

Exploring EFL Freshmen's Motivation for Choosing a Career in Teaching English: A Case Study at A Public University in Ho Chi Minh City

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Abstract

English language teaching is growing rapidly in Vietnam. Therefore, understanding why students choose this career is very important to help universities support and develop future teachers. This study aims to explore the career motivations of freshmen in the English Pedagogy major at a public university in Ho Chi Minh City. It also examines whether gender and previous teaching experience create any differences in their motivations. The study used a quantitative method. Data was collected from 101 first-year students using a 25-item questionnaire based on the FIT-Choice framework. The collected data was then analyzed using SPSS software with descriptive statistics, Pearson correlations, and t-tests. The findings showed that students reported high levels of motivation across all FIT-Choice constructs. Task Demand and Task Return and Socialization Influences received the highest mean scores, while altruistic and intrinsic motivations also emerged as prominent reasons for choosing teaching. Extrinsic motivation, particularly fallback careers, received the lowest ratings. In conclusion, first-year EFL students proactively choose the teaching profession because of their true passion for English and a desire to contribute to society, rather than seeing it as a secondary option. These findings provide helpful evidence for universities to build better strategies to nurture students' passion for teaching.

Keywords: career motivation, FIT-Choice framework, EFL freshmen, pre-service teachers, English Pedagogy

1. Introduction

1.1. Background to the Study

English has become an essential medium for global communication, education, and professional development, leading to an increasing demand for qualified English language teachers in many countries, including Vietnam. As educational systems continue to face challenges related to teacher recruitment and retention, understanding why individuals choose teaching as a career has become an important research concern (Müller et al., 2009; Watt & Richardson, 2007). Career motivation is particularly significant because it influences not only

entry into the profession but also professional commitment, persistence, and long-term career satisfaction (Richardson & Watt, 2006; Watt & Richardson, 2007).

1.2. Statement of the Problem

To investigate motivations for choosing teaching, researchers have widely adopted the Factors Influencing Teaching Choice (FIT-Choice) framework developed by Watt and Richardson (2007). Drawing upon Expectancy-Value Theory (Eccles et al., 1983), the framework explains how individuals' career decisions are shaped by intrinsic interest, social utility values, personal utility values, perceived ability, social influences, and perceptions of the teaching profession. Across diverse educational contexts, studies have consistently found that intrinsic and altruistic motivations are among the strongest reasons for entering the teaching profession, whereas extrinsic considerations such as salary, social status, or fallback career opportunities tend to be less influential (Asriani et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2019; Pavin Ivanec, 2023; Saito, 2024).

1.3. Research Gap

Within the Vietnamese context, previous research has reported similar patterns, highlighting the importance of personal interest in teaching and the desire to contribute to society (Tran & Cao, 2020). However, recent policy initiatives, particularly Decree No. 116/2020/NĐ-CP, which provides financial support for teacher education students, have introduced additional contextual factors that may shape students' career decisions (Tran et al., 2025). These developments suggest the need for continued investigation of teacher motivation within contemporary Vietnamese educational settings.

1.4. Research Objectives and Research Questions

To fill these gaps, this study aims to explore the career motivations of first-year English pedagogy students at a public university in Ho Chi Minh City. By surveying

freshmen without formal teaching experience, this research provides a complete and authentic view of why they chose this major. Specifically, the study seeks to answer the following questions: (1) What are the primary FIT-Choice motivational factors underlying the career choices of first-year English Pedagogy students? and (2) To what extent do gender and prior informal teaching experience differentiate their motivational profiles?

1.5. Significance of the Study

Theoretically, this study extends the application of the FIT-Choice framework to first-year EFL teacher education students, a relatively underexplored population in Vietnam. By focusing on freshmen, the study provides insights into career motivations at an early stage of teacher development before extensive pedagogical training and professional socialization occur. Additionally, the study examines motivational differences across gender and prior teaching experience groups, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of teacher motivation within the Vietnamese context. Practically, the findings offer useful implications for teacher education institutions and policymakers. Understanding the factors that motivate students to pursue English language teaching can support the development of recruitment strategies, orientation programs, and student support initiatives aimed at sustaining motivation and strengthening commitment to the teaching profession.

1.6. Scope and Delimitations

This study focuses on English language teaching first-year students of the Faculty of Foreign Languages at a public university in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Moreover, data were collected from participants at a single point in time to examine their career motivations. This research intentionally focuses only on first-year English Pedagogy students because they have had limited exposure to pedagogical coursework and teaching practicum, allowing the research to capture their initial career motivations before they are substantially influenced by

teacher education. In addition, the study is confined to one public university and adopts a quantitative survey design. Consequently, qualitative perspectives and changes in motivation over time are beyond the scope of the present study.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Definitions of motivation

Motivation is a multifaceted psychological construct that serves as the internal engine for human behavior, initiating and guiding goal-oriented actions through the interplay of biological, emotional, and cognitive forces (Guay et al., 2010). In its broadest sense, it is defined as the process whereby activity is instigated and sustained (Schunk et al., 2010), varying not only in level but also in orientation, the underlying “why” that moves an individual to act (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In teacher education, motivation is key to attracting and keeping teachers. It decides who joins the profession, how they study during training, and their long-term commitment to teaching (Müller et al., 2009). For first-year students, these early drivers show their “pure” career goals before they face the real challenges of teaching practice (Dewi & Fajri, 2023; Sinclair et al., 2006). Therefore, understanding why students choose this career helps us see how they build their professional identity and stay determined in a university environment.

2.2. Types of motivation

Motivation has been categorized into three main sources: extrinsic, intrinsic and altruistic. Deci & Ryan (2000) demonstrated that motivation includes two kinds: intrinsic and extrinsic. To be more specific, intrinsic motivation refers to doing something because of innate interest or enjoyment, which in the context of teaching may include feelings of enjoyment and satisfaction (Wang & Wang, 2022). On the other hand, extrinsic motivation is related to doing something because of a possible external result (Deci & Ryan, 2000) such as

salary (Balyer & Özcan, 2014; Cheung & Yuen, 2016) or the status of the profession (Han & Yin, 2016). Specifically, altruistic motivation refers to the desire to help others and contribute to society (Virtanen et al., 2025). Moreover, Brookhart and Freeman (1992) synthesized research on motivation to conclude that intrinsic, extrinsic and altruistic are the main factors that motivate people to do something, especially choosing a teaching profession, such as making a difference in society and shaping the future of others (Başöz, 2021; Brandmo & Nesje, 2017; Richardson & Watt, 2006). The FIT-Choice framework (Watt & Richardson, 2007) systematically conceptualizes these dimensions, offering a comprehensive model for vocational choice in teaching.

2.3. FIT-Choice Framework

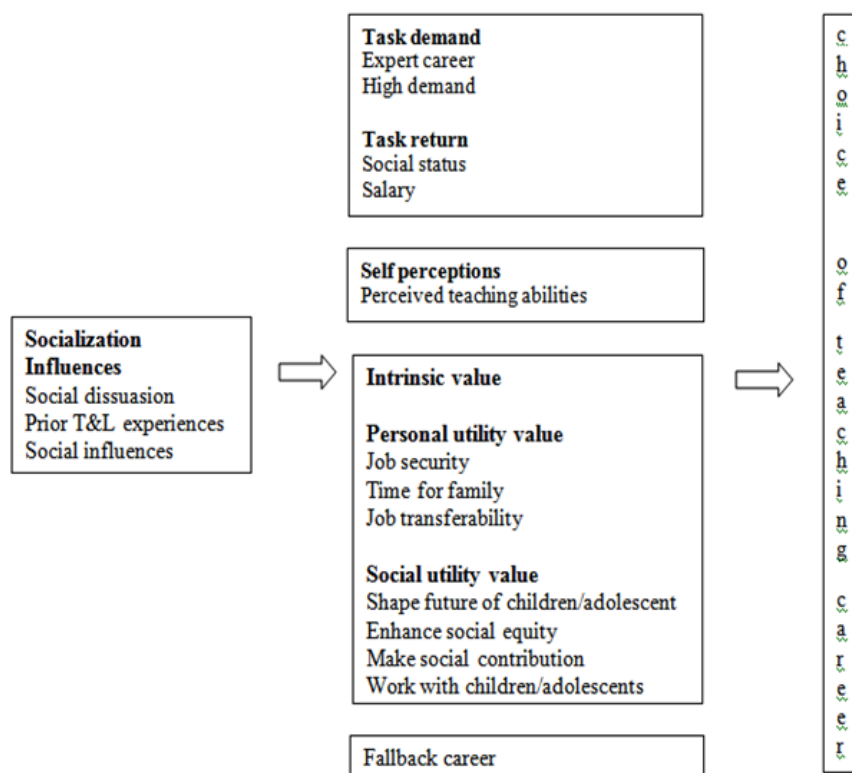
The FIT-Choice model, created by Watt and Richardson (2007), is a popular tool for studying teacher motivation in many countries, including South Korea (Jeong, 2016; Lee et al., 2019), Finland (Goller et al., 2019), Indonesia (Asriani et al., 2022; Sari, 2023), and more recently in the Vietnamese EFL context (Tran & Cao, 2020). Based on the Expectancy-Value Theory, this model suggests that career choices depend on two main things: what a person believes they can do and how much they value the job. Many factors shape this choice, such as past learning experiences and advice from family or friends. A key part of the model is perceived ability, where students judge their own English and teaching skills before joining the profession.

The model also breaks down values into three specific groups. First is intrinsic value, which is the love for the subject or teaching itself. Second is personal utility value, involving job security, time for family and job transferability. Third is social utility value, which is the desire to help children and society. These values are taken into consideration by task perceptions, such as the balance between hard work and rewards like salary or social status.

Finally, the model looks at fallback career factors to see if someone chose teaching just because they failed to get into their favorite major.

Figure 2.3

The Fit-Choice model (Watt & Richardson, 2007, p.176)



Overall, the FIT-Choice framework helps us understand how personal goals, skills, and the desire to help others come together to form a student's professional identity. This provides a strong foundation to explain why they chose English teaching and how committed they will be in the future.

2.4. Previous studies

Global research from Western (Spain, Scotland, Norway, Ireland, Sweden) to Eastern cultures (Indonesia, Korea, Japan), even mixed cultures such as Turkey consistently identifies altruistic and intrinsic factors as the primary motivators for choosing a teaching career. Conversely, extrinsic motivation, particularly fallback careers, salary, and social status, are

frequently reported as the lowest-rated motivations (Asriani et al., 2022; Başöz, 2021; Hennessy & Lynch, 2017; Kiliç et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2019; Nesje et al., 2018; Pavin Ivanec, 2023; Saito, 2024; Wang et al., 2022).

In the Vietnamese context, quantitative studies reinforce the dominance of altruistic and intrinsic motivations, often derived from students' prior learning experiences. (Tran & Cao, 2020). However, extrinsic factors have gained prominence, specifically the impact of Decree No. 116/2020/NĐ-CP, which provides significant financial support to teacher candidates (Tran et al., 2025).

2.5. Gap

Although the FIT-Choice framework has been extensively applied in studies of teacher motivation, several gaps remain in the current literature. First, many previous studies have focused on pre-service teachers from mixed year levels or students who have already completed substantial pedagogical coursework and teaching practicum experiences (Tran & Cao, 2020). Such experiences may influence students' professional beliefs and career motivations, making it difficult to distinguish between initial motivations and motivations that develop during teacher education programs (Sinclair et al., 2006).

Second, relatively limited attention has been given to first-year English Pedagogy students in Vietnam. As freshmen are at the beginning of their academic journey and have had limited exposure to formal teacher training, investigating this population may provide a clearer understanding of the motivations that initially attract students to the teaching profession. Examining these early-stage motivations is important because they may serve as a foundation for later professional identity development and career commitment.

Third, while previous Vietnamese studies have primarily focused on identifying dominant motivational factors, less attention has been paid to potential variations in motivation associated with demographic characteristics such as gender and prior teaching experience. Exploring these differences may contribute to a more nuanced understanding of teacher motivation and provide insights into how different groups of students perceive the teaching profession at the beginning of their university studies.

2.6. Theoretical implications

Using the FIT-Choice framework to study first-year English pedagogy students brings several useful theoretical benefits. First, this study helps expand the FIT-Choice model by testing it on a very specific group: freshmen in a Vietnamese English-teaching context. Because these students have not started real teaching practice yet, looking at their answers helps us understand their original reasons for choosing this job. This adds a new time-based perspective to the current theory, showing what motivates students before they are changed by university training. Second, by looking at how gender and previous experience affect students' choices, the study adds more details to the theory about how personal backgrounds shape a student's values, such as wanting to help society or looking for job security. Finally, this research helps improve the theory on teacher identity. It explains how a student's early belief in their own skills and their desire to help others act as the starting points for their future love and commitment to the teaching career.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

This study adopted a quantitative cross-sectional survey design to investigate the career motivations of first-year English pedagogy students at a public university in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), A cross-sectional survey

design was considered appropriate because data were collected from participants at a single point in time to examine their career motivations without any intervention or manipulation of variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Furthermore, the research was conducted at the Faculty of Foreign Languages of a public university located in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. With a long history in teacher education, this research location provides an ideal and suitable context to explore what drives freshmen to become English teachers.

3.2. Participants

The participants were carefully selected based on two limiting conditions: they must be first-year students, and they must currently study in the English Pedagogy major. At first, the survey reached 103 students. However, after data cleaning, two invalid responses were removed. Therefore, the final sample consisted of 101 participants. In terms of gender, female students accounted for the majority with 68 participants (67.3%), while male students made up 33 participants (32.7%). Regarding prior teaching experience, 58 students (57.4%) reported that they had previous teaching experience (such as tutoring), whereas 43 students (42.6%) had no teaching experience.

3.3. Sampling technique

The participants were selected using convenience sampling from the EFL pedagogy classes at a university in Ho Chi Minh. A convenience sampling method was employed because all first-year English Pedagogy classes that were accessible during the data collection period were invited.

3.4. Instruments and Materials

A structured questionnaire was the main tool for collecting data. As noted by Brace (2004), questionnaires are highly effective for gathering a large amount of information about

people's attitudes within a specific group. The questionnaire was administered via Google Forms and divided into two main sections:

Section 1: Demographic Information. This section collected basic information, including the students' gender and prior teaching experience.

Section 2: Career Motivations. This section comprised 25 items adapted from the Factors Influencing Teaching Choice (FIT-Choice) framework developed by Watt and Richardson (2007). Minor wording modifications were made to ensure suitability for the Vietnamese higher education context while maintaining the original meanings of the constructs. It measured six main constructs: Intrinsic Motivation (3 items), Altruistic/Social Utility Motivation (4 items), Extrinsic/Personal Utility Motivation (6 items), Perceived Ability (2 items), Task Demand and Task Return (6 items), and Socialization Influences (4 items). All items used a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Before the main survey, reliability of each construct was subsequently examined using Cronbach's alpha after data collection.

Table 3.4

Reliability statistics for the FIT-Choice constructs

Motivational Constructs	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Intrinsic Motivation	3	.715
Altruistic/Social Utility Motivation	4	.892
Extrinsic/Personal Utility Motivation	6	.782
Perceived Ability	2	.840
Task Demand and Task Return	6	.850

3.5. Procedures

Data was collected through four sequential stages and was carried out step by step. First, the questionnaire was adapted from the FIT-Choice framework and modified to fit the Vietnamese context. After that, it was created as an online survey using Google Forms. Before the official collection, a pilot study was conducted in one day with 15 freshmen and 1 lecturer. The purpose was to check if the questions were clear enough to distribute to the first-year English pedagogy students. Based on feedback from both the lecturer and the pilot participants, the questionnaire was revised and finalized. Next, the official questionnaire was distributed to the first-year English Pedagogy students via Google Forms. Before participating, all volunteers received clear explanations about the study's purpose and provided their consent. This official collection phase lasted for four days. Finally, after the survey had been closed, all responses were screened for completeness and consistency. Incomplete or invalid responses were removed from the dataset. The remaining data were coded and entered into SPSS version 26.0.

3.6. Variables

The study involved two main types of variables. The independent variables were the students' demographic characteristics, specifically their gender (male or female) and prior teaching experience (yes or no). Meanwhile, the dependent variables were the students' career motivations. These motivations were measured through their scores on the 25-item FIT-Choice questionnaire, which covered the six main motivation constructs.

3.7. Data analysis

SPSS software (version 26) was used to analyze the collected data. First, descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were used to summarize the students' motivation levels. Next, a Pearson correlation test was applied to find the relationships between the six motivation factors. Finally, independent samples t-tests were conducted to compare the motivation scores between different groups (male vs. female and experienced vs. inexperienced). These statistical tools provided clear evidence to fully answer the research questions.

4. Results

4.1. Research question 1: What are the primary FIT-Choice motivational factors underlying the career choices of first-year English Pedagogy students?

4.1.1. Overall Picture of Career Motivational Factors

Table 4.1.1

Descriptive statistics of FIT-Choice motivational factors influencing career choice

Motivational Constructs	M	SD
Task Demand and Task Return	4.32	0.61
Socialization Influences	4.14	0.70
Altruistic/Social Utility Motivation	4.10	0.86
Intrinsic Motivation	3.98	0.77
Perceived Ability	3.78	0.85
Extrinsic/Personal Utility Motivation	3.60	0.83

Descriptive statistics indicate that first-year English Pedagogy students reported generally high levels of career motivation across the six FIT-Choice constructs. Among these, Task Demand and Task Return received the highest mean score ($M = 4.32$, $SD = 0.61$), followed by Socialization Influences ($M = 4.14$, $SD = 0.70$) and Altruistic/Social Utility Motivation ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 0.86$). These findings suggest that participants generally

recognized both the characteristics of the teaching profession and the influence of significant others when considering teaching as a career. In contrast, Extrinsic/Personal Utility Motivation received the lowest mean score ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 0.83$), although it remained above the midpoint of the scale. This indicates that external or personal utility considerations were less strongly endorsed than other motivational dimensions among the participants. Also, this overall pattern appears inconsistent with the common perception that students choose the teaching profession primarily for extrinsic rewards like the financial support policies from Decree No. 116/2020/ND-CP (Tran et al., 2025) or due to a lack of career orientation. Instead, they enter the field with a clear and realistic awareness of the difficulties and specific characteristics of the teaching profession.

4.1.2. Detailed Analysis of Motivational Constructs

Table 4.1.2

The descriptive statistics of all motivational items based on the FIT-Choice framework

	Constructs and Items	M	SD
<i>Task Demand and Task Return</i>	(E.1) Teaching English requires a high level of specialized knowledge.	4.56	0.73
	(E.2) Teaching English requires a high level of pedagogical skills.	4.53	0.74
	(E.4) Teaching English is a heavy workload/demanding profession.	4.41	0.80
	(E.3) Teaching English requires hard work and high emotional demand.	4.32	0.75
	(E.6) English teachers have a good salary/income.	4.21	0.80
	(E.5) Teaching is a high-status profession in Vietnam.	3.91	0.98
<i>Socialization Influences</i>	(F.3) My former teachers have inspired me to be a teacher.	4.28	0.90

	(F.4) People around me thought I would make a good teacher.	4.20	0.92
	(F.2) My family members influenced my decision to become a teacher.	4.13	0.95
	(F.1) My friends influenced my decision to become a teacher.	3.95	0.95
<i>Altruistic/Social Utility Motivation</i>	(B.2) I want to be a positive influencer on the future of students/pupils.	4.31	0.94
	(B.1) I want to contribute to the development of society through teaching.	4.12	0.92
	(B.4) Teaching English allows me to benefit the socially disadvantaged.	4.06	0.99
	(B.3) I feel pleased because teaching allows me to work with children.	3.92	1.09
<i>Intrinsic Motivation</i>	(A.1) I love the English language subject and want to work directly with it.	4.24	0.81
	(A.2) I believe the teaching profession will bring me long-term enjoyment.	4.03	0.91
	(A.3) I have always wanted to become a teacher.	3.68	1.15
<i>Perceived Ability</i>	(D.1) I have good English language skills for teaching.	3.80	0.91
	(D.2) I have good pedagogical skills.	3.76	0.92
<i>Extrinsic & Personal Utility Motivation</i>	(C.1) Teaching English will be a secure job.	4.12	0.93
	(C.6) I think teaching will allow me to work anywhere.	3.93	0.93
	(C.3) The teaching profession offers me time for family.	3.80	1.07
	(C.2) I do not worry about unemployment when teaching English.	3.65	1.21
	(C.4) I chose this major because of financial support policies (Decree 116).	3.54	1.35

(C.5) I chose this major as a fallback career (secondary option).	2.54	1.56
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Table 4.1.2 provides a closer look at the specific survey items, showing some clear trends in why students choose this major. For Task Demand, students showed a very realistic understanding of the job's requirements. They gave very high scores to statements saying that teaching requires a “high level of specialized knowledge” (M = 4.56) and “pedagogical skills” (M = 4.53). These scores are much higher than their expectations for a “good salary” (M = 4.21). These findings indicate that participants generally agreed that teaching requires substantial professional knowledge and pedagogical competence. In addition, among socialization influences, former teachers received the highest mean score among the four socialization items, which is greater than the influence of family (M = 4.13) and friends (M = 3.95) in inspiring their career paths.

Furthermore, their wish to be a “positive influencer” (M = 4.31) and their “love for the English language” (M = 4.24) were much stronger than the thought of “always wanting to become a teacher” (M = 3.68). Even with this strong passion, they rated their English (M = 3.80) and teaching abilities (M = 3.76) at a moderate level. This means they know they need more university training. Finally, although they value job security (M = 4.12), students strongly disagreed with the idea of choosing this major as a “fallback career” (M = 2.54). Because this item has the lowest score, it suggests that their career choices are active and clear, not just a backup plan.

4.1.3. Correlations among Motivational Factors

Table 4.1.3

The correlations between different motivational factors

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1. Intrinsic Motivation	Pearson	-					
	Correlation						
	Sig. (2-tailed)						
2. Altruistic/Social Utility Motivation	Pearson	.723**	-				
	Correlation						
	Sig. (2-tailed)						
3. Extrinsic/Personal Utility Motivation	Pearson	.494**	.496**	-			
	Correlation						
	Sig. (2-tailed)						
4. Perceived Ability	Pearson	.588**	.636**	.563**	-		
	Correlation						
	Sig. (2-tailed)						
5. Task Demand and Task Return	Pearson	.495**	.495**	.420**	.303**	-	
	Correlation						
	Sig. (2-tailed)						
6. Socialization Influences	Pearson	.541**	.488**	.535**	.417**	.498**	-
	Correlation						
	Sig. (2-tailed)						

Note. ** $p < .01$ (2-tailed)

Pearson correlation analysis revealed that all six motivational constructs within the FIT-Choice model exhibit statistically significant positive correlations with one another ($p < .01$). This indicates that these motivational factors do not operate in isolation but are intricately intertwined, forming a cohesive psychological ecosystem in the students' career decision-making process.

The most striking finding is the robust positive correlation between Intrinsic Motivation and Altruistic/Social Utility Motivation ($r = .723$, $p < .01$). For EFL freshmen, personal passion for the language and the idealistic desire to contribute to society merge into one unified drive. The more they love the English language, the stronger their interest to use it as a tool to help students and make a positive social impact. Furthermore, Perceived Ability

also showed a strong positive relationship with Altruistic Motivation ($r = .636$) and Intrinsic Motivation ($r = .588$). This suggests that Students who reported higher perceived ability also tended to report stronger intrinsic and altruistic motivations.

4.2. Research question 2: To what extent do gender and prior informal teaching experience differentiate their motivational profiles?

4.2.1. Gender Differences in Career Motivation

Table 4.2.1

Descriptive Statistics of FIT-Choice Motivational Factors by Gender

Motivational Constructs	Male (n = 33)	Female (n = 68)	t	p
Intrinsic Motivation	4.24 (0.71)	3.86 (0.78)	2.403	.018*
Altruistic/Social Utility Motivation	4.27 (0.85)	4.02 (0.85)	1.343	.182
Extrinsic/Personal Utility Motivation	3.84 (0.89)	3.48 (0.77)	2.104	.038*
Perceived Ability	4.05 (0.85)	3.65 (0.82)	2.219	.029*
Task Demand and Task Return	4.45 (0.51)	4.26 (0.65)	1.457	.148
Socialization Influences	4.24 (0.65)	4.09 (0.73)	1.035	.303

Note. * $p < .05$

Independent-samples t-tests were conducted to determine if demographic characteristics, specifically gender, create variations in career motivations. The results indicated statistically significant differences between male and female students in three specific domains.

Male freshmen exhibited significantly higher levels of Intrinsic Motivation ($p = .018$), Extrinsic/Personal Utility Motivation ($p = .038$), and Perceived Ability ($p = .029$) compared to their female counterparts. In a traditionally female-dominated major like English Pedagogy, male students who choose to pursue this path often equip themselves with a stronger intrinsic motivation and higher self-confidence to overcome underlying gender

stereotypes. Additionally, driven by traditional societal expectations regarding financial provision, male students also display a more pragmatic concern for extrinsic rewards, such as salary and job security. Nevertheless, both genders share equally high levels of Altruistic Motivation and a realistic understanding of Task Demand ($p > .05$), proving that the core values of the teaching profession resonate universally across genders.

4.2.2. The Impact of Prior Teaching Experience: Passion and Academic Humility

Table 4.2.2

Descriptive Statistics of FIT-Choice Motivational Factors by Prior Teaching Experience

Motivational Constructs	Male (n = 33)	Female (n = 68)	t	p
Intrinsic Motivation	4.13 (0.69)	3.79 (0.84)	2.202	.030*
Altruistic/Social Utility Motivation	4.25 (0.75)	3.90 (0.96)	2.056	.042*
Extrinsic/Personal Utility Motivation	3.66 (0.82)	3.52 (0.84)	.832	.407
Perceived Ability	3.90 (0.72)	3.63 (0.98)	1.588	.115
Task Demand and Task Return	4.45 (0.51)	4.27 (0.63)	.739	.462
Socialization Influences	4.14 (0.66)	4.13 (0.76)	.060	.952

Note. * $p < .05$

Independent samples t-tests indicated significant differences based on prior teaching experience. Freshmen with prior experience demonstrated significantly higher Intrinsic Motivation ($p = .030$) and Altruistic Motivation ($p = .042$) than those without such experience. Initial interactions with learners successfully ignited their love for teaching and magnified their desire to become inspiring educators.

Most importantly, this practical experience did not foster complacency or an illusion of mastery. There was no significant difference in Perceived Ability ($p = .115$) between the experienced and inexperienced groups. This highlights a remarkable sense of academic humility among the freshmen. Despite having prior tutoring experience, they accurately perceive the vast gap between informal tutoring and professional classroom teaching. Consequently, they maintain a modest attitude, recognizing the necessity for rigorous, formal pedagogical training at the university level.

5. Discussion

5.1. Purpose

This study explored the career motivations of first-year English Pedagogy students at a public university in Ho Chi Minh City, while examining the influence of gender and prior teaching experience on these drives.

5.2. Findings

Although Task Demand and Task Return and Socialization Influences obtained the highest overall scores, the item-level analysis indicates that students were primarily attracted to teaching because of altruistic and intrinsic values rather than external rewards. This aligns with Tran and Cao (2020), emphasizing the role of passion and social contribution. It also indicates that modern EFL students actively and proudly choose this path. Interestingly, the results disagree with Tran et al. (2025), as Decree No.116 did not strongly influence their career choice, highlighting the students' genuine devotion to the profession. Demographically, male students showed significantly higher Intrinsic and Extrinsic motivations, as well as Perceived Ability. Moreover, freshmen with prior teaching experience had stronger passion, but their Perceived Ability stayed at a realistic, moderate level compared to inexperienced students.

5.3. Explanation for findings

These outcomes may be associated with the deep-seated cultural respect for the teaching profession. The high levels of Altruistic and Intrinsic motivation, together with participants' awareness of task demands, may indicate that students have some understanding of the profession's requirements rather than viewing it solely through an idealized lens. This pattern may suggest a more nuanced understanding of the profession, although further research would be needed to explore how such perceptions develop over time. Regarding gender, higher motivation among males likely stems from the need to overcome stereotypes in a female-dominated major (Tran & Cao, 2020; Tran et al., 2025). Their extrinsic drive may be associated with societal expectations for financial stability. Finally, the impact of prior experience illustrates an increased awareness of professional knowledge; while tutoring fuels passion, students recognize the necessity of formal university training to bridge the gap between informal instruction and professional teaching.

5.4. Limitations

Despite providing valuable insights, this study has a few limitations. First, the self-reported data with small sample size ($N = 101$) from a single public university in Ho Chi Minh City means the findings should be interpreted with caution and may not be generalizable to all EFL teacher education students in Vietnam. Second, using a self-reported questionnaire can cause social desirability bias, as participants might unconsciously rate altruistic items higher to fit the noble image of a teacher. Lastly, the cross-sectional quantitative design only captures a snapshot of their current motivations and lacks the deep qualitative data needed to fully explain the psychological processes behind these choices.

5.5. Implications

Universities should introduce early practical opportunities, such as tutoring clubs, to sustain teaching passion. Faculties must support male students through mentorship programs and career talks featuring successful male educators. Future research should utilize qualitative or longitudinal methods to track how motivations evolve throughout the four-year curriculum.

Theoretically, the findings may contribute to the growing body of research applying the FIT-Choice framework in EFL teacher education contexts. The results also point to the potential influence of cultural and gender-related factors on career choice motivations, which could be explored further to enhance current theoretical explanations of why students choose teaching as a career.

5.6. Recommendations

Institutions should prioritize early-exposure initiatives to maintain freshmen's enthusiasm. Recruitment campaigns should emphasize social impact and personal fulfillment over financial incentives. Additionally, establishing mentorship for male students is crucial for gender inclusivity. Finally, freshmen should be encouraged to engage in informal teaching early to build a grounded professional identity and ensure long-term commitment.

6. Conclusion

This study investigated the initial career motivations of first-year English Pedagogy students at a public university in Ho Chi Minh City using the FIT-Choice framework, alongside the impacts of gender and prior teaching experience.

Findings reveal that freshmen are primarily driven by Altruistic and Intrinsic motivations, decisively rejecting teaching as a fallback career. Notably, male students exhibited higher motivation, potentially to overcome gender stereotypes, while those with prior tutoring experience demonstrated academic humility by recognizing the gap between informal tutoring and professional teaching.

However, generalizability is limited by a small sample size and potential social desirability bias. Future research should employ qualitative and longitudinal methods to track how these motivations evolve throughout the students' four-year academic curriculum and formal teaching practices.

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Appendices

PART I: DEMOGRAPHICS

Please tick (x) the most appropriate option.

1. Gender
2. What year of study are you in?
3. Your current major
4. Have you participated in any form of teaching/tutoring (paid or unpaid) before entering university or during your first year at university?
5. How long have you taught or tutored before entering university or during your first year at university?
6. Have you ever heard of the motivation to choose English as a teaching career?

PART II: MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS

*Please read each statement carefully and select your level of agreement on the **5-point Likert Scale** to evaluate the degree to which this reason influenced your decision to choose the English Teaching major.*

1: Strongly Disagree

2: Disagree

3: Neutral

4: Agree

5: Strongly Agree

No	Statements	1	2	3	4	5
A.	Intrinsic Motivation					
A1	I love the English language subject and want to work directly with it.					
A2	I believe the teaching profession will bring me long-term enjoyment and satisfaction in my work.					
A3	I have always wanted to become a teacher.					
B.	Altruistic/Social Utility Motivation					
B1	I want to contribute to the development of society through teaching.					
B2	I want to be a positive influencer on the future of students/pupils.					

B3	I feel pleased because the teaching profession allows me to work with children/young people.					
B4	Teaching English will allow me to benefit and motivate the socially disadvantaged.					
C.	Extrinsic & Personal Utility Motivation					
C1	Teaching English will be a secure job.					
C2	I do not worry about unemployment when teaching English.					
C3	The teaching profession offers me time for family (e.g. summer break or working hours).					
C4	I chose this major because financial support policies (e.g., Decree No. 116/2020/ND-CP) greatly influenced my decision.					
C5	I chose this major as a fallback career after failing to enter into my favorite major.					
C6	I think teaching will allow me to work anywhere.					
D.	Perceived Ability					
D1	I am confident in my ability to learn and use the English language when teaching.					
D2	I am confident that I have the abilities and qualities to become a good teacher.					
E.	Task Demand and Task Return					
E1	I think teaching requires high levels of expert knowledge.					
E2	I think teachers need high levels of teaching knowledge.					
E3	I think teachers have a heavy workload.					
E4	I think teaching is emotionally demanding (e.g. dealing with stress from students' parents).					
E5	The English teaching profession offers a stable and good salary/income.					

E6	The teaching profession receives social respect and high status in society.					
F.	Socialization influences					
F1.	People around me think I am suitable for teaching English.					
F2.	Family or other significant influences encouraged me to choose the teaching profession.					
F3.	I have had inspirational English teachers.					
F4.	I have positive learning experiences with my English teachers.					