Exploring Pre-Service Teacher Motivation: Variations Across Programs and Gender Differences in Indonesia

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Abstract

This study examines pre-service teachers' attitudes toward the teaching profession in Indonesia and explores how sociocultural factors shape their motivation. A mixed methods design combined a Teacher Attitude Inventory (TAI) survey (N = 460) with semi-structured interviews (n = 20). Group differences were assessed non-parametrically; interviews were then thematically analyzed to explain the quantitative patterns. Attitudes were broadly positive and stable, with no statistically significant differences by gender, program of study, or semester. Interviews revealed three interlocking strands shaping career decisions: intrinsic–altruistic commitment (meaning, contribution), pragmatic–extrinsic calculus (stability, compensation, entry routes), and sociocultural positioning (family expectations, gendered identities, perceived status). These strands clarify why professional pride and learner-centred beliefs coexist with cautious views of career prospects and perceived limits on teacher voice. Results support (i) gender sensitive mentorship, (ii) discipline-specific motivational scaffolds in ITE, (iii) recruitment and bonded scholarship schemes for rural deployment, and (iv) well-being supports that enhance agency and retention. By integrating group-level convergence with culturally situated narratives, the study reframes motivation as a contextual phenomenon and offers actionable levers for teacher workforce policy and ITE program design.

Keywords: Gender Roles; Initial Teacher Education; Pre Service Teacher Motivation; Sociocultural Context; Rural Deployment

INTRODUCTION

In the global pursuit of educational excellence, the role of teachers remains indisputably central. Across various educational systems, ensuring a qualified, committed, and motivated teaching workforce is not only an institutional priority but also a societal necessity. The quality of teaching significantly impacts student achievement, as teachers influence curricular implementation, learning processes, and overall school effectiveness (Hattie, 2019). Despite the prominence of teachers in education discourse, understanding what motivates individuals to pursue and persist in the teaching profession remains an evolving and context-dependent inquiry, especially in Southeast Asia.

In Indonesia, the teaching profession has undergone dynamic transformations driven by socio-economic changes, educational reforms, and cultural shifts (Hussain

& Hussain, 2023). Historically perceived as a fallback career, teaching is now gaining increasing recognition due to its role in national development and social advancement (Hussain, Intizar & Hussain Kazmi, 2021; Ulan Dari & Hidayanto Pancoro Setyo Putro, 2021). Yet, this recognition coexists with persistent issues such as low salaries, high workloads, and limited societal prestige, which continue to influence the career choices and motivation of pre-service teachers (Ismail & Jarrah, 2019). Understanding what drives motivation in these pre-service educators is crucial, particularly as Indonesia invests in the revitalization of its initial teacher education (ITE) system to produce reflective, committed, and socially responsive teachers.

Despite global consensus on the value of intrinsic motivation for educators, pre-service teachers often exhibit varying levels of commitment, enthusiasm, and resilience, influenced by individual aspirations, educational experiences, and broader cultural narratives (Diarta & Saluy, 2022; Utomo et al., 2023). This complexity is compounded by contextual variables, such as gender roles, institutional settings, and disciplinary orientation (Aung & Sakurai, 2023; Jacob & Pillay, 2022). As a result, examining how gender and program of study intersect with teacher motivation is essential for developing inclusive, equitable, and effective teacher education policies.

A wide array of studies highlights the influence of intrinsic and extrinsic factors in shaping pre-service teacher motivation. Intrinsic drivers include professional autonomy, personal growth, and the desire to contribute meaningfully to students and society (Aris Sabthazi et al., 2024). Extrinsic motivators, while often viewed as secondary, such as job stability, financial security, and institutional recognition, are equally critical in sustaining long-term engagement in teaching (Aris Sabthazi et al., 2024; Takwate, 2021). In culturally diverse and economically stratified contexts like Indonesia, both types of motivation must be considered to create supportive environments that cultivate and retain future educators.

Within the Southeast Asian context, effective teacher training initiatives have emerged as pivotal in nurturing motivation among pre-service teachers (Damnet, 2021). Research from China, Singapore, and other neighboring countries shows that culturally situated values—such as Confucian duty, community harmony, and reflective inquiry—deeply shape motivational orientations (Lee et al., 2020; Tang et al., 2025.). For instance, in southern China, Confucian ethics emphasize team harmony and commitment to the profession, while personal development is deprioritized due to its association with individualism (Tang et al., 2025). In Singapore, teacher learning is embedded in collective socio-cultural practices, with educators actively negotiating institutional demands while fostering culturally aligned instructional strategies (Lee et al., 2020).

These regional insights resonate with broader international findings. Klassen et al. (2011) demonstrate that cultural expectations significantly shape career motivations, with Canadian pre-service teachers favoring intrinsic values, and Omani teachers influenced more by social expectations and fallback career considerations. Similarly, studies on L2 teacher motivation in East Asia highlight how teacher identities evolve dynamically within complex socio-cultural systems, where motivation shifts according to classroom realities and institutional pressures (Kimura, 2022). Thus, teacher motivation is a situated phenomenon that reflects both global trends and local realities.

However, despite the growing body of literature, several critical gaps remain. While existing studies examine motivation broadly, few provide an integrated view of how pre-service teacher attitudes vary simultaneously by gender, academic program, and educational level within a single national context. Moreover, limited attention has been given to how ITE programs can tailor support to different demographic and disciplinary groups to sustain motivation over time. This gap is particularly significant in Indonesia, where diverse teacher preparation tracks (e.g., English, Mathematics, Sports Education) attract students with varying goals, identities, and motivations.

The current study addresses this lacuna by investigating pre-service teacher motivation across four academic programs in an Indonesian state university: English, Indonesian, Mathematics, and Sports Education. It also explores how gender and semester level shape attitudes and aspirations toward the teaching profession. By combining quantitative data from the Teacher Attitude Inventory (TAI) and qualitative interview analysis, this research offers a multidimensional understanding of motivation among Indonesian teacher candidates.

Specifically, this study aims to answer three core questions: (1) What are the attitudes of pre-service teachers toward the teaching profession? (2) Are there significant differences in attitudes based on gender, program of study, and semester level? (3) Which variables influence pre-service teachers' decisions to pursue teaching? These questions are vital for informing the design and implementation of responsive ITE programs that consider demographic and cultural diversity.

The study contributes to teacher education scholarship in three key ways. First, it contextualizes pre-service teacher motivation within Indonesia's socio-cultural and institutional frameworks, offering insight into how cultural norms, career perceptions, and education policy intersect. Second, it highlights the role of academic discipline and gender in shaping teacher identity formation, suggesting that differentiated support strategies are essential. Finally, the study reinforces the need for culturally situated approaches to teacher motivation, where both intrinsic and extrinsic influences are recognized, and where teacher preparation is grounded in local realities and global standards.

This study offers a nuanced exploration of pre-service teacher motivation in Indonesia. It reflects the complexity of educational aspirations, professional identities, and socio-cultural expectations, and calls for a reimagining of ITE programs that honor both personal and collective dimensions of motivation. By doing so, it aspires to support the development of empowered, resilient, and culturally responsive educators prepared to meet the evolving challenges of 21st-century education.

Context and Review Literature

Research on teacher motivation has garnered increasing scholarly interest, particularly due to its relevance to student learning outcomes, educational reform, pedagogical practices, and teacher well-being (Han & Yin, 2016). Motivation is a foundational concept in both psychology and education, recognized as a driving force behind human action. (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021) define motivation as the direction and magnitude of human behavior, emphasizing the interplay between one's decision to engage in an activity and their persistence in it. In the realm of teacher motivation, this involves not only the reasons individuals choose to enter the profession but also

the underlying factors that sustain their commitment to teaching. According to (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021), motivation is shaped by four interrelated dimensions: intrinsic motivation, social-contextual factors, the temporal aspect of lifelong engagement, and demotivating experiences.

Understanding teacher motivation cannot be separated from the concept of attitudes, which are shaped by social, emotional, and personal factors and have a strong influence on classroom behavior and decision-making (Pajares, 1992). Teachers' attitudes toward their profession significantly impact their instructional choices and overall classroom performance (Hooks et al., 2006; Richardson & Watt†, 2006). Hence, exploring pre-service teachers' attitudes offers insight into their preparedness, decision-making capability, and enthusiasm for the profession. Effective teacher education programs (ITE) must cultivate not only pedagogical skills but also positive dispositions and enjoyment of teaching. The findings of (Riaz & Hassan, 2021) emphasize the importance of practical experiences in enhancing both pedagogical knowledge and desirable dispositions, which are critical for training future educators.

The preparation of teachers in higher education institutions is fundamental to the development of professional identity and sustained motivation. The importance of addressing pre-service teachers' beliefs and expectations is pertinent in light of the potential negative impact caused by exposure to less competent role models or outdated teaching practices (Mooman & Sadruddin, 2023). Research suggests that pre-service teachers who reflect on their identities and contexts are better prepared to connect with their teaching environments. When such alignment occurs, it enhances job satisfaction and reinforces a sense of purpose in teaching (Butler, 2017).

Recent empirical evidence underscores the dynamic and context-sensitive nature of teacher motivation. Positive teachers are generally more productive, motivated, and capable of fostering inclusive, student-centered environments (Semerci & Semerci, 2004). Motivation also correlates strongly with a teacher's sense of belonging, commitment to teaching, and professional aspirations (Fray & Gore, 2018; Kim & Corcoran, 2018; Neugebauer, 2015). These motivational dimensions are particularly relevant in teacher education, as pre-service teachers' academic aptitude must be complemented by personal drive and emotional readiness.

Demographic variables also shape motivational orientations. Studies have shown that attitudes toward teaching may vary across gender, academic program, and institutional contexts. However, motivation is not only individually constructed; it is also a reflection of broader socio-cultural and gendered dynamics. In Indonesia, for instance, the overrepresentation of women in teacher education programs has been linked to societal perceptions of teaching as an extension of caregiving roles, aligning with traditional gender norms. Conversely, male pre-service teachers, especially those in Sports Education, may view the profession through a masculine lens emphasizing authority, physicality, or discipline, which can influence their motivational pathways and professional identity formation.

Further dimensions of teacher motivation have been explored in culturally situated contexts. In China, Confucian ethics encourage values such as duty, professional harmony, and social responsibility over individualistic goals like personal development (Tang et al., 2025). Aligning motivational strategies with these traditional virtues has proven effective for enhancing teacher engagement (Tang et al., 2025). In Singapore, teacher learning is rooted in socio-cultural systems that

emphasize collective inquiry and reflection, enabling teachers to adapt policies and practices to their specific educational contexts (Lee et al., 2020).

Beyond East Asia, comparative research has revealed striking cultural differences in teacher motivation. For example, Klassen et al. (2011) found that Canadian pre-service teachers often prioritize personal and altruistic goals, while Omani teachers are more influenced by social expectations and career fallback reasoning. East Asian language teachers show motivational trajectories influenced by dynamic socio-cultural systems, according to Complex Dynamic Systems Theory (CDST), which acknowledges classroom-level variability in shaping motivation (Kimura, 2022).

Culturally responsive professional development is increasingly recognized as a key driver of teacher motivation, as it enables educators to align their professional growth with the needs of diverse classrooms. (Lin et al., 2023) showed that such programs enhanced Chinese kindergarten teachers' perceptions of minority students' motivation, though effects varied by classroom composition. Motivation, however, is not merely an individual trait but a complex construct shaped by relational and institutional ecosystems that nurture professional identity, resilience, and collective support. Strong networks provide resources, mentorship, and collaboration opportunities, all of which enhance motivation and contribute to higher instructional quality and student achievement, with favorable working conditions linked to improved outcomes (Carriles-Alberdi et al., 2021; Shah et al., 2024). Teachers' motivational orientations are also influenced by intercultural sensitivity, family and peer dynamics, and institutional support, with intercultural sensitivity playing a particularly critical role in enriching teaching practices and motivational frameworks (Chen & Hu, 2023; Yepes et al., 2024). Given that motivation is deeply embedded within sociocultural contexts of values, beliefs, and norms (Guay et al., 2016; King, 2022), the shift from traditional theories to integrative models is essential. Approaches that synthesize self-determination theory (SDT) and social cognitive career theory (SCCT) offer more inclusive insights for fostering motivation in diverse educational settings (Asfahani, 2024).

Taken together, this literature emphasizes that motivation is multifaceted and deeply embedded within socio-cultural systems. As teachers increasingly operate in culturally diverse classrooms, understanding these motivational underpinnings becomes essential not only for fostering teacher satisfaction but also for enhancing educational equity and effectiveness.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed an explanatory mixed-methods design that combined a cross-sectional survey with semi-structured interviews to examine pre-service teachers' attitudes and motivations toward the teaching profession (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The quantitative strand provided a cohort-level attitudinal profile, and the qualitative strand was used to elaborate and explain the observed patterns. Gender (male/female), program of study (English, Indonesian, Mathematics, Sports Education), and semester level (1, 3, 5, 7) were treated as grouping variables. The research protocol was reviewed and approved by the university's ethics committee.

Participants and Sampling

The target population consisted of 2,956 pre-service teachers enrolled in the Faculty of Education and Teacher Training at a state university in Indonesia during the 2023–2024 academic year. The minimum required sample size (n = 352) was estimated using Yamane's (1967) formula for finite populations with a 5% margin of error. To increase statistical power and enhance representativeness, data were collected from 460 volunteers, which also meets common recommendations for attitudinal survey research (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1978).

The final quantitative sample comprised 139 males (30.2%) and 321 females (69.8%). Participants were distributed across four programs: English Education (n = 91), Indonesian Education (n = 132), Mathematics Education (n = 137), and Sports Education (n = 100). Semester distribution was as follows: Semester 1 (n = 93), Semester 3 (n = 156), Semester 5 (n = 119), and Semester 7 (n = 92).

For the qualitative strand, 20 participants were selected purposively from the survey respondents to reflect diversity in gender, academic program, and semester level.

Instruments and Data Collection

Quantitative instrument

Attitudes toward the teaching profession were measured using the Teacher Attitude Inventory (TAI) (Ahluwalia, 2007). The TAI comprises 30 Likert-type items rated on a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) and is organised into three subscales: (a) Teaching Profession, (b) Educational Process, and (c) Teacher (status/perceptions). In the present sample, the TAI showed excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.95), in line with conventional psychometric criteria for reliability (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). As a self-report measure, the TAI is subject to potential social-desirability bias, which was taken into account when interpreting the findings.

Qualitative instrument and procedure

Qualitative data were collected through online semi-structured interviews with the purposive subsample. The interview guide focused on three domains: (i) beliefs and feelings about the teaching profession, (ii) attitudes toward being a teacher, and (iii) motivations for enrolling in the teacher-education program. Pre-planned open-ended questions were accompanied by follow-up probes to elicit detailed and reflective responses (Qu & Dumay, 2011).

Interviews were conducted in Indonesian via an online conferencing platform, in line with institutional regulations at the time of data collection. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent, transcribed verbatim, and subsequently translated into English for analysis. Data collection was coordinated with the English, Indonesian, Mathematics, and Physical Education departments to facilitate participant recruitment and scheduling.

Data Analysis

Quantitative analysis

Survey responses were organised and analysed using SPSS. For each participant, a composite TAI score was obtained by summing responses across the 30 items. For

descriptive purposes, total scores were grouped into five ordinal categories (Very Low, Low, Moderate, High, Very High) based on conventional cut-points.

Prior to inferential analysis, the distribution of TAI scores was examined to assess the assumptions of parametric tests. Normality was tested using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test; results indicated that male and female attitude scores were not normally distributed ($p < .05$). Consequently, non-parametric procedures were employed. Gender differences in TAI scores were examined using the Mann–Whitney U test, while differences across programs of study and semester levels were analysed using the Kruskal–Wallis test. The significance level was set at $\alpha = .05$ for all tests.

Qualitative analysis

Interview transcripts were analysed using an applied thematic analysis approach (Guest et al., 2012). After repeated readings for familiarisation, an initial round of open coding was carried out to identify meaningful segments related to attitudes, motivations, and contextual influences. These codes were then reviewed, refined, and grouped into broader categories. Through iterative comparison and abstraction, higher-order themes were developed that captured recurrent patterns across participants' accounts.

Integration of the quantitative and qualitative strands occurred at the interpretation stage: themes from the interview data were used to explain, elaborate, and contextualise the survey results, particularly where descriptive patterns did not translate into statistically significant group differences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Participant Demographics

Table 1 outlines the demographic characteristics of the 460 pre-service teacher participants. The sample consisted of 321 females (69.8%) and 139 males (30.2%), indicating a marked gender imbalance that aligns with broader national and global trends in teacher education, where women are typically overrepresented. Cultural expectations and social norms may contribute to this trend, particularly in Indonesia where teaching is often viewed as a gender-appropriate profession for women. This disproportionate participation may also reflect the broader societal framing of caregiving professions as more suitable for women, a theme often reinforced by media portrayals and institutional practices. In contrast, male participants may perceive Sports Education as more congruent with masculine identity due to its association with physical strength and leadership.

Semester distribution was relatively balanced, with the largest proportion of participants in the third semester (33.9%). This peak may reflect programmatic emphasis on coursework or practicum experiences during that academic phase, which may in turn influence students' motivation and professional identity development. The study programs were distributed as follows: Mathematics Education (29.8%), Indonesian Education (28.7%), Sports Education (21.7%), and English Education (19.8%). Notably, the underrepresentation in Sports Education—combined with gender composition—may reveal implicit gendered patterns in enrollment. Masculine norms may encourage male students to pursue more prestigious or economically rewarding fields, while discouraging affiliation with professions perceived as emotionally laborious or underpaid.

Table 1. Demographics of Participants

Frequency Gender	%	Mean	SD
Male	139	30.2	1.7
Female	321	69.8	
Total	460	100%	
Grade Level			
Semester 1	93	20.2	3.91
Semester 3	156	33.9	
Semester 5	119	25.9	
Semester 7	92	20.0	
Total	460	100%	
Programs of Study			
English Education	91	19.8	2.53
Indonesian Education	132	28.7	
Mathematics Education	137	29.8	
Sports Education	100	21.7	
Total	460	100%	

Overall Attitudes Toward the Teaching Profession

Table 2 presents the distribution of scores from the Teacher Attitude Inventory (TAI). Notably, 13.67% of male pre-service teachers fell into the "very high" attitude category, compared to 10.28% of females. However, 44.86% of females scored in the "high" category, compared to 46.04% of males. These slight variations suggest nuanced gender dynamics that merit deeper contextual exploration. While the Mann-Whitney test later confirms no statistically significant gender difference ($p = 0.585$), qualitative interpretations may uncover underlying socio-cultural beliefs not fully captured by the statistical measure.

Interestingly, female participants exhibited a broader distribution across moderate and low attitude ranges. This could imply that many women enter the teaching profession under social obligations rather than intrinsic passion. Previous research indicates that female pre-service teachers may be more likely to experience external pressures—such as family encouragement or perceived gender suitability—prompting their enrollment (Suryani, 2017; Uysal, 2022). These findings highlight the complexity of interpreting gender-based data, where cultural values play a powerful but often implicit role

Table 2. Overall Percentage of Male and Female Pre-Service Teachers on the Teacher Attitude Inventory (TAI) (N=460)

Number of Scores on TAI	Level of Attitude	
	Gender	
	Female (N=321)	Male (N=139)
121-150 (Very High)	33 (10.28%)	19 (13.67%)
91-120 (High)	144 (44.86%)	64 (46.04%)
61-90 (Moderate)	95 (29.60%)	38 (27.34%)
31-60 (Low)	49 (15.26%)	18 (12.95%)
0-30 (Very Low)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

Subscale Insights from the TAI The breakdown of individual TAI items (Table 3) reveals a duality in pre-service teachers' perceptions. On one hand, many expressed pride in joining the profession (Items 1, 5, 9, and 30), suggesting that they view teaching as a noble and impactful career. On the other hand, responses to Items 2, 6, and 10 suggest scepticism, such as perceiving teaching as a fallback or second-choice profession. For instance, 13% agreed that teaching is more likely chosen by those who fail in other fields, reflecting societal devaluation of the profession

To maintain coherence and unity across the Results, we begin by positioning RQ1 as the baseline attitudinal map of the cohort. Building on the overall sample description and the measurement strategy (TAI with three subscales), this subsection first establishes how participants, as a whole, evaluate the profession before we proceed to between-group comparisons (program and semester) and then to qualitative mechanisms that explain the observed patterns. This sequencing is consistent with the explanatory mixed-methods design guiding the study.

Research Question 1: What are pre-service teachers' attitudes toward the teaching profession?

This part presents the item-level distribution of responses on the Teacher Attitude Inventory (TAI) and synthesizes the attitudinal profile across its three subscales: Teaching Profession, Educational Process, and Teacher (Status/Perceptions). Because the TAI includes both positively and negatively worded items and uses a 5-point scale (1 = Very Agree to 5 = Very Disagree), response polarity is interpreted with reference to item wording.

Analyses are based on 460 pre-service teachers enrolled in four programs (English, Indonesian, Mathematics, and Sports Education) at a state university in Indonesia during the 2023–2024 academic year. Females represented 69.8% (n = 321) and males 30.2% (n = 139), reflecting a gender distribution typical of teacher-education cohorts. Semester representation was reasonably balanced across Semesters 1, 3, 5, and 7 (Table 1).

Teacher attitudes, measured via the 30-item TAI, were grouped into five ordinal ranges (Very Low to Very High). Among females, 10.28% were in the Very High range, 44.86% High, 29.60% Moderate, and 15.26% Low; none scored Very Low. Among males, 13.67% were Very High, 46.04% High, 27.34% Moderate, and 12.95% Low (Table 2). Descriptively, both groups clustered in the High range, with a slightly higher Very High proportion among males, but subsequent non-parametric tests did not yield statistically significant gender differences in overall attitude scores.

On the Teaching Profession subscale (see Table 3), responses indicate coexisting pride and pragmatism. A substantial share endorsed pride-oriented and commitment items such as *"I take great delight in announcing that I am a member of the teaching profession"* (Item 5; mean 3.47) and *"I will not take up any other job except teaching"* (Item 9; mean 3.39). In contrast, items reflecting optimism about the profession's future or fallback reasoning attracted more ambivalent responses, for example *"The teaching profession has a promising future"* (Item 4; mean 2.55) and *"If I am unable to find another work, I intend to enter the teaching profession"* (Item 10; mean 3.08). Overall, participants value teaching as a career yet remain cautious about its long-term prospects.

Table 3. Attitudes of Pre-service teachers toward Teaching Profession

Subscales	Items	N	Mean	Very agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Very Disagree (%)
Teaching Profession	1. If you had any family members who were going to college, I would have urged them to choose a teaching career.	460	3.37	72 (15.7)	151 (32.8)	146 (31.7)	55 (12)	36 (7.8)
	2. Those who fail in other fields of employment are more likely to become teachers.	460	2.74	55 (12)	150 (32.6)	159 (34.6)	52 (11.3)	44 (9.5)
	3. The teaching profession, in comparison to all other jobs, is the best.	460	2.64	32 (7)	54 (11.7)	163 (35.4)	137 (29.8)	74 (16.1)
	4. The profession of teaching has a promising future.	460	2.55	36 (7.8)	48 (10.4)	136 (29.6)	151 (32.8)	89 (19.4)
	5. I take great delight in announcing that I am a member of the teaching profession.	460	3.47	92 (20)	162 (35.2)	117 (25.4)	46 (10)	43 (9.4)
	6. There are more problems than positives to being a teacher.	460	2.63	86 (18.7)	139 (30.2)	137 (29.8)	56 (12.2)	42 (9.1)
	7. I want to pursue a career in education just because my parents want me to.	460	2.60	38 (8.3)	43 (9.3)	159 (34.6)	139 (30.2)	81 (17.6)
	8. People who work in the teaching sector are lazy.	460	3.51	41 (8.9)	44 (9.6)	124 (27)	143 (31)	108 (23.5)
	9. I will not take up any other job except teaching	460	3.39	78 (17)	150 (32.6)	145 (31.5)	49 (10.7)	38 (8.3)
	10. If I am unable to find another work, I intend to enter the teaching profession.	460	3.08	54 (11.7)	108 (23.5)	169 (36.7)	77 (16.7)	52 (11.4)
Educational process	11. It is not necessary to pay close attention to individual variances among students.	460	3.54	37 (8)	42 (9.1)	121 (26.3)	154 (33.5)	106 (23.1)
	12. Students should not be given the freedom to pursue	460	3.46	43 (9.3)	48 (10.4)	113 (24.6)	168 (36.5)	88 (19.2)

Subscales	Items	N	Mean	Very agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Very Disagree (%)
	their own interests in their pursuit of education.							
	13. Students learn more effectively via love than through punishment.	460	3.29	60 (13)	146 (31.7)	166 (36)	42 (9.1)	46 (10.2)
	14. There is no single teaching style that is appropriate for all students.	460	2.52	79 (17.1)	184 (40)	115 (25)	41 (8.9)	41 (9)
	15. Students' participation in group activities does not foster a sense of cooperation among themselves.	460	3.25	48 (10.4)	58 (12.6)	148 (32.2)	145 (31.5)	61 (13.3)
	16. The school's physical environment has an impact on the learning process.	460	3.58	116 (25.2)	153 (33.3)	110 (23.9)	40 (8.7)	41 (8.9)
	17.If students' special abilities are not given the recognition they deserve, their latent talents will remain hidden.	460	2.42	32 (7)	42 (9.1)	122 (26.5)	155 (33.7)	109 (23.7)
	18. The ability to form a positive relationship between the teacher and the pupils is critical for learning.	460	2.58	42 (9.1)	55 (12)	122 (26.5)	151 (32.8)	90 (19.6)
	19. The teaching methods used in the past were better than those used today.	460	2.87	72 (15.7)	127 (27.6)	112 (24.3)	86 (18.7)	63 (13.7)
	20. When the realization between the teacher and the students is warm and friendly, it creates a favorable learning environment for both parties.	460	2.95	56 (12.2)	88 (19.1)	149 (32.4)	110 (23.9)	57 (12.4)
Teacher								
	21. Teachers are not free to express their views	460	2.48	114 (24.8)	145 (31.5)	109 (23.7)	52 (11.3)	40 (8.7)

Subscales	Items	N	Mean	Very agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Very Disagree (%)
	22. When one sees a teacher he feels like laughing at him	460	2.56	87 (18.9)	148 (32.2)	137 (29.8)	57 (12.4)	31 (6.7)
	23. Everybody pays attention to what a teacher says	460	3.45	99 (21.5)	129 (28)	152 (33)	37 (8)	43 (9.5)
	24. People do not look down upon teacher	460	3.44	85 (18.5)	161 (35)	120 (26)	59 (12.8)	35 (7.7)
	25. Teachers do not have a sense of humour	460	3.05	63 (13.7)	74 (16)	146 (31.7)	130 (28.3)	47 (10.3)
	26. Teachers cannot satisfy the intellectually superior students	460	2.52	101 (22)	161 (35)	102 (22.2)	49 (10.7)	47 (10.3)
	27. One who does not inflict corporal punishment on students, is a poor teacher	460	2.69	73 (15.9)	139 (30.2)	150 (32.7)	52 (11.3)	46 (9.9)
	28. One, should not even dream of becoming teacher in his life	460	3.11	65 (14.1)	91 (19.8)	123 (26.7)	90 (19.6)	91 (19.8)
	29. Teaching makes a teacher tired	460	3.52	43 (9.3)	33 (7.2)	132 (28.7)	148 (32.2)	104 (22.6)
	30. Teachers are the leader of the nation	460	3.65	141 (30.7)	137 (29.8)	102 (22.2)	40 (8.7)	40 (8.7)

The Educational Process subscale shows strong endorsement of learner-centred and inclusive beliefs. Participants generally recognised the importance of the school environment for learning (Item 16; mean 3.58) and rejected one-size-fits-all or deficit-oriented pedagogy, such as the negatively worded statement on uniform teaching methods (Item 14; mean 2.52, where lower scores reflect disagreement). Items emphasising attention to individual differences and learner autonomy were evaluated favourably, pointing to a constructive orientation toward responsive, student-centred practice, consistent with prior work linking positive attitudes to engagement and openness to instructional innovation (Eshete, 2023; Jiang et al., 2025).

On the Teacher (Status/Perceptions) subscale, respondents affirmed teachers' authority and social contribution while simultaneously perceiving constraints on professional voice. High endorsement appeared on items such as *"Everybody pays attention to what a teacher says"* (Item 23; mean 3.45) and *"Teachers are the leader of the nation"* (Item 30; mean 3.65), indicating perceived symbolic esteem. At the same time, agreement with the negatively framed item on lack of freedom to express views (Item 21; mean 2.48) suggests awareness of reputational pressures and limited autonomy. This combination of high status and perceived structural constraints aligns with evidence that professional attitudes and job satisfaction are shaped by institutional

climate and perceived autonomy (Peláez-Fernández et al., 2021; Tsai & Antoniou, 2021).

In relation to Research Question 1, the overall pattern indicates that pre-service teachers in this cohort largely endorse teaching as a meaningful and respected vocation, value learner-centred and non-deficit pedagogies, and reject punitive or restrictive approaches to students. Yet these positive orientations are tempered by doubts about the profession's long-term prospects and perceptions of limited voice. Such ambivalence underscores the need to strengthen motivational resources and clarify career structures during initial teacher education, while designing programs and policies that enhance teacher agency and provide clear progression pathways. At the same time, the consistent rejection of deficit views and endorsement of environmental and relational factors (e.g., Items 13, 16, 20) offer a solid foundation on which to scaffold evidence-based, student-centred practice and to leverage practicum and technology-supported learning environments that reinforce positive professional identity and commitment (Alkayed et al., 2024; Eshete, 2023; Jiang et al., 2025; Peláez-Fernández et al., 2021; Tsai & Antoniou, 2021).

Research Question 2: Are there any significant difference in pre-service teachers' attitudes toward the teaching profession regarding gender, program of study, and grade level?

This part compares composite Teacher Attitude Inventory (TAI) scores across gender, program of study, and semester using non-parametric tests, and then integrates these findings with qualitative themes from semi-structured interviews.

We first examined gender differences using the Mann–Whitney U test. Mean composite scores were 91.53 (SD = 22.65) for males (n = 139) and 90.60 (SD = 22.20) for females (n = 321). The test yielded p = .585 at α = .05, indicating no statistically significant difference between male and female pre-service teachers (Table 4). Although males showed a slightly higher proportion in the Very High category and females a somewhat broader spread into Moderate and Low ranges, these descriptive tendencies did not reach statistical significance. In this sample, male and female pre-service teachers thus hold broadly similar attitudes toward the profession.

Table 4. Gender Differences in Pre-service Teachers' Attitudes Toward Teaching Profession

Gender	N	Mean	SD	α	p	Conclusion
Male	139	91.53	22.65	5%	0.585	No significant
Female	321	90.60	22.20			difference

Attitudes were then compared across four programs of study: English Education (n = 91), Indonesian Education (n = 132), Mathematics Education (n = 137), and Sports Education (n = 100). Mean TAI scores ranged from 89.72 to 92.10 (Table 5). A Kruskal–Wallis test yielded p = .582 (α = .05), indicating no statistically significant differences in TAI scores among the programs. Descriptively, Sports Education students displayed a marginally higher mean, and English and Mathematics slightly lower means, but these small spread differences do not justify inferential claims about program-specific advantages. The absence of a program effect suggests that, within this cohort, the overall appraisal of the teaching profession is broadly shared across disciplinary homes. This finding is compatible with evidence that positive

professional attitudes are sustained when initial teacher education (ITE) provides enriching environments and authentic practice opportunities, irrespective of subject area (Eshete, 2023; Jiang et al., 2025). It also aligns with work showing that strong professional identity and self-efficacy—both linked to job satisfaction and commitment—can operate as cross-cutting resources across programs (Alkayed et al., 2024; Peláez-Fernández et al., 2021; Tsai & Antoniou, 2021). At the same time, prior research has reported discipline-specific patterns in motivation and efficacy, particularly in STEM-aligned programs versus other fields (Navarro et al., 2022), and in the adoption of evidence-based pedagogies across disciplinary contexts (Merle et al., 2023). Our non-significant omnibus result indicates that any such differences are not large or systematic in this sample.

Table 5. Differences Between Programmes of Study in Terms of Pre-Service Teachers' Attitudes Toward the Teaching Profession (N=460)

Programmes of Study	N	Mean	SD	α	p	Conclusion
English Education	91	89.73	22.07	0.05	0.582	No significant difference
Indonesian Education	132	91.97	22.51			
Mathematics Education	137	89.72	22.46			
Sports Education	100	92.10	22.31			

To investigate potential changes across the learning trajectory, we compared attitudes by semester (1, 3, 5, and 7). Mean scores were similar across groups, with Semester 5 showing a modestly higher mean (Table 6). The Kruskal–Wallis test was non-significant (p = .899, α = .05), indicating no statistically detectable differences in overall attitudes by semester. We therefore retain the null hypothesis and interpret the cohort's attitudes as broadly stable across program progression. The absence of a semester effect suggests that, at cohort level, attitudinal orientation to the profession is relatively steady from entry to later semesters, in contrast to studies reporting fluctuations around practicum or transition-to-work phases. A plausible explanation is that global composite scores can mask micro-shifts within subscales or subgroups, or that local curriculum structures and mentoring practices buffered stressors typically associated with late program stages.

Table 6. Difference Between Grade Levels Based on Pre-Service Teachers' Attitudes Toward Teaching Profession (N=460)

Grade Level	N	Mean	SD	α	p	Conclusion
Semester 1	93	90.54	22.33	0.05	0.899	No significant difference
Semester 3	156	90.54	22.33			
Semester 5	119	91.81	22.61			
Semester 7	92	90.61	22.31			

Qualitative findings from 20 semi-structured interviews were used to contextualise these null quantitative differences. Three cross-cutting thematic families emerged from the coding process (Tables 7 and 8). The first family, Intrinsic/Altruistic Commitment, captured participants' descriptions of teaching as meaningful, future-oriented work with moral, spiritual, and social value. Interviewees frequently referred to teaching as a *"long-term investment,"* emphasising enjoyment of working with

young people, the fulfilment of helping others learn, and pride in contributing to society.

The second family, Pragmatic/Extrinsic Considerations, reflected how participants weighed job stability, entry pathways, and work–life integration alongside intrinsic motives. Teaching was sometimes viewed as attractive because of predictable schedules and compatibility with family responsibilities. Several participants noted financial constraints and the relative affordability of teacher education, as well as opportunities to earn supplementary income (e.g., tutoring) while studying. At the same time, limited civil service positions and perceived salary ceilings were acknowledged as tempering enthusiasm about long-term prospects.

The third family, Sociocultural Positioning of the Profession, highlighted how gendered and disciplinary norms shape professional imaginaries. Female participants often framed teaching as consonant with caregiving roles and community expectations, describing the profession as socially respectable yet accompanied by heightened moral scrutiny and perceived ceilings on advancement. Some male participants, particularly in Sports Education, narrated teaching through lenses of leadership, discipline, and coaching. Across interviews, respondents recognised a tension between the symbolic esteem accorded to teachers and the structural undervaluation of the profession in pay and status. These patterns resonate with research linking professional identity and self-efficacy to commitment and job satisfaction (Alkayed et al., 2024; Peláez-Fernández et al., 2021; Tsai & Antoniou, 2021) and with evidence that enriching practicum and technology-supported learning environments reinforce positive orientations toward teaching (Eshete, 2023; Jiang et al., 2025).

Integrated analysis of the quantitative and qualitative strands indicates a coherent pattern. Quantitatively, TAI scores cluster in the High range across gender, programs, and semesters, with no statistically significant differences on the global composite. Qualitatively, narratives show that strong intrinsic and altruistic motives coexist with pragmatic calculations shaped by labour market uncertainty, civil service scarcity, and sociocultural expectations about gender roles and professional comportment. Apparent descriptive tendencies—such as slightly higher means in Sports Education or more confident professional identities among some subgroups—do not translate into statistically significant omnibus effects, suggesting that any true differences are small, localised, or better captured thematically than via a single global index.

These results warrant a cautious interpretation of robustness and have design implications. Although means are similar, small true effects cannot be ruled out given common score dispersion (SD ≈ 22). Future studies could increase statistical power (larger N per program), incorporate multi-site samples, and compute non-parametric effect sizes with confidence intervals to bound plausible differences. Moreover, global composites may obscure domain-specific distinctions; mixed-method expansions that link subscale scores (Teaching Profession, Educational Process, Teacher Status) to program narratives may reveal subtle program-level emphases even when totals converge. Program design should therefore not assume homogeneity of motivational drivers. Even with convergent totals, scaffolding can be tailored through discipline-relevant practicum placements, instructional technology integration aligned with subject affordances, and mentorship pairings with role models who exemplify

program-specific professional identities. Such alignment is consistent with evidence that positive attitudes flourish when learning environments speak to students' disciplinary cultures (Eshete, 2023; Jiang et al., 2025) and when identity and efficacy resources are intentionally cultivated (Alkayed et al., 2024; Tsai & Antoniou, 2021). Accordingly, program redesign should focus less on presumed attitude gaps and more on discipline-specific motivational scaffolds that leverage shared positive orientations while addressing distinct identity narratives within each program (Alkayed et al., 2024; Eshete, 2023; Jiang et al., 2025; Merle et al., 2023; Navarro et al., 2022; Peláez-Fernández et al., 2021; Tsai & Antoniou, 2021).

Research Question 3: What Variables Influence Pre-Service Teachers' Decisions to Pursue a Career in Education?

This part synthesizes qualitative evidence from semi-structured interviews with 20 participants and links the emergent themes to the survey patterns obtained from the Teacher Attitude Inventory (TAI). Inductive analysis yielded three interlocking thematic families that structure the decision space: (i) intrinsic–altruistic motives, (ii) pragmatic–extrinsic considerations, and (iii) sociocultural positioning of teaching.

Table 7. Samples of Structured Interview Coding

Aspect	Sample of Question
Attitudes toward the teaching profession	How do you feel about the teaching profession? Please elaborate.
Attitudes regarding the profession of teaching	How do you feel about being a teacher?
Motivation	What are some of your other motivations for pursuing this teacher education program?

Interviews were semi-structured and designed to elicit beliefs, attitudes, and motives concerning teaching as a career. Table 7 summarises the key prompts ("How do you feel about the teaching profession?", "How do you feel about being a teacher?", and "What are some of your motivations for pursuing this teacher education program?"), while Table 8 presents representative extracts and the initial codes generated during first-cycle coding. These examples illustrate the range of stance-taking, from recognising teaching as challenging but meaningful work ("teaching is not an easy career") to appreciating its nobility alongside concerns about job vacancies, and describing it as enjoyable and dynamic ("a fun job… many activities, students' character, materials, and challenges").

Table 8. Samples of Responses of Interview Coding

Aspect	Participants	Responses	Codes
Belief	1	"Due to the fact that teachers must cope with a variety of student personalities, teaching is a challenging profession. Additionally, teachers must be able to create meaningful student learning activities that meet the requirements and objectives of their students."	Teaching is not an easy career.

Aspect	Participants	Responses	Codes
Attitudes	10	"I appreciate the teaching profession as a noble one, but I will seek another job if this profession proves difficult to reach in terms of quality requirements and limited job vacancies."	Students appreciate the profession.
Motivation	17	"I suppose that teaching is a fun job in which every day we engage with many activities, students' character, materials, and challenges."	Teaching is an enjoyable and challenging job.

Theme A – Intrinsic–altruistic commitment (meaning, contribution, growth)

Participants frequently positioned teaching as meaningful work oriented toward student development and societal betterment. Narratives emphasised enjoyment of working with young people, the satisfaction of facilitating learning, and the moral or spiritual significance of the role. One participant (Andy) described teaching as providing *"flexible hours, an interesting environment, and students and the community will admire me… Teaching is a long-term investment, not only in this life but also in the afterlife,"* signalling a future-oriented identity that integrates personal values with professional purpose. These accounts are consonant with research linking positive attitudes, professional identity, and self-efficacy to engagement, job satisfaction, and commitment, as well as with evidence that enriching, authentic learning environments in initial teacher education (ITE) strengthen such orientations (Alkayed et al., 2024; Eshete, 2023; Jiang et al., 2025; Peláez-Fernández et al., 2021; Tsai & Antoniou, 2021).

Theme B – Pragmatic–extrinsic calculus (stability, access, resources)

Career deliberations also reflected material and structural realities. Students weighed compensation trajectories, civil service opportunities, perceived job stability, and compatibility with family life alongside intrinsic motives. Several highlighted the relative affordability of teacher education programs and the feasibility of generating supplementary income (e.g., tutoring) while studying (Suryani et al., 2016). Decisions were thus described as multi-faceted rather than purely vocational or purely economic: enthusiasm for teaching coexisted with cautious appraisal of labour market conditions, advancement prospects, and remuneration. This pragmatic strand resonates with evidence from developing-country contexts that perceived undervaluation and inadequate compensation can erode commitment and motivation (Grimalda et al., 2018; S. J. Wu & Paluck, 2025).

Theme C – Sociocultural positioning and gendered identity

Interviewees located their choices within family expectations, gender norms, and local perceptions of teachers. Female participants often framed teaching as compatible with caregiving responsibilities and community respectability, while also noting the pressure to meet idealised moral standards. As one participant (Rina) explained, *"Teachers are expected to be flawless—as parents, knowledge providers, motivators, and leaders—while leaving personal issues outside the classroom."* Male participants—particularly in Sports Education—sometimes articulated a coaching- or leadership-oriented identity, emphasising discipline, mentoring, and embodied role-modelling.

These patterned narratives indicate that discipline identity and gender socialisation contour motivational trajectories even when global attitude scores do not differ significantly. The pattern aligns with studies reporting higher intrinsic motivation among women in collectivist settings, alongside evidence from other contexts where gender gaps in motivation are minimal, underscoring cultural contingency in how teaching is gendered and valued (Mishra & Sharma, 2023; Shen & Luen, 2022; Uysal, 2022).

Themes A–C map closely onto the TAI item-level patterns reported earlier. Pride and prosocial purpose (Theme A) correspond to strong endorsements of items such as "I take great delight in announcing that I am a member of the teaching profession" (Item 5) and "I will not take up any other job except teaching" (Item 9). Pragmatic reservations (Theme B) resonate with neutral-to-mixed responses on items concerning the profession's future and fallback entry (Items 4 and 10). The learner-centred stance evident in interviews aligns with the Educational Process subscale, where participants rejected punitive or restrictive pedagogy and endorsed environmental and relational factors (e.g., Items 13, 14, 16, 20). Perceptions of constrained voice and structural limits (Theme C) echo responses to Item 21 on teachers' freedom to express views. Quantitative comparisons by program and semester were non-significant; the interviews help explain this convergence by showing that many motivational drivers are shared across subgroups even as identities are narrated differently.

These qualitative patterns also align with broader evidence that perceived undervaluation, limited participation in decision-making, and constrained voice can undermine commitment, whereas participatory governance and supportive organisational climates enhance satisfaction and retention (Bandauko et al., 2025; Hoop & Arora, 2021; S. J. Wu & Paluck, 2025). Interventions with demonstrated promise—such as mindfulness-based social-emotional learning for pre-service teachers (Y. Wu & Qin, 2025), supportive mentorship and positive school climate (Dekawati et al., 2021), and gender-responsive pedagogy that recognises and challenges inequitable expectations (Ananga, 2021; Cagang et al., 2023; Kreitz-Sandberg & Lahelma, 2021)—speak directly to the levers surfaced by Themes A–C and point to concrete avenues for enhancing motivation, wellbeing, and persistence.

Pre-service teachers' decisions to pursue teaching in this cohort are shaped by a three-strand configuration: (i) intrinsic–altruistic commitment to meaningful, relational work; (ii) pragmatic–extrinsic considerations regarding stability, remuneration, and entry pathways; and (iii) sociocultural positioning, including gendered expectations and community perceptions. The coexistence of these strands helps explain why attitudes are broadly positive at the group level while narratives highlight practical constraints and identity negotiations. This convergence underscores the importance of ITE designs that reinforce intrinsic commitment, clarify career structures and progression, provide discipline-relevant practicum experiences, and explicitly engage with the sociocultural realities that modulate entry into and persistence within the teaching profession (Alkayed et al., 2024; Eshete, 2023; Jiang et al., 2025; Merle et al., 2023; Navarro et al., 2022; Peláez-Fernández et al., 2021; Tsai & Antoniou, 2021).

CONCLUSION

This study examined Indonesian pre-service teachers' attitudes toward the teaching profession using a mixed-methods design (TAI survey, N = 460; semi-structured interviews, n = 20). Quantitative comparisons revealed no statistically significant differences by gender, program of study, or semester, indicating broadly positive and stable attitudes across groups. Qualitative evidence, however, illuminated the sociocultural textures beneath this convergence: (i) strong intrinsic–altruistic commitment (meaning, contribution, growth), (ii) pragmatic–extrinsic calculus (stability, compensation, entry routes), and (iii) sociocultural positioning and gendered identities. Together, these strands explain why endorsement of learner-centred beliefs and professional pride coexists with cautious evaluations of career prospects and perceived constraints on teacher voice.

The findings advance a culturally situated understanding of motivation in initial teacher education (ITE) and underscore that program redesign should move beyond assumed group differences toward structural and contextual supports that sustain commitment. Practically, we recommend gender-sensitive mentorship, discipline-specific motivational scaffolds, and recruitment/scholarship schemes that address regional distribution and status concerns, including rural deployment and perceptions of men in teaching. These steps can strengthen professional identity, enhance retention, and align ITE with national teacher-workforce priorities.

The study is cross-sectional and single-institution, limiting causal inference and generalizability. Attitudes were captured via self-report (TAI), which may be susceptible to social-desirability bias. Global composite scores may mask subscale-level or latent-profile differences; power to detect small effects across programs/semesters may be insufficient. Although interviews provided cultural depth, the qualitative sample was modest and not stratified for intersectional analyses (e.g., rural origin × gender × program). Finally, while instruments were adapted carefully, residual cultural-linguistic nuances may remain.

As practical implications, teacher-workforce planning and recruitment should leverage the cohort's broadly positive attitudes to design evidence-based campaigns that destigmatise male participation—especially in early grades and language arts—while simultaneously supporting women's career continuity by recognising caregiving realities, and these efforts should be coupled with scholarships and bonded placements linked to rural schools that match candidates' mobility preferences and provide structured induction. In parallel, gender-sensitive mentorship and identity development ought to be institutionalised through mentoring constellations that pair pre-service teachers with trained mentors who can address gendered expectations, strengthen professional voice, and normalise diverse role identities (for example, "teacher-as-coach" in Sports Education and "teacher-as-designer" in Mathematics and Language Education). Discipline-specific motivational scaffolds should be integrated via micro-credentialed modules—such as coaching leadership, data-informed instruction, and inclusive pedagogy—that resonate with program cultures while reinforcing common learner-centred principles, with practicum placements aligned to disciplinary affordances and community needs and prioritised for under-resourced schools with strong mentor capacity. To sustain well-being and a positive school climate, initial teacher education should embed social-emotional learning, mindfulness, and reflective practice to buffer stress during practicum and the

transition to work, while partnerships with placement schools ensure psychologically safe, feedback-rich environments that enhance teacher agency and perceived status. Finally, recognition and progression should be advanced through transparent career pathways (covering certification, promotion, and advanced roles) alongside recognition systems that celebrate instructional leadership and community impact, rather than focusing solely on examination results.

RECOMMENDATION

Guided by these findings, future work should adopt a unified program-improvement lens: conduct multi-site longitudinal studies that follow candidates from entry through the induction years to capture motivational dynamics and plausible causal pathways; test measurement invariance and model latent profiles across gender, program, and rural–urban origin while triangulating the TAI with complementary validated scales (e.g., WTMST, TMS) to strengthen construct coverage; implement and rigorously evaluate trials of gender-sensitive mentorship and discipline-specific motivational scaffolds, examining effects on identity formation, self-efficacy, and retention; investigate rural-deployment mechanisms—such as bonded scholarships, housing supports, and community-based mentorship—and their impacts on motivation and placement stability; explore intersectional configurations, including first-generation status, socioeconomic background, and caregiving responsibilities, to reveal heterogeneous trajectories; and, finally, apply qualitative comparative analysis or realist evaluation to identify context–mechanism–outcome patterns that sustain commitment across varied settings.

Author Contributions

Name of Author	C	M	So	Va	Fo	I	R	D	O	E	Vi	Su	P	Fu
Indra Budiman	✓		✓		✓	✓		✓			✓		✓	
Elih Sutisna Yanto	✓	✓			✓		✓		✓	✓		✓		

Conflict of interests
The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Data Availability
The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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