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# Intrinsic Motivation of Gen Z to be a Teacher in Elementary Schools

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**Abstract**. Intrinsic motivation plays a critical role in influencing an individual's career choices. Since 2017, Gen Z, as the youngest generation to enter the workforce, exhibits distinct career motivations compared to earlier generations. However, there is still very little research that explores a person's intrinsic motivation in choosing a career as a teacher. This research aimed to explore the intrinsic motivation of prospective teachers from Gen Z to become professional teachers in elementary schools. The study included 12 pre-service teachers enrolled in the elementary school teacher education program, selected using purposive sampling techniques. By adopting qualitative focus group study research, the results showed that intrinsic motivation to become a teacher in elementary schools included three main themes, namely: the interest in teaching, self-development, and comfort in teaching. This research made an important contribution to the understanding of intrinsic motivation in entering

a career as a teacher, which could assist in the development of strategies and policies that support the recruitment and retention of quality teachers.

**Keywords:** Intrinsic motivation, gen z, interest in teaching, self-development

### Introduction

The success of the learning process is influenced by many variables. One of the important variables that influences the success of the learning process is motivation that comes from within the teacher, which is called intrinsic motivation (Fidan & Oztürk, 2015; Han & Yin, 2016; Klaeijsen et al., 2018). Amidst increasingly complex challenges in the field of education, the intrinsic motivation of elementary school teachers plays a pivotal role in ensuring the success of the teaching and learning process. Intrinsic motivation, which is an internal drive to do something because of personal satisfaction or deep interest, has a significant impact on the quality of learning provided by educators.

Since 2017, a new generation (known as Gen Z) has entered the job market (Barhate & Dirani, 2022). Some of them choose the profession of being a teacher (Suryani, 2017; Suryani & George, 2021). Teachers from Gen Z have unique characteristics that are different from their senior teachers from the millennial generation or even earlier. Born in an era of massive information technology development, Gen Z are loyal consumers and digital world enthusiasts. As digital natives and the only generation that was born, grew and developed exclusively with the influence of technology, Gen Z is very adept at interacting using digital media. The research findings indicate that Gen Z dedicates considerable time to using social media, surpassing the time allocated to other activities (Shatto & Erwin, 2016). Ultimately, the influence of this technology causes underdeveloped social skills, experiencing isolation and mental health problems (Chicca & Shellenbarger, 2018), and poor self-confidence (Twenge, 2017). In choosing a career, Gen Z also has unique characteristics that are different from previous generations. They really care about physical, financial and emotional security caused by their life experiences surrounded by unstable and uncertain situations, crises and the COVID-19 outbreak (Marshall & Wolanskyj-Spinner, 2020). This circumstance leads them to encounter difficulties in securing employment and apprehension about making career decisions (Chicca & Shellenbarger, 2018; Twenge, 2017). Gen Z hopes to choose a career that fulfills elements of freedom and flexibility in the workplace to meet their personal and family needs (Bohdziewicz, 2016). Other studies (Goh & Lee, 2018) state that Gen Z considers choosing a career that allows them to deal with people and be financially secure.

There is concern that current conditions surrounding the teaching profession in Indonesia may diminish its appeal to the younger generation of Gen Z in the future. Even though the Indonesian government has tried to improve teacher welfare through teacher certification allowances, there are still many teachers in the larger number of private schools who have not received these allowances so that up to now there has been injustice towards honorary teachers (Fauzan, 2021). This low welfare is the most influential external factor that causes people to abandon the teaching profession (Nguyen et al., 2020; Suryani & George, 2021). Several empirical studies have also found that teaching is one of the professions where the administrative workload is very high, even though the administrative workload actually has a negative impact on teacher performance and can even cause work stress (Hasibuan & Munasib, 2020; Na'imah & Nur, 2021; Sakti, 2016). This condition is clearly not in line with Gen Z's career expectations, so it is feared that the teaching profession will no longer be of interest to the younger generation in the future.

### **Problem Statement**

Through an extensive review of pertinent literature, it is evident that minimal research exists on Generation Z's intrinsic motivation towards pursuing a teaching career. However, comprehending teacher motivation types in career selection is crucial for recruitment strategies, motivation enhancement, and placement initiatives. The types of teacher motivation will influence their professional involvement and the behaviour they will use when teaching their students (Tomšik, 2016). This understanding can also be the basis for developing education to increase the motivation of prospective teachers. Considering their motivation is also critical from a teacher recruitment and career development perspective because teaching is a profession that struggles to attract and retain new graduates (Spittle & Spittle, 2014). By using qualitative focus group study research, this research sought to find the variables that were the intrinsic motivation of Generation Z to become a teacher. The findings of this research offered a framework for the Directorate General of Teachers and Education Personnel of the Ministry of Education, and school principals regarding the teacher recruitment process, developing teacher work motivation, and developing teacher professionalism in carrying out their duties at school.

### Research Aim and Research Questions

This research aimed to explore the types of intrinsic motivation of Gen Z teachers in choosing a career as a teacher. Specifically, the research question was: what intrinsic motivation drives research participants to choose a career as a teacher?

#### **Literature Review**

### Intrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation is an internal drive that encourages a person to carry out an activity because of the satisfaction and personal interest obtained from the activity. According to Ryan and Deci (2017), motivation is conceptualised and measured as a multifaceted construct that lies on a continuum of relative autonomy or self-determination. At the end of the self-determinant theory continuum is the intrinsic motivation theory, which reflects behavioural engagement as a result of personal enjoyment and interest in the behaviour (Ntoumanis et al., 2021). Intrinsic motivation is the motivation to do something for one's own sake, for the enjoyment of the task itself (Hennessey et al., 2015).

The concept of intrinsic motivation is generally applied to an activity that is considered as an end goal (Kruglanski et al., 2018). The activities of play, exploration and curiosity are examples of intrinsically motivated behaviour, because these activities do not depend on external influences, but rather are for the sake of obtaining their own satisfaction and pleasure. Intrinsic motivation is the motivation most responsible for the dominance of lifelong human learning (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Several studies showed that intrinsic motivation could influence a person's achievement, higher performance, and control basic human achievements (Taylor et al., 2014). Intrinsic motivation is also predicted to increase student involvement in learning and higher achievement (Froiland & Worrell, 2016).

Intrinsic motivation for an activity is displayed when the activity is undertaken because of inherent interest, enjoyment, or satisfaction (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Vallerand & Ratelle, 2002). Intrinsic motivation is the motivation to experience stimulation, listed in descending order of self-determination (Vallerand et al., 1992). Intrinsic motivation to know refers to the need or desire to understand and learn. Intrinsic motivation for achievement concerns behaviour undertaken to gain a sense of

accomplishment and ability, and motivation to experience stimulation involves participating in an activity for the pleasure or sensation that will be felt.

Intrinsic motivation is built by several components, for example a sense of satisfaction, a sense of challenge, deep interest, a sense of responsibility, and a desire to develop. A sense of satisfaction is a positive feeling or sense of satisfaction that a person gets when carrying out activities that are considered enjoyable or satisfying. A sense of challenge is an urge that arises from a person's desire to overcome challenges or pursue difficult achievements. People who feel challenged may be driven to learn or master a skill because they want to push past their own limitations. Intrinsic interest pertains to an individual's inherent attraction or fascination with a specific activity or subject matter. When someone has a deep interest in something, they tend to be more intrinsically motivated to engage in that activity. Sense of Responsibility, which arises when someone feels responsible or attached to a task or activity. They feel that performing these tasks is an important part of their personal identity or values. Desire to Improve, namely the drive to improve oneself or reach their full potential. People who have intrinsic motivation tend to feel satisfied when they can learn, grow, and develop personally through the activities they do.

#### Intrinsic Motivation to Become a Teacher

Several studies have established a connection between a person's intrinsic motivation and their decision to pursue a career in teaching. Research indicates that teachers' early professional engagement is often shaped by their initial motivation to enter the teaching profession (Richardson & Watt, 2014). Therefore, understanding their motivation to become a teacher can explain the reasons why someone is interested in entering the teaching profession and ultimately have an impact on how long they will stay in their profession (Heinz, 2015). Previous research showed that teachers who were intrinsically motivated in teaching had more influence on student autonomy, and at the same time influence students' intrinsic motivation (Pelletier et al., 2002). Intrinsic motivation has an impact on greater creativity, flexibility, spontaneity, work quality, increased attention, and learning skills (Spittle et al., 2009).

Numerous studies have been conducted on the motivation to pursue a career in teaching. Research by Tang et al. (2020) highlights the intrinsic motivation of pre-service teachers from the millennial generation to become teachers. The results showed that the self-development and an ideal lifestyle were the main intrinsic motivations for the millennial generation to choose a career as a teacher. Meanwhile, the research by (Mukminin et al., 2017) highlights teacher motivation in general, including intrinsic, altruistic and extrinsic motivation in entering a career as a teacher. The results show that the motivation to become a teacher is a strong mixture of altruistic motives (idealistic and social mission), such as helping society become better in the future, helping rural and remote areas, forming an educated generation in the future, and liking to work with younger generation), intrinsic motives (consisting of intellectual mission, continuation of role models, and personal fulfillment), and extrinsic motives in the form of work schedules and hero status at school and in society). Other research focused on the influence of intrinsic and altruistic motivation in choosing the teaching profession (Fray & Gore, 2018) and the main motivator for pre-service teachers entering the teaching profession is interest in the subject (Nesje et al., 2018). Based on previous research maps, there has been no research focusing on exploring the intrinsic motivation to become a teacher among Generation Z, the youngest generation to enter the workforce since 2017 (Barhate & Dirani, 2022) and this number will continue to increase from year to year considering The recruitment of young teachers will of course be filled by Gen Z. Thus, this study complemented and expanded previous research and the results can become a framework for developing teacher professionalism in the future.

### **Materials and Methods**

Qualitative research with a focus group study approach were adapted in this research. A qualitative research with a focus group study approach is a method that focuses on interactions between participants in focus groups to gain an in-depth understanding of a particular phenomenon or issue (Saarijärvi & Bratt, 2021; Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014). In collecting interview data, researchers facilitate semi-structured discussions between participants with the aim of exploring their various views, experiences, and thoughts regarding the topic under study (Newcomer et al., 2015). The participants in this study comprised 12 pre-service teachers enrolled in an elementary school teacher education program at a private university in Yogyakarta. They were selected using purposive sampling techniques (Etikan et al., 2016). The data obtained from the focus group interviews was then analysed using a thematic analysis approach, where researchers identify, classify, and interpret thematic patterns that emerge from the interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2021). This analysis involved the process of coding and grouping data based on specific themes or motifs, which allowed understanding a diversity of perspectives and build a rich and detailed understanding of the phenomenon under study.

The focus group study method in qualitative research allows participants the freedom to influence one another and explore perspectives that might not emerge in individual interviews. The process of collecting interview data in this context allowed for rich and dynamic social interactions, creating space for the emergence of diverse perspectives and shared knowledge among participants. By using thematic analysis, researchers can explore deep meaning from focus group interview data, reveal thematic patterns that emerge from interactions between participants, and gain a deep understanding of the complexity and diversity of human experience related to the research topic.

### **Results**

Based on the data analysis carried out, three important themes that explained Gen Z's motivation to become elementary school teachers were found out, namely: the interest in teaching, self-development, and comfort in teaching. Each theme is supported by relevant coding as shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**Research Data Analysis



# Interest in Teaching

The interest in teaching is the theme most frequently mentioned by participants in this research. The interest in teaching is an indicator of the intrinsic motivation that participants have to become professional teachers in elementary schools. The theme of interest in teaching was built by coding as follows: love of teaching, passion, calling, and dream since childhood. As explained by P1 through an interview as follows: "There are many reasons that make me confident about pursuing this profession. I enjoy teaching and becoming a prospective professional teacher is my own choice [P1]". According to P1, his intrinsic motivation to become a teacher is because he likes teaching. It was that pleasure that motivated him to enter the teaching profession. P2 also expressed the same thing as follows:

Teaching is my passion. Inside me there is enthusiasm and passion for teaching. And also love children. Therefore, I aspire to become a teacher. If experience is one of the best teachers, then being a teacher is one of my best experiences [P2].

Apart from enjoying teaching and having a passion, being a teacher is also a calling as expressed by P7: "Being a teacher is a calling. I have loved teaching since I was young, starting from my father and mother who were also teachers [P7]." Apart from that, teaching has also been a dream since childhood, as explained by P11 as follows: "The motivation that pushed me to become a professional teacher was firstly because of my dreams from childhood, besides that I also like children and want to advance education and play an important role. for the future of education in Indonesia [P11]".

# Self-Development

The self-development of intrinsic motivation is next according to the participants in this study. This theme was formed by coding as follows: continuing to learn, improving self-quality, and trying new things. As stated by P10 in an interview as follows: "In my opinion, being a teacher means having the opportunity to continue learning. When a teacher teaches something to his students, the teacher will also participate in learning [P10]". For P10, being a teacher has given him the opportunity to continue learning. The teaching work requires teachers to continue learning so that the teacher can ultimately continue to increase their knowledge. P5 also expressed the same thing:

Teaching is a profession that provides opportunities for me to learn. In order to teach well, I have to learn. And I want to improve my inner qualities and practice patience without any coercion from other people [P5].

For P5, being a teacher makes him continue to improve his quality through learning. Similar coding was also expressed by P4 who stated that being a teacher made him try new things so that his experience continued to grow. "I also want to keep learning, trying new things to continue improving myself from my experience as a teacher (P5)."

### Satisfaction in Teaching

Satisfaction with teaching is a component of the intrinsic motivation observed in the participants of this study. This theme emerged through coding, encompassing aspects such as satisfaction, enjoyment in interacting with children, and finding happiness in teaching. These insights were gleaned from participant interviews, where they expressed the following sentiments: "I became a teacher because of the satisfaction I get. I feel happy because of my closeness to students and enjoy gaining knowledge and also enjoy passing on knowledge to other people [P9]". "The motivation is that being a teacher always broadens your knowledge and always learns, being a teacher is fun to meet the children [P6]." "Being a teacher has been my dream since I was little, I also feel happy and enjoy teaching young children."

### **Discussion**

This research aimed to explore the intrinsic motivation of research participants from generation Z to enter the teaching profession. The results of data analysis showed that they chose the profession as a teacher because they were driven by the following intrinsic motivation: the interest in teaching, self-development, and comfort in working. Intrinsic motivation is motivation that comes from within, whether in the form of personal growth or working in the school environment (Friedman, 2016). Intrinsic motivation can encourage teachers to pursue the teaching profession for a longer period of time because this motivation comes from the deepest personality structure so it is more effective than other types of motivation. Intrinsic motivation is shaped by three fundamental human needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan et al., 2019).

### Interest in Teaching

Intrinsic motivation to become an elementary school teacher often stems from a deep interest in the teaching process itself (Bergmark et al., 2018). Individuals who have an interest in teaching tend to feel deep satisfaction and joy when interacting with students and helping them learn. They find invaluable satisfaction in seeing the development and progress in their students' understanding and skills, which is the main driver in choosing the profession of primary school teacher. In addition, a strong interest in teaching can lead elementary school teachers to continue to hone and improve the quality of their teaching (Stronge, 2018). When individuals possess a strong passion for the learning process, they typically seek novel approaches to make learning materials more accessible to students, foster a stimulating and motivating learning environment, and innovate with effective teaching methods (Suyatno et al., 2022). This not only benefits students by providing a more meaningful learning experience, but also enriches teachers' personal experiences, fosters a sense of accomplishment, and pride in the contribution they make in shaping future generations.

### Self-Development

Intrinsic motivation to become a teacher is also closely related to the desire for self-development. Future teachers often see the profession as a platform that allows them to continue learning and growing as individuals (Vashetina et al., 2022). In a dynamic environment such as elementary school, teachers are faced with various challenges and opportunities to develop various skills, from the ability to manage the classroom to creativity in designing learning that suits students' needs. The teaching process itself becomes a means for teachers to deepen their understanding of the subjects they teach, broaden their horizons about education (Olsen, 2015), and even strengthen their interpersonal skills through interactions with students, colleagues, and parents.

Furthermore, becoming an elementary school teacher provides individuals with opportunities to continue exploring their own potential (Simpson, 2019; Sydnor, 2017). Through teaching experience, a teacher can discover their own strengths and weaknesses, and work towards continuous self-improvement. The process of helping students reach their own potential also triggers deep self-reflection, allowing teachers to continuously improve their teaching practices and become the best version of themselves (Korthagen & Nuijten, 2022). Thus, the intrinsic motivation to become an elementary school teacher is often reinforced by the drive to achieve ongoing personal and professional growth. The results of this research supported the results of previous research which explained that self-development was the strongest part of intrinsic motivation for entering the teaching profession (Tang et al., 2020). The feeling that a person can succeed and develop will grow in an environment that provides optimal challenges, positive feedback, and opportunities for development (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

## Satisfaction in Teaching

The teaching satisfaction felt by teachers is a source of intrinsic motivation (Fuller et al., 2016; Hasanah et al., 2020). Most teachers find great joy in contributing to the intellectual, social, and emotional development of their children. When teachers see their students reach new milestones, solve problems, or overcome obstacles, it brings a deep sense of satisfaction. This sensation comes not only from the knowledge that they have made a positive contribution to children's lives, but also from the relationships built with their students and the sense of fulfillment in carrying out daily teaching tasks. When teachers experience greater satisfaction in their profession, particularly in interacting with students in the classroom, they tend to be more engaged in teaching and encounter reduced emotional exhaustion (Klassen et al., 2012).

Apart from that, satisfaction in working as an elementary school teacher also often arises from the freedom given in the teaching process. Teachers have the opportunity to design and structure the curriculum, create teaching methods that suit students' learning styles, and adapt their approaches according to individual needs (Suyatno, 2024). This flexibility allows teachers to express their creativity, create engaging and motivating learning environments, and meet the unique needs of each student. By experiencing the positive impact of their work and having control over the teaching process, teachers often feel fulfilled and eager to continue contributing to shaping the future of future generations (Van Wingerden & Poell, 2019). Research by Suryani (2020) found that teachers in elementary schools are more motivated to pursue their profession due to intrinsic motivation.

However, this research has limitations. This research was a type of qualitative research that involved a very limited number of participants so the results did not describe the condition of Gen Z teachers as a whole. Apart from that, the participants in this research were Gen Z pre-service teachers who were completing their studies at university. Therefore, their experience of teaching is still very limited to teaching experience during school field practice so that the participants' experience may change when they enter the assignment as teachers in schools.

### **Conclusions**

This research concludes that the primary motivations for individuals to become elementary school teachers are their interest in teaching, desire for self-development, and satisfaction with their work. The first theme, interest in teaching, showed that individuals who were motivated to become teachers tended to have a natural interest in teaching and learning activities. Furthermore, the self-development theme emphasised the drive to continuously improve their skills and knowledge in an educational context, indicating that intrinsic motivation in this profession was also driven by the desire to grow and develop personally and professionally. Lastly, the theme of satisfaction at work emphasised that elementary school teachers felt significant satisfaction from their work, perhaps through positive interactions with students and the positive impact they create in children's lives. This research made an important contribution to the understanding of intrinsic motivation in education, which can assist in the development of strategies and policies that support the recruitment and retention of quality teachers.

# Suggestions for Future Research

As the most recent generation to enter the workforce, studies investigating the experiences, perceptions, and relevant variables influencing the professional development of Gen Z teachers remain largely under-explored and offer significant avenues for research. Based on the findings and limitations of the conducted research, there are two suggestions for future research: Firstly, there is a need for quantitative research that involves a larger number of participants and encompasses a broader

geographical scope to enhance the generalisability of research findings. Second, qualitative research involving teachers from Gen Z who have real experience in teaching practice in the classroom is also very much needed. This is to prove whether their intrinsic motivation to become teachers which was deeply embedded when they became pre-service teachers can persist when they have learned about the real world of teaching or not.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

None.

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