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Factors Affecting Academics' Decision to Pursue an Academic Career as a Profession

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Abstract

This study explores the motivations behind academics' decisions to pursue and sustain careers in faculties of education, focusing on how these motivations evolve over time (RQ1) and differ by age and gender (RQ2). Data were collected through open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with academics at various career stages. The analysis identified multiple intrinsic (e.g., self-development, service, lifelong learning) and extrinsic (e.g., salary, prestige, professional autonomy) motivations driving initial career choices. Many participants refined or broadened their motivations with experience, shifting from self-focused goals to service or quality-driven objectives. Younger academics often emphasized systemic improvement and social impact, while older participants adopted more pragmatic views, balancing academic responsibilities with future career plans. Female generally reported combining personal development with educational impact, whereas male more frequently highlighted professional autonomy and research productivity. Overall, these findings affirm the complexity of academic career motivations and highlight the value of the reinterpreted FIT-Choice framework for understanding how intrinsic, extrinsic, and demographic factors intersect to shape long-term engagement in higher education.

Keywords: Academic Career Motivation, Faculty of Education, Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations, Fit-Choice scale

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Introduction

The motivation to pursue an academic career could stem from a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Intrinsic motivations, such as intellectual curiosity, a passion for learning, and the satisfaction derived from contributing to knowledge, play a significant role in driving individuals toward research (Friesenhahn & Beaudry, 2014; Ommering et al., 2019). Extrinsic factors, including career advancement, financial incentives, and recognition, also influence this choice, as individuals often pursue research to enhance job opportunities or achieve promotions (Van der Weijden et al., 2016; Lapin & Balezina, 2021). Additionally, encouragement from mentors, lecturers, or peers can inspire individuals to take up research by providing guidance and support (Guerin et al., 2015). Furthermore, an academic environment that promotes collaboration and provides necessary resources significantly contributes to sustaining research interest (Waite & Davis, 2006). Thus, becoming a researcher is often the result of a dynamic interplay between personal interests, professional goals, and external influences. However, this motivation for pursuing an academic career is faced with various challenges.

At battle with these motivators academics worldwide also face hardships while balancing research productivity, teaching duties, and societal contributions, as highlighted by Roach and Sauermann (2017). In addition, job insecurity and a competitive funding landscape (Christian et al., 2021; Signoret et al., 2018) adds additional challenges, which Reithmeier et al. (2019) describe as transforming academia into a risky career path. The increasing expectations for high performance and the necessity for funding lead to heightened stress levels among faculty members (Rowley & Sbaffi, 2021; Naidoo-Chetty & Plessis, 2021). Moreover, pressures faced by academics, particularly women, are compounded by societal expectations and family obligations, which can hinder career progression (Mason et al., 2013; Morley, 2014; Rowley & Sbaffi, 2021; Sum, 2021). Thus, the academic landscape creates a dynamic picture where motivations are not only affected by changes happening over time but also challenges that these changes bring. (Kwiek, 2015; Morley, 2014; Julien et al., 2014).

A reflection of these worldwide motivations and challenges can also be observed in the Turkish academic context. According to Alparslan et al. (2021) and Balcı et al. (2019), academics are motivated through various factors such as usefulness (including teaching and benefiting humanity), passion (encompassing job satisfaction and self-realization), growth and learning (including personal development and curiosity), meaning of life, scientific contribution, earning money, respectability (including career advancement and professional freedom), sense of duty, well-being, and patriotism. The motivation stemming from passion and growth is also supported by Demir (2016). On the other hand, reported academic challenges include insufficient funding, insufficient academic staff, lack of an adequate support, unclear missions, and limited institutional autonomy, which hinder openness to new practices and growth (Abbas & Zalta, 2022; Akyol & Tanrısevdi, 2018; Balyer & Özvural, 2021; Burak, 2024; Deniz, 2024; Fındıklı, 2020; Kaya et al., 2023). The Turkish higher education system struggles with faculty shortages, globalization pressures, and inadequate infrastructure, further exacerbated by political instability and security concerns (Akar, 2010; Burak, 2024; Gokturk et al., 2018). Language barriers, both for Turkish also add to the reported and perceived difficulties (Tutar, 2023). On the other hand, researchers working on sensitive topics are reported to have encountered censorship and trust-building issues (Karasu & Uluğ, 2020), resulting in efforts to internationalize being hindered by negative perceptions and political challenges (Gokturk et al., 2018).

A Framework for Exploring the Motivation of Becoming Teachers and Researchers

Having examined the various motivations and challenges academics face, it becomes clear that research within teacher education offers a valuable perspective for understanding why individuals choose and remain in academic careers. The field of teaching motivation, which examines the factors influencing individuals to enter the teaching profession, can serve as a microcosm of broader academic motivations. By exploring how and why people are drawn to teaching, emphasizing both personal passion and social responsibility, we gain insight into the deeper drivers that also underlie academics' commitments to higher education. This next section reviews key findings on teaching motivation, focusing on established research frameworks and empirical evidence that illuminate these motivational processes.

Teaching motivation has emerged as a significant area of study, with research examining the diverse reasons individuals choose the teaching profession. These motivations can be broadly categorized into intrinsic, altruistic, and extrinsic factors, with extensive literature supporting the predominance of intrinsic and altruistic drivers. Research consistently shows that intrinsic motivations, including personal passion for teaching, intellectual stimulation, and the joy of working with students, serve as primary drivers for entering the profession. This finding is supported by multiple studies, including Kwok et al. (2022) and the quantitative research conducted by Yıldırım et al. (2021), which found higher intrinsic motivation levels among teacher candidates compared to extrinsic factors. Altruistic motivations also play a crucial role, as demonstrated by Simonsz et al. (2022) and further reinforced by Suryani et al.'s (2016) comprehensive study of 802 teacher education students. Their research, utilizing the FIT-Choice scale, identified social utility values and prior teaching experiences as significant motivational factors, alongside intrinsic career value and religious influences. While extrinsic factors such as job stability and convenient work hours are present in the motivational framework, studies consistently show they are less influential than intrinsic and altruistic factors. This pattern is observed across research over time, from Sinclair's (2008) findings to Mariscal and Delgado's (2016), Hartl and Holzberger's (2022), and Bönke et al.'s (2024) studies of student teachers' and in service teachers' motivational changes over time.

To enhance the ability to measure teachers' motivations, the field on teaching motivation has benefited from various measurement tools, including the FIT-Choice scale (Richardson & Watt, 2007), Teaching Motivation Scale (TMS) (Kauffman et al., 2011), and Motivational Orientations to Teach Survey (MOT-S) (Sinclair et al., 2006. Specifically, the FIT-Choice (Factors Influencing Teaching Choice) framework, originally developed by Watt and Richardson (2007), strives to understand the motivations underlying career decisions. Grounded in expectancy-value theory (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002), the FIT-Choice framework provides a structured approach to exploring career motivations through multiple dimensions, categorized into intrinsic, extrinsic, and altruistic values, along with perceptions of task demands, task returns, and fallback career options. The framework's primary constructs are as follows (Watt & Richardson, 2012, pp 792-794):

Intrinsic Motivations: Intrinsic motivations refer to personal satisfaction and enjoyment derived from the chosen profession. For teaching, this often includes a passion for imparting knowledge, intellectual engagement, and a genuine love for the profession. Intrinsic motivations are central to long-term engagement and professional identity.

Social Utility Value: This dimension captures altruistic motivations, emphasizing the desire to contribute to society by helping others or fostering community development. For educators, this may involve making a positive impact on students' lives or improving societal well-being through education.

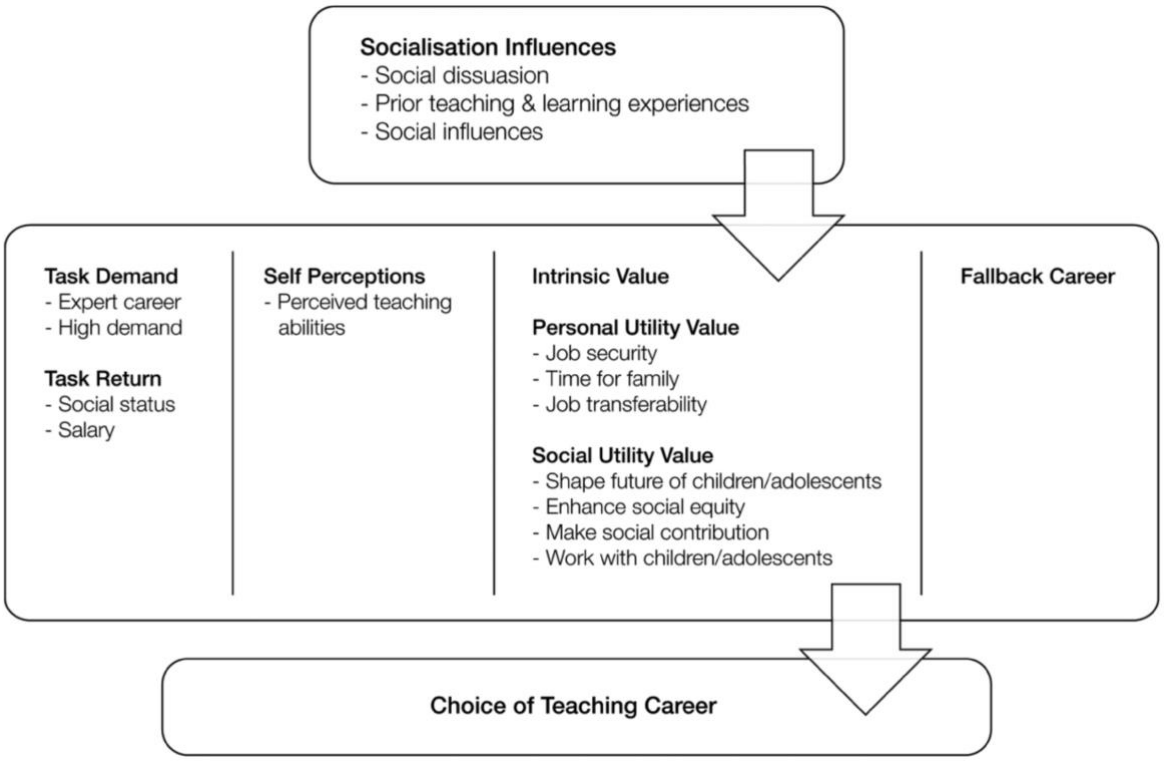
Personal Utility Value: Personal utility motivations focus on pragmatic factors such as job security, financial rewards, and work-life balance. These considerations often influence career satisfaction and decisions, particularly in professions with varying levels of economic stability and institutional support.

Task Perceptions: Task perceptions include individuals' views on the task demands (e.g., workload, responsibility) and task rewards (e.g., prestige, professional fulfilment) associated with their profession. Positive task perceptions are crucial for sustaining motivation and managing professional challenges.

Fallback Career Perceptions: The fallback career dimension recognizes that some individuals may view their profession as a secondary or default choice. While not always central, understanding fallback career perceptions helps explain differences in career commitment and satisfaction.

Figure 1

FIT-Choice Empirically Validated Theoretical Model.



Note. Retrieved from *An introduction to teaching motivations in different countries: Comparisons using the FIT-Choice scale*, by Watt and Richardson (2012), Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education, 40(3), p. 187. Copyright 2008 by Helen Watt & Paul Richardson.

The FIT-Choice framework has been validated in diverse contexts, providing a comprehensive and flexible tool for examining career motivations. As can be seen in the Figure 1, its emphasis on multidimensional motivations makes it particularly relevant for studying complex career paths. In the

literature, it has identified intrinsic motivations, such as a passion for teaching, interest in the subject, and self-perceived teaching ability, as significant drivers for individuals pursuing this profession (Watt & Richardson, 2007). Social utility values, including the desire to make a social contribution, shape the future of children, and improve society, are also highlighted as important factors across diverse cultural contexts (Nesje et al., 2018). Although extrinsic motivations like job security and work-life balance are included, they tend to be rated lower compared to intrinsic and altruistic motivations (Fokkens-Bruinsma & Canrinus, 2012). The scale has also been used for various cultural contexts, revealing unique motivations such as religious influences, moral values in regions, and effects of economy (Kılınç et al., 2013; Roudi, 2021; Suryani et al., 2016). Overall, the FIT-Choice scale offers valuable insights into the multidimensional factors driving individuals to pursue teaching, making it a useful tool for recruitment and education policy development.

Motivation for the Study

While global research has made efforts in exploring academic career motivations, studies often overlook the specific experiences of academics within distinct institutional and cultural contexts. In Türkiye, where higher education reforms and cultural norms shape career trajectories (Deniz, 2022; Özkan, 2024), there is a lack of empirical research that systematically investigates what drives individuals to pursue and sustain careers in academia, particularly within faculties of education.

Frameworks such as the FIT-Choice model have been effective in exploring career motivations in teaching but have seldom been adapted for the academic profession. The FIT-Choice framework's focus on intrinsic, extrinsic, and altruistic motivations provides a robust starting point for understanding career drivers (Watt & Richardson, 2007) which has the potential shed light into academic career motivations. However, academic careers differ from teaching roles, as they involve balancing three-fold responsibilities: research, teaching, and civil service (Akyol & Tanrısevdi, 2018), while also accounting for the evolving nature of career motivations.

As mentioned earlier, motivations for pursuing an academic career are dynamic, shaped by institutional policies, career milestones, and personal circumstances. This is especially true in Türkiye, where cultural factors such as family expectations, societal gender associations of professions, family imposed regional constraints for a job market; and economic factors such as likelihood of employment after graduations, families socioeconomic status having an effect on available options, and saturation of graduates in the job market further influences career decisions (Atlı and Canpolat, 2023; Tatlı et al., 2021; Pekkaya, 2013; Özen, 2016). Additionally, other demographic factors also have an influence as according to Akbaş et al. (2019) gender creates distinct experiences where women often face societal expectations that complicate work-life balance, while younger academics encounter challenges related to job security and career advancement (Morley, 2014). Considering their effects on career choice and motivation, these factors show a potential to be significant in motivations for pursuing an academic career, yet the literature in the Turkish context appears to be not saturated enough. Additionally, as Han and Yin (2016) note, there remains a need for more qualitative research to provide deeper insights into teaching motivations, as most existing studies have relied on quantitative methodologies.

In light of these, this study addresses these gaps by adapting the FIT-Choice framework to capture the complexities of academic career motivations within a Faculty of Education in Türkiye. Through open-ended questionnaire items and interviews, the study examines not only the primary drivers behind

academic career choices but also how these motivations evolve over time and differ across demographic groups. The findings aim to inform institutional policies and strategies that enhance academic satisfaction and retention in Türkiye's higher education system. Furthermore, gaining a deeper understanding of Education Faculty academics' career motivations is of importance since these academics have direct effects on teacher education quality, the training of future teachers; hence, indirect effects on the overall educational system. To these ends, the following research questions shape the current study:

RQ1. What factors influence the academics in the Faculty of Education decision to pursue an academic career at higher education institutions?

1.a. What were their primary motivations behind their decisions to pursue an academic career?

1.b. How, if so, have their motivations evolved throughout their academic careers, and what factors contributed to these changes?

RQ2: How do career motivations of academics in the Faculty of Education differ based on gender and age?

Methodology

Research Design

To find answers to the research questions above and explore the career motivations of academics in the Faculty of Education at a state university in Türkiye, this study adopted a qualitative case study design. The case study approach was adopted as it allows for an in-depth investigation of a situation (Creswell, 2014) and is specifically appropriate for revealing the "how" and "why" of a certain case, in this study, the academics' career motivations. Various researchers have defined case study in a similar vein. For instance, Creswell (2014) described it as an in-depth analysis of a situation. Similarly, Given (2008) defined case study as an approach that studies situation(s) in depth, emphasizing that defining case study with a single definition is both difficult and unnecessary. Furthermore, Tight (2010, p. 337) defines case study as "the detailed examination of a small sample" from a certain stance. Case study research design both emphasizes the specific characteristics of relationships and social contexts in particular settings and explains why those things happen (Denscombe, 2014). Additionally, Denscombe (2014) indicates that the true value of a case study lies in its ability to explore complexities in depth and provide detailed insights into a situation. The current study addressed both initial and evolved career motivations of academics to pursue their academic career in higher education institutions, and how these motivations vary between gender and age. Case study research design is especially effective for exploring the individual experiences and decision-making processes and they provide rich and contextual data.

The current study adopted a qualitative case study design as it is the best fit to explore how and why academic in the Faculty of Education made and maintained their career choices. Case study design was particularly suitable for various reasons. Firstly, the research questions aim to explore the individual motivations to choose academic careers within a defined context (a Faculty of Education at a Turkish State University), requiring an in-depth data collection and focusing on understanding "how" and "why". Secondly, the case being studied is embedded in real-life contexts since academics' career motivations are shaped by personal experiences, educational background, institutional settings, cultural

norms, educational policies. Furthermore, focusing on a single Faculty of Education as a bounded unit of analysis allowed for a detailed exploration of how different factors contribute to academic career motivations.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection instruments included both an open-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The development of these data collection instruments involved a systematic approach. The open-ended questionnaire and interview questions were based on already established scales in the literature. Particularly, the FIT-Choice Scale (Richardson & Watt, 2007) aiming to explore the factors influencing teaching choice and the Occupational Motivation Scale for Academicians (Çarıkçı & Zeynel, 2017) which sought to measure the perception of occupational motivation of academics. These scales were adapted to tackle the academic career motivations in the context of Faculty of Education. Prior to adaptation of these scales, the necessary permissions and suggestions were taken from the researchers via email. Following the scale permissions, the data collection instruments were drafted initially to be reviewed by other experts in the field of educational sciences. With the help of the expert opinions, the questionnaire and the interview questions were refined to ensure credibility. Lastly, the instruments were piloted with five participants who are similar to the original participant group of the study to oversee the parts that needed improvements. Both instruments were employed in Turkish so that the participants could express themselves thoroughly and naturally. The open-ended questionnaire was administered online using Google Forms and the semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face. The questionnaire was distributed to all eligible faculty members. Despite the initial distribution to a larger pool of potential participants, the response rate was low. Following the questionnaire, semi-structured interviews were conducted with three participants to gain a deeper understanding of themes emerging from the questionnaire data.

Participants and Setting

The current study was conducted in the Faculty of Education of a state university in Türkiye. The campus of the Education Faculty is located in a remote and rural district of the city. The campus' location exhibits exceptional conditions that may affect the career motivations and academic experiences of academics who work at the institution. Compared to the urban campuses, the rural campus has fewer opportunities for networking, professional development, and socializing which may have negative effects on the career motivations of academics in the campus. Thus, the academics working at rural campuses may experience discrete challenges and opportunities that will build a more different academic career journey than those in urban institutions. The remote rural location of the campus performs as an important contextual factor which may affect the academics' career motivations; therefore, the current study was conducted in a rural campus. Examples can be seen in the literature on job satisfaction and motivation. For example, Yasin et al. (2019) reviewed the literature systematically to reveal the factors related to job satisfaction of nurses in both rural and urban settings, emphasizing the work environment as an influencing factor. Additionally, Yasin et al. (2019) indicated that both intrinsic and extrinsic factors affected the job satisfaction of nurses, suggesting that urban and rural contexts should be further investigated with further research. In another study, Duraku et al. (2022) investigated the effects of individual and organizational factors on work motivation levels, job satisfaction, and burnout levels of early childhood teachers using several scales. Duraku et al. (2022)

reported the most important factor influencing job satisfaction, burnout, and work motivation at various levels emerged as professional development.

In order to recruit participants who might offer detailed data on their career motivations, criterion sampling was used which is a purposeful strategy used in research to select participants who disclose specific and predetermined traits that align with the purpose of the study. As outlined by Patton (2014), this sampling method identifies participants likely to provide detailed and meaningful data relevant to the research focus, making it a strong method for improving systems and assuring quality. Similarly, Denscombe (2014) differentiates criterion sampling with random sampling methods, highlighting that criterion sampling involves a deliberate and informed choice of cases based on the characteristics that align with the research aims. The criterion sampling method's strength lies in the selection of participants who meet the criteria, enabling researchers to address the specific research questions. This type of sampling is specifically suitable for case studies and qualitative research designs where depth and quality outweigh the generalizability.

The main inclusion criteria, in the current study, were holding a PhD degree and being actively employed as an academic at the remote campus of the Education Faculty at the selected state university. Thirteen academics from various departments in the Faculty of Education were included in the study. Among them, male participants (n=9) outnumbered the female participants (n=4). The participants' academic ranks comprised Assistant Professors (n=6), Associate Professors (n=5), and Professors (n=2). Age-wise, most participants (n=8) were in the 41-50 age range followed by 30-40 age group (n=4), and one participant aged over 51. The participants came from six departments including Educational Sciences, Foreign Language Education, Mathematics and Science Education, Primary Education, Social Science and Turkish Language Education, and Special Education. Table 1 summarizes the demographics of the participants.

Table 1

Demographic Information of the Participants

Variables	**Category**	**n**
Gender	Female	4
	Male	9
Age	30-40	4
	41-50	8
	51+	1
Academic Title	Professor	2
	Associate Professor	5
	Assistant Professor	6
Department	Educational Sciences	2
	Foreign Language Education	3
	Mathematics and Science Education	2
	Basic Education	2
	Social Science and Turkish Language Education	2
	Special Education	2

Data Analysis Procedures

To systematically analyze the data gathered from the open-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, the researcher employed inductive content analysis. Content analysis is a way of drawing meaning from the data through identifying similar patterns and categorizing them into conceptual themes. Various researchers defined content analysis with their own words. As a broad definition, Fraenkel et al. (2023, p. 432) explained content analysis as a facilitator for studying human behaviour indirectly by analysing their conversations and expressions, emphasizing that any content, not necessarily written content, could be analyzed and added that beliefs, values, and ideas usually emerge in their communications and expressions. Given (2008, p. 120) provided a more precise definition and indicated that content analysis is the systematic process of organizing qualitative written data into "cluster of similar entities, or conceptual categories, to identify consistent patterns and relationships between variables or themes". Furthermore, Schreier (2014) described qualitative content analysis as the reduction of data and focus on the specific aspects of meaning which are relevant to the research questions. As for inductive content analysis, Mackey and Gass (2022) indicated that the codes emerge from the raw data without predetermined themes and codes, highlighting that the emergence of codes and themes depends on the recursive examination and interpretation of raw data considering the research purposes and the induction of themes from the data. Given these definitions, the data analysis procedure followed a systematic process of reading, re-reading, coding, categorization, and theme development. Beginning the data analysis process started with thorough reading and re-reading of the data, which includes questionnaire responses and interview transcripts. Followed by the coding phase, the researcher divided the data into smaller meaningful segments, each representing an initial code. This step complies with Given's (2008) definition of content analysis as a rigorous intellectual process that organizes related data into cohesive groups. After the coding process, the researcher categorized the emerged codes into broader groups that encapsulated the common patterns within the data. The last phase consisted of developing themes in which the researcher synthesized the categorized data into comprehensive themes, tackling the research questions that aim to uncover the career motivations of academics and their evolution. These steps were iterative, meaning that the researcher went back and forth between the analysis steps continuously refining and reorganizing the codes and themes. To triangulate the data and increase the credibility of the findings, the researchers made use of two different types of data collection instruments allowing for cross-checking. Furthermore, the researcher consulted experienced researchers in the coding and theme development phase and got help from another researcher for inter-coder reliability. The inter-coding process involved two researchers independently coding the data, comparing and discussing the two sets of codes to reach a consensus and increase the credibility of the findings. To ensure transferability, the researcher provided detailed description of the research setting, participant characteristics and quotations from the data. The process of analysis included a documentation of raw data sets, expert opinion forms, codes, and themes to ensure dependability. Moreover, the researcher took reflective notes in the analysis process to avoid researcher bias.

The study had several limitations in terms of methodology that should be taken into account. Although the low response rate and the small sample size (N=13) enabled an in-depth examination of academics' career motivations, it may pose as a limitation to the study and its findings in terms of generalisability. Another limitation can be pointed as the imbalance between the male and female academics, leading to underrepresentation of female academics and affecting the results on gender-specific motivations.

Findings

Academics' Career Choice Motivations

To have an understanding of the participant group's motivation types in choosing academia as a career, the researchers benefited from the data gathered from open-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. Firstly, the analysis of the open-ended questionnaire has been used to explore the underlying motivations of academics' career choice. The results of motivation could be put in two categories: intrinsic & altruistic, and extrinsic. Table 2 displays these categories and what motivates each one.

Looking at the first category, we see several personal reasons that drive people. The first involves growing one's abilities and skills through self development. Another set of reasons centers on service, which includes four main areas where people aim to help: society, scientific knowledge and doctrine, cultural practices, and their nation. This organization lets us see the various ways individuals work toward positive outcomes. Many people also show ongoing dedication to learning new things throughout their whole life. The findings also point to people wanting to become better teachers. The last item in this group, "Being Favorable," shows how people aim to stay helpful and positive in their approach.

The extrinsic category shows clear, concrete rewards that drive people. Salary ranks as a primary reason, as people need to support themselves and their lives. Academic roles and titles matter too, showing how people want to move up in their work settings. The social standing that comes with working as a teacher also pulls people to this career path - they see value in having others view their work positively.

Table 2.

Motivation Types of Academics' Career Choices

Intrinsic & Altruistic	**Extrinsic**
Self-development	Salary
Service to	Academic Title/Position
a. Society	
b. Science and doctrine	
c. Culture	
d. Nation	
Life-long Learning	Respectable Profession
Being a good teacher educator	
Being Favourable	
Personal satisfaction	

In addition to the types of motivation, the analysis of data retrieved from the open-ended questionnaire has also provided insight into the initial motivations and factors affecting the career choice of Education Faculty academics. The initial motivations of Education Faculty academics to start an academic career are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Factors Affecting Academics' Initial Career Choice in Education Faculty

Codes	Participants
Personal Interest	3, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12
Service	1, 2, 4, 7, 12
Main Goal	3, 4, 6, 9
Self-development	1, 2, 4, 10
Being a good teacher educator	1, 2
Role Model	8, 12
Previous Education	5, 13
Respectable Profession	6, 10
Education Inequality	2
Productivity	6
No obvious factor	3
Academic Autonomy	8

As portrayed in Table 3, most academics (n=7) were motivated to choose academic career with a personal interest. The ones who are motivated to choose academic career as a profession with personal interests are all males and have different academic titles. It is evident in the analysis of the questionnaire data that three male and one female academics mentioned that pursuing an academic career had always been their main goal. Additionally, having self-development in its nature were also mentioned as a motivator. Other participants mentioned serving the society, science, culture, and contributing to the field. For example, in the conducted interview, Participant 2 (Female, 31) exhibited a purposeful entry into academia, driven by a clear social mission. Her decision crystallized during her undergraduate years when she observed educational inequalities across institutions:

> "When I saw a Farabi exchange student with a very low profile but high GPA, I realized things weren't going very idealistically everywhere... That's when I decided I should be in the faculty of education to influence future teacher candidates."

Some of the participants indicated that being a good teacher educator and being favourable motivated them. Lastly, two of the participants mentioned role models as being a motivator for pursuing an academic career.

> "During my undergraduate studies, the guidance of someone I knew and took as a role model, along with my own desire, played a role." (P8, Male)

> "I decided on this because I believed I could contribute to the scientific world, guided by the role models of the academic professors I looked up to." (P12, Male)

Participant 1 (Female, 32), on an additional note, demonstrated an evolving path into academia, initially lacking specific academic career goals. Her narrative retrieved from the interview data emphasizes the gradual development of academic interest:

> "Actually, I didn't have any special motivation to become an academic at first. I was sure I wanted to do a master's degree... I decided after getting into the work a bit." Her motivation

> developed through direct experience with the academic environment, particularly drawn to the continuous learning aspect: "It's an endless learning process, I really enjoy it."

Participant 3 (Male, 45), on the other hand, presents a distinct approach, describing his entry into academia as driven by individual professional interest rather than social contribution and his motivation stems from intellectual satisfaction and professional development:

> "I have no such thing as contributing to society or doing it for God's sake. I do my job professionally."

> "I work professionally and try to do my job well... I receive both monetary compensation and other titles as physical returns for what I do."

Additionally, the participants' responses in the interviews point different patterns in how their motivations evolved over their academic careers. Participant 1's motivations expanded to encompass broader educational impact. She developed a strong sense of purpose in training future teachers:

> "I think training future teachers is a very sacred duty. When you consider that we have 30-40 graduates each year who spread across Turkey, maybe the world... indirectly touching many students over 20-25, maybe 30 years of teaching. That's very rewarding and motivating for me."

Participant 2 demonstrates remarkable consistency in her core motivation. While she acknowledges additional satisfaction from personal growth, these remain secondary to her primary mission.

> "Even now after finishing my doctorate, there's still no change. I'm still going the same way. My motivation and purpose are still to contribute to teacher candidates and ensure they become good teachers wherever they go."

> Participant 3's motivational evolution was significantly influenced by his experience abroad and his perspective evolved toward valuing quality over quantity in academic output

> "My advisor was very influential... I saw academic ethics there. I really saw how this work should be done."

> "My goal now is to produce one or two publications a year that really contribute to the field, that people will actually read and say 'this is good work.'"

Academics' Career Choice Motivations and Demographic Factors

Analysis of age, gender, and work level shows several clear patterns in why people choose academic careers. Age stands out as a determining element. Faculty aged 30 to 40 want to grow their skills and make education better, no matter their gender. These junior faculty members, typically in Assistant Professor roles, wish to advance their capabilities alongside their work duties. Academic staff aged 41 to 50 present alternative patterns, concentrating on research activities and professional independence. This variation demonstrates how career duration affects professional choices.

Gender also plays a determining role in motivations. Male participants, constituting 9 out of 13 individuals in our study, primarily concentrate on research activities and professional independence. This pattern appears most prominently among male academic staff with extended careers, who

concentrate on academic achievement and research output. Female participants also value professional advancement but present an alternative pattern. They unite personal advancement with improving educational standards, particularly in teacher preparation. This indicates that while both genders seek professional success, they pursue different paths.

Academic rank further influences these motivational patterns, often intersecting with age and gender. Assistant Professors, particularly those in their early career stages, tend to focus more on self-development and educational impact, regardless of gender. As faculty progress to Associate Professor and Professor ranks, we observe a shift toward research-focused motivations and professional autonomy, particularly among male faculty members. This progression suggests that academic rank works in concert with age and gender to shape motivational patterns in complex ways. These findings indicate that demographic factors significantly influence academic career motivations, with each factor contributing uniquely to how faculty members conceptualize and pursue their academic careers. The interplay between these factors suggests that understanding academic career motivations requires consideration of multiple demographic dimensions simultaneously.

The analysis of the interview data also reveals further insight into the differences in how male and female participants frame their academic motivations Participant 1 (Female, 32) demonstrates an evolutive journey into academia that began without predetermined academic aspirations. Her initial motivation centered on pursuing advanced education and the transition from teaching to academia emerged through direct experience with university teaching, where she discovered personal fulfilment. Additionally, while acknowledging the influence of academic role models her path was shaped more by experiential learning and growing appreciation for academic work's nature.

> "Actually, I didn't have any special motivation to become an academic at first. I was sure I wanted to do a master's degree... I decided after getting into the work a bit."
>
> "Working at the university made me very happy. Being with adult individuals, seeing their development really affected me."
>
> "It's an endless learning process, I really enjoy it."

Participant 2 (Female, 31) exhibits a more mission-driven path to academia, sparked by critical observations during her undergraduate studies. Her motivation emerged from recognizing systemic issues in teacher education. Unlike P1's gradual evolution, P2's decision was catalysed by a specific realization about educational inequalities. Her initial teaching career goal transformed into a broader educational mission, influenced by exposure to idealistic professors

> "When I saw a Farabi exchange student with a very low profile but high GPA, I realized things weren't going very idealistically everywhere... That's when I decided I should be in the faculty of education."
>
> "They had good command of knowledge in their field and were very good at conveying it to students, and they were very idealistic. Their idealistic attitude actually influenced me."

Participant 3 (Male, 45) presents a distinctly autonomous and internally driven path to academia. Unlike his female colleagues, he describes a consistent, long-standing inclination toward academic work. His commitment remained steadfast despite alternative opportunities. He explicitly distances his decision-making from external influences. P3's motivational narrative emphasizes professional identity and personal standards over social impact or systemic change.

> "Even during military service, it was still in my mind... I even rejected alternative plans because of this academic career plan."
>
> "Throughout my life, no professor ever made me their prince or princess, neither in undergraduate, doctorate, nor master's. It was entirely through my own efforts."
>
> "From the first year of university, I had this logic in my mind... It was entirely individual motivation. There wasn't even a role model."
>
> "I work professionally and try to do my job well... I receive both monetary compensation and other titles as physical returns for what I do."

When further examined, it is evident based on the data that younger participants (31 and 32) express more idealistic motivations, focusing on systemic change and social impact. P2 particularly emphasizes her desire to address systemic inequalities in education quality across institutions.

The older participant (45) demonstrates a more pragmatic approach to academic work. He reflects on career sustainability and potential future changes. His perspective includes consideration of post-academic career possibilities and a more measured view of academic impact.

> "When I reach that point of satisfaction... I'll close this chapter and may plan a second career. I go by my own measures, my own scale."

Discussion

These findings shed light on how different elements of the reinterpreted FIT-Choice framework, involving intrinsic motivations, social utility value, personal utility value, task perceptions, and fallback career perceptions, shape academics' decisions to work in education faculties. The results show that motivations are diverse, fluid, and influenced by factors like age, gender, and academic rank, suggesting that individual motivations do not function on their own but in harmony with changing career stages, institutional settings, and personal goals.

Many participants expressed a strong sense of intrinsic motivation, often tied to personal growth and continuous learning. They described how the academic environment initiated or sustained their interest in research and teaching. For some, the satisfaction of preparing future educators was just as important as intellectual curiosity. These findings align with Alparslan et al. (2021), Balcı et al. (2019) and Demir (2016) which report self-growth, self-realization, personal development, and curiosity as motivational drives for academia. Additionally, in international context, Friesenhahn and Beaudry's (2014) and Ommering et al.'s (2019) studies support the findings on intrinsic motivations by mentioning curiosity, passion. Lastly, Guerin et al. (2015) and Waite and Davis (2006) highlight the effects of being situated in an academic environment in shaping intrinsic motivation.

At the same time, social utility value played a major role as altruistic motivation, especially among participants who aimed to fix problems they saw in the education system. They viewed academia as a way to address inequality or improve teacher preparation, reflecting the idea that academic work can serve the public good. Younger academics showed a particular commitment to this idea, seeing themselves as agents of change in education. Motivation driven by contributing to the nation as servant for public can be observed in the literature as well with sense of duty and serving for a greater good being recognised as factors (Alparslan et al., 2021; Balcı et al., 2019; Demir, 2016).

Personal utility value—including financial security, professional titles, and academic autonomy—also surfaced. Some participants saw a stable income and the prestige of a university position as key reasons for pursuing an academic career. They spoke about tenure and advancement opportunities, highlighting how external rewards reinforce their broader goals. While these motives did not always overshadow intrinsic or altruistic motivations, they added another layer of practicality to the decision-making process which are also reflected in the literature. Monetary gain, having a prestigious job, freedom in research are some factors that arose in the works of Alparslan et al. (2021), Balcı et al. (2019), and Demir, (2016) in national context and in Van der Weijden et al. (2016), Lapin and Balezina (2021), and Waite & Davis (2009) in international context.

Findings also highlight how academics' task perceptions are shaped by both task demands, such as the need to publish, secure grants, and fulfill teaching and administrative duties, and task returns, including recognition, career stability, and professional autonomy. Participants described the challenge of balancing heavy research expectations with high-quality teaching, along with institutional service obligations often required in faculties of education yet many participants found the returns rewarding. Satisfaction arose from seeing research inform practice, impacting teacher preparation, and earning respect from peers and students. Achievements like tenure and promotion, along with the intellectual freedom to pursue one's interests, further reinforced their commitment. Literature provides some support for the interaction of task returns and task demands. Richter et al. (2021) mentions that supporting teacher educators results in higher satisfaction in their work, potentially contributing to the resilience to the task demands.

Fallback career perceptions did not frequently appear in the data, but a few participants noted less direct paths into academia. Some discovered their interest in research or teaching only after pursuing graduate degrees. Others had planned an academic career from the start. These diverse experiences show that for some, academia was a natural choice, while for others, it was an option that grew on them over time.

Age and gender cut across these themes. Younger participants often stressed social goals and ideals, while older participants seemed more aware of pragmatic considerations, including balancing their research with other life plans. Women tended to combine personal development with a focus on improving education, whereas men more often cited professional autonomy and research output as key factors, especially in later career stages. Svartefoss et al. (2024) reports that women in research consider practical application and career advancement as a better motivator, which also aligns with Zeng's (2024) study where female researchers take on additional research tasks such as peer-reviewing since they consider it to be beneficial for career advancement and recognition. Moreover, Chen and Zao (2013) report that women faculty has higher motivations resulted from intrinsic rewards such as recognition, respect, satisfying curiosity. Svartefoss et al. (2024) also report that with lower ages, career progress has a higher effect on motivation.

On the topics of job satisfaction, motivation, burnout, well-being, and overall life quality, the literature shows that there are several studies on their intertwined relationships of in various contexts (Ahmed, 2011; Atmaca et al., 2020; Bowling et al., 2011; Cvjetkovic, 2022; Duraku et al., 2022; Melek et al., 2007; Örücü & Çolak, 2002; Öztürk, 2015; Van Scheers & Bota, 2014; Yıldız & Kılıç, 2021; Yuh & Choi, 2019). First of all, it is evident in the literature that working motivation and job satisfaction are highly related to each other both in the international and national contexts (Duraku et al., 2022; Van Scheers & Botha, 2014; Yıldız & Kılıç, 2021). In their study of the business sector, Van Scheers and Botha (2014) revealed a strong relationship between job satisfaction and motivation, suggesting that

increased working motivation levels may have positive effects on job satisfaction. Therefore, the relationship between working motivation and job satisfaction may indicate that the increase in these factors may improve the performance and the well-being of employees. Similar results can be seen in the educational settings. In their study, Yıldız and Kılıç (2021) reported the significant relationship between job satisfaction and motivation among teachers in Türkiye, with personal regulation and intrinsic motivation as key influencing factors. Another study in the Turkish context, Melek et al. (2007) examined the job satisfaction of academics in Türkiye and identified key influencing factors of job satisfaction as work environment and culture, and academic workload. Additionally, Cvjetkovic (2022) confirmed that there are several factors affecting job satisfaction such as effective communication with colleagues and organizational culture indicating that there is a strong interrelation between motivation, job satisfaction, and job performance in her study. The relationship between job satisfaction, motivation, and job performance helps us gain a better understanding of the study's findings regarding academics' career choice and changing motivations. On the other hand, the literature on job satisfaction levels of employees working at rural locations reveals a different perspective in accordance with the focus of the current study (Huysman, 2007; Iwu et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2022; Yasin et al., 2019). Particularly, Wang et al., (2022) sought to discover the factors affecting teacher job satisfaction in a rural location in China and reported that workload, social resources and support, community literacy in rural locations were highly related to teaching satisfaction. Consequently, the results of the current study show that motivation is an evolving construct and highly intertwined with job satisfaction, well-being and overall life quality which reflects the importance of sustaining motivation in the workplace. It can be interpreted from the results of the study that although academics start their career with high level intrinsic (and altruistic) motivations and expectations, these may not be reciprocated in the later stages of career.

Conclusion

This study set out to explore the factors influencing academics' decisions to pursue and sustain careers in faculties of education (RQ1) and to examine how these motivations differ by age and gender (RQ2). Overall, the findings reveal a broad spectrum of motivations which are both intrinsic and altruistic (e.g., self-development, service to society, lifelong learning, becoming a good teacher educator) and extrinsic (e.g., salary, academic title, professional prestige) that initially draw individuals to academia. While some participants entered academia with a clear goal in mind, others discovered their passion only after engaging in teaching or research. Over time, many refined or expanded their motivations, for instance, shifting from self-oriented goals to stronger service or quality-focused aims.

Age and gender stood out as key aspects that shaped why people chose academic careers. Our younger study participants often talked about wanting their work to create positive changes in society. The older group showed a practical outlook, thinking about long term career paths and how to balance work with their future plans. Women in our study often combined their own learning with wanting to make education better overall. Men, mainly those in the middle or later parts of their careers, often talked about wanting freedom in their work and producing more research papers.

Taken together, these findings point to the complexity of academic career motivations and the interplay of personal, social, and institutional forces that guide them. They also highlight the relevance of the reinterpreted FIT-Choice framework for understanding the evolving nature of academic work, where research, teaching, and service converge. By acknowledging the diverse and dynamic motivations that

bring individuals into academia, along with the ways these motivations vary with age and gender, higher education institutions can more effectively support faculty members through policies, mentorship, and professional development opportunities that address both their personal aspirations and broader educational goals.

Implications & Suggestions

The study expanded our understanding of career choice motivations of academics by examining the initial career choice motivations, their motivation types (intrinsic, altruistic and extrinsic), and their evolved motivations in choosing academic career. The current study's findings may have several implications to be considered and utilized by policymakers, higher education institutions, and other fellow researchers to better support, to increase working motivation and productivity, and retain the academic staff. Firstly, the results illustrated that being a service to society and contributing to scientific literature is of importance to academics, which may indicate that more formal recognition and appreciation of academics' efforts in serving society, the institution, and contributing to science may have positive effects on their job satisfaction and motivations and support retention rates, particularly in rural locations. This kind of systematic appreciation can reinforce the intrinsic and altruistic motivators. Secondly, academics' having a three-fold job including research, teaching, and civil service may result in increased workload leading to burnout, lack of motivation, lack of job satisfaction, and increased turnover rates. Thus, creating a healthy working environment in higher education institutions may contribute to a dynamic workforce and productivity in terms of research, teaching, and paperwork, having positive effects on job satisfaction and motivation within the institution and the faculty. Lastly, assessing the motivations and satisfactions of faculty members can pave the way for guided regulations and additional support system developments in the working environment.

The current study focused on exploring the Faculty of Education academics' initial and evolved career motivations in a qualitative in-depth manner. However, there were several limitations to the study mentioned previously. These limitations may lead to new directions for future research ideas such as expanding the sample size with a more balanced distribution, replicating the study in different contexts, and conducting longitudinal studies to examine the motivational changes in pursuing academic career over time. Additionally, the findings of the current study emphasize the possible effects of remote campus location on the working experiences and career motivations of academics, which may offer new opportunities of research. Further research may be needed on comparison of the effects of rural and urban working locations on the employees' job satisfaction and motivation. Lastly, the current academicians should inform their students about academic career, its duties, and its advantages and disadvantages so that the students can be familiar with requirements of being an academician. This way, more qualified and motivated academics can be trained.

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