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# Teaching as a Career Choice: Triggers and Drivers

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# Teaching as a Career Choice: Triggers and Drivers

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*Abstract: Why people are drawn to teaching has been a focal research area. However, previous studies seem to centre on the traditional conceptualisations of intrinsic, altruistic, and extrinsic motivations as well as some other similar categorisations. This study attempts to discuss the issue from a different conceptual stance, proposing a distinction between the "triggers" and the "drivers". The influences on the motivation for joining teaching were explored through in-depth interviews with 26 student teachers. Results show that student teachers' motivations for joining teaching in Singapore may differ in important ways from that of their counterparts in other places. More importantly, the results highlighted differences between "triggers" and "drivers" as well as the inter-relatedness between them. Some practical implications are drawn for teacher education both within Singapore and internationally.*

**Keywords**: teaching as a career choice, triggers, drivers, student teachers, interviews, Singapore

## Introduction

Many previous studies have focused on the topic of why people are interested in joining the teaching profession (see Heinz, 2015). However, most existing literature on this topic adopts the traditional conceptualisations of intrinsic, altruistic and extrinsic motivations. They do not seem to separate the influencing factors that trigger one's interest in teaching from those that drive one into teaching – what we call the "triggers" and the "drivers". In this study, we argue that in many cases, the factors that attracted one in the first place may not be the same as that finally made him/her decide to go into teaching. Our study strives to explore and substantiate this argument by examining student teachers' motivations to choose teaching as a career in Singapore, with a special focus on the conceptual and practical distinctions between the triggering factors and the driving factors, as well as the relationships between them. Looking at teaching motivations from the perspective of triggers and drivers advances the existing literature on this topic. At the outset, we should acknowledge that it is not possible to totally distinguish the "triggers" from the "drivers", but as our findings suggest, they are not parallel concepts either. We believe that the conceptual differentiation between the two may deepen our

understanding of teaching motivations, and therefore help inform policies and practices on teacher recruitment and retention.

This paper will first introduce the Singapore context to illustrate its contextual uniqueness and its potential international relevance. Next, we review the major theoretical frameworks in earlier research on teaching motivations. We then move on to examine the major findings in extant literature (international followed by local) on the factors influencing teaching as a career choice. In light of the theoretical and empirical foundations laid by current literature, we propose a theoretical distinction between "triggers" and "drivers", and support it with qualitative evidence from the Singapore context. We conclude by summarising the implications and limitations of this research.

## The Singapore Context

Given its educational success in the major international benchmarking tests, Singapore's teacher policy has drawn the attention of many researchers and government officials (e.g. Darling-Hammond, Goodwin, & Low, in press; McKinsey & Company, 2007; OECD, 2014). One of their major interests is to examine how Singapore has recruited and maintained a high quality teaching force.

Singapore differs from some other countries where teachers are not well paid and have a low social status (Richardson & Watt, 2006). Teachers in Singapore are well remunerated financially and enjoy a relatively high status (Low, Lim, Ch'ng, and Goh, 2011). In addition, in many jurisdictions (e.g. Hong Kong, the United States) holding a degree or certificate in education is not a guarantee of a teaching position in the school and many of them seek career opportunities in other professions (Gu & Lai, 2012). Essentially, student teachers in some countries are just joining the teacher education programme, not entering the teaching profession per se. Learning in initial teacher education (ITE) programmes and obtaining paper credentials may just be promising more career choices, which might not lend them a job in teaching, as evidenced by the respondents in Gu and Lai's (2012) study. Hence, it can be argued that these candidates are not necessarily selecting teaching as a career.

To join teaching in Singapore, individuals need to apply to the Ministry of Education (MOE) and then will be interviewed before being officially enrolled in the ITE programmes at the National Institute of Education (NIE), the sole pre-service teacher education institute in Singapore. Successful candidates are fully sponsored by MOE for their tuition fees, drawing a monthly stipend while undergoing training, and will be posted to government or government-aided schools upon graduation (Low et al., 2011; MOE, 2015a). In other words, student teachers in NIE have been appointed by the MOE, with a guaranteed position in schools. On the other hand, they are bonded to serve in the teaching profession for a stipulated number of years (the length differs across different programmes). They are not allowed to seek jobs in other professions unless they are willing to pay back the tuition fees and the stipend (MOE, 2015b). Given these contextual differences, it is valuable to examine how Singapore student teachers are similar or different in their motivations of joining teaching, as compared to their counterparts in other jurisdictions.

## Taxonomies of Teaching Motivations

One of the widely cited model on teaching motivations is the tripartite framework (i.e. intrinsic, altruistic and extrinsic motivations) noted by Kyriacou and Coulthard (2000) and Moran, Kilpatrick, Abbot, Dallat, and McClune (2001). *Intrinsic* motives refer to internal satisfaction in the work of teaching (e.g. enjoy working with children, love of a particular subject, or love teaching in general). On the other hand, people join teaching for *altruistic* reasons see teaching as a socially worthwhile endeavour in contributing to the growth of the individual and the advancement of the society. *Extrinsic* factors can be rewards or other benefits related to teaching (e.g. compensations, social status and prestige, working conditions and environment, vacations, etc.). However, these three broad categories do not seem to be able to capture the intricate and interrelated influences on one's teaching choice.

Another taxonomy of teaching motivations is the *Factors Influencing Teaching Choice* (FIT-Choice) framework proposed by Richardson and Watt (2006) and Watt and Richardson (2007). The FIT-Choice framework is based on the expectancy-value theory (Eccles, et al., 1983; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Originally developed to explain gender differences in students' mathematics engagement and achievement, expectancy-value theory has been widely used to explain how expectancies for success and values directly and indirectly influence a range of task-related choices such as career choice, performance, effort, and persistence (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Expectancies for success refer to perceptions related to skills, characteristics and competencies (Eccles, 2009). Subjective task values refer to the "quality of the task that contributes to the increasing or decreasing probability that an individual will select it" (Eccles, 2005, p. 109). The components of subjective task value include 1) *interest value* (anticipated enjoyment of engaging in the task), 2) *attainment value* (the needs and personal values that a task fulfills), 3) *utility value* (the value of a task that is less personally central), and 4) *perceived cost* (the cost of participating in the task) (Eccles, 2009). Expectancies and values are influenced by individual's goals, general self-schema, affective reactions, and socialisation (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000; Eccles, 2005).

Based on the expectancy-value theory, the FIT-Choice framework includes four major components: *task perceptions* (e.g. task return), *self-perceptions* (e.g. perceived teaching ability), *values* (e.g. intrinsic career value), and *fallback career*, with socialisation influences (e.g. prior teaching and learning experiences) as the antecedents. *Task perceptions* and *self-perceptions* capture the expectancy component while *values* captures the value component of the expectancy-value model.

Although there are overlaps between the tripartite framework and the FIT-Choice framework, the latter appears to capture teaching motivations in a deeper and more comprehensive manner. Their overlaps are evident. For example, "intrinsic career value" and "social utility value" (e.g. social contribution) are similar to the intrinsic and altruistic motivations, while "personal utility value" (e.g. job security) and teaching as a "fallback career" (e.g. teaching is not the first choice) can be grouped under extrinsic motivations. However, the FIT-Choice framework has a number of advantages and strengths over the tripartite framework. First, with the adoption of expectancy-value model – one of the most influential motivation theories in education psychology, the FIT-Choice framework has stronger and more systematic explanatory power. This is evident in its fine-grained classifications of teaching motivations and the practical implications that can be drawn from these classifications (please refer to Watt and Richardson (2007) for a fuller discussion). Second, the FIT-Choice framework identified

additional important factors that were not previously focused on (e.g. ability beliefs). Third, it covers broader categories, and takes into account the influences of prior teaching and learning experiences and social influences or dissuasion on one's teaching choice.

Despite the strengths of the FIT-Choice framework, it has a few limitations. First, it failed to make a conceptual distinction between socialisation factors and other teaching motivations, although socialisation factors are categorised as "antecedents" of other factors. Both the dictionary definition[1] of antecedent and its use in the psychological literature (e.g. antecedents of career commitment) suggests the need of a conceptual distinction. However, the distinction is not elucidated in the FIT-Choice framework. Second, Watt and Richardson (2007) as well as later publications based on the FIT-Choice framework (see volume 40, issue 3, *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*) did not attempt to explain the inter-relatedness between socialisation factors and the other influencing factors. Contrary to what the FIT-Choice framework suggests, their data analysis regarded socialisation factors not as antecedents, but as parallel factors with the other influencing factors. This treatment may overlook important relationships among teaching motivations and teachers' career choice. Third, almost all studies that adopted this framework as the theoretical basis were quantitative.

The present study builds on and extends the FIT-Choice framework, with qualitative evidence from the Singapore context. We make a conceptual distinction between the socialisation factors (triggers) and the other factors (drivers) that are more proximal to teachers' career choice and considered to be the descendants of the socialisation factors. The next section reviews the major findings from research on teaching motivations, which are primarily based on the two theoretical models we have discussed in this section.

## Studies on Teaching as a Career Choice

Given that the above-mentioned two taxonomies are very popular in teaching motivation research, our review of studies on teaching as a career choice are organised around these two models. From the lens of the tripartite model, a consistent finding from research conducted in the western countries is that people are primarily intrigued by intrinsic and altruistic reasons to join teaching (Kyriacou & Coulthard, 2000; Manuel & Hughes, 2006), while the influence of external factors is far less prominent. That is, people are drawn to teaching largely because they love working with children, love a particular subject, or love teaching in general (Mee, Haverback, & Passe, 2012; Moreau, 2014), or because of the intellectual fulfillment that teaching affords (Butt, MacKenzie, & Manning, 2010). Other altruistic motivations include teaching as a calling (Marshall, 2009; Mee et al., 2012), the opportunity to make a difference to the students and the society (Ganchorre & Tomanek, 2012). External factors such as high salary, long holidays, favourable working conditions did not feature prominently. By contrast, studies in other cultures such as Africa (Cross & Ndofirepi, 2013), Malaysia (Azman, 2013), Hong Kong (Gu & Lai, 2012, Lam, 2012), Turkey (Yuce, Sahin, Kocer, & Kana, 2013), and Taiwan (Wang, 2004) have found that job security, high pay and remuneration, and long holidays are among the main reasons for joining teaching, apart from intrinsic and altruistic motivations.

In Singapore, studies on teaching motivations appear to have all adopted the tripartite model as the theoretical basis and they have some limitations. Chong and Low (2009), and Low

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[1] According to the Merriam-Webster's Learner's Dictionary (www.merriam-webster.com), antecedent is "something that came before something else and may have influenced or caused it"

et al. (2011) are two major studies in the Singapore context. Consistent with the major trends in international literature, they found that Singapore's pre-service teachers are mainly motivated by altruistic and intrinsic factors to enter teaching, and least by extrinsic factors. However, their data were collected in 2004, with all participants from the same batch. Furthermore, purely quantitative data affords little opportunity for in-depth exploration of the influence of participants' life history on their motives to choose teaching as a career. Another limitation is that they made no attempt to explore the interaction among different teaching motivations and the effects of their interactions.

Research findings from the FIT-Choice perspective confirm the social utility value (altruistic motivation) as one of the dominant factors influencing teaching choice. This trend was observed in studies from various contexts such as Turkey (Kılınç, Watt, & Richardson, 2012), the US and China (Lin, Shi, Wang, Zhang, & Hui, 2012), and Germany (König & Rothland, 2012). Another important trend was the prominence of socialisation influences, especially prior teaching and learning experiences (e.g. Lin et al., 2012). This trend is also observed in the literature that did not adopt the FIT-Choice model. For example, prior mathematics learning experiences was one of the main reasons for the career choice of a group of practicing mathematics teachers in the UK (Andrews & Hatch, 2002). Other important socialisation factors are family members and/or school teachers (e.g. Butt et al, 2010; Cross & Ndofirepi, 2013). Apart from the socialisation factors, perceived teaching ability was found to be another key teaching motivation (Fokkens-Bruisma & Canrinus, 2012; Watt & Richardson, 2007). However, it is important to point out that while the social utility value usually dominates in teaching motivations, substantial differences are found with regard to other motivations across different contexts. For example, prior teaching and learning experiences was one of the least important factors among students in a Dutch teacher education programme (Fokkens-Bruisma & Canrinus, 2012), and the desire for a secure job was the second most important factor in a sample of pre-service teachers in Turkey (Kılınç et al., 2012).

Implications from the studies reviewed above centered on teacher recruitment and retention. First, all studies emphasise the importance of understanding the core values, beliefs and expectancies that attract people to the teaching profession/teacher education within particular social-cultural contexts (Watt & Richardson, 2012). For example, the high tendency of choosing teaching as a fallback career for science teacher candidates in Turkey (Kılınç et al. 2012) highlights potential risks in teacher quality and the need of more effective recruitment strategies. Second, the prominent teaching motivations are most likely those that sustain teachers and their effectiveness in the profession (Low & Chong, 2009; Watt & Richardson, 2012). If the initial motivations are not able to be realised in the schools, a range of professional outcomes would likely be affected such as job satisfaction, career commitment and psychological well-being. Thirdly, despite the importance of considering contextual uniqueness, it is possible to draw lessons and principles that could be informative to other systems regardless of local contexts (Goodwin, Low, & Ng, 2015).

Despite the valuable insights current research can offer, little attention has been paid on how socialisation factors, being classified as antecedents of other teaching motivations in the FIT-Choice framework, function as antecedents. In other words, there has been a lack of research on how socialisation factors influence other teaching motivations. Therefore, we are less informed of the deeper dynamics of how socialisation factors work together with other motivational dimensions to influence teaching as a career choice. However, earlier studies treated socialisation influences and intrinsic, altruistic, and external motivations as parallel

factors explaining one's teaching decision (e.g. Cross & Ndofirepi, 2013; Marshall, 2009; Olsen, 2008). Moreover, studies employing the FIT-Choice framework made no attempt to distinguish socialisation factors and other teaching motivations either conceptually or empirically. This study tries to fill this gap by illustrating the distinctions and connections between the triggers and the drivers with qualitative data. It should be noted that the concepts of "triggers" and "drivers" were not a-priori concepts that we had before conducting this study, but emerged during our initial data analysis using the grounded theory approach.

## Triggers and Drivers: A Conceptual Distinction

As mentioned earlier, the concept of socialisation influences as "antecedents" of other teaching motivations has rarely been formally defined in the FIT-Choice framework, except for acknowledging that other teaching motivations are more proximal to the outcome of choosing teaching as a career. Adding to the confusion regarding the intended meaning is the common practice of treating socialisation factors and other factors as parallel in data analysis. Much uncertainty regarding intended meaning remains with a statement such as "… considered social influences and teaching ability to be more important motivations for becoming a teacher" (Fokkens-Bruinsma & Canrinus, 2012, p. 249). This confusion in part surrounds whether "social influences" is used to refer to a stimulus that simply precedes the participants' choice versus a stimulus that directly causes the decision to join teaching. The first entails a mere temporally precedent association, while the latter attributes causal power to the motivation factor. The current literature provides little clarification regarding what is precisely intended when a given teaching motivation is identified as a socialisation influence.

Therefore, do socialisation factors *cause* teachers' career choice or are they merely *associated* with the reasons? Perhaps neither relationship is accurate. This paper aims to make the distinction clearer. It is of critical importance that we make distinctions that truly cause people to go into teaching and the factors that are facilitating these causes. These clarifications will enable deeper understanding of teaching motivations and better facilitate policy making on teacher recruitment and retention. Hence, we propose a conceptual distinction between "triggers" and "drivers". Triggers were defined as events, experiences, people, or environments that activate or hinder one's inner motive to join the teaching profession. Triggers encompass the socialisation factors such as social influences (e.g. significant others) and prior teaching and learning experiences. Drivers refer to the factors that directly cause a person to go into teaching. The subcategories of drivers include task demand, task return, perceived teaching abilities, intrinsic value, attainment value (e.g. compatibility of personal interests with teaching), personal utility value, social utility value and fallback career. Attainment value was not captured in the FIT-choice model (see Watt & Richardson, 2012, p. 187).

## The Current Study

This study explores why student teachers in the 4-year degree ITE programmes in Singapore pursue teaching as a career. It hopes to extend current understanding about the factors that influence student teachers to pursue teaching as a career. If there does exist a difference or relationship between triggers and drivers, it would be important to understand why and what can

be done in terms of policies and practices in teacher recruitment and retention. We attempt to answer the following questions:
1.      What are the factors that trigger student teachers' interest in teaching in Singapore?
2.      What is the driving force behind student teachers' choice of teaching as a career in Singapore?
3.      Are there any relationships between the "triggers" and the "drivers"?


## Methodology
### Research Design

The present study is part of a larger research, which investigates the impact of ITE programmes and subsequent teacher professional learning on teachers' development of professional competencies and identities. The larger study adopts a cross-sectional design (involving NIE's Year-1 to Year 4 degree student teachers) and a longitudinal design (tracking one batch of student teachers from pre-service to their $2^{nd}$ year in schools). Main research methods include surveys via an online platform (Qualtrics) and subsequent face-to-face semi-structured interviews. Approvals from the University's institutional review board (IRB) and MOE Singapore were obtained before data collection. The data for the current study were extracted from the interviews with the degree student teachers in 2014.


### Participants

Among the four intakes (Year 1 to Year 4) of degree student teachers who were invited to participate in the online surveys, 60 volunteered to participate in the subsequent interview. 30 were selected for the interviews based on the principles of data saturation (Francis et al., 2010) and the research team's manpower capacity. Four of them were practicing teachers who returned to NIE to pursue a Degree in Education. Given that they have been in the teaching profession for a number of years, their interviews were not included in the data analysis to minimise the influence of confounding factors (e.g. age and teaching experience). All of the other 26 participants were either graduates of Junior College or Polytechnics, holding a pre-university General Certificate of Education (GCE) A-level qualification or a Diploma. They were doing a Bachelor of Arts or Science Degree in Education, specialising in either primary or secondary school teaching. The final sample for data analysis consisted of 15 females and 11 males, whose age ranged from 21 to 25 (except for three who were 20, 26, and 28 respectively) at the time of interviews.


### Interviews

As mentioned earlier, one aim of the larger project is to examine the impact of ITE programmes on student teachers' development of professional competencies and identities. Specifically, the interviews explore deeper into how student teachers' pre-ITE life experiences and ITE learning experiences have influenced their choice and understanding of teaching as a career, and understanding of the job of teaching and being a teacher. We therefore adopted a life history approach (Josselson & Lieblich, 1993) in data collection. The interview protocol covers

four sections: (1) prior teaching (if any) and schooling experiences; (2) reasons for choosing teaching, and understanding of teacher competencies and identities; (3) imagined future teaching; and (4) expectation and evaluation of ITE programmes. The current study only focuses on their reasons for choosing teaching, elicited by three general questions: (1) When did you first start thinking that you would be a teacher? (2) Why are you interested in teaching? (3) Were there any teachers or others that have inspired you to be a teacher or have influenced your decision to be a teacher? As rightly pointed out by one reviewer, we recognise that the questions could lead the respondents towards the themes that emerged in the findings. For example, the third interview question prompted student teachers to reflect upon the people that influenced them to become a teacher, data might be biased towards this theme. That is, simply because we asked student teachers about the influence of significant others, they may have thought that it was an important factor for them and respond affirmatively. Our data analysis, however, revealed that participants seemed to affirm or negate this factor according to their own experiences. In fact, a few of them frankly said that their teachers or family members had little influence on them. It is also important to clarify that "triggers" and "drivers" were not a-priori concepts that shaped our interview questions on the motivation to join teaching. However, the conceptual distinction between "triggers" and "drivers" emerged in the process of data analysis and the authors' examination of relevant literature on teaching motivations.

In addition, it makes sense to see our interview questions as a kind of "active interview", a concept introduced by Silverman (2004), that "all participants in an interview are implicated in making meaning. They are involved in meaning construction, not contamination" (p. 157). According to him, the leading question should not be whether or not interview procedures contaminated data, but how the interview generates useful information about the phenomenon of interest.

Therefore, the first question was intended to activate participants' memory of prior experiences (socialisation influences) with regard to their teaching choice. The second question was to understand why they were interested in teaching. We asked the third question because school teachers and family members who are/were in the teaching profession were consistently reported by many previous studies as one of the significant influences on participants' decision to join teaching, as noted in the literature review section. It was also intended to further confirm whether the so-called socialisation influences (Richardson & Watt, 2006) have had any decisive role in participants' teaching decisions. In a few cases, the respondents would talk about why they were interested in teaching and the persons that had influenced them when responding to the first question. This in a way reflects the validity of our interview questions in terms of their inter-connectedness. In such cases, the next two questions were not asked. Instead, probing questions were followed that prompted the respondents to elaborate on certain points and giving concrete examples. Clarifications were also sought from the respondents in cases of ambiguity or inconsistency. For each face-to-face interview with individual participant, at least two researchers of the research team were involved so that the influences of life stories could be explored from different perspectives, and any interestingly related probing questions that were neglected by one researcher would be caught up by the other.

**Data Analysis**

The interview data were transcribed by several part-time researchers and double checked by two members of the research team. Data were then analysed by two researchers to identify prominent patterns, with grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) as the guiding approach, with reference to the FIT-choice framework (Watt & Richardson, 2012). Specific techniques adopted for data analysis were the constant comparative method and Glaser's (1978, cited in Urquhart, 2013) recommended open coding (identifying categories), selective coding (clustering around categories), and theoretical coding (connecting categories) techniques. Specifically, 1) the two researchers individually read a sample of transcripts and assigned codes to any meaningful units of narratives (e.g. private tuition, relief teaching); 2) compared the codes with each other and discuss to reach agreement on a particular code; 3) grouped similar codes into larger categories (e.g. prior teaching experiences, make a difference); 4) converged similar categories into higher level categories (e.g. socialisation influences, intrinsic value); and 5) identify the relationships between categories. For example, how was one's prior teaching experience associated with the vision of making a difference in the students? During this process, the transcripts were re-read by the two researchers to arrive at a common understanding of the emerging codes and categories that could capture why participants decided to come into the teaching profession. These codes and categories were then shared and discussed with other team members, formally and informally, for further revisions. Then one of the researchers individually coded and categorised the rest of the transcripts, during which process several rounds of sharing and discussion with teammates were conducted. This exploratory nature of grounded theory and the evolving and iterative process of constant comparative method enable the themes to emerge naturally from the narratives and can potentially capture the various complex factors that motivates people to teaching.

**Findings and Discussion**

The findings are reported in the following manner:

- A general overview of the themes and sub-themes emerged from data analysis, as well as the number and percentage of participants identifying with each sub-theme (Table 1).
- The triggers that stimulated pre-service teachers' interest in teaching.
- The drivers that motivated pre-service teachers to join teaching
- The relationship between triggers and drivers

Table 1 below presents the numbers and percentages of respondents who identified with each sub-theme under the two major themes. Some student teachers only mentioned one sub-theme, while some identified with more than one. For example, some who mentioned prior teaching experiences also referred to their teachers, families, or friends as one of the social influences, while those who would like to make a difference in the children also thought teaching was fulfilling. Therefore, we only report the findings of the first two major sub-themes under "triggers" and the first three sub-themes under "drivers".

| Themes | Sub-themes | Respondents (N = 26) | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Number | Percentage |
| Triggers | Prior teaching experiences (e.g. relief teaching) | 19 | 73.08% |
| | Social influences (e.g. school teachers) | 10 | 38.46% |
| | Others (e.g. childhood play experience, etc.) | 1 | 3.85% |
| Drivers | Intrinsic value (e.g. sense of fulfillment, enjoyment) | 15 | 57.69% |
| | Social utility value (e.g. making a difference) | 10 | 38.46% |
| | Attainment value (e.g. compatibility of personal interests with teaching) | 4 | 15.38% |
| | Others (e.g. perceived teaching abilities) | 3 | 11.54% |

**Table 1: Numbers and Percentages of Respondents within Each Sub-theme**

Next, we will present and discuss the findings according to the two major themes that emerged and their relationships, in answering to the three research questions. For ease of reading, the respondents were quoted in a numerical sequence.

### Triggers – What Triggered My Interest in Teaching?
*Prior Teaching Experiences Had the Major Influence*

As shown in Table 1 above, most interviewees (n=19) reported to have had prior teaching experiences, mostly relief teaching in local schools or private tuition, before joining the ITE programme. They unanimously acknowledged the influence of these prior teaching experiences on their interest in teaching. For example, student teacher (ST) 1 started private tutoring since Secondary 2, and as a Chinese martial arts athlete, she got the chance to coach students of different levels in various primary schools in Singapore. Through these experiences she not only found that she liked teaching but also had a passion for it:

> *I gradually realised that I like teaching so I continued to teach more students. … So through that I realised that maybe I have passion [in teaching] and I can see myself as a teacher in the future (ST1).*

The influence of private tutoring on the interest in teaching was also reported by a male student teacher (ST2):

So that was my first experience in teaching. That was when I realised I actually like teaching … that actually confirmed my liking for teaching. I wouldn't say it is a passion but it is a liking. Yah, it is a liking for teaching, for education and for all (ST2).

Another female (ST3) attributed her interest in teaching to her prior teaching experience in a Special Education School:

> *That experience made me realise that I actually like to be around with students. I like interacting with them, I like to spend time with them. So I guess it prepared me for coming to NIE and eventually becoming a teacher in a way. I won't say it was precisely because of that that I decided to join teaching, but it actually showed me that I can survive in a school setting as a teacher. I think it's also because I saw that I have certain characteristics that can help me to be a good teacher. It's like you're discovering yourself (ST3).*

Clearly, prior teaching experiences, either formal or informal, have exposed the participants to the life of a teacher, at least partially, and help them discover their potential (ability), enjoyment, and even passion for teaching. This theme concurs with a number of previous studies such as Chang-Kredl and Kingsley (2014), suggesting prior teaching experience as an important form of socialisation factor that contributes to individual's career decisions. In

addition, the way that participants' relate prior teaching experiences to their decision to join teaching also makes it evident that these experiences were more probably a facilitating process, rather than a direct causal factor. Just like what ST3 said, "*I won't say it was precisely because of that that I decided to join teaching*", but a self-discovery experience that showed her potential in being a good teacher.

### The Influence of School Teachers

One recurring theme in previous research is the social influences (e.g. significant others) on participants' decision to become a teacher, especially prior school teachers or family members who are/were teachers. However, for most participants in our study, school teachers just triggered their thinking of joining the teaching profession. Although we specifically asked them about the influence of school teachers on their teaching choice, only one agreed on the direct inspiration from the teacher. This in a way also mitigates the methodological concern that our interview questions would have biased our results, which seemed less likely. Most participants recalled teachers that they liked or disliked. However, the impact of the inspiring teachers were on their beliefs about what makes a good teacher or a poor teacher, and on their understanding of what teaching entails and what it means to be a teacher, or influenced the way they would like to teach, rather than on their decision to join the profession, as shown below:

> *I wouldn't say the teacher has an influence on my decision to be a teacher but definitely on the subject that I have chosen (ST4).*
> *I wouldn't say that he was my inspiration to teach. He would possibly influence the way I teach but I wouldn't say he inspired me to join teaching (ST5).*
> *I had good teachers who inspired, in different ways. They motivated me to think more about why I teach, how to teach better, what more I can do. Their influence is not on [joining] teaching per se, but to encourage me to use my language abilities to help or to contribute. … And on the kind of relationship I want to be able to have with my own students (ST6).*

Direct influence of school teachers on one's decision to teach was only evident in the recount of a Year 1 male student teacher (ST7). He had difficulty in financing his education due to family problems, and was even thinking of dropping out of school to start work earlier to support the family. He was able to complete his secondary education and continue to pursue his study in Polytechnics because of the encouragement, support, and sponsorship of the school principal, teachers and MOE. However, in this case, it would still look more plausible to classify the influence of school teachers as triggers – they provoked his aspiration to make a difference in the next generation of students, as how his teacher helped him to succeed. The story of this student teacher is a typical example of the enormous impact that teachers can have on the ones that they touch.

> *It is because of my principal and my other teachers that motivated me to come into this service, this line. So that I can help the next generation of students who really need our help and guidance to be a better person (ST7).*

Our findings suggest a clear temporal sequence of teaching motivations: socialisation factors as antecedents that stimulate one's inner motive to join teaching. Our study differ from many previous studies including Marshall (2009), Mee et al. (2012), and Olsen (2008) about the influence of school teachers or family members who are (or were) teachers as a direct influence on one's decision to get into teaching. In other words, their decisions to teach is not directly

caused by former school teachers, rather, they are influenced by those teachers in terms of igniting their desire to make a difference, and influencing the subject they have chosen, the way they will teach, and their sense of self as a teacher.

**Drivers – What Made Me Decide to Apply for Teaching?**
*Intrinsic value - Sense of Fulfillment*

When we explored further their underlying reasons for making such a decision, intrinsic value stood out to be the strongest driving force. That is, the act of teaching and the interaction with the students have instilled in them a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment. For example, this male student teacher (ST8) got offers from another two universities for an engineering degree, but he said he just wanted to go into teaching and never gave a second thought to other careers. Teaching, as he explained, is fulfilling.

> *I join teaching basically because I actually like the experience of teaching content, passing on knowledge to kids … So I find the act of teaching is fulfilling. So without second thought, I just went to teaching. You know, when you explain something that is confusing or complex to that particular person and he gets it, it is fulfilling (ST8).*

This sense of satisfaction that teaching can promise was also shared by a female student teacher, who had a diploma in law and was supposed to be a lawyer. She discovered her liking in teaching when doing an internship at the Parliament educating the public what Parliament was about. The act of teaching gave her a sense of satisfaction, which sparked her desire to join teaching.

> *So that kind of satisfaction actually came to me. That actually made me think perhaps I was on the wrong path of becoming a lawyer. I should be doing something else. That sparked me to become an educator (ST9).*

*Social Utility Value - Making a Difference*

For some other student teachers, the underlying drive for making such a decision was to make a difference in the children or the society.

> *I want to be that figure, that role model that helps to nurture these younger children especially teenagers. That's the main reason why I choose secondary track. Secondary school is the time when students actually make life changing decisions. And I wanted to be part of that. I wanted to be part of that experience that these teenagers will be going through. I mean that's the time they also reach puberty and they start to think maturely and it is the way that we teachers get them to think and provoke their thoughts that helps them mature (ST10).*

The vision to help the students and to make a difference in their lives was also evident from the account of another female student teacher (ST11).

> *I enjoy teaching because I see it as an avenue for me to help the children, which is why I entered teaching. I specifically enjoyed teaching the children with learning disabilities of any kind. And I think that, I mean it is meaningful, it is meaningful (ST11).*

Another male student teacher (ST12) had a bigger vision of making a difference, which is to contribute to the future of the nation.

> *I want to contribute, in a way it sounds very big, but I really want to help to contribute to the future of the nation in a way ... I think teachers are really important because we really help to groom every single profession. I mean every student goes through our hands and become who they are next time (ST12).*

One may see student teachers' vision to make a difference as a reflection of naiveté and idealism, as concerned by Young (1995). Surly, altruism alone cannot sustain one's passion for teaching and unrealistic expectations of the profession can be detrimental (Alexander, 2008), leading to discouragement, frustration, betrayal, and even leaving the profession. However, our data shows that the participants seemed to have a relatively realistic, rather than a distorted view of the teaching reality, thanks to their prior school working experiences. Through these experiences, they have already witnessed the impact they can make on the students, which they desire to continue.

Clearly, the main drive for most of the student teachers to enter teaching is either because they appreciate the enjoyment and fulfillment derived from the bonding and interaction with the students, and/or they see the meaningfulness of teaching by impacting those under their care, academically and personally. These findings find strong resonation with those of many other studies including Lin et al. (2012) that intrinsic value and social utility value are the major drive for one to come into the teaching line.

### *Attainment Value - Compatibility of Personal Attributes/Interests with the Nature of Teaching*

Another reason offered by student teachers for coming into teaching is that the nature of teaching is compatible with their personal attributes or interests. This factor is seldom reported in previous research. Our participants articulated that:

> *I like doing that kind of interaction with young people. But I love English as well, I love my subject. But how can I be sure that I can combine those interests of mine to make sure that they actually just be in harmony with each other? So I think only teaching will give me that kind of opportunity (ST13).*
> *Initially I wanted to do counselling, because I like to listen to people's problems. I also like to explain things to people. And another reason is I like youths. So I feel teaching actually can fulfil these 3 criteria where you can work with youths, you can teach, explain, and you can also be a counsellor to them (ST14).*

These student teachers differ from the "pragmatists" in Lam's (2012) study, although they explicitly emphasise the match between personal attributes or interests and what the work of teaching can offer. They fall more on the intrinsic side, as they do not weigh teaching against other professions in terms of external factors such as good salary and long holidays. Rather, what they focus on is the inherent nature of teaching such as the opportunities to interact with young people, to help students, and to relay their love for a certain subject to the next generation of students. They join teaching primarily because they perceive that the nature of teaching is compatible with their personal attributes or interests. One may notice the potential overlap between this theme and the earlier themes (e.g. intrinsic value)

It is obvious that for participants in our study, the underlying drive for them to come into this line are a sense of fulfilment and satisfaction that teaching and interacting with young people can offer, and/or the desire to make a difference, academically and personally, in the lives of the students. In other words, student teachers choose teaching because they see the intrinsic value and social utility value of that decision, which resonate with the findings of many others (e.g.

Kılınç et al., 2012). Another driving force for making such a decision was the realisation of teaching as a good match between personal interest and the intrinsic nature of teaching. This finding differs from Olsen (2008) about the impact of perceived teaching ability and teaching as compatible with mothering on one's decision to teach. This reason for joining teaching also expands Watt and Richardson's (2007) FIT-Choice model to include attainment value (Eccles, 2009). This teaching motivation, not commonly reported in the literature, sheds new light on people's choice of teaching as a career and can inform future research.

It is worth noting that few participants indicated tangible financial benefits as a prominent motivator in their career choice or choosing it as a fallback career. This finding is quite different from that reported in other studies in Hong Kong (Gu & Lai, 2012; Lam, 2012), Taiwan (Wang, 2004), and Malaysia (Azman, 2013). Clearly, guaranteed job opportunities, prestige of status, job stability and flexibility, financial security, longer holidays, etc., are not the factors that motivate them into teaching, neither do they come into this profession because they have no other options apart from teaching. This resonates with the findings of Chong and Low (2009) and Low et al. (2011), two local studies on teaching motivations. This is probably because despite the external attractions, e.g. tuition fees fully borne by the MOE, appealing monthly stipend and benefits, and guaranteed promising job opportunities, the four years of ITE learning and the 4-year bonded commitment to the profession upon graduation coupled with one big lump sum payback if breaking the bond make these benefits less appealling. To put it differently, people who decide to enter this field may have given considerable thought to this decision, and therefore those who join really enjoy teaching and want to be that significant figure in students' lives. Intrinsic value and social utility value as two prominent drivers could also be because in Singapore, same as in other Asian cultures, the influence of the Confucius value of contributing to the future of the nation and the social common good still prevails. These findings are not the same as those found in other Asian studies on teaching motivations. This indicates that even within similar cultural terrains, there may exist social and contextual differences in people's motivations to teach. This has implications for future cultural research on teaching motivations.

**Relatedness – How Are Triggers and Drivers Related?**

Although the "triggers" are not identical to the "drivers", they are related. That is, student teachers' vision to make a difference, sense of fulfillment that teaching can promise, or perceived compatibility between personal characteristics and teaching are actually derived from their past experiences of working with children in school settings or private tuitions, or because of the influence of school teachers. For example, this female student teacher had private tutoring experience and taught in the church Sunday school. These experiences had enabled her to feel the impact that a teacher can have on the lives of the students, which drove her to teaching.

> *You'll see because of you they are willing to do things, they are willing to change, because of you they are willing to study hard. Since secondary school I have seen that happen, and I felt happy when I saw that, so that's why I started thinking of joining teaching, wanting to impact more lives, knowing that you can make a difference (ST15).*

The realisation of the possibility to impact the students because of prior teaching experience was also evident in another female student teacher (ST10), which also accounted for her decision to join teaching.

> *I did relief teaching in schools during the vacation when I was pursuing my
> diploma, and it has been about five years now ... I would say that it was a
> turning point that made me realise that you can actually impact the students. No
> matter how poor their academics might be, you can still actually make a
> difference, even if it's one percent of the difference (ST10).*

Clearly, it is these prior teaching experiences in the school or other educational contexts that have made them realise the powerful impact that a teacher can have on the students. Therefore, their understanding of what teaching entails, the sense of fulfilment that teaching can offer, and what influence they can have on the academic and personal lives of the students is closely related to these prior teaching experiences. As for the student teacher (ST7) who had personally experienced the tremendous life-changing impact because of the help of significant school teachers, his decision to join teaching still boils down to the underlying driving factor, which is to make a difference in the next generation of students and to extend the impact to more people. Therefore, the drivers are closely associated with the triggers, either prior teaching experiences, learning experiences, or influences of significant others.

## Implications, Limitations, and Conclusions

Our research shows that prior teaching experiences are an important factor that stimulates one's interest in teaching. In addition, it is closely related to the factors that drive people to teaching. Therefore our results suggest that it would be important, if possible, for teacher candidates to have some school teaching experiences before making the final decision. While the driving factors that make one decide to teach may not be under the control of teacher recruitment, the provision of more opportunities for school teaching beforehand is what teacher recruitment policies and practices can manage. This will hold the promise to recruit the persons with a genuine interest in teaching, which would in turn help reduce attrition rate during early years of teaching and to retain teachers with a sustained love for the profession. On the other hand, former school teachers did not feature as an important source of influence in terms of teaching decisions, but in terms of the chosen subject, preferred teaching styles, and vision of a good teacher underscores the importance of "apprenticeship of observation" – the significant socialisation process (Lortie, 1975). This also suggests the long-term impact of teachers on one's teaching identity and teaching beliefs, which is more profound and may not be easy to change during ITE. Therefore, it is necessary for ITE to offer student teachers more opportunity to reflect on these areas in relation to their own identity – the type of teacher that they want to be, whether those teachers are really "ideal" teachers, and how they themselves can improve, which will in turn influence their future teaching practices.

This study is not without limitations, as our data consist of only 26 Year 1 to Year 4 student teachers from one teacher education institute from Singapore, which may not be representative of their respective cohort. It can be argued that those who came for the interviews may be more passionate in teaching, and clearer about why they want to choose teaching as a career. On the other hand, there may be some others who join teaching without any explicitly articulated reasons or for reasons different from those mentioned by these participants. However, the findings are congruent with and lend support to previous research about the intrinsic value and social utility value as the dominating drive to teaching, and shed light on future research with some new findings. In addition, the researchers recognise that this is a small study, but it is

hoped that there will be a "universal generalisability" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) to other pre-service programmes in Singapore or other contexts. This initial study also informs future research on the dynamics of teaching motivations and how they influence preservice teachers' career choice.

To conclude, our results show that although the factors that trigger one's interest in teaching may differ from those that drive them to teaching, they are related. Participants were overwhelmingly influenced by their prior teaching experiences to join teaching, while for some others, school teachers exerted some influence in terms of the subject they have chosen, the way they will teach, and their teacher identity. Those prior experiences of working with children and the significant others have given them the sense of satisfaction or made them realise the impact that they can make on the students. Therefore, intrinsic value and social utility value seem to be the "drivers" of teaching decisions, coupled with a sense of compatibility of personal attributes with the nature of teaching, while prior teaching experiences and former teachers helped to stimulate such an interest. These findings are illuminative with respect to future research on teaching as a career choice.

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