-fallback orientation and its links to retention-related outcomes. **Take-home message**: Gen Z preservice teachers' career direction toward teaching appears strong and value-driven, not a fallback.

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